BECOMING ACTIVISTS: HOW ORGANIZATIONS ENGAGE AND POLITICIZE YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

Sarah Gaby: Becoming Activists: How Organizations Engage and Politicize Youth
(Under the direction of Kenneth Andrews and Neal Caren)

Youth-serving organizations are at the heart of civic life in the United States. Either because of their own interests or as a result of service requirements, thousands of youth turn to civic organizations to facilitate community participation. Some organizations facilitate engagement and expand youth skills, knowledge, and identities. Others have modest impacts and may even alienate youth from further engagement by limiting their desires for social change through constraining their participation and avoiding politicized topics. Youth experiences in these organizations motivate the core questions of this dissertation: how do organizations engage and politicize youth, and why are some more effective than others? This dissertation combines survey data on youth-serving organizations in the Raleigh-Durham-Cary metropolitan statistical area with comparative fieldwork, interviews, and focus groups in a matched pair of service organizations and a matched pair of social movement organizations.

I analyze the interactions between youth and adults that occur during routine activities. In comparing organizations, I develop the concept of managed autonomy to describe engagement that allows youth a critical role in decision-making combined with adults serving as supportive mentors. Organizations that utilize managed autonomy provide youth opportunities to experience meaningful civic participation. The patterns of interaction in these organizations also shape how each reacts to dilemmas that arise as participants encourage group response to the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and subsequent discourse on racial inequality. When youth are central to decision-making, they shape the direction of the organization and their groups become
committed to anti-racist causes. However, groups with more constrained opportunities for youth avoid engagement with these issues. Finally, I show that organizational participation can provide youth with specific tactics, frames, and deliberative approaches that can be used beyond the particular organizational setting. These opportunities are enhanced when youth are able to practice their participation by engaging in decision-making processes. Youth inclusion, therefore, increases the political capacity of young people. I contribute to the understanding of youth civic and political participation by demonstrating that meaningful youth inclusion in daily decision-making practices leads to organizations that are more open, adaptive, and engaged with issues of inequality.
This dissertation is for all the organizations that graciously let me into their protected private spaces, providing a chance to see a world so often unobserved and so challenging for outsiders to access. I will be forever indebted to each of the individuals in this study for sharing parts of themselves now forever captured in this dissertation.
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PREFACE

It’s cliché to write that youth are the social change agents society needs for today and the future in a dissertation that both challenges and extols the role of organizations in engaging and politicizing young people. So, I have not written that in this study. Instead, I’ve written it here, in the preface. This study was born not from a desire to prove that youth, in fact, are valuable agents of change, but from a need to see if they are. Scholars and practitioners emphasize the ways youth can innovatively and strategically solve social issues and often cite civic organizations as places to develop the necessary skills to do so, but with limited evidence.

Through this research, I was able to directly observe the capacity of young people to enact social change and the contexts where this capacity was fostered or hampered. What I learned from this research is that youth are powerful, excited, and enthusiastic about engaging in civic life, but not all of the institutions they interact with will help them translate those interests into social change work or push them to develop the skills they need for success. Some organizations are dominated by preexisting expectations about youth as recipients of their services who need adult mentors and guides. Others are open to innovating and responding to the particular youth in their groups and the changing nature of youth-adult relationships. In short, not all organizations are created equal, but there are many empirically grounded arguments for working more to include young people in decision-making and providing the experiences necessary for their successful current and future civic participation.

In this study, I set out to compare the experiences of minority youth in organizations to their white, middle class peers. The matched pairing of organizations in this study was intended
to provide leverage in making sense of how experiences differed primarily for white and non-white youth. In the end, I found that heterogeneity in organizations was important, but it is hard to separate from organizational cultures. There remains much to be considered in this area. In particular, although I could not systematically analyze these experiences during my fieldwork, I saw a few youth disengage from organizations. In most cases, the youth who left the organizations I observed were racial and ethnic minorities, often young women of color. One hope for this study is that it motivates other researchers to think much more critically about how youth organizations respond to issues of inequality and, similarly, when and how they isolate and produce disengagement for minority youth. This line of inquiry provides a challenge to the long-standing expectation that what drives racial and socioeconomic homogeneity in organizations is selection. It is most often stated in the literature that the higher prevalence of white, middle class youth in organizations is due to parental selection (Gordon 2008; Lareau 2002), but these preliminary findings indicate that practices internal to organizations may undercut the engagement and retention of minority youth.

Through this research, I also touch on another often-stated assumption: that civic organizational participation in early life leads to later life participation (McFarland and Thomas 2006). Often, these claims come from survey data that demonstrates correlations between participation and outcomes like voting. By observing and comparing organizations through fieldwork, interviews, and focus groups, I am able to show some of the ways that organizations specifically shape youth civic engagement by helping youth develop tactics, frames, and deliberative approaches that can be used in other settings. I hope this study pushes scholars to think about the mechanisms behind claims around the power of youth civic participation and
even allows space to emphasize that some organizational experiences discourage youth from future civic participation.

In sum, my experience in the organizations depicted here was full of opportunities to watch young people, enthusiastic about social change turn to their organizations hopeful they would facilitate their civic engagement. While some succeeded in this mission and likely shaped the life course of youth who will go on to be powerful actors in civic and political life, there is much more empirical work to be done on youth organizational participation. Importantly, there also remains a lack of exchange between scholars and organizations, which I found many groups desirous of during my research. I hope that by sharing findings from this study with organizational actors and supporting community-engaged scholarship I, and fellow scholars, will build strong bridges between the research on organizations and the organizations themselves.
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

On a Monday in late March, I sat around a conference table at the office of a healthcare advocacy organization called Youth Empowered Solutions (EYC) with four high school students and Luke, an adult male staff member. Luke informed the group that another set of youth at EYC was working on passing legislation to put healthy food in corner stores. He told the teens “…it’s important for us to decide whether this is something I can get behind versus not get behind…if this is something we believe in and support, and if so can we develop a message and give a phone call at least to our representatives in congress…so they know that they have your voice.”

The group had a teleconference with an expert on the legislation who discussed the pros and cons, showed statistics on obesity in North Carolina, and discussed the existing efforts and support thus far for the bills. The adults on the call both emphasized that the teens did not have to support the bill if they did not think it was a good use of state funding. At the end of the teleconference, the teens decided to support the cause. However, most had never made calls to their elected officials before and they asked each other and Luke questions to help with the process and eventually collaborated on a script for the calls. Luke mimicked the call he would make and then worked with the teens on mock phone calls before they went home to reach out to their representatives and ask for support of the healthy corner store initiative.

As in many examples from my observations of youth civic organizations, Luke and the EYC served a dual role in this scenario: directly engaging youth in their communities and providing foundational experiences in civic engagement that can inform participation into adulthood (Campbell 2006; Jennings and Stoker 2004). At EYC the teens both “learn[ed] to do
advocacy” on the healthy corner store initiative and acquired tools for the future they can use to “challenge [elected officials] to think more critically,” two goals of the organization. And, it’s not just EYC that seeks to engage youth in civic and political life and train activists. Previous research indicates that civic organizations are one of the primary pathways through which youth become involved in politics and their communities (Campbell 2006; Jennings and Stoker 2004), and emphasizes that future participation results from organizational participation in early life (Youniss, McLellan, and Yates 1997).

The reach of civic organizations like EYC is vast—by some estimates, over one third of U.S. youth participate in voluntary organizations (The Federal Agency for Service and Volunteering 2012). Scholars and practitioners boast that youth in these groups will be more politically efficacious than peers, will learn civic skills, and gain knowledge of politics and the community. In short, these organizations claim they will produce engaged citizens, young people “…willing to act on [their] principles, be politically independent and address social needs” (Dalton 2008:81). Despite their potential influence, some organizations deeply engage youth in their communities and provide them with the skills needed to participate, while others dictate and constrain the roles of youth, leaving them discouraged about civic participation (Eliasoph 2013; Gordon 2010). One primarily goal of this dissertation is determining what drives these various outcomes in order to understand how and when youth learn to become civically engaged.

While there is evidence of the benefits of youth civic participation, the experience of youth in civic organizations remains understudied and poorly understood, inhibited by both theoretical and methodological limitations. Theoretical understandings of the relationships between organizations and their participants are shaped by studies of adult organizations which struggle to inform a setting where power differentials between youth and adults pre-condition the
experience of participation. Empirically, survey data and the case study approach have dominated the field. Case studies limit the applicability and generalizability of findings beyond the selected sites and survey research is unable to capture the processes and exchanges that take place inside organizations. For example, survey data indicates that youth who participate in civic organizations are more likely to vote later in life (McFarland and Thomas 2006), but cannot explain why this is the case or what features of organizational participation lead to later life engagement. This study overcomes both limitations by developing a mixed methods approach to analyze youth participation in organizations and generate a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between youth and organizations.

In this study, I address three research questions: 1) How do organizations engage and politicize youth?, 2) what is the impact of experiences in these organizations on the youth and the organizations?, and 3) why do some participatory approaches influence youth more than others? To answer these questions, I combine comparative ethnographic observational data of four youth civic organizations with survey data, interviews, and focus groups. By comparing groups, I unpack the processes by which organizations engage and politicize youth, and examine when they do not. I argue that the critical factor differentiating organizational experiences is found in the interactions between youth and adults. Some organizational cultures produce routines around how activities are organized and enacted that encourage youth autonomy and inclusion in decision-making. The extent of youth autonomy and the balance with adult management is critical for influencing two major organizational outcomes addressed in this study: 1) how organizations respond to dilemmas, 2) the development of youth civic skills and capacity that extend beyond the organizational bounds.
To return to EYC, youth in the example above not only decided whether they and their organizational subgroup would support the healthy corner store initiative, but also how they would do so. Similarly, when they learned Wake County school board member Jim Martin posted on Facebook that, “There is not a school-to-prison pipeline...There is a POVERTY-TO-PRISON pipeline” they used this previous experience as they encouraged the organization to join the discussion on the topic and they wrote to Jim Martin criticizing his stance. The youth continued to raise concerns related to racial and ethnic inequalities and pressured the organization to become meaningfully engaged in understanding and responding to these issues. They utilized what they learned on that late March afternoon to contact their local officials. In these interactions, the youth also learned a less direct lesson—that they had a role as decision-makers in the organization. Luke and the other adults in the organization provided youth the opportunity to make important decisions about the focus and commitments of the organization, even when they initiated directions Luke opposed.

Relatedly, when the youth became committed to working against racial and ethnic inequality, they used the decision-making power to push the organization to engage more fully with these issues. By offering youth decision-making power, the EYC created an open environment that allowed for discussion and response to perceived dilemmas, in this case pressure on the organization to respond to Black Lives Matter and the rise of racial/ethnic inequality discourse. The experience of participating in decision-making in the organization impacted youth and the organizations beyond the moment, influencing both organizational trajectories and the capacity of the youth to gain civic skills and knowledge they can use outside of the organization.
This study responds to the question of when and how organizations engage and politicize youth. I begin by considering the short-term and direct implications of youth participation in organizations. In examining the relationship between organizations and youth, I develop the concept of managed autonomy, or the patterned interaction between adults and youth in which adults provide guidance and support to youth who are given critical roles in decision-making processes. These interactions are the direct result of the culture of each organization. I argue that by balancing youth autonomy in decision-making with adult management, youth become engaged in their organizations and communities. But, the extent of youth autonomy in organizations also influences their politicization, or how much they view themselves as part of a collective group acting for change. By comparing how some groups politicized in response to Black Lives Matter and the growing discourse on racial inequality while others did not, I reveal the way managed autonomy influences the response to organizational dilemmas.

I then turn to the question of how organizational experiences impact the youth beyond their direct involvement in the organizational setting. I consider possible longer-term impacts of participation in these organizations, in particular how deliberative approaches, frames, and tactics used in organizations are leveraged by youth in other civic engagement settings. I argue that the extent of youth inclusion in decision-making processes strongly influences how youth retain these elements and deploy them when presented with civic opportunities.

To understand when and how organizations engage and politicize youth, I look at the relationship between organizations and their participants. In chapter 2, I present the theoretical foundations for this study, considering theories and findings from past work on organizations and civic and political participation. In the existing literature, organizations are touted as intermediaries between youth and politics that produce participatory democratic citizens.
Organizations have the power to create engaged citizens who have the skills and knowledge needed for civic participation (Youniss et al. 2002; Blee 2012; Eliasoph 2013; Perrin 2006), but how they are able to accomplish these goals has not been fully explored. I argue that the critical factor for how organizations influence youth is the extent of autonomy and youth inclusion in decision-making that takes place in these organizations.

Further, I present three organizational constraints that produce the shape and extent of youth autonomy: 1) organizational culture, 2) the skills and capacity of adult leaders, and 3) the heterogeneity of the participants. Organizational cultures are persistent and often lead to conditioned responses and internalized assumptions. Adult mentors, however, have the capacity to establish interactional styles and roles for the youth that are inclusive and extend autonomy to youth, but this requires the adults themselves to bequeath some power and have a deep understanding of how inequality operates. In addition, organizations can buffer against some of their own capacity limitations by including a diverse group of youth in their organizations. By doing so, they create more opportunities for youth to contribute to the organization’s understanding and response to issues of youth inclusion and inequality.

To analyze how organizations engage and politicize youth, I draw on various methodologies described in chapter 3. I begin with survey data I collected on the population of youth-serving organizations in the Raleigh, North Carolina area and combine that data with ethnographic fieldwork, interviewing, and problem-solving groups, an adaptation of a focus group used successfully to evaluate how groups engage in political discourse in past work (see Gamson 1992; Perrin 2006). The ethnographic data were collected in four youth civic organizations; a matched pair of service organizations and a matched pair of activist
organizations. These organizations are typically non-profit groups staffed by adults that serve local populations of youth. I also provide an overview of each organization studied.

In chapter 4, I analyze the interactions between youth and adults. I turn to my fieldwork to show the various approaches to including youth in decision-making processes across the four organizations. I analyze the interactions between youth and adults to determine how youth are included on a daily basis. I find that the extent to which young people are included in the decision-making processes in organizations vary greatly, with some utilizing approaches that include a highly autonomous role for youth and others employing a heavily managed and hierarchical approach. Some types of interactions demonstrate that youth are in subordinate roles where they defer to adults. In other instances, youth are given the autonomy to make decisions about programming, administration, and daily decisions in their organizations.

The role of youth in decision-making also influences how organizations respond to dilemmas that arise. Concurrent with my observation of these organizations was the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement and the corresponding rise in public discourse on issues of racial/ethnic inequality. Subsequently, increased public attention to this issue put pressure on the organizations in the study to respond. A dilemma arose in these groups—would they respond to this public discourse? Would they become involved in community efforts to take action? And, if they did, how extensively would their groups become involved? If the involvement led to changes in their organizations, would these be fleeting or enduring? I analyze the various responses to this organizational dilemma, arguing that the inclusion of youth in decision-making plays a key role in shaping organizational responses. In chapter 5 I analyze the responses of two groups in which youth influenced organizations to become involved in the issue to the extent that they came to embody anti-racist organizations. I examine the extent to which the transformation
to anti-racist organizations were lasting in each group. In chapter 6, I contrast these organizations with two that did not respond to the issue and where youth either similarly avoided responding or became frustrated with the organization.

In chapter 7, I consider why the approach to youth inclusion and the experience engaging in organizational dilemmas matter for the young people in these organizations. I present findings from the focus groups in which I proposed hypothetical social and political issues and asked the youth to offer solutions. This approach illuminates how youth take what they learned in these organizations and apply it to issues outside of the organizations. I consider the deliberative approaches, frames, and tactics used to assess the kinds of impacts civic organizations may have on youth. I find that autonomous youth in organizations that include youth in responding to dilemmas utilize organizational approaches and knowledge in these focus groups.

In the final chapter, I focus further on potential explanations for why some organizations encourage subordination and avoid talking about issues and others encourage autonomy and youth influence in responding to dilemmas that arise. I also discuss how the findings may apply to other organizations and young people. I conclude by considering the implications of the findings for explaining how youth civic participation may generate later life civic engagement.
CHAPTER II. CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Organizations are often seen as the mobilizing mechanism for civic participation, serving as the intermediary between individuals and politics (Almond and Verba 1965), but do so to varying degrees. Organizations have the ability to directly mobilize participants for political action (Clemens 1993; Ganz 2009), provide participants with civic opportunities and resources for engaging in politics (Almond and Verba 1965; Baggetta 2009; Youniss et al. 2002), help them build civic skills (Blee 2012; Eliasoph 2013; Perrin 2006; R. D. Putnam 2001), and gain a collective sense that they can affect change (Almond and Verba 1965; Corrigall-Brown 2012; Perrin 2006; Youniss et al. 1997). As a result, the decline in participation in civic associations that has been reported in recent years (e.g., Putnam 2001) is perceived as alarming because it indicates a loss of skills and opportunities necessary for civic participation outside of organizations.

Putnam (2001) claimed that the trend from collective activities to more individualized ones (e.g., bowling in leagues to donating to local organizations) was indicative of the decay of a connected society engaged in civic conversations. In the existing literature, organizations are privileged as institutions that influence participants to engage in political and social issues. The assumption underlying this logic is that civic organizations create engaged citizens who understand the process of political participation, participate themselves, and have meaningful experiences that encourage future engagement. It is against this theoretical background that this study examines the larger question of how organizations engage and politicize young people and the outcomes of those experiences for both youth and the organizations in which they participate.
Why Youth?

In particular, youth-serving organizations are at the heart of civic life in the United States. Roughly 25% of adult and youth volunteers participate in the thousands of youth-service related organizations in the U.S. (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016). Teens comprise a quarter of people who volunteer, participating at nearly twice the rate of adults (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2005). Yet, simultaneously, today’s youth are portrayed as disengaging from civic life, apathetic about politics, and disinterested in collective action. Still, either because of their own desires and interests or as a result of compulsory service requirements, thousands of youth participate in organizations. These conditions result in an open question: How are youth included in civic organizational life?

Previous claims about the role of civic associations have primarily come from studies of adult organizations. However, the experience of youth in civic organizations and the influence of these organizations on their civic knowledge and participation requires further study. Arguably, the stakes are higher for youth organizations, which may shape political participation throughout the life course if they can successfully engage youth in their early years (Campbell 2006). The benefits of civic participation for developing long-term commitments peak during high school, and students who are engaged in those critical years are more likely to vote and become involved in community organizations later in life (Youniss et al. 1997). While these high school activities may not immediately translate into future activism, past experience may be reactivated later in life when civic opportunities present themselves (Campbell 2006). The influence is not consistent across all organizations; the context of the organization in which youth participate is critical for shaping the length and persistence of youth civic involvement over time (Corrigall-
Brown 2012). Although youth organizations serve a slightly different purpose than adult organizations, many of the benefits and approaches to participation apply to youth groups.

*Why Organizations?*

Significant attention has been paid in the literature to the way organizations influence participants. These studies tend to suggest myriad ways that organizational participation can influence and shape participants and their capacity to engage in civic and political life. While the literature in this area is vast, it does not fully address *how* that influence is conveyed, as I seek to do in this study. However, the insights from this existing work suggest both the importance of organizations for impacting participants and offer some expectation for the types of influence that may occur.

*Organizational Influence*

For participants in youth organizations, a major way that members are influenced is through taking advantage of civic opportunities and building civic skills (Eliasoph 2013), which allow them to develop civic knowledge and participate in civic activities (Youniss et al. 1997). But, how and to what extent this influence occurs remains poorly understood. Civic opportunities are defined in a variety of ways. For Tocqueville (2012), the civic opportunities provided by organizations included seeing and interacting with others. An expanded version of these opportunities includes “opportunities for interpersonal interaction, governance experience and institutional relationships” (Baggetta 2009). The extent and type of opportunities provided in organizations varies by the type of organization and population the organization serves. Through participating in civic opportunities and exercising civic skills, youth acquire civic knowledge and
learn to participate in civil society. Civic knowledge is the awareness of political and social issues and public affairs, and is enhanced by the sense that individuals can participate in debate or action around those issues. Beyond knowledge, individuals may also actively participate in these issues through critical thinking and direct action.

Alexis de Tocqueville (2012) identified the importance of civic associations when he conceptualized them as the training ground for democracy. Scholars of associations expanded de Tocqueville by empirically considering the benefits of associational affiliation. Focusing on the individual level, scholars considered positive outcomes for participants in organizations above their non-participant peers like greater leadership skills, more capacity to participate in civic life, and a greater number and more diverse set of social ties (Putnam 2001; Verba et al. 1995; Verba and Nie 1987). Scholars also conceptualized mechanisms through which association participation influenced democracy more broadly, such as through the creation of a “civic culture” (Almond and Verba 1965) and by considering the political influence of civic engagement (Skocpol and Fiorina 1999). At the organizational level, some scholars focused on differentiating the influence of types of associations (e.g., non-profits), finding that those organizations exhibit behavioral differences from their counterparts (DiMaggio and Anheier 1990). Other scholars found that the form and nature of civic associations has changed over time (Skocpol and Fiorina 1999; Zukin et al. 2006), resulting from professionalization and funding structures (Skocpol 2003, 2004).

While scholars agree that organizations influence participants, the way that participation shapes member behaviors and the outcome of that influence remain contested. Verba and colleagues (Verba et al. 1995; Verba and Nie 1987) argued that participants in civic organizations are given the opportunity to build their capacity for civic engagement by gaining
skills and knowledge that exceeds that of their peers. Organizations may also shape member ideology (Snow and Benford 1988). Although these influences are often considered positive, a long-standing unresolved issue remains: while organizations have the potential to shape political participation and positively influence participants, they also have the capacity to divert attention from public issues and reduce radical response (Meyer and Tarrow 1998). Although organizations can provide civic opportunities to members, they may also push participants away from political participation (Theiss-Morse and Hibbing 2005). For instance, Eliasoph (2011) found that youth who might otherwise push back against the status quo were channeled into résumé-building activities in organizations. Organizational experiences, then, can produce divergent outcomes for participants: developing their civic skills and understandings or channeling them away from particular interests and social change efforts.

One explanation for this channeling is that civic participation is conditioned by the socioeconomic status of the organization’s target population (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Gordon 2010; Musick, Wilson, and Bynum 2000; Verba et al. 1995, 1993). In her comparative study of empowerment projects, Eliasoph (2011) found that participation was strongly divided along socioeconomic lines. For disadvantaged members, perceptions about their involvement were often focused around preventing them from becoming problems in society. Non-disadvantaged youth, however, viewed their group membership as an opportunity to help others. Non-disadvantaged youth experienced comfort speaking in the group and were able to discuss problems in universally understood terms, so their voices and ideas were more commonly incorporated into the group’s projects (Eliasoph 2011). In this case, the civic opportunities were shaped by sociodemographic characteristics in a clear way—more advantaged youth were given more opportunities to participate and lead in organizations. In general, this
phenomenon points to a larger trend whereby advantaged youth are channeled into résumé-building activities in organizations, while disadvantaged youth join organizations that are likely to keep them out of trouble (Eliasoph 2011). Privileged groups of youth activists required much less support from adult allies to aid their activism (Gordon 2010). In contrast, lower class minority members of groups struggled to establish autonomy and be seen as valuable participants in the political process to a greater extent than their privileged white peers (Gordon 2010).

Organizational participation is influenced by socioeconomic status, such that higher educated members are more likely to be actively involved in their organizations (Almond and Verba 1965). Therefore, it is necessary to consider how various sociodemographic groups are served by organizations and whether the types of experiences vary along these dimensions.

Another factor that influences the differential experiences in groups is organizational structure. The structure of organizations shapes the civic knowledge of members (Skocpol 2003). For instance, organizations that utilize a democratic structure were found to strengthen the civic skills of members over more hierarchical organizations (Verba et al. 1995). Controlling for other factors like political context and available resources, Andrews et al. (2010) found that organizational leadership practices remained the primary factor for producing organizational effectiveness.

In addition, the type of organization is likely influential. Perrin (2006) argued that political microcultures arose in groups to “restrain and enable citizens’ democratic imaginations” (130) and that the type of organizations to which participants belonged (e.g., religious, unions, etc.) was critical for establishing particular microcultures. In an attempt to further differentiate organizational influence, scholars often focus on three organizational types: service, recreational, and political (Baggetta 2009; Eliasoph 1998). Past scholarship indicates that it is critical to
consider a variety of organizational types, as the type of organization strongly influences members’ experiences (Perrin 2006). Although service organizations are the most common, political groups like social movement organizations are considered to be the most influential type for disseminating civic opportunities and skills. Scholars differentiate these types of organizations from service and non-political organizations because they explicitly seek to engage members in politics (Almond and Verba 1965; Blee 2012; Corrigall-Brown 2012; Eliasoph 2013). Scholars often define members of these groups as activists (e.g., Gordon 2010), privileging the civic capacity of these individuals to affect social change.

In practice, it is likely that the various factors previously outlined all play a role in shaping the experience in organizations. As such, I consider factors like structure, population served, and organizational type in explaining the variation across organizational experiences.

*Participatory Practices in Organizations*

As mentioned above, one major factor in shaping organizations is the structure, in particular the extent to which the organization uses democratic or hierarchical practices. Although there is variation with organizations ranging from more hierarchical to more democratic, there is a strong expectation in the literature that organizations increasingly move from democratic practices to hierarchical ones. The expectation for an increasing bureaucratization of organizations dates back to Weber (2015), who argued that a bureaucratic management style would take over every element of daily life, resulting in workers having decreased control over their work. Although Weber understood that restrictions to bureaucracy were necessary, he generally viewed the maintenance of hierarchies as a means for efficiency. Since this early work, organizational scholars (e.g, Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Skocpol 2003) and movement scholars (Piven and Cloward 1978) argued that a bureaucratic approach leads to
disempowerment for participants in these organizations. While participation in civic associations is highly valued, the success of organizations in empowering and engaging youth is contingent on forms of management and participation.

Yet, the practice of organizational inclusion and constituent participation has grown drastically in recent years, such that the current period has been referred to as the era of Public Engagement, represented by a shift in participation from shareholder to stakeholder (Phillips 2009). The extent of participatory approaches is so vast, that even President Obama joined in, launching the Open Government Initiative as an effort to create a more participatory government (Lee 2015; The White House 2015). Although trends in increasing engagement in organizations have been a major focal point of recent studies in work and occupations (Stohl and Cheney 2001), scholars of civic associations have simultaneously remained focused on the limitations of participation. Even when empowerment practices are utilized, they may have negative effects such as demobilization, marginalization, and the reification of authority (Lee, McQuarrie, and Walker 2015). Further, contradictory arguments about the importance of participatory practices have emerged between organizational scholars and scholars of work and occupations.

Organizational scholars are concerned about defining and evaluating participation, as it is an ever increasingly “nebulous construct” (Glew et al. 1995:396). To date, theorizing about participatory practices in organizations has primarily resulted from studies of employee participation in workplaces. Early work in this realm adopted the Weberian approach to understanding the relationship between workers and workplaces, focusing on the development of authority and resultant disempowerment of workers (Lee 2015). In this framework, the outcome for participants and potential participants is disempowerment and disengagement. Parallel findings emerged in work on political and social movement participation (Lee et al. 2015). Social
movement scholars showed that when engagement does take place, such as when workers seek change in their organizations, participation and mobilization are portrayed as David fighting Goliath (Ganz 2009) or an “Insurgency of the Powerless” (Jenkins and Perrow 1977).

Turning to the work and occupations literature offers further insight into participatory practices. Although scholars of civic associations have not linked the experience of volunteering as a form of work to the labor literature, there are many parallels. Connecting these forms of organizational participation, I argue, introduces concepts that have not been discussed in the organizational literature. For instance, while youth development scholars focus on the successful conditions for youth-adult partnerships, they do not address the workplace conditions that create satisfactory experiences for adult organizational staff or for youth who often serve similar but unpaid roles. In particular, the concept of autonomy is largely absent from the literature on civic organizations, but it is a critical factor in producing satisfying organizational work experiences.

While the comparisons are useful, participation in civic associations is different from formal work experiences. For instance, it is typically—although not always—uncompensated, and almost never comes with fringe benefits. However, as a result of the sorts of tasks and roles participants take on in civic associations, characteristics that make for a positive work experience often mirror the conditions surrounding volunteer experiences. Kalleberg (2011) lays out three primary noneconomic job qualities that determine satisfaction with one’s work: 1) “autonomy over work activities, or task discretion”, 2) “participation in wider group decision-making”, and 3) “intrinsic reward” (132). The relationship between work conditions and satisfaction is somewhat endogenous—workers who have a sense of control over their work are more likely to experience intrinsic satisfaction.
The ideal form of democratic participation in organizations includes a collective approach to authority and a limited division of tasks (Rothschild and Whitt 1989) along with highly autonomous control over decision-making (Kalleberg 2011). These organizational approaches may be supported by certain conditions such as self-criticism, homogeneity, sharing of knowledge and information, a social movement orientation, and supportive professionals (Rothschild and Whitt 1986). Autonomy and control are especially critical—“people do obtain meaning and challenge from being able to decide how to do their own work…” (Kalleberg 2011:144).

The literature on work may also point to a possible solution to the prominent concerns in the social movement and volunteering literature about long-term engagement in organizations and social movements (Klandermans 1997). Kalleberg’s characterization of good jobs as those that involve high levels of autonomy and control suggests that both short-term and long-term remedies are possible. In the short-term, if participation in civic association follows the characteristics of good jobs described above, people may opt to stay in those associations longer, as they are receiving intrinsic rewards. Under these conditions, participants may find more value in participation, form stronger ties to organizations, and perceive a greater ability to create social change. Autonomous control over work task, participation in group-decision making, and intrinsic reward, may also have longer-term effects, such as increasing political engagement and developing capacities for future participation (Pateman 1970).

Although forms of democratic participation are often privileged as positive for both managers and participants, this is not always so. Organizations may change practices in an effort to increase participation, which may lead to tension and dilemmas in the organization (Selznick 1949). Further, “Even as they define themselves against bureaucracy and oligarchy, members of
participatory organizations are centrally concerned with legitimacy and authority” (Lee 2015:275). Autonomous approaches to inclusion are still connected to authority and management. As a result, autonomous participation is rarely separate from management, but instead a balance must be reached between management and autonomy.

There are several critical constraints that limit how much autonomy organizational routines and interactions provide to participants. Perhaps the most important factor is the culture of the organization (Romero and Perez 2003), or “…the collective values, beliefs and practices of organizational members...” (Needle 2005:238). Culture influences democratic participation in organizations by shifting individual perceptions about participation and increasing beliefs that decision-making processes are equitable and decision-makers are competent (Romero and Perez 2003). Although cultures are often pervasive, leaders in organizations can develop particular roles and norms of interacting with constituents that may influence choices to implement democratic practices, even when they go against existing expectations in the organizational culture (Eikenberry 2009). Organizations may also experience participants generating democratic approaches, especially when the participants are diverse and offer varied values, ideas, and interests (Stohl and Cheney 2001). By engaging a diverse set of participants, there is also more input for the democratic process of participation, which produces more diverse organizational outcomes (Kerr 2004).

**Autonomy and youth**

One major challenge of extending the work and occupations literature focused on the importance of autonomy and inclusion in decision-making to youth organizations is the complex power differential between adults and youth (Sherrod 2006) and implicit or explicit adultism
(Camino and Zeldin 2002; Gordon 2009; Gordon and Taft 2011). As a result of these forces, youth are rarely given the responsibility to make meaningful decisions and are rarely included in organizational governance (Sherrod 2007). Often when youth are included, the participatory approach does not “ensure that young people’s voices will be taken seriously by adults in power” (Taft and Gordon 2013:89). Youth are given opportunities in these settings to have their voices heard, but not to make or impact decisions (Taft and Gordon 2013).

Often, civic opportunities that promise youth empowerment and inclusion go unfulfilled (Eliasoph 2013; Lee 2015). In civic organizations, adults often steer youth away from political participation, leaving youth voiceless “citizen[s]-in-the-making” who struggle to find their place in primarily adult community organizations (Gordon 2010:205). To a great extent youth participation in empowerment projects leads to feelings of ambivalence and doubt (Eliasoph 2013). Youth report feeling as though they were not given the opportunity to truly make an impact in these settings (Taft and Gordon 2013).

An alternative approach, which happens less frequently, is to engage youth as equal participants (Gordon 2010), which results in more extensive engagement and participation in organizational activities. Youth in these settings are given autonomy to “make choices and participate in decision-making” (Cargo et al. 2007). Following past work, I focus on youth autonomy as instances in which youth are included in and influence decision-making processes and the approach to youth inclusion is one of collaboration between youth and adults (Zeldin, Petrokubi, and MacNeil 2008). This approach is in contrast to situations in which organizational representatives make decisions “on behalf of youth” (Cargo et al. 2007). Autonomy is considered valuable for outcomes like affecting change in their communities (Taft and Gordon 2013), gaining civic skills and knowledge (Gordon 2010), and building a civil society (Sherrod 2007).
Yet, when promises of autonomy and inclusion are unmet or do not align with youth expectations, youth may leave formal organizational settings and either disengage or seek alternative civic opportunities (Taft and Gordon 2013). Therefore, the role of adults in promoting and facilitating collective decision-making and offering support to youth is critical for the success of these efforts (Camino and Zeldin 2002).

The relationship between adults and youth in setting that promote youth autonomy have been referred to as “youth-adult partnerships” and “autonomy supportive contexts.” In formal civic organizational settings, there is often a preexisting structure whereby adults are paid staff volunteer managers for youth volunteers. In this case, often few adults are working with a group of youth (Camino 2000). When youth autonomy is successfully fostered, these adult organizational managers provide “guidance, support, and expertise” for youth, which represents the expectation of support from the youth themselves (Camino and Zeldin 2002:218). This role includes “coaching, dialoging, and connections to institutional resources and community leaders” as well as “knowledge and perspective, and cause-based passion” from their experience working on these issues (Camino and Zeldin 2002:218).

*Conceptualizing Managed Autonomy*

The work on participatory practices indicates that various approaches to inclusion likely dictate the impact of organizations on participants. Particularly for youth participants, the complex dynamics of being young people in primary adult settings exacerbate the critical importance of the way youth are included. In this dissertation, I develop the concept of managed autonomy, an approach that balances youth participation in decision-making with supportive adult guidance. I argue that although most youth organizations in the study claim to engage
young people in decision-making, the extent of their inclusion and their capacity to actually exert influence in these settings varies greatly. In these organizations, there is a correlated continuum of both youth autonomy and adult management.

