YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT:
A SOCIOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO PROGRAMS AND PARTICIPANTS IN NYC

by

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ABSTRACT

Youth Civic Engagement: A Sociological Inquiry Into Programs And Participants In NYC

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America has low levels of civic, community and political participation, especially among youth. Moreover, poor and minority youth are particularly disaffected. This dissertation considers the emergence of the field of youth civic engagement programming that seeks to address that civic cynicism among teenagers in New York City. The data for this research comes from multiple sources, including: 7 interviews with youth civic engagement program coordinators/directors, 8 with youth policymakers, and 44 with teenagers; 5 focus groups with youth involved in youth civic engagement programs; survey data collected from 133 program youth; and a content analysis of 7 youth organizations' websites, publications, and tax statements. This mixed-methods approach was used to draw from the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of doing solely quantitative or qualitative research. The dissertation argues that youth civic engagement work has undergone organizational isomorphism that has contributed to it becoming its own homogenized field. As this has happened, there has been goal displacement whereby the organizations doing the work have become less focused on increasing and supporting civic dialogue among youth because more attention has to be paid to reporting to funders on non-related outcomes. By uncovering key advocacy strategies that have made some youth groups successful in influencing policy, the research hopes to push back on that goal displacement. It also shows how teenagers' involvement in delinquent

behaviors does not mean they do not have a desire to actively make positive contributions to their communities, and their cynicism towards various institutions of social control does not mean they do not want to work with them to create positive change. The conclusions made speak to the concerns for the future sustainability of the field, as well as potential directions for it to move.

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and entertained at the same time. You actually made this process – dare I say it? – somewhat fun.

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This dissertation is dedicated to all of the teenage activists who are working to make this world a more humane place, advocating for economic equality, and pushing back on all forms of oppression. La lucha continua!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction………………………………………………………………………………… 1

Chapter 1:
An Organizational Analysis of the Youth Civic Engagement Field in NYC………… 12

Chapter 2:
Pushing Back on Goal Displacement: Strategies for Increasing the Voice of Youth… 44

Chapter 3:
Drifting Between Worlds: Positive Engagement and Delinquency Among Red Hook Youth……………………………………………………………………………….... 89

Chapter 4:
Legal Cynicism Among Civically Engaged Youth Working with Institutions of Social Control………………………………………………………………………………. 132

Chapter 5:
Conclusion and Future Directions for the Field and Research…………………………………………………………………………….... 154

Bibliography……………………………………………………………………… 167

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1 - Foundations Funding Three or More of Organizations in Sample………….. 30

Table 4.1 - Participant Demographics…………………………………………………... 141

Table 4.2 - Measures of Legal Cynicism and Interactions with Criminal Justice Institutions………………………………………………………………………………. 144

Table 4.3 - Means on Legal Cynicism Scales by Demographics and Experience with Criminal Justice Agencies………………………………………………………………. 145

Table 4.4 - Legal Cynicism Scales Correlations……………………………………... 146

Table 4.5 - The Effects of Interactions with the Police, Court Involvement, Demographic Characteristics, and Church and Community Involvement on Negative Attitudes towards the Police…………………………………………………………….. 146

Table 4.6 - The Effects of Interactions with the Police, Court Involvement, Demographic Characteristics, Church and Community Involvement, Lack of Confidence in the Court, and Lack of Fairness of Laws on Negative Attitudes towards the Police……………………………………………………………………………... 148

INTRODUCTION

Young people today spend a significant amount of time in the presence of media; these media, from television to movies, from video games to the Internet, bombard our sensoriums with overt and covert messages through programming and advertising. Because of this media onslaught, youth need an education that prepares them to deal critically with these messages, especially as they relate to politics and communities. Additionally, as Putnam (1996, 2000) showed, America has low levels of civic, community and political participation, especially among youth. Moreover, poor and minority youth are particularly disaffected (Jankowski 1992, 2002). But a citizenry actively engaged in civic life and participating in building and solving community problems is at the heart of a healthy democracy.

What does healthy civic life look like? As young people themselves – student activists in the 1960s – outlined in the Port Huron Statement, in a participatory democracy, political life is based on several principals, including: "that decision-making of basic social consequence be carried on by public groupings; that politics be seen positively, as the art of collectively creating an acceptable pattern of social relations;" and "that politics has the function of bringing people out of isolation and into community, thus being a necessary, though not sufficient means of finding meaning in personal life" (Students for a Democratic Society, 1962). Additionally, as Barber (1998) also discussed, there needs to be a public space, or "civic terrain," in which democratic attitudes are cultivated and democratic behavior is conditioned, where citizen participation is maximized for working on behalf of the common good. The government must take a more active role in nourishing, protecting, and encouraging an open,

inclusive, and egalitarian "commons," especially at the local level. Schools should be a source of this encouragement and serve as a site of public space for civic dialogue. As Giroux (1997) stated, schools should be providing "the opportunity to develop the critical capacity to challenge and transform existing social and political forms, rather than simply adapt to them."

Aronowitz (2004) noted, however, that schools are in fact not sites of critical education, and are failing to encourage an Enlightenment intellectual tradition that would allow for discernment of knowledge from propaganda, as well as failing to promote participatory citizenship to and among its students. Instead, schools have become test prep centers, subordinating the discourse of responsible citizenship to "marketplace imperatives of choice, consumption, and standardization" and have become "training grounds for 'the corporate workforce'" (Giroux, 1993), rendering knowledge a product for profit and not for social good. Moreover, the American political system grants precious few opportunities for active citizen participation, and behavior that is traditionally defined in the United States as democratic participation is limited to voting. Therefore, the first formal opportunity for youth civic involvement cannot happen until they are at least eighteen years of age.

Acknowledging this lack of support for both the development of critical reflection skills and for civic participation, some community organizations have taken a new approach to working with teenagers that compensates for what is not happening in school. These organizations are involving young people in their communities in order to help them become better citizens while also having a positive impact on their emotional, social, and cognitive development. As peace-educator Leonisa Ardizzone (2008) noted,

"Learning that is critical, creative and student-subjective allows for the development of democracy and open communication. It follows then, that an education … that fosters critical consciousness … supports efforts for justice, peace and social change."

These efforts have formed a new arena of youth development: civic engagement, or actively involving youth in dialogue about public policy and social issues. In the late 80s and early 90s, much youth programming was aimed at prevention work: keeping young people from fighting, drugs, gangs, and dropping out of school. The violence that educators and youth organizations expected to explode in the mid-90s in urban areas because of the youth "superpredator" and "moral poverty" (DiIulio, 1995) myths did not materialize, and funders and program directors were forced to shift focus away from prevention and negative development to something new. In this case, the shift was to positive youth development (PYD) – seeing young people as assets to society and their communities, not problems to be dealt with. In part, this movement came in reaction to the pathologizing of poor youth. Some of the key tenets of PYD include promoting positive relationships and bonds with peers, adults, and their community; empowering youth to assume leadership roles; challenging them in ways that build their competence and confidence; and emphasizing their strengths. (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Lerner, 1995; Little, 1993)

PYD was embraced by many major national funders such as the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, the Ford Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. During this shift, some non-profit organizations pushed even further, creating civic engagement programs that could be seen as falling under the PYD umbrella, but the focus had more of a political edge to it: engaging youth

in policy work, community organizing, and civic dialogue on a range of local, national, and global issues. This focus recognized and sought to push back on the isolation of young people from power and community that has underscored the rise of "a democracy without publics" (SDS, 1962). In the current neo-liberal political climate where free-market fundamentalism and the retreat of the state have led to a public that no longer provides resources and social provisions for children and youth, adults no longer fear for young people's futures and well-being, but rather fear the youth themselves (Giroux, 2009). It is within this context of a new state that victimizes and criminalizes young people (Males, 1996) that many youth civic engagement programs have appeared. Unlike PYD in general, the funding for these programs tends to be local, and, with the exception of a few college-aged voter groups, there are no national organizations that work on this issue (for high school-aged youth). The programs themselves tend to be decentralized, democratic, and local as well.

What is civic engagement, and what does it look like? For Dewey, it was about communities and meaningful interactions (1927), and learned citizens engaging in the public realm for the betterment of the larger social good (1916). When the discourse today turns specifically to youth and civic life, many educators focus on service learning and volunteerism, which, while laudable, do not necessarily lead to political involvement or social change. Additionally, political scientists focus on young voter participation as an indicator of an engaged or disengaged population, which automatically excludes young people who are under eighteen years of age. In practice, though, what these youth civic engagement programs are looking to do is move away from the procedural aspects of democracy (e.g., voting) to embrace deliberative democracy, or what Putnam (2000)

described as engaging in a "civic conversation." This approach recognizes youth as citizens who can contribute to civic life while providing them with the necessary education to critically evaluate the media they experience on a daily basis. These programs seek to overcome the cynicism and apathy many teenagers feel about democratic participation and institutions of civic life. These are more than attitudes; they are products of social institutions and the structure and organization of the institutions relevant to their lives (e.g., schools) that have separated them from power and knowledge.

Research on Youth Civic Engagement

The field of youth civic engagement gained attention in the 1990s with the shift to a positive youth development approach to working with young people. There were, however, earlier approaches to youth engagement. As Flanagan (2004) summarized, three theories guided previous research before the shift: 1) political socialization theory looked at intergenerational stability in political loyalties; 2) cognitive development theory looked at how conception of the political domain changes as children and youth mature; and 3) the generational model looked at how the transition to adulthood is one's politically defining period. These theories, however, were not grounded in the everyday lives of adolescents, and also underestimated the importance of peer relationships, which Pearce and Larson (2006) identified as imperative to creating the sense of belonging, group loyalty, and collective experience that keep youth engaged and motivated in youth programs. As Sherrod and Lauckhardt (2009) also pointed out, much of the research from the 1960s and 1970s was also with college students on campus settings, a much different environment than high school-aged youth experience.

New models of youth civic engagement extend the civic aspects of PYD and respond specifically to young people who have been marginalized by more mainstream organizations, reframing political socialization from an emphasis on preparing for the day when young people are old enough to engage in civic affairs to enabling youth to act in the here and now as citizens. Under this new paradigm and with a focus on issues that matter to young people, community-based youth organizations are providing spaces for youth to contest the status quo and collectively devise alternatives. Participation gives youth an opportunity to develop a collective identity and feelings of solidarity with others in the group. The focus is not just on political participation, but on involvement in community affairs and life that involve active citizenship; connectedness to oneself, community/neighborhood, race, gender, etc.; and concern for others (Sherrod and Lauckhardt, 2009). There is also more of an awareness of social capital as being a precursor to and a means of promoting civic engagement (Hyman, 2002).

Research on the new models of engagement has changed as well. Old theories have in part been replaced with a more participatory approach. One example is youth participatory action research (YPAR), which provides young people with the opportunities to study social problems affecting their lives and then determine actions to rectify these problems. While still within formal youth development practices, the traditional relationship between researcher and the "researched" has been shifted. The researchers are now "insiders," or stakeholders in the community being researched, part of a collective that includes youth and adults who bring multiple perspectives and experiences, and share all parts of the research process: designing the questions to be asked, the methods to collect the data, doing the actual data collection, and analyzing and

disseminating the findings. As Fine and Cammorata (2008) described, the knowledge produced from YPAR is not passive, but rather is meant to be "launching pads" for ideas, actions, and strategies for social change.

Sherrod, Torney-Purta, and Flanagan's recent (2010) edited volume, *Handbook of Research on Civic Engagement in Youth*, provides examples of the diversity of research in the field, addressing such issues as race/ethnicity, immigration status, and sexual orientation, but note that it is hard to characterize the cumulative findings of this research because many studies employ different conceptual frameworks and ask different questions. The authors offer positive youth development as a tool for conceptualization and measurement of youth civic engagement, as well as the life-course theoretical perspective, which is based on the idea that growth and change are continuous throughout life, and therefore there is a need for research on citizenship that crosses several developmental periods and continues throughout life.

Reflexive Statement

My own work in this field started nearly a decade ago. In 2001, I became an after-school program coordinator at Seward Park High School, a New York City public high school in Lower Manhattan. The school was in the former location of the Ludlow Street jail, whose notable prisoners included Boss Tweed. In 1923, it became a school that, until its closing in 2006, served wave after wave of immigrant populations who congregated on the Lower East Side. To the parents of the students who attended Seward Park, the school represented a sacred institution of public education, a gateway from the life of persecution they had experienced in their home country. For years the school and

the neighborhood were a hotbed of socialist and anarchist politics. (Its alumni include Ethel and Julius Rosenberg.)

I was excited to be working at this historical institution, and was given the freedom to develop any programs I wanted. I surveyed the students to see which activities most interested them. Some wanted typical after-school activities such as a homework help center, organized basketball tournaments, and a drama club. In addition to this, however, I was asked by the principal to design a course that would be put on every ninth grader's schedule as a 9th period class once a week. The goal of this class was to help ease their transition from middle- to high-school.

My own interests really drove the design of this class. Many of the students lived in the public housing projects along the East River on Lower East Side and in the East Village, a neighborhood where I had also been living for five years, during which time I had seen the socio-economic makeup of the community change dramatically. Signs of gentrification were ubiquitous: Starbucks seemingly every few blocks, upscale restaurants opening up as far east as Avenue C, and NYU students buying apartments that just ten years earlier had been filled with homeless people and squatters. The ethnic composition was changing as well: as rent prices increased, many of the Puerto Ricans and Dominicans who had been there for years were being pushed out and replaced by young, white college students.[1] I wanted to give my students, who were exclusively Latino, a space to talk about these changes, and to explore their own feelings about the transformation of their neighborhood. I bought cameras for all of them. Each week they would go out and photograph what "community" meant to them, write reflective essays

[1] See Neil Smith and James DeFilippis (1999) for more on the economics of the gentrification of the Lower East Side.

on their pictures, and when we came back together I would facilitate discussions on their work, situating it within larger socio-political contexts. For me, using the arts to generate civic dialogue seemed to make the most sense, because it supported the youth in their exploration of identity and politics as they used various media forms as tools of confrontation and discussion, but just as importantly, as a means of identity negotiation, self-representation and their own “coming to voice” (hooks, 1989).

The school, unfortunately, was closed a few years later due to poor performance. It had been on the then Board of Education’s Schools Under Registration Review list, and later reopened as four smaller schools within the building. I was just finishing graduate school at NYU when this happened, and decided it was a good time to move away from hands-on work to more behind-the-scenes, research-based work. I became a researcher and program evaluator for youth programs at the Harlem Children’s Zone, a large community organization that runs numerous after-school youth development programs and two charter schools, in addition to other types of services. At this job I helped develop new programs, design program models and evaluation plans for them, and conduct process and impact evaluations for the programs, many of which were arts- and civic dialogue-based. It was during this time that I started to think that the work I had been doing at Seward Park was situated within a larger, youth civic-engagement field.

After spending over three years up in Harlem, I again switched jobs to my current position as a Senior Research Associate with a non-profit organization called the Center for Court Innovation. Part of my job is to design and evaluate youth programs that again can be considered to fall under the youth civic-engagement umbrella. They all seek to engage teenagers around juvenile justice and policy issues that affect them, supporting

their activism and organizing to address these issues. Many of these programs became sites of data collection for my dissertation. I was interested in combining my professional and political work with my academic endeavors to try to understand these programs, what they involved, whom they involved, who participated, who did not, and what kind of power they could create for youth. The result is this: *Youth Civic Engagement: A Sociological Inquiry into Programs and Practice in NYC*.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation looks at the way youth civic engagement programs are implemented and seeks to understand the attitudes of program participants in New York. I employ a multi-method approach to illuminate the field and its participants.

Chapter 1 frames the subject: what youth civic engagement work looks like and who is doing it. Using the framework of institutional isomorphism, I examine the key players involved in youth civic engagement programs in NYC – both those administering the programs and those funding them – to provide an organizational analysis of this field in a large, urban setting. Using qualitative content analysis of organizational documents and quantitative summaries of fiscal data, I look at key components of the organizations that help to define the field, including: political stances, program descriptions, leadership, budgets and funding, and program evaluation.

In Chapter 2, I use data from semi-structured interviews – with youth civic engagement program coordinators and directors and New York City and New York State policymakers who work on youth issues, as well as focus-group data with teenagers who are working to influence public policy – to help push back on the goal displacement that many of the youth civic engagement organizations experience. The findings uncover the

most effective ways for youth to influence public policy and improve their advocacy efforts in an attempt to help the organizations shift their focus back to part of civic engagement's original aims.

Chapter 3 seeks to understand how teenagers in the low-income and geographically isolated area of Red Hook, Brooklyn think about and engage in delinquent behavior and civic dialogue. Using interview, focus group, and survey data collected in 2008 and 2009 with teens involved in a youth organizing program, I examine the relationship between positive engagement and anti-social behaviors within the context of the sociological literature of subcultures and delinquency.

In Chapter 4, I examine the relationship between legal cynicism and positive engagement among Red Hook youth. I analyze a survey I administered to teenagers entering one of three programs that give local youth an opportunity to interact with law and legal institutions in a non-adversarial context in order to improve relations between the various groups. The survey measured attitudes towards and experience with the law, the court system, and the police.

Finally, I conclude with implications for the youth civic engagement field, suggesting directions in which I believe the field should move, as well as future directions for research.

CHAPTER 1: An Organizational Analysis of the Youth Civic Engagement Field in NYC

Introduction

The number of youth civic engagement programs in New York City (NYC) has increased tremendously in the last fifteen years, with funders of youth programs shifting focus away from violence prevention to positive engagement. With a large amount of money being poured into youth civic engagement in NYC, and with numerous organizations doing this work, the questions arise: What does youth civic engagement work look like and who is doing it? Is youth civic engagement actually its own field? What does this field look like in NYC?

Weber (1968) theorized that bureaucratization resulted in part due to competition among capitalist firms in the marketplace, and that once established, the "iron cage of bureaucracy" was irreversible. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) extended Weber's iron cage analogy to organizational analysis, changing it slightly: while bureaucracy is still the common organizational form, organizational change is not driven by competition, but occurs due to the structuration (Giddens, 1979) of fields. As they noted, "Once a set of organizations emerges as a field, a paradox arises: rational actors make their organizations increasingly similar as they try to change them" (p. 147). Initially, organizations in a field (i.e., those producing similar services or products) are diverse in their approach to their work, but once the field is defined institutionally, the organizations become homogenized. DiMaggio (1982) stated that this structuration process involved the organizations in the field beginning to interact and form coalitions, and to understand that they share a common goal.

As DiMaggio and Powell discuss, institutional isomorphic change – or institutions becoming similar to each other – occurs through three mechanisms: coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphisms. Coercive isomorphism stems from pressures by other organizations upon which the organizations in the field are dependent. Mimetic isomorphism occurs when goals are ambiguous, leading organizations to model themselves on other organizations. Finally, normative isomorphism results from professionalization, or the workers in the field defining the conditions and methods of their work.

In the 1990s, there was a shift in youth programming away from focusing on negative development and "risky behaviors" such as drug use, dropping out of school, gang membership, and violence. Instead, youth development programming focused on young people's positive development. The theory behind a *positive* youth development approach to working with teenagers was that supporting and helping youth in a comprehensive way to achieve their full potential was the best way to promote youth development. This included what some call the "five Cs": Competence (e.g. intellectual ability), Connection (e.g., positive bonds with people), Character (e.g., integrity), Confidence (e.g., a sense of agency), and Compassion (e.g., empathy, a sense of social justice) (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Lerner, 1995; Little, 1993). Organizations such as the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation embraced this approach in their funding of youth organizations.

Prior to this shift, goals of most youth programs were clear: keeping young people from fighting, doing drugs, joining gangs, and dropping out of school. But the new focus

on young people's positive assets led to vague goals and difficulty in defining success: what do confidence and connection look like? How do we evaluate them? Simultaneously, there was pressure from funders to track, measure, and report on the effects that the programs were having on young people. Finally, the need to gain a new understanding of positive youth development required new training and qualifications for staff members doing the work. The combination of these pressures, reflecting the three types of isomorphic organizational change, led to a homogenization of programs in the field of youth development, and, consequently, in the field of youth civic engagement. Despite different program content and administration, the same indicators have emerged as the measurements of success.

In this chapter, I examine youth civic engagement programs in NYC to provide an organizational analysis of this field in a large, urban setting, arguing that there is considerable evidence of organizational isomorphism and that these organizations constitute a field.

Methodology

Sample

In order to assess who were the major players in the field of youth civic engagement, I looked at what organizations were getting the most foundation and government money specifically for working with young people to engage their peers, community, or policymakers on social issues. Organizations were not excluded if they did not solely focus on youth civic engagement work, but they had to have at least one program that did youth civic engagement work, and that program's budget had to be comparable to the organizations that offered mostly youth civic engagement

programming. Specifically, organizations for the sample had to meet the following criteria:

1. Location – was not part of a larger national organization (such as a YMCA), but was New York City-based and focused.
2. Budgetary parameters – in order to be considered a "major player," the organization had to have expenses in excess of $500,000 in their 2006 fiscal year.
3. Age of youth – program participants had to be high school-aged young people.
4. Tax status – had to be classified as 501(c)(3).
5. Web presence – had to have a comprehensive Internet site in order to analyze how they presented themselves to the public.

In this case, random sampling was undesirable because I was looking for the top organizations in the field in order to uncover practices and isomorphisms that were specific to youth civic engagement work. Seven organizations met the criteria above for the sample: El Puente de Williamsburg, Global Action Project, Global Kids, TRUCE (Harlem Children's Zone), Lower Eastside Girls Club, Make the Road NY, and Youth Ministries for Peace & Justice. These organizations were all included because of their variation in how they viewed civic engagement – some engaging with policymakers and government and others engaging with their surrounding communities and looking to spark civic dialogue on a variety of issues. For the purpose of understanding the whole field of who is doing this work and how, included is one organization that meets the above criteria but is a financial outlier in that their annual budget is over $30,000,000 more than any of the other organizations (though the amount devoted to youth civic engagement is comparable to others in the sample), and one organization is a faith-based organization. The organizations represent youth civic engagement work being done in four of the five NYC boroughs (Brooklyn, Bronx, Manhattan, Queens).