![Figure 1. Relationship Between Management and Autonomy](image)

As shown in figure 1, as management increases, autonomy often decreases. Organizations that are highly managed are those described above in which adults make decisions for youth. A prominent example of a heavily managed organization with low autonomy for youth is the Boy Scouts. Scouting has standardized uniforms, activities, handbooks, and management guidelines (Quinn 1999). At the other extreme, are organizations that are youth-run and where adults play no role. These are uncommon for several reasons including legal limitations on youth under the age of 18 including serving on boards of directors and making financial decisions (Camino and Zeldin 2002). Most examples of these organizations are less well-known and frequently take the form of grassroots mobilization like the National School Walkout campaign organized by youth around gun violence initially using a Change.org petition (Weigel and Lowery 2018). Other examples include the Baltimore-based Youth as Resources, which is youth-led and run by a majority youth board of directors and the Seattle-based Youth Force, which has a majority youth staff and board of directors.
Most often, though, organizations fall in between these extremes with adults and youth retaining various levels of autonomy. In some cases, youth are included in advisory councils, but their involvement is constrained (Gordon and Taft 2011). In others, youth inclusion and participation in decision-making are “infused” throughout the organization (Camino and Zeldin 2002). 4-H organizations, for instance, have worked on including young people in decision-making within their groups while simultaneously placing some youth on the board of directors (Sherrod 2007). Although there may be ideal types of youth organizations, I am particularly interested in examining how management and autonomy interact in the messy middle category in which boundaries are negotiated through daily interactions.

I argue that the organizations that are successful at establishing managed autonomy provide youth with opportunities to build and practice civic skills and guide organizations as they face emergent dilemmas. When youth have autonomy to participate in organizations, they also have the opportunity to practice the kinds of civic participation they will enact in adult life. Their participation can go beyond involvement in everyday practices and group meetings to include governance opportunities, which in past research have been critical opportunities for youth to develop civic skills and make important organizational contributions (Sherrod 2007). This approach moves youth beyond token participation in which they are “equipped only with the techniques of involvement, not with the knowledge and experience of leadership and administration,” which can be developed through experiential learning in partnerships between youth novices and adults with more experience (Camino and Zeldin 2002:218).

The relationship between youth and adults and the extent of youth inclusion in decision-making also dictates how organizations respond to unexpected dilemmas. For organizational participants with high levels of autonomy, repeated inclusion in decision-making processes likely
creates an expectation of inclusion in emergent issues. For the organizations that include these young people, their inclusion may also represent an openness to youth guiding the organization. The patterns and conditions of youth inclusion, therefore, are critical for shaping how organizations respond to emergent issues.

*Organizational culture, adult leaders, and heterogeneity*

Drawing on past work, I primarily focus on three organizational constraints that shape the extent of youth autonomy in organizations. In considering the first, organizational culture, I focus on culture as a process within an organization, but one that is already fully in existence by the time I enter these settings as observer. The culture of each organizations is shaped by external environments, but I primarily focus on the internal development of culture. That is the establishment of values, beliefs, and norms that are shared in an organizational setting, often as tacit assumptions codified in organizational practices (Ravasi and Schultz 2006). Culture, therefore, dictates the decisions around participatory practices and sets the bounds around youth inclusion while also signaling whether and how extensively organizations are open to influence from participants.

Organizational culture can also be impacted by human actors who may simultaneously be constrained by the existing culture and shape it. I focus on these individuals as a second influential factor. In order for adults to engage youth in partnerships, they must create shared understandings of the relationship expectations, explicitly address the power dynamics between youth and adults by taking actions like clarifying the roles of each, and develop supportive infrastructures for youth inclusion (Libby, Rosen, and Sedonaen 2005; Zeldin, Camino, and Mook 2005). Adults serving in leadership roles are essential for shaping organizational
effectiveness (Andrews et al. 2010) and their various capacities to engage young people and build support for their inclusion shape youth experiences in organizations.

Finally, I consider the extent of heterogeneity in the population of youth served. Many of the benefits of including heterogeneous youth stem from the finding that diversity increases organizational effectiveness (Milem 2003). Organizations with more diverse participants generally experience more innovation, better problem solving, and more flexibility (Milem 2003), all of which are likely to influence how willing they are to engage in adapting innovative youth-adult partnerships as part of their methods of operation (Zeldin et al. 2005). Having more diverse youth present also encourages increased attention to issues of inequality (Rogers, Mediratta, and Shah 2012), which may occur across multiple sociodemographic domains that shape successful establishment of youth and adult relationships. When diverse groups are present, organizational staff can buffer against some of their own capacity limitations in discussing critical topics that may arise, especially around issues of inequality.

*Responding to Dilemmas*

The types of participatory practices that are in place in organizations also shape how those groups respond to dilemmas that arise. In selecting particular approaches to participation, organizations often constrain their possible responses to conflicts and at times even create tension by their participatory choices. In participatory workplaces, workers are empowered to work toward organizational goals and become involved in activities beyond the scope of their jobs or traditional workplace expectations (Stohl and Cheney 2001). These employees, then, have greater access to decision-making across their workplaces including “at the shop-floor level,” in administrative decisions, and even in strategic decisions that impact the entire
corporation; “Individuals are able to register concerns, suggestions, and ideas that transcend the narrow scope of a job description” (Stohl and Cheney 2001:357).

One of the ways participants can influence less hierarchical organizations is through shaping the strategic direction of the organization, or the kinds of decisions that organizations might make about changing their commitments or interests. Dilemmas often arise as organizations determine how to respond to changing external environments. Broader changes in the political environment may cause organizations to reconfigure their approach and goals (Robnett 2002). When these dilemmas are present in democratically-run organizations, there is often space for lay participants to influence organizational response. For example, in Robnett’s study of changes in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), she argued that the shift from a civil rights organization to a black nationalist organization took place as a response to changes in policy like the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the failure of other groups to successfully challenge illegal practices in mainstream politics. These changes outside of the organization impacted the organization itself; “..as the political climate shifted…so did the meaning of SNCC[]” (267). The democratic participatory nature of the organization led participants to respond to external pressure and push the organization to radicalize in hopes of achieving goals that were out of reach under the previous approach.

Social movement organizations like SNCC are more susceptible to influence from the broader sociopolitical environment since they are places for activists to “assert political claims in public life” and in which people “work collectively to understand their world, decide what is just or unjust, and express their values” (Blee 2012:31). When dilemmas like how to respond to changing Civil Rights legislation arise, these groups may be inclined to respond and change. As groups develop these values and commitments, they often undertake collective actions that help
to codify their beliefs (Barr and Drury 2009; Polletta and Jasper 2001). As a result, social movement organizations are more likely to respond to the external environment by radicalizing, factionalizing, collapsing, or withstanding mission shift.

Responses to dilemmas may also produce organizational conflict. Participatory practices themselves are “objects of political contention within a group” (Lee 2015:278). The process of including participants in community work may be “messier and contested” than other approaches (Pollock and Sharp 2012:3075). When external pressures for change interact with participatory practices, then, it is likely that there will be some resultant organizational conflict.

*Moving Beyond the Organization*

While in many ways organizations influence participants, the extent to which participants can utilize the knowledge and skills they learn in these settings outside of their organizations remains unclear. There are many claims about the benefits of civic participation, most of which are the result of studies that find correlational relationships between organizational participation and civic outcomes like voting in later life (Frisco, Muller, and Dodson 2004).

In part, the limited empirical research on organizational impacts on participants is due to the methodological challenges of measuring those impacts. In the literature on work and occupations, scholars often provide groups with a task to perform while they are evaluated (e.g., Cohen and Bailey 1997). Task groups to which these studies often refer are thought to provide a link between organizations and their members (Gladstein 1984) and are typically utilized as tools to predict and evaluate organizational efficiency and effectiveness. These scholars consider general elements of group behavior such as boundary maintenance and diversity within these
settings. While sociologists have not primarily used these techniques, some have adapted them to study political talk and discursive practices (Gamson 1992; Perrin 2006).

Studies on the impact of civic organizations using similar techniques are rare. In one instance, Baggetta, Han, and Andrews (2013) analyzed teams in Sierra Club chapters to examine the factors that lead to committed organizational leaders. Although they have not been used as such, these techniques are a useful and empirically tested approach for making sense of whether and how elements of organizational experiences are transferred to participants. For instance, can participants apply tactics utilized in organizational settings in other civic environments? These sorts of questions have yet to be analyzed.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I argue that it is critical to examine the relationship between participants and organizations. In many cases, youth do benefit from participating in civic groups, but research is needed to determine what elements of organizational participation lead to participant benefit and to evaluate outcomes for participants. I argue that the critical feature that differentiates both how extensively youth gain civic skills and knowledge and how impacted organizations become from working with young people is the extent of youth participation in decision-making processes. Participatory practices in organizations, therefore, act as a pathway for organizational and participant influence. The extent of youth inclusion in organizations is driven by organizational culture, the skill and capacity of leaders, and the population served. These practices can be seen in how youth are engaged in decision-making processes, which becomes particularly salient when organizations face dilemmas like external pressure for change.
CHAPTER III. YOUTH CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS

This study draws on a mixed methods approach. The initial phase of the project included a survey of the population of youth-serving organizations in the Raleigh, North Carolina area. The survey data was used to inform organizational selection for the second portion of the project; a comparative case study of four youth civic organizations. The four organizations include a matched paid of service organizations and a matched pair of social movement organizations. I observed in each organization for at least 6 months. At the end of the observation period, I also interviewed youth and adults in each organization. I then ran focus-group style sessions called problem-solving groups in which youth were given realistic hypothetical civic problems to solve and their responses were recorded.

As we begin to consider how organizations influence youth, it is necessary to first understand the types of organizations youth participate in, what activities they do in those organizations, who participates, and how organizational representatives perceive participation. As such, I begin by describing the organizational population in the Raleigh-Durham-Cary Metropolitan Statistical Area more broadly. The RDCMSA ranks 39th among the 51 largest metropolitan statistical areas in terms of the extent of volunteering nationally, and is located in a state that ranks below average on volunteering (North Carolina is ranked 33rd) (The Federal Agency for Service and Volunteering 2012). For the purposes of the survey data collection, youth organizations were identified and defined based on the following criteria: self-identify as working with youth, have an address within the RDCMSA, and are stand-alone organizations.
(e.g., unaffiliated with another institution like a school). All identifiable organizations were included in the survey.

I collected data on the population of organizations in the RDCMSA in May 2014 using an online survey in Qualtrics. Although not all the organizations were 501(c)3 registered, they were all non-profit organizations. To identify the population of organizations, I first began with tax-exempt organization data from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) exempt organization (EO) database (n=169), as well as Guidestar and the Nonprofit Explorer (Tiggs and Wei 2014) (n=46). I supplemented this initial database with local databases, such as the North Carolina Center for Nonprofits, VolunteerMatch, and Chapel Hill-Carrboro Youth Forward, as well as coalition and event listings (n=49). Organizations on the updated list with a Twitter handle (n=84) were passed through a customized search engine I created using the Twitter application program interface (API) to look for connections between the initial organizations and other local youth organizations (n=18). I used this approach to locate organizations in the population that were not listed in formal directories as a means to capture the broadest set of organizations. Once duplicates were dropped and organizations that no longer existed or did not actually work with youth were removed, the total identifiable population included 246 unique youth organizations.

I then administered a survey online using the survey program Qualtrics, and made follow up telephone calls to respondents who began but did not complete the survey. I distributed the survey by email and through web site inquiry forms, if available (n=174). I called organizations that did not have email or web forms and offered them the opportunity to complete the survey (n=37). Of the 211 organizations contacted, 73, or roughly 35%, filled out the survey. The respondents were determined by the organization. Completion of the survey required extensive knowledge of the organization, and most commonly the respondents were organizational staff.
members, often executive directors, although a few were volunteers. Survey questions were broken down into four major categories: organizational structure, online/offline strategies and tactics, general and event-based perceptions of effectiveness, and demographic characteristics of participants.

Organizational Structure

The majority of organizations responding to the survey were 501(c)3 organizations with formalized organizational structures. Of the respondents, 91% had a board of directors, most of whom served only a minor role in the organization. The majority of organizations, nearly 70%, also had paid staff that played a large role in the organization. Beyond the board and paid staff, most youth organizational respondents also emphasized the importance of volunteers in the organizations. 86% of organizations utilized volunteers in some capacity. Like staff, volunteers were relatively involved in the organizations.

As mentioned, youth organizations vary widely in their main goals. As table 1 shows, the most common organizational goals were recreation, volunteering, and academic achievement and the categories were not mutually exclusive. Organizations with explicitly political goals were the minority in the RDCMSA.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal of the Organization</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence Politics</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence Policy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bring Community Together Through Volunteer Work</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bring Together Like-Minded People</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shape Public Opinion</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train Leaders</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet Civic Responsibility</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide Social Services</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Achievement</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Youth Organizational Goals

Beyond the basic structural elements like goals and non-profit status, organizations also vary based on their access to resources. In particular, when scholars consider influential resources they often think of items like the age of the organization, its budget, size, participants, and whether or not it has a staff and board of directors (a measure of institutionalization) (e.g., Glisson and Durick 1988). One important structural factor I consider in this study is the participatory practice of the organization. For the purposes of the survey data, I consider participatory practices by analyzing the inclusion of youth in decision-making processes. Figure 2 shows the proportion of organizations that include youth in various areas.

In general, less than 1/3 of the organizations include youth on their boards, and only in very rare cases do youth comprise over 25% of the board of directors. Around 15% of the organizations have youth staff, and organizations with youth staff members tend to have over 25% of their staff comprised on youth. However, the majority of the organizations include youth as volunteers, often in large numbers. This means that often youth serve the organizations in unpaid roles. Both volunteer and more formal youth roles lead to inclusion in the decision-making processes of organizations. Youth primarily have a say in daily activities in 37% of the
organizations that had a representative respond to the survey and programming in 33% of the organizations. Youth were also included in fundraising decisions in 21% of the organizations. Youth are included in hiring (4%) and budgetary decisions (8%) with much less frequency. Often, adults and youth work together in organizations. Adults most commonly advise youth and plan activities for youth, but they also work in collaboration with youth.

Figure 2. Proportion of Organizations Including Youth

Organizational Demographics

The youth served by organizations in this study vary. As shown in figure 3, the most common population of youth served are from families near or below the federal poverty line. More organizations serve youth from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds as shown in figure 3 and table 2, and are not homogenous organizations of singular groups. The adult staff in organizations, shown in table 3, however, are primarily white. As a result, organizations serve economically disadvantaged mixed race youth, but are primarily staffed by white adults.
Comparative Ethnography

The survey data provided insight about how organizational representatives understood their groups, but did not allow for an examination of interactions and operations in these organizations. To supplement the survey data, I embarked on a year of fieldwork in 4 youth civic organizations. I observed the daily routines of these organizations at meetings and events, interviewed youth and adults, and ran problem-solving groups with participants to evaluate whether what they learned in the organizations could be applied to solving social and political problems outside of the organization.
To select organizations for this study, I began by drawing from the survey data. I then utilized the survey results to determine categories for selecting organizations that varied by type. The initial organizations selected for study were one service and one social movement organization. I then matched these initial organizations with pairs that differed on the race and socioeconomic status composition of the population served. These preliminary categorizations were drawn from the literature on civic associations and intended to capture variation as the population served strongly influences members’ experiences (Gordon 2010). The approach of selecting organizations that operate in the same arena (e.g., two teen courts) but differ on key characteristics has been utilized in the study of civic organizations (e.g., Pearce 1983). This approach helps to limit the number of factors that vary in organizations and allow for direct comparisons (Symon and Cassell 2012).

The majority of civic participation takes place in service organizations (Verba et al. 1995), that often actively differentiate themselves from other groups by avoiding using “politics” to define their work, and instead focusing on social issues (Elisasoph 2013). Membership in these organizations, even when the organizations are explicitly apolitical, can impact political participation, increasing the political competency of members over non-participant peers (Almond and Verba 1965). Oftentimes, apolitical service organizations explicitly seek to engage members in their communities through activities such as volunteering. Scholarship on community organizations and volunteering has produced mixed results surrounding the extent of civic opportunities and participation available to members of service organizations. For instance, while volunteering can increase political knowledge, in some cases youth who volunteer disengage from politics as a result of learning that individuals are responsible for solving social problems (Musick and Wilson 2008). Musick and Wilson (2008), point to the case of Habitat for
Humanity claiming that volunteers gain political consciousness while simultaneously receiving messages of self-reliance.

Political organizations are often seen as important organizations for building civic opportunities and skills. Scholars differentiate these types of organizations from service and non-political organizations because they explicitly seek to engage members in politics (e.g., Almond and Verba 1965; Blee 2012; Corrigall-Brown 2011; Eliasoph 2013). Eliasoph (2013) distinguishes between volunteer organizations and groups of political activists, demonstrating that political activists frame their problems as injustices and often “expand the domain of political, conscious, democratic decision-making” (45). In Blee’s (2012) evaluation of how activist groups exercise democratic principles, she finds that political groups innovate in the realm of political talk and action and create social change. It is these groups where members have a say in decision-making and policy influence. In general, greater active participation in these organizations leads to greater political competency, although members who only participate briefly or minimally still outpace their peers who are not part of civic organizations in political competency (Almond and Verba 1965). Political groups are more likely to engage in contentious actions outside of the standard routine channels for political involvement (Eliasoph 2013). In particular, one type of political organization, social movement organizations (SMOs), often function outside of mainstream political avenues. Political organizations, like SMOs, therefore, are seen as groups that explicitly engage members in politics. Although these organizations might be expected to primarily engage their members in political issues, groups like unions—while political—were found to offer fewer opportunities to build civic skills than service organizations (Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995) and sometimes even these groups actively avoided discussing politics (Eliasoph 1998).
In addition to selecting organizations based on type, I also selected on the socioeconomic status of the population served. As described above, the population served dictates both the kinds of experiences that youth have in the organizations and the extensiveness of adult intervention (Eliasoph 2011; Gordon 2010). While theoretically important for variation in organizations, selecting on the sociodemographic population served proved challenging. I utilized organizational representatives survey and interview responses as well as their published materials to identify the socioeconomic status of the youth. I then selected across organizations that served a higher socioeconomic status majority population and those that served a minority and lower socioeconomic status population. Although this sampling technique was informed by both theoretical constructs and representatives reports, in practice the variation across race and socioeconomic status was not straightforward, and more often organizations over reported their variation on these characteristics on their materials and in survey responses. This experience fits into a larger trend of ‘cosmetic colorblindness” whereby organizations publish statistics and discuss diversity as a way to make their organizations appear more inclusive than they are (Ernst 2010). As a result, instead of across organization variation on these two axes, variation often occurred within organizations, the implications of which I discuss further below.

In the end, I observed four civic organizations, matched pairs of service and political organizations that varied on the populations served, although not as extensively as I sought. I used comparative ethnographic methods to study these organizations. This choice in part came as a response to the dominance of case studies of participatory practices in the literature on organizations (Lee 2015), which have limited the comparative leverage of participatory practices across organizations. Although comparative ethnographic methods have a long history, they have been rarely utilized and passed over in favor of case studies. Yet, comparative ethnographies
have produced influential work (Blee 2012; Lichterman 2005; Staggenborg 2018) and have garnered greater attention in recent years (Jørgensen 2015; Lichterman and Reed 2015). The power of this approach is that it allows for several analytical strategies that are not possible in single case studies or large quantitative analyses. Building on Jørgensen (2015), three primary strengths of a comparative ethnographic approach include the ability to 1) delve deeper into emergent patterns, 2) compare topics brought to light by research participations, and 3) challenge norms, concepts, and expectations that emerge through observations and participants’ expressions.

In my observations, I focus on everyday interactions among organizational participants. Through these interactions, I observe how youth are engaged in organizations, the roles of youth, and their interactions with peers and adults. This project is a multi-sited comparative ethnography, which focuses on variation across organizations by type, participatory practices, and across sociodemographic elements. Using a comparative ethnographic approach allows for consideration of these intersecting factors. The observations give me a chance to look at the mundane and everyday experiences of youth in these organizations, but also the times when organizational actors sought to mobilize youth around a given issue. This comparative ethnography also allows for activism to be defined more broadly, not just by a count of protest attendance or letters written to the editor, but as a process of learning and skill development. This study extends beyond case studies that produce assumptions based on a single organization, as has been done in the majority of work of this type.

Further, comparative ethnography allowed me to look for emergent patterns across all organizations in the study. During observations, I took fieldnotes, and recorded interviews that were later transcribed using professional transcription services. Throughout the process, I
analyzed the data collected through analytic memos that captured recurrent themes in the organizations and across organizations. All data collected was in compliance with the Internal Review Board. The field notes, analytic memos, interview transcripts, and focus group transcripts were then compiled into Atlas Ti. I then used a selective open coding scheme to develop codes as they emerged from the data (Corbin and Strauss 1990). Throughout the process, I reevaluated the codes and concepts and their relationships to each other (Charmaz 2006). The data remained nested in organizations and the analysis focused on the processes of organizational influence as well as comparisons across cases. The observations were extensive, at least 6 months of observation occurred in each field site, totaling 72 field notes and 33 interviews.

At the end of the fieldwork and interviewing, I ran problem-solving groups to evaluate whether youth could utilize their organizational frames and tactics outside of organizations. By selecting participants for each problem-solving group from their associated organization I was able to consider the impact of group affiliation and preexisting patterns of interaction on the responses. I recruited broadly for the groups and offered selective incentives for participation (e.g., pizza). Following similar approaches in past work, I shared minimal information about the group session prior to their start (see Perrin 2006).

Logistically, these groups were akin to focus groups, in that I brought together a group of people and asked them to discuss a topic. However, instead of asking interview-style questions, I proposed realistic hypothetical political and social problems. Group observations allow researchers to analyze the construction of shared meaning and interactions among the set of individuals (Gamson 1992) and are the natural way that individuals engage in politics (Perrin 2006). Observing groups that are part of existing organizations allowed me to consider how patterns of interaction and types of information are retained from the organizational setting.
While focus groups have received a significant amount of criticism in recent years (Axinn and Pearce 2006), that criticism has largely been based around the use of focus groups as a proxy for interviewing individual participants, and as a process influenced by a moderator. Other scholars have attempted to negate these concerns by utilizing a mixed methods approach to focus groups that combine interviewing or other techniques with some success, especially with forethought around research design (Morgan 1993). However, the role of a moderator is hard to remove when the individual is asking questions and prompting discussion. By providing the scenarios and then merely observing the youth interact, the measurement error often produced by researcher-led focus group discussions is reduced (Axinn and Pearce 2006). In addition, I asked youth during the groups follow up questions such as whether they had performed a specific task or where they learned a strategy.

Youth in these groups were asked to work together towards a resolution to the proposed issue, with no sense of a wrong or right answer, but rather a focus on the process of creating a solution and the strategies and tactics used to accomplish their proposed solution. The prompts varied in content, asking about social, political, and organizational issues. This reduced any biasing of the questions towards a particular group. These sessions were also recorded and transcribed for analysis in Atlas Ti. The small group setting offered insight into group processes, such as whether individuals in organizations with more participatory structures captivated these elements in group sessions. This group analysis also resulted in the emergence of repertoires of tactics and strategies that were viewed as appropriate responses to political and social issues.

Although I cannot isolate the influence of the organization, I established several sensitivity measures to limit outside influence. For instance, although I cannot separate the effects of other socializing mechanisms like family and schools, I collected survey data on the
youth participating to determine their family background and other organizational activities. During the focus group, I also asked youth follow up questions about how they were able to come up with certain solutions (see appendix c for more details). While it remains impossible to remove the effect of non-organizational forces, I utilize both my observations of the groups and interview questions to increase my ability to observe organizational influence. Generally, focus group methods are strengthened when additional methods also occur, such as individual interviewing and participant observation (Lee 1999). In this case, the focus group is not being used as a tool for efficiency, but rather to observe the process of group interactions, which would otherwise be impossible to experience (Lee 1999).

In addition, there may be selection issues that dictate who enters and remains in civic organizations. To inform my analysis, I capture detailed information on who is present in the organization, observe for long enough periods to understand recruitment, and discuss with organizational representatives who they feel is absent from their organizational settings. While these approaches help to reduce the influence of selection, there remains the question of who is missing in this study of civic participation, and the possibility that parental influence primarily explains the effects I find. Of the 24 teens surveyed prior to interviews, 38% were only in the organizations I observed or had one additional affiliation, often with a school-based club. Youth were in the organizations for various amounts of time, from less than 1 month to 7 years. Youth also identified several pathways to finding organizations including parental identification, peer recommendation, web searches, and school listing of service organizations. When I discuss organizational influence in chapter 7, I will again address the potential for confounding factors.
The Organizations

In this study, I completed in-depth ethnographic analysis of four civic organizations along with interviews with youth and adults and problem-solving groups with youth. To begin, I offer an overview of each of the organizations I observed for this study. All names of individuals and organizations are pseudonyms and this work was completed in compliance with the University of North Carolina Internal Review Board (13-2815).

Youth Teen Court

Youth Volunteering Group (YVG) is a not-for-profit 501(c)3 organization that runs several programs, the largest of which is called Youth Teen Court (YTC). There are over 1,000 teen courts, or alternative justice programs, across the country, which have recently received attention in the media (Baker 2015). At the time of observation, the YTC was run by one paid staff member of YVG, and was majority white, middle-class youth volunteers serving as lawyers and jurors on court cases for primarily lower socioeconomic status black and Latino youth. Volunteers primarily found the organization through school listing of volunteer opportunities and peers.

A second set of teens was often present in the court serving as jurors. These teens were not volunteers, but rather youth who were previously tried in the court and were serving part of their sentence, which included completing jury duty. YVG depicts how the program works describing that volunteers act as attorneys, clerks, bailiffs and jurors alongside a presiding adult judge. The youth attorneys present case facts and the peer jury provides a constructive sentence. Most sentences include jury duty on future cases and community service, but optional sanctions
can also be included such as apology letters, counseling, essays, and observation of district courts (YVG 2015).

Although the participants are primarily teens, Youth Teen Court sessions feel and operate like many courtrooms in America—there is a judge in a robe with a gavel in front of him, lawyers dressed in dress shirts and some in suits and ties, a jury seated in the jury box, and observers in the audience. The attorneys use complex arguments to make their points, and they win and lose cases based on the sentencing of a jury of peers. Youth on trial are referred to the program through arresting officers in their schools and communities. When teens complete their sentences, they have the opportunity to have their cases expunged or to avoid having a criminal record entirely.

Restorative Justice Teen Court

Much like YTC, the Restorative Justice Teen Court (RJTC) is a not-for-profit 501(c)3, but their primary program is Teen Court. At the time of observation, the RJTC had four rotating staff members who would attend meetings, all of whom were black. The lawyers were mixed black, Hispanic, and white, and primarily lower middle class, and the jurors and teens on trial were almost exclusively black and majority male. The RJTC offers a description of the benefits to teens for participating in the court saying that it is “community service” since it involves helping other young people who have violated laws and need to be held accountable for their actions and receive a second chance without a criminal conviction. They state that participation both benefits the community and helps the volunteer “develop new skills” (RJTC 2015).

This setting looks very similar to the YVG Teen Court, although they utilize a higher security courthouse (e.g., you enter through a metal detector, there are cameras in the
courtroom), and the jury is almost exclusively teens sentenced to jury duty, as opposed to mixed volunteers and former defendants. In structure, the courtroom again seems like any across the country, although at times the RJTC uses bench trials, where the adult attorney sentences the teen on trial instead of a jury of peers. Teens find this organization in similar ways to pathways into the YVG and serve similar roles in the court.

**Engaging Youth in Community**

Engaging Youth in Community (EYC) is also a nonprofit organization that serves a political purpose and can be classified as a social movement organization—or an organization that is part of a broader social movement, in this case healthcare reform. As I have heard them say every time they introduced their organization to new teens or potential funders, their mission is engaging youth alongside adults in community change (EYC 2015). EYC combines two primary approaches to advocate for healthcare reform. First, they train an in-house paid staff of youth to do advocacy activities in the community, but also to train other youth. Second, they offer training and “customized services” to other groups who seek to create change and engage youth. These groups may be as mundane as a small-town Parks and Recreation Department that seeks to include a youth council, or as unique as a grassroots group of teens who seek to reduce access to tobacco products for underage youth in their communities. In cases where both teens and adults are involved, adult EYC staff trains the adult contingent, while youth EYC staff train the youth contingent. Although these trainings make up a significant portion of the adult staff time at EYC, they are less frequent youth activities, since often adults from organizations contact EYC to begin a youth inclusion program, and therefore do not have youth participants at the time of training.
At the time of observation, the EYC youth healthcare team I observed was 6 teens and one adult, and was mixed by race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Teens were recruited to EYC primarily through recruitment tabling at high schools, peers, and contacts with other local non-profit organizations. Primarily in my observations, the youth were trained on issues such as the social determinants of oral health, implicit racial bias, and equity, and completed advocacy activities such as writing letters to the editor. The majority of the time, the group worked together in conjunction with their primary adult staff mentor.

**Youth Reducing Sexual Violence**

Youth Reducing Sexual Violence (YRSV) is a grassroots political, social movement organization that describes itself as youth-founded and run in partnership with adult mentors. It is under the umbrella of a local Rape Crisis Center (RCC), a nonprofit organization that provides interventions and services to individuals who have experienced sexual violence (RCC 2015). YRSV seeks to change rape culture through education and exposure using activities such as high school workshops on consent and other sexual health issues, and by attending protests and events of other social movement organizations in the community. At the time of observation, the organization was majority white (except for two non-white youth) and primarily higher socioeconomic status. The organization had two adult mentors who were paid staff of the RCC for the majority of the observations, but one of the adult staff was no longer with the group at the end of my observations as I will discuss further below. The majority of the organizational time was spent in meetings, planning for events and discussing instances of rape culture in the lives of the teens. Most youth found the organization through direct network ties or workshops the group presented at local schools.
Comparing the Organizations

Table 4 below presents a guide for the basic demographic features of the organization. EYC and YRSV are a matched paid of social movement organizations. EYC is primarily mixed on race and socioeconomic status and the teens are primarily female. YRSV teens are primarily white, upper-middle class, and female. The RJTC and YTC are a matched pair of service organizations. The RJTC is primarily non-white and mixed on socioeconomic status and gender. The YTC, however, is primarily white and middle class but mixed on gender. Although the influence of these features will be addressed throughout, this synopsis is meant to serve as a guide to understanding the basic composition of the various groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Youth</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Socioeconomic Status</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engaging Youth in Community</td>
<td>EYC</td>
<td>Social Movement</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Primarily Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Reducing Sexual Violence</td>
<td>YRSV</td>
<td>Social Movement</td>
<td>5-15</td>
<td>Primarily White</td>
<td>Upper Middle-Class</td>
<td>Primarily Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restorative Justice Teen Court</td>
<td>RJTC</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>5-20</td>
<td>Primarily Non-White</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Teen Court</td>
<td>YTC</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td>3-8</td>
<td>Primarily White</td>
<td>Primarily Middle-Class</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Overview of Youth Organizations
CHAPTER IV. ENGAGING YOUTH IN DECISION MAKING

Of the 70 organizations that completed the TYCEP survey, 42, or about 60% claimed that their organizations involved youth in key organizational processes like daily decision-making, programming, or an administrative task.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily Decision</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programming</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Youth Inclusion

As shown in table 5, many involved the youth in decision-making across various organizational realms from daily decision-making to organizational administration. Inclusion on a daily basis entails youth having a role in decision-making about the daily logistics, activities, and conversations that take place in the organization. Inclusion in programming decisions may mean helping to develop new programs for the organization, becoming involved in how the strategy around a particular program changes over time, and even a role in determining how a program fits with the overall goal of the organization. Administrative inclusion refers to the involvement of young people in the major decisions made at the organizational level including hiring, fundraising, and budgetary decisions. In line with past work, I focus on various areas that are typically considered “adult roles” in organizational settings (Zeldin, Camino, and Mook 2005) and identified as valuable opportunities for developing civic capacity (Baggetta 2009).
Analyzing youth inclusion in these traditionally adult areas of the organization indicates how extensively youth are included in decision-making processes.

Organizations that included young people in decision-making often promoted that their groups worked “in partnership” or “alongside” youth. Primarily, organizational representatives indicated that youth in these organizations were part of decision-making on a daily basis or around programming. Yet, past work indicates that the claims of these organizations or their stated objectives do not meaningfully capture the participatory practices utilized in these settings (Collingwood and Reedy 2012; Michels and De Graaf 2010). The sorts of rules and norms established by these organizations often function as “myths”, different from the social interactions that occur in the organizations (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Therefore, it is in the interactions within the groups that participatory approaches can be seen (Leino 2012). To analyze how youth are included in organizations, therefore, I focus on the ways that daily interactions between youth and adults influence organizational practices.

In past work, there is a strong expectation that organizations may strategically choose to include youth in decision-making processes, but limited evidence of successful inclusion (MacNeil 2006; Zeldin et al. 2014). Yet, ideals of democratic participation drive many organizations to seek a participatory style that is non-hierarchical and inclusive (Polletta 2004). However, there are particular challenges for youth organizations in pursuing this approach, since the inherent power differential between youth and adults (Sherrod 2006) combined with adultism can leave even well-intentioned groups struggling to include youth (Gordon 2010; Gordon and Taft 2011). There are also additional challenges such as turnover as youth enter and leave the organization and various forms and levels of youth commitment in the groups.
Despite the majority of youth civic organizations claiming to include youth in decision-making processes, the way inclusion was enacted in these organizations varied in ethnographic observations. I found that organizations often struggled to live up to their claims about participation. The challenge of overcoming the power dynamics and producing an inclusive approach to youth participation impacted even the least hierarchical organizations in this study. The four organizations I observed varied in the extent youth were included in decision-making processes. Some organizations created routines and inclusion approaches that allowed autonomous roles for youth to participate in various elements of the organization, while others enforced pre-determined decisions that could not be influenced by the youth.

In part, the approaches and struggles for inclusion in these organizations are part of a broader shift in organizations towards formal hierarchically structured organizations run by paid staff (Rainey and Bozeman 2000). Civic organizations in the United States have moved towards instituting managers; paid staff members who retain control over the organization and manage participants. While this historic trend remains, youth organizations in particular have been scrutinized for their approach to including participants and an entire area of practice-based research has emerged that supports these organizations as they move away from a hierarchical model to a more inclusive model (Barcelona and Quinn 2011). Discussions of inclusivity tend to examine the experiences of adults, but rarely consider how young people are included in groups and organizations (Polletta 2013). Yet, for youth organizations, participatory practices are consequential for the experiences of constituents as well as for the ability of organizations to develop activists.

In this chapter I focus on the interactions between youth and adults on a daily basis in both mundane moments and times of conflict. I analyze the extent to which youth are involved in
the decision-making processes in their organizations and begin to identify the importance of various participatory approaches.

Participatory Practices in Youth Organizations

The four organizations in this study vary in their participatory approaches and the extent to which they include youth in decision-making processes. The two activist organizations both offer youth extensive roles in decision-making processes on several levels, including in daily decisions and programming decisions. However, both EYC and YRSV also experience conflict around the extent of autonomy youth receive. At YRSV, contention around autonomy dominates the interactions that take place. By contention I am referring not just to isolated instances of conflict, but rather to the general nature of the relationship whereby two parties have recurrent tension around a particular issue. In contrast, moments of conflict occur at EYC, but they tend to be isolated incidents that led to increased youth autonomy. As I will demonstrate, the differentiation between these two experiences indicates the importance of balancing youth autonomy with adult management to ensure that adults can support youth in establishing their roles in the organization.