Data Sources and Analyses

Data were collected from three sources: the Foundation Center, which provided the organization's 990 tax forms[2] (from which one can obtain executive salary information, revenues and expenses, and number of employees, among other things) and foundation funding information for each organization (how much money they received and for what, as well as information about each of the funders); GuideStar, which provided goals, objectives, and results for the organizations (as presented to funders); and the organizations' websites, which provided mission statements, information on programs, annual reports, staff biographies, and links to relevant media coverage.

For fiscal data, I provide a quantitative overview of what the NYC youth civic engagement field looks like in terms of organizational spending and funding. For the organizational documents, qualitative content analysis (QCA) was used to generate themes and descriptions of how these organizations interpret youth civic engagement and implement relevant programming in order to 1) describe the field, and 2) uncover similarities in practice and language across organizations in the field. Quantitative content analysis was not used because it relies on random sampling in the data collection, whereas as samples for QCA are usually purposely selected based on the research questions, and because it "pays attention to unique themes that illustrate the range of the meanings of the phenomenon rather than statistical significance" or simply providing frequencies of appearance of words (Zhang, 2006).

Texts and documents are often the basis of organizational research, and the language they use can provide valuable insights into how these organizations make

[2] The IRS Form 990 is titled "Return of Organization Exempt from Income Tax." It is submitted by tax-exempt and non-profit organizations to provide the Internal Revenue Service with annual financial information.

meaning of their work. The quantitative and qualitative datasets collected provided some directly comparable sets of information, such as that taken from the 990 tax forms and mission statements, and other related information such as descriptions of programs and evaluation strategies that, though presented differently, addressed the same structural issues and could therefore be compared as well. Coding categories for the qualitative content analysis were derived directly and inductively from the raw data. This involved "examining aspects of the structure and function of language in use" (Johnstone, 2002), with theme as the coding unit. As Minichiello et al. (1990) state, when theme is the coding unit, the researcher is looking for the expressions of an idea. Constant comparisons were made in order to highlight similarities in themes, but also to make differences apparent (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

In this chapter, I look at key components of an organization that help to define the field. These include: political stances, program descriptions, leadership, budgets and funding, and program evaluation.

Political Stances

Mission statements

Organizational language, or the vocabulary and rhetoric that an organization produces and embraces, is a primary way that it interacts with others outside of the organization, including funders. Analyzing mission statements, which express the purpose and values of organizations, can illuminate the fundamental political stance that motivates the work being done. Additionally, a nonprofit's mission often centers on public service and is the starting point for articulating the success of the organization in fulfilling its purpose, how well it provides that service. Particularly in these times of

increased demands for accountability, a mission statement serves not only to define what an organization is and what it has been set up to do, but often states these things in such a way that the organization can evaluate its success in carrying out this mission over time (Wolf, 1990). This does not mean that mission statements necessarily outline quantifiable metrics, but rather are broad enough to encompass many possible activities of the organization. This broadness, however, allows for leeway in how it discusses and conducts program and evaluation.

In the sample described above in the Methodology section, looking at whom the organizations identify as the target of their services, all seven name "youth," "children," or "young people" as their primary clients, although three of them additionally mention that they serve adults as well. Four of the seven are neighborhood-specific, identifying the geographical location within which their work is focused (Bushwick, South Bronx, Harlem, and the Lower East Side). Finally, four talk about the issue of poverty in their work: building power for New York-City's low-income and immigrant majorities, providing services for underserved communities, enhancing the quality of life for poor children, and rebuilding devastated neighborhoods. An additional organization may have coded the issue of poverty, using the words "urban youth," which is often used to describe poor young people of color in cities. None of these organizations' mission statements, however, state what they believe to be the root causes of this poverty, and steer clear of mentioning issues of race, class, or gender oppression, avoiding alienating funders by sounding too much like an activist organization.

Regarding the work being done, all of the mission statements mention education in some way, either generically just as promoting education, or specifically pinpointing

types of issues they are educating about, such as politics, or local and global concerns. Additionally six of the mission statements talk about leadership work: leadership development, promoting leadership for peace and justice, leadership training, educating and inspiring youth to become global and community leaders, preparing young people to become prophetic voices for peace and justice, and providing leadership programs. Three specifically identify a focus on media and arts, whereas only one actually uses the words "civic engagement." The use of terms such as education and leadership, while important aspects to be sure, are again non-alienating words that do not portray an activist agenda.

Three of the organizations do however embrace the language of "social justice" in their mission statements, including words and phrases such as economic justice, community and electoral organizing, human rights, and peace and justice, and one uses the more tempered language of "social change." Only two of the seven organizations identify using a youth development approach to working with young people.

The emphasis on the language of offering educational and leadership opportunities to poor, young people is consistent across the sample and is evidence of normative isomorphism. The "language" of the field will be discussed further later in this chapter.

Program Descriptions

No single approach to youth civic engagement emerges as the ideal type for doing this work, although there were two themes that recurred across them: the use and importance of the arts and media in engaging young people in civic dialogue (trying to engage and educate community and peers), and youth organizing to influence policy

specifically related to problems in a geographic neighborhood (trying to influence policymakers).

Many of the organizations used film and video to engage young people. Global Action Project (GAP) works with teenagers 1) to produce documentary videos that focus on global issues, such as the effects of war on teens in Bosnia, how Palestinian and Israeli teens can co-exist, and cross-community efforts towards peace in Northern Ireland; 2) to create fictional narratives for Manhattan Neighborhood Network (MNN, public television) on topics such as the effect that the elimination of drop-out prevention funds to NYC public high schools have had on youth leadership and tutoring programs, and coping with teen pregnancy; and 3) to create public service announcements on issues of gender, sexual health, and sex education. GAP's website says that there are three critical components to their programming: holistic youth development, political education, and media production. When describing these three components, they use phrases that embrace social justice, stating things such as wanting young people to "develop an analysis of the root causes of social injustice," and to "raise consciousness by … break[ing] down how dominant narratives impact their communities … and uncover the power dynamics at play" (Global Action Project website). Additionally, they say that their curriculum examines race, gender, migration, capitalism and Neoliberalism, and the history of community resistance to oppression.

Another program that does video work is TRUCE, The Renaissance University for Community Education. (It is the program that is part of the larger organization whose budget is a financial outlier.) Interestingly, the main organization's website only has a short description of the youth civic engagement program, stating that it does youth

development through arts and media, and fosters media literacy and artistic ability. Whereas a walk through the stairwells and program space of TRUCE would reveal signs such as a poster for the city health department that says "HIV does not have a face" and lists where to go for free HIV testing, designed by a program participant. Social justice signs adorning the walls of TRUCE include: "Speak Truth to Power," "Your silence will not protect you," "Justice for Bell, Guzman, and Benefield" (which references the NYPD's murder of Sean Bell in November 2006), "Women of color against war," "Not in our Name," "Genocide ≠ Justice," and "We are not the enemy."[3] The civic engagement programming includes youth production of a newspaper that discusses current events and community and youth issues; a video production group that creates public service announcements and short films for MNN; a theater project where students write, stage, direct, design sets and costumes for, and act in plays that have a social message (past themes included youth HIV/AIDS, family violence, and peace and respect); and a youth-led documentary video initiative that seeks to promote understanding and harmony among the African-American and West African populations in Harlem.

A third organization, Lower Eastside Girls Club, states that its programs fall into three categories that work to build "ethical, entrepreneurial, and environmental awareness and leadership." These programs include digital filmmaking and photography, civic engagement workshops, and a store where young women sell and educate about fair-trade items from around the globe. The focus of much of these programs is supporting female

[3] The avoidance of radicalism on the website may be due to the spotlight on the parent organization; because of its grand scale and success, it has garnered much media attention, and President Obama has cited it as an organization he would like to replicate in poor cities through the country ("promise neighborhoods"). It may also be due to the fact that much of its funding revenue comes from private sector multi-national financial institutions that have more conservative politics.

teenagers in exploring the social issues that surround women in NYC and around the world. "Activist" or "social justice" language is not used on the website of the organization.

A fourth sample organization, Global Kids, has programming designed to provide young people with an understanding of complex global issues – on their website listed as globalization, international and intra-national conflict, human rights, peace-building, and immigration. The programming involves having teenagers host workshops and roundtables, and creating public awareness campaigns and media projects that address these issues. One of the programs, which has the word "activist" in its title, works with young people to organize and try to influence policymakers on issues such as equal access to education for undocumented immigrant students at the City University of New York (CUNY, NYC's public university system), homelessness among NYC youth, and poverty. The organization also has a youth-led theater program where high school-aged students come together and use music, poetry, dance, and personal storytelling to examine issues of equality and social change. Finally, there are multiple programs that host on-line interactive programs for teenagers where they can host "youth-led on-line dialogues to stimulate informed, substantive discussions about social issues and current events among youth around the world" (Global Kids brochure).

A fifth organization, El Puente de Williamsburg, has multiple programs, focusing on arts and culture, and health and the environment. The arts programs focus on using media, visual art, and drama to create theme-based projects and presentations that, according to their website, "promote human rights and social action" and address "current issues relevant to the community, such as local garment sweatshops, street

violence, and environmental concerns" (El Puente website). The organization also hosts a youth theater that is used to educate about HIV/AIDS, drug and alcohol abuse, and violence. Additionally, some of their youth and adult programs interact to create public service announcements about childhood asthma, and to organize around environmental justice issues.

A sixth organization, Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice, is a faith-based organization that has a program that uses visual and performing arts as a medium for social and political transformation. This program has the word "activism" in its name and describes the philosophy underlying the program on its website:

> *Young people should have an appreciation for the artistic and cultural traditions of their forebears. When a young person is able to appreciate their ancestors' histories, specifically the ways in which their ancestors resisted colonization and oppression, often through artistic mediums, they will gain a greater appreciation of their origins, their heritage, and the arts. (YMPJ website)*

This program seeks to get youth "acquainted with the concepts of oppression, justice, peace and violence, and worldwide struggles for freedom," and then develop their own work with a strong personal and political identity. Another program, which has the words "community organizing" in its name, offers training for young people to become community organizers. Past organizing campaigns have been around issues of environmental justice, police reform, and youth employment. In this program young people identify neighborhood-specific issues (e.g., anti-crime, anti-military organizing) and engage stakeholders in addressing those issues.

Finally, the seventh organization, Make the Road NY, offers arts and media programs that address problems in its geographic-specific community, such as police misconduct, gentrification, access to higher education for undocumented students, and

high school reform. These programs include a youth-run newspaper and youth theater productions. Additionally, the young people work on strategic policy campaigns alongside of adult members of the organization. The organization's website does not shy away from social justice language, using phrases such as "building a new level of political power," "promoting justice," and "political organizing." Additionally, Make the Road NY heads up a NYC-based youth civic engagement collaborative called the Urban Youth Collaborative (UYC), comprised of five core youth civic engagement organizations in NYC (Make the Road NY and four smaller organizations[4]). The UYC's mission is to bring NYC youth together to fight for change through local and citywide organizing strategies, making sure youth voices are heard. Their campaigns focus on school issues such as quality, equity, and safety, and they work together because all of the organizations involved believed they have more power to fight for change if they work together.[5]

The most common theme of these organizations is that they have youth civic engagement programming that uses arts and media to create community education campaigns, but many also have an international focus, connecting the young people and their experiences to those of young people around the world. Additionally, nearly all of the programs also have an academic component that includes time for homework help, Regents and SAT exam tutoring, and college preparation. The programs are either for a set time of no less than a year, or are open to young people for their full time in high school. They all involve a focus on youth development (with many adding the word

[4] These other four organizations are not included in the sample because they did not meet inclusion criteria; specifically, their budgets were too small.
[5] The collaborative itself is not a major force of organizational isomorphism, except that it brings groups together to work on the same policy or community issue, reinforcing program isomorphism that has already occurred.

“holistic” beforehand), as well as leadership skills training whereby the youth are given responsibility for running parts of the various programs and making important decisions about program content. Three of the organizations rely on membership of both adults and youth in the administration of and decision-making in the organizations themselves, and, though they deliver services to the community, are not seen as strictly service-delivery organizations but rather have a member-driven, collective component. Three of the organizations discuss the importance of Paulo Freire’s philosophy of popular education to their work. Finally, three of the organizations run their own high schools, and three others offer programming in local high schools.

The similarities in program content – arts and media with a focus on global awareness – are again evidence of institutional isomorphism, both mimetic and normative. Organizations have seen what has been successful in the past with other organizations – involving young people in arts programming as a way to keep them engaged after-school and away from anti-social and violent activities – and have mimicked those strategies for achieving other pro-social ends (i.e., civic engagement), resulting in mimetic isomorphism. Normative isomorphism is seen in that the leaders in these organizations are defining the conditions of the field: they have chosen arts and media programming. As some leaders have indicated, the rationale for arts and media programming is threefold. First, because young people spend a significant amount of time in the presence of media, they need to have an education that prepares them to deal critically with media messages due to its strong influence on adolescent decision-making and value formation. Secondly, there is general consensus on the effectiveness of arts-based civic dialogue, in terms of youth wanting to use arts and media to engage their

peers and community in an exploration of identity and politics, but also to be used as a tool in their own identity negotiation, self-representation and their own coming to voice. Thirdly, arts and media serve as a "hook" for appealing to young people: youth are still teenagers and want to have fun, and this type of programming helps draws them to the organization.[6] While any individual organization's own motivation for program design might differ from the others, the resulting programming is the same, with the only main difference being geographic location or community being served.

Language of the Field

Looking at the sample's programming, however, illustrates another interesting point: these organizations seem to have an external and an internal language.[7] Externally – particularly to funders as shown in their mission statements and annual reports – there is discussion of education and leadership, youth development, opportunities for poor children in urban areas, global education. This "professional" language serves external purposes. Internally – to staff and participants – the language is a bit more politicized with the language of human rights, activist slogans, and anti-capitalist, anti-gentrification, and anti-war program content. This internal language serves to organize young people around social justice issues. These external and internal languages are consistent across most of the sample organizations (only one doesn't have this type of internal language), and are more examples of normative isomorphism.

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[6] This last rationale may itself have two rationales: keeping programming fun, but also helping programs meet their enrollment numbers by recruiting youth who would not have chosen to engage in a "civic engagement" program but want to participate in an arts program.

[7] External language was assessed by looking at mission statements and annual reports; internal language was assessed by observations of programming through site visits.

Leadership

The types of people directing these organizations varies, from a former member of the Young Lord's Puerto Rican nationalist group, to two PhDs, to someone U.S. News and World Report named one of America's Best Leaders. In general, the leadership of these organizations falls into two categories: managers and community organizers. Four of the organizations have leaders that would be classified as managers, three as community organizers.

Of the organizations led by community organizers, all three are focused on specific neighborhoods in Brooklyn or the Bronx, and two have leaders who have deep roots in those neighborhoods stemming from their childhood or early adulthood. The top three staff members of one of these organizations (Chief Executive Officer, Executive Director, and Chief Operating Officer) have a history of decades of organizing work in the (geographic and ethnic) community their organization serves. Two are male, one is female. Another organization led by a female community organizer who grew up in a public housing project in the neighborhood her organization serves. The third organization is led by a community organizer who did not grow up in the neighborhood her organization serves, but she started providing free legal services to the community there while she was attending law school and eventually co-founded the community organization she has been leading for over a decade.

Of the four organizations that are led by those who could be classified as "managers," three are female, two have PhDs, and two have Masters Degree in Education from Harvard. A male who grew up in a similar socioeconomic neighborhood and who has been working in the geographic and demographic community for over thirty years

leads the one organization in this group that works in a specific NYC geographic neighborhood.

The similarities in the leadership of these organizations is more evidence of normative isomorphism, as DiMaggio and Powell defined it. When managers and key staff of different organizations have very similar educational and professional backgrounds (as is the case with the leaders of the sample), they will tend to view problems in a similar fashion, and devise solutions in similar fashions. The leaders of these organizations are highly educated, having advanced degrees (some from the same school), with personal and historical attachments to the communities they serve. Those who take a more managerial approach run their organizations very similarly, as do those who are community organizers. Their similar educational and personal backgrounds beget similar organizational models and consequently, normative isomorphism has occurred.

Budgets

Tax forms were obtained for six of the seven organizations; the one faith-based organization did not release its tax information. These organizations ranged in their funding sources, with government support ranging from 0% to 80.5%, with an average of 22.6% of an organization's funding coming from a government source. When receiving government funding, it was mostly from a local NYC agency (Department of Youth and Community Development). The median total revenue for the 2006 fiscal year was $2,529,266, and the median total expenses was $2,139,128.[8] The percent of expenses that went to program-related items ranged from 69.8% to 88.3%, with an average of

[8] Because of the outlier organization whose total revenue was over $41,000,000 in FY 2006, medians are reported instead of means.

81.3%. The percent of expenses that fell under the category of management and general operations ranged from 3.2% to 17.8%, with an average of 11.7%. The organization with the lowest management and general cost was the organization that spent the highest percentage of their budget on programming. Finally, the percent of expenses that went to fundraising ranged from 2.6% to 15.0%, with an average of 7.0%.

In terms of staffing and salaries, the median salary of the executive director or president of the organization was $74,862, and number of employees ranged from 12 to 792, though the large organization's program that was devoted to youth civic engagement had only 21 of its 792 employees. When using the 21 instead of 792 for that organization, the number of employees ranged from 12 to 75, with an average of 30 employees per organization, and an average of 4 employees per organization had a salary of over $50,000.

Funding from Foundations

This section shifts discussion away from the sample organizations to the private foundations that fund them. After a brief overview of funding in the field, I discuss nine of the top private foundations who fund youth civic engagement programming in NYC.

With an average of only 22.6% of the sample's funding coming from government agencies, all the organizations look to private foundations for money. Between 2003 and 2009,[9] 257 foundations provided funding to the seven organizations in the sample, ranging from one-time $1,000 grants to multi-year million-dollar grants. The median amount of grant money received from a foundation was $25,000. Two of these 257 foundations gave money to six of the organizations in the sample during this time frame,

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[9] A range of years was chosen because funders often give multi-year grants that are divided up over multiple years, and I wanted to include the whole amount of those grants.

eight gave to four of the sample organizations, eight gave to three, and 21 gave to two. The remaining 239 organizations gave to only one organization in the sample. Table 1.1 summarizes the amount of money given to the sample by the 18 foundations that funded three or more of the sample organizations. Interestingly, all of these foundations are based in New York State.

Table 1.1 – Foundations Funding Three or More of Organizations in Sample

Foundation Name	**# of Organizations from Sample Donated To**	**Total Amount of Donations (in US$)**
The New York Community Trust	6	$1,688,100
Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Inc.	6	$902,500
Surdna Foundation, Inc.	4	$1,623,000
Charles Hayden Foundation	4	$1,280,600
Booth Ferris Foundation	4	$830,000
Open Society Institute	4	$526,350
The Overbrook Foundation	4	$360,000
The Cricket Island Foundation	4	$355,000
Theodore Luce Charitable Trust	4	$286,000
JP Morgan Chase Foundation	4	$158,000
The Starr Foundation	3	$29,460,000
The Lehman Brothers Foundation	3	$9,060,000
New York Foundation	3	$529,200
Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation	3	$221,625
Carnegie Corporation of New York	3	$215,000
The Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation, Inc.	3	$163,500
Brooklyn Community Foundation	3	$160,000
The New York Women's Foundation, Inc.	3	$95,000
TOTAL		**$47,913,875**

These 18 organizations were examined more closely because donating to at least 3 of the 7 sample organizations demonstrates a commitment to funding youth civic engagement work in New York City. The median amount of giving by the organizations listed above to the seven sample organizations was $443,175. Most of the websites for these organizations emphasize commitment to service delivery as well as providing funds to organizations for capacity building to monitor outcomes. Below describes the nine

organizations that donated more than the median amount to more than two of the sample organizations, and the amount of money they donated between 2003 and 2007 to organizations doing youth civic engagement work, which fell under categories of education, youth development, community development, and civil/human rights work.

Open Society Institute

The Open Society Institute (OSI), an operating foundation established in 1993 by international political activist George Soros, seeks to shape public policy to promote democratic governance, human rights, and economic, legal, and social reform. It has a specific program that focuses on young people called the Youth Initiative, whose mission is "to empower youth to become active citizens who are willing and able to influence public life and promote open society ideals" (Open Society Institute website). This initiative has three grant components that fund programs all over the globe: Youth Action Fund, which is for youth-driven initiatives that are trying to mobilize and influence large numbers of their peers to promote open society ideals; Debate Program, which encourages youth to engage in critical, reasoned discussion about issues important to their lives and communities, and to call for positive change around the world; and Youth Citizen Journalism, which sponsors programs where teens ages 14-18 learn how to use photography to tell stories about their lives and communities. Between 2003 and 2007, OSI gave $55,716,084 for civil/human rights work, $33,470,307 for education, $12,621,823 for community development, and $7,717,133 for youth development work. OSI is a member of the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing, as well as the Funders' Committee for Civic Participation.

New York Foundation

New York Foundation is an independent foundation that incorporated in NY in 1909. Its giving is limited to local programs in the five boroughs of NYC. According to its mission statement, it supports groups that are working on problems of urgent concern to residents of disadvantaged communities and neighborhoods, and it has a strong interest in community organizing and advocacy. The foundation's website displays pictures of people holding placards with slogans such as "Hold the U.S. Accountable for Human Rights Violations," and "No Human is Illegal." The website links to other foundations, including four listed in Table 2.1, as well as organizations that would be considered "activist," such as The Brecht Forum, an activist center that includes The New York Marxist School. Not afraid of embracing the language of social justice, it is a member of the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing, and funds programs whose fields include civil/human rights and youth development. One of its grant programs goes to organizations that provide internships in community organizing for young people ages 16 to 23. Between 2003 and 2007, it gave grants totaling $4,115,724 to do human/civil rights work, $3,584,296 for community development work, $1,500,815 for youth development work, and $854,500 for education work. It shares one staff member with The Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation, Inc., a foundation that has given money to three of the sample organization programs.