The service organizations differ vastly from each other on the extent of autonomy they provide youth. The YTC includes youth in decision-making processes, but not around programming or organizational administration elements, which are highly structured by the adult staff. The RJTC does not include young people in the majority of decision-making, instead primarily relying on adults to manage the youth into subordinate roles in the organization. Table 6 provides an overview of the various participatory approaches of each organization and indicates how youth are included in the organizations.
Table 6. Organizational Style Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Org. Style</th>
<th>Daily Decisions</th>
<th>Programming</th>
<th>Organizational Administration (including fundraising, hiring, budget)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restorative Justice Teen Court (RJTC)</td>
<td>Management Over Autonomy</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Teen Court (YTC)</td>
<td>Managed Autonomy – constrained</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging Youth in Community (EYC)</td>
<td>Managed Autonomy – extended</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Reducing Sexual Violence (YRSV)</td>
<td>Managed Autonomy – contentious</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Continuum of Autonomy

The participatory practices in these organizations vary along a continuum of the extent of autonomy provided to youth and the degree of management exerted by adults. An approach that balances the adult and youth role in decision-making is called managed autonomy. Managed autonomy occurs when adults in the organization provide guidance and support to youth who are given critical roles in decision-making processes. This supportive adult role is necessary for development of both youth and the organizations (Zeldin et al. 2005). Managed autonomy also involves both youth and adults categorizing the role of adults as support for the youth and both parties perceiving equitable participation in decision-making. I consider organizational approaches to youth inclusion across three primary realms within which youth make decisions; on a daily basis in the organization, around programming, and in the administration of the organization (including, budget, hiring, and fundraising).
As I will describe below, The RJTC primarily utilized adults as decision-makers in all three areas of the organization. Youth were primarily positioned as subordinate to adults and were not given much if any role in decision-making. The YTC similarly limited the youth role in decision-making around programming and organizational administration. However, the youth had a more extensive role in daily decision-making and in the organizational setting adults often served as support for the youth. At YTC managed autonomy was utilized, but it was constrained to the realm of daily decision-making, with little or no ability for the youth to have a role in decision-making in other organizational areas.

EYC primarily operated under the style of managed autonomy, with varying degrees of youth inclusion based on the organizational realm. Youth were decision-makers in some capacity at each level of the organization, but mostly in daily decision-making, then programming, and least in administration. YRSV included youth most extensively in each realm of the organization, utilizing a managed autonomy approach. At YRSV, although the youth had an extensive role in decision-making and adults acted as support for the teens, the specific roles of adults and youth were unclear. The adults overpromised autonomy to the youth, but under delivered on those promises. As a result, youth expectations often went unmet and contention around autonomy dictated the experience, eventually leading to the collapse of the organization.

Although each organization primarily relied on a particular style, there was never complete consistency as groups worked through interactions to determine the roles of youth in the organizations. Despite having one primary approach, there were instances in each organization where the established balance between management and autonomy fluctuated. In these instances, interactive norms were at times violated, challenged, or renegotiated. Further, the claims of the organizational actors often conflict with the practices within the groups. What
follows are findings based on the interactions between adults and youth in the four organizations combined with interview data. I discuss the extent to which youth have autonomy over decision-making in the various areas of the organizations and the way organizational approaches may confine these practices to certain realms or produce contention.

*Participatory Practices*

I begin by discussing the RJTC, the organization that utilized the greatest extent of adult management and offered youth the least autonomy. I then turned to the YTC to demonstrate how managed autonomy occurred in a similar organization but remained constrained to certain realms. I analyze the use of managed autonomy at EYC and begin to introduce the way that offering youth autonomy in organizations can produce conflict. I then present findings from YRSV where managed autonomy was used, but in which contention around autonomy dominated the interactions between youth and adults. Finally, I turn to the implications of including youth in decision-making for youth and adults in organizations.

*Management over autonomy*

An approach that utilizes management over autonomy focuses on adult managers as the sole or primary decision makers. Despite claims of empowerment, youth have a very limited place if any in decision-making processes in these organizations. This approach often involves adults telling youth how to participate and expecting youth to accept a subordinate role. Youth in these organizations often ask adults for permission to undertake even small tasks.

The RJTC states in their organizational materials that by participating in the program “Youth are empowered to constructively find ways to reduce crime and violence in their schools
and community.” However, in practice youth were confined to a few scripted roles in which strong norms limited their autonomy. The roles and explicit scripts for most roles were published on the organization’s website and given to the teens when they entered the organization. Other indications about the limitation of the youth role were also present in the “volunteer guidelines,” which contained 9 rules for participation. The guidelines lay out the rules that volunteers must “abide by” and notes that they are important for maintaining the judicial building as well as helping volunteers “do [their] jobs. The RJTC utilized the rules and the formality of the courtroom with its structured roles to limit youth autonomy and inclusion in decision-making, advance adult authority and subsequent youth subordination, and at times create an environment of fear.

On any given day, there are typically about 5 teen volunteers in the RJTC courtroom and between 10 and 20 youth present who were serving sentences. The group meets weekly, and there are enough cases most nights to run two courtrooms simultaneously. The scene looked familiar—teens sat behind the lawyer’s desks, an adult sat in a robe at the judge’s bench, and other teens sat in the jury box. But, when the court session began, it is evident that this is not a traditional court but rather a setting in which adults and youth are both present and navigating their roles.

In observations at the RJTC, adults often told teens what to do and expected the subordination of the youth. This ranged from telling youth to “pull up [their] pants,” to instructing them that their opening statements must be kept “short,” to interrupting teen attorneys as they presented their arguments. Generally, in this setting youth were expected to accept adult authority and not challenge them. Steven, a black male adult staff member at the organization who was present during most court sessions, emphasized the subordinate role of youth to adult
authority when he said in an interview that 10 years ago when he started at the organization “The kids back then you had a little bit more control, they respected authority a little bit better…” He said that many of the volunteers don’t need discipline because they “already get it.” Steven said that the teens came to the court to learn and to receive help, so he took the approach of “just kind of be[ing] real strict on the court….lett[ing] them know that this is serious…” Teen attorney, Skyler, in her interview reiterated this point when she said, “I think that was another reason for teen court now that I’m thinking about it is to teach these kids about authority.”

The limited autonomy of youth was also evident in interactions around decisions. At RJTC, youth often asked adults permission to make even small decisions. For instance, on a day when teen attorney Jamal was going to begin the court session, he asked the adults in the room “can I begin?” and awaited permission before welcoming everyone to the court. Similarly, Skyler asked the adult, Ms. Perkins, about the lack of a clerk of court, seeking the ability to decide who should serve in this role. Ms. Perkins told her “you can pick someone.” Skyler looked into the audience where teen volunteers and teens serving jury duty sat and asked a black female if she would be the clerk. The teen looked hesitant. Skyler told her “you just have to read from a book.” The teen still looked hesitant, and before the teen could respond to Skyler’s request to serve in the role Ms. Perkins said that she or the other adult in the room would serve as the clerk, a role youth held in most of the other court sessions. Ms. Perkins then asked a black male teen if he would take on this role, telling him what the role entailed, but the teen said “nah.” In the end, Skyler was not allowed to choose a teen for the role and an adult served as clerk of court, despite there being many teens present. Similar interactions between youth and adults occurred in the jury room, where youth were deliberating a sentence and adults would come into the room and ask questions or encourage a sentencing strategy. Although the instances of youth
decision-making at RJTC were few and relatively minor, youth often consulted with adults and sought permission before making mundane everyday decisions, even when adults previously gave them permission to make a decision.

During the court sessions, teen attorneys determined the opening and closing statements, the questioning for the defendant, and what information they chose to share with the jury and court attendees. But, as the adult Steven explained in an interview, the teens had a guide book they used to produce the statements and questions. They had autonomy to “put their own little tweak on it and do what they need to do. Put their own little personal effect on it…” The expectation in the court was that teens would keep their arguments short and not stray far from the script. As a result, from trial to trial the language used was very similar. Although teens decided what information to share and how to express that information to some extent, they also faced adult intervention in this role.

The judge in the court and the adult staff at the organization frequently interjected information or questions into the teen attorney’s questioning and arguments. In about one-third of the trials, the judge intervened in a case to ask the defendant questions the attorney did not cover. The judge would then allow the attorney to ask follow-up questions. On a few occasions, the judge also changed the sentence the defendant received. For instance, in one case, after the teen jury determined a verdict and it was read to the defendant, the judge said “In addition to that, in my authority as judge, I request that you write a 2-page essay on friendship and what it means to be a friend.”

Besides the limited autonomy youth had to craft their arguments and questioning in the courtroom, youth were typically given autonomy only when adults were unable to fill a role due to staffing issues. For instance, Jamal noted in an interview that on the few instances when the
program staff were absent or running late, they asked him to start the court session or serve as the check-in monitor, documenting who attended teen court on a given day. But, even in court sessions where I observed Jamal announce the start of court, Steven would often walk in before the judge began the trial to reiterate in a commanding voice the same sentiments Jamal stated moments prior. For example, Jamal would welcome everyone and tell them to turn off their cell phones and Steven would come to the front shortly thereafter with similar words, “If you do not put away your phones they will be confiscated and held until the end of court. Do not talk and take off your hats.” When Steven gave the second round of instruction, the teens often reacted by clicking their cheeks against their teeth in disappointment or anger, or by very slowly doing as Steven asked. In the courtroom, it was clear that even in moments where youth were briefly in autonomous roles, adults managed the courtroom and made decisions.

Overall, youth at the RJTC had very limited decision-making power in daily decisions and little to none in programming or administrative realms. Interestingly, the RJTC was the only organization I observed with a formal youth leadership structure. Youth served roles like “president” and “vice-president,” but when asked about these roles indicated that they mostly helped to plan the end of the year party. The positions otherwise did not provide the youth with a role in decision-making processes. The inclusive structure of the organization was overshadowed by a culture with a very limited view of the youth role.

Only some of the teens were aware of the leadership positions at the RJTC. One of the teens, Josiah, said that the current president “she ain’t do nothing.” Josiah said that if he were the president he’d “help do like fundraising stuff and…set stuff in order…like how attorneys act sometimes.” He also said “I don’t even know what Teen Court counsel does…” In an interview with Skyler, she said that Jamal was the vice-president, and so he decided on the jury, although I
never observed him having involvement in jury selection. She also said that was the reason Jamal was the one to announce the start of court. In my observations, I was unaware of the existence of formal leadership roles for youth and learned about them only in interviews.

The RJTC is not unlike many groups that primarily view the youth in their organization as receiving a service and not as participants in the process (Zeldin 2004). In similar organizations and at the RJTC, youth have very limited involvement if any in decision-making processes, and do not generally feel very included in the organization. Yet, many still express enjoying their time there. Skyler said, “I love teen court and I love doing it.” Despite their enjoyment, however, the youth also pointed out that they’d like to have a greater influence, like setting up longer-term relationships with defendants in Skyler’s case or helping with administration as Josiah suggested. But, their roles remained confined to serving in the courtroom and helping with the end of year parties and occasional car washes. And, the teen court reminded teens as Skyler’s noted that, “you’re always going to be under someone’s authority… the authority is real and by the consequences it shows that the authority is real.”

*Managed autonomy – constrained*

The YTC, in many ways, looked similar to the RJTC. On a given day in court, teens similarly sat behind the lawyer’s desk and in the jury box, and an adult in a robe sat at the judge’s stand. But when the court began things seemed different. There was not a sense that adults were involved, with the exception of the judge and the bailiff who welcomed everyone to the court. At the YTC Adults disappeared into the background and teens ran the courtroom.

The rules and scripted roles presented in the organizational materials at the YTC looked similar to the RJTC and in some cases the language was identical. For instance, the introduction
to the rules was the same, but instead of referring to the role of the teens as their “job,” the YTC rules emphasized that volunteers were “role model[s]” and that the success of the program “depends” on the teens following the rules. But, whereas adults in the RJTC used the rules and formal court structure to limit the role of youth, adults in the YTC used the structure of the courtroom to establish autonomous roles for youth. This was evident as the YTC referred to rules as a way to support “role models,” while the RJTC said they were necessary to help teens “do your job.”

The volunteer base at the YTC was larger than the RJTC. On any given day, there were typically 10-12 volunteers at the court session and another 12-15 youth on trial or serving jury sentences. The YTC also met weekly, but only had 1-3 cases a night all held in the same courtroom. Whereas the RJTC was held in an operational county courthouse, the YTC took place in a non-functional historic courthouse, which provided a less formal setting for the trials and lacked security measures like metal detectors that volunteers must pass through. Throughout the cases, the teens moved around the courtroom with ease, often appearing confident in their stature and speech. The courtroom felt indistinguishable from a traditional adult court session, with attorneys and jurors acting independently and with authority in their roles.

The adult expectation of youth at the YTC was that they would operate “as in traditional court” and that youth, knowledgeable in legal matters, would use that knowledge to serve as attorneys on cases that impacted their peers. Adults treated youth as authorities in their roles in the courtroom. On several instances, the adult, Charlotte, even asked one of the teens for information about a legal matter. Legal objections, for instance, were used sparingly in the cases and typically by the most senior teen attorneys. One night Charlotte, a law student, and Barry had a conversation about objections and Barry appeared more knowledgeable than Charlotte,
generally having a broader sense of what “counts” as an objection and how to use them. She confirmed this deference to youth legal knowledge in an interview saying, “…there’s some things they definitely know better…” but, she explained “there are other things that they wouldn’t know at all.” Their knowledge and influence, as Charlotte confirmed, is limited to the cases and courtroom, and they are not involved in the organization much outside of the court sessions. She mentioned that she “…floated the idea for a while of like letting youth…elect new judges” and expand some of the areas they influence, but the logistics and politics of those decisions stopped her from doing so, thereby constraining youth autonomy to the courtroom.

The youth in this setting viewed the role of adults as constrained as well. Chip, a teen attorney, described the role of the adults in the court:

“Well so any given time there’s really, I see four roles for the adults. The judge, Charlotte, acting as a coordinator, the Bailiff and then whatever role the parents of the defendant play. Those are the only real four roles that adults actually have any influences. I’m not really all that familiar with the role Charlotte plays, she does a lot of back end stuff that I don’t think we see. In terms of preparing, working with the clients before and after…when we’re in recess when juries deliberating, a lot of times the judge will call us up and give us constructive feedback on our case and then Charlotte and the law students will help beforehand or provide input afterwards.”

In several interviews when I asked youth about the role of the adults in the organization, they only had a limited sense of adult roles. Most knew that Charlotte was, “the one that’s taking care of communication, she’s the one that’s putting together the case files, doing all of the work that goes into running the show before we actually get there, figuring out judges for the night.” Teens also knew she had an extended knowledge of the cases, so at times she could give them additional information. In observations, the primary contact between youth and adults occurred when youth asked Charlotte about the content of a case and received handouts on a particular case from her and when the judge spoke to the attorneys about their cases.
Interactions between youth and adults indicated that adults were there to support the youth. In one instance, a new teen attorney asked the judge “can I start over?”, but the judge just assured him “you’re doing great” and, without offering feedback or making corrections, told the teen to go forward with the questioning. Although the judges at YTC at times gave “feedback” to teens after the cases, during observations, I only observed one instance in which the judge interrupted the attorney to ask questions of the defendant. Although the teens did not rely on adults and were able to enact their roles in an autonomous way, they did have adult partnerships for support when needed. Beyond Charlotte and the judge, they could ask law students from the local law school who occasionally visited the court for advice on legal matters and could talk to Corporal Waverly, a school resource officer who acted as bailiff if they needed advice on disciplinary issues. Unlike youth and adults at RJTC who both agreed that the role of the adults was to be the authority figure and instill subordination, at YTC adults and youth had largely different roles and autonomy within those roles, and adults were there to support youth.

Youth at YTC did not ask for permission to make small decisions, but rather made them on their own or in conjunction with Charlotte. For instance, youth often decided which attorney would serve on a particular case, or if two attorneys were presiding how they would divide the responsibilities. In some instances, Charlotte would assign youth to cases before they arrived, especially cases that seemed more challenging. Youth would sometimes challenge Charlotte for decision-making power in these situations. For instance, teen attorney Mark told Charlotte that he did not want to serve as a prosecuting attorney in a case she’d put him on because he wanted to be the defense attorney. He said “I hate prosecuting people, it makes me feel bad. I’d rather defend the innocent than prosecute the guilty.” Charlotte told Mark that he needed to email her ahead of time with requests, but he said “is it ok to have someone switch with me...defense via
prosecution?” After some back and forth, Charlotte told Mark to trade with another attorney so that he could serve as defense. Mark in this case pushed for inclusion in the decision-making process. Interactions along these lines occurred on several other occasions, such as when Charlotte asked a teen to be the clerk for the day who pushed back saying “I’d like to be on the jury for at least one [case].” In another instance, Mark told Charlotte he wanted to submit evidence on a case, and when told him it was unnecessary, he said he’d really like to “put it’s content on there” and Charlotte agreed. Unlike the RJTC, in the jury room, youth decided on sentences without much influence from adults, and Charlotte only went into the jury room once during the period of observation after deliberations exceeded 30 minutes.

Although the interactions were not viewed as contentious, occasionally youth and adults came into conflict about the extent of autonomy given to youth. In observations, these moments of tension helped to illuminate the participatory practices of the organizations because the unspoken expectations of youth and adults could more readily be seen. On several occasions, Charlotte questioned the role of youth in making certain decisions in the courtroom, but typically to other adults (myself and the bailiff) and not to the youth themselves. These comments would often be along the lines of “he shouldn’t have said that.” Although there were moments of frustration or tension, because they did not tend to enter the interactions between the youth and adults, they did not typically create conflict.

However, on a few instances there was some limited conflict in interactions. For instance, in a training for teen attorneys on objections, Charlotte, the adult manager told Barry, a teen attorney who has been at teen court for several years, that he could help during the training by giving advice and providing examples. After interrupting Charlotte several times to add his view, Barry attempted to interrupt Charlotte again as she was explaining the importance of asking
various questions during questioning, rather than asking the same question several times. When Charlotte finished, Barry jumped in eagerly to explain that different judges react to this approach differently. Charlotte quickly changed the subject to keep Barry from going on with his discussion. Several times throughout the training, Barry appeared annoyed that Charlotte cut him off or asked him to be short in his response. Tension increased between the two and throughout the room over the course of the training. But these instances were rare and often seemed driven by interpersonal dynamics, and youth did not express that these interactions limited their autonomy in the setting or in interviews.

Overall, at the YTC teens ran “The whole entire trail proceeding…at a certain point an adult may be watching you but you’re doing all of the pedaling” as Mark told me. Youth had extensive roles in deciding on the case arguments, questioning, and sentences. One of the youth, Jin, elaborated on the process of youth attorneys in the courtroom: “… well I go find out what my case is and then I like sit there and read through everything and I like figure out you know depending on the prosecution or defense then I like to figure out what’s gonna help me and then I usually ask my [teen attorney] partner if they have any suggestions like what they wanna do. I usually get help from the law students and then if I’m the defense I’ll like go ask and then you know interview whatever the defendant um… Yeah then I just write out the questions and I usually write out my opening just like the little statements and stuff.” Although in essence Teen Court was run basically the same way each time, the teens controlled many aspects of the decision-making process, such as working with Charlotte to decide who would act as attorneys, interviewing defendants to determine the narrative of a case, and dictating how each case was run. The teens also decided what arguments were made about a case, what sentence a defendant received, and who or what was shared publicly in the courtroom. The youth had autonomy in
daily decisions and some control over the programming, but were not involved in the administration of the organization.

In this case, I observed the formalized roles and highly structured nature of the court used as a youth space; a place for creativity, idea creation, trial and error, and encouragement. The difference between this approach and the one taken in the RJTC was evident in the role description of attorneys, which was not a set of rules but rather a description of the pacing of the trial without suggestions on what to say or do in the courtroom. The attorneys used complex arguments to make their points to a greater extent than those in the RJTC, and won and lost cases that impacted the futures of other teens and were not overshadowed by adult intervention. Teens had complete discretion over their tasks and the adults in the organization supported the teens by running the program behind the scenes so that when the teens came into the court room there were cases to be tried and an adult judge was present. But, when the teens and adults were in the same space, the adults were there to support the teens and help them improve within their roles, while allowing the teens autonomy over tasks and group participation, both as lawyers and jurors.

*Managed Autonomy—Extended*

Although youth autonomy at the YTC was limited to specific areas and organizational realms, EYC and YRSV both included youth in decision-making across the organization. At YRSV, however, the extent of autonomy youth had in the organization became contentious when a major decision about staffing was made without youth inclusion. EYC claims on their website and organizational materials to “empower youth…in partnership with adults” in several areas including skill development, decision making, peer relationship building, and advocacy (EYC
The stated approach is reiterated by interactions in the organization as adults seek autonomy for youth even when this leads youth to challenge adult authority.

Unlike the RJTC and YTC, EYC is a much less structured organization. There are not clearly defined roles for adults and youth, the daily activities and schedules vary and are open to change, and even the space itself is more fluid with various areas to meet and gather. This allows youth an increased ability to negotiate for autonomy in various areas of the organization. On any given day, the 5 youth and Luke typically sat around a conference table in the middle of the organization’s office. The group met about twice a week. This setting allowed the youth to meet and interact with organizational administrators, hear and respond to various issues that arose, and bring concerns or suggestions to the executive director and others who often sat down at the table to “catch up” with the teens.

In explaining the organizational structure of EYC to a group of teens, Lilly said “they don’t believe in having a hierarchical structure, they have a round structure.” The idea of the structure is that youth participate equally with adults. During my observations, Luke remained the primary adult who interacted with the youth in the organization. He was highly self-aware and constantly struggled with the amount of autonomy he granted the youth, often describing the experience in a similar way. For him, youth were truly empowered when they were able to question his authority and understand their own. For instance, in an informal interview Luke remarked that he expected that youth were more participatory when he was out of the room or not in a meeting for the day. He said that this was because, “I haven’t been able yet to give them the authority I want to give them. Their world says not to respond…it will take a while for them to unlearn some [subservience]…I hope they are taught through their own experiences and learn to respectfully and reasonably use authority they are given, to know they can challenge me and
to know things are better when they can challenge me.” His leadership style, in line with the culture of the organization, is focused on creating pathways and opportunities for youth to develop their autonomous roles not dependent on adults.

The approach Luke emphasized was evident in negotiating decision-making. In one instance, Kiara, a black female teen, wrote to Luke to tell him that she was no longer going to be a part of EYC because she made the cheerleading squad. Luke went into the next meeting with the teens and shared the news about Kiara. Malik immediately asked if she was “pushed out.” Luke noted that this was something he worried about, and the group discussed whether they played a role in Kiara leaving. Luke then said that this also connected to the conversation the group was having about “how we can operate equitably.” In the conversation Luke began to discuss whether the team should bring someone else on saying “I want to hear what you think. What are the pros and cons?” He expressed concern that “we’d have to spend time back tracking….and having to condense 5 or 6 months of work into a shorter time frame.” The teens differed somewhat on their opinions, Lilly primarily wanted the group to develop more equitable practices before they brought in someone new, and Malik agreed but thought they could do this quickly and then bring in the new person. Evelyn was for bringing someone on sooner.

The teens pushed forward various arguments for bringing on a new team member. For instance, when Luke expressed concern that the new person would feel isolated, Evelyn said “it’s our responsibility” and Malik added “to include them.” At the end of the conversation, Luke said “Right now, I’m leaning towards—and my decision does not trump anybody’s—I’m leaning towards not hiring right now.” The teens, all but Lily who noted that she was graduating high school soon so should be considered less central to this decision-making, grew more adamant about hiring as the conversation went on. Pearl was absent that day, so the teens said that the
team should get her opinion. In the end, the teens decided that they wanted to bring on a new teammate, and Luke agreed to support them in this decision, recruiting at high schools and bringing in a new EYC youth participant despite Luke’s stated contradictory desire. Even though Luke was not on board for the decision, the teens were able to take the action they desired with Luke’s support.

In many ways, the outcome of the conversation about bringing in new youth was in line with the way Luke and the youth interacted on a daily basis. Luke commonly invited youth to participate in conversations and make decisions. He often said “I want to hear your thoughts” or said to a specific teen “I want to hear more from you.” At the same time that Luke invited youth participation and supported youth decision-making, youth also questioned Luke and challenged him on both his interactions with them and his decisions. For example, in one meeting the term “hippie” came up in describing someone, and Luke began to challenge the teens about what counts as a “hippie” asking things like “…if you were looking at a group of people, how do you know that one is a hippie?” Lily responded saying “I don’t think those are fair questions…you’re asking for generalization.” Luke pushed further with these questions, and Lilly pointed to the fallacy in the conversation saying “it depends who your stereotype is, according to your standard of normal, which is constantly changing by my surroundings.” Luke then agreed “So it’s hard to answer because it depends…” Exchanges in which youth challenged Luke and he agreed with them or went back on his original idea or decision were frequent at EYC and represented Luke’s goal of giving the youth power, while still supporting their learning and growth. He believed in this approach even when it was challenging for him personally, as he told me in an interview, “It’s like this angst, like from all of the hard work it takes to build up the capacity of youth to be
able to question adults, in the end it’s this whole other side of angst, you have to deal with what you’ve done.”

In an effort to truly give the youth autonomy in decision-making, Luke used the following strategy, “I need them to fully understand the issues, so if there are pros and cons of doing something or if I have a particular opinion I want to share after I hear from them, like I need them to discuss it so I can feel that we can do it objectively…” Luke went on to clarify:

I think that it also is important not to just like help them and include them in the decision making, but it helps them when like they own the decision and so moving forward they're responsible for doing these things, like this is a decision that we've all made together, but also it helps them just be more effective project managers, having the information that they need to get from point A to point B in a project, if they... If I made that decision to work with the [] students, didn’t tell them, and then we get into an action plan and they said 'Oh, we're going to do this as well'. One that's super disempowering, but two, I would predict that that would not be in the forefront of their mind moving forward, because it wasn’t a decision that they thought about and made…

Most of the youth saw this approach as successful and discussed feeling included in decision making in interviews. For instance, in an interview, Malik said “When I first came to EYC, I basically thought it was going to be adults telling me to do this work and do this, but ever since day one, [Luke] told me I don’t need to know when you come in, you can just come in whenever, the office is your office too, and he told me to stop calling him Mr. Luke and I realized it was not like that…it’s not like a hierarchy, it’s more like, it’s like a circle.”

Pearl had a similar sense. She said that what appealed to hear about EYC was being involved in youth leadership “it means that youth give, or somebody gives youth a voice and
opportunities to experience these things in leadership, and talk about these issues that affect them…we have different opportunities every day.” Pearl said “Luke lets us speak about anything and what we feel about these issues and he takes it into account, not just what he feels, but also what we feel. And he transfers it over to more people who want to hear what we want to say.” She said, “we’re working with the adults…whereas other organizations we are youth underneath and adult staff.” Lily similarly noted “it’s such a power sharing organization between youth and adults.” Youth at EYC felt they had a meaningful autonomous role to play in decision-making at the organization.

However, at times the interactions were not as autonomous as Luke and the youth hoped. Luke sometimes felt like the balance was off, “I feel like I was pulling stuff out of them a lot of times yesterday.” While Luke’s intention was to get the youth opinion before sharing his own, he was not always successful. On the day Luke was referring to, he asked the youth what they thought about a predicament he perceived: they planned to gather data from young people on their perceptions of dental health, but they did not have the resources to immediately fix or improve the situation of the respondents. He wanted the youth to think about what actions they could take and asked, “Why are we doing this, what can we use this information for?” None of the teens responded and he prompted them with more questions “…how can something like that be used to support the current work we’re doing?” Malik said that it helped “…pinpoint the main problems affecting the youth,” but no one else offered answers or interpretations. Luke jumped back in to talk about how they could use the knowledge they acquired to show “…how a collection of a lot of young people think about oral health…”

Instances like this one, where Luke drove the conversation and seemed to have a sense of the outcome he desired lead some teens to question how far their autonomy went. Evelyn noted,
I think that when Luke sits down at the table with us and is presenting an agenda of things we're going to talk about and then says 'We're going to decide whether we're going to do this or going to do this', I feel like he already kind of has an idea in mind of how it's going to go, because his whole description of what we're going to do leans a very particular way...but I mean I do think that if someone decided that they didn't agree with his choice and everyone else’s choice, he would be open to discussing it, he would be open to discussing it with that person, with the hope that they would make X choice.

Evelyn said that she enjoyed her time at the organization and she remained in the group for several years, but these sorts of interactions left a part of her feeling skeptical. “I do know that they value young people [at EYC]; I guess I question why they value young people. I hope that they’re not manipulating me for their political agenda, but I’m a willing participant in this manipulation so…I don’t know.” Lily was not skeptical, but she wanted to push the organization to go further “they’re more minor gaps that exist between the youth, staff experiences we should just try to—we can’t equalize anything, but just share power as much as possible.”

Although Evelyn remained skeptical and Lily pushed the organization, in observations and interviews, youth consistently discussed their inclusion in various aspects of the organization. For instance, youth felt they had influence over the programming at EYC as Pearl described, “Creating, I guess uh, the schedule throughout the day that [Luke] knows what we need to get done but we get to put our input in it and change it around to where we want it.”

At EYC, youth also had influence in organizational administration, everything from fundraising to hiring, although the hiring decisions were limited to bringing on new youth. On one occasion, Luke told the teens that a family foundation considered giving them money and he wanted the foundation to observe the youth meeting to make their decision. In one of my
observations, two individuals from the family foundation came into the meeting, observed the group, and asked youth questions about the organization and their work. EYC youth also spoke at fundraising events. In addition, youth were the leaders of the interviews for new youth to join. They presented the material on the organization, ran the session, and decided who should be selected along with Luke. But, Lilly felt this did not go far enough. In an interview, she said that she felt like there was a way it could be different, that EYC youth could have greater control over both programs and administration, but she said she was not sure if that was possible.

Luke’s role was described by the youth as “the facilitator” as Malik said and as being there to “support us and guide us through” as Pearl noted. Lilly said that in the beginning adults and youth who have been there a long time are “modeling” and helping youth to explore and find their passions. The youth perceived Luke along with each other as a resource for accomplishing their objectives at the organization as Malik described “…we all have a connection with each other, we can all go to each other for help, if we need anything we can ask Luke.” The youth generally saw Luke as someone they could turn to when they did not know an answer or needed support or when they wanted to enter an adult space and not be alone.

Luke tried to help youth become self-sufficient in these roles by giving them the skills they needed. He said “You know’ like they aren't looking at questions for the first time and reading them off of a sheet of paper, they are able to think through how to ask secondary questions. They're able to get the information we need to get, which is the point…” For instance, Luke was out of the office one day and asked the youth to start thinking about what factors might impact whether counties had fluoridated water. The teens generated a list of possible influences and then looked for various resources to find the information like percentage youth on free and reduced lunch. The youth expressed learning skills they could use elsewhere at EYC, such as
how to know who the stakeholders are in a setting or how to challenge politicians and write letters to the editor questioning something they viewed as unjust.

At times, conflict occurred around the relationships between youth and adults that demonstrated the way both viewed youth inclusion. For instance, while youth were discussing their opinions about recent backlash the organization received over letters they wrote to newspaper editors in support of water fluoridation, Luke mentioned receiving a call from a lawyer who worked with Erin Brockovich. The teens did not know who Erin Brockovich was and, seeing their confusion, Luke joked about how old that made him feel and said “take the dagger out of my back.” Lilly, later in the conversation, said “if EYC is an organization that works with young people and there’s intergenerational power sharing, if we don’t know who Erin Brockovich is, we’re not calling you old…it doesn’t have to be like that. It can be just like there’s differences between those groups.” Luke paused and considered this comment and said, “so I don’t have to say take the dagger out of my back?” Lilly went on to emphasize how this simple comment made her question the relationship, “so if youth is having power sharing between youth and adults, I don’t get why those conversations are happening in the way that they’re happening.” Luke responded “yeah, I get it.” Luke tried to change his approach after this to explaining things the youth did not know instead of taking offense or commenting on the knowledge differences.

Similar interactions occurred on other occasions at EYC that appeared to violate the norms of interaction between youth and adults and led to a negotiation of the relationship. In one instance, youth were sitting at the main conference table working on a project when Luke came in and said to one of the teens who was looking at her cell phone “Hey, how are we doing?” The teen, Evelyn, responded with a sassy tone “I’m checking the to do list.” Luke said “sorry, I made
a bad assumption.” In prior interactions, Luke would rarely confront a teen he perceived not to be working on the task at hand, and instead would mention trusting the youth to do the work that needed to be done. In this instance, it was clear by the tone of the interaction and Evelyn’s defensiveness that she felt Luke did not trust her to do the work on her own.

In another instance, a relatively benign joke about Evelyn’s self-evaluation of a presentation went as follows: Luke asked Evelyn why she gave herself a 7 out of 10 on speaking and joked “why not lower?” He laughed and Evelyn responded “I’m challenging the power dynamic. Down with the patriarchy.” Although the two were laughing and joking, there was a serious look on Evelyn’s face, and the interaction likely represented some of the feelings Evelyn had towards Luke and the organization, as she mentioned above.

At times this tension was the result of youth perceiving constraints on their autonomy. Tension was evident in the organization when disagreements occurred and were not readily resolved. In particular, longer-lasting periods of tension often resulted in the group ending a meeting without consensus, such as occurred on several instances before they decided to bring on a new teen to replace Kiara. Constraints on autonomy were often explicitly mentioned by youth, as demonstrated above. In one instance, after Luke mentioned that he’d like the youth to write letters to a local official, one of the teens noted that if they all did it at the same time it would look “sketchy…like someone told us to do it.” Luke asked “did someone tell you to do it?” and a few of the teens shook their heads. One teen said, “I wouldn’t do it on my own, but I don’t feel like I’m being coerced.” Another commented “I am being forced to write the letter, but what I write is my opinion.” One teen pointed out that if one of them did not believe in the issue, Luke wouldn’t have them write a letter. Luke responded “I’d totally welcome that conversation.” In this example, the youth did not perceive their decision to participate as autonomous, and
pushed Luke to unpack the decision-making process. When reviewing the activities that were completed during their first 6 months at the organization, the youth used words like “made” and “told us to” when discussing writing these letters and a few other activities. Lilly expressed on multiple occasions that they were told to do the letters and other things in the organization by Luke, but they could say whatever they wanted in the letters and do what they wanted in the activities. While youth perceived having extensive autonomy and often negotiated for more, limitations remained and youth experienced some dissatisfaction as a result.

Although there was tension and constraint around autonomy in the organization at times, the result at EYC was that these interactions often led to the youth gaining autonomy. For instance, even though Luke responded defensively to Lilly challenging him during the Erin Brockovich incident, he consistently reiterated the importance of Lilly and the other youth challenging him and pointed out any times when he was not acting equitably as they called it.