Booth Ferris Foundation

The Booth Ferris Foundation is an independent foundation established in 1957 that gives money to NYC organizations that focus on the arts, K-12 education, and civic and urban affairs. The foundation is administered by J.P. Morgan Private Bank as sole

trustee. Between 2003 and 2007, it gave $13,922,000 for education work, $3,887,500 for community development work, $865,000 for youth development work, and $725,000 for civil/human rights work. Its website is hosted by The Foundation Center, and only provides basic background and application information.

Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Inc.

The Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Inc. is an independent foundation incorporated in 1940 whose mission is to build a more just, sustainable, and peaceful world. With its domestic work focusing primarily in NY, it funds programs that make an effort to expand knowledge, clarify values and critical choices, nurture creative expression and leadership development, and shape public policy. It gives grants related to democratic practice, with the purpose:

> *To empower individuals and encourage civil society organizations … to advance constructive social change through participation in democratic decision making and social movements; … and to improve democratic practice in global governance by expanding participation and effective representation in the political and policymaking processes of globalization. (Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Inc. 990 tax form, 2006)*

A member of the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing, the Funders' Committee for Civic Participation and Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund gave $4,997,500 for community development work between 2003 and 2007, $4,886,745 for education, $1,786,000 for civil/human rights work, and $1,620,000 for youth development. While its website uses "social justice" language, it does not have radical political slogans or pictures anywhere on its site.

The Charles Hayden Foundation

Founded in 1937, the Charles Hayden Foundation is an independent foundation whose mission is to promote the mental, moral and physical development of children and

youth ages five to eighteen in the metropolitan area of New York and the City of Boston. This includes programs that 1) seek to expand community-based programs offering needy youth educational, social, recreational, and career opportunities, particularly in the after-school hours; 2) improve student achievement by strengthening kindergarten to grade 12 in charter schools, independent, and parochial education targeting needy students; and 3) strengthen informal educational enrichment programs offered outside of schools. Between 2003 and 2007, the Hayden Foundation gave $24,995,781 for education work, $11,907,299 for youth development, and $909,800 for community development. Its website emphasizes support for programs that help disadvantaged school-aged youth.

Surdna Foundation, Inc.

The Surdna Foundation, Inc. is an independent foundation that was founded in 1917. Giving primarily to organizations in New York, California, and Washington, D.C., its mission is to foster just and sustainable communities in the United States guided by principles of social justice and distinguished by healthy environments, strong local communities, and thriving cultures. Surdna is a member of the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing and the Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement, and between 2003 and 2007, donated $23,735,300 for community development work, $15,949,940 for youth development, $5,201,580 for education, and $2,001,200 for civil/human rights work. Its "Effective Citizenry" program focuses on civic engagement, specifically: youth organizing, youth media, and youth governance/advocacy.

The New York Community Trust

Established in 1924, The New York Community Trust is a community foundation whose priority is giving to organizations doing work the New York City area. Their

major program areas of interest are Children, Youth, and Families (including youth development); Community Development and the Environment (including civic learning opportunities for youth); and Education, Arts, and the Humanities. Between 2003 and 2007, the Trust gave $159,112,346 for education work, $15,988,043 for community development work, $14,966,936 for civil/ human rights work, and $10,171,108 to organizations doing youth development.

The Lehman Brothers Foundation

The Lehman Brothers Foundation is a company-sponsored foundation established in 2000 whose current status is in question due to the bankruptcy of its parent company, Lehman Brothers, and the company's acquisition by Barclays. However, between 2003 and 2007, it provided funding for organizations involved with arts and culture, health, and youth development: $10,565,000 for education programs, $731,000 for youth development, and $100,000 for community development.

The Starr Foundation

The Starr Foundation is an independent foundation incorporated in 1955 whose domestic funding focus is on NYC-based programs and organizations. The foundation makes grants in a number of areas, including education, medicine and health care, human needs, public policy, culture, and the environment. Between 2003 and 2007, it gave $213,183,950 for education, $30,421,000 for community development, $12,498,000 for youth development work, and $350,000 for civil/human rights work. The Starr Foundation's website is very basic and does not include any social justice language.

Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing

The Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing (FCYO) formed in 2000 as a collective of national, regional, and local grantmakers and youth organizing practitioners dedicated to advancing youth organizing as a strategy for youth development and social justice. Its mission is "to substantially increase the philanthropic investment in and strengthen the organizational capacities of youth organizing groups across the country" (FCYO website). Included in FCYO are four of the nine foundations discussed above, an additional two funders (The Cricket Island Foundation and The Overbrook Foundation) from Table 2.1 and the executive director of one of the sample organizations (Youth Ministries for Peace & Justice). The group's website describes their reason for the collaboration:

> *Youth, especially those growing up in poor communities, are often simplistically perceived as recipients of services at best or as threatening, social delinquents at worst. Neither common perception does justice to the critical need for communities to engage youth as essential members, nor the inherent capacity of all youth to be active, contributing partners in their individual and community development. (FCYO website)*

The FCYO is an important player in the youth civic engagement work being done in NYC. Since its inception, it has – separately from the foundations that comprise it – given money to 12 NYC-based non-profit organizations doing youth organizing work. Though most of these grants were to groups with smaller budgets, one was to an organization in the current study.

The collaborative is also a vehicle for isomorphism among organizations doing youth civic engagement work: the website includes a "Tools and Resources" section that includes an occasional paper series aiming to capture and document growing knowledge around youth organizing, addressing key issues and questions commonly posed by

funders and practitioners about the work and field overall. This reinforces specific methods of civic engagement work as ones funders support, and directs programs to current funding opportunities in the field. The FCYO also serves to help define what the field of youth civic engagement covers, creating a specific "youth civic engagement program" product with an agreed upon definition and purpose.

Isomorphism Among Foundations

Similar to the organizational isomorphism seen among the programs, the private foundations funding youth civic engagement programming in NYC have experienced isomorphism as well. These foundations are funding similar types of programs (youth civic engagement that relate to education, youth development, human/civil rights, and community development) and focusing their work in the same geographic area (New York State), working together to create norms for the field, sharing staff, and meeting with each other to share knowledge through the FCYO, and hence, normative isomorphism has occurred. Simultaneously, the organizations that are doing the work with young people are experiencing coercive isomorphism: the funders on whom they are dependent are helping to define what the work actually looks like.

Evaluation

How an organization frames its programming can determine its funding. Additionally, funders are interested in measures of success. Therefore, program evaluation is a necessary part of any youth program. In seeking to determine best practice in the emerging field of youth development, it is important to recognize that the cultural and social milieu of teenagers is constantly changing, so it is necessary to design programs that are equally dynamic, responding to the needs and interests of its

participants while not losing sight of the goals of the program. Program evaluation is a means of obtaining continuous feedback so that you can constantly adjust your program to be most effective, but it is also a way to determine how the program has affected the young people themselves. In addition to helping organizations gain a better understanding of where their programs' strengths and weaknesses lie, participant-level data can be useful in positioning the program to funders because it shows a documented commitment to trying to improve programming, as well as being able to report on past successes. Finally, it is also important to get feedback from key stakeholders to see how they respond to the work the youth are doing to influence policy.

Therefore, evaluation of youth civic engagement programs should, ideally, cover individual-level data on program participants – change in knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, skills, civic engagement, and youth development – as well as gauging effectiveness of the young people in their work. Did they influence policymakers? Did they increase knowledge or change attitudes of their peers? Did they generate a dialogue on community issues?

On their websites and in their grant requirements, many funders emphasize the need for "well-defined goals" and "expected outcomes and criteria for evaluation." As one funder describes, measuring effectiveness is essential in order to establish benchmarks for continuous improvement, to communicate the value of the work, and to provide information about performance as a way of being accountable to the public. With the need to report on outcomes, what indicators are youth civic engagement programs using to evaluate their work? In examining the websites and annual reports of the sample organizations, three themes emerge as the areas of focus for evaluation: 1)

process goals, 2) outputs, and 3) individual-level measures of academic achievement and positive youth development outcomes. Below I shift back to discussing the original seven sample organizations and their evaluation foci.

Process Goals

Most of the sample organizations report on the process goals related to program implementation and expansion. This is spoken about broadly, such as one organization saying it wants to "develop a rich range of programs" over the course of the next year, and more specifically, "add a third class to our high school program." Another organization states that its goal for the following year is to sustain and expand media-arts programs to include more advanced opportunities for youth. Two other organizations say their goals for the next year are to build relationships and collaborate with other organizations. A fifth organization states that it wants to "broaden the range of opportunities available" for young people. Some of the organizations mention implementing a new system to track participant growth. Establishing process goals as the majority of the organizations' goals reflects two realities: 1) the field of youth civic engagement is in its early stages of development, since organizations are still trying to find best practices and reach organizational capacity, hence the focus on process; and 2) general statements on process outcomes almost ensures being able to report on success, since goals such as "building relationships" and "expanding opportunities" are so vague they can encompass even the smallest amount of movement.

Outputs

Outcomes are levels of performance or achievement, whereas outputs are quantifications of a program's activities. Outcomes are changes resulting from the

outputs and are more difficult to attain and measure. The organizations in the sample all report more on outputs than outcomes in their discussion of evaluation: what they do and whom they reach. One organization reports on the number of program participants going on a college visit, the number of seniors applying to college, and the number served. Another reports on how many individuals attended a training they ran, how many adults attended a panel they hosted with youth media practitioners, and how many film screenings they held. A third organization reports on the number of teenagers who came in for college application assistance or tutoring, while a fourth reports on the percent of its seniors who graduated from high school.

This focus on processes and how many people an organization serves, results in a description and counting of activities and people. Interestingly, though the organizations are primarily engaging youth around policy advocacy and community education campaigns, much of what they report on is related to education: the number of participants graduating high school, and visiting and applying to colleges. Perhaps this is more because, as seen above in the funding section, much money is being given in the field of education, and doing mostly youth civic engagement work but being able to report on academic outcomes makes them eligible for a larger pool of money from foundations.

While outputs report on counts of people and activities, outcomes focus on the difference that this work makes. Do the outputs *change or lead to* anything?

Individual-level Outcomes

Some of the organizations don't speak about impact, treating the process outcomes and outputs as ends in and of themselves. This may be an indication of the

youth civic engagement field being young, but may also be an indicator that neither funders nor the youth civic engagement organizations really know what the appropriate measures are.

Those programs that do discuss impact report on individual-level outcomes of academic achievement and youth development, oftentimes using anecdotal narratives of "success stories": a qualitative description of one or two program participants who, because of their participation in the program, have overcome challenges to, for example, graduate from college or have become an intern for a local politician. Another organization focuses on improvement in personal and leadership skills and behaviors (more self-confidence, motivation, and participation in class and after-school activities; expanded educational and career goals), as measured by a pre-post survey. Another organization, in its annual report, presents the findings from an outside evaluation done of its organization, with the results indicating members had an improved sense of responsibility and self-esteem, and were communicating more clearly and "appreciating their opportunities." Finally, one organization reports on individual-level outcomes related to academic achievement and involvement: what percent of program participants have a school attendance rate greater than the city average for high school students, what percent passed Regents exams, and what percent passed at least 75% of their classes.

The indicators of success and the evaluation of these programs are essentially the same across the sample. This is an example of coercive isomorphism. In their grant requirements, all funders require applicants to have specific indicators of success and a plan for measuring them. Because of the intangibility and broadness of the idea of civic engagement, the sample organizations are reporting on the same types of outcomes:

process (e.g., expand more programs); outputs (e.g., serve more people); and individual-level outcomes, usually related to academics. The organizations are reporting this because they are required to do so by other organizations on which their continued existence depends: their funders. Because their funding sources are extremely similar, so are their evaluation indicators.

Conclusion

The organizations in the sample have experienced all three isomorphisms that DiMaggio and Powell (1983) discussed. The relationship between the organizations themselves and their interactions with funders have helped solidify a youth civic engagement field in NYC, whereby much of their practice looks similar, with a focus on education and leadership goals, connecting young people to civic engagement work through arts and media programs. This is an example of mimetic isomorphism, whereby the organizations are mimicking and implementing strategies that other youth organizations have found to be successful in the past. It also has stemmed from coercive isomorphism, whereby resource dependence has led to each of the sample organizations adapting its programming to include education-related programming (such as tutoring) so it can apply for funding that is marked for education purposes, one of the areas foundations give the most money to.

The leaders of these organizations are well educated; they share similar educational and professional backgrounds, and therefore develop programs and interventions in a similar fashion, using the same language as well. The internal and external languages that these organizations share are further examples of normative isomorphism.

Because their funding comes from many of the same sources, and the funders themselves are interacting through collaboratives or shared employees, the organizations are reporting on very similar outputs and outcomes as organizations and funders work together to solidify what the field actually looks like. This is another example of coercive isomorphism. Finally, ambiguous goals have led to mimetic isomorphism. The youth civic engagement discipline in NYC has become its own field, with the youth organizations doing civic engagement work becoming homogenized.

As with much civic engagement and activism, the ultimate goal is an increase in democratic participation: a greater voice for those not in power, more representation in decision-making (either direct or indirect) and dialogue, and an influence on policy. That this engagement and activism is done with young people makes the goals no different. Possibly due to the recent emergence of the field of after-school youth civic engagement programming, the organizations doing youth civic engagement work are not currently focusing on the effectiveness of the engagement of young people on a more macro level: what impact is it having on apparatuses of democracy? In the next chapter, I discuss the goal displacement of the field and what organizations can focus on in their work that will bring back to the discussion the goal of increasing the voice and representation of youth.

CHAPTER 2: Pushing Back on Goal Displacement: Strategies for Increasing the Voice of Youth

If the policies and programs don't work for young people, then we're doing the wrong thing. - Bill Chong, Deputy Commissioner, NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (interview, 2/8/08)

Introduction

In the field of youth civic engagement, there is often a disconnect between theory and practice. Efforts to engage teenagers typically begin with the ambitious intention to mobilize the youth perspective and transform it into concrete recommendations that exert a real influence on future policy and practice. However, advocacy work done by young people is complex, and policy success is often difficult to attain, and just as difficult to measure. Youth civic engagement programs, therefore, generally end up focusing on the impact of participation on the individual youths themselves – their knowledge of a particular issue, self-esteem, communication skills, and perceptions of self-efficacy – as opposed to measuring the success of a particular campaign to effect a policy change.

This chapter describes findings from a study that sought to understand how young people can not only change themselves but change the lives of others by becoming important players in the policymaking process. The study adopted a two-pronged approach focusing respectively on the supply (the availability of) and demand (the desire) for youth input. On the supply side, I examined several New York City programs that work to increase the voice of inner city youth in order to determine what have previously been the most effective strategies. On the demand side, I sought to understand what policymakers want to know from youth, and what they look for when evaluating recommendations and policy ideas formulated by young people. By understanding what policymakers want to know, youth can become more tactically effective, combining their

unique insights with an approach that will truly resonate with their target audiences. Finally, by showing instances of youth as resources and assets to a community, as opposed to "problems in society," as they are often seen, the study seeks to help policymakers to recognize young people as competent citizens able to participate directly in the work of democracy.

This chapter begins by summarizing some of the key literature related to youth civic engagement and advocacy as it relates to increasing voice and representation, then follows with a discussion of the sociological literature related to organizational goal setting and displacement. I then describe the project methodology and key findings related to youth advocacy and programming, concluding with a discussion of implications for youth civic engagement programs.

Literature Review

Youth Civic Engagement

After-school civic engagement programs have been developed in response to low levels of civic, community and political participation among today's youth (Putnam 1996, 2000), and particularly among poor and minority youth (Jankowski 1992, 2002). These programs have also been driven by young people's desire to challenge the view that they are "future citizens" and not "present civic actors," as well as youth organizers' desire to challenge this view as well. Adolescents have few channels for political participation (they are not old enough to vote), and they have been traditionally marginalized in the policymaking process. In the United States, public policy has often tended to pathologize and blame urban youth for social problems (Garabarino, 1995). This pathologizing generates a sense of fear about urban youth (Brooks-Gunn et al.,

1997), hindering efforts to recognize theirs as a valid voice in working to solve the real problems that exist. Furthermore, mass media and policymakers have emphasized the deficiencies and disengagement of young people, thereby restricting their ability to be active participants in the policymaking process (Checkoway et al, 2005). As Dick Hebdige (1988) notes, "youth is present only when its presence is a problem, or is regarded as a problem." How do young people push back on a society that deems them as problems and denies them a voice in meaningful decision-making around policy issues that directly affect them?

As Camino and Zeldin (2002) as well as Flanagan and Faison (2001) have shown, there are few contemporary policy structures to support youth in community governance. Most often adults are making decisions about and for young people, with the young people themselves having little opportunity for participation or input. The formal institutions of public life "either ignore young adults and the issues that matter to them or are ill equipped to attract young adults and provide them with meaningful opportunities to participate" (Delli Carpini, 2000).

There are, however, three main theoretical rationales for involving youth in public policy decisions: 1) ensuring social justice and youth representation, 2) building civil society, and 3) promoting youth development (Zeldin, Camino, & Calvert, 2003). The Social Justice Youth Development model encompasses all three of these rationales, and youth after-school programs can support youth in their desire to participate in local democratic decision-making venues.

Social Justice Youth Development

There is a growing movement of groups who embrace a social justice youth development model to working with young people. Such a model encourages youth to challenge and respond to the injustices they face: to become assets to their communities *and* agents of social change. The social justice youth development model (SJYD) extends positive youth development work to include a critique of power, promoting systemic social change and encouraging collective action (Ginwright & James, 2002). Through analyzing power and how it is organized in society, students begin to understand how the abuse of power has led to institutional inequality that reproduces social stratification (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970). Asking questions such as "who has the power to influence the quality of our education system?" allows for the development of critical thinking skills and the revelation of the root causes of social problems. By promoting systemic change, students are supported in strategizing, researching, and acting to change public policy.

SJYD programs focus on issues young people identify as crucial to their own lives, and youth program participants are encouraged both to research how power shapes these issues and to respond to those powers. Steeped in the teachings of Paolo Freire, SJYD programs believe that critical reflection without action is what Freire calls "verbalism," or mere ideology, while action not grounded in critical reflection/perception is "activism," or wasted effort (Freire, 1970). For Freire, reflection and action must be in dialogue with each other, and this learning process is called praxis.

While research has been done on SJYD in terms of explicating the theoretical models behind it and what the practice looks like (see Ginwright & James, 2002;

Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammarota, 2006), there is limited literature as to how effective high school-aged students have been in their advocacy and what successful strategies look like (see Cammarota & Fine, 2008). Evaluation of these programs has been shaped by funders' desires to know the impact of program involvement on the individual participants, using quantitative measures of youth development such as involvement in risky behaviors, academic performance, and positive use of free time. In short, the measured outcomes of the work are evaluated at the individual psychological level. Mesolevel and macrolevel outcomes (Watts & Guessous, 2006), such as perceptions of collective efficacy, empowerment, and civic engagement, not to mention actual results in terms of social policy change, are often ignored in the formal evaluation process, not necessarily due to lack of interest but often due to a lack of capacity to undertake this work.

Empirical Studies

One study that has tried to address this gap in the literature related to effectiveness of strategies is Kirshner and Geil (2006), where the authors examined access points, defined as "organized encounters between young people and adult policymakers in which young people share their views on policy issues." They found that youth's rhetorical performance in the access points influenced how their message was received. Youth who appeared comfortable speaking in a public environment (looked up, made eye contact while speaking, did not stumble over words) were received better than those who read off a script, did not make eye contact, and mispronounced words. Youth were most persuasive when they departed from scripts and responded flexibly to the situation, having the ability to use three rhetorical moves: 1) acknowledging policymakers'

comments, 2) introducing new points in response, and 3) framing the issue in terms of a moral one on which both youth and adults could agree. Their study, however, was limited because it was based solely on observations but did not include post-encounter interview data from either the youth participants or the adult policymakers. Hence, the study constituted an empirical, observation-based analysis of youth-policymaker interactions but did not ultimately reveal whether those interactions had concrete policy effects.

In their article "Sociopolitical Development: The Missing Link in Research and Policy on Adolescents," Watts and Guessos (2006) describe the need for young people to feel a sense of agency in their work, and perceived success or "wins" in youth-led campaigns contribute to that sense of agency. This makes it important for youth programs doing policy advocacy to clearly lay out realistic goals for the campaign, and focus on achieving them, in addition to the individual-level indicators of success that programs measure for funders. Part of this includes providing participants with a range of possible roles that confer real power, with a balance between freedom and structure. But they draw a distinction between leadership skills and agency. While youth development programs may provide leadership opportunities for teenagers, this is not synonymous with agency, where the youth have real impact on policy and therefore feel that they have the ability to effect social change.

Organizational Goal Setting and Displacement

For as long as organizations have existed, so has the problem of organizational purpose. As Warriner (1965) discussed, the problems with purpose are identified by three questions: 1) What is organizational purpose?, 2) What data identify purpose?, and

3) What is the relationship of purpose to other organizational features and variables? As shown in Chapter 1, organizations have different statements of purpose, which include mission statements and goals, for different audiences: funders, staff, clients, etc., and, according to Warriner (1965), these different statements are fictions used to rationalize or account for an organization's existence to these different groups; they are not valid and reliable indicators of purpose. When looking at data that identify purpose, oftentimes what is measured are not real demonstrable consequences of activities serving purpose, but rather assumptions are made concerning the consequences of particular activities, and activities are reported on along with the assumptions made about what those activities mean. The incidental consequences of the work are identified as success, but that was not the underlying purpose. For organizations seeking to increase youth voice in policymaking, this translates to them reporting on young people demonstrating such things as greater self-esteem and having given public presentations, with no mention of the impact the youth have had on policy.