EYC primarily operated in a managed autonomy approach, including youth in all aspects of the organization. At EYC the teens controlled many aspects of the daily and programming decisions, as well as having some role in the administration. Yet, Luke was seen as a necessary support for youth in the organization. In the beginning of the observation period, the youth remained somewhat reliant on Luke, in part because many did not know the meaning of terms or concepts. But, Luke often worked to provide youth with the skills they needed to find the answers on their own. And, as the youth became more comfortable in their roles, questioning Luke and making decisions on their own, they became more autonomous often making decisions without Luke’s involvement, but Luke remained there for when they had questions or needed extra support.
Managed Autonomy—Contentious

Managed autonomy at EYC led to some instances of conflict, but at YRSV it led to consistently contentious interactions, or to interactions that were generally characterized by recurrent tensions between two parties, often adults and youth, about a particular issue. YRSV intended to utilize a highly autonomous youth-centric style with adults serving as mentors in support of the teens who “led” the organization. Adults referred to their role as “youth activism support work.” The youth even generated the materials used by the organization to describe their own role noting that the organization was a “teen activist collective” working to create an environment “where young people are empowered…to fight systems that silence [them]” Youth at YRSV were given autonomy in each realm of the organization, but perception of high autonomy for youth often translated into overpromises of youth inclusion and perceived overextensions of adult decision making in interactions. In this case, the misalignment between expectations about inclusion and reality led the youth to disengage from the organization and the group to temporarily collapse.

Adults in the organization described the role of youth as leaders but indicated the struggle around how this operated in practice. There were typically two adults present, Ruth and Samantha, both of whom worked for the parent organization and who, from an organizational standpoint, ran the group. Ruth was a full-time employee and Samantha was part time, but a portion of her formal job was serving as a mentor at YRSV. Samantha noted the conflict with youth autonomy in an interview, “Well for a long time it was supposed to be youth led and youth driven and for a long time it was…but then it ended up failing apart…because many of the decisions were being made without them being the ones to instigate those decisions.” Ruth also felt the organization was youth led and youth run, but she struggled with how far that went,
“…student voice is really important…but there’s a level at which it’s not, there’s a point, I think specifically having to do with how adults hold one another accountable, that it’s not actually a consensus moment. That’s a moment when we as an organization have certain responsibilities.”

In other words, Ruth argued that at times adults had to make “adult decisions” and be responsible for organizational issues that youth were not included in. Like EYC, YRSV was relatively informal in structure. Meetings changed locations between the office of the parent organization, a local youth community center, and coffee shops. Most days there were between 5 and 10 youth present at the meetings and youth would occasionally meet on their own to work on organizational items in between formal sessions.

Teens described the organization as a highly autonomous environment for youth from founding onward. Erin, one of the founding youth participants at the organization, explained to new members the history of the organization during a meeting. Erin said,

YRSV started 3 years ago with a bunch of young people from area high schools. They approached the rape crisis center on their own and through Ruth’s coordination came together and realized we wanted to do something where we were engaging with our peers on issues like feminism and rape culture…One of the cool things about YRSV is it’s entirely youth led. We call the shots here and whatever projects we want to do we can. We have access to various facilities through our mentors but we get to execute them.”

In describing YRSV, Erin emphasized the autonomy youth had and the support and guidance they received from their “mentors.”

In general, I observed youth having significant autonomy over programming and daily decision-making, but decision-making over organizational administration was limited, with little involvement in areas like fundraising, hiring, and budgeting. Youth at YRSV planned the
meeting agenda along with the adult mentor outside of the organizational meetings. The youth often had roles in running the meetings and were responsible for the majority of projects and work, without much adult influence. When the adults wanted to make recommendations about meeting logistics or content to the teens, they often took a very gentle approach. During a meeting, Ruth said “…maybe we should go over the agenda just as a suggestion” and Samantha added “who wants to take over the agenda just as a suggestion.” After this point youth in the group suggested reordering of agenda items and identified a particular area they wanted to discuss and Samantha supported them saying “yes” to their requests.

Ruth and Samantha would, at times, point out a place where the organization was lacking such as the absence of a Facebook page or the need to create a shared google doc for keeping track of their developing mission and plans for recruitment. In response, youth would often jump in to volunteer or adults would ask someone to “commit” to this project and a youth participant would lead the effort. The adults often offered to meet with teens to support the work outside of the general meeting, offered helpful resources, or encouraged the youth to use their own talents on the project.

Youth also developed new programs for the organization and dictated which areas received attention and adults typically supported these initiatives. For instance, over the course of a couple of meetings, the youth introduced a plan they developed for an “overheard” Facebook group that would allow students in the county’s high schools to post any instances of injustice around rape culture that took place in their schools. At one meeting, they discussed some outstanding questions that came up like “whether we want to be anonymous.” The youth developed a complex plan for monitoring the accuracy of the stories and protecting the identities of individuals. During the discussion, they found that Ruth and Samantha were very supportive,
although they were concerned about any legality issues that might result. Adult staff looked into
the process for reporting grievances to the school, and helped the teens understand the best way
to complete the group without infringing on any legal issues.

Moving forward with this knowledge, the teens decided in the meeting to form a smaller
group who would work on the Facebook page, develop a mission statement for the page,
submission procedures, and determine how they would manage the group. At the smaller
meeting, four of the teens worked on the overheard page without adults present, and concluded
“we’ll talk to Ruth later” to update her on their planning. Ruth’s main role was sharing
information like her discussion with the title 9 coordinator at a local high school and offering
information from a lawyer she met at a local racial inequality march the group attended. These
kinds of interactions were frequent at YRSV, with youth operating outside of the adult purview
or functioning under the assumption that adults would defer to youth leadership.

Beyond working on programming, youth also influenced how the organizational space
and meeting time was utilized. When youth were more engaged in conversing with each other
than working on organizational activities, adult mentors would try to guide the youth back to the
task at hand, but often the youth would push back that they were enjoying the discussion they
were having or the unstructured time. The adult, in almost every instance, would defer to the
youth and let them decide what to do with their time. Although youth would continue their
conversations, tension resulted. Some youth said these moments made them question whether the
organization was primarily a “free space” for discussing issues around rape culture, or whether it
was an “activist” organization intent on creating social change around rape culture.

There were other small interactions between adults and youth that indicated inconsistency
around who “ran” YRSV. For instance, one of the youth indicated that she was hungry and ready
to leave the meeting. Samantha responded “are you trying to leave? I’m sorry it’s not 7:30 yet and the meeting goes until 7:30.” Samantha laughed, indicating some level of humor in the comment. The teen responded, “a little authoritarian aren’t you?” and Samantha said “oh yeah, that’s why they call me authoritarian Samantha.” Although there was jest in the interaction, interactions of this sort occurred at YRSV as youth and adults determined the bounds between youth autonomy and adult management.

While YRSV appeared to have the most autonomous role for youth of the organizations in observations, in interviews the youth spoke about how much the adults “ran” the group, especially in the administrative areas. Hailey noted that although she saw the group as generally collaborative, “I don’t think that necessarily means entirely without any adults involved, because you’re going to have to work with other adults and they’re the ones in charge of everything.”

While comparing YRSV to another organization a teen named Gina was a part of, she said “YRSV is not as youth-focused, there is a lot of youth leadership and youth do a lot of the planning, but as far as how people get fired and hired…the youth aren’t very aware or involved in that process…I wasn’t aware of what the leadership structure looks like… they have to have adults that are in charge in some areas like hiring and firing and what we are allowed to say…”

This perception was heavily influenced by a contentious event around administrative authority.

The expectation of youth as true leaders of the organization was a critical part of how a contentious incident at the organization came to dominate the experience between adults and youth. Like youth in the other organizations, YRSV youth did not have much involvement in administrative decisions at the organization. The youth did not make hiring decisions about adult staff, sit on the boards of the organization, or know much about what went on at the organizational level outside of their group meetings. Youth also were not very aware of the
structure of the organization and the legal and formal relationship between the larger parent organization and their group. However, at YRSV, the perception that youth “led” the organization created an expectation of inclusion in all decisions. Either as a result of intentionality of adult managers or as a result of having founding youth participants in the organization, youth believed that they were more autonomous than they experienced in practice, especially around organizational administration. However, as evidenced by the comments youth made above when discussing the general relationship between youth and adults at YRSV, the contention extended beyond just administrative decision.

However, on one occasion, the contention came to a head. One day in June, Ruth, one of the adults working with YRSV, decided with the administrative staff at the parent organization (but without youth inclusion in the decision-making) to ask Samantha not to return as a mentor at YRSV. Samantha’s part-time position at the parent organization was temporary and grant funded and was coming to a close. Ruth and Samantha mentioned this to the youth in a previous meeting, but Samantha indicated that she intended to stay on as a mentor at YRSV, even after leaving her paid position. Prior to this time, the two adults seemingly operated as equals at YRSV and appeared to have a cordial relationship.

In an interview, Ruth was vague in the reasons Samantha was not allowed to return to YRSV saying, “…over the course of a couple weeks a series of kind of alarming things came to my attention that I brought to Samantha’s attention…they had a response that didn’t really inspire a whole lot of confidence in our ability to have a trusting professional relationship moving forward.” She later noted in the interview that Samantha was “creating a dynamic of asking students to take sides, which I felt was inappropriate, but Samantha did not.” As a result, Samantha was asked not to return to YRSV as her paid position ended. Ruth did not mention the
plan to ask Samantha not to return to the youth, and they only found out about it after the
decision was made. Many became upset and felt that Ruth overstepped some boundaries. The
youth said things like they “didn’t realize” that the adult mentor could hire and fire someone
without their approval. Ruth assured the teens that they could play a role in hiring the staff
member to replace Samantha.

With Samantha gone, a new staff member was going to be hired at the RCC whose job
would include working with YRSV. Ruth, messaged the Facebook group to say the following:
“\[\]
I'll be sending y'all an update on the search interviews tomorrow once I confirm dates with
our two front candidates-- We used the "job description" you all wrote last year for YRSV
mentors as a screening tool, and I think you'll really enjoy meeting both people. I'll let you know
who they are and send you their application stuff once I get their consent…” She later sent out
the times of the interviews, and a small group of youth went to the office and met the adult staff
person to ask questions and form opinions on who the organization should hire, which they
shared with Ruth.

After the hiring decision was made, Ruth sent out the following message on Facebook: “I
am pleased to announce that the RCC has offered the position to Patricia [], who many of you
have had a chance to meet. Thank you for your help with the interview process—your comments
went a long way toward this very exciting offer!” Although the adult manager set up and
screened early applicants, youth set the terms of the agreement between the applicant and their
organization, were able to interact with the applicant on their own terms, and their opinions
about the applicants were considered in the hiring decision. All youth were encouraged to
participate in the hiring process, but those that were disengaged from the organization as a result
of Samantha’s firing chose not to participate. The youth I spoke with felt they were fairly included in the processes and were excited for Patricia to start at the organization.

Throughout these interactions, what emerged was a crisis of confidence at YRSV. The organization, which had recently won the Ella Baker prize for organizing from another local youth organization, found itself with an uncertain future. The teens quickly learned that tensions existed amongst themselves in regards to whose “side” they landed on. Were they in support of the fired mentor, Samantha, or Ruth, the one who remained? At the heart of the crisis sat the question I heard from several youth in interviews: “Do we continue to have adult mentors?” The youth struggled with this question, debating the relative merits of their association with the parent organization and, in doing so, unpacking all of the pros and cons that were associated with that connection. Although I was not included in the conversation, I later learned that youth ceased meeting or responding to Ruth’s emails or Facebook messages throughout the summer. A resolution had not been reached by the end of my observation. When the school year began, Ruth recruited an almost entirely new group of youth participants with newly hired Patricia.

I later went back to get a sense of the organization in its new form. Patricia, in speaking to the youth present at the meeting the following August said, “we only have one current official member of YRSV here.” This represented the refresh of the organization that took place after the break. Patricia explained to the youth why this was the case. She said, “…YRSV right now, and jump in and correct me because this is kind of awkward since I’m new and YRSV is kind of in transition…” In losing the pervious group of youth, negotiating about the role of youth and adults had to take place. At one point during the meeting, Patricia was discussing a project idea with the youth. She said, “I’m going to pause the brainstorming to have a bit of a reality check, which is YRSV is a youth-led youth driven program so it’s up to whoever is involved with
YRSV who is not myself or Ruth to decide how y’all want this to happen.” Although I did not continue to attend the meetings, I heard from several youth who I ran into around town and who were part of the organization during my initial observation period that they never returned and did not have a sense of what the organization was doing the following year.

So why did the youth struggle with managed autonomy in this critical moment of organizational transition instigated by Samantha’s letting go when they had extensive autonomy in meetings and around programming? The answer, as I observed and heard from interviewees, is in the perceptions of youth about their role in the organization. Although everyone knew there were no formal leadership roles for youth in the organization, they thought this was to enhance equality, not to promote the leadership of adults over the leadership of youth. They were told that the adults were there to support them and help them achieve their desired goals. In previous conversations, adults indicated to youth that if new mentors were selected youth would have a role in making these decisions. The adult mentors in overpromising autonomy and transparency to youth—through calling the organization youth-led, telling youth they ran the organization, claiming youth would be a part of all decisions, and deferring to youth in daily decision-making—set the youth up for the resultant anger and disappointment when one of their mentors was fired and they were not included in the decision.

In an interview, one of the youth told me about another organization she was a part of that had a youth board, which partook in decision-making around organizational administration. The difference, she told me, was in the “expectations.” In that group, youth were expected to commit additional time and meet weekly to keep up with the organizational administration. They had formal leadership roles that came with duties and responsibilities to the organization. Yet, at YRSV, the youth lacked those formal pathways to involvement in the organization’s
administration and operated off the assumption promoted by youth and adults alike that they were the major players in decision-making at the organizational administration level. Although the interactions were highly autonomous, there was a head-to-head in this organization over how much management was too much, and how far autonomy should go. Although youth debated relaunching the organization without adult mentors during their summer hiatus, most felt that it was “too hard” to move forward because it required developing a new organization, but this time without the resources, connections, and legitimacy of the adult and the 501c3 parent organization. The youth felt that there needed to be changes in the structure that increased transparency and participation of youth in the administration of the organization.

YRSV youth were given autonomy across many areas of the organization and were typically supported by adult managers. But, there was a mismatch between the extent of autonomy they perceived and the reality of their role in making decisions in practice. As a result, contention was often part of the interactions at YRSV. Eventually, this came to a head when an adult mentor was fired, calling into question everything youth believed they knew about their role in the organization.

**Implications of Youth Inclusion**

Primarily, the way that managed autonomy impacts the experience of youth in organizations is by shaping their extent of participation and inherent satisfaction with the experience in the organization. Youth who are involved extensively in decision making in their organizations have the opportunity to practice the kinds of civic participation they will do later in life including practicing governance. Participatory practices also shape the ability of youth to receive civic opportunities offered, comprehend civic knowledge, and influence the accessibility
and transferability of civic skills. For instance, youth in the RJTC learn to create legal arguments and support through following a script and therefore do not develop their own public speaking skills that are beneficial for their future civic participation. Youth in the YTC, on the other hand, spend time creating arguments on the spot and speaking as authorities in the courtroom and in interviews they expressed the influence of teen court on their public speaking skills. In light of the argument that youth civic participation should enhance civic skills and knowledge, I examine the ways youth from the various groups conceptualize their own civic participation and demonstrate that more highly autonomous experiences yield greater civic skills and knowledge.

**Youth Civic Knowledge and Skills**

When organizations successfully utilized managed autonomy, youth participants expressed a comprehensive understanding of organizational material, felt attachment to their organizations, expressed inherent satisfaction, and suggested that they would engage in community and political activities outside of the organization. In interviews, youth from the YTC expressed these elements readily. Chip discussed what he learned through Teen Court saying the following:

I think one of the more critical aspects you really develop that critical thinking and public speaking ability I started off pretty confident, but I think Teen Court has made a significant impact in increasing that ability. And kind of synthesizing all the various components I mean you’re taking critical, you’re essentially working on a puzzle then you have to go talk about that puzzle in real time…you have to first understand the case and then the legal ramifications of that case then you have to formalize an argument on those two disparate topics. So you have to somehow merge those two together and
portray it in a way that 9th grade high school students can understand…I think actually one of the critical components that it develops that I don't see many other avenues doing when you’re younger is it’s a really good way of taking something that’s formal and intellectual and transmitting it in to a colloquial conversation manner. So, you’re taking that complicated legal side and transforming it into I'm going to go talk with a jury and convince them.

Another teen, Mark, offered the following:

It teaches people about the court environment and it teaches people about, I mean to be honest, life, life skills, there’s a lot to be learned in a court, not just how to question and how to object.

Mark went on to say that he thought his training at teen court influenced his participation and future participation in activities outside of teen court:

Um, especially in cases where there’s a legal decision and dispute it’s always nice to have a backing in basic legal procedures. Also again, the general philosophy of upholding justice and not doing something…. The knowledge that there’s also right wrong and legal I think comes out a lot in teen court. My goal always is always to get right and legal in the same pot. Obviously legal line is black and white but I think that really helps inform my decisions regarding those things.

When I asked Mark for more specifics on what he would use outside of the organization, he offered this description:

Well debating skills, you could say. Um, I would say learning how to address people as people. It may sound really weird but in teen court, too many times as the defense attorney I’ve seen people treat the person on the stand as if they’re not a human you
know as if they’re simply a scenario. Um, humans are by their nature, dehumanized and
canonized no matter what we do and through teen court, through the interviews, through
being able to sit down with somebody and to listen to their story, to question them, to put
yourself in somebody else’s shoes to walk around in it for a day, it really gets you…

Similarly, teens at EYC focused on how beneficial their time was in the organization and
how it shaped their ability to engage in politics and their communities. Malik said in an interview
“I feel like I have a chance to make a change and actually go do something in the world. Without
having to be 25 years old, with a master’s degree and, a politician or something like that, I feel
like I can actually go to my politicians and have people backing me while I’m doing it.” Pearl
said similarly “…I’m able to speak on what I believe in and what, how it can come into conflict
with people, with different people that I talk to but I have the ability and the right to speak in
what I believe…..” Evelyn also said “I think that when I look at Lilly” who has been there longer
than she has, “and the way that she is able to participate in different spaces and the conversation
that she’s able to have with people that are older than her, I think it’s really unique.”

Malik also expressed learning new civic skills like “writing skills, like the letters to the
editor.” Pearl said she learned a new sense of awareness “The awareness of racism and sexism
around me and around my peers.” She also said she learned public speaking and learned about
how to step into environments like politics, which increased her interest in these areas: “I find
myself getting more interested, so I do read these articles about politics and watch these
debates…my favorite classes were civics and AP…now I’m taking AP gov and I love it, so. I
think EYC has built that interest and curiosity for this one.”

Evelyn, who already felt she was strong at public speaking, said that EYC let her
strengthen these skills and use them in environments that were not “speaking at school to my
peers” but where she could “participate in the space as an equal member” even when everyone was not her age. Lilly learned the importance of making sure that “people who are impacted by the issue are represented in the processing.” She also said she learned a lot about the process of social change work “Just knowledge about the different stakeholders that you have to be able to network through and contact to create change…how do you contact your legislator, what is your legislator’s role in all this…being kind of fluent in that is important to get your foot in the door.” She listed specific skills she learned as well “I guess like public speaking and writing letter to the editor, um, and emailing skills but also like conversation skills, facilitation with our training, leadership skills…” Lilly summarized how she learned these skills and focused on the opportunities she had to autonomously lead trainings and activities, but also just to ask questions in meetings.

Youth in organizations that did not include them in decision-making processes struggled to communicate the skills they learned in those organizations or indicate how they would use them elsewhere. For instance, one teen, Isiah, said that he didn’t really think he could take what he learned and use it outside of teen court. All he could take, he said, was “I feel like just composing my thoughts, that’s about it.” Another teen, Sophie, noted that there’s “not necessarily” anything she can use in other settings either. She said the one time she found herself using something form teen court when during a mock trial at her school. “I was like no, you can’t ask that, no you should object to this, this is wrong…I guess that’s as much as I’ve been able to use Teen Court knowledge outside of it…” Teens mostly focused on learning specifically how the courtroom operates, but some said they gained specific skills. Teens who participated for longer periods of time noted that they enhanced their public speaking learning “how to ask questions in a way that revealed exactly what you need to know and nothing else.” Others noted
that they learned “better professionalism.” In general, there was less consensus around learning civic skills and significantly less perception that the skills could be used elsewhere.

By having autonomy in organizations, I argue, youth have the opportunity to practice making decisions, participating in adult settings, and experiencing informal leadership in organizational, civic, and political environments. Enacting these roles both offers youth specific skills and teaches them the process of participation that they can use in future efforts. Youth in more autonomous roles also recognize their skills and capacity and understand how their experiences can be applied elsewhere.

Approaches to Youth Inclusion

Although the interactions between adult leaders and youth members of civic organizations are extremely important for both dictating participatory practices and shaping civic skills and knowledge, there are several confounding factors that must be considered. Primarily, two components arise as influencing different approaches to youth inclusion in the cases described above. First, organizational culture, or the values and beliefs of individuals in these organizations. Second, the skills and capacities of adult leaders. I address both of these elements and how they impact participatory practices. These elements are the main factors impacting why some organizations encourage subordination and others encourage autonomy and youth influence in responding to dilemmas that arise.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is a “set of shared mental assumptions that guide interpretation and action in organizations by defining appropriate behavior for various situations” (Ravasi and
Schultz 2006:437). The most important part of organizational culture for influencing youth inclusion is the way staff in these organizations view the role of youth. The unspoken assumption at the RJTC, for instance, is that youth have a set of confined roles in the courtroom and are subordinate to adults. This assumption dictates the norms of interaction in the organizations (e.g., asking adults for permission). In contrast, at EYC, the norm is for youth to be included in decision-making and learn to question adults.

The culture of the various organizations also influences which realms of the organization are open to youth participation. For instance, at YTC, organizational staff perceive that the role of youth in the organization is inside the courtroom, and do not consider roles for them in other areas. This approach strengthens the rigidity of the boundaries for participation. At YRSV on the other hand, the organization is conceptualized as “youth-led,” which opens more areas of the organization to youth involvement. Cultural factors that shape the norms and styles of these organizations heavily influence how extensively youth are included in decision-making processes.

**The Role of Adults**

The role of adults also impacts how extensively organizations include young people in decision-making processes. In fact, managing autonomy as a term sounds like an oxymoron – if something is autonomous, then how can it also be managed? While youth autonomy is critical for youth becoming engaged citizens who can participate in civic and community activities on their own, youth still rely on adults for the resources, knowledge, and experience necessary for accomplishing organizational and individual goals. Adults also model civic participation for youth and influence deliberative and governance practices within their groups settings. Adults
view their role as support for the youth, in many cases, and youth view the adult role similarly. Still, the complex dynamics between youth and adults often result in struggles over control in decision-making and challenges understanding the boundaries of adult authority.

One of the undercurrents of this study is the inequality between youth and adults. The assumption of adults tends to be that youth are subordinate in some way, still developing their abilities to actively and equally engage (Gordon 2010). Although inequalities around race, class, gender, and sexuality have been a key part of the literature on civic organizations, ageism or inequalities around age have primarily been absent. In my observations these inequalities shape power dynamics and they run parallel to the other inequalities considered in work on organizations. But, inequalities between youth and adults are a critical component of understanding how youth organizations operate.

One possible explanation for the variation across organizations is that it is the adult mentors themselves who are creating the style and interactions that lead to managed autonomy, either intentionally or unintentionally. If Charlotte was running the RJTC, then, might the RJTC have successfully implemented managed autonomy at least in daily decision-making? This is undeniably part of the story. Some adults, like Luke, are intentional and evaluative about engaging youth in the organization and decision-making processes. But, these adults are also constrained by organizational culture and the implementation of policies and practices that limit autonomy of both youth and adults.

An example of this sort of inherent restriction can be seen in the volunteer description for RJTC. There are 9 rules for participation. Some are mundane like arriving on time, and others are more focused on fair and objective interactions with defendants. The tone, however, can be seen in rule 5, which state that teens must “go directly” to the courtroom and tells them “do not
wander the halls…hats should not be worn…no eating or drinking.” The description of the position begins to create clues about how participation operates. Still, as at the YTC, adults can offer more autonomy than predicated by the rules, but they remained constrained by the norms of their organization.

Although a given adult is limited in their ability to change the entire style of the organization as a result of organizational culture, adults primarily create the interactional patterns in these groups. As I mentioned above, established patterns of interaction occur in these organizations that reinforce the role of youth and adult mentors in organizations and primarily dictate the extent of youth autonomy in a given interaction. As a result, they can also challenge organizational norms by initiating interactions that are more highly autonomous or ones that are more highly managed, suggesting the ability for adults to challenge or change the role of youth in decision-making.

This capacity for change was demonstrated by Luke in the decision around bringing on a new youth participant. In general, as the months progressed at EYC, the interactions became more autonomous for the youth. This was the result of Luke’s concerted effort to increase youth autonomy and feedback especially from Lilly about the hypocrisy of claiming to empower youth and then limiting transparency and youth participation at the organizational level outside of the group. Although there remained moments of uncertainty or contention, change did seem to be possible if enough thoughtful and intentional interactions took place.

A more skeptical viewpoint of the relationship between adults and youth in organizations is that managed autonomy is the “illusion of autonomy.” That is, as a volunteer in an organization not in this study told me, the work done by managers is to give rank and file participants the sense that they have some control over decision-making while still retaining
control yourself. In this approach, managed autonomy may be viewed as a way to delegate some meaningless or non-critical decision-making to volunteers who will feel included in the organization while allowing staff to run and make the real decisions. While I think that view is too cynical, especially given evidence that adults in the organizations are often intensely struggling with how to engage youth and develop what Ruth from YRSV calls “group norms for democratic space.” There are few indications that the organization and the adults that utilize managed autonomy are looking to confine youth participation to token decisions, although some youth like Evelyn questions the organization's intentions around inclusion.

Discussion

When organizations engage youth as somewhat equal players by bringing them in as autonomous decision-makers in various areas of the organization, youth are more likely to feel valued and engage in the organization in a meaningful way, and organizations are more likely to feel those youth are being empowered. This remains true unless contention comes to dictate the experience and lead youth to disengage, as occurred at YRSV. There may also be longer-lasting impacts of using participatory practices that model citizen participation that are not observed during these short periods of observation (Button and Ryfe 2005). For instance, beyond being engaged, other kinds of outcomes may result from greater youth participation such as an increased sense of connection to the organization and peers, often referred to as collective identity.

Increased youth participation also increases the intensity of peer-to-peer connections formed within and across organizations, offering informal interpersonal interactions and chances to develop trust (Putnam 2001). These opportunities also provide a chance to form relationships
with other organizations and institutions, which can create opportunities for further civic engagement and offer participants opportunities to further their goals (Lichterman 2011[2005]). Extensive participation may also increase school achievement (Fredricks and Eccles 2006) and improve health outcomes for participants (Kalleberg 2011).

The extent of participation also seems to influence youth perceptions of ownership of the organization and commitment to achieving organizationally-related goals. Youth who control decision-making beyond the daily decisions in organizations have a stronger sense of “we” when they discuss the organization and tend to identify with the organization rather than with a subgroup such as “youth attorneys.” Providing youth with increased autonomy, then, is likely to result in their own satisfaction, which keeps them engaged in the work and with the organization (see Kalleberg 2011).

In the next chapter, I will consider how approaches to youth inclusion impact the response of organizations to dilemmas. In particular, I will address how the pressure for these organizations to respond to Black Lives Matter and the growing discourse on racial inequality was shaped by existing patterns of interaction in these groups. As I will demonstrate, organizations that engage youth in decision-making broadly in the organization are better able to respond to this dilemma.
CHAPTER V. ACTIVISM AND INEQUALITY

Including youth in decision-making serves a subtler role as well—it indicates the openness of the organization to youth influence in ways beyond the particular decision being discussed in a given moment. Organizations that set a precedent for allowing youth to have a role in day-to-day decision making, programming, and administration signal to youth and organizational representatives a role for young people to shape the organization. The expectation of youth influence means that when unexpected instances arise and present dilemmas that organizational actors must resolve, youth and some adults may assume a role for youth in responding. This relationship is especially salient when the dilemma presented is relevant to the organization and resonates with participants and staff.

During my time in the field, a major sociopolitical shift began to take place. July of 2014 represented a moment when a movement against racial inequality that had only been bubbling under the surface prior exploded onto the scene and into the national media with great fervor. Two years earlier, on July 13th, 2012, George Zimmerman was acquitted of murdering black teenager Trayvon Martin. A year later, messages began appearing sharing information from the case with the hashtag #blacklivesmatter (Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark 2016). Then, in July of 2013, the first massive protest against issues of racially motivated violence occurred as over 1,000 people took to Times Square in New York city to respond in anger to the results of the Trayvon Martin case. In the time between July 2013 and July 2014, attention to and activism around issues of racial inequality swelled across the country (Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark 2016). Then, on July 17, 2014, Eric Garner died in the streets of New York City after being put
into a chokehold by arresting officer Daniel Pantaleo. On July 19th, the protest that would codify the large and rapidly expanding Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement occurred in Staten Island followed by explosive unrest in Ferguson, Missouri in August.

In the months following the rapid growth of the Black Lives Matter movement and related actions against police violence, scholars and pundits both noted the influence of the movement. BLM entered and shaped politics (Eligon 2015) and conceptions of public health issues (Jee-Lyn García and Sharif 2015), made its way into college classrooms and campuses, led to the renaming of city streets, decreased some funding streams for federal prisons, and motivated new organizations to form (Workneh 2015). In large part, these changes were the result of the Black Lives Matter movement increasing attention in national discourse to issues of racial inequality (Anderson and Hitlin 2016). The expansion of BLM and the subsequent rise in inequality discourse led each of the organizations in this study to consider what if any way this changing sociopolitical environment should shape their group’s conversations, actions, or community involvement. During my time in each organization, youth and at times adults in the groups exerted pressure on peers and organizational representatives to become engaged and respond to the issues and movement.

BLM and the subsequent rise in inequality discourse influenced institutions and, as I will show, the organizations in this study in critical ways, yet little is known about how and to what extent this influence exists. How does public discourse influence organizations and how far can the influence go to changing organizational activities or even missions? Will the influence of public discourse create meaningful dilemmas for groups to navigate? What are the consequences for organizations that respond to the influence of externally-generated public discourse inside of their organizations? These questions bring together two issues discussed in chapter 2: first, what
is the influence of public discourse on organizations, and subsequently, how does this external influence produce internal organizational conflict? Finally, how enduring are any organizational changes made in response to public discourse?

In this and the subsequent chapter, I argue that all the organizations in this study faced a dilemma as a result of BLM and rising racial inequality discourse. I will demonstrate that the dilemma was generated by the interest and attention of youth and sometimes adults to these issues, often influenced by ties to other organizations and experiences outside of the organizational setting. What occurred in both organizations was a transformation combining new organizational goals and the development of new collective identity through incorporating broader public events and discourse with the influence of individual experiences and identities. The varied responses, however, as I demonstrate, are driven by the extent of youth inclusion in the organization combined with the salience of the topic to a particular group. To limit the influence of salience in comparing the responses in these organizations, I first analyze the way the two social movement organizations responded and then in chapter 6 analyze how the two service organizations responded.

I begin by comparing EYC and YRSV and the ways that both groups responded to the influx of media and activism occurring across the nation in conjunction with the BLM movement. Importantly, both of these groups offer youth an extensive amount of autonomy in their organizational settings. By asking youth to influence the direction of the organizations, I will argue that where youth play prominent leadership roles, they are able to shift the attention and activity of the group to focus on the issues that matter to them. In this case, the urgency and importance that youth attached to BLM combined with their autonomy in the organization facilitated important changes in both groups. Analyzing the influence of this broader context on
These activist organizations show both the critical importance for participatory practices in shaping organizational responses to dilemmas, but also demonstrates the ways young activists understand and interpret issues of inequality. However, the responses for each group are not without consequences for their relationships to parent organizations, funders, and the cohesion of the group itself, which I also address in this chapter.

\textit{A Budding Dilemma}

Prior to the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement, EYC and YRSV were primarily engaged in work related to their core goals and missions around health care and sexual health respectively. Both sought to develop several shared interpretations; an understanding and commitment to the goals of the organization, a collective identity, or shared sense of “we-ness” amongst the group, and a shared ideology or understanding about beliefs and values. The development of these collective frameworks and interpretative lenses are particularly critical for social movement organizations. These groups are spaces to both “assert political claims in public life” and in which people “work collectively to understand their world, decide what is just or unjust, and express their values” (Blee 2014: 31). Both EYC and YRSV, were dedicated to doing this work in mission-relevant ways, as both saw the development of shared understanding as critical for success.

At EYC the group of youth I observed were relatively new and began their time at the organization and their work on dental health issues only 3 months before my arrival. In those early months, the youth were learning about the organization, becoming informed on state-based dental health practices and issues in dental health generally, and to some extent, learning about equity as it was promoted by EYC. Luke, the adult at EYC told a group of newly recruited youth
that the work they will do is a new opportunity and they’re really excited about focusing on oral health. He told the youth that oral health might not sound very interesting as a topic, but it is not about “teaching people how to brush”, it’s about seeing issues like how “people in low income communities get low or no access to dental care. In some counties there aren’t even dentists!”

The youth in the group I observed at EYC, two white females, one black male, one black female, and one Asian female, were all new to work on dental health and were focused on trying to make sense of a complicated and under-examined policy arena when I arrived.

March 18th, 2015, was one of my first visits to EYC. I did not yet know much about the group, but I knew their stated goal was to empower youth to make change in the venue of healthcare advocacy. But, on that day, I sat around the table as the youth and the adult staff, Luke, launched into conversation. Luke led the group through a conversation that ran the gamut on issues of racial inequality. They talked about red lining as a housing inequality practice that produced racial segregation, the process of gentrification in changing the “face” of communities, the lack of teachers and administrators of color in schools, the ways magnet schools upheld racial divisions while promoting diversity, school tracking, the way the school to prison pipeline disadvantages black males, and differential sentencing for blacks and whites for similar drug related crimes. Initially, the observation was a bit disconcerting as I contemplated whether this organization was as advertised. Why, I wondered, would a health care advocacy organization spend the better part of an entire meeting focusing on issues of racial inequality that, at the very least, were not a core part of the organization’s mission? This experience was the start of observing a budding dilemma at EYC around how extensively to engage youth in issues of racial inequality.
A couple towns over, YRSV was engaged in similar conversations during this period. In early 2014, prior to my arrival, the newly formed YRSV launched its first major effort in developing a local branch of the Hollaback campaign, a national effort to raise awareness of and push back against street harassment (Bruckman 2013). An adult involved in the effort was quoted in a press release for the group saying, “We recognize the role that street harassment plays in creating a culture of violence against women and violence against marginalized individuals. We see our work as complementary to Hollaback and their mission to shine a light on the seriousness of street harassment.” Although the Hollaback campaign had formally subsided when I arrived at the organization, the youth remained engaged in similar work. One teen, Ellen, told some newcomers that this organization seemed like “a group of young people talking about rape culture and how to change it in the community.” One of the more senior youth, Jeanne, added that in public schools there is not a lot of education around the realities of rape culture. She continued noting that “I want to come here and learn a lot of new things…we’re not educated on the realities of rape culture and I think we all should be because it’s prevalent in our culture.” At the time, the work of YRSV youth often involved holding workshops at local high schools on sexual consent and sexual harassment.