Why does an organization's indicators of success, then, differ from its purported mission? Thompson and McEwan (1958) put forth that organizations are interdependent on other organizations in larger society and this has consequences for organizational goal setting. As discussed in the previous chapter, funders have played an important role in shaping the field of youth civic engagement. Therefore, environmental factors (e.g., funders) exercise a significant amount of control over organizations in the field – organizations that are financially dependent on them. In order to gain continued support, organizations have to produce something useful to the funders, and hence adopt goals that

respond to the funding environment. Thompson and McEwan (1958) suggest that goals appear to grow out of this interaction between organizations and larger society.

Robert Merton (1957), in *Social Theory and Social Structure*, discussed the tendency for some organizations to focus on work that contributes very little to the attainment of their goals. He called this goal displacement, where goals are neglected in favor of goals associated with building or maintaining the organization. This happens most often when programming is focused on abstract ideas and intangible goals, much like youth civic engagement programming. When this happens, more concrete substitutes are developed, and Selznick (1957) noted that what often happens is a means-ends inversion, whereby the means become ends in and of themselves. This reflects what was discussed in the previous chapter, whereby organizations were reporting on outputs (means) rather than outcomes (ends). Intangible goals are often created because they facilitate flexibility in interpretation of goals (Wilson, 1966), and the difficulty in evaluating them makes it possible to accept the assumption that the organization is effective in its work. Similarly, as Lipsky (1980) pointed out in *Street-level Bureaucracy*, organizations face several pressures, including the problem of limited resources, and the continuous negotiation that is necessary in order to make it seem like one is meeting targets. Additionally, goal displacement occurs in order to promote organizational survival and growth (i.e., to please funders and secure more funding by proving past success): organizations create more tangible goals that are more familiar and less risky (e.g., youth civic engagement programs reporting on academic goals), things that are easier to evaluate in simple, quantifiable terms. Organizations want favorable evaluation results because of the sanctions (i.e., in the form of decreased funding) that

can accompany lack of demonstrated success. This evaluation and sanction system reinforces goal displacement. Bureaucratization occurs from this displacement because it increases capacity for organizational maintenance and program growth rather than proving goal attainment (Merton, 1957; Messinger, 1955; Selznick, 1957). As discussed in the previous chapter, bureaucratization leads to homogeneity among organizations competing for resources. This is also why we see youth civic engagement programs reporting on the same types of indicators of success.

In short, there is rich literature on the need for youth civic engagement programs, on the need for spaces where youth are supported in challenging or shaping public policy, and on the theoretical models of social justice youth development that underlie these programs. Yet, there is scant research on what success looks like in the actual practice of youth working to influence policy, because organizations have displaced policy goals in favor of more measurable process and youth development goals. What follows is an attempt to unite theory and practice in order to inform and improve advocacy by young people and by the youth programs that support such work, shifting the work of youth civic engagement organizations back to their original organizational purposes and making those goals more attainable and measurable.

Methodology

Sample

This chapter studied youth organizations in New York City (NYC) that have programs focusing on youth advocacy. Seven program coordinators and directors from five NYC youth programs that work with high-school aged students were interviewed. These interviewees and their organizations/programs were: Oona Chatterjee from Make

the Road NY, Molly Delano from Global Kids/Human Rights Activist Project, Laura Shmishkiss and Marisa Suesun from Coro Leadership NY, Remi Holden from Citizen's Committee for Children, and Dory Hack and Linda Baird from Center for Court Innovation/Youth Justice Board. Their programs were identified using a purposive, non-random sample design. The sample was purposive in that organizations with a focus on youth-led policy change that work under a youth social justice framework were targeted for participation. A sample of this nature was valuable for this project for two reasons. First, youth organizations that had some level of commitment to social change were more likely to understand the language and field of youth-led advocacy, helping to facilitate the flow and inclusion of accurate information. Second, the "buy-in" of these organizations with the project's goals made them more likely to participate, take interest in, and potentially use and implement the study's findings and recommendations. These programs varied in terms of their methods of advocacy and policy issues, with some focused on more formal research and presentations, others focused on direct action and organizing, and another focused on arts and education campaigns.

In addition, eight policymakers were interviewed to understand, from their perspective, how youth could be effective. These included two New York City Council members (Rosie Mendez and Daniel Garodnick), three policymakers from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) (Nancy Martinez, Diana Fenton, and Linda Brown), two from the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) (Bill Chong and Susan Haskell), and one from the NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS) (Dodd Terry).

Data Collection and Analysis

Field data was collected in two ways: semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Program coordinators and directors (subsequently referred to as program staff), and policymakers participated in semi-structured interviews where the conversation was guided by relevant questions, with probes used to encourage the expansion of important ideas, enabling a dialogue between interviewer and interviewee that allowed for flexibility and expansion on the issues raised (Patton, 1987). Interview questions were primarily open-ended, and sequencing flowed logically from one set of ideas to another (Kvale, 1996). All interviewees consented to have the conversations audio recorded and transcribed.

For program coordinators and directors, the questions focused on:

- How much decision-making power the youth have in choosing policy issues to address and methods of advocacy;
- The structure of their youth-adult partnerships (i.e., youth as research informants, youth as research assistants, or youth as research partners; see Kirshner, O'Donoghue, and McLaughlin, 2005);
- How best to support the youth in their work;
- What they perceive as the barriers to giving youth a meaningful voice and influencing policy; and
- What they see as the most effective strategies in youth-led policy change.

For policymakers, the questions focused on the following issues:

- How they work to involve the communities that their policy affects in their policy decisions;
- How they regard youth-led recommendations, as compared with recommendations from adults;
- What elements of recommendations they look for;
- Which presentation formats they respond to and which they don't;
- What were some examples of their interactions with young people around policy issues, and why those interactions did or did not influence them;
- How young people's language and style affect their view of the recommendations; and
- What would bolster confidence in youth groups as credible sources of information for policy.

Finally, two focus groups with current and former Youth Justice Board members were conducted. The Youth Justice Board is an after-school program of the Center for Court Innovation where fifteen to twenty teenagers from different schools, neighborhoods, and experiences within New York City come together twice a week during the school year to study and devise policy recommendations on a specific juvenile justice issue. Past issues have included school safety, juvenile reentry, and the court response to child abuse and neglect. The program recently expanded so that the policy issue remains the same for two years. The first year is devoted to researching a policy issue and forming policy recommendations and the second year to advocating for and pursuing implementation of the Board's recommendations. This expansion occurred in response to the young people's desire to see their work continue after their research year so that they would have time to effectively advocate for their recommendations.

Focus groups were used with Youth Justice Board members because they allow for understanding the collective experiences of the young people, which mirrors the collective approach that the selected groups take in their advocacy. Moreover, focus groups are unique in that they use group interaction to produce data (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1998), and the collective responses encouraged by a focus group setting will generate different data than would individual interviews (Glitz, 1998).

There were two types of focus groups, both with program participants and alumni. The first helped to specify the focus of the interviews with policymakers (learning what the young people wanted to know from the policymakers and what information would be most useful to them). The second group focused on determining what the youth found to

be effective strategies for influencing policy, what barriers they encountered, and how they overcame these challenges.

All qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus groups was recorded and transcribed. Each interview/group was open-coded for conceptual categories with the previous interview/group coding in mind.

Youth Civic Engagement Programming Logistics

Youth civic engagement programs vary slightly by organization, but, as shown in Chapter 1, look very similar in content and structure. In terms of program logistics, programming is conducted either at local schools that the program organization partners with, or at the organization's main office. Most programs meet after school for 2 hours a day, two days a week, though some only meet once a week. During summer months, sometimes programming will be extended to other days because the participants have more time when school is not in session. Typically, each program has about 20 students active during the course of the program cycle, which averages about a year. Some extend the option to reenroll after the program year is up. As is the trend with many after-school programs, students are given stipends for their participation, and the amount is linked to their attendance.

When the program year ends, so does the campaign. While one program keeps the same topic for two years with the second year group building off the work of the first, most change the topic at the beginning of each cycle. The groups in the sample were about evenly split between program staff choosing the campaign topic ahead of time and letting the participants choose. Topics have included such things as juvenile justice, school safety, education rights, homelessness, nutrition, problems with truancy

enforcement, and foster care policy. Below describes three campaigns that successfully contributed to a change in policy on some of these topics.

Case Study #1: Obtaining In-State CUNY Tuition for Undocumented Immigrants

In August 1989, NYC Mayor Ed Koch issued an executive order (No. 124) declaring "any service provided by a City agency shall be made available to all aliens who are otherwise eligible for such service unless such agency is required by law to deny eligibility for such service to aliens" (Koch, 1989). This meant that undocumented immigrants were able to receive in-state tuition at any of the city's public colleges or universities at the City University of New York (CUNY), with the only conditions being that the immigrant student demonstrate one year's residence in NY State and declare their intention to remain in New York. Mayor Dinkins reaffirmed this order during his term. Then, in 1996, a provision in the federal Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act prohibited states from "providing a post-secondary education benefit to an alien not lawfully present unless any citizen or national is eligible for such benefit" (Section 505). This meant that undocumented students could no longer receive in-state tuition at public higher-education schools unless those same rates were extended to all U.S. citizens, regardless of their state of residency; because the wording did not specifically mention in-state tuition though, and because of the large undocumented immigrant population in the city, then Mayor Giuliani chose not to change the CUNY policy.

In the wake of the September 11th attacks, however, many politicians turned to a more conservative policy vis-à-vis undocumented immigrants. NY State Senator Frank Padavan from Queens told CUNY officials that allowing this group of people to study at

CUNY was both a national security issue and "an insult to every citizen and legal immigrant seeking a higher education" (Arenson, 2001). CUNY officials, then, under pressure to increase tuition for undocumented immigrants, changed their policy, stating the change was necessary to comply with the 1996 federal law. The new policy, where undocumented immigrants had to pay out-of-state tuition, went into effect for the Spring 2002 semester. Nearly 3,000 CUNY students were affected by this new policy, with many not being able to afford to attend school and others having to drop down to part-time status.

In almost immediate response to this tuition increase, students, professors, and immigrant rights groups in the city and state started organizing campaigns to change the law. The twenty youth participating in the Human Rights Activist Project (HRAP), a program of one of the sample organizations (Global Kids), became involved in the organizing, stating its mission as follows:

> *We are a group of students organizing to equalize access to education. We believe that immigrants are an invaluable resource to this country and deserve to be treated as such. We also believe that access to education, specifically higher education, is fundamental to the success of a democratic society and therefore should be available to everyone who wants it. (The Communication Initiative Network website)*

HRAP's campaign included multiple advocacy approaches, including community education, arts activism, direct action, petitions, and formal meetings with policymakers to try to bring about change. First, they lobbied elected officials to reverse the decision. Program participants met with six NY State Assemblymen and three NY State Senators, and collected 650 signatures from high school students for a petition to the governor. Next, they did school- and community-based outreach to educate the public about the issue. They spoke on the radio station WNYE 91.5 FM and presented a street theater

performance about the issue in front of 500 young people at a conference they organized as well as at various places around the city. The skit, written by the HRAP members, included characters such as the government, Statue of Liberty, and various immigrants, and showed the negative impact the CUNY decision would have. Thirdly, they organized a direct action demonstration, where 20 HRAP members led 80 of their peers from various high schools and colleges citywide in a march from Union Square to City Hall, where they then held a rally and vigil. Finally, they joined a coalition of CUNY student groups (e.g., Student Liberation Action Movement, Mexican American Student Alliance), professors, individual activists, and immigrant rights organizations working to reverse the decision. "We joined forces with other groups that were doing work on it, and we were the only high school group really active," said Molly Delano, the program coordinator (interview conducted, 2/15/08). This coalition held local demonstrations at CUNY locations, where Global Kids participants read poetry, performed dance numbers, and spoke to the media.

Following the six-month campaign by the various groups, in June 2002 the NY State Assembly narrowly passed a bill sponsored by Assemblyman Adriano Espaillat (Manhattan) that reversed the CUNY decision to charge out-of-state tuition to undocumented immigrants. The bill, which had also passed in the state Senate in June, was signed into law on August 9, 2002 by Governor Pataki. The bill specified the eligibility criteria for the resident tuition level charge at SUNY and CUNY, which included: the student attended at NYS high school for at least two years; or the student attended a NYS-approved program GED program and received their general equivalency diploma within the state; or the student was enrolled at SUNY or CUNY in the Fall of

2001 and was authorized to pay the resident tuition rate at that time; and the student files an affidavit with the college stating that he or she has applied to legalize his or her immigration status, if applicable, or will do so as soon as he or she is eligible. This was a great success for HRAP. As Ms. Delano stated in my interview with her: "Of course it wasn't us alone, but our voice, the student voices of high school students who are being directly affected, as many of those students were going to CUNY the next year. It was very powerful, and to have a victory like that was very powerful."

Following this success, participants in HRAP, along with the coalition, continued their fight for immigrant rights by shifting their attention to the national level, advocating for the passage of the DREAM Act, which had been introduced in the Senate in June 2002. The Act sought to make it easier for illegal immigrant youth to become legal U.S. residents, as well as allow them access to higher education at the same cost as citizens.

Case Study #2: Meeting the Clothing Needs of Children in Foster Care

In 2003, policymakers at the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), seeking to create an opportunity for youth in care to have an outlet to address the unique issues that impact their lives, developed the Youth In Progress (YIP) program. OCFS is divided into six regions, and they created a corresponding YIP program in each region for youth ages 14-21 who are in the foster care system in the state. Each region has 10 to 20 youths who work together on developing a policy agenda that reflects concerns of foster care teenagers, having the following goals: raising public awareness of the experiences of youth in care; increasing youth involvement in the foster care system; improving policies and practices to assist youth in transitioning out of foster care; and increasing awareness of the services available to youth in care.

OCFS policymakers have identified the youths involved in YIP as influential in helping shape their policy decisions, and discussed one instance where they were particularly influenced by the work of the young people in YIP. In 2004, the YIP groups held their annual "speak-outs" in their respective regions; these were forums where youth in care who were not in the YIP program could come discuss issues that were of concern to them. The main issue to come out of these speak-outs – something that members discovered was consistent across the regions when all six groups met for a retreat afterwards – had to do with unmet clothing needs: youth felt they did not have adequate clothing to feel confident about going to school, special events, or job interviews.

YIP then made it a priority to address the clothing needs of those in foster care. They were concerned that the regulations on the standards on clothing for children in care, Title 18 NYCRR Section 427.16, were too broad and resulted in major differences in the way in which their clothing needs were addressed across the state, especially regarding the extent of youth involvement in selecting and purchasing clothing. Additionally, they were upset that the official OCFS clothing inventory list (89 ADM-14) was outdated since it had been issued in 1989 and was based on the 1988 cost of living.

In order to get OCFS to address their concerns, they implemented multiple strategies to influence the policymakers there. First, they created skits that exemplified some of the issues related to clothing and acted them out at an OCFS advisory board meeting. For example, one skit was of a young man in foster care who is poorly dressed going into a job interview, and does not make a good first appearance. Then another young man goes to interview for the same job, except he is wearing dressier clothes and therefore comes across as more credible and employable to the interviewer. As one

policymaker stated, “There was a touch of humor in there, but it was a very real message that they were trying to communicate.”

Next, in order to bring their message to a larger audience such as other OCFS officials not on the advisory board, district social service agencies, and stakeholders at the local level, YIP members made a short, eight-minute video that visually communicated the importance of adequate clothing for foster care youth. The video opens with a narrator expressing that youth should be involved in making decisions that involve them. Next, she states that youth in care have less spending power then than they did in 1989. Following, there are a series of short scenarios that young people act out that involve problems that arise due to their inadequate clothing allowance. An emcee raps introductions to each scene, identifying the key issues: some foster parents take the clothing allowance and buy whatever clothes they want, without the input of their foster child, often leading the youth having to wear embarrassing clothing; foster care youth are often made fun of because their clothes aren’t “hip” or because they wear the same pair of pants everyday, either leading to fights to defend themselves or to low self-esteem; they don’t have appropriate dress clothing for job interviews, and that affects their job prospects and their confidence going into an interview. As the emcee states, “In reality, clothes change your personality.” It ends with recommending that foster care youth are given debit cards directly in order to buy their own clothes, and this responsibility will help them develop financial skills such as managing a budget and keeping their money safe.

A third part of YIP’s campaign included a survey of clothing stores to document what basic clothing such as underwear, jeans, sweaters, winter coats, and sneakers cost,

in order to show that the prices had increased from 1989, and therefore the current allowance was insufficient to provide for their basic clothing needs. They went to stores such as Wal-Mart, J.C. Penney, and Target and did inventory of the cost of clothing in 2005, and presented their findings to OCFS policymakers as well as local foster care agencies. According to OCFS officials, this part of the campaign was particularly powerful. As Ms. Martinez stated (interview 1/28/08), "Clearly we needed to have the comparison data. Really that was the influential piece." Additionally, the youth pointed out other ways in which the clothing inventory was out of date: jeans were called dungarees, and girls were required to have two slips. According to one OCFS official, "[The youth] were very helpful in pointing out where we needed to update the guidelines of what constitutes an adequate wardrobe when a young person comes in to foster care."

After a nearly two-year campaign on the part of YIP, the young people succeeded in getting OCFS to agree to update the Guide to Clothing Inventory List for youth ages 12 through 20, as well as increasing the clothing allowance. YIP members were brought in to help design the new list, which was incorporated into an Informational Letter (06-OCFS-INF-10) issued by OCFS to commissioners of social services and executive directors of voluntary authorized agencies who work with foster care children. In this letter OCFS' Director of Strategic Planning and Policy Development suggested that local district and agency managers and staff also view the YIP clothing video "to better understand how clothing impacts a young person's self-image, and his/her achievement of positive outcomes" (NYS OCFS, 2006). She then made the video available to all OCFS Regional Offices and to the Adolescent Services Resource Network, a resource for all child welfare agencies.

OCFS policymakers identified the reasons for YIP's campaign success. One was that they were able to demonstrate that this issue was a systemic one: youth in care across the state were facing this same issue, as evidenced by the information gathered from the hundreds of young people who attended the speak-outs. That made them know it was an issue they would have to address as a statewide agency. Additionally, "they used different vehicles," as one OCFS policymaker explained. Their campaign was multi-faceted, and involved different strategies, each of which provided important data: individual-level stories, proof of it being a statewide problem facing many in care, concrete data that highlighted the inadequacies of the previous policy, and drawing attention to the outdated language of old policy.

Following this success, YIP also created an information manual as part of their "Need to Know" series. This information, available on their website, is targeted at youth in care to provide them with information on the updated clothing allowance and their rights under the new policy. It also included the updated Guide to Clothing Inventory List.

Case Study #3: Redirecting Money Away from Juvenile Detention Centers

The Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) is a NYC government agency in charge of providing non-secure and secure detention for alleged juvenile delinquents and secure detention for alleged juvenile offenders whose cases are pending, along with post-adjudicated juveniles awaiting transfer to state facilities.[10] Between 1993 and 2000, the city saw a 60% increase in the average number of juveniles in locked detention on any

[10] A juvenile delinquent is defined as a person under 16-years old, but at least 7 years-old, who commits an act which would be a "crime" if he or she were an adult, and is then found to be in need of supervision, treatment, or confinement. A juvenile offender is defined as a person 13, 14, or 15-years old who commits a more serious or violent acts and may be prosecuted as adults.

given day, going from 237 to 379 (Mayor's Management Report, 2002), despite the fact that juvenile crime and arrests dropped by 28% during that same time (Faruquee, 2002). An increasing number of youth were being locked up in secure facilities for misdemeanor charges or for violation of probation conditions. This led Mayor Giuliani to design a plan to expand the city's juvenile detention centers. At the end of his term, he proposed a $64.6 million project to build 200 more beds at two of the city's centers (Crossroads in Brownsville, Brooklyn, and Horizons in the South Bronx); it was never implemented. When Mayor Bloomberg unveiled his preliminary budget for 2002-2003 in February of 2002, the juvenile detention project was still there, despite the fact that the average number of youth locked up daily decreased to 357 in 2001 (and would decrease further to 284 in 2002) (MMR, 2002).

Members of the Youth Power Project at Make the Road NY immediately started organizing to get the money removed from the budget. In February 2002, they partnered with the Prison Moratorium Project, who had been fighting against expanding juvenile detention facilities since June 2001. The two groups brought together other youth advocacy groups, educational justice organizations, and juvenile justice policy organizations; they formed the Justice 4 Youth Coalition (J4Y) to battle the city's plan. The same month Bloomberg released his preliminary budget, the young people organized major rallies. Their first one, attended by about 50 youth activists, was held on Valentine's Day of 2002 on the steps of City Hall, chanting "Educate, don't incarcerate," meant to bring attention to the budget allocation. Less than a week later, Make the Road NY sponsored a rally outside of the Crossroads detention facility, calling on Bloomberg

to reallocate the money to after-school programs and alternatives to incarceration instead of expanding the facility. Over 100 youth and their families attended.

The group also pulled together key statistics related to the project. They found that in addition to juvenile crime decreasing over the years, when the City opened Crossroads and Horizons in 1998, they promised to close Spofford Juvenile Detention Center, which had been operating in the Bronx since 1957. However, less than a year after the two new facilities opened, $8 million was spent to renovate three wings in Spofford, and the City renamed the facility Bridges. At the time of the budget proposal, all facilities were operating under capacity. Additionally, the young people worked with researchers to pull together statistics on re-arrest rates of youth coming out of jail, showing that the percentage was much higher than for those youth coming out of alternative-to-incarceration programs, which cost about a third of the price per year per young person. With this information they launched community education campaigns in schools and community centers, as well as sending thousands of postcards to Mayor Bloomberg with some of the information, asking, “Why does NYC love jails more than schools?” They also sent fax after fax to the head of DJJ.

Members of the Justice 4 Youth coalition also met with members of the City Council to build alliances. They found allies in Councilmember Yvette Clarke, a liberal Democrat from Brooklyn, and Councilmember James E. Davis, a former police and corrections officer who had led Stop the Violence rallies in Central Brooklyn and was chairman of the Council’s Juvenile Justice Committee. Because of Clarke’s and Davis’ support, J4Y was able to get local and national media attention. They were also able to make presentations to City Council, and they held four hearings at City Hall on DJJ’s

budget. At these hearings they had formerly incarcerated members of J4Y speak about their personal experiences in the detention facilities, and advocated for more alternatives to incarceration.

Finally, Make the Road NY staged another protest on the steps of City Hall and was able to follow Mayor Bloomberg with a video camera, asking him questions about why he was spending the money on jails. They used his responses in a video they created about the issue, circulating it to press.

Then, in late June 2002, Mayor Bloomberg and the City Council came to an agreement to remove from the city's capital budget $53.2 million that was to have gone to adding the 200 beds to the two facilities. The remainder of the $64.6 million would be used for maintenance and upkeep at the other DJJ facilities. As Councilman Davis said afterwards, "'I think that the mayor heard our cries and the cries of the activist communities and used common sense to take that money out of the budget'" (Cooper, 2002). Since then, the Mayor has opened more alternative-to-detention facilities, and, in January 2010, folded DJJ into the Administration for Children's Services, the city's child welfare agency, signaling, as the NY Times notes, "a more therapeutic approach toward delinquency that will send fewer of the city's troubled teenagers to jail" (Bosman, 2010).

Findings

The above are three examples of successful policy campaigns. During the course of the study, many lessons were learned about key elements of success and failure. Findings fell into two categories: advocacy and program operations. Advocacy findings focused on "how to" strategies for influencing policymakers. Findings related to program content concerned program structure and the types of barriers that programs and

youth run into when doing this work; knowing what these obstacles are in advance can help inform the way the program is organized.

Program directors found that, for the most part, policymakers are not patronizing to youth and do take them seriously, and interviews with policymakers underscored this same point: age is not an important factor in how youth advocacy is received, as long as the young people are informed and have done their research. More important is the actual content of their presentations and policy recommendations. Because of this, some of the advocacy findings, while youth-related, were not youth-specific.

Advocacy

Advocacy findings related to the following themes:

- Building coalitions/collaboration/collective action
- Understanding power/jurisdiction
- Balancing authenticity of voice vs. professionalism
- Including personal narratives
- Effective methods of advocacy
- Understanding implications of policy recommendations
- Building the brand of your youth organization

Building coalitions/collaboration/collective action

One of the most important factors for success that was identified by program staff and policymakers alike was collaboration. Programs that have successfully influenced policy say that working together with other youth groups – and also with adult groups – was a necessary part of that success. Framing the issue within a larger context, and connecting with other advocates in that larger context (e.g., on a state or national level), is also a strategy recommended by both program staff and policymakers. One reason for collaboration is that it is hard to create winnable campaigns from scratch, and oftentimes other groups are already working on the same issue; therefore, youth have a greater

chance of winning, especially in a limited timeframe, if they build on the work that is already being done. Another reason is that the more people that are involved, the more power that is mobilized. As one program coordinator said when discussing what made their campaign to allow undocumented immigrants to get in-state tuition at CUNY successful: “The coalition: the coalition was incredible. We were strong in our numbers and pressure on Pataki … we joined forces with other groups that were doing work on it.” This coalition included immigrant’s rights groups, CUNY professors and students, and adults and youth from about twenty organizations.

Another program director stated that all of their campaigns are done with other groups, and that working together brings the power and numbers needed to influence policymakers.

> *One thing that’s fundamental to our model is the idea of power and people coming together. In this neighborhood, people don’t have the power or money or influence necessary so when you come together and act collectively, you have more power. - Oona Chatterjee, 1/17/08 interview*

When discussing their victory of keeping a Bushwick outreach center open for teens, she stated that the youth organized with teachers and students alike. The need to have a critical mass of people working for the change you want to see was emphasized in other ways as well. One program director whose program takes a more formal approach to advocacy than the two groups discussed above stated that the youth “have to organize around 25 percent of their school community to be involved in working on [the] project.”

Additionally, policymakers have said that hearing the same recommendation from several groups makes them take it more seriously, and young people should prove that they represent a larger group (e.g., doing a survey of a large sample of young people and reporting on those results). Youth advocates should try to prove they have larger

public support. As City Council Member Garodnick stated, "What happens is if we start to see a pattern … in constituent complaints, [my staff will] say we should address or think about legislation" (interview, 1/9/08). Bill Chong, Deputy Commissioner at the Department of Youth and Community Development emphasized the importance of popular support: "If they're picking something that has no support, it's not going to go anywhere" (interview, 2/8/08).

Understanding Power/Jurisdiction

The theme of power came up in numerous ways, the first being the idea of increasing power for youth and communities who have traditionally not had the power to influence policy. As Ms. Chatterjee stated: "It's not always about a specific policy and changing it, it's about increasing power for communities and also stepping to people in positions of power or institutions with power … holding people accountable" (interview, 1/17/08). One way of gaining this power is, as discussed above, collaboration.

The other aspect of power that came up had to do with the target audience: program staff stressed that it is impossible to win a campaign or influence policymakers if you cannot specifically identify the person who has the power to implement your recommendations and what gives that person that power. Because of this, recommendations also have to be specific to the policymaker's jurisdiction. As Ms. Chatterjee explained, referring to a campaign against gentrification that has yet to have success: "When something has a target that's not a single person or an entity that's easy to influence it becomes very difficult … to address it." Alternatively, when discussing a winning campaign, she said, "There was definitely a clear target … you identify a target, and the target is a person. So first you have a problem … and then you see if you could

turn it into an issue … it's an issue if you can identify a person who can fix it and if it affects a lot of people and you know when it's fixed" (interview, 1/17/08). This idea of targeting power was emphasized by other program staff as well.

Policymakers reinforced this finding in another way, stating that many youth and other advocacy groups have come to them and given strong, well-researched presentations or recommendations, but they often are misdirected because they are out of the jurisdiction of the policymaker. The groups have clearly identified the problem, but failed to show that the solutions are something the policymaker has the power to do something about. ACS official Dodd Terry said that "[The youth's] recommendations make a lot of sense, but it's something that you just don't have control over" (interview, 3/24/08). Council member Garodnick stated that recommendations from young people, or indeed anybody, should show that they have "identified a problem, the solutions are both within the jurisdiction of the Council and also would have a concrete result" (interview, 1/9/08). Additionally, sometimes the recommendations simply aren't feasible because of budgetary constraints, and the policymaker lacks the power to do much about it. These issues should be researched by the young people ahead of time.

Balancing Authenticity of Voice vs. Professionalism

An interesting finding was that policymakers are weary of adults using young people to get their own message or recommendations across. When policymakers hear from teenagers, they want to hear about their own experiences and recommendations as teenagers, not as "mini-adults." City Council member Mendez stated that she wants "to hear from the youth and hear what their actual experiences … on a day-to-day basis are" (interview, 3/13/08), while another policymaker said that, "You want to make sure that

you don't have adult voice influenced on or sort of in or thrown into a young person's mouth." When ACS official Mr. Terry was discussing a presentation from a youth leadership group, he identified one of the challenges he faced in interpreting what they were saying:

> *One of the biggest issues I struggled with was really figuring out, 'is it their voice or are they trying to make young people mini-adults and trying to present it in a language we're willing to receive it in?' As opposed to the language that a lot of young people speak in. (interview, 3/24/08)*

A policymaker at the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) who is also involved in one of their youth programs spoke to this point when she said that it was important that people saw that the "young people are speaking with their own voices, we haven't co-opted them," because "they really are an independent, important and credible voice."

The need for authenticity of voice, however, can complicate the idea of professionalism when making presentations to or interacting with policymakers. For some policymakers, the dress and language of the youth have an effect on how their words are received. One City Council member stated, "Somebody who comes in, you know, looking professional and ready for business will be taken more seriously." On the other hand, an ACS administrator said that while he once looked for professionalism, now it doesn't mean as much to him:

> *If a young person is dressed in a certain way, it could speak to a lot of issues in different ways, it could speak about poverty, that doesn't make your voice any less meaningful … If you really want to find out what's the most important thing for young people and how we're failing young people, I just can't support, I just can't say that you have to come in a three-piece suit. It just can't be that way.*

Including Personal Narratives

One way to potentially overcome the dilemma of finding a balance between authenticity of voice and professionalism is through making the issues at hand personal. Almost all of the policymakers said they were highly influenced by narratives of youth experiences, particularly regarding foster care, and think that young people using personal narratives is a good way to influence them and make the policy recommendations "compelling." As one OCFS official stated, "It really helps advance a policy message if you have the human face, the voice, the individuals who are impacted by that policy." When presenting illustrative examples, it is important to connect those stories to those with similar experiences, so policymakers can start recognizing patterns in service or how their policies affect people. This will help show that the recommendation addresses a systemic problem, and not just an individual one.

This doesn't mean that more qualitative stories of one or two young people are all that is needed, however. One City Council member underscored the need to have hard data as well: "Presenting a story to highlight what the facts show is good, but to try to appeal to me simply on … an emotional level without the facts will fall flat." Another Council member reinforced this point: "I need to have some facts if it's going to be addressed at a bigger citywide or district-level meeting ... but real life anecdotal experience of how this has affected them or other people is helpful."

Effective Methods of Advocacy

Knowing what to include in policy recommendations is important, as is how to gather that information (e.g., surveys, focus groups, interviews, etc.), but how the advocacy is presented is important as well. Some program staff said that the way to

influence the person or people in power varies by their status or position. The more of a public figure they are (e.g., the mayor), the more public your campaign should be. One program director discussed a success her group had:

> *We had a tactical success; we chased the Mayor [Bloomberg] with a video camera because we wanted to ask him why is he going to spend all of this money on juvenile jails. And we got him, this is an example of 'they're adorable, let me just stop and talk to them, I'm probably smarter than all of them, I'll be fine.' So they asked, he asked, we asked all of these questions and he just answered like, he gave the most inane answers and we made a videotape about it, and then started circulating it, made a flyer quoting him on everything ... And then we got the money taken out of the budget ... It was sixty-four million that was supposed to create 200 new spaces. (interview with Oona Chatterjee, 1/17/08)*

Because the mayor was a public figure, he was more vulnerable to embarrassment, so inviting press to events is important here.

If the person who has the power to make policy change is not a public figure, the methods of advocacy might be more traditional (e.g., presenting survey data). Program staff agree that for a campaign to be successful, you must use multiple methods: letter-writing, formal meetings, speaking with the press, writing editorials, making documentary films, peer education, doing radio spots, conducting formal research (surveys/interviews) and presenting findings, petitions, lobbying, protests, etc., because success will not be had from one interaction with the policymaker alone. "Using different methods of advocacy and strategy is certainly key," said one program coordinator. A DYCD Deputy Commissioner notes that getting media attention is very important.

Understanding Implications of Policy Recommendations

In addition to having hard data backed by personal narratives, policymakers state that any good policy recommendation from young people must incorporate four specific

elements. First, the presentation must consider the counter-argument. Youth groups should not just state their policy recommendations and why they're good, but also raise possible objections/alternatives and show why those would not work (e.g., "The obvious objection to policy A is B, but this is why B wouldn't work…"). As one of the City Council members notes, "If somebody comes in and they just tell anecdotes about a problem and they don't consider the specific consequences of taking whatever action it is they're proposing, I can't really take it too seriously … if you come in with an argument and where you want to go but also an appreciation of, or even a raising of the counter-arguments, I give that a lot of credibility."

The second necessary element is for the youth to demonstrate that they understand everyone who is affected by their recommendations. Youth should show that they know how their recommendations will affect all parties, not just those who are involved on the surface. Who might gain, who might lose? If their recommendation goes through, is it at the expense of someone else? If they are recommending that money be given to a certain program, will that money be moved from a different program? How will that affect the participants of that other program? The policymaker must know that these issues have been taken into consideration when the youth formed their recommendations. One youth program coordinator said that policymakers had given him this advice in the past, and now when his participants are creating their recommendations, he asks them, "Did you think about it impacting these people in this way?"

The third necessary element is for the young people to show they have some understanding of the fiscal impact of their proposal. One policymaker at OCFS stated: "You want to change a regulation or a policy. Here's the process and here are some of

the realities of the fiscal impact, who else it's going affect in terms of providers, counties, courts. Look at all the stakeholders that are affected by any policies that we make, change or laws that we enact." Sometimes youth have strong recommendations, but lack an idea of what the monetary cost will be, and fail to address from where the money will come. One City Council member said that recommendations have to discuss budgetary needs and where the money is going to come from in order to be considered for implementation. One policymaker, discussing an instance when her agency increased the clothing allowance for children in foster care because of the advocacy work of a group of young people, identified some of the attributes of what influenced her: the presentation was well-researched, creatively presented, included the cost of the policy change, and had comparison financial data.

Finally, because of the complexity of the issues that each proposal must address, some policymakers think that youth should limit the number of recommendations they make, which will also make them more likely to be implemented. "Target some of your priority issues and try to make one or two of those things happen, and still work on the other ones," says one policymaker. Some programs have heard this when getting feedback on their presentations as well.

Building the Brand of Your Youth Organization

Doing advocacy work around certain issues that youth are passionate about is important, but one of the ultimate goals is for youth to become a permanent player in the policy-making process. Indeed, Dory Hack (interview, 3/14/08) states that this is the real goal of her program:

> *I think actually our primary measure of success ... is ... demonstration that the [program] as an entity is seen as a resource for policymakers ... being asked for*

> *presentations, being asked to consult, being asked to have the youth write articles, being asked to present at conferences. None of which in and of itself is 'we like your recommendation, and we're going to implement it.' I mean, that would be, that is a huge win and a huge measure of success but I think it's not as realistic.*

Youth policymakers do want to hear more from young people, and some are already involving teenagers in the process. "We try to always ensure that there is a youth voice in the design, in the early stages of the design of the programs so that we can meet the needs of young people," said a DYCD official, and a director of policy and planning at OCFS said that they have identified youth who they go to when they want to run a focus group or need youth advisors: "The youth would be at this table in the development of how we address a policy. It's not in a vacuum, we don't say 'well let's try to dig up a kid to comment on it.' They're at the table with the dialogue." But one of the reasons it does not happen as often as it should with all policymakers is because of access to those young people. Although one administrator at ACS stated that he thought it was up to policymakers to reach out to ensure that youth voices are heard before the policy is developed, it seems more feasible that it would happen if they knew of a youth group they could reach out to and consult with before decisions are made. Policymakers recommend that youth advocates make themselves known as a group, in a sense "selling themselves" as a ready advisory group of teenagers who would be interested and available to participate in focus groups, etc. As an ACS official put it**:** "I don't think policymakers are against consulting youth, I think what has to happen is there has to be a body that's ready, willing, and able earlier, that policymakers know they … can contact people, whatever entity it's going to be, like youth policymaking group, saying 'okay, well this is worthwhile.'"

For a youth program doing advocacy work, this translates into trying to brand your program as a source of trustworthy young people who can think critically about policy issues and clearly articulate their views. One OCFS official said that teenagers should try to identify policymakers who are interested in youth voice and get on their radar as potential advisors, making themselves visible. This might include, for example, knowing about and going to relevant conferences or open meetings that the policymakers might attend. As one policymaker explained, "Kind of build up their own branding, so that people know this is a group that they can go to and get real voice."

Building your brand and forming relationships with policymakers is important, and one way of doing so that was recommended by a few policymakers was to maintain open communication even when there is not an issue at hand. One City Council member says, "You get good feedback if you maintain that open communication when you're there when there's no problem, then when there is a problem they feel comfortable telling you everything there is and how it affects them." Additionally, OCFS officials said that it was important for youth groups to not just complain or advocate, but to point out what's good, too. Doing so will help build the relationships necessary for policymakers to see a particular youth group as one to go to for policy recommendations and advice.

Program Structure and Operations

Findings related to program structure and operations fell into four categories:

- The structure of youth-adult partnerships,
- Defining success and its relationship to funding,
- Barriers for youth, and
- Barriers for programs.

While discussed separately here, the four themes are interrelated in a way that has implications for programming.

The Structure of Youth-Adult Partnerships

While it is necessary for the youth to have adult allies who support their work, help them to gain access to key figures, and share their own experience, the issue of whether youth advocacy can succeed if the youth have not chosen the policy issue to be advocated for is a contentious one. Because meaningful change will take time and hard work, much of which will not be glamorous or fun, young people have to be fully invested and inspired, which some interviewees believed could only be sustained if the topic was chosen by the youth. This raises many issues for program structure. Whereas some of the programs in the study let youth choose the topic so as to ensure passion, other programs have staff choose it beforehand, because of time constraints. As one program director stated, "To choose the issue in and of itself can take all summer." Adults choosing the issue beforehand allows them to save time and have the participants jump into the work once they start as opposed to spending weeks or months choosing an issue. According to these program directors and coordinators, choosing the issue does not ignore the voice of youth, but allows for recruiting youth who are interested in that issue and who have a personal tie to it. These staff believe that if you spend time and choose an issue democratically (e.g., by voting), you risk having some youth whose issue was not chosen being unhappy with the program. The only ways for all of the youth to be happy are either to choose the issue by consensus, or recruiting towards an issue. [11]

Not all programs agreed with having the adults pre-select the issue. Indeed, even one policymaker who funds youth programs maintained: "We insist that the providers that we have selected in the RFP build into the design of the program youth voice,

[11] One program director stated that with one of their winning campaigns, the issue was chosen by consensus, and though it took up time, it was worth it.

because it doesn't work if the adults pick the project. Then it's just busy work." Some interviewees stated that because advocacy is difficult, you need young people who are dedicated, and to achieve that necessary devotion youth have to have a strong voice in choosing the issue, as well as have the responsibility for coordinating much of the project. Everything from facilitating their own internal meetings to designing and conducting the actual research to choosing the advocacy strategy will give them greater ownership of the project, increasing their commitment to seeing it through. One director stated:

> *We see this with different sorts of kids but making social change isn't always going to be the glamour and the glory of running about and holding placard signs. It's going to be coming in here every single week and going through our Gant chart which we have tasks, support who did it, who didn't, if you didn't what's going to happen. We have our notes, did you copy, did you follow up, did you make this ... in addition to having your vision and being passionate, it's like getting the details done. (interview with Laura Shmishkiss, 1/18/08)*

Another director said, "It has to be around stuff they are directly affected by and/or passionate about."

Though there is disagreement about who should choose the policy issue, everyone seems to believe that passion and agency are important, because of the difficulty in having real victories in influencing policy. As one project coordinator said, "Putting the agency in the hands of the youth is very important." As one youth stated, "The more involvement the youth have, the more power they have. I feel like the more the adult dominates, it makes it feel like, it can't be run by youth."

While the role of the teenagers vis-à-vis adults was discussed in terms of choosing the advocacy issue and leading the program and campaign, some also made it clear that this did not mean that adults should completely take a back seat. Indeed, because of the

nature of the work as an after-school program, the adult staff members *have* to be working on the issues when the program is out of session in order for there to be movement. According to one program director, "The adult staff have a big role to play in the advocacy in that … they usually do the first establishment of a relationship, and it could either be that we're approached because someone has heard of us and is interested and so we follow up and set that up, or we do the initial outreach." You don't want the adult staff to take such a backseat that they cannot bring their own wisdom to the campaign. As the director of one youth organization stated, "I think it's weird sometimes the way adults work with youth in trying to support youth leadership and be like, 'I will be silent, I will not share my experiences.' I don't think that's very helpful either. It's not a secret that someone's an adult and has done stuff."

Defining Success and its Relationship to Funding

Part of the existing vacuum in the research on youth civic action is having a clear definition of success. There seems to be a general consensus among program staff that there are two main measures of success: one utilizing hard data which proves invaluable for securing funding, and one utilizing soft data which focuses on anecdotal information to learn about "success stories" through the individual youth. Hard data focuses on the statistics of the individual youths while in the program, recording details on indicators of positive youth development and school success. Soft data proves much more difficult to track, record and report. One program director stated that "the successes with our kids is clear…when you see their growth and development in terms of their confidence, their ability to be articulate, in public speaking, their critical thinking" success is obvious, but she went on to explain that with each successive year of the program they need to be able

to track this data in a more systematic fashion. But even these anecdotal stories are measures of participant growth (individual-level successes) and not the collective impact of the advocacy work of the youth (policy successes).