In early meetings I observed, youth and adults focused on creating a shared understanding about rape culture, its prevalence in society, and the capacity of the youth to create change. But, over time, youth at YRSV were beginning to share stories about racial inequality and police violence in addition to those about sexual violence. For instance, some of the teens were discussing a recent event in which a teen from a local high school posted a photo of themselves with the confederate flag and the caption “South will rise.” They discussed the
response of school teachers and administrators and why their approach was problematic and “reinforce[ed] that racism is a thing of the past.”

My experience being in an organization that was centered around one issue but focused on racial inequality became a pattern that continued to occur across both groups. What I came to understand was that both groups were beginning to experience a dilemma—were they and how were they going to engage with BLM and the rising discourse on racial inequality. The analysis I present in this chapter is based off the dissonance I felt I was observing in the early days of observation at these organizations, but that I would come to find out was part of a larger shift taking place in both groups, and likely in activist organizations across the country as they discussed current issues and shifted their discussions to issues of racial inequality.

*The Growth of a Dilemma*

While the teens in each group spent some time discussion the topic related to their organizational missions and working to develop a shared understanding of those topics, this was not the primary content of my observations. Neither the EYC nor the YRSV remained focused on developing a deep understanding of the particular topic connected to their mission as the weeks and months passed. Both organizations instead became increasingly focused on developing a shared interpretation of issues of racial inequality, allowing the budding dilemma I began observing to dominate the organizational discourse. This shift was due to influence from the media, other social movements and organizational ties, and experiences outside of the organization.

In the years leading up to this study, the political pressure for social change and the influence of elite actors led to increased attention in the public discourse to issues of inequality
(Gaby and Caren 2016). As the years passed, the discourse on inequality also changed in response to current events (Gaby and Caren 2016; Lewis 2004). During the period of my observation, both organizations existed in a setting in which activists across the nation were writing about, taking to the streets for, and talking about the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement and issues of racial inequality. During my time in the field, the broader sociopolitical environment led this budding dilemma to grow in both organizations. As the public discourse on racial inequality grew, it ceased being a minor part of organizational conversations and each group had to decide how to incorporate, engage, or avoid the increasing attention in their groups to issues of racial inequality.

During this period, public discourse on inequality was dominated by a focus on issues of racial inequality including violence against people of color, police brutality, and general concerns about unequal outcomes for non-whites compared to whites. Discussions of these and various related issues appeared on radio shows, in newspapers, across social media, and in conversation. Media provided one major venue through which this discourse began to enter both organizations. The passing mentions and conversation on the issues as presented in the media began to provide raw material for greater attention of both organizations to issues of racial inequality.

Videos of police shootings and incidents that entered the media often found their way into EYC as did Podcasts, posts on social media, and other news stories. For instance, in June of 2015 when an officer at a pool party in Houston Texas pulled his gun on a group of teens and pushed one to the ground, teens from EYC brought the issue up in one of their meetings. One of the teens arrived early and started the conversation by saying “Listen L, do you want to talk about that Texas thing? You shouldn’t, it’s just so stupid.” But, a few minutes later when the
whole group arrived, Luke said “I want to hear your thoughts on current events” and Malik responded “Texas?” The teens and adult discussed together the event, how it made them feel, how communities were responding to police violence, and alternative solutions that might better respond to the current crisis.

Although YRSV relied less directly on media content and social media posts, local coverage of issues was often presented along with retellings of local and national incidents as portrayed by the media. One of the teens mentioned that she recently attended a local community event called “All Lives Matter.” The event was “supposed to be about police brutality” and provide an opportunity for police and the community to have a conversation about the local context. Charlene said that she thought the event was not very useful because the police spent the time trying to convince community members that racial bias was not a factor in their work. The YRSV teens and adults similarly criticized this approach to resolving racial inequality in policing noting that it offered an unrealistic interpretation of issues of racism in local policing. The teens also talked about the rhetoric around gun violence like “I don’t shoot to kill, I shoot to stay alive,” and why this was problematic for understanding how gun violence is perpetuated. In both groups, the influx of public discourse on racial inequality became apparent and began to become a focus of the conversations.

Besides exposure to media, social movements themselves can “spillover,” creating for future movements various features like interpretive approaches (Meyer and Whittier 1994). In the early portions of the conversation in both organizations, there was a heavy amount of influence from the adult leaders in the group, who aligned themselves in various ways with BLM actor’s interpretation of issues around racial inequality. For example, at EYC, Luke was interested in and dedicated to understanding current issues in this way and connecting the youth
to particular interpretations of racial inequality. He brought in media and podcasts from liberal sites like NPR to help the youth develop a neoliberal understanding of racial inequality that was in line with the rhetoric of the movement. In doing so, Luke brought the ideology and the interpretive approach of BLM into the group’s discussions on racial inequality.

Sharing media took place more often at EYC than YRSV, because YRSV adults relied more on their ties to other groups focused on issues of racial inequality to share information. This is another way social movements can influence one another. Movement community networks are groups of individuals tied together through particular social movement campaigns (Staggenborg 1998). In these networks, information and ideas about social change are often exchanged. For instance, one of the adults at YRSV, Samantha, was tied to various local activist groups in the area. Her friendships and organizational connections helped inform the discussion topics and interpretations she introduced into YRSV. As the movement grew, she also became deeply committed to the growing local Black Lives Matter movement and it was she who suggested that the youth attend their first protest event.

**New Youth Opportunities**

At EYC and YRSV, short conversations about current news stories and passing concerns around issues of racial inequality became increasingly common in the organizational settings. As the public discourse on racial inequality entered each organization, new opportunities were created for individual beliefs and identities to determine the role of this new topic. At EYC, attention to BLM was primarily analytical. Luke sought to develop a shared interpretation of issues of racial inequality that was influenced by both the public discourse and the frames offered by the movement for making sense of these issues. At YRSV, however, the connection and commitment to the movement went beyond discussion and conversation into action. Because
adults in these groups were given status as mentors and guides by the youth, even when youth themselves had extensive autonomy, youth accepted and participated in discussions using the lens adults offered and were mobilized to action by adults. In both cases the interpretive approach often drew on a liberal and movement-influenced understanding of racial inequality.

In initiating these conversations, adults also created opportunities that youth took advantage of frequently in these groups. The groups that offered youth a significant amount of autonomy to participate in their organizations often asked them to take on particular roles and to be a part of decision making. By doing so, they positioned these youth to have influence in the organizations and to take on leadership roles within the group. The youth also learned the norms of participation. For activist organizations, leading the group meant leading like an activist by working for social change and engaging in the kinds of conversations and taking the sorts of actions of activists.

The autonomous role of youth, their conception that EYC and YRSV were open to youth influence, and their growing identities as activists created new opportunities for youth to emerge as leaders on the topic and guide the relationship of the organization to racial inequality. Several youth in the groups had commitments to issues of racial inequality from either personal experiences, past activism, or familial influence. A few of the teens at YRSV, for instance, had other organizational affiliations with groups that focused on racial inequality, like the NAACP. They too were part of facilitating a spillover from BLM to their organizations. With the attention to issues related to racial inequality, these teens were given the chance to discuss their other affiliations, take the lead in conversations and events, and appear as experts on emergent topics. Fewer EYC teens had outside ties relating to these topics, but Luke encouraged them to bring in media they gathered outside of their groups to share, often allowing youth opportunities to lead
discussions and reinforce the focus on these issues. These individuals sought to emphasize issues of racial inequality in both groups by discussing them frequently, presenting opportunities to join events with their other groups, and bringing in interpretations and views of racial inequality developed outside of the group. Youth pushed the organizations even further into engaging with the discourse on racial inequality.

As groups shared and discussed these topics, they fostered the rising dilemma about how to engage with these issues and whether to respond to these issues they were discussing within their groups. The critical element that distinguished this experience in both groups from a passing discussion of a current event is the extent to which it became prominent in both settings. It was in this shift that these groups found themselves facing a full-blown dilemma: how central would racial inequality become in the organization and would attention to racial inequality in the organizations be fleeting or enduring?

As the initial goals of the organization were put aside and a collective identity began to emerge in both groups centered around racial inequality, the adults and emerging youth guides for this topic began to develop a set of norms that promoted certain elements and interpretations of the issue and excluded others. The process of defining the group’s understanding of racial inequality was shaped by offering youth the opportunity to gain status when they displayed the understanding of racial inequality acceptable in the group setting and by identifying norms violations when they occurred.

Gaining status was signaled in both groups by leadership opportunities or by receiving praise from adult leaders or youth peers. In some instances, the opportunity to gain status was explicit. At EYC on one occasion, Luke asked the teens if anyone “read on redlining.” Malik and Evelyn both offered answers about redlining as a process for “denying [housing] applications on

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socioeconomic status or race.” Luke asked what the result was, and Malik said “segregation, basically.” Luke agreed with Malik’s interpretation and emphatically said “and that is how segregation happens!” Luke raised Malik’s status in the group by praising his interpretation.

Similarly, at YRSV youth who expressed that their understanding of racial inequality was in line with the one being centered in the group were given opportunities to lead. Those that did not understand the current interpretation or expressed contrary viewpoints were not afforded these opportunities. Alecia, a black female, told Ruth about the paper she wrote on the school-to-prison pipeline for school. She and Ruth chatted about the paper, and Alecia was given the opportunity to present to the group on the topic in another meeting. Receiving this leadership opportunity also elevated Alecia’s status in the group. She became the expert of how “The Juvenile system…discriminates against children of color and those with disabilities.” In another instance, Samantha is discussing how police at a local swimming hole knew her car’s license plate, but now she sold the car. Some of the teens used this example to discuss racial profiling and local pull over rates by race. Although previously Samantha was discussing approaches to self-care that included swimming, she turned the floor over to the two youth who shared stories and facts about local incidents, including that “you’re 30% more likely to get stopped if you’re black and 35% if you’re Latino.” The ways that adults and peers increased the status of participants with praise and leadership opportunities helped to emphasize the importance of particular understandings of racial inequality and further develop the commitment to these issues.

Similarly, violating norms in organizations demonstrated the accepted interpretations of particular issues. Violations of norms were identified when participants were silenced, minimized, or ignored within the group. In each organization, these norms violations often took
place when individual identities and understandings conflicted with the collective identities being established.

One norm violation took place at EYC when Kiara, discussing a fight at school said, “my color set themselves up to get suspended.” Malik agreed with this statement saying, “sometimes they do set themselves up.” In these two comments, the youth violated the systemic interpretation of racial inequality that was being developed in the organization, placing blame on racial minority youth for their own challenges in school. Lilly responded quickly to these comments asking “do you think they chose to be in that situation?” Pearl then said, “that anger is coming from somewhere else.” Evelyn added that it’s because those students don’t have opportunities to succeed at school and noted, “it’s not their fault.” Pearl continued by saying to Malik and Kiara that “it’s not fair to categorize it by race.” The group continued to talk about the issue without giving Malik or Kiara space to speak. The conversation did not end until the teens and Luke seemed to feel that everyone in the room agreed that there were issues in the system like teacher expectations that kept minority students from having as many opportunities as white students and therefore led them to be more inclined to get into fights.

Violating norms at YRSV was also often connected to individual interpretations. In one instance, Alecia brought up a time a white elementary school friend’s father told his daughter that he did not want her spending time with Alecia because of “all these stereotypes about black people.” She told the group that she saw him recently and felt triumphant because she was in college and accomplishing things. Some of the teens commended her for feeling triumphant, and Ruth said, “it sounds like you’ve already made some choices about how those things will affect you” and after a brief moment of silence, she changed the subject. On this and several other instances, such as when Alecia was discussing harassment she and her family received from a
store clerk, Ruth was quick to move the discussion away from personal experiences of racism. By silencing individual experiences, she limited the sorts of conversations on racial inequality that took place in the group setting.

_Taking Action_

Beyond determining the bounds of acceptable interpretations, both organizations needed to decide what sort of action they would take on the issue. Would they become involved in the local mobilization efforts taking place? Would they go to activities or events that supported the causes they were now discussing in their organizations? In response, both groups began to participate in community events linked to racial inequality. In part, this was likely because activities are used to affirm identities (Bernstein 2008; Snow and Anderson 1987), especially those that organize difference (Ghaziani and Baldassarri 2011).

At EYC Luke came in with a series of Facebook posts in response to a school board member’s comment that “there’s nothing like the school to prison pipeline, but there’s a poverty to prison pipeline.” After discussing why this interpretation was not appropriate including that it “negat[es] a decade’s worth of research,” Luke and teens decided to respond by writing letters to the school board member. Although they did some community activities related to racial inequality, on various occasions Luke limited the teen’s involvement in community and public activities. For instance, when one of the teens, Evelyn, suggested that the group go to the Black Lives Matter protest, Luke told them that he supported them going as individuals, but that he did not think they should go as a “EYC” affiliated group. At EYC, although they did participate in events, they spent more time building their understanding of inequality, spending about [half] of
the time I observed watching videos about racial inequality, being trained in issues related to racial inequality, and generally engaging in inequality discourse around racial issues.

At YRSV, the teens attended several different events focused on racial inequality, including several local Black Lives Matter protests and youth-related rallies and events. The youth also became informally part of local planning efforts around racial inequality-based initiatives and trainings. In fact, during my observation, 2 of the 4 community events participants attended were focused on racial inequality. For YRSV, attending activist events and connecting to local coalitions meant taking their commitment to racial inequality and turning it into action.

At EYC, the extensiveness of attention and focus on racial inequality overtook the group’s stated commitment to dental health. In part, this transition within the group at EYC happened readily because the youth were new to the organization and, despite joining to support healthcare advocacy, were not strong in their commitment or investment in this area when the emergent discourse entered the group. At YRSV, however, some of the youth participants were founders of the organization and there was a deeply established set of shared goals and understandings present in the group when BLM became prominent.

In the course of my observations, both EYC and YRSV developed similar approaches, focusing on issues of racial inequality that were popular in public discourse using a movement-centered frame, even when these issues were not central to either organization’s stated mission. Youth in leadership roles helped to further codify the interpretations around issues of racial inequality and acceptable views were reinforced through interactions within the group. Although there are many discussions of these issues with overlapping themes in the two groups, both organizations most often discussed popularized issues like schools, policing, and the role of whites as allies as critical topics in understanding racial inequality. For instance, when both
groups discussed school related issues, they focused on the ways that school systems were racist and produced unequal outcomes for black and white students. They used similar rhetoric to discuss how racial bias operated in policing, and the ways that police were, to some extent, intentional in their racist actions. In addition, in part because there were white people in each of these conversations, the groups also focused on how whites supported the work of minority communities. Both groups displaced their organizational goals and focused primarily on racial inequality. There, however, were consequences for both groups resulting from shifting their goals and collective identities away from their stated missions and towards racial inequality.

*The Endurance of Organizational Change*

Working on issues of racial inequality and developing commitments to related organizations and initiatives produced a series of consequences for both organizations. Questions began to arise as a result around how extensively the organizations would change and whether these changes would be lasting. Both groups began to consider racial inequality in several areas including the makeup of their own groups, the way these new commitments matched other organizational expectations, and the relationships with the parent organization and funder. If they were going to work for racial inequality in their communities, were they also going to work for racial inequality inside their groups? How would a healthcare advocacy and a sexual health organization defend to their parent organizations and funders the time spent working for racial justice? Various new challenges resulted as the burgeoning focus on racial inequality became codified into the organizations.
Focusing Inward

Having a strong commitment to issues of racial inequality and taking actions in the community led organizational participants to turn inward and consider what was going on in their own organizations and how that connected to their experiences around issues of racial inequality. They began to wonder if their own organizations met the standards for racial justice they were learning about and fighting for at community events. At EYC and YRSV there was a sense that this new insight offered the opportunity to reevaluate their organizations and engage more deeply with internal issues.

Luke was instrumental in determining how to think about racial inequality in the group at EYC He said, “…I want to dig in on equity and race…That just increases other opportunities like for Evelyn to realize her own privilege, and Malik to get more comfortable talking about privilege. I get the sense he understands it well but is hesitant to speak up about…” he paused before saying, “…being a black man.” Luke and the teens at EYC frequently drew parallels between the conversations they were having on racial inequality generally and their own organizational practices.

On another occasion, there was the possibility of bringing a new teen into the group. There was a somewhat contentious conversation amongst the group about whether and how to hire as noted in chapter 4. They discussed hiring from the communities they sought to support (lower socioeconomic status, minority youth), and then Lilly pointed out how they might not be prepared for this. She said that they first needed to figure out “a more equitable way of [adding someone] in our team.” She added “I think we should focus on changing things based on past team experiences before we hire someone…I think we would want to focus on making things more equitable and teaching each other and things like that first.” This led to a conversation
about the ways the group may be excluding certain participants and reproducing traditionally middle-class participation. Lily said “I think the only way to work [], for someone to be successful was…unless they had the life experiences and privileges to have all the skills…but I don’t think we’d want to do that, we’d want anyone to be able to start on the team no matter their background.” The group tabled the conversation and returned to it later, deciding to create more formal ways to reach individuals from lower socioeconomic status minority backgrounds.

At YRSV, the teens and adults were already aware that their group was white and primarily middle class. When I met with Ruth to discuss observing the group, she told me they were a group of primarily middle-class girls. But, even though they were aware of these issues, the youth had not spent a lot of time evaluating what that might mean and whether the composition of the group required change. As they became more focused on racial inequality, they also began to see racism as a frame for understanding their group. One teen Erin, said, “Yeah like racism is a really big problem…I'm okay with our group like experiencing this sort of discomfort and like this sort of self-recognition of like our white privilege…” As a result of their other experiences and involvement in similar topics, participants at YRSV began to more critically evaluate their own organization as well.

Both organizations identified their own groups as problematic for the way they conceptualized racial inequality in their changing groups. Each group decided to respond to this new dilemma by considering actions within the organizations that could reduce issues of inequality internal to the organization. In the same way they were taking action in their communities, they also sought to create change in their groups. For EYC and YRSV, recruitment became the primary way to improve inequality within their organizations.
Each group discussed the importance of having the people in the community they served be in the room and organizational actors saw recruitment as a solution to the newfound problem. Luke expressed to the teens during the conversation about bringing on new participants, “if we believe in equity, do we believe that we want equity? Does that mean that it’s more equitable to work with the most oppressed population of people?” Similarly, Ruth wrote on the agenda at a YRSV meeting that one of their most important goals for the organization was “recruit[ing] for diversity.” Samantha similarly noted that the group was “trying to figure out ways to expand and not just be a bunch of middle class white girls.”

As they discussed the way recruitment would change their organizations, they began to imagine a future version of their organizations that was more diverse and represented the population they served. Both groups operated under the assumption that this future self would eventually exist and that recruitment could help them achieve this outcome. Yet, during my observations neither group was successful at bringing in new participants who represented the populations they served. At YRSV they were only able to bring in one person of color, and at EYC Luke told me that the new participant was a person of color, which he was happy about, but that the new teen was more middle-class so therefore did not represent the equity they discussed.

One consequence of using the language of the imagined other, this future organizational version that was more diverse, was that it gave groups a false sense that those individuals were present in the room. In part because they brought these imagined others into the space with the idea of inevitability, the organizations also used this logic to provide an out for actually meeting the goal of bringing in members from the communities they served. For instance, Luke implied that they would work towards bringing in these individuals in the future.
The new focus at EYC and YRSV revealed a challenge for both groups—their own organizations did not live up to the standards they were establishing for racial justice. In each, they questioned and critiqued their own organizations, and responded by developing the imagined other and attempting to use recruitment to achieve more diverse groups.

*Making Racial Inequality “Fit” [here]*

In developing a strong commitment to issues of racial inequality and working within their organizations to become more equitable, another consequence arose. How do a healthcare advocacy organization and an anti-sexual violence organization make racial inequality “fit” into the core goals and mission of their organizations? At EYC and YRSV responding to this dilemma often involved building an intersectional understanding that related race to healthcare and sexual violence respectively.

The general shift to thinking about racial inequality to the extent that it overtook the organization’s commitments including internal and external actions meant these groups had to defend their increased attention to racial inequality. At EYC, Luke explicitly addressed this dilemma with the group saying that he was trying to help them understand equity before they learned about the health care system or began their advocacy work. In an informal interview, Luke reiterated this point saying that learning about racial inequalities was a way to help youth understand the other sorts of inequalities the organization addressed. He later told the youth that he was using discussions of racial inequality as a way to lead them into understanding other inequalities and that they are all in the same “social justice tree.”

Similar work occurred at YRSV to make racial inequality “fit” into the remainder of the organization’s goals. As one teen Charlene pointed out to the group, “As much as we try to be
intersectional in the way we deal with dismantling oppression, we have to be clear about how rape culture upholds and is upheld by other forms of oppression like racism, classism, and xenophobia.” YRSV too focused on the strong connection between the work they were doing on racial inequality and rape culture. Further, in telling new participants about YRSV’s recent work, Ruth said they were “mak[ing] connections with youth organizations that are more established to try to learn from them and going to events that are connected to our understanding of what our politics are but aren’t necessarily about rape culture.” In both cases, primarily adults in these organizations created explanations for the focus of the groups on racial inequality by building bridges between issues of racial inequality and the core goals of their organizations.

*It Doesn’t Quite “Fit”*

Although organizational participants were making strong arguments to connect racial inequality with the core goals of the organizations, this was not always sufficient and contention arose. At EYC this contention was not internal to the group, but rather in its relationship with the parent organization and the funder. Luke, for his part, was glad that the group was focused on developing an understanding of racial inequality, and often mentioned how he did not think the youth could move forward in their work without a strong understanding of these sorts of inequalities. He was pleased with the work the group was doing to incorporate and engage issues of racial inequality and the youth were also unanimously onboard. Yet, the group’s relationship with the parent organization and funder, both of which were healthcare organizations, were more problematic.

Although the teens often acted autonomously and were able to create change in their group at EYC, they also sought change in the organization more generally. In these instances,
Luke supported them but was unable to achieve these changes. Lilly, for instance, wanted the organization to work more equitably beyond just their group. She expressed that the organization needed to have the kinds of conversations that were happening in their smaller group and make some changes. In response to this suggestion, Luke said, “I escalated this conversation to the rest of the organization…It didn't go far and was met with the idea that we need to really determine what our definition of equity is first and that is something the equity committee will do. However, it got pushed to the side, the committee doesn't even meet, maybe is not even formed.” Having to go through bureaucratic processes in organizations like the equity board at EYC limited the ability to create change in the parent organization and produced contention in the group as Lilly and the other teens subsequently felt they lacked support for their goals and capacity to make change outside of their groups.

But Luke worked hard to limit the contention that resulted from this new focus at EYC. He told the youth that they could not attend events outside of the organization as EYC affiliates. While youth were encouraged to attend protest events on their own, the organization itself did not go to these events together. In part, this was an effort to buffer against criticism from funders. Each group made promises to funders about the kind of work they would be doing and owed them deliverables in the form of reports and data collection. At EYC one primary conflict for the group was around helping the funding organization accept the importance of focusing on racial inequality. Luke asked the group, “what can EYC invest in as somebody who’s funded to do oral health work? [Topics like literacy] are underwritten in many of the tasks we will be doing. How can we do this and be responsible to our funders and our outcomes?” Limiting the events they attended as a group was one way that Luke mitigated the contention with the parent organization and funder.
At YRSV, however, contention around fit was more problematic. In fact, the focus on racial inequality played a role in the Ruth-Samantha conflict described in the previous chapter. Samantha was dedicated to working locally on issues of racial inequality and encouraged the shift in YRSV towards a focus on these issues, while Ruth wanted the organization to remain more centered on rape culture. The firing of Samantha, whether intentionally or not, also meant less support for working on issues of racial inequality. Further, in discussing Samantha’s firing, Ruth said that she was “creating a dynamic of asking students to take sides,” which was also connected to decisions about the general direction of YRSV.

During my observations, the focus on racial inequality was so central at YRSV, that rape culture took a backseat, which some supported but others found disappointing. YRSV participants considered the possibility that the organization, in rewriting its mission statement, should change its name from Youth Reducing Sexual Violence to something like “Youth for Intersectionality” as one of the teens, Henry suggested. Since they were no longer primarily focused on issues of rape culture but had instead moved to considering broader injustices, this seemed logical to several of the teens and Samantha, who was herself involved in the BLM movement and beginning to see herself more as a racial justice advocate. Yet Ruth was opposed and wanted the organization to return to focusing on the main goals. She said to the group, “the thing is it comes down to intersectionality verses mission drift…is rape culture the central point for YRSV?…you can do rape culture and intersectionality in a way that creates a connection between the two.” For Ruth, racial inequality needed to fit inside rape culture at YRSV, and not be an independent focus that overtook the organization.

Beyond this tension internal to the group, there was also strife with funders and the parent organization. Ruth explained saying “…we have things we need to get accomplished, and if
that’s not the direction YRSV wants to go, then that puts us in a hard place. Like we need to do a community assessment in part of the funding we get for YRSV. If YRSV doesn’t want to do that, then it puts the RCC in a strange place.” This assessment, which had only briefly been mentioned in earlier sessions, could not take place if youth were not interested or available to do the data collection because they were focused elsewhere. In addition, Ruth told the group that if they moved away from being a rape culture organization, they may also need to sever their ties with the parent organization, a rape crisis center, which offered them funding and legal protections like liability insurance for when the youth attended events.

Although contention around the way inequality “fit” into each organization manifested itself differently, in both cases there were barriers to achieving their goals of racial justice. In part this was due to the strong tie of each group to routines, funders, and parent organizations, which were limiting in various ways. For each group, shifting from healthcare advocacy and sexual violence to an antiracist framework revealed consequences and tensions that had to be negotiated or, if they could not be resolved, led to the decline of the organization.

Outcomes for Organizations

The impact of focusing on racial inequality discourse and commitment to BLM strongly influenced both groups. At EYC, because they spent a majority of the early weeks and months discussing racial inequality, the group did not take actions in the community on issues of oral health until significantly later than they planned. The newly recruited youth working on the new oral health initiative were optimistic about their ability to understand the politics around oral health and hit the ground running, beginning to make changes. Although Luke imagined that they would be involved in low income communities and working for increased access to oral
health in the first six months of meeting, the team took very few actions. This was in part due to the extensive time and energy they exerted learning about and engaging in issues of racial inequality. Although not problematic for Luke, several of the teens mentioned in interviews that they had not done very much at the organization.

At YRSV, the impact of the focus on racial inequality was much more problematic for the survival of the organization. As briefly mentioned above, the focus on racial inequality coupled with the contention between Ruth and the youth over the dismissal of Samantha discussed in the previous chapter led to the temporary disbanding of YRSV and recruitment of almost entirely new membership. But, it also intersected with several other issues like the possibility of severing ties with the parent organization. If YRSV left the RCC, they would be able to more freely work on other issues as Samantha told the group. She said “RCC from my understanding isn’t supposed to be affiliated with activism the way YRSV is doing it because it’s not supposed to take a position.” The new affiliation would provide an “incubator for youth-led programming” and YRSV would have “complete autonomy.” For Ruth this was a negative, but for Samantha this meant more freedom and ability to commit to racial inequality. The focus on racial inequality was the primary reason the organization was considering massive change, like taking on a new name and mission. As the divide deepened, the focus on racial inequality versus rape culture was used to further polarize the organization and codify the Ruth/Samantha split.

It’s impossible to know, but if YRSV had remained committed to sexual violence they may not have seen such a deep and divisive split. Either way, once Samantha was pushed out of the group, Ruth’s efforts to reach out and re-center the group around sexual violence became more evident. As the youth were meeting independently to decide whether they wanted to still be connected to the rape crisis center and Ruth, or whether they wanted to go it alone as a purely
youth run organization, Ruth was readying for the next phase of YRSV. Ruth and the new staff member, Patricia, were recruiting new members and focusing on their goals for the organization for the coming year. Ruth did initially try to bring the members back to the group, but her efforts were limited. She contacted the youth individually once or twice but did not persist in efforts to reconnect them to YRSV. The temporary disbandment of the organization meant that a proverbial reset could occur. When the organization returned the following fall, I went briefly and found that there were almost exclusively new faces and the conversations returned to primarily being focused on sexual violence.

Discussion

To reiterate, neither organization initially explicitly expressed an interest or commitment to working on antiracist issues, and the analysis I present was the result of observing the development of a shared set of beliefs in each group. I did not select organizations for their particular engagement in issues of inequality, nor was I looking specifically for the ways these groups discussed issues of inequality. However, my analysis of both organizations showed that even though EYC and YRSV did not initially engaged with issues of racial inequality in their groups, both focused on this topic and came to construct meaning and engagement with issues of racial inequality in similar ways.

Returning to the original question of this chapter, how much influence can BLM and racial inequality discourse have on seemingly unrelated organizations and what are the consequences of responses to this dilemma? In this chapter I have shown that the goals, commitments, and collective identity of both organizations shifted in response to public discourse and the influence of individuals to become focused on racial inequality. Youth played
a major role in this shift by leveraging their autonomy to push their organizations to engage with these issues. Both groups brought in liberal movement-influenced interpretations of current events and media examples from popular media outlets and from other organizations and connections. But, for both organizations, the shift to focusing on racial inequality produced challenges and tensions that needed to be resolved. The groups had to address their own organizations, how this new focus “fits” with their core goals and missions, and the ability to defend this choice to parent organizations and donors. For EYC this shift had little impact on the livelihood of the organization, but for YRSV it produced a threat that aided in the temporary disbanding and recruitment of new membership. The shift that occurred at EYC was also enduring in the organization as discussed further below. However, at YRSV, the change was fleeting and in many ways detrimental to the organization, at least in the form I observed.

I argue that what I observed in both groups was the process of organization transformation, which combined focusing on organizational goals, forming a new collective identity, incorporation of broader public events and conversations through inequality discourse, and the influence of individual experiences and identities. Both groups filtered the public discourse and decided how to integrate it with the main goals of the organization. But collectives do not automatically decide to share a set of beliefs, instead youth and adults helped to centralize particular parts of the discourse as influenced by their experiences and backgrounds. These steps reconstructed the process of organizational transformation and help explain why a health care advocacy organization and an anti-sexual violence organization became intensely focused on understanding and challenging racial inequality.

One important finding of this research is the capacity for social movements to indirectly influence very loosely tied activist groups. For social movement scholars, these findings
emphasize the importance of considering how inequality discourse shapes organizations and how far movement influence may extend. In addition, this study indicates that social movement scholars should move away from studying collective identities and movement commitments as stable and focus instead on the ways that they might change and evolve, taking a more process-based approach to understanding organizational change.

The findings also lead to questions about the long-term influence of the shift towards racial inequality in these groups. Although I did not remain in the groups, I maintained several connections. YRSV youth that I remained connected to after the fieldwork told me that they, despite having been deeply committed to the organization prior, never returned after the hiatus. They were unaware of the actions of the organization. Based on their Facebook page and other public material, they appear to have remain refocused on sexual violence. At EYC, however, I remained on their text message conversation for the following two and a half years until the majority of the youth left for college. The group remained deeply committed to issues of racial inequality, even seeking a partnership to do community work with the NAACP almost two years after my observations.

Although the focus of this chapter is on two activist organizations, the potential for public discourse to influence institutions extends beyond these cases. During this same time period, for instance, universities hosted hundreds of events around this topic and formalized course offerings and new elements of their curriculum to educate students on racial inequality. As a result, this work is also of interest to scholars of institutions more broadly. Organizational and institutional representatives also have to similarly decide how to incorporate, respond to, or avoid public discourse. When disruptions take place like the sudden growth of a social movement, processes of reconfiguration in these institutions must also take place. These groups
similarly filter public discourse and, potentially change their organizations or elements of their organizations accordingly.
CHAPTER VI. AVOIDING INEQUALITY DISCOURSE

Although EYC and YRSV both became committed to issues of racial inequality, in the other two organizations there was an avoidance of engaging with or responded to public discourse as I will demonstrate. Most often, these non-activist organizations took a colorblind approach, avoiding discussing inequality issues and actively stating that those issues were not acceptable to discuss in the organizations. What differentiates the responses, I will argue, is a combination of the way youth were included in decision-making processes and the resonance of the dilemma with the organizational participants. When youth were given formal and informal leadership roles in the organizations, they had to conform to the norms of the organizations. This meant that to take on these leadership positions they needed to understand how to be a leader in those settings. To be a leader in an activist group, youth needed to understand the broader activist community and be able to participate in other activist organizations. But to be a leader in a teen court organization, for instance, teens had to understand legal settings and be able to participate in other courtrooms and legal environments.

That said, issues connected to the public discourse on racial inequality and Black Lives Matter were also present in the conversations and off-handed comments of teens in the service organizations. However, they did not produce dilemmas for the organizations in the way that occurred at EYC and YRSV. In this chapter, I will explore why teens who expressed an interest in their organizations more deeply considering issues of racial inequality were unable to push their organizations to respond to these issues. I will argue that the service organizations in the study avoided the dilemma of fitting the emerging national conversation on racial inequality into
their organizations by constraining autonomy and establishing their groups as places where it was inappropriate to engage in inequality discourse. In part, the focus on both groups on a specific activity created more structured interactions with less capacity for change. However, the close tie of these organizations to the justice system that was a prominent part of the discourse on racial inequality simultaneously created an expectation in teens that the organizations would provide a setting for examining the larger causes and consequences of racial inequality.

In these organizations, there was a different approach – silence and avoidance. The autonomy that was given to the youth led them to incorporate some of the discourse on racial inequality and identify issues of inequality in their organizational settings, but without much organizational response. As a result, they expressed frustrations over the way the organization responded to issues including the influence of racial dynamics in the justice system and in the organization. They did not use these frustrations, however, to create change in their organizations. The constraints placed on youth autonomy in these organizations meant that they had little access to decision-making at the administrative level and therefore could not influence the broader setting in the same way as teens at EYC and YRSV. Further, the adults in these organizations were not interested in facilitating discussions or engagement with issues of racial inequality.