Oftentimes there are clashes between the direct goals of the funding organization and the ability of non-profits to work into their internal metrics a way to evaluate the soft data success of their youth. A Deputy Commissioner at the Department of Youth and Community Development acknowledged this difficulty when discussing a program his organization funds: "The focus for evaluation….is really about positive outcomes for young people who enroll in it. That's our main [goal]. Hopefully the projects that [the group does] have an impact as well, but with the money they have for evaluation they [have] to evaluate 41 initiatives, there is only so much they can do. I feel sorry for the evaluators." This creates a reliance on hard data that emphasizes overall numbers and counts of the program – how the program has impacted the young people, rather than measuring how much the young people have impacted policy. As another program coordinator pointed out, "Any non-profit engaged in this kind of work has to play that game. Because we are non-profits, because we secure funding sources and because we do our good work by building those types of measures," these programs have to focus their limited resources on individual-level indicators of success.[12]

In addition to having to navigate this space between program goals and funder goals, staff have to be careful in how they define success. One program coordinator recognized the difficulty in actually influencing policy in discussing how her group chose

[12] Interestingly, the one program in this study that takes an activist and direct action approach to youth advocacy has less problems with funders because of the types of funding it gets, and therefore, as the director says, she doesn't have to choose between youth development goals and advocacy goals; "we value them both really highly."

to look at disproportionate rates of AIDS transmission among African-Americans; while recognizing this as an important issue, she added, "Actualizing that into something they can really do is just a hard process." And as Watts and Guessos (2006) discussed, some winnable campaigns are necessary for young people's sense of agency. How do you build success into these programs when influencing policy seems like such a Sisyphean task? One program director suggested a shift in focus to smaller-scale victories: "We're not measuring our success as the City Council passing new policy, because we're looking at this on a more microcosmic level." She went on to describe several changes her program youth produced within their schools and the respective positive impact it had on student life. By focusing on realistically scaled success relative to the length of the program, number of participating youth, and available advocacy methods, program directors create the ability to build on past small-scale success with each successive cohort. As one program coordinator emphasized, it's important to let the students know that "there is success you can see now, and there might be success you can see later," so they do not become disillusioned over a perceived lack of impact of their advocacy efforts. There is a definite strength in having a realistic understanding of what kind of success is attainable in the face of practical constraints.

Barriers for Youth

Age in itself does not appear to be a barrier in terms of legitimacy and access. However, program staff believed that the constraints of working with a teenage population create other barriers. In particular, developing a winning campaign often takes many years, but the available timeframe is generally limited (e.g., one school year). As one program director noted, "It's like you can do a whole year just on the

implementation. And we could have a whole year just of asking survey questions." How do you create a winnable campaign victory, with all the research and work that needs to go into it, over the course of just one program cycle? As another coordinator put it:

> *I think one of the primary challenges is that we have the youth and the program for a finite period of time. And how can we get the most out of that time? Versus in a sort of professional world where, like, you know you could be working on a project for a year, 'Oh it suddenly takes two years,' - then it takes two years. 'Oh, we have a six month delay,' - we have a six month delay. You can't do that when you're also running it as a youth program. (interview with Linda Baird, 3/14/08)*

In addition to the restrictions of time as well as meeting only for a certain number of hours each week, the youth are also restricted in what they can do outside of the regularly scheduled meetings. One coordinator stated that her youth have been asked to make presentations to policymakers, but most often the times conflicted with the times they were in school so they could not make it. This issue relates to the earlier discussion about defining success, and helping the youth understand what realistically they can accomplish in the time they have.

> *There are things that are sometimes particular to youth, like, organizing campaigns take a long time, so sometimes, and so like, when you're 14, and you start. Like, we want them to build schools in Bushwick. The likelihood is you could work on that for four years of high school and never see it. And by the time it's built, you've moved or something ... I think that oftentimes around June when we've been working on things since September, there's like a feeling of 'what are we doing?' (interview with Oona Chatterjee, 1/17/08)*

How do program staff keep youth engaged during this time where they see no success? How do they help the young people to avoid feeling that all of their work has been for naught?

Time matters in another way too; young people are pulled in many directions and have many responsibilities, and the advocacy work that they are doing is just one of many

commitments. How do young people keep focused when they have other educational, recreational, and familial responsibilities?

> *Kids got sports. They got drama. Mock Trial. This class trip. They're doing this thing with their friends. They gotta go baby-sit. They're working after school with their parents. All these things, and then it's like, 'oh yeah, and then Youth Action on Wednesday.' (interview with Remi Holden, 1/25/08)*

How do program staff get the young people to view their work not just as "yet another after-school opportunity" but as meaningful engagement with advocacy?

Another barrier for youth is lack of power, which can partially be overcome by building coalitions; and another is lack of continued passion/commitment/engagement, which can partially be overcome by having the young people choose the policy issue.

Barriers for Programs

While many of the barriers for youth then become barriers for program success, there are additional obstacles for programs that are not related to the youth. Program staff identified lack of resources (money, staff, time) and lack of staff training as particular problems. The staff training becomes important when the selected issue changes with the program cycle. "I think staff training required way more time that we gave it, like we assumed that all staff kind of got it in a way they didn't," said one program coordinator, whose program chose three very different topics over the course of three years, with the same staff. Another staff member underscored this point: "Part of it is just staff development. Like, when we choose a new topic every two years basically we have to become experts on that topic all over again." When asked about what she thought the biggest challenge in doing this work was, yet another program coordinator stated: "I think more than anything it's adult preparedness and capacity to support [the youths'] efforts. The biggest barrier, individually but also organizationally."

Staff training needs are multiple in nature. If adult staff members are to support the youth, they need to be well-informed on the relevant issues. At the same time, because they run after-school programs with youth development goals, they need to be trained in how to support the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development of the young people in their program as well. This too is related to how the program defines success, because, as discussed earlier, programs usually do not have the capacity to measure the success of the campaigns/advocacy, leading them instead to focus on the improved development of the individual program participants (because that is what they will have to report to funders). This often means that staff cannot sufficiently focus on the advocacy/campaign work as its own entity, which could be a factor in an unsuccessful campaign.

Staff may also be restricted in the types of advocacy work they can do because either the expectations of their funding agency or the political stance of the parent organization. As one coordinator stated, "There's not been a lot of direct action because … the battle has not been fought yet here internally, but it can and will one day I'm sure." Some programs have found success with direct action, but other organizations could not use that method of advocacy, even if it might be the only avenue to success for getting a particular recommendation implemented. As one program coordinator whose program uses a more traditional style of advocacy (e.g., presentations to policymakers) noted, her program seeks to create change by working "within the system," so her youth know from the very beginning they will not be participating in marches or protests, but will try to get meetings with key policymakers. Despite this, she noted that there is real value in drawing media attention to an issue. Again, this finding is related to success. If you

know that some methods are effective but cannot use them, your chances of achieving meaningful policy influence are reduced.

Summary

The findings of this study suggest that, in principle, policymakers are receptive to the voice of youth. However, social justice organizations working with youth can increase their effectiveness by adopting a number of concrete strategies and tactics. In particular, young people doing advocacy work and adults who are supporting them will have more successful campaigns if they work together with other organizations working for similar change. Additionally, they should clearly identify who has the power to make the change they want to see and address that person or those people with policy recommendations that are within their jurisdiction, striking a delicate balance between making the voice of youth heard in a professional way that does not sacrifice their own experiences as teenagers. Policy recommendations, which should be limited in number, should address counter-arguments, and young people should demonstrate that they have knowledge of the full implications of their recommendations, including the fiscal impact. Finally, youth should work to "brand" their program, so that policymakers view it as a resource for soliciting the voice of youth whenever new policies are formulated.

On the program structure side, youth programs should be sure that their youth-adult partnerships are structured in such a way that the youth feel they are driving the program and the advocacy work. Additionally, program staff need to clearly identify realistic measures of campaign success that fall within the length of their program, so as to maintain the young people's feelings of agency, but also be clear about what efforts would be needed for long-term success. Finally, recognizing ahead of time the barriers

that the young people face in terms of time commitments and outside-of-program responsibilities, as well as barriers that the program itself faces related to staff development and limitations in types of advocacy strategies, will help shape the definition of success for the youth.

The findings of this chapter can hopefully be used to enhance the credibility of youth with policymakers and to produce civically engaged young people whose voices are heard in public policy, and counteract the goal displacement that youth civic engagement organizations in NYC have seen.

In the next chapter, I look to deconstruct assumptions about the relationship between civic engagement and criminal behavior by examining a NYC youth civic engagement program that works with disconnected youth to design community education campaigns to change peer attitudes towards criminal and delinquent behavior. Positively engaging delinquent youth sheds interesting light on contemporary sociological theories of delinquency.

CHAPTER 3: Drifting Between Worlds: Positive Engagement and Delinquency Among Red Hook Youth

Introduction

Cool kids. Influentials. Popular opinion leaders. Marketers spend millions each year trying to reach this small percentage of teenagers in the hopes that they will adopt their products, lending said newly released shoes, jackets, phones, an aura of "coolness" that is the secret to massive sales. Over the last decade, theories of influence have gained a certain cachet. Journalist Malcolm Gladwell brought the concept of "influentials" and "early adopters" to national attention, first in his 1997 *New Yorker* article, "The Coolhunt," and later in his best-selling book, *The Tipping Point,* published in 2000. Other books soon followed, including Keller and Berry's *The Influentials* (2003) and Barabasi's *Linked* (2003). Theories of social change and the study of networks, however, have long governed the work of sociologists, epidemiologists, and public health officials (Rogers, 1983). In fact, at the same time that the concept of influentuals was capturing the public's imagination, particularly as applied in the world of marketing and advertising, public health officials began testing the efficacy of harnessing this model to change risk behaviors related to the spread of HIV/AIDS.

In 2007, inspired by Gladwell's *New Yorker* article, and the success of these public health interventions, the Red Hook Community Justice Center, an experimental, neighborhood-based court in Brooklyn, developed Youth ECHO (Expanding Community Horizons by Organizing), a unique effort to reduce youth crime among teenage residents of the nearby public housing development, the Red Hook Houses. Rather than relying on conventional criminal justice responses (arrest-adjudication-incarceration) or standard social service interventions (drug treatment, education, counseling), Youth ECHO

proposed to use theories of influence to change youth perceptions of crime. This did not mean a top-down, "just say no"-style media campaign. Instead, Youth ECHO would target the "influentuals" in Red Hook's youth community, working intensively with young popular opinion leaders to get them to endorse and model pro-social behavior to and for their peers. Youth ECHO would use ethnographic techniques to identify 15 young people who were popular and well-liked by teens in the Red Hook Houses. Although some of these young people would not be "leaders" in the conventional sense and may in fact have been involved in criminal activities, they would have been identified by their peers as influential role models. Once identified and recruited, these informal leaders would participate in a multi-month after-school program. They would receive intensive leadership training and be charged with creating and implementing a grassroots, "guerilla" marketing strategy aimed at changing opinions about crime in Red Hook.

The ultimate goal of Youth ECHO was to change the culture of youth crime in the Red Hook Houses, to get crime to not be seen as "cool." Following theories of influence, and given the success of the HIV/AIDS interventions, launching a similar effort against normative criminal behavior seemed likely to work. From the beginning of research efforts, however, staff began to realize that many of the assumptions underlying theories of influence didn't mesh neatly with how Red Hook youth were thinking about and engaging in criminal behavior. Interviews, group discussions, surveys, and informal observations of Youth ECHO participants' in-session behavior suggest that theories of delinquency and drift more correctly reflect the attitudes and actions of these young people.

Neighborhood Context

Surrounded on three sides by water and cut off from the rest of Brooklyn by an elevated highway, Red Hook is a geographically and socially isolated community. The Red Hook Houses, where the majority of the residents live, were built in 1939 and are comprised primarily of six-story buildings built around courtyards and pedestrian malls (Kasinitz and Rosenberg, 1996). The development consists of Red Hook East and Red Hook West, which has the project's only 14-story building and was completed later, in 1955. In 1960, the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway (BQE) was completed under the supervision of Robert Moses. After this time, Red Hook underwent a dramatic metamorphosis. The expressway essentially cut the neighborhood in half. Now "Red Hook" refers to the community that sits to the southwest of the BQE, surrounded on three sides by water and one side by the highway (Kasinitz and Hillyard, 1995). After 1960, the demographic makeup of the neighborhood shifted from white working-class dockworkers and their families to poor African-Americans and Puerto Ricans. Over the last fifty years, the population has become increasingly poor, and according to 2000 Census data, 46% of Red Hook residents now live below the poverty line. Once a booming waterfront, Red Hook suffered from the loss of its shipping industry and the influx of heroin and crack in the 1980s. In a nine-page cover story on the neighborhood entitled "Crack: Downfall of a Neighborhood" (Barnes and Howe Colt, 1988), Life Magazine named Red Hook one of the most crack-infested neighborhoods in the U.S. But the nadir came in the early 1990s, when Patrick Daly, the principal of the local elementary school, was shot and killed in broad daylight when he got caught in the crossfire between two rival drug dealers.

According to the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) (2011), there are currently 6,351 people living in the Houses. They estimate, however, that there could be as many as 2,000 residents beyond this official count. According to the 2000 US Census, approximately 60 percent are African American and 40 percent are Latino. In 1999, 28 percent of the work force was unemployed and the average household income in the NYCHA projects was $10,372. There are at least 1,300 youth between the ages of 10 and 19 living in the Houses and at least another 400 in the surrounding neighborhood (Center for New York City Affairs, 2003).

Red Hook makes for an interesting site for exploring delinquency and civic engagement among youth. Community ties here run deep, and though there has been some gentrification along the waterfront, over 70% of the available housing in the neighborhood is NYCHA, limiting the amount of socioeconomic and demographic change. And while crime has decreased all over New York City, it is especially interesting to note the decrease in Red Hook, given its history in the 1980s and 1990s. There have been some competing theories about the reason for this decrease: social control from the outside in the form of increased police presence and raids (e.g., the NYPD's 2006 "Operation Off the Hook" raid), and social control from within: the residents themselves, especially the youth, controlling their own and their neighbors' criminal behavior, wanting to change the culture of their community.

The Red Hook Community Justice Center

A project of the Center for Court Innovation, the Red Hook Community Justice Center is an ambitious experiment in using the authority of the courts to respond to the challenges of drugs, crime, and disorder. Launched in June 2000, at the heart of the

Justice Center is its multi-jurisdictional courtroom in which one judge presides over criminal, housing, domestic violence and juvenile delinquency cases. The animating idea is that rather than simply processing cases, the judge should seek to solve the problems that bring people to court. The judge has access to a broad range of meaningful sanctions for offenders, such as community service projects, on-site social services and youth development programs, and ready access to services to help try and avoid further court involvement. All services are also available to community residents on a walk-in basis.

Youth crime is a special area of focus for the Justice Center. The Justice Center sees young people both voluntarily and on a mandated basis. Young people who are considered "mandated" include teens (16 to 18 years old) with cases in criminal court, young people (under 16) with juvenile delinquency cases in family court, and cases referred by the New York City Department of Probation. These young people receive a combination of services and supervision from the Justice Center as part of their court mandate.

In addition, the Justice Center is home to a range of programs that seek to attract young people on a voluntary basis. For example, the Justice Center's Youth Court uses positive peer pressure to ensure that young people who have committed minor offenses pay back the community and receive the help they need to avoid further criminal behavior. Local teenagers are trained to perform the roles of judge, jury, and advocate in youth court cases involving their peers who have committed low-level crimes such as truancy and shoplifting. The Justice Center has also partnered with a local theater company, Falconworks, and the 76th Police Precinct to bring together police and neighborhood youth – two groups that often share a mutual suspicion – to write and

perform short plays, fostering not only positive interaction but also allowing both young people and officers to present their perspectives to each other. (These two programs will be discussed further in Chapter 4.) Other youth programs at the Justice Center include internships, GED classes, and a summer youth photography project.

In this chapter, I discuss the literature related to social change as well as the sociological literature on delinquency, and use research conducted with Youth ECHO participants as a case study to illuminate the relationship between youth civic engagement and delinquency, closing with a discussion of the implications the findings have for youth policy and programming.

Literature Review

Social Change

The theories of influence, social change, and diffusion of innovation often follow a similar trajectory. Social diffusion theorist Everett Rogers (1983) argues that when "trend-setters" or popular-opinion leaders in a given social group begin to model a new behavior, they begin to alter perceptions of what is normative. As Bertrand (2004) states, "Ultimately, community members, regardless of whether they have had contact with the original trendsetters, are expected to adopt the new behavior as it diffuses through the community's social networks" (115). This echoes structural aspects of Gladwell's example of influence, drawn from a 1943 study of diffusion theory. Gladwell (1997) writes:

> *One of the most famous diffusion studies is Bruce Ryan and Neal Gross's analysis of the spread of hybrid seed corn in Greene County, Iowa, in the nineteen-thirties. The new seed corn was introduced there in about 1928, and it was superior in every respect to the seed that had been used by farmers for decades. But it wasn't adopted all at once...In the language of diffusion research, the handful of farmers who started trying hybrid seed corn at the very beginning of the thirties were the*

> *"innovators," the adventurous ones. The slightly larger group that followed them was the "early adopters." They were the opinion leaders in the community, the respected, thoughtful people who watched and analyzed what those wild innovators were doing and then did it themselves. Then came the big bulge of farmers in 1936, 1937, and 1938-the "early majority" and the "late majority," which is to say the deliberate and the skeptical masses, who would never try anything until the most respected farmers had tried it. Only after they had been converted did the "laggards," the most traditional of all, follow suit. The critical thing about this sequence is that it is almost entirely interpersonal. According to Ryan and Gross, only the innovators relied to any great extent on radio advertising and farm journals and seed salesmen in making their decision to switch to the hybrid. Everyone else made his decision overwhelmingly because of the example and the opinions of his neighbors and peers.*

If innovators are responsible for inspiring early adopters, then logically these are the two essential target populations for anyone wishing to disseminate an idea, a product or a behavior.

Public health researchers, hoping to stem the spread of HIV/AIDS, developed what they term a “popular opinion leader model,” which recruits “already-popular people to personally endorse the value of risk reduction behavior change.” A series of studies of interventions based on the popular opinion leader model demonstrate fairly dramatic shifts in both prevalence and frequency of high-risk sexual behavior (generally by magnitudes of 30% from baseline risk behavior levels) (Kelly et al., 2004). Through these methods, groups of popular opinion leaders from different segments of the targeted risk population were identified, recruited, and trained to deliver prevention messages to other members of the target population (Kelly, 2004).

Delinquency

Much of the academic literature on delinquency comes from sociology. Historically, positive criminologists tended to focus on the psychological and behavioral

reasons for why the delinquent acts,[13] emphasizing differences between the delinquent and non-delinquent. Contemporary sociologists, by contrast, move away from individual pathology to examine the social structures (e.g., class, ethnicity, geography) and subcultures that lead to delinquency, looking at the subculture of delinquency.[14]

The idea of the juvenile delinquent emerged with the growth of large urban areas in the early part of the twentieth century. In his 1927 book *Gangland*, Frederic Thrasher concluded that gangs, which he characterizes as primarily male groups, grew out of the unregulated and unsupervised areas in interstitial spaces in the modern city – broken-down, ignored neighborhoods with dilapidated buildings, alongside rivers and railroad tracks, and in between "good" residential areas. Thrasher contrasted these urban spaces with the nearby residential and highly organized suburbs, which he argues remained mostly gangless because of established institutions of family, school, church, etc. that provided activities and opportunities for children, supporting their transition from adolescence to adulthood. The environment of urban neglect, however, with shifting

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[13] For example, Yablonsky (1997) discussed how gang members are pathological rather than normal, and their delinquent acts stem from "individual emotional problems." Other positive criminologists focus on antisocial personality stemming from, for example, parental neglect, poor role models, neuroses, or the inability to understand consequences of transgression. Hirschi (1969) argued that delinquency could be explained by the absence of social bonds (e.g., to parents, teachers, peers).

[14] Most of the delinquency and subcultures literature has been dominated by discussions of males, written by males. Females have received a very small amount of attention (McRobbie and Garber, 1977). Perhaps, as Miller (2000) hypothesized, girls involved in gangs, for example, are not nearly as criminal as their male counterparts, especially when it comes to violent crime, and gender serves as a protective factor for girls, allowing them to place limits on gang activities in which they will participate (e.g., they have an easier time of avoiding gun use than gang boys do). Additionally, the reasons for girls' involvement in delinquent behavior are often different than for males: girls are more likely to have been the victims of sexual and physical abuse, causing them to run away to escape problems at home. The research and understanding of girls' delinquency is, as Chesney-Lind and Shelden (2004) say, "sketchy at best." Because of this, the literature reviewed here is largely focused on the male adolescent population that doesn't necessarily reflect the female experience for delinquency.

populations and disorganization, led to the rise of gangs, especially for young people who were negotiating their identity during their teenage years.[15]

Albert Cohen, whose scholarship was heavily influenced by Thrasher, examined the formation of subcultures, focusing not on individualistic behavior but on collective action. In *Delinquent Boys* (1955), Cohen described how new cultural forms emerge. He suggests that when a number of actors share a similar maladjustment to cultural expectations, they interact with each other to mutually explore and create a new, collective solution in which they find the social support and acceptance they need. These solutions are cultural because they are collective and an actor's participation in them is influenced by knowing that he/she shares the same norms with other participating actors; they are subcultural because the norms are shared only by the actors who somehow benefit from participation. A particular subculture then becomes a community for its members, a group of people with the same norms and values. A subculture of delinquency (and not a delinquent subculture), Cohen argues, occurs as a lower-class boys' solution to the problem of being judged by middle-class values and being unable to meet the middle-class goals set by society.

In response to Cohen, Walter Miller (1958) theorized that lower-class boys are socialized with different and unlawful norms; he suggested that delinquency was synonymous with lower-class culture, and that it was only because the legal system reflected a more dominant value system that the actions of lower-class individuals were "delinquent." For example, lower-class boys evaluated personal status not on

[15] As Brotherton (unpublished) put forth, Thrasher's definition of the gang was more open-ended and didn't include anything about delinquency, whereas now gangs are defined by delinquency – engaging in transgressive practices that break our legal codes and, according to Brotherton, inspire the social control responses of the community.

"achievement" but along "trouble" potential: getting into trouble achieves several valued ends such as prestige, excitement, and risk. Additionally, the idea of "toughness" was possibly valued in lower-class culture because of the lack of consistently present male figures in pre-adolescence. Again, the focus is on social structures and culture as opposed to individual pathology.

Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin continued this subcultural theory of delinquency in their book *Delinquency and Opportunity* (1960), which argues that the lower-class' alienation from conventional culture leads to opposition, in turn leading to delinquency. By this formulation, delinquency stems from opposition to middle-class morality, caused by poverty and the lack of alternative mobility opportunities for lower-class adolescents.