I identify two approaches to the absence of engagement with issues of racial inequality in the service organizations. The groups either avoid the topic completely by actively silencing youth or by openly recognizing inequality while avoiding responding to or focusing on any related issues. The first, active silence, takes place primarily in groups that are heavily managed, or where adult managers retained power and offered limited space for youth to participate in decision-making. In these settings, adults and youth both actively avoided discussing or engaging
in any conversations around issues of racial inequality, despite expressing recognition of their presence and potential influence on organizational processes in interviews. The second approach involved a broader and more open recognition of group boundaries. In this case, offering youth autonomy provided opportunities for youth to bring up issues around group-based divisions. Although the participants recognized the issues and addressed them in various ways, they did not become a part of the organization’s core activities or conversations. As a result, both talking about the issues and minority groups themselves remained marginalized in the organization.

Since the groups I describe below are not activist organizations, they also do not have as ready an imperative to participate in the discourse on racial inequality facilitated by the Black Lives Matter movement. They also may not be as aware of or committed to social justice causes. However, across these organizations, the active inclusion of diverse youth participants in activities did lead to pressure from youth in both organizations to engage in discourse around inequality. Although this engagement remained limited and restricted by adults and practices in the organizations.

*Active Silence*

One approach to addressing issues around inequalities in organizational practices and content was to practice active silence. By active silence, I mean that organizational participants were aware of potential race and class issues surrounding the organization, but they remained silent on those issues. The Restorative Justice Teen Court was the only organization in which the majority of the participants are non-white, primarily African American. The RJTC was also the only group in which the adult staff and volunteers were majority African American and lower socioeconomic status. Yet, in this group, issues of inequality were silenced and avoided.
The Restorative Justice Teen Court avoided discussions about race and socioeconomic status in the organizational setting. The vast majority of the teens who were tried in the teen court were African American, and approximately half of the volunteers who volunteered consistently during the period of my six-month observation were non-white. The consistent volunteers were four African American teens, one Southeast Asian, two Hispanic, and two white teens. Adults in the organization recognized that race could potentially be at play in the court system, but offered that it was a minor issue. Youth participants, too, noted the role of race, but also tended to see that it was not consequential to the organization. Issues related to inequality only explicitly arose once at the RJTC, so the majority of the data provided for this case is from interviews. The interview data reveals the depth of interest young people had in the issues, and the lack of observational data begins to reveal the silencing process that occurred. The process of silencing the youth on these issues is further described by youth who indicate in interviews that they were not comfortable bringing these issues up in the organizational setting.

Josiah, a black male teen, when asked if issues around race came up in teen court said “Uh, not really, not necessarily. I remember we used to have an attorney that used to try and play the race card sometimes…and say like, like this only happened because—or like something like if you were white—if you weren’t black this wouldn’t have happened, or something I don't know something along those lines. I always know he used to mention the race card, but it’s like, not now…I mean other than we see a lot of black kids coming through, more so than white.” When asked what he thought about that disparity, Josiah responded “That’s life, that’s how it is. I mean that’s how it is in the real court system so, it’s not different in Teen Court.” He went on to say that it’s not really something Teen Court can change because “That’s more of an outside of, in the community, actual community activism stuff…” Josiah, pointing to the broader discourse on
racial inequality in the justice system, noted seeing these issues and being aware of their influence, but did not have the sense that Teen Court was a place to engage in the issues and his tone indicated some disdain for prior teen attorneys who brought up “the race card.”

Similarly, one teen named Jamal, said that in his over 7 years at Teen Court, they've never faced an issue with race. He clarified "but I feel like it's always going to be an underlying issue." He explained further, "...I feel like it’s just underlying, underlying um, prejudice, but I don’t feel like Teen Court actually like, really addresses that at all..." He says he is dissatisfaction with his observation that mostly minority teens come through teen court. But, instead of addressing that in the organization, he says "that's one thing I try to change...If I hear someone say they're going to do this...I will bring Teen Court into the mix and be like no, you don't want to cause then you'll like ruin your life or your record..." Jamal, however, does not address this issue with the staff or others in the teen court, indicating that he does not target the court as a place for change.’ Jamal's interested in the inequality he saw and knew existed in the justice system, but his response was to take a personal and individualized approach outside of the organizational setting.

Sophie also said that issues with racial inequality were often “implied” in cases like when defendants said “I don’t know why the cop was chasing me; I guess I just looked suspicious.” She said “You have to read into that like there is a surface suspicion there…” But, she went on to say that in the context of the court, there was only one time “that would have been brought up so openly.” That incident is described further below. Generally, she said “We’ve danced around it a couple times…no one wants to admit it is still a problem. Obvious in the last year or so that’s really been shown that it is still an issue today…no one wants to come out and admit that it’s still an issue, no matter how much we’re trying to hide it.” Sophie makes it clear in her interview that
she’s aware of and concerned about the issues that were arising in the broader society, but she
too did not see teen court as a place that was open to responding to or engaging with the issues.

Although Sophie did not feel that these topics entered the courtroom, I asked her about a
time I heard her ask a defendant if she thought his interaction with the police would be the same
if he was white. She said she did ask that once or twice, especially on a case where she thought
that a black teen was not doing anything wrong and yet was approached by the police. She
mentioned asking one defendant that same question before the trial. His answer was “I’d like to
believe that answer is yes, but I don’t think it is.” Sophie said in response that she thought it was
important to bring this out in the courtroom,

I thought that a lot of people in the courtroom would see that. Sounds really mean to say,
but a lot of our defendants are African American, and I think in a lot of these cases that’s
partially why they’ve been cited and I feel like if you're a former defendant and you're
sitting on a jury, you see that, you can feel that in their story because you've experienced
that. Obviously, I've not experienced that. But you can see it in their faces, they’re like
'we know there was something else going on here, but we don’t want to say it', but, yeah.

Sophie said she generally avoided being explicit about the kinds of racial inequality she saw in
cases. “There was the case where I explicitly asked that, but I feel most of the time it's better to
let it go implied because there’s like the appeal for your logic there, this should not have been
treated this way, why was it? And it really makes the judge and the jury think about that. If you
take away everything but these simple facts of what happened, that’s what I’m trying to go for. If
that’s all they're thinking about, I think it’s fair.”

Although several of the teens noted that there may be racial inequality in the
demographics of the defendants, they generally focused on how little the issues came up in the
court. Steven, one of the primary adults in the court, also said it was not really an issue that came up in teen court; “…kids seem to get in trouble regardless of their race….” In my observations, teens did not discuss racial issues in informal settings, in the jury room, or on the stand, with one exception. In July, 2015, a black male teen was tried in the RJTC for allegedly stealing a bicycle and restricting and obstructing a police officer. As I observed, Josiah was the prosecuting attorney on the case, although in order to have one’s case heard in teen court, the defendant must admit guilt. This practice meant that the defendant pleads guilty to the charges prior to the trial, and instead of negotiating guilt as is done in other courts, the attorneys negotiate the sentence of the teen within a sentencing range.

When Josiah gave his opening statement for the case, based solely on reading the sentencing and intake sheet provided to him by the organization, he argued that the teen was not thoughtful and made a mistake. Josiah said that the defendant “went to someone’s house and took a bike not thinking about whether it was a kid’s or someone’s only means of transportation. What if they didn’t have another way to get to work to provide for their family? He didn’t think of any of these things. Also, he resisted authority later that day.” Susan, a white female, was the defense attorney on the case. After asking a set of standard questions, Susan asked the defendant to explain what happened. He said,

“I got off the bus to look at a bike in a garbage pile. I hop on the bike and started to ride. A Caucasian man in a black Volvo started to follow me and he pulled up beside me and said that it wasn’t my bike and to take it back. So I did. The guy followed me and pulled up beside me and said he wanted to take a picture of me. I kept walking. I see him take out his phone to take a picture so I run to the woods to see if the coast is clear. When I walked out, I saw an older Caucasian woman saying I couldn’t walk into people’s yards.
I asked for a ride home. I asked her not to call the police when she picked up her phone. She said she was calling for the police. The police pulled up and I ran into the woods. He had his gun pointed at me. I thought he was going to shoot me, but he didn’t. He told me to get on the ground and put me in handcuffs.”

The case went on, and the defendant said he was arrested and spent the night in jail. He then went to district court where he was referred to teen court. The attorneys continued to ask questions to get the details of the case. The defendant later noted, “I knew they wouldn’t listen to me because of my skin tone.” Josiah asked where the police got the information that he stole the bike, and the defendant said they would only take information from the Caucasian man. Josiah also asked why the defendant ran from the police, and he said he was scared and acting on instinct. After a bit of back and forth, Josiah asked the defendant “so you know a lot about what happens with police officers?” The defendant responded “yeah.” Josiah said “didn’t you realize you shouldn’t run?” The defendant responded “no.” Josiah changed the topic, to try and clarify if the area was residential and whether the defendant perceived the bike as trash in a pile as well as whether leaving items on the curb was a common occurrence in his neighborhood.

The white male who was acting as judge on the case worked as an attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). He interjected to ask some questions about how far the items were from the curb and the quality of the other items in the pile. When Susan was given the chance for redirect, a chance to ask follow-up questions to Josiah’s and the Judges’ questions, she said “you talked about being aware of race relations, does that instill in you and young people a fear of the police?” The defendant said “yeah, I’ve heard people talk about how when police come they run because no one wants to get in trouble with the law.” In her closing statement, Susan argued that part of the reason the teen committed the crime of resisting arrest
was because “a gun was pulled on him” and he was afraid, which is “prevalent in young Americans today.” She also noted “The police don’t always treat everyone fairly.” In Josiah’s closing statement, he also alluded to the relationship between police and African Americans that dominated the news media. Josiah said that the issue in the case was not about stealing the bicycle but resisting arrest. Discussing the police officer Josiah said “He’s an authority and if he tells you to stop, you need to stop. With race relations in this country today, he couldn’t be here tonight, but he got lucky.”

The sentencing range for the case was 15-20 hours of community service and 5-7 teen court jury sessions, plus juries can impose optional sanctions. The sentencing for the case determined by a jury of teens was 5 teen court jury duties and 17 hours of community service as well as an apology note to the bike owner. The judge told the teen that since he did not know the owner of the bike, he did not have to send the letter, but he still needed to write the apology. As was a typical part of the post-sentencing process, the judge then lectured the teen on the incident. He told him that the case was complicated, but the point is that you do not necessarily know if something is abandoned property, and you should not take it even if it looks abandoned unless there is a sign saying it can be taken. He went on,

I haven’t had the same experience you had as a not person of color with the police. Even if it’s wrong, you have to deal with it after the fact because you’ll find yourself in a bad situation. Following the stories out of Texas, even if it is wrong, you have to go back after the facts and deal with it through the legal process. That’s how things get better and part of what I do with the ACLU is worry about that. If that’s a situation, try to deal with it after the fact without getting yourself in a situation where you may end up far worse than what could have happened.
The case ended, and the defendant was sent to serve his sentence. As Sophie noted, racial issues had “never been explicitly stated like it was that night.”

Despite this one public incident and discussions of issues of racial inequality and references to the public discourse in interviews, the organization limited engagement with this topic. Other teens brought up limitations around discussing inequality in the organization.

Skylar, a Hispanic female attorney, after noting that she and another female were the “only white people in teen court,” (although there are a couple others who come less regularly), said,

that’s just such a sensitive like you don’t really talk about it in teen court kind of thing and I think it handles… I don’t think any of the defendants have ever tried to plead like look I’m black so this isn’t fair. So that hasn’t really come up…or I’m white, this isn’t fair. None of that has been an issue, a verbal issue that’s come out, and at court case, some of the judges are a little harder on some of the black males that come in. Just one judge specifically, he’s just like being a black male he was…he always tells this story whenever he has a black defendant he’s like look you are a strong black man, you don’t need to be here, don’t follow those stereotypes.

She went on to say that there was no discrimination, but noted “there’s never been an issue with it and if there has, we don’t know about it. It was handled among the adults, but as far as attorneys, it's never been.” Still, the teens noticed the racial disparities in the cases. Josiah said …preppy white girls come through Teen Court…Like I don’t know they like steal something, but they had $100 in their wallet….And the person will be like, stole when they had no money you know. And you see how they dress when they come, there like don't really have nice clothes they wear, even to wear to court. And this person just like got their nails done and stuff like that and most times their parents are like really cool
with it. They’re just like, oh Sally made a mistake and she’s blah, blah, blah, and smiling and stuff, but then the lower-class people come, and even if they’re white or black, their parents are like, you need to get it together. ‘Cause like I guess they realize that they’re at a higher risk of ending up somewhere where they don’t want to be because, rather than you know if they have the ability to get a good lawyer….that’s life though like is there’s always going to be a thing.

Josiah observed both racial/ethnic and socioeconomic disparities at teen court, but other teens dismissively said that issues like these never arose in the court—“Never really an issue, nope.”

While some individuals were thinking about and discussing this issue, I never witnessed teens discussing issues of inequality amongst themselves before, during, or after the meetings. As a result, I focus on interactions between individual teens and the organizations here since I did not observe engagement on these issues either in peer interactions or in informal organizational time (e.g., chatting in the elevator or hallways). There was not space or encouragement to engage these issues, despite their known prevalence in the justice system. In particular, adults did not generally feel that these issues were central to the court and the highly structured nature of the courtroom further limited informal interactions between youth and adults on issues of racial inequality. There was also very little recognition of any racial inequality within the group, except by Steven who said he felt that more whites volunteer to serve as attorneys. In the case of the RJTC, there was some concern about racial inequality in the justice system, although it was kept out of the courtroom, and there remained very little reflection on how any issue of racial inequality might transfer into the group setting.
Openly Recognizing Group Boundaries

Unlike the RJTC, the Youth Teen Court volunteers were majority white and most from higher socioeconomic status backgrounds. The teens on trial and serving jury sentences, however, came from a wide variety of socioeconomic status backgrounds. Charlotte the adult staff member at YTC, said she thought one of the most important things teens could take away from the experience in teen court was interacting with a diverse group of people. She said there were probably issues that resulted, especially in the jury room where she could not see it, but she said this was generally a beneficial part of the process. She wanted everyone to see themselves as equal, whether teen attorney or defendant. She also said there were never “blatant issues people tell me about.” In general, though, “yes, they’re always asking about disproportionate minorities coming in.”

Again, since issues around racial inequality in the justice system did not come up very often in the context of the court itself, a significant portion of the data are from interviews. Here the interviews show the perceptions of issues of racial inequality while the observational data indicate the contexts in which the issues enter the group setting. In talking with teens from the Youth Teen Court, they often told me that they noticed differences in the teens on trial like that there were many black teens who were there for fighting or that in referring to the rarity of a white defendant, “if he had been black…it was different…” Others noted that there are groupings of people that are more targeted by courts and claimed, “race is an issue.” Often, when asked if there were any racial issues at teen court, youth echoed similar sentiments: “…I feel like we do have less white people who go on trial than any other race.” Minorities in the setting, however, seemed to have a strong view of the differences. One Asian teen, after lowering her voice said about noticing racial divisions, “I think you can… I mean I don’t want to say you can
see it, but you can see it. All the attorneys are white; I think I’m the only Asian. If I… I haven’t seen any other race; I haven’t seen one off the top of my head.” Teens noticed other divisions as well, especially between the attorneys and the jurors.

According to Charlotte, the adult staff member, the majority of the teen volunteers were upper middle class. The teens on trial, however, varied by socioeconomic status but were primarily African American and Hispanic. On a typical day, about a third to half of the teens present were non-white; mixed between African American, Hispanic, Asian, and Southeast Asian. The vast majority of African American teens present on any given night were serving jury duty sentences from previous cases. The Asian and Hispanic youth were divided between those serving jury duty and volunteers. The volunteer attorneys were predominantly white. Based on the observations and the interviews, teens were concerned about a divide in the jury that placed whites against African Americans in sentencing, which at one point led to a dispute that I will discuss further below.

Patrick said that he noticed that “There’s a disproportionate number of African American, of people of other races, who get called to Teen Court.” He went on to say “I think a lot of the time Teen Court tries to avoid saying that there is a situation with race and social class.” Patrick also said “I don’t feel like I’m allowed to talk about that or weigh that directly in my decision making” in Teen Court. Jin, an Asian female, when asked if there were racial issues in the courtroom, similarly said,

…like the jury, you can definitely see more minorities and there’s less whites on the jury I think…I guess it depends on the day like usually there’s a lot more African Americans and Hispanics so…It’s an impact that I don’t necessarily would like but I think it does create like this whites are better than you kind of like event especially because…
especially if… this is why I don’t like doing prosecution, I feel like it’s just kind of like the majority being like your born kind of to a minority and I just feel like that’s I mean I guess it’s just something you can’t avoid but I think it does create a racial tension a little bit. Because you know the attorneys all interact with each other and like sometimes we do go ahead and interact with the jury, but I don’t necessarily see a lot of like race interaction I guess.

She went on to say that teen court does not handle issues of race, and she brought up the dispute in the jury room for support.

As Jin told the story of the dispute, she said, “I know there was like that one time and there was like that case about race…and [the jury] got in like a huge argument down in the jury room.” I witnessed this “argument” during my time in the field. In the weeks prior to the incident, which I describe below, a clear division began to emerge between black and white jurors in the jury room. In my observations, I found that the divide became evident as black jurors began to stick together on their suggestions over sentencing. Non-black teens also ignored the suggestions of the few black youth and dismissed their arguments. The black teens sat in one corner of the room together and often chatted amongst themselves during deliberation, a not uncommon behavior in the jury room. Teens outside of the group noted the division. Patrick said that on that day there were “…several black males in the corner and they um, felt as if they weren’t being heard.”

The division became deeper. In one jury session I observed, a Hispanic male teen, Luis, as several other teens were agreeing on a sentence, said “well, let’s see if they agree” and looked to the two black males who were present that day. Luis asked them if they were ok with a sentence of 4 community service hours and two teen court sessions. One of the black males said
he agreed with a white male who said they should do 5 community service hours and 1 teen court. Then another white male said “how about 4 and 2. Is that ok? Does anyone object?” Another white male jumped in and said “4 and 2 everybody? Great.” He winked. A law student who was present in one of the jury sessions noted the divide between the jurors and singled out the group asking Darnell, a black male, if he and his friends would “participate and try to pay attention.” A couple weeks later, after trying to make several suggestions about the sentencing, one of the black males approached me as the only adult in the room after the jury decision was made and said “I tried!”, indicated that he tried to participate as he was asked by the law students to do in the weeks prior.

The strong division between the “black males in the corner” and the rest of the jurors grew for several weeks at the Teen Court, with differing opinions on sentencing remaining divided between the two groups. In an interview, Marie emphasized how racial divisions were impacting the courtroom. She noted “Sometimes it’s hard to make decisions because certain groups like stick together because they’re like friends and like whether they know the person or not they’ll stick to it…they like won’t budge on their opinion like no matter how much like we try to understand their opinion and what they think and persuade them to think about our opinion or something like that it’s hard because they’re grouped together.” She said “…what it comes down to [is] race is a part of that issue…”

After these sort of racially divided group interactions occurred for a few weeks, the tension came to a head in a jury session. In one debate, I observed on whether to impose an additional sanction beyond jury duty and community service on a defendant, teens had varying opinions. A white female, Michelle, and a black male, Tyrone, disagreed about the benefits of imposing a requirement to attend therapy. After a white female teen pointed to the group of black
males in the jury room and asked what they thought, the two bickered about whether the teen was smirking on the stand because he did not take the case seriously as the white teen argued, or because his mom was there, as the black teen suggested. More interruptions and contentious discussions mounted as the conversation progressed and everyone in the room tried to argue for the sanctions they saw fit and the reasoning behind them.

In general, Tyrone and Jayden, the black males, were arguing that the optional sanctions suggested including anger management sessions, therapy, and participation in an afterschool program for students who have been suspended would not change the teen’s behavior and therefore were not useful to give in this case. Beyond the optional sanctions that the teens were not required to offer in their sentencing, the teens could not agree on the number of community service hours and jury duty sessions the defendant should complete. During the heated conversation about sentencing, Luis said “everyone’s opinion is equally valid.” As the debate got more tense over the sentencing, one black male teen muttered something about racism. A white female quickly replied, “I’m not racist.” She started to build an argument for why she was not racist, but Luis stopped her and said, “you don’t have to prove it.” After that brief moment the debating flared again, and a white female, after arguing that the most outspoken black male should not be on the jury because he knew the defendant, said to me “I’m going to have to go to therapy after this. Did you see what he said?” Amongst all the raised voices, I missed the comment that prompted this, but it tied back to the racial division in the room.

In that moment, Charlotte came into the jury room. This was the first time she had ever entered the jury room to the best of my knowledge, but the jury had been in session for about a half hour (compared to the typical 5-10 minutes) and she told me she was concerned about what was taking place during that time. Charlotte quelled the debate by informing the teens that the
Juvenile Justice Department ordered several optional sanctions already, and the jurors agreed to just endorse those optional sanctions. Despite the racial tension that occurred during this incident, Jin and others who were not in the room at the time noted about the jury that, “…I don’t really think [the teen jurors] take race into account when they’re doing anything.”

Race and ethnic issues came up in numerous ways as teens talked about teen court. A mixed-race female, Marie, said that racial “stereotypes” came into the setting. Marie went on, “but I mean the facts or like there's obviously like more black people incarcerated.” She also said that people divide themselves into groups by race. She noted that this was true at other places like school, but here, she said, those group affinities impacted the decisions jurors made about sentencing. Jurors serving sentences tended to be the non-white youth in the organization, while volunteers were predominantly white.

A white female teen, Matilda, expressed the ways that racial divisions shaped peer interactions. She said, “so on a few occasions, like, there were these 3 black kids sitting behind me…and they were like talking a lot during the case, and like just making a lot of noise, and I turned around and was like ‘excuse me, if you guys are going to talk and like laugh and stuff do you mind moving back a little bit’. And he was like no, you can move somewhere else. And I was like, ‘Okay.’ And then they were just like kind of insulting me and then in the jury room, there’s most of the time the people who sit in the back corner and laugh and joke around.” Matilda said that at teen court, the issue “doesn’t get handled. There’s nothing we can, like, I don’t think there’s anything we can do. You can’t just focus on the black people and be like, “Behave,” you know?” This view offers a darker perspective on how to respond to racial division that arose in the courtroom, suggesting a more racially differentiated system that targets blacks who do not participate in a way whites see as fit.
Mark, a white teen attorney, also noted instances where race and ethnicity have mattered, but in a different way. He told the story of a recent case I observed in which a Hispanic male teen was pressured into carrying drugs by an older high school student who threatened to “kill” him if he did not comply. Mark said he did not feel like the teen should have been tried. He went on, “…it made me very angry because sometimes you wonder if people really care, if people really are willing to go the extra mile to understand somebody’s story or whether law enforcement officers are merely out there just to do their job, get the ticket on somebody and then as long as situation permits just hold them to it.”

In one instance, Chip, a white male teen attorney said in an interview that race did not come up in the courtroom. Then he went on to talk about social class, at first arguing that socioeconomic status had no impact in the courtroom, but then pointing to the potential that assumptions and implicit bias are shaping the courtroom. Jin saw this differently, noting that you could, in some subtle ways, see class divisions “I don’t think the division is as prominent as racial divisions is but I think it’s still kind of there. Um you know you can tell cause like I guess it’s cause attorneys have to… they come in these really nice suits and then like the jury’s wearing like just jeans, you know?” Marie offered a slightly different interpretation still, “I mean it’s just like race. Some social classes…like come together sometimes and like that’s just like a part of your friend group or something.”

Chip and several other teens pointed out the ways that these divisions impacted the courtroom. They said you can also see differences in the defendants who are tried in the courtroom. Chip listed an example of a higher and lower socioeconomic status defendant in recent cases, and then said the program “ha[s] this large disparity from our defendants… you either get the kid who probably doesn't have the best support at home and has other reasoning’s
for falling into what’s happening as opposed to the kid whose parents don’t really give a shit and just let him do whatever.” He went on to say, “I don't see much bias in the court room… and I don't think [we’re] biased when it comes to making constructive responses…The only thing that I could say is the lower socioeconomic groups tend to have worse testimony when it come’ to speaking on the stand, they aren't able to do as good as a job kind of telling their story, as opposed to a kid whose been taking all AP classes for three years.” He noted that this impacted how attorneys questioned defendants and he said that as opposing counsel, when someone struggled to tell a clear story, the attorneys sometimes “use[d] that to our advantage…We can ask very structured yes no questions, but he may understand to a degree to say yes or no…” Chip thought this likely impacted the sentencing of the teens, as the jury may find the story the prosecution tells to be clearer.

As illustrated by the observations and interviewing, YTC teens and adults were aware of the division between race/ethnic and socioeconomic status groups in the courtroom setting. In interviews and informal conversations, most teens were aware of both the racial inequality in the justice system that led more minority teens to be tried and of the racial divisions in their own organization. However, few teens discussed these issues publicly in the courtroom or worked on challenging or changing issues of racial inequality in the courtroom, organization, or in the justice system. In the case of cross group exposure and engagement with diverse groups, someone in the setting must still bring attention to issues of inequality in order for action to take place. In these settings, as a result of youth autonomy, youth were able to bring up issues of inequality both inside and outside of the courtroom, as I observed on several occasions. However, that autonomy for youth was a necessary but not sufficient condition for engaging in these conversations at the organizational level.
Since their autonomy did not extend broadly across the organization, youth likely also remained limited in how much influence they could exert. In order for the sorts of conversations and responses to inequality that did arise in the organization to move from the fringes of brief interactions and peer conversations, either youth or adult participants had to take charge to bring the issues to the forefront. This required the person to be comfortable and confident with their ability to discuss the issues and create a space where it is alright to struggle and discuss the issues. In the setting as I observed, this did not occur.

I argue that in this setting, the racial division between volunteers and defendants kept the youth and adults from critically addressing race or class in the group setting. This was especially true because the white and middle-class group retained high status in the organization by serving as volunteers, sentencing defendants, and being professionalized into the role of attorneys. That privilege, allowed teens and adults to notice and discuss the issues, without being critical or feeling the need to more deeply engage with inequality. Further, the organizational structure did not support this approach; although disadvantage is prevalent in the justice system, teen court programs are not trying to change the system, but rather change individual outcomes. Teens in the courtroom may become aware of issues of inequality and discuss them on the sidelines, but even teens themselves noted that it was hard to become truly aware of the issue. One teen said she was raised blind to inequalities. At one point in the interview, the same teen brought up race unprompted while discussing gender, “That, that hasn’t stood out to me but it’s also like I didn’t, I didn’t really realize that, umm, sexism was even a thing until like, last year, because I grew up sheltered in [a nearby town], where people don’t care what gender you are, or what race you are, and what sexuality.”
One reason that issues of inequality did not become central in the YTC was because Charlotte avoided addressing the issues, even though the teens brought them up. Charlotte said, “since there are no obvious issues to me, I kind of hesitate to address it…sometimes I feel like that should be a parent’s issue to address.” Without the support of the adult, youth were limited in how far they could go in addressing inequality in the organization or in the larger society. However, this engagement may have been more likely in a prior iteration of the teen court. Although I did not observe teen court when it was led by a previous adult leader, one teen told me that the adult leader was concerned with the school to prison pipeline, bringing youth to lobby against the factors that reproduce injustices. He said that at that time, the issues were more a part of teen court. Now, however, there was little comfort, desire, or perhaps shared language to address inequality.

Charlotte maintained that some of the reason group divisions were the way they were was because many less privileged, non-white volunteers did not come to teen court and therefore were also in the role of defendants serving sentences. She offered that some factors were structural (e.g., teens cannot get to the location), but she also said she had a role in the process, “for one kid it’s because he lives in [another] county and it’s hard for him to get over here.” In other cases, “there’s a language barrier between me and the parents, and another kid doesn’t have email…I will call them, but not to the same extent I send out email…a lot of them it’s been a transportation issue…” She said about non-white teens not coming to the court, “I don’t think it’s because they feel uncomfortable there. I don’t want to think that at least.”
Discussion

Past work on how diversity and inequality shape experiences in civic organizations is limited by a focus on quantitative approaches and selecting groups focused primarily on racial issues (e.g., Hughey 2012). In this chapter, I expand this work by studying how youth discuss inequality in the context of their organizational participation. This approach shifts away from the standard line of research that seeks to identify correlational relationships between variables such as contact with “out groups” and attitudes towards diversity (e.g., Islam and Hewstone 1993) towards a more complex understanding of the ways youth discuss and respond to issues of inequality in organizations.

I find that the contact between groups may have a marginal impact, but any meaningful change or youth consideration of inequality is primarily driven by actively engaging in conversations and actions around inequality. In youth civic organizations, engagement with inequality is negotiated between adults and youth, and groups with greater inclusion of youth participation in decision making tend to engage more deeply with issues of inequality. Contact theories that suggest that simply sharing space and interacting with a diverse group produces tolerance are insufficient. However, the set of research that considers the importance of dialogue and critical interaction over issues of inequality offers insight into how civic groups may be able to build awareness of and response to issues of inequality.

Critical engagement with issues of inequality is driven by a combination of youth autonomy and adult leadership. When youth are more autonomous actors in organizations, they are able to raise issues of inequality and contribute their viewpoints on the issues. The second component to ingraining inequality discussion in the organization broadly is to have adults incorporate the issues of inequality that they and the youth address into the organization. Adults
who are comfortable with and capable of engaging in discourse around inequality can decrease racial disparities in groups (Dreachslin and Hobby 2008). The skill of the leader and comfort of engagement in discussion mitigates any negative outcome of alienation or isolation that might result from the conversations. While the combination of youth and adult engagement on issues of inequality does help influence citizens who are more aware and responsive to these issues, it still fails to give citizens the skills they need to resolve the issues. That is, the actors in these organizational settings did not seem to change the things they saw as problematic like recruitment and equal participation within the group. Being concerned about inequality is not sufficient for reducing separatist notions (Hughey 2012). In other words, having a heterogeneous group is a step towards creating exchanges and understanding across sociodemographic groups, but it is not sufficient for achieving this goal. In both heterogeneous and homogeneous organizations, adults and youth both have to actively engage in discussing race/ethnic and social class group boundaries.

Further, although the youth and adults at YTC recognized issues around inequality and how they affect the group, these issues did not arise during the sessions. Although there were no explicit issues or conversations around inequality, these issues still played an important role in the organization. Bonilla-Silva (2010) and others would argue that this lack of engagement with persistent inequalities further perpetuates and marginalizes economically disadvantaged youth and youth of color by promoting a color-blind ideology that reduces recognition of differences.

Adults and youth collaboratively determined whether inequality discourse was focused on and connected to organizational issues. The context of the conversations was important for reducing and responding to inequality. For instance, when Susan brought up that a teen on the stand would likely have not had the interaction with police described if he was white, the
response could have been for the judge or adult staff members to delve further into this argument. However, that was not the case and no adult in the room engaged this line of reasoning. When groups address internal issues, they have more inclusive environments that are responsive to issues that arise. Avoidance of inequality in organizations may also be the result of routines that limit organizational participants’ ability to engage and respond to particular issues (Blee 2012). Organizations have the capacity to divert attention from public issues and reduce radical response (Meyer and Tarrow 1998; Theiss-Morse and Hibbing 2005), at times leading youth who might push back against the status quo into more mundane organizational practices (Eliasoph 2011).

While the extent to which the group was diverse did have some influence in the extent of inequality discourse, having members of race, ethnic, and socioeconomic status minority groups did not provide the necessary conditions for this sort of engagement. In part, this may be due to a general avoidance of sensitive issues around inequality through colorblind approaches of both whites and non-whites to group interaction (Bonilla-Silva 2010). Eliasoph (2011) offers several practical suggestions for engaging with issues of inequality including noting and discussing differences, allowing disadvantaged youth a role as teacher for other youth, and engaging in discussion about differences noted by organizational participants. Beyond these, it seems important to encourage adults or staff in organizations to be open to these discussions, and it is necessary to improve their own comfort and ability to facilitate inequality discourse. By doing so, participation in civic organizations becomes more inclusive and responding to issues of inequality more achievable.
CHAPTER VII. BEYOND ORGANIZATIONAL PARTICIPATION

Thus far, I have analyzed the experiences of youth inside of their organizations. I presented findings on the ways young people are included in organizations and the influence of inclusive practices on discourse about inequality in the organizations. However, I will look beyond the moments I observed inside the organization to consider whether elements of organizational participation can be used outside of the organization.

*Studying Organizational Influence*

This chapter draws on data collected in three of the four organizations during problem-solving groups, an adaptation of a focus group. I recruited problem-solving group participants broadly from each of the organizations. I told them that we would discuss issues that have come up during my time in the organization, but I gave no further specifics. I provided food and beverages to the groups as an incentive to participate, and I held them during times convenient for participants. I was able to recruit groups from each of the organizations in the study except YRSV. As stated prior, contention in YRSV led to a long hiatus in the organization, which resulted in several of the youth exiting the organization. Despite efforts to recruit the youth on numerous occasions, I was unable to coordinate a problem-solving group for YRSV. I did, however, successfully host groups in the other organizations.

In each group, I asked members to respond to the same set of issues. I intentionally distributed the issues across three arenas—political, school, and organizational. By asking respondents to engage with different institutions, I am able to observe whether the target of the
action shapes the strategies. Specifically, I offered the following prompts to every organizational group:

1. There is no policy about bullying in your school. A student who has been bullied many times by the school bully tried to get help from a teacher on multiple occasions, but the teacher will not act.

2. Legislators passed a law that you see as unjust or harmful.

3. The adult mentor in your organization was asked to leave, but you didn’t think they did anything and you really liked them.

4. The only public library you can access in your town is closing.

5. Your school is monitoring everything you do online even if you do it on your personal phone or personal computer.

In stating these prompts to the various groups, I utilized the context of the group to specify the scenario. For instance, I indicated that Luke would be asked to leave EYC, and that Charlotte would be asked to leave YTC. Comparing the answers to these questions across groups revealed how organizational practices and interactions observed in the fieldwork were applied more broadly. Below I first present findings on the types of practices youth were able to use in the group settings and then on interactions. By practice I mean the application of skills and knowledge gained in the organizational setting outside of the organization. I consider two areas of practice: tactics and framing. I also analyze two main elements of interactional style: the extent of deliberation and whether it is conciliatory or confrontational, and relatedly, the extent of collective identity. Observations indicate that under certain conditions organizations can shape both practice and deliberative approaches that can be observed outside of the organizations. I
outline the major conditions that led to successful organizational influence on youth and then discuss how the experiences youth have in these groups might result in long-term impacts.