The focus on class as it related to delinquency and subculture was the focus of many of the Birmingham school theorists, who interpreted the actions and behaviors of youth groups through a neo-Marxist prism, where culture was always taken as a matter of class conflict. In *Subcultural Conflict and Working-Class Community* (1972), Phil Cohen asserted that the emergence of subcultures is rooted in working-class culture. Subcultures *must* be working-class in origin; they cannot be produced from the middle-class, since subcultures arise from a dominated culture and not a dominant one. He showed how modern urban planning had a disastrous effect on working-class communities; high-density housing developments, which were based on the middle-class nuclear-family model, led to the destruction of communal space, kinship networks, and caused a loss of neighborhood supervision, all essential components of a working-class community. Additionally, increasing technological advancements led to a decrease –

indeed the near-elimination – of craft industries, small family businesses, and corner shops, which were replaced by automated techniques, large corporations, and supermarkets. As the local economy contracted, it became less and less diverse. Change in the production process resulted in a loss of semi-skilled jobs and the loss of the traditional ideology of production, which included dignity relating to work ethic and quantity/quality of production. The shift to an ideology of consumption left workers with not only a loss of their pride in the job, but it put them in a position where they were excluded from the new consumer society as well.

According to Cohen (1972), young people were most affected by these changes, which brought about a strain on the relationships between parents and children. As he also suggests, "What had previously been a source of support and security for both now became something of a battleground, a major focus of all the anxieties created by the disintegration of community structures around them" (89). Youth responded by forming youth subcultures in opposition to parent culture. Generational conflict allowed for the shift from interpersonal, face-to-face conflict to situating the conflict within a collective context. Subcultures brought a sense of community and solidarity that had been destroyed by advanced capitalism in the field of work, which had primarily been the source of working-class unity. For Cohen, subcultures and delinquency became a way to compensate for the loss of proletarian culture.

Similarly, in his 1977 book *Learning to Labor*, Paul Willis discussed working-class youth resistance, focusing on how young school boys ("lads") in an English industrial city interacted with an educational institution that was entrenched with middle-class values. For Willis, counter-culture at school must be placed in the larger framework

of working-class culture. The school provides an example of class and social reproduction in a capitalist society. Steeped in a dialectic of opposition, the boys he talks to are refusing to do schoolwork and rebelling against school authority. While teachers and school staff attribute this to exposure to bad influences and individual pathology, Willis (1977) states that these explanations "will not do … as proper social explanations for the development of an anti-school culture" (116). Through rejecting the conformist code of the school, students are rejecting incorporation into a middle-class way of life. This rebellion of poor and working class kids against the school, while empowering, prevents their social mobility and prepares them for working-class jobs, thus reproducing pre-existing class inequalities. Thus, ironically, it is their active opposition that actually ends up helping to maintain class divisions.

While much of the literature seems to focus the oppositional nature of delinquency, David Matza (1964) felt like this nature was overemphasized. He posited that the relationship between the subculture of delinquency and conventional culture cannot be purely oppositional, because conventional culture is multi-faceted and cannot be reduced solely to middle-class morality and "ascetic Puritanism" (37). According to Matza, unlike completely oppositional subcultures, delinquents' justifications for their acts are oftentimes not radical, but rather about status and publicity, unavoidability (e.g., having to defend oneself), or necessity (doing what one needs to do to meet basic needs). Additionally, delinquents often take offense at false accusation of delinquent acts, implying that they concur with conventional assessment of delinquency; if delinquency were oppositional, they would take imputations of delinquency as a compliment. For

Matza, when you look at delinquents, they play both delinquent and conventional roles, and they "drift" between criminal and conventional action.

The response to delinquency in the United States used to be one of attempted socialization and rehabilitation, particularly through the juvenile court. But with predictions that youth crime would explode in the 1990s (Fox, 1997; Bennett, DiIiulio, and Walters, 1996), and with policies such as the "war on drugs" and "war on crime," fear started to shape public policy related to minority youth, and as Males (1996, 1999) pointed out, the term "black youth" became synonymous with "predator" and "criminal." Negative perceptions were reinforced through repressive policies at schools, through law enforcement, and in the juvenile justice systems, which was under pressure to pass stricter juvenile crime laws and send more youth to adult court (Butts, 1999). Despite these reactions, youth crime actually decreased, proving Fox and Bennett et al's predictions wrong.

In this chapter, I seek to determine whether, in today's consumer society, the contemporary sociological theories of delinquency still hold for young people, and whether young people involved in the criminal justice system are willing to adopt and model pro-social behaviors for their peers.

Youth ECHO: The Intervention

Starting in the fall of 2007, the Red Hook Community Justice Center implemented an experiment designed to address the positive perceptions of youth crime thought to be held by many young people residing in the Red Hook Houses, the largest public housing development in Brooklyn, New York. The teenage residents are predominantly low-income and Black and Latino; many are disconnected from

mainstream social institutions and are involved in the neighborhood's drug trade. The original funding[16] for the experiment – known as Youth ECHO – was for a program that would try to increase pro-social behaviors and change attitudes about crime among Red Hook youth, employing a marketing campaign to achieve this goal.

Before the curriculum could be devised, there were numerous programmatic protocols (e.g., behavior management, recruitment, and interview structures) that needed to be put in place. These policies and practices were combined to create an interview protocol that would identify youth that were both well-positioned socially to spread their messages but were also interested in and in possession of sufficient critical thinking skills to engage with the issues investigated by the group. The program also created a structure of relevant and meaningful rewards for positive group behavior and consequences for negative behavior.

Recruitment for youth programs is often done at schools, community-based organizations, and other places where youth come into contact with adults. Youth ECHO was intentionally designed to engage a cadre of teenagers who were disconnected from mainstream institutions. Consequently, recruitment was done at alternative schools (for young people who have had difficulties in traditional school environments), at popular hangout spots in the neighborhood like the Chicken Spot (a local take-out restaurant), the park, and through word-of-mouth. For the first cohort, special efforts were made to recruit young people whose names were heard numerous times in ethnographic interviews with other young people in the area (see Methodology section below), having been identified as influential yet disconnected teens in the Red Hook neighborhood. Applicants for the second cohort were also recruited through participants in Cohort 1.

[16] The funder was the Brooklyn Community Foundation (see Chapter 1).

Program staff were repeatedly warned that it would be difficult to recruit Red Hook youth, who are traditionally very reluctant to engage with programming, yet staff had no problem identifying 15 participants; many ECHO members said later they decided to interview for the job because it was "something new" and did not yet have a reputation among teens. A broad range of youth were selected, from those who were enrolled in school and possessed relatively high levels of executive functioning to those who had been in and out of the criminal justice system, were unemployed, and had dropped out of school. This mix provided a range of youth experiences and lent a necessary credibility to the program and its message.

When applying to the program, teens had to submit an application and participate in group and individual interviews. During the interview process, there were discussions about the issues youth face in Red Hook, and the applicants were asked to brainstorm solutions to some of these problems. By integrating brainstorming opportunities into the interviews, youth had the opportunity to see that the program took their experiences and opinions seriously and that they were expected to participate and demonstrate commitment from the beginning. This interview structure also enabled staff to see which young people wanted to talk about social issues, who took charge and was respected by peers, and who was not really capable of engaging in discussions of this nature. If they were accepted into the program, it was framed as though they were being hired for a job; the language of "working for" and "being employed by" Youth ECHO was used throughout the program. Participants were given a bi-weekly stipend, with youth ages 13-15 given the job title of Community Organizer and paid $50 every two weeks, and youth ages 16-19 given the job title of Community Leader and paid $65 every two weeks.

The participants came to work every Tuesday and Thursday from 4:30 to 6:30pm for the program period (Cohort 1 was six months long, Cohort 2 eight and a half months), and their stipend was tied to being present and on-time. Youth who were not at work (at the courthouse or another designated location where the session was taking place that day) by 4:30pm were considered late and got docked pay. Youth who were absent had to either show a note or they were docked pay. This structure had a positive effect on attendance and promptness. Mostly, participants were on time, attended regularly, or were absent for legitimate reasons. The rigid structure was meant to prepare them for standard policies in future jobs they might have.

Youth were to be heavily involved in what happened in the program on a daily basis. As the background research showed, the program's pro-social message needed to come from the participants in order for it to be relevant and to resonate with their peers (Swaner and White, 2009). Giving young people a say in the issues to be addressed and the resulting strategies and projects led to: 1) greater commitment among participants to program, 2) greater commitment to the message itself, and 3) investment in the long-term success of the program. The youth-driven nature of the campaign gave it the source credibility and the street acceptance it needed.

The Youth ECHO curriculum, designed to both educate and engage the teens, was derived from the Search Institute's positive youth development model that focused on assets of the young people. In its final iteration, following some changes from the first cohort, the program curriculum had three key phases: skill-building, research and development, and implementation. The first, skill-building phase front-loaded work on healthy communication, active listening, team-building, and learning styles so the group

developed a sense of cohesion and a healthy group identity. At a weekend retreat, youth and staff honed these skills and with staff support, youth decided the issue they wanted to address over the course of the program. They transitioned into learning about research, organizing, and marketing methods over a more extended period of time, first with program staff leading workshops and then by visiting various marketing agencies for specialized presentations about alternative advertising methods and innovations in the field. By framing this as “training” following the selection of the year’s issue, youth had a concrete anchor for the more abstract lessons to come. During this phase, youth mostly reported to the courthouse for their training, with the occasional fieldtrip to an outside agency.

In the second phase, research and development, youth conceptualized and designed their campaign. They explored the topic in-depth so they understood the individual, community, and structural causes that brought it about and perpetuated it. The topic the first cohort chose was selling drugs, and the second cohort chose dropping out of school. Youth devised a research project to learn more about these issues, including how they were affecting young people and how they are thinking and talking about drugs and dropping out. They also conducted and analyzed research with adult stakeholders (e.g. police, teachers, parents, and court staff). Based on their findings and drawing on the marketing and organizing lessons, they created a multi-stage campaign to address their chosen campaign issue. During this research and development phase, the youth would meet at the courthouse, though on some days they would immediately go out into the neighborhood to conduct interviews.

In the final, implementation phase, youth partnered with marketing professionals, other youth programs, and/or various professionals as appropriate to carry out their campaign. Over the course of the last few program weeks, youth implemented their campaign. The culminating project – like the issue itself – was left largely to the discretion of the ECHO members. Its central goal, however, was to provide participants with visibility and a vehicle to disseminate their message. Though the youth met twice a week at the courthouse during this phase, they spent additional time outside of the court implementing their marketing campaigns (discussed below).

Youth ECHO's first cohort consisted of a group of thirteen Red Hook teenagers between the ages of 13 and 18, 92% of whom were African American and 15% were Latino (one person chose more than one race/ethnicity). Six were male and seven were female. These young people selected an anti-drug dealing message: "Drug Dealing: It's Not Worth It" for their campaign. As part of their messaging strategy, ECHO members partnered with 826NYC, a local Brooklyn arts non-profit, to create a documentary film, "Knock the Hustle: The New Movement," which explored the impact of drug dealing on young people in the neighborhood. They also developed a cell phone ring tone, a website with links to youth services across the city (to provide alternatives to dealing), message t-shirts for distribution at events, and a spray chalk stencil to "tag" the message throughout the housing development. At the end of the summer, the group hosted a Block Party that was attended by approximately 250 Red Hook residents, all of whom got to hear Youth ECHO's message.

The second cohort consisted of a group of 14 young people – eight boys and six girls, 80% African American and 20% Latino. This group selected dropping out of

school as the issue they wanted to address, seeing dropping out as a direct pathway into underground economies (like drug dealing, stealing and robbery). The message, "Fast Money is Trash Money. Get it in now. Get it back later. Stay in School," was sent to peers via text message (through a three-stage, chain letter-style text campaign); stamped onto fake dollar bills scattered around the neighborhood and slipped into the lockers and books of friends at school; featured in several YouTube videos; and printed or etched on free t-shirts, Tech Decks (mini skateboards popular among young people), and trophies. The t-shirts, Tech Decks, and trophies were distributed to young people 13-16 (those most vulnerable to dropping out or who will have the easiest time reenrolling) at an “End-of-School Bash,” a basketball tournament and talent show thrown in Red Hook’s Coffey Park.

Staffing for Youth ECHO included one full-time program coordinator, one full-time assistant coordinator, and one part-time AmeriCorps member (during the second cohort only), the latter two having had grown up in the Red Hook Houses and currently lived there as well. Hiring staff from the neighborhood was meant to help the program be seen as “culturally inside,” not just a program of the local community court. These staff members were able to establish a substantially different kind of rapport with youth than staff from other youth programs run out of the same location.

Methodology

Data for this study on delinquency and civic engagement were collected between January 2008 and June 2009 by four methods: one-on-one interviews, surveys, focus groups, and program observations. The use of both qualitative and quantitative methods allowed for a full understanding of the experiences of teenagers in Red Hook. All

interview and focus group protocols and survey instruments received Institutional Review Board approval, and all informants were asked to sign a consent form before participation, and for those under the age of 18, parent/guardian consent forms were obtained as well.

One-on-one interviews with Red Hook youth

One-on-one individual interviews were conducted at two time points with two separate groups of Red Hook young people. From January to March 2008, 23 open-ended interviews were conducted with teenagers ages 13 through 18 who were Red Hook residents (83%) or who were Brooklyn residents who spent a significant amount of time in the Red Hook neighborhood (17%).[17] Seventy percent of those interviewed were female, and 70% also lived in New York City public housing. The interview method was chosen in order to gain a better understanding of the cultural norms of Red Hook teenagers, especially as they related to delinquent behavior, and hence uncover meaning in the experiences of the young people (Kvale, 1996). The interview protocol included questions about how they spend their free time; "crews" they were involved in; if they or their friends commit crimes, and the reasons they might do so; how adults view youth from Red Hook; and their own perceptions about themselves and their futures. Interview length ranged from 30 to 90 minutes. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded for conceptual themes.

Additionally, 21 semi-structured interviews were conducted in August 2008 and June 2009 with Youth ECHO participants who had remained in the program for its full

[17] Some participants were recruited through schools, flyering, word-of-mouth and other community-based organizations. Additionally, two adults from the Red Hook houses were trained as interviewers; because of their cultural "inside" status, they were able to identify and interview harder-to-reach teenagers who were not able to be recruited through the more traditional recruitment methods.

program cycle. These interviews, which lasted about 45 minutes each, sought to understand how the young people made sense of the work they had done in the community education campaigns, and how it affected their personal growth and their plans for the future. Seventy-one percent of the ECHO participants were African-American, 24% Hispanic, and 5% Black and Hispanic. Forty-eight percent were female, and 86% lived in public housing.

Youth ECHO participant surveys

Baseline and end-of-program follow-up surveys were administered to 21 members who completed the Youth ECHO program between March 2008 and July 2009. Surveys were used to gather participant demographics and assess their attitudes and behavior regarding civic engagement, delinquent behavior, risk behavior participation, work, and feelings of efficacy. Most survey questions were pulled from national youth surveys[18] that have been tested for reliability and validity.

Exploratory factor analysis (principal components) revealed a civic engagement scale from six items designed to measure how often participants were trying to improve their community. The six items comprising the civic engagement scale included items such as: "I am serving others in my community" and "I am trying to help solve social problems," with a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "Not at all or rarely" (1) to "Extremely or almost always" (4). Responses to the six items were combined to form a civic engagement scale, with a Cronbach's alpha of .77. A higher mean indicated greater civic engagement.

[18] Some of these surveys included the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, the National Household Education Survey, the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, and the Black Youth Survey.

A feeling of efficacy scale was created from three items that measured whether the individuals felt they could make a difference in their community and in politics (α = .72). Using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree," survey takers were asked to identify how much they agreed with statements such as "People working together in my community can solve our problems," and "I have the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in politics." A higher mean indicated stronger feelings of efficacy.

An attitudes towards delinquency scale was created from five items measuring how wrong the individuals felt about specific delinquent behaviors (e.g., skipping classes without an excuse, stealing something worth less than $50, selling drugs) using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "Very wrong" to "Not at all wrong." A reliability test yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .64. A lower mean indicated feelings that the delinquent behaviors were more wrong.

Exploratory factor analysis (principal components) revealed a seven-item attitudes towards gangs scale (α = .64). This scale calculated the mean of responses to statements such as "I think it's cool to be in a gang," and "I think you are safer, and have protection, if you join a gang." Responses were coded as 0 ("Not true for me") and 1 ("True for me"). The coding for three items[19] were reverse coded so that "True for me" was coded as 1 and "Not true for me" as 0. A lower score indicated less positive attitudes towards gangs.

An attitude towards work scale was created from five items designed to measure how participants felt about working and having a job (α = .63). Using a 4-point Likert

[19] These three items were: "My friends would think less of me if I joined a gang"; "I believe it is dangerous to join a gang; you will probably end up getting hurt or killed if you belong to a gang"; and "I think being in a gang makes it more likely that you will get into trouble."

scale that ranged from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, survey takers were asked to say how much they agreed with certain statements, such as “I admire people who get by without working,” and “The only good job is one that pays a lot of money.” The coding of one of the statements was reversed so that Strongly Disagree was coded as 4 and Strongly Agree as 1. A lower score implied more positive attitudes towards work.

Other variables included whether or not the survey taker had used alcohol, cigarettes, or marijuana in the last 30 days, whether that had been in a physical fight in the last 12 months, and whether they had ever been arrested.

Youth ECHO participant focus groups

Between August 2008 and June 2009, three focus groups were conducted with Red Hook teenagers who participated in the Youth ECHO program. The first focus group included nine participants from the first program cohort, the second had nine participants from the second cohort, and the third had seven participants and one staff member[20] from the second cohort. Focus groups were conducted to get at the collective experiences of the young people who had worked together on community education campaigns (Glitz, 1998). Participants were asked about their feelings of agency as it related to their message campaign and work with Youth ECHO, how their attitudes towards their campaign issues (drug dealing and school dropouts) changed over the course of their campaigns, the challenges of trying to influence their peers in a positive way, and how they felt interacting with and in an institution of justice (i.e., a courthouse). Each focus group lasted 60 minutes and was audio recorded and transcribed.

Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

[20] The staff member was a graduate of the first cohort who was then hired as an AmeriCorps member to work with the program.

The findings from this study fell into two interrelated categories: delinquency and engagement. The attitudes and behaviors of young people were complex and most closely followed Matza's idea of drift. Positive behaviors were not mutually exclusive of negative ones, and the teenagers often found themselves moving between not only "conventional" and "delinquent" behaviors, but "prosocial" as well. Moreover, the youth who were getting in trouble with the law most were the most outspoken ones in their campaigns against crime.

Civic Engagement

Youth ECHO participants unanimously felt that the work they were doing was important and mattered to other young people. Whether the issue at hand was drug dealing or dropping out of school, all participants had either friends or family who had been affected by the topics or could clearly see the effects (e.g., high incarceration and unemployment rates) both had on Red Hook, particularly in public housing. Despite early claims made to one another within the group (during the period when they were trying to establish who were the group's leaders and what the group's tone would be) that they were only involved for the stipend attached to participation in the program, they also universally stressed when pressed that they believed in Youth ECHO's mission and in trying to make a difference in the community. Many emphasized that they wouldn't have even applied if they didn't want to "help." Some expressed in a focus group that while at first they were in the program just for the money and they didn't care at all, they felt by the end of the program that they were there to make a change. As Jayden[21], a 14-year old African-American male, stated, "You change, you actually, actually want to help, learn,

[21] All names of youth in this chapter have been changed to protect confidentiality.

it’s an experience.” Shante, a 13-year old Latina, echoed, “We got a chance, we have an opportunity, it’s a real open opportunity for us.”

Indeed, when they were informed at the end of the program that it wouldn’t run during the next program year due to funding difficulties, many expressed frustration during the final focus group and in exit interviews about the lack of similar programming in the neighborhood. Princess, a 17-year old Latina, stated her reaction to the program funding being cut: “I feel like we were the first, like, we’re the first to have a program that’s about … trying to change the community, that’s why I feel like, why this program?”

During each campaign, the groups expressed simultaneously a belief that the work they were doing was important and of value for teenagers and Red Hook as a whole, and a concern that their “target,” other young people, might not take them seriously. The first group struggled conceptually with the concept of the marketing campaign (that is, with thinking of themselves as creating a distinct campaign that was part of a tradition of using advertising methods to create social change or for public education purposes). Instead, they primarily framed their work as trying to help the neighborhood out. The second cohort, perhaps due to changes to the curriculum strengthening the marketing skills portion, clearly thought of the work they were doing as creating change *through* the creation and dissemination of a marketing campaign. In both cohorts, however, the emphasis from the beginning was on wanting to be engaged in an effort perceived as being of service to teenagers and the wider Red Hook community.

Youth ECHO also led to feelings of empowerment for its participants. Tameeka, a 13-year old African-American youth stated that although she was a bit shy when she

started the program, she "learned how to speak out on stuff." Precious, also a 13-year old African-American female, stated that because of Youth ECHO, "We can make a difference now." They talked about how they can use what they've learned in other contexts and how they can speak up about their rights. "Speaking out" was something they all felt they were learning how to do, "how to speak our minds," and they were building confidence to do so through the program. Valentina, a 17-year old Latina, summed up everyone's feelings when she stated, "We are the new movement."

Attitudes Towards Work

While Youth ECHO participants were engaged in the program because of its magnanimous goals, the bi-weekly stipend and the concept of being employed were extremely important to them. Participants used their paychecks differently, some spending their money on food, clothes, or social outings, with others saving half and giving half to parents or guardians. Based on interviews conducted at the end of program, participants clearly felt there was a social cachet to having a job and an income, however small.