Youth discussion in response to the prompts varied across groups and demonstrated how experience in the organization mattered. For instance, in the problem-solving group at EYC, youth responded to concerns about a hypothetical law passed in North Carolina that youth were told they saw as unjust or harmful. Lilly said “…as far as movements to create change to [...] laws, it’s not going to be an individual thing, like we have to have…networks of people who we can kind of build their support as well to have our backs versus just doing it alone.” Evelyn added on “I think that EYC is in a great position to kind of like, spearhead, garnering the support that would be needed…to have enough numbers to actually make a significant impact.” Two things stand out in these examples. First, Lilly and Evelyn drew on one of the central organizing tenants at EYC—building networks in order to mobilize collectives. On the health disparities project I observed, one of the tactics the group utilized was to begin networking with other youth who were working on health-related outcomes across the state, so that when the time came to confront state legislatures, they would have backing from a state-wide collaborative. Second, Lilly talked about the actions and the actors as “we”, identifying a strong sense of collective identity with EYC and the other youth in the organization. Evelyn explicitly called to the groups’ identity as members of EYC with a close connection to the organization and pointed to EYC as a platform they could leverage to create change. Throughout the problem-solving group, the youth often utilized approaches I observed within the organization and frequently expressed a strong sense of collective identity tied to EYC.
Observing organizational socialization

To gauge whether and how participation shapes participants, I focus on the specific tactics, frames, deliberative practices, and collective identity that was evident in the focus group settings. This approach contrasts past work that draws on outcomes less specifically tied to organizations like whether participants take part in political actions at a later point in time (e.g., Youniss et al. 1997). In doing so, I observed how organizational socialization was used outside of the group, although I cannot fully separate influences from prior experiences.

It is possible to observe the role of various influential practices in socializing youth, although it remains impossible to separate their influences. For instance, Ehman (1980) distinguished the role of school political socialization from familial political socialization without observing students in their home settings. In Annette Lareau’s (2011) famous work on parental socialization, she observed the influence of family socialization on childhood outcomes, but herself noted that interactions with non-familial institutions received limited treatment. Still, by utilizing a comparative lens, Lareau was able to parse out the role of parental socialization, even though it intersected with other socializing institutions that she did not observe. In analyzing the problem-solving groups, I look for where elements from the organizational setting appear in the focus groups. In questioning youth about how and where they learned particular skills and tactics mentioned in the groups, I can observe organizational influences and their interactions with other forms of socialization like those from their families and schools.

I also include information from surveys I gave youth who were interviewed or participated in focus groups. The surveys included demographic information and information about the other organizational and leadership experiences they had. I conclude by discussing potential mechanisms for long-term organizational influence across the life course.
Considerations about familial and school socialization are present in the literature and served as a means for understanding youth outcomes, however, organizational socialization outside of school has received significantly less attention. Civic participation may build civic skills, which become part of participants’ “behavioral repertoire” and can be used outside of their organizations (Theiss-Morse and Hibbing 2005). Although scholars have shown many ways that individuals benefit from participation in civic associations—providing a way to build social networks and capital (Baggetta 2009), shaping understandings for their later adult social participation (Finlay, Wray-Lake, and Flanagan 2010), and buffering against negative physical and psychological health outcomes (Putnam 2001)—they have not by and large set out to understand the elements of organizational participation that are transferable to participants outside of the organizational setting. In particular, I focus on how specific organizational practices and interactional styles appear in the focus groups, which I describe in more detail below.

While not typically considered for civic organizational participation, scholars of work often utilize observational techniques to analyze whether employees can apply skills they learned at work and to evaluate how they interact with peer employees and management. These group process techniques offer an opportunity to identify areas of influence and provide strategies for analyzing group interaction. In these approaches, employees are often observed while they complete a task such as proposing an ad campaign or repairing Xerox copy machines (Wageman 1995). In two different instances, similar techniques were used to observe political discourse in groups (Gamson 1992; Perrin 2009) by proposing political problems and observing whether and how group’s develop possible solutions. Perrin’s (2009) work identified the organizational type
(e.g., labor union, religious group, etc.) as one of the critical predictors shaping group political talk.

Organizational Influence – Practice

The way that organizations practice their work and the daily activities and discursive approaches they use are often considered a means by which organizations transfer civic skills. For instance, leading meetings teaches participants leadership skills that they may transfer to other civic activities (Baggetta 2009). Similarly, youth learn civic skills in organizations by practicing those skills (e.g., writing letters to the editor). For instance, they can come to understand legislative interactions as a means through which to engage elected officials more generally (Flanagan and Faison 2001). Although the organizations I observed varied in their organizational practice and goals, I evaluated the influence of each organization on youth conceptions of tactics and framing based on ethnographic observations of each organization’s practices and goals.

EYC Organizational Influence

Practice

EYC is a unique case in some ways because the organization has a copyright for their own youth empowerment model. The model has three parts: skill development, critical awareness, and opportunities. As defined by EYC, skill development involves “strengthening the skills of youth” to help facilitate their ability to “effectively make decisions,” enhance peer interactions, and be “community advocates” (EYC 2016). Critical awareness is a process for giving youth “information and resources” they can use to analyze issues and “strategize on ways
to act.” And finally, “opportunities” focuses on giving young people “platforms for decision-making” and aiding their community participation. This model is directly applied in the organization. For instance, when Luke set out to expose the youth to writing letters to the editor, he first discussed their importance and provided youth with a model for how to write the letters. Then he provided them information on the issue they could write about and held a discussion of the issue with the group. They gathered information and learned through Luke’s provided content and through their own discovery about the topic. Then, the youth wrote the content of the letters that they eventually sent.

Unlike other organizations I studied, youth in the problem-solving groups from EYC discussed the importance of gathering information on the topic and doing extensive research before taking action, demonstrating their understanding of the model utilized in the organization. In discussing the passing of an unfavorable law, the teens said the following: “understanding the law and like the language of the law would probably be important” and “actually read[ing] the law and just not hear[ing] what other people told you or what the news told you, actually read[ing] what the law says.” In responding to losing the adult staff member, Lilly said “I would like wait and put some thought together about what I should say…” Lilly also discussed the importance of understanding both sides of an issue. She said she’d sit down with the director and hear her reasoning and then evaluate that.

In addition, EYC youth also used several tactics from their organizationally-informed repertoires. Their most frequent response to solving a given problem was to take collective action, followed by contacting elected officials, and then using petitions. These are all core components of the organizational approach. The majority of EYC teens had not contacted a political official prior to their time at the organization. But, as described in chapter 4, the teens
took several actions like placing legislative phone calls to support the healthy corner store bill during my observations.

EYC youth also suggested specific tactics like creating a petition to show large-scale support for a given change. As they mentioned, the majority of the teens had also never signed or used a petition as a technique prior to their time at EYC. However, at EYC petitions had been touted on several occasions as a meaningful way to create change, and evidence of their success was illustrated by a discussion on the success of petitions in bringing healthy food to corner stores in North Carolina. In discussing the healthy corner store initiative, Luke and one of his colleagues discussed the role of petitions as critical for developing community buy-in. Luke’s colleague said that without the community on board “they might not understand what happened or that the store was changed.” The teens and adults discussed the role of petitions for knowledge, fostering change, and building civic skills.

As I noted above, one of the key approaches at EYC involved organizing collectives such as mobilizing youth health activists across the state. During my time at EYC, teens were often asked to form ties to other youth for the sake of accomplishing a goal. For instance, in seeking to diversify the youth participants, Luke instructed the youth to both go through their existing networks and seek ties to other clubs and groups at school to whom they shared less closeness. By doing this, Luke indicated, they would be able to reach a broader range of potential youth. In discussing the legal scenario, Hannah pointed to why she thought change was possible “we have to have networks...networks of people who we can kind of build their support as well as have our backs versus doing it alone.” In the problem-solving group, EYC youth discussed the need to form collectives to respond to issues I proposed at the state, school, and organizational level. For instance, Lilly said that she would respond to the organizational issue by “say[ing] something
collectively. Collective action…I really like collective action in just the way it sounds, to collectively have the team…go talk to [the executive director].” Although there is not a lot of specificity about who to reach out to or how to form networks of support, the idea mirrored discussions at EYC on collective organizing strategies.

At EYC, the youth became committed to issues of racial inequality, often discussing topics like equity and framing issues as unjust in their treatment of diverse people. In the problem-solving group, youth framed issues this way on several occasions. In discussing whether they could bring EYC into the fight to keep the library open, Malik noted that he thought the organization would be involved “because equity basically.” He continued saying, “it makes people that don’t have a computer, printer, anything of that sort, not be able to get some of their schoolwork done and they have to go like, maybe they have to drive thirty minutes to get to the library. Maybe they have parents taking them there, I think cause of equity, EYC would definitely try to fight it.” The teens had never discussed libraries within the organizational setting, yet Malik applied a similar framing to the ones used when the group discussed access to dental care to make an argument about responding to the library issue. The conversation on access to dental care almost exactly mirrored the construction of his argument. The conversation involved a discussion of challenges for certain populations to accessing dental care and the impacts of missed dental care on school success.

A second framing approach common at EYC was to discuss the power of youth. On several occasions at the organization, Luke would say things like that improving participation of youth in the organization was “tied to capacity growth, it’s tied to power sharing…all of these things contribute to being an empowered person.” In the problem-solving group, teens mentioned the power of youth to create change and the sense that youth power was underestimated multiple
times. They even mimicked the idea that adults do not treat youth as equals, another key part of the youth empowerment framing at EYC.

In discussing how youth could respond to surveillance issues, Pearl framed her response around both collective tactics and youth empowerment. “I think in situations like this, um, I think people undermine the power of youth and how…we can put our brains together and find solutions to this without adult help or adult support Evelyn added, “Teenagers are crafty...” Building on this conversation, Pearl noted that some people believe teenagers will do “bad” things on their phones at school, but “I think we come to school with the intentions of learning and I think there’s been a stigma going on of teenagers that they don’t care, they don’t um, they’re just doing all these inappropriate things at our age and I think a lot of our organization is trying to change that image of teens and youth.” Further, part of the problem, as Pearl identified, is that “adults do not handle us as student body just like they would handle their adult staff.” The framing of these responses closely aligns with the language of EYC about partnerships between youth and adults and the power of youth and helps demonstrate the organizational influence at EYC in the problem-solving groups.

*Interaction*

Deliberation is a primary way to gain exposure to multiple viewpoints (Yankelovich and Friedman 2010) and form and voice opinions (Perrin 2009). Deliberation occurs between two or more parties as they discuss political topics. These interactions should be respectful, rational, calm, and goal-directed (Perrin 2009). In evaluating the exchanges that take place during the problem-solving groups, I analyzed the interactions between members of the groups to look for deliberative practices. Organizational influences on deliberation operate similarly to practice-
based influences. In this section, I will show that utilizing deliberative approaches in interaction at the organizational level leads to the reproduction of similar practices in the problem-solving groups.

The EYC focus group was highly deliberative. Youth often interacted with each other during the time by expressing their viewpoints and responding to the viewpoints of others. For instance, in discussing the bullying situation, Malik suggested utilizing a petition, which he said was successful in another case where the school tried to create one-directional hallways for coming and going and the petition received “a crazy amount of signatures.” Pearl directly engaged Malik in this suggestion by asking if he thought they could really liken the response to a one-directional hallway walking policy to surveillance. She went on to suggest that this case is more extreme and that while “we can use the one-way hallways as an example to act towards the surveillance…” as Evelyn said, “one violates our constitutional right and the other just keeps little freshman safe.” In this exchange, Pearl did two important things for the deliberative process; she engaged Malik’s suggestion and respectfully questioned its implications using the logic offered by Evelyn about the importance of the issue. By incorporating peer views and engaging with suggestions, Pearl helped create an inclusive environment for the conversation, similar to those that took place within the organization. At EYC, Luke frequently asked youth who were not engaged on an issue to join the conversation, directly asking them their opinions or thoughts on a topic.

Deliberation can also contain elements of conflict and conciliation (Perrin 2009). In the focus group, the EYC youth used a conciliatory approach more than a conflictual one, although both took place. The modal style of interaction was one in which youth built on each other’s suggestions. Even in instances that might lead to conflict, the youth often used conciliatory
deliberation to avoid this interaction. For instance, after responding to the hypothetical library closing, Lilly said, “it would be really hard for me to determine my like, like whether I cared about this certain issue…” Then, she paused and said “Someone else answer the question!” Pearl responded “…I feel really strongly about this.” She built her argument about why the issue mattered and different ways to respond without ever criticizing Lilly’s viewpoint. Instead, she tried to illustrate with a logical argument why the issue was important. She said, “…if the public library were to close then people who do not have access to computers and printers don’t have the access to libraries to finish and this affects um, education, and jobs….” Other youth built on Pearl’s point about the importance of the libraries and discussed ways to keep them open. Lilly, after not participating for a few minutes while the other youth discussed the issue, came back into the conversation beginning to discuss ways they could respond and suggesting successful strategies from previous events. In doing so, she not only built on the existing discussion but reengaged in the discussion she opted out of earlier. She noted that she found the issues became more important as the conversations went on, saying during the bullying conversation, “The more we talk about it, the worse it sounds and the more I’m caring…”

The youth also used humor as an interactional approach. Humor in deliberation can represent openness and a way to connect with others (Basu 1999). Utilizing humor in the group shows a comfort and familiarity with others, facilitates openness in the dialogue, and reduces barriers. Humor, at times, is also used to diffuse authority. For instance, Luke told me outside of the group that he finds it distracting how much the youth are on their phones. In one meeting, after coming in while three youth were sitting quietly on their iPhones, Luke joked “everybody’s tapped in. It’s alright, you can be tapped into the Matrix. Take the red pill.” Luke also explicitly
discussed using humor as a way to connect to the youth, reduce the perception of his role as one of authority, and share power with the youth.

During the conversation on surveillance, Evelyn joked that “my mother would welcome them to survey my phone.” She and others laughed, and Malik, returned the joke, saying, “tell me everything.” Evelyn then responded, “Please report back to me weekly, I want a newsletter, xoxo [Evelyn’s Mom].” Youth also used humor in other instances, such as when discussing using social media to share a message. They joked in this instance about the person behind the twitter account for their county’s public-school system, calling the tweeter “sassy.” Discussing how people interacted with that twitter, especially around inclement weather, one youth noted “people like find ice from the freezer on their ground, like cancel school!” The youth often laughed together in this setting as they did in the organization. The role of humor at EYC was representative of the openness in communication between the youth and adults and among the youth. This interactive style was reproduced in the focus group setting.

**YTC Organizational Influence**

**Practice**

Youth at YTC gained practice-based influences from the organization, but they did not deploy them with as much frequency in the focus groups as youth at EYC. The youth at the YTC expressed a broad range of tactics and an extensive reference to past participation in civic activities. The organization only offered youth autonomy in certain areas and it was difficult to identify organizational influence on tactics in the focus group, although there are several examples. The youth did not rely on legal arguments or tactics as may be expected. I argue that the inability to identify tactical influence in the focus group is the result of the extensive
socialization of these youth in other organizations and familial settings. This can be attributed to the fact that they are the highest socioeconomic status group, and, as a result, have extensive knowledge of tactics and experiences to draw upon. Therefore, the youth at YTC do not need to draw on the specific tactics they acquired from the organization, because they have a vast repertoire into which organizational tactics comprise only a small portion.

The vast tactical repertoire and previous experiences of youth were evident on several occasions in the focus groups. For instance, Steve responded to the passage of a legal issue by suggesting protesting. Steve referred to both protesting and contacting his elected official and mentioned a protest event he attended this past summer called Moral Mondays. In solving the issue, Steve primarily focused on collective approaches. The extent of prior experience and tactics was also evident in Bianca’s response to the state law issue, which she immediately connected to an existing issue. She said “I am really angry. I’ve been calling Thom Tillis. I’ve been Tweeting. I’ve been Facebooking. I’ve done everything I can. I’ve been telling all my friends about it…I know that I’m only one voice, but I’m one voice of potentially many.” Barry expressed a similar approach. He said he went to protests or marches but also “…I can reach out to members of online communities that I’m part of to raise awareness. Um, contacting my representatives and Governor McCrory…just looking if there’s um if there are protests, organizations that work for [the cause]…if the ACLU has any ongoing things…that kind of stuff.”

Not only do the youth have several tactics to draw upon, they also have experience using those tactics, like building collective support and reaching out to elected officials. The tactics leveraged to respond to these issues are not ones that I observed occur in any other instance at the YTC. This is because these are tactics and practices learned elsewhere. In the focus group,
Barry talked about learning these tactics from his mom who “went to Vietnam marches…she was near um the Kent State shootings. Um and that she’s just sort of instilled that in me.” Other youth expressed similar training through other organizations or family ties.

In one instance, however, the teens learned a tactic they used from a previous experience at teen court, during a time when a different adult led the organization. Steve suggested contacting elected officials and said that this was a tactic he learned a few years back at Teen Court. The adult who ran the program prior to Charlotte was involved in lobbying around a house bill that would determine whether to put teenagers into the adult court system. She brought Steve into the advocacy work, and this was how he learned to engage elected officials to create change. There was not any of this advocacy-type work going on during my observations, nor did Charlotte express any interest in engaging the youth in politics directly. Instead, this action was something Steve stored in his repertoire from past experiences. This does, however, indicate that when these sorts of tactics were utilized at the organization, they would likely have transferred to the youth participants.

Responses that utilize multiple non-organizational tactics combined with past experience were employed in responding to each of the scenarios, regardless of the setting. In response to the bullying scenario, for instance, Kristen responded saying “…I’ve done this before. I went to the guidance counselor…then from there I got an appointment with our assistant principal, and then I went to our principal and had a discussion with each of the individuals and then had eventually a group meeting about it…” Youth commonly responded to the various hypothetical issues by quickly translating them into real issues they had engaged with in the past. They often expressed their savviness with navigating political and school environments and their confidence in their existing capacities.
For the YTC youth, the targeted institution was important. For instance, even highly efficacious youth like Steve were apprehensive about changing school issues. He noted that the youth might be able to influence student behavior like bullying, but “it’s difficult to change the culture” and Steve suggested that a time period of four years was too short and too transitory to create any real change. By and large youth were pessimistic about their ability to influence schools, a feeling they did not express towards other institutions.

In the other focus groups, the scenarios that I call hypothetical often truly are. That is, the youth in the organizations have not experienced dealing with the particular issues. However, in the YTC, the youth had experience with most of the scenarios I proposed. The one scenario that youth had not responded to in the past was the firing of an organizational staff member. In this case, the unfamiliarity of the situation led youth to draw more on YTC’s tactical repertoire. Although the youth drew parallels to similar situations in which teachers were fired from school, their lack of specific experience with this issue led them to express uncertainty about taking action. They first discussed who ran the organization, trying to figure out what authority figure they could press for information or change. Then, incorrectly deciding that the organization was run at the county-level, the youth expressed some defeat when no one seemed to personally know anyone to contact at the county. Barry suggested that he would instead go to the Mayor and then “work my way down, because I don’t know anyone, I don’t know how to work up.” Another youth suggested mobilizing everyone else at Teen Court while simultaneously engaging vertically with people in power. Chip countered this idea saying that perhaps you just need to “find a critical person who can actually make crap happen.”

The youth scraped for the appropriate tactics pulling out approaches from their repertoire in a sort of rapid fire discussion where each offered tactics they knew of to see if they might find
an approach that worked. In this discussion, they suggested a wide range of approaches from making a “hefty donation” to talking to the coordinators or the mayor, to hiring an attorney. Patrick suggested, “I honestly believe a team of lawyers can solve most of your problems.” It’s at this point that the youth begin to tap into the portion of their repertoire that was influenced by the organization, suggesting using a lawyer to solve the other proposed issues as well. This was the sort of approach reinforced in teen court – deferring to legal help to resolve issues. Even in this case, however, the utilization of these organizational tactics was bolstered by other experiences such as Patrick’s use of a lawyer to resolve a school suspension issue.

One possible explanation for the selection of tactics chosen by the youth to respond to the proposed issues is that, with a broad repertoire, youth were choosing the tactics that they thought would be the most useful for achieving their goals. While this likely had some influence, it appears that the frequent use of a particular tactic was more likely the driving factor. About halfway into the group, after proposing to use protest and other collective action to respond to issues, Patrick asked the youth if they thought protest is a truly effective tactic, and a long interaction broke out in which many of the youth expressed their viewpoints on the topic. As Mark said about protest “I don’t really think that it like really it does change legislation sometimes…protests are about getting support and changing hearts instead of changing legislation.” He went on to note that changing minds might be able to affect the legislation, but he expressed skepticism about protest as a mechanism for legislative change. Instead of choosing the tactic that was the most influential, youth drew from the tactics they used most often and most recently, similarly to the EYC teens, although in this case those tactics did not stem from the organizational setting.
Similarly, framing the issues in the focus group drew on the larger sense of the vast experience of the youth. Initially, the youth did not frame the issues as justice issues or relate them to the judicial system. However, once the idea of hiring an attorney was presented, the youth began to frame issues this way more readily as well, and organizational influence became more apparent. For instance, Kristen related the ability to hire a lawyer as a way to make change around firing Charlotte and the possibility of that sort of influence as a marker of “how corrupt our like judicial system is.” When discussing the value of using attorneys to respond to the bullying issue, Steve also expressed organizational framing. He said “Like the school is not the end all be all of our legal system in any sense. Like I’ve seen consistently at Teen Court that…where the school has just been overreaching in their use of things like suspending individuals or turning it over to the criminal justice system.” Patrick added “There’s a concept of the school to prison pipeline and I think that that is so real at Teen Court. You see it constantly.”

Later, in discussing censorship, Patrick expressed how his experience at teen court was strengthening his viewpoint. He said that giving up your belongings without force should not be used as a mitigating circumstance in teen court, because “if a person wants to keep their stuff until it is like taken from them, then that is absolutely fine.” In general, once the youth were asked by peers to bring their legal repertoire and understanding to the forefront, they began to more readily apply these organizational approaches, but this was not their first response to the issues proposed.

Interaction

The style of interaction at YTC was very individualized. The youth attorneys each presented their arguments during the cases and rarely had the chance to interact over the content
of the case at the court. The youth rarely worked together despite often being on cases with one another. They were also forbidden under a confidentiality clause from discussing details of the cases outside of the court setting. Teens discussed vague content from cases but did not mention names of defendants or details on particular cases with each other. The jurors, however, engaged more often in deliberative conversations in the jury room, although sometimes they devolved into conflict, requiring another youth to step in as a moderator as two youth continued to promote their particular understanding of a case. This highly individualized approach to interaction was reproduced in the focus group setting.

Much as they do in the courtroom as they argue for the defendant or the state, the youth in the focus group expressed their own independent viewpoints and experiences. They expressed low levels of collective identity, rarely referring to themselves as a group or using any sort of “we” language. Even when they proposed collective tactics, they rarely involved the other youth in the room or at YTC. When youth engaged in a discussion like whether protest was an effective tactic, they only interacted with ideas presented by other teens briefly before going on to suggest their own response. When interactions did occur in which youth seemed more interested in the viewpoints of others, they were utilized in an individual strategic fashion. For instance, Barry mentioned his interest in becoming involved in local legislation around the death penalty during the focus group. Mark interrupted Barry to ask him if he needed a recommendation for an internship, and then said he could get him one from a friend of his Moms who was involved in death penalty stuff and “knows everybody.”

Near the end of the focus group, I asked the youth to propose just one solution to each of the scenarios. Through this questioning, I was seeking to delve deeper into their interpersonal and group interactions. During the YTC focus group, this was the first time the youth
consistently referred to themselves as a group. Prior to my prompting, the YTC youth enacted an individualized style of interaction similar to what took place at the organization in the focus group.

*RJTC Organizational Influence*

*Practice*

Unlike youth at YTC, youth at RJTC did not have a large repertoire, but they also did not appear to gain tactics from their experience in the organization. Because they were not building a tactical repertoire in their organization nor did they have the existing set of experiences that teens of higher socioeconomic status backgrounds had, they struggled to generate responses to the proposed issues. The youth drew on their limited prior experience, but they employed no tactics that I observed being utilized in the organizational setting. Although the limited tactics the youth did propose were not particularly dissimilar from those of their YTC peers, their understanding of how to utilize the tactics were much more limited and their desire to engage with the issues also appeared lower.

In responding to the legal change, Isiah first suggested protesting about it. He mentioned that he once went to an #alllivesmatter protest which he learned about from the principal at his school. He said that his mother also attended the protest. Other youth in the group, however, appeared less interested in taking action in response to the issue. Sophie said for some issues “I would probably just go home and gripe about it to my mom. I’d be like can you believe this happened? But I probably wouldn’t like, do anything against it.” She noted that if she really cared about the issue, she also might protest and sign online petitions. She said that she signed some online petitions in the past, and although she’s never been to a protest, Sophie said that
protests get a lot of news coverage, and news coverage helps people pay attention: “…I feel like
the more people are paying attention, the bigger chance of change actually occurring.” In
responding to legal changes at the state level, the youth did not appear to believe they could
create change, and they did not have much to say in response to the proposed issue regarding
what actions to take.

Although the youth were not particularly apt to engage on the legal issue, they became
much more interested and passionate when the issue was the closing of the local library. The
youth also generated a larger tactical repertoire to respond to the library issue. Skyler began the
response saying “I would do everything I could to stop it.” Despite feeling passionately, the
youth still struggled, unsure how to respond and how to even take the actions they knew were
available. Skyler said she would “try to write letters and petitions and protests as much as I
could.” She had signed online petitions previously but never been to a protest. She said she
didn’t know who she’d write letters to, “I guess whoever is trying to pass the law.” Even though
the organization was focused on legal processes, the youth had no understanding of the legal
system or how to engage in political participation. One teen said that as part of a class they sent
letters to officials, but she did not seem to believe this tactic would work. “I honestly think they
like, skimmed over it, crumpled it up and threw it away.” Adding additional possible responses,
Isiah said that he would start a blog “about the issue” similar to the one he created about his
school last year.

The youth each repeated the suggestion to protest and use online petitions as they made
suggestions, either mimicking each other or expressing the same repertoire. The inability to
respond to the issue was not driven by a lack of passion or interest. After these few possible
responses were suggested, the youth began to talk in depth about their personal experience with
the library, events they attended there, and the role the library played in their own lives. As they began to express more attachment to the library and the importance of the library in their lives, they made comments like, “The library was apparently a big part of my life”, the youth then offered an additional solution. Skyler suggested, “What if you…got it to the President’s attention?”, she went on, maybe by starting a protest. Isiah added that they could use social media to get his attention. The youth felt hopeful that he would respond saying “…he would care enough about our libraries.” Despite wanting to respond to the issue, the youth did not have a strong sense of how to use the tactics they proposed and often lacked any experience using them. Most, for instance, knew protest was a viable solution, but had not protested themselves. The youth wanted to get the president’s attention, but again were not specific about how to do so.

Unlike the legal and library issue, in responding to the firing of their staff member and the school surveillance issue, the teens mostly deferred to the decision makers, therefore not proposing many solutions to the issues. The limited response to these issues was largely constrained to individualized tactics initially, although the teens did move more towards collective responses. Isiah said he would find out why Ms. Perkins was fired through “making connections” via his mom who is a cop and through a classmate who used to be a part of teen court. Skyler suggested going to talk to Ms. Perkins to figure out what happened. More collective responses included Sophie, who said if that doesn’t work she’d go to social media. Sophie suggested going on strike and having the regular volunteers join her.

The teens also expressed resignation about school officials and other authority figures monitoring their personal technology. Skyler said she was fine with her parents monitoring her, but if a school was going to do that, she said she simply would not go to that school, and that, “…privacy is a huge thing to me. I mean, there’s a line of respecting the government, and
obeying their laws, and like, being a good citizen, but there’s also a point where you say this is
the constitution, this is my privacy.” Skyler said that if she got fed up enough with issues of
surveillance, she’d blog about it on the blog she recently created. Instead of seeking change in
potential surveillance policies, even when the youth saw them as unjust, they deferred to
authority or developed individualized responses like using their technical savvy to get around the
firewall.

While discussing the school-based issue, Sophie and Isiah brought up their desire to
lessen the demerit policy at their school. During the discussion, they mentioned several ways
they responded to this issue. Isiah said “Um, we’ve talked to the principal multiple times, we
had, um we hosted school meetings to bring students in to talk about the issue, um we’ve sent
multiple emails.” The principal, Sophie noted, had responded that he was trying to implement
changes. Despite this prior experience and success, the deference to authority of the school over
the surveillance policy limited the youth’s application of these tactics to this school-based issue.

The limited tactical repertoire and individualization of responses at the RJTC was also
seen in the discourse around a potential bullying incident. At times, this sort of individualization
led to confrontational approaches. Isiah spoke first about a potential solution to the bullying
issue, relaying a story from an experience at school in which he yelled at and threw a chair at a
student who was bullying an autistic peer. He said he was satisfied with this way to solve the
problem because “I felt like I helped a kid out, even if I didn’t get recognition for it.” Skyler
supported this approach saying, “Sometimes you have to yell, you have to show them what
they’re doing to other people.” The teens were unable to come up with any other responses on
this issue, besides taking matters into their own hands. This was a highly individualized and
confrontational response to the issue.
The authority of the organizational adult actors was reproduced in the focus group. After mentioning “what if the issue is at teen court” and not even specifically mentioning the issue, Sophie quickly said “Don’t fight it.” I asked why and she said that, “I’m not supposed to fight it.” The teens at YTC deferred to the authority of the organizational adults. When it came to the issue of surveillance, the teens deferred to the authority of the school, saying the actions were probably beneficial in that they “keep[] a lot of people off of bad stuff” and “they’re there for good reason.” Two of the teens signed a contract with their schools “saying that if we accessed it on their property using their wifi network, they had the right to go through it,” even though the teens thought the school was “kind of taking it overboard.” Skyler, who was home schooled, said that her parents used to monitor her phone. She said “…well I feel that as a child you’re under your parents’ authority, they’re paying for your phone, then they have a right to look at your phone.”

The justice framework that was used in the teen court did not appear with much frequency in the focus group discussion. In the initial response to the question about legal changes, Skyler immediately asked if the legal change would legalize marijuana “Cause that’s like, one of the biggest, between judges and attorneys, like, I guess, barrier.” She said that’s because they disagree on the issue, “…some of the judges, are so for like legalizing marijuana, and therefore they go really easy on the kids, even though they still broke the law.” Although the teens in YTC often utilized a rights framework to discuss their own entitlement in the situations, the teens in the RJTC did not employ this framework.
*Interaction*

The interactions in the focus group were centered around agreement and positive reinforcement and tended to be highly inclusive. At RJTC, the lack of autonomy for youth and the hierarchical structure led teens to associate more with each other than YTC. The teens also spent a significant amount of time talking to each other about teen court and personal topics during informal social time in the organization. Several of the teens also went to school together or worked at the same fast food restaurant. There was a significant amount of congeniality amongst the teens based on their in-court socialization and out of court ties.

A common mode of interaction in the group was storytelling. The teens often told stories from their own lives, and their peers seemed interested in each other’s stories, asking more questions about the stories than about the solutions to the issues. For instance, when Sophie talked about the importance of a library event for her and her family, Skyler asked “You went to that? I was there!” Then the two had a short conversation about the family that “drove the big red truck” in the event and shared each of their connections to the family from different parts of their lives. The teens often built off each other’s stories or told them together. Isiah and Sophie told the story about demerits at their school together, as well as a story about security, building off one another. The two interacted frequently in the organizational setting, but they also had a preexisting relationship from attending the same school. Storytelling was used quite often in this setting. Frequently the stories were tangential or connected to the topic of the hypothetical without proposing a way to respond.

The group was generally inclusive of each other. For instance, during a discussion in which Isiah and Sophie went back and forth several times discussing the issue, Sophie prompted Skyler to respond to the next question, gesturing towards inclusivity. Similarly, as Isiah was
talking about women’s wages, Sophie, noticing the look of excitement on Skyler’s face, remarked, “Skyler is so ready.” In another instance, Isiah proposed a solution that involved each of the teens. He said, “I would have to attack from multiple fields…what I know about you, Skyler, so far, is she loves writing. Um, if she could put her passion into the law then maybe she could produce something that could influence others to, that’s the um, written form of what we all could. Sophie enjoys acting, she also enjoys debating and, debating…Sophie is really good at like, making people see her side…and then I enjoy making videos and um, I’m really passionate about making videos…so I would like, make a video…” These interactions showed signs of a sense of collective identity as well as an inclusive view of the group. The group, when discussing a single solution to a given problem, often used “we” language, although they did not do so prior to being prompted.

The youth often supported each other by agreeing with each other and positively reinforced what each person said. When Isiah was talking about an instance in which he was bullied, Sophie responded, “I’ll fight them too!” in support of him. This sort of support occurred in numerous instances. For instance, while discussing the library, Sophie said “…I’m pretty sure my answer is identical to theirs.” When Skyler said responding to the firing at the teen court that she would first want to figure out why it happened, Sophie responded “Exactly!” When the idea of a strike came up, Skyler said “I think we would step down…”, and Sophie added “I don’t think there would be a program if [Ms. Perkins] left…” Then Skyler responded, “She loves us,” and Isiah added on “…she’s a really good person that cares about it.” Skyler said “…I would go to her first” and Sophie added in “That’s true.” Sophie responded, “We’re going on strike right now.” When I asked Sophie if she thought others would join her, Skyler responded, “I would do it.”
Similar interactions involving peer support and positive feedback took place around the other scenarios within the group. During the discussion of legal changes, the youth at one point discussed the hypothetical situations of a law that would cap women’s wages. When Isiah began to talk about this issue and how important it was, Sophie responded “Preach. Preach please.” In another instance, Isiah was talking about using social media to make a video to get the president’s support, and he mentioned having made a video for a friend. Skyler responded, “That’s so great” and Sophie, who saw the video said, “It was great.”

In another instance, Skyler mentioned taking the library issue before the president and ended the suggestion saying, “And hopefully, he would care enough about our libraries.” Sophie quickly chimed in saying, “He would probably care,” supporting Skyler’s proposal. When discussing if contacting elected officials would make a difference in responding to an issue, Sophie said “I think that would matter, I think, I don’t think it would matter if it was like, just me, but there’s no way it would be just me.” Skyler said “Yeah, you got me if anything.” Sophie responded, “I got Skyler!” Skyler later said “…I don’t even really have like super close friends.” Isiah immediately responded, “You have us!” and Sophie agreed “Yeah.” Skyler said, “I got you guys!” and laughed. Then Sophie said, “Let us get thrown out of the White House together!” Skyler said, “Let’s go do it!”

The youth also tried to help each other fill in the blanks. For instance, while Skyler was discussing writing letters in response to the library closing, I asked her who she would write to. She said, “I guess whoever is trying to pass the law” and began to laugh somewhat uncomfortably. Isiah jumped in and suggested, “City Council” and then went on to say that’s where he once wrote to try and change a different issue. Isiah also said that he agreed with Skyler on how to respond to the library issue.
Although the youth bolstered each other, they did not engage in the deliberative practice of disagreement in any meaningful way. Skyler disagreed about submitting to a school surveillance policy saying, “…I probably, no offense to you guys, wouldn’t go to a school where I had to sign over my privacy.” Isiah responded by saying “It’s not as bad as you guys, I guess we made it sound bad.” He laughed. Unlike the youth at EYC and YTC who often challenged each other’s ideas or suggested alternatives they thought would be more influential than the original suggestion, the youth at RJTC did not ever challenge each other on the proposed solutions or each other’s ideas. There was no confrontation. Despite the teens interacting with each other throughout, there was not deliberation around problem solving.

Although there was a lot of interaction and bolstering of each other in the RJTC focus group, there was only a limited amount of collective identity. This collective identity was mostly expressed in discussions around firing an adult staff member, and when collective tactics were utilized. For instance, when referring to responding to the firing, Skyler said “…we would step down.” Teens at the RJTC did not have a clear sense of who the “we” was when referring to in their group. The EYC teens had an identity associated with their shared organizational experience, while the RJTC teens had a looser sense of group cohesion without a clear indication of what constituted the group or who would be in or out. The teens bolstered and supported each other, but they did not have a strong sense of themselves as a group that could respond to social and political issues that arose.

*How Participation Shapes Participants*

Although, I cannot separate the effects of different socializing mechanisms, I do offer several conditions under which organizations are able to transfer practice and interactional
strategies to participants. The key element of transferring practice-based approaches, I argue, is engaging youth in process-based learning. That is, teaching youth how to engage in their community is essential. The process-approach is clearest to observe at EYC, although it can also be observed in other instances. At EYC, the empowerment model is a process for engagement that first involves researching and learning about an issue and the stakeholders, learning skills (often collective approaches) that target key political actors, and then taking action. By teaching a set of steps to respond to an issue and the skills needed to take those steps, youth at EYC retain a problem-solving approach that is highly influenced by the organization. Beyond the basic model, even learning how to do the research, identify one’s political representatives, building networks of supporters, and understanding the pieces of a letter to the editor that result in publication, are part of a process-based approach.

Knowing how to do something, however, is not sufficient for being able to do so. Although the process-based approach is important for transferring tactics, merely teaching the approach but not asking youth to enact the actions is limiting. In other words, providing youth autonomy in organizations shapes the way they respond to proposed issues because it influences what they practice in their organizations. For instance, youth learned about petitions at EYC through discussion of the healthy corner store initiative, but in the time prior to the focus group they did not utilize petitions for their work. When asked how they would petition, Pearl said she would “gather up a group of friends or people that feel the same as I do and create a petition for my legislator to see and review.” Although Pearl gave a basic idea of the approach, she did not have the specificity of knowledge to describe how to enact using a petition, who to send it to specifically and how, or how it would create change. The youth felt strongly that this tactic was effective at creating change, but they themselves did not know how to utilize the tactic. In the
other instances in which they were given autonomy to do their own research, write a letter, or explore an issue, the youth felt capable of completing the task at hand through applying the organization’s replicable process. When they enacted the process of using a particular approach, they were better able to apply a similar process to both similar and dissimilar problems.

Collective identity also influenced the deliberative choices groups made (Polletta and Jasper 2001). Tactical choices were also made in line with collective identity—that is how much people felt a given tactic represented their shared sense of identity (Polletta and Jasper 2001). Youth in the focus group expressed a sense of collective identity to varying degrees. Collective identity again refers to a sense of group affiliation or identification with a particular group. This sense of group identification was evident in the EYC focus group in several ways. First, the group often referred to itself as “we” and viewed the youth in the room as members of a team. This was evident in the way they brought each other into the conversation and deliberated about the solutions to proposed problems by relying on each other for support and assistance (e.g., asking for other members to back them up or support their views, or even challenge their claims). Collective identity, then, is behind a significant portion of the types of interactions the youth had in these group settings.

Tactical decisions, too, were influenced by this sense of identity. For instance, when determining how to respond to the library issue, the youth discussed and almost sought permission to participate through their collective EYC identity. They discussed whether and how EYC might respond to the issue before going on to develop their own view points. This sort of “checking in” on the collective identity and repertoire influenced the tactical decisions made within the group.
Previous forms of interaction in the organization also strongly influenced how members interacted in the groups. For instance, the openness and full engagement of participation in interactions at EYC around inequality represented the sort of interactional style that was reproduced within the group. In this case, each participant expressed comfort bringing up issues and engaging in problem solving exercises. By utilizing inclusive strategies within the organization, such as bringing in less readily active participants and creating opportunities for various forms of participation (e.g., writing individual answers on white boards, peer paired learning, etc.), the experience within the organization translated to a highly deliberative and participatory approach to interaction outside of the organization.

Discussion

In the problem-solving groups, I observed various ways participation in organizations influences participants through both interactions and practices. In these groups, I primarily observed transfers of practice-based influences like tactics and framing and interactional influences. Several factors influenced how organizational practices shaped participants in a manner that can be leveraged outside of the organization, but the two most important seem to be engaging youth in process-based learning through autonomous approaches and the organizational orientation to interaction and inclusivity.

To be clear, although I observed organizational influences in the problem-solving groups, often the sorts of suggestions youth made in these groups were not tied to any element I observed at the organizations. For instance, YTC youth often employed tactics that were far from their organizational repertoire. I argue that the higher socioeconomic status of youth in this organization helps explain the frequent occurrence of influences unrelated to their experience at
YTC. YTC is the highest socioeconomic status organizational population as well as the whitest. At the intersection of these two identities, are youth who have experienced quite a bit of concerted cultivation in their lives to date, had access to and accessed multiple organizational opportunities, and been engaged in civic life through familial ties. For instance, on average youth who responded to the pre-interview survey at the YTC were a part of 5 different clubs and activities outside of the organization, compared to 1 for EYC teens, 2.2 for YRSV teens, and 3.75 for RJTC teens. As a result, youth who had extensive experience with civic engagement did not as readily display tactics and frames offered by the organization. I argue that this is the result of the arsenal of alternative tactics, frames, and processes for response that they possessed. Youth with extensive prior experience may already understand the process of participation or have a particular process-based approach to draw from in their repertoire. Youth with less prior experience utilize organizational framing and tactics more readily because they are the primary experience the youth have with civic and political engagement.

Although organizations may influence participants in ways that extend beyond the organizations, it is not conclusive that the influence of organizations is a positive one for youth. In the cases I observed, organizations did seem to influence youth to be more inclusive and deliberative and to learn strategies for engaging in civic life more broadly.
CHAPTER VIII. CONCLUSION

The organizations in this study took various approaches to engaging young people, developing routines and pathways for youth inclusion that included different levels of youth autonomy. At the RJTC, for instance, organizational operations were primarily run by adult managers and youth had limited roles in decision-making. Youth at the RJTC also expressed that their organization was not a place to engage with issues of racial inequality that arose in the public discourse, despite their interests and observations about connections to the teen court. Youth from the RJTC did not express using many of the tactics learned in their organizational participation, although they did reproduce cordial interactions and indicate a sense of shared identity with their organizational peers. They did not engage in traditional deliberation, rarely challenging each other or debating particular points.

At the YTC, on the other hand, youth retained extensive autonomy over the daily decision making, but it was constrained to the courtroom. Inside the courtroom, the organizational interactions were under the framework of managed autonomy. Youth at the YTC did bring up issues relating to racial inequality amongst themselves, but there was not an openness or commitment to engaging the issues within the organizational setting. In the problem-solving group, youth from the YTC did demonstrate organizational tactics, but as a part of a larger repertoire including a long list of tactics they learned and practiced in other settings. They tended to take a highly individualized approach to interaction and displayed very limited collective identity.
EYC youth were part of a more highly inclusive organization where they were a critical part of many areas of decision making. When the EYC was faced with pressure from the youth to engage more deeply in issues of racial inequality that were expanding in the public discourse, their mode of operation that was highly inclusive of youth went into effect and the organization allowed youth to influence their practices to be more deeply engaged in the issues. Youth at EYC also adopted the practices and interactive styles of the organization reproducing them when they discussed and responded to other civic issues.

Finally, although YRSV youth were part of the organization that offered the most autonomous youth participation in routines and activities, there was a mismatch between the stated extent of youth participation and the experience of youth in the organization. Although the youth were able to push forward the organization to engage with issues of racial inequality, the tension that resulted from the overpromise of autonomy and a deep divide between two adults who had different visions for organizational commitments led the organization to dissolve before I was able to complete a problem-solving group with the youth.

As I argue in chapter 2, what differentiates the routines and practices around youth inclusion in these organizations is a combination of organizational culture, the skills and capacities of adults, and the heterogeneity of youth in the group. For instance, if Luke, who was dedicated to creating an organization that allowed youth meaningful participation in various elements worked with youth at RJTC, he would have been constrained by the culture of an organization that sees youth roles as subservient to those of adults. By retaining a heterogeneous group of young people in the organization, EYC also introduced a variety of viewpoints, expectations, and youth expertise, all of which shaped the capacity of youth to challenge and influence EYC.
The youth themselves were impacted to various degrees by their participation in these organizations. Although past scholars have considered the correlations between youth participation and later civic engagement, there have not been many studies that consider what particular features of organizational participation are transferred to youth or whether and how skills and knowledge might be applied in other settings. I find that the assumption of transfers of organizational tactics and deliberative approaches in past work is not ubiquitous in organizations and that organizations vary greatly in how much they influence youth. When youth have the opportunity to practice civic activities through inclusion in the decision-making process and organizational governance, they retain and can deploy the tactics learned in their organizations in other settings. However, the interactional and peer development elements of organizational participation do influence how youth interact in deliberation more readily. This indicates that youth are deeply influenced by the routines of interaction in organizations and model the interactions from their groups in other civic activities.

Although youth may feel connected to peers and their organizations regardless of the extent of their inclusion in decision-making, “for young people to remain involved, organizing groups must address topics youth care about deeply and must do so in a manner that maintains their interest and attention. Importantly, organizing groups must respond to young people’s experiences in their communities…” (Rogers et al. 2012:52). During the observation period, this meant including youth in shaping organizational responses to the Black Lives Matter movement. These kinds of experiences are transformative for youth, as they aid them in recognizing their power and challenging inequalities (Rogers et al. 2012).

*Broader implications*
The findings I present from the four organizations I observed provide insights into youth organizations more generally. The small literature on youth-adult partnerships has noted that there is value for young people who are included in decision-making especially when this is done in partnership with adults (Zeldin et al. 2005). Even the United Nations Social Development Commission has recently begun focusing on the importance of youth inclusion in decision-making to create an innovative and responsive youth force for global social change (Anon 2018). Further, youth learn important civic skills like leadership by “engag[ing] in the action of leadership” (MacNeil 2006:99-100). The same is true of learning how to be active citizens engaged in civic life and politics; in order to be civically engaged, youth must practice civic engagement. Supportive youth-adult partnerships in which young people have autonomy to make decisions, are able to practice civic engagement, and work with adults towards a common or community goal are therefore the most powerful for shaping young people into activists and civic actors (Camino 2005). These experiences and relationships run counter to traditional mentoring or youth development models in organizations that focus on individual youth and lack clear roles for youth and adults in decision-making (Camino 2005).

While this alternative approach to youth organizations involves youth in decision-making, engages them in community issues they generate, and supports them with adult partners, many organizations have yet to adopt these policies. The strong historical model of youth organizations as places to mentor youth and keep them away from other possibly challenging outcomes remains a restriction for many organizations that might otherwise pursue these approaches. Ingrained in the culture of many youth organizations is a hierarchical relationship between youth and adults where young people are recipients of service. These approaches are codified in legal limitations to youth participation. For instance, in many states there are laws
that prohibit youth under 18 from being able to participate on boards of directors of
organizations (Camino and Zeldin 2002). However, if young people are to benefit in the many
ways organizations hope and promise, more work must be done to include youth in meaningful
ways that allow them to enact their civic participation.

*What’s in it for organizations?*

Although this study focuses on how organizations impact young people, there is another
critical piece that further supports developing more inclusive approaches in organizations. There
is a reciprocal relationship between youth and their organizations. In the survey data I collected,
I considered how youth inclusion shaped various outcomes for organizations (see Gaby 2018).
For the organizations in the study with paid staff, including youth in decision-making most
strongly influenced organizational staff members and volunteers’ sense of effectiveness of the
organization as shown in figure 4. Including youth in daily decision-making in organizations was
also more influential than inclusion in other areas.
In other words, by including young people in decision-making, organizations can increase their sense of organizational efficacy, or their sense that their group can achieve their goals. Having a positive perception of effectiveness is beneficial to organizations as it improves their ability to set and achieve goals, solve problems, increase interest and investment in their organizations, boost performance, and take risks (Gist 1987; Truskie 1999). More highly efficacious organizational staff also have a stronger sense of resilience, which makes them better able to respond when problems arise. For youth organizations, there are many benefits of moving towards more inclusive models.

**Moving Forward**

While this research demonstrates the various ways young people are included in organizations and makes a strong argument for creating routines and practices that place youth in settings of managed autonomy where they can practice their civic engagement, there are some
limitations of the study that create opportunities for future research. This study is limited by context-specificity based on the area surrounding the organizations of study and the type of youth participation common in the organizations. It would be useful, for instance, to compare the organizations presented here with organizations that are truly run by youth, where young people are the primary staff members and serve on the board of directors. These organizations likely offer a broader sense of the kinds of decision-making available to youth in organizations and indicate limitations and benefits of adults as managers in these groups. Further, other areas of the country likely have different norms and opportunities for youth to participate in civic engagement and their communities. The place-based nature of the organizations studied here, primarily in an urban setting with a limited local culture around volunteering and civic life, likely dictates the types of organizations presented.

Further, future research should determine the specific balance between management and autonomy that optimizes the experience of young people. I inductively demonstrate how this balance is established in the groups I observe, but organizations would benefit from more specificity about how to employ these practices. Similarly, future research would benefit from further testing of the mechanisms I outline that lead to managed autonomy in chapter 3.

This study also benefitted from the coincidental emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement and the discourse on racial inequality alongside the organizational observations. However, it would be useful to examine whether other kinds of dilemmas that arise for organizations lead groups to shift in the way described here, and whether those experiences are meaningful for how much youth benefit from participation. Finally, although I examine how youth can apply specific tactics and interactional styles from their organizational experiences in other civic settings, to truly measure and understand this phenomenon scholars must design a
longitudinal study that follows young people from early organizational participation into later life.
APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

In this appendix, I provide more information about the data collection process for the entire project. In appendix B and C, I share the forms and questionnaires used during data collection.

Determining an Organizational Population

As noted above, the process of data collection involved first collecting a database of youth serving organizations. In doing so, I sought to gather the broadest population possible employing both best practices demonstrated in prior work (e.g., using local organizational coalition and event listings) and modern technological advances. Although I was not able to collect many otherwise unidentified youth organizations through using innovative approaches like collecting network data through Twitter, this approach does provide a useful contribution to existing work on gathering organizational populations. Especially for youth organizations, social media and online platforms are likely to be useful for identifying grassroots organizations and those that, for various reasons, do not have a 501(c)3 status. The initial stage of data collection was enhanced by seeking as broad of a set of organizations as possible, and the likelihood of collecting data on the entire population also increased with these additional data collection approaches.

Fieldwork, Interviewing, and Focus Groups

Collecting data on several youth civic organizations at a time often involved 80-hour weeks of data collection, writing fieldnotes, teaching, and completing other research. I gave as much as I could to each organization to ensure that I was able to experience everything the youth and adults in these groups experienced. I was rarely able to sit in the office with the adults when youth were not present (although this did occasionally occur), but otherwise I was present most of the time the youth were and sometimes when they were not.

Gaining access to observe these organizations in all their glory and failures was not an easy feat. For instance, to gain access to EYC, I had to survive a vetting process involving 15 email message back and forth with Luke followed by a phone call. He was skeptical about my interest in EYC and desire to observe to say the least. He wrote in an early email “I’m curious how you might use your observations for your studies? Similarly, what is the survey going to be used for? Where does the data go?” A few messages later, he said “Sorry for all of the vetting I felt I needed to do. Honestly, it's not often I learn of someone studying youth organizations. But, being an organization that hires and works with high school aged youth, we just always have to do our due diligence.” He also confessed in that email that the reason he was willing to let me enter their group was because of a “common connection,” who turned out to be a former graduate student in our program who used to be a part of EYC and was willing to vouch for my legitimacy. Gaining access to field sites is not always disclosed in writing on qualitative work, but it is both a challenging and time-consuming portion of the research. Although I observed four organizations, I approached many others that denied me a chance to observe either because of concerns about my intentions, concerns about revealing organizational failures and challenges, or legal reasons. I jumped through many hoops to gain the access I was able to acquire.

In total, I collected 72 fieldnotes during my time in the field; 15 for YTC, 11 for RJTC, 14 for YRSV, and 32 for EYC who met twice a week instead of once. They were often several extensive pages of in-depth notes on discussions, interactions, comments, and body language
expressions. Combined with the 33 interview transcripts (6 for EYC, 8 for YRSV, 12 for YTC, and 7 for the RJTC), the amount of data for the project was extensive. The data collection took over a year and the coding process also took over a year and involved the help of undergraduate research assistants without whom I’d still be coding.

In the field sites, I played many roles, always trying to influence the site as little as possible. I’d hand out papers when asked or give an opinion when solicited, but I tried to speak and interact as little as possible until the end of my time in each organization. Remaining uninvolved was challenging, especially at organizations like YTC and EYC where the adult often solicited my advice on various topics. It is impossible not to influence a field site, but I worked hard to do so as little as possible. Occasionally, I felt as though my commitment to remaining uninvolved was problematic for the success of youth in the organizations. In particular, I had opportunities to influence issues of inequality in the groups, but because I did not want to change the sites I rarely took these opportunities until the end of my time in the field. The emotional distance required to appear uninvolved was a part of the research not captured in the dissertation. When I eventually was able to share with the adults as I exited the organization, it was cathartic, rewarding, and informative of the ways adults understood issues I witnessed in the groups.
APPENDIX B: SURVEY

Dear Representative of ${e://Field/OrgName},

Thank you for your interest in the Triangle Youth Engagement Survey. Your answers will help to create an understanding of best practices for engaging youth in the community. Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary. You may choose to not answer questions or end the survey at any time. Please answer the questions as honestly and thoroughly as possible.

This survey has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you can contact the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113. If you have questions about the survey or my research, please feel free to contact me at sgaby@unc.edu or at 305-318-2973. You may contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Kenneth Andrews, at kta@unc.edu or 919-843-5104.

Do you consent to participate in this survey?
- Yes
- No

We’ll start/begin by verifying some information about the organization and your position within it.

This survey is for ${e://Field/OrgName}. Is this the name of the organization you work for?
- Yes
- No

What is the name that your organization goes by?
_________________________________________

What is your name?
_________________________________________

What is your position at the organization?
_________________________________________

How long have you been at the organization (in months)?
_________________________________________

Next we'll cover how your organization operates and the ways that your organization works with youth.

Which of the following are part of your organization's leadership? Select all that apply.
- Board of Directors
- Paid Professional Staff
- Volunteer Staff
- Youth Leaders
- Other

How are members of the following leadership areas selected?
- Board of Directors
- Paid Professional Staff
- Volunteer Staff
- Youth Leaders
- Other

What percentage of the overall decision-making regarding programming is handled by each of the following leadership areas?
- Board of Directors
- Paid Professional Staff
- Volunteer Staff
- Youth Leaders
- Other

What role do adults play in your organization?
- Advising Youth Members
- Planning Youth Activities
- Collaborating with Youth Leaders
- Other

How many staff members are part of the formal leadership of your organization?
_________________________________________

How many youth are part of the formal leadership of your organization?
_________________________________________

How many adult volunteers are part of the formal leadership of your organization?
_________________________________________

What is the organization's yearly operating budget?
_________________________________________

What is the organization's average yearly membership (approximately)?
_________________________________________

How many members were part of your organization last year?
_________________________________________

How many youth members were part of your organization last year?
_________________________________________
What percentage of each racial/ethnic group would you say makes up your youth membership base?
- White
- Black of African American
- American Indian and Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander
- Hispanic

What percentage of each racial/ethnic group would you say makes up your adult staff and volunteer base?
- White
- Black of African American
- American Indian and Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander
- Hispanic

What percentage of each income group would you say makes up your youth membership base (based on yearly family income)?
- Less than $12,000
- $12,000-$30,000
- $30,000-$75,000
- $75,000-$150,000
- $150,000-$300,000
- More than $300,000

What percentage of the parents of the youth members in your organization fit into the following education categories?
- Did not complete high school
- High school diploma or GED
- Some college
- College degree
- Some graduate school
- Graduate degree

Which of the following statements best describes the organization's youth membership base?
- The youth members of the organization are generally low-income
- The youth members of the organization are generally middle-class
- The youth members of the organization are generally upper middle-class
- The youth members of the organization are generally upper class

How many staff members worked at your organization in the last year?

How many people volunteered at your organization in the last year?
On average, how many of the following activities do you have at your organization per year?

- Planned Social Events
- Informational Socializing Amongst Members
- Open Forums
- Board Meetings
- Open Board Meetings
- Standing Committee Meetings
- Delegate Meetings
- Collaborations with other youth organizations
- Collaborations with non-youth organizations
- Recreational Activities
- Volunteer Activities
- Protests
- Boycotts
- Writing Political Officials
- Events Outside of the Organization
- Lobbying
- Advocacy
- Litigation
- Held Press Conferences
- Contacted the Media
- Public meeting
- Petitions

Which of the following best describe the central goal of your organization? Select all that apply.

- Recreation
- Influence Politics
- Influence Policy
- Better the Community Through Volunteer Work
- Bring Together Like-Minded People
- Shape Public Opinion
- Train Leaders
- Meet Civic Responsibilities

Which of the following categories would you say that your organization fits within?

- Recreational
- Service
- Political
- Other

The next section will cover how your organization uses digital media to engage in civic activities.

Which of the following tools does your organization use? Select all that apply.
- Organization Website
- Twitter
- Facebook
- A Photo Sharing Website (e.g., Flickr)
- Printed Newsletters
- Email Lists
- Online Forums
- Phone Trees
- Online Newsletter
- Other

For what purpose(s) does the organization utilize each of the online tools? (Share News, Recruit Members, Host Discussions, Other)
- Organization Website
- Twitter
- Facebook
- Photo Sharing Website
- Printed Newsletter
- Email Lists
- Online Forums
- Phone Trees
- Online Newsletter
- Other

For which of the following activities does your organization use online tools?
- Recruiting Members
- Sharing News
- Hosting Discussions
- Petition Signing
- Writing Letters to Officials
- Mobilizing Members Offline
- Mobilizing Members to Participate in Online Activities
- Boycotts
- Email Campaigns
- Fundraising
- Recruit Volunteers
- Sending Updates
- Event Information

Which programs does your organization use to manage these online activities? (Facebook, Twitter, Website, Email, Online Forums, Other)
- Recruiting Members
- Sharing News
- Hosting Discussions
- Petition Signing
- Writing Letters to Officials
- Mobilizing Members Offline
- Mobilizing Members to Participate in Online Activities
• Boycotts
• Email Campaigns
• Fundraising
• Recruit Volunteers
• Sending Updates
• Event Information

Does your organizations use online tools, offline tools, or both for the following activities:
• Recruitment
• Promote Organizational Accomplishments
• Discuss Organizational Strategies
• Mobilize Members

Why does your organization participate in online activities?

________________________________________________________________________

What goals does your organization hope to accomplish by using online tools?

____________________________________________________________________

Does your organization use Google Analytics or another analytics program to track hits to your website?
• Yes
• No

Does your organization change or adjust the content of your site based on the results of the analytics?
• Yes
• No

How does your organization know when an online resource isn't working?

____________________________________________________________________

How often does your organization update the content of your organizations online tools?
• Never
• Less than Once a Month
• Once a Month
• 2-3 Times a Month Once a Week
• 2-3 Times a Week Daily

How often does your organization change the online tools your organization is using?
• Never
• Less than Once a Month
• Once a Month
• 2-3 Times a Month Once a Week
• 2-3 Times a Week Daily
Who primarily produces the content of your organization's online material?
- Paid staff member(s) who is a technology professional
- Paid staff member(s) who is not a technology professional
- Youth member(s)
- Volunteer(s)

Who is responsible for updating the content of the online tools?
- Paid staff member(s) whose primary job is technology related
- Paid staff member(s) who is not a technology professional
- Youth member(s)
- Volunteer(s)
- We do not update the content

How does your organization's online activities differ from offline activities?

In the past year, what would you describe as your organization's greatest successes?

In the past year, what would you describe as your organization's greatest challenges?

In 2017, do you expect your organization to be:
- More Effective
- About the Same
- Less Effective

How does your organization define organizational effectiveness?

Describe the project that your organization devoted the most resources to in the past year:

How many volunteers participated in the project?
- Less than 10
- 10-25
- 25-50
- 50-100
- 100+

Did your organization receive support for the project from other organizations?
- Yes
- No

Did your organization face opposition to the project?
- Yes
- No

From whom did you face opposition?

______________________________

What were the goals of the project?

______________________________

Did your organization accomplish the goals of your project?
- Yes
- No
- Somewhat (please explain)

Please list any organizations your organization has collaborated with in any way over the past year.

______________________________

Please list any organizations in the Triangle that you think are particularly effective at serving youth.

______________________________

What makes the organizations you listed effective?

______________________________

Is your organization effective at serving youth?
- Yes
- No

What makes your organization effective?

______________________________
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW, FOCUS GROUP, AND FIELDWORK GUIDES

Observation Guide
To record (adapted from Blee 2013):

- Date
- Location
- Group Name
- Type of Group
- Who was at the event?
- How the meeting or event was advertised?
- Information on member attendance and composition
- Notes on recruitment
- Stated goals of the event or meeting
- Other events planned or discussed

General notes to take (adapted from Blee 2013):

- Impressions about the group
- Mentions of other groups
- Conflicts
- Identity building, calls to identity or collective identity
- Leadership structure
- Participatory structure
- Assumptions

For organizational events:

- What is the event?
- What types of activities are youth asked to participate in and in what roles?
- How is the event organized?
- Where is the event located?
- What is the goal of the event?
- How do members and staff/volunteers interact?
- What types of civic opportunities are offered to members?
- What types of civic skills can be learned at events?

For organizational meetings:

- How are meetings planned?
- Who attends meetings?
- How do discussion happen – who leads? Who is encouraged to participate? Who participates without encouragement? How are members responded to by each other and staff/volunteers?
- What kind of information do staff/volunteers share with members?
• How are members engaged in the meeting?
• What types of events or activities are planned as part of the meeting?
• How are decisions made?
• What types of civic opportunities are offered to members?
• What types of civic skills can be learned in meetings?

For problem-solving groups:
• What is the initial reaction to the problem?
• Who participates in the discussion?
• What is the response and interaction among members?
• How do members reach consensus or do they?
• How are disagreements resolved?
• How are new ideas or proposals introduced?
• What are the range of proposed suggestions?
Pre-Interview/Pre-Problem-Solving Group Survey

Thank you for being a part of this study. This survey will provide the researcher with some basic information and help the researcher understand your experience. Please select or write in the answer that you feel best captures you. Feel free to skip any question you do not wish to answer.

1. Name

2. Date of Birth

3. What country were you born in?

4. With what racial group do you identify?
   a. White
   b. African American/Black
   c. Asian
   d. Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
   e. American Indian/Alaska Native
   f. Other____________________________________________

5. What is the highest degree of schooling completed by your mother?
   a) Did not complete high school
   b) High School Degree
   c) Some college
   d) Associate’s Degree
   e) College Degree
   f) Some graduate school
   g) Master’s Degree
   h) Ph.D., JD., MD., or other professional equivalent

6. What is the highest degree of schooling completed by your father?
   a) Did not complete high school
   b) High School Degree
   c) Some college
   d) Associate’s Degree
   e) College Degree
   f) Some graduate school
   g) Master’s Degree
   h) Ph.D., JD., MD., or other professional equivalent

7. What is your mother’s occupation?

8. What is your father’s occupation?

9. List all organizations to which you belong:

_______________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________
10. On a weekly basis, how many meetings do you attend in organizations outside of school?

11. On a weekly basis, how many events do you attend in organizations outside of school?

12. Have you ever held a leadership position in an organization?

13. What was the leadership position?

14. What did you do in the leadership position?

15. How long have you been in this organization?
Interview Guide for Youth Participants

1. How did you become part of this organization?
2. How long have you been at this organization?
3. Were you part of any other organizations before joining this one? Which ones?
4. What did you do at those other organizations?
5. Tell me what it was like when you first came to this organization.
6. Can you describe a day/meeting/event at this organization?
7. What do you see as the goal of this organization?
8. In what ways are you involved in this organization?
9. What do you gain from participating in this organization?
10. What do you do when you’re at this organization?
11. Did you know how to do/did you ever do that before joining the organization?
12. Describe your most positive experience in the organization.
13. Describe your most negative experience in the organization.
14. What does it mean to participate in this organization?
15. What does it mean to be an active member in this organization?
16. Do you consider yourself an active member in this organization?
17. What does it mean to be a leader in this organization?
18. Do you consider yourself a leader?
19. Describe an instance where you served as a leader in this organization.
20. How are other members of the organization involved?
21. Who do you think of as leaders in this organization?
22. What makes those folks leaders?
23. Could you become a leader? How?
24. What do you think about the adult leaders and volunteers in this organization?
25. What did you learn from being involved in this organization?
26. Did you already know how to (insert relevant activity or skill) before coming to this organization?
27. In what ways are you involved in politics outside of the organization?
28. In what ways does your participation in this organization result in your participation in politics?
29. Do you know of any similar organizations in the area? Which ones?
30. What do those organizations do?
31. What do you think members do in those organizations in any given day?
32. Is there anything you would like to do in your organization that you are not currently doing? What? Why?
33. Do you think you can use what you learned as part of this organization outside of the organization? In what way? What skills/ideas/approaches?

Prompts:
- What do you mean by that?
- Tell me more about that?
- What was it about that?
- How did you feel when that?
- Can you give me an example of that?
- Who did you talk to about that?
• What did x say?
• What was that conversation like? What did you ask x?

Interview Guide for Youth Leaders

1. How did you become part of this organization?
2. How long have you been at this organization?
3. Were you part of any other organizations before joining this one? Which ones?
4. What did you do at those other organizations?
5. What other organizations are you currently part of? What is your role in those organizations?
6. Tell me what it was like when you first came to this organization.
7. Can you describe a day/meeting/event at this organization?
8. What do you see as the goal of this organization?
9. In what ways are you involved in this organization?
10. What do you gain from participating in this organization?
11. What do you do when you’re at this organization?
12. Did you know how to do/did you ever do that before joining the organization?
13. Describe your most positive experience in this organization.
14. Describe your most negative experience in this organization.
15. What does it mean to participate in this organization?
16. What does it mean to be an active member in this organization?
17. Do you consider yourself an active member in this organization?
18. Do you consider yourself a leader?
19. What does it mean to be a leader in this organization?
20. Describe the ways you lead in the organization.
21. What is the difference between a leader and a member of this organization?
22. Describe an instance where you served as a leader in this organization.
23. What is your most important role as a leader?
24. What makes a good leader?
25. What leadership skills have you learned as a leader of this organization?
26. How do you think you can use those skills outside of this organization?
27. How are other members of the organization involved?
28. Who else do you think of as leaders in this organization?
29. What makes those folks leaders?
30. What do you think about the adult leaders and volunteers in this organization?
31. Who decides what programs/activities/events the organization should have?
32. What did you learn from being involved in this organization?
33. Did you already know how to (insert relevant activity or skill) before coming to this organization?
34. In what ways are you involved in politics outside of the organization?
35. In what ways does your participation in this organization result in your participation in politics?
36. Do you know of any similar organizations in the area? Which ones?
37. What do those organizations do?
38. What do you think members do in those organizations in any given day?
39. Is there anything you would like to do in your organization that you are not currently doing? What? Why?
40. Do you think you can use what you learned as part of this organization outside of the organization? In what way? What skills/ideas/approaches?

Interview Guide for Adult Leaders (paid or volunteer staff)

1. How did you become part of this organization?
2. What did you do before becoming part of this organization?
3. Tell me what it was like when you first came to this organization.
4. Can you describe a day/meeting/event at this organization?
5. What do you see as the goal of this organization?
6. In what ways are you involved in this organization?
7. What do you gain from participating in this organization?
8. What do you do when you’re at this organization?
9. What do you hope the youth in this organization will gain from participating?
10. How do you try to teach them those things?
11. In what ways do you feel the youth in this organization benefit from participating?
12. What does it mean to participate in this organization?
13. What does it mean to be an active member in this organization?
14. What does it mean to be a youth leader in this organization?
15. What does it mean to be an adult leader in this organization?
16. What does it mean to be a leader in this organization?
17. How do you become a leader of this organization?
18. Describe what makes you a leader.
19. Do you think the youth in the organization perceive you as a leader? What makes you think they do/do not?
20. Describe your most positive experience in the organization.
21. Describe your most negative experience in the organization.
22. Who decides what programs/activities/events the organization should have?
23. How do you/they decide?
24. What are you goals for the youth involved in this organization?
25. Do you know of any similar organizations in the area? Which ones?
26. What do those organizations do?
27. What do you think members do in those organizations in any given day?
28. What organizations do you see this organization as most similar to? Why? In what ways?
29. What organizations are you different from? Why? In what ways?
30. Do you collaborate with any organizations? In what ways?
31. Is there anything you would like to do in your organization that you are not currently doing? What? Why?
32. Do you think youth in this organization can use what they learned as part of this organization outside of the organization? In what way? What skills/ideas/approaches?
Problem-Solving Group Prompts

Below is a list of possible prompt ideas for problem-solving groups. Groups will be asked to propose a solution to the problem including who they would target to solve the problem, what they would do, who would be involved, and whether/how they expected their solution to have an impact. The list of components of the response will be posed so that the members can work through each question without interruption from the moderator.

1. Legislators passed a law in North Carolina that you see as unjust or harmful.
2. Police have been found to pull folks over based on their race and then arrest them for any other outstanding crimes. In the program, black and Hispanic drivers are much more likely to be pulled over.
3. The only public library you can access in your town is closing.
4. You school is monitoring everything you do online, even if you do it on your phone or personal computer.
5. The school police are being allowed to search lockers and backpacks without permission, taking anything that they find to be suspicious, and prosecuting offenders.
6. The local coffee shop where you and your friends often gather has stopped allowing anyone under 17 to enter because they want to create a quieter environment.
7. The city has decided to ban making contributions to the homeless. If anyone is found giving a homeless person money, they will be given a ticket.
8. There is no policy about bullying in your school. A student who has been bullied many times by the school bully has tried to get help from a teacher on multiple occasions, but the teacher will not act.
9. One of the adult leaders of the group was fired because they were found to be HIV positive.
Problem-Solving Group Interview Guide

1. What would you have done if you were faced with this scenario?
2. Where did you learn to do that?
3. What was your role in the proposing the group’s solution?
4. Did you already know how to do the thing the group proposed?
5. Where did you learn how to do that?
6. If this was real, would you actually do the thing you proposed?
7. How likely is it that you can contribute to finding a solution to this issue?
8. How likely is it that your solution will be considered by policy makers?
9. Who would be affected the most?
10. How likely is it that you would succeed at making this change?
REFERENCES


Symon, Gillian and Catherine Cassell. 2012. *Qualitative Organizational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges.* Los Angeles ; London: SAGE.