The desire to be perceived as successful or as having prospects was pervasive in the community. As found during the ethnographic research stage and again among Youth ECHO participants, wanting clothing and other status symbols was a central concern of young peoples' lives. The concern was not just to have new clothes, or to appear "not poor," but to have designer labels and to appear wealthy. Coveted labels included Prada sneakers, Gucci, Coach, and Nike Air Jordans. Many teens also had Blackberries or Sidekick phones, and iPods or Zune music players. Basically, as Mike, a 16-year-old African-American male explained, young people "just get whatever new."

Destiny, a young Latina woman who lived in East New York until a few years ago, says she sees a big difference between the importance of fashion in her old neighborhood and in Red Hook. In Red Hook, she says:

> *'Cause it's like if you dress bummy or whatever. People just look at you different like you – you dirty. Like, nobody cares about you. It – It doesn't matter how – how you are. What you are as a person. It doesn't matter how you act if you like – if you – if you don't dress the way they dress or look the way they look, they just – they just put you out.*

All young people expressed a strong desire not to be perceived as "bummy," suggesting a strong correlation between material goods, being seen as successful, and status. Despite this, they chose education campaigns that condemned non-legal work, creating anti-drug dealing and stay in school campaigns with slogans such as "Drug dealing; it's not worth it," and "Fast money is trash money: stay in school."

There was a real tension for Youth ECHO members between the desire to acquire wealth through "legitimate" means and acquiring "fast money." Having a job, however, lent youth a sense of importance that had a powerful impact on their behavior. Indeed, as ECHO members built their skill-levels and gained confidence in their abilities as collaborators and employees, many members expressed interest in furthering their own professional lives. Several members from the first year, and all of those in the second year, wished to rejoin for the next program year. Additionally, while some first years did not reapply for the second year due to school or sports commitments, several requested that their spot be saved so they could be rehired for year three. Princess, a first-year ECHO participant who had been involved with the criminal justice system and dropped out of school, joined the Justice Center's AmeriCorps (public service) program and worked with program staff as a co-facilitator for the second cohort. Jayden, who had also

been arrested during his time at Youth ECHO, interned at the Justice Center, expressing a desire to build his skills to make himself more hirable.

The mean score on the attitudes towards work scale for Youth ECHO participants (N = 21) was 1.85 at baseline and 1.78 at the end of the program (a lower score signifies more positive attitudes towards work), implying that the young people had positive attitudes towards work and did not value easy money or have a desire to get by without working. While they were able to state in focus groups that there was a need for more programs for kids and more jobs for adults in the community "so people can stay off the streets," they were also able to recognize the difficulty in doing so in Red Hook. As Nicole, a 17-year old African-American Youth ECHO participant, stated: "Everybody that has a job out here they don't even live out here so our money is being sent somewhere else, and it's being spent here but being sent somewhere else."

A good example of this happened when Ikea, a large multi-national furniture store, opened in the area. The young people were skeptical about what it would mean in terms of jobs for the community. Alex, a 13-year old African-American male, said, "They hire Red Hook, and then they fire them. Like, that's not right, yo," while Joshua, a 16-year old Hispanic male, said that, "There's mad people from Red Hook who work there for like two months, then they drop them," and another participant said, "I don't think they like people from Red Hook working in Red Hook." Nicole summed up the problem when she said, "When they hire people from Red Hook, I think it's only so they can, like, um, get y'all to back their idea to have something new in the neighborhood, just to get y'all on board, but then they drop you and there's nothing you can do about it."

Jayden explained further, with bigger companies moving into the neighborhood,

> *Everybody's building places, like, before back in the day, like, you know, everybody, like, like, every job, everybody's job was like, alright, if you had this job, like, say you worked at a deli, that person that worked in the deli lived in this neighborhood, so when you buy something, you're feeding them, like you're feeding them. Now, it's like, everybody that has like a job out here they don't even live out here so our money is being sent somewhere else, and it's being spent here but being sent somewhere else.*

So while the young people had positive attitudes towards working, they understood that there were structural barriers that prevented people from getting and maintaining jobs in Red Hook, perhaps leading some to look to the illegitimate economy for money.

Working at an Institution of Social Control

Young people's attitudes about working at a courthouse raised issues that reflected issues that young people of color often encounter. Joshua stated that, "Like, if you say you work at a courthouse people think you're a snitch or something." Some did not like the security measures taken when they were coming to the program, making statements such as, "I didn't like it, going through the metal detectors," and "The security was one of the things that bothered me most." Despite this, they were able to overcome these feelings to in fact break down some stereotypes that the young people have about police. As Derek, an 18-year old African-American male, stated, "I didn't like nobody with a badge really, but then … [our mentors], they kinda cool, so I'm like, 'alright,'" referring to the fact that two of the court officers in the building served as mentors to members of the program. Having to interact with the court officers – who are associated with institutions of social control which youth in Red Hook are highly cynical of (see Chapter 4) – did not reduce ECHO members' commitment to the program, in part because they felt the officers were friendly to them,

Gangs

In Red Hook, gang culture assumes a slightly different air than it does elsewhere in Brooklyn. Many Red Hook youth, particularly boys, are members of well-known gangs, like the Bloods, Crips, and Latin Kings. These affiliations often fall out along family and geographic lines and, while there are rivalries between these gangs, because Red Hook is so small, there is very little actual violence that occurs as a result. More important to young people are "teams," typically small groups of three to fifteen members between the ages of 13 and 18. There are all-boy teams, like 100, Violators, GMG (Green Money Gang), and Soldiers. There are all-girl teams, like Trendsetters, TBB (The Baddest Bitches), and TDD (Top Dime Divas). ATM (Addicted to Money) and Dynasty are among the mixed-gender teams. As the names suggest, these teams are largely geared around the acquisition of money and status. Malikah, the only female member of ATM, 14-years old, explained that physical indicators of success are requirements for membership. "I don't really know because I didn't make it up," she said, "but I think if you not about money then you can't mess with them. Like, if you a bum, you can't mess with them. If you don't have money, you can't mess with them. If you not pretty or handsome, you can't mess with them."

According to all the young people interviewed, while these crews are concerned with projecting an image of material success, they aren't necessarily engaging in criminal activity beyond occasional fights, smoking marijuana, and public drinking. They are essentially formalized social networks. Another young African-American teen, Mayra, clarified by saying, "They don't do things like they used to. Like Violators, they name. You'd think they dangerous, but they don't do what they used to, 'cause they saw that

they're getting older and they need to calm down." While they don't participate in violent criminal activity, they do have a strong rivalry with one another that can lead to altercations. "It's a team thing to say whose crew is better," Mayra continued. "We don't do that, but we don't have no problem – like real, real beef. We just play around like, 'Yeah. We better. Y'all droppin'. Y'all comin' to us. We better.'"

Some of the youth interviewed described these teams as being comprised of the popular teens in the neighborhood. This link was a source of confusion to these young people, because, as one young girl indicated, "They do stupid stuff. I don't know why they popular. People like them." Others, however, did not agree that these kids were admired. While there are the more well-known, formalized teams, members are not uniformly considered the "popular" kids by everyone. Some young people interviewed purposely did not want to be involved in these groups. One African-American male teen, James, for instance, was approached by an older friend last year to join Violators but decided not to join because those teams "are for punks that don't know how to fight." James' rejection of the team was acceptable, however, because he and the Violators member had been friends since kindergarten. As James said, "He didn't do anything because we been friends since we were little."

Other young people interviewed opt to give their group of friends a name. While on one level these might resemble competing teams, these groups of friends do not engage in the rivalry or membership-games. Wakara, a 13-year old African American female, explained:

> *We, well me and my friends, we had a couple of other girls, we had a name for ourselves. We – Christine's mom passed away when she was younger and her mother always loved sapphires, so we called ourselves the 'Sapphires.' And it*

> *was like, that was one day. The first day that we named ourselves we cried. We sat down and cried because of her mom.*

As the Sapphires girls' experience suggests, the teams and crews that are the most noticeable might be related most visibly to fashion and material wealth. Nonetheless, the structure – names, solidarity, recognition – assist other youth in creating socially supportive groups.

Survey data found that, though young people were involved with these "crews," they didn't have positive feelings towards gangs, or think that gangs made them feel safer. On the Attitudes Towards Gangs scale, the mean for the group at the start of the program indicated extremely negative attitudes towards gangs and gang membership. The reasons for involvement in these groups, then, was more about conventional peer groupings than anything related to a desire to resist norms imposed on them by middle-class values or participate in criminal behavior because it was oppositional. In fact, the focus on money and status indicated an embrace of indicators of middle-class success, reflecting the cultural belief of the "American Dream."

Delinquency/Crime

While there is a tendency to think of youth delinquency as a fixed state, either a young person is or isn't a delinquent, the experiences of Youth ECHO participants and youth interviewed during the ethnographic research phase suggest a much more fluid relationship to delinquent and criminal behavior. Youth associate the concept of "crime" with a very specific set of behaviors, ones that do not describe the petty criminal behavior in which they and their peer group commonly engage. That is to say, certain kinds of

criminal behavior are normative behavior for many of these young people.[22] When asked what they thought of when they heard the word "crime," all the ethnographic research subjects referred to violent crime: gunshots, guns, shooting, killing, stabbing, dying, and murder. All said these kinds of things don't happen in Red Hook. The majority of young people identified robbery as the most common crime committed by youth, with smoking and selling weed as the second most common. Teens associate robbery with deprivation. "People see what they want," Terence, a 15-year old African-American male explained. He continued, "If they can't get it themselves with their money they find a way to get it."

The primary crimes they thought Red Hook youth committed were inconsistent with their sense of general youth crime. Answers varied from marijuana selling and smoking to hopping the train, from fighting to stealing. When pressed for reasons why they think Red Hook youth commit crimes in general, youth answers identified four basic ideas: 1) there's nothing else to do, 2) they need the money, 3) peer pressure, and 4) not wanting to appear "corny." "Football, basketball – sports," explained one interviewee. "That's the only thing you can do in Red Hook without getting into no trouble." If boys aren't into sports, "basically you're lost. Like, unless you don't go sit there, you go on the corner and sell drugs – go and start trouble unless there's something else to do." Another teen, agreed, saying she believes that many boys end up joining gangs "cause they have nothing better to do." Young people commit crimes, one young woman suggested, because "I guess they need the money. I don't know. Nobody trying to give it to them. Like I said, parents don't care, so they go find it the easy way – make it the

[22] More than half of the Red Hook youth interviewed have had a family member incarcerated, and at least half of those young people have had more than one family member incarcerated. Several have lost brothers, uncles, or godfathers to gang or drug-related violence. Criminal behavior is familiar to them.

other way. Nowadays a lot of kids don't depend on their parents, so they depend on theyselves."

This justification of low-level criminal behavior – that parents do not provide for children, that they want things they can't pay for, that there's nothing else to do – were echoed somewhat by Youth ECHO participants. The crimes they referenced most often were fighting, marijuana use, and shoplifting. During several group discussions with program staff, participants could not understand why some of these low-level criminal activities (i.e., smoking marijuana) were illegal and, moreover, could not identify a moral or ethical reason not to engage in them. They reasoned they might elect to avoid such behavior to stay out of trouble, but not because they personally felt there was something wrong with the action. They could, however, readily identify right and wrong in relation to the things the ethnographic research subjects identified with the word "crime" – murder, arson, robbery, and certain kinds of physical and sexual abuse – and eschewed such behavior. Malikah suggested, further, that Red Hook youth avoid committing many crimes in the neighborhood precisely because of the feeling of extended family: "[I]f you do something to somebody in Red Hook, it's a big possibility that they know your parents. So, it's like you don't want to get in trouble by your parents. You don't want them to find out, so they'd rather not do it in Red Hook." She was referring here not to normative Red Hook teenage behaviors like fighting, marijuana use, and shoplifting but to things like stalking, teen relationship abuse, and the use of weapons.

Across the board, girls and boys, those who participate in delinquent behavior and not, explained feeling surveilled by police even when they're not doing anything wrong (as Ruck et al (2008) and Fine et al (2003) had previously found) and, conversely, not

having police arrive in a timely fashion when they're needed. Destiny warned, "Watch out for cops, 'cause they're, like, everywhere. It's unbelievable … For some reason people who live in Red Hook attract a lot of attention. They automatically assume that you're a problem." One of the interviewees, a high school graduate with a full-time job who coaches several basketball teams, describes the way he feels young men of color are treated: "We used to be able to be in the buildings and cops would just walk past us. Now, if there's more than two people in the building they want to talk to us – throw us against the wall and search us." Some of the increased police presence is the result of the sweeps. Young people are accurate in their sense of being targeted by law enforcement. Often, this is because so many of the petty crimes for which they are arrested or given citations are normative behaviors among their peer groups. Few young people considered public drinking and smoking marijuana to be serious infractions. Similarly, many were unclear about whether or not fighting or graffiti were considered crimes.

Peer Pressure

Peer pressure also plays a role in teenagers' behavior. In ethnographic interviews, several young people said that the peer pressure they most experienced was around doing things to win respect and not be perceived as a "punk" or as "corny." One young woman said, "Like I know what I'm doing but sometimes I don't make the right decisions. Like in my mind I'm like this is right but I'll do the opposite of what my mind is telling me…'cause I feel like if I don't do it they'll be like 'Oh, you mad corny.'" As another young woman put it, teenagers will do something "if they got a friend in their ear. But if they by theyself, they won't do it." This distinction between doing things only if their friends are telling them to emphasizes the degree to which certain behaviors are not

merely the result of rebellion or resisting mainstream culture, but are the result of a complex combination of morality, sense of a larger social or filial responsibility, and feelings of peer social pressure.

Several young people told anecdotes about using similar peer pressure power to bring about so-called "positive" behaviors. As Wakara explained, one of her friends at school was the leader of the school's primary gang,

> *G-Nation, ... and it was crazy because it was like we were watching our friend get into all of this. So we always, we sat her down and talked to her, like 'What are you doing? You have, you're in school, you're failing school. You get suspended more than like three times a week. How is that possible? Like you always in trouble. It's not cool, it's not working out.' You know, and she's back on track now. I see her doing her work. She sits with me in class now and she does her work, she does everything. When she starts off a little bit I pull her back in.*

Whereas this young woman used social pressure to change behavior, other young people explain that they simply resist joining in whatever the negative or illegal activity is. The following explanation, like the one above, indicates the degree to which no young person is decidedly fixed in either a "cool" or "uncool" social location, or a "good" or "bad" one: "I don't really hang out with people who do the wrong stuff. Sometimes if they're doing the wrong stuff I might be with them to get in trouble, but like, I don't do stuff like that." Young peoples' stories suggest that they often find themselves in situations where they "wild out" and are either accidental bystanders or, at the very least, complicit non-participants in delinquent and criminal behavior.

Drift

Despite the belief among Youth ECHO participants that their work had a real significance to the community and potential to affect other young people's behavior, and their longing for developing marketable work skills, they themselves struggled with

consistently avoiding the activities they were advocating against. In the first cohort, one young person admitted that she occasionally dealt drugs to make money, and others questioned whether their message to not sell drugs, which they really believed in, would be taken seriously by their peers who knew they were marijuana users themselves. In the second cohort, many young people continued to cut classes or even entire days of school, despite group discussion in which they adamantly argued for the importance of education. Ultimately, what they came away with was a global commitment to a set of behaviors – not dealing drugs, staying in school – that they had trouble regularly following. Princess, who after her first year became employed by the program, had herself dropped out of school and was struggling with returning to a GED program.

Despite involvement in prosocial behaviors in the Youth ECHO program, participants also were involved in antisocial behaviors, almost all of which increased during their time in the program. The percent that had used alcohol in the past 30 days went from 43% to 52%; past 30-day cigarette usage increased from 19% to 33%, and past 30-day marijuana usage jumped from 29% to 38%. Though these changes were not statistically significant, that may be because of the small number of people in the sample. The percent that had ever been arrested significantly ($p<.05$) increased from 33% before program participation to 52% at the end of the program. Additionally, there was a positive correlation between civic engagement and attitudes towards delinquency, $r = .53$, $p < .05$, indicating that greater levels of civic engagement were associated with beliefs that delinquent behavior was *not* wrong. This reinforces the non-exclusivity of pro- and anti-social behaviors, because the positive and negative behaviors often exist together.

Navigating through conventional and delinquent worlds, young people in Red Hook have a critical understanding of how their desire to engage in positive behaviors is often difficult when faced with institutional barriers. For example, when working on their stay in school campaign, they began learning about "push outs." These are young people who, because of insufficient credits at too advanced an age, are counseled out or "pushed out" by schools despite the fact that they are legally entitled to be enrolled in school until the age of 21. As one ECHO participant put it: "The school to prison pipeline. Like, it's set up so like, kind of, like, [the school's] not exactly helping them, so they're going from school and they're gonna drop out and they're gonna be in prison." Another participant added, "In a way the school sets up the kids, a certain type of kids and whatnot, or whatever, they set them up to go to jail from school. They're leading them to a bad life." Yet while they talked about all the negative aspects of schools (from their point of view, insufficient funding, poor structural conditions, non-relevant work, uncaring teachers), they understood that it was "ironic" that they were trying to convince people to stay in school. Joshua stated: "People need to know, you can't ignore the fact that some schools are bad and it is hard, you know but you still gotta keep doin' it … Sometimes you just need to go on, like, everything ain't gonna be perfect, you got to make it, you just got to do it."

Additionally, the young people felt that when they did do positive things, reactions were often patronizing. A local newspaper in Cobble Hill, Brooklyn, the Cobble Hill Cobbler, wrote an article about the Youth ECHO program, and while they were excited about being in the newspaper, they were upset by the title of the article stating the program was giving at-risk kids a chance. "I didn't like that shit. I'm not at

risk. And they trying to say that 'cause we in the hood…" They were upset that the article seemed to imply that the program was good for them because they were low-income and from Red Hook, and didn't recognize the work that the young people themselves did to try to help their community, i.e., the article focused on how good the program was for its participants, and not how good the young people were for the community.

Deconstructing Assumptions

Much of the literature on delinquency discussed earlier in this chapter focuses either on individual psychopathology or on the resistance aspect of the delinquency, whereby young people commit delinquent acts as part of their participation in a deviant subculture in opposition to middle-class values being imposed on them. Gladwell's (1997) writing about influentials and popular opinion leaders suggests that locating young people who are central to extended social networks and working with them to shift opinions and behaviors of other youth could potentially result in significant changes in behavior and attitudes. This study, however, challenges the assumptions of both these theories. The findings suggest that delinquency in this low-income, urban neighborhood is not rooted in desires to resist middle-class values, adopt a fully formed and alternative subculture, or follow a select group of popular or influential youth; in fact, many of the young people embrace a variety of middle-class values.

Although they were not troubled by certain types of petty criminal behavior (fighting, marijuana use, and shoplifting in particular), they saw neither these nor more serious delinquent actions as cool or oppositional to mainstream values, but rather as the result of boredom that originates from living in an isolated neighborhood or as growing

out of financial or social necessity. And while many participants engaged in delinquent behavior, they simultaneously embraced pro-social behaviors and advocated a desire to improve the quality of their neighborhood through positive action.

Accordingly, Matza's (1964) theory of drift, which suggests that delinquents "drift" between delinquent and conventional norms, is supported by this study. The young people in the sample played both conventional and delinquent roles: they were getting involved in low-level crime at the same time they were trying to effect positive change in their community, thereby "drifting" between worlds. Their primary justifications for delinquent behavior focused on having to do things out of necessity, or not having anything else to do. Youth ECHO participants expressed a desire for more job opportunities, programs, and activities to keep them off the streets and provide them with positive outlets for their energy and need for social engagement. As one male participant stated, if the young people in Red Hook were actively engaged in after-school programs or part-time jobs, they wouldn't be on the street getting "harassed by the cops for no reason, or be[ing] tempted to do something stupid. People get bored, they get crazy."

It is important to return to the question of the source of decreased criminal behavior in Red Hook over the last decade, given its drug-infested and violent history in the 1980s and 1990s. This study points to a significant amount of social control from within, instigated by the youth themselves. Many of the teens interviewed pointed to drugs has having had an extremely negative effect on their families, with parents, uncles, and older brothers having been locked up for selling drugs. And they themselves are feeling the long-term effects. As one young woman stated, "It affects not just yourself, but everybody. You lose your apartment, your family, for no reason." Another stated

that he has been deeply affected by his older brother's imprisonment, because he does not have anybody he can go to for advice, and so now he knows he must be a role model for his younger siblings. Having seen the deleterious consequences drugs and violence have had on the neighborhood, youth are looking for alternatives and doing things differently than the previous generations had in Red Hook. And they are seeing the results of those behavioral changes, and understanding the importance of they themselves being role models for their younger siblings. One teen stated, "I've lived here my whole life … there used to be a lot of gunshots. There's still gunshots around here sometimes, but it's not like it used to be." Another, "Red Hook is changing fast, and we're tryin' to make Red Hook change for the good and not for the worse … Red Hook's changing for the better." The kids in Youth ECHO are reclaiming the public space in Red Hook, especially the formerly drug-infested Coffey Park where the ECHO block party and basketball tournament were held, for positive activities.

Implications

The research described in this chapter suggests that though young people in Red Hook desire to be seen as successful, they want to do so by "legitimate" means, and do not value or gain status from antisocial behaviors. Nor do they engage in such behaviors as part of broader rejection of a mainstream culture. Rather, they engage in them out of a sense of necessity or boredom. The assumed relationship between attitude and behavior appears much more complicated – certainly less predictable – than Gladwell's (1997) theory of influentials immediately suggests. Youth attitudes towards crime are determined by numerous variables, not the least of which is geography and social milieu.

The findings of this research are an important building block for challenging assumptions of when, how, and why youth engage in antisocial behavior.

The findings from the interviews and focus groups underline the importance of youth-adult partnerships and of having access to activities and projects where young people are active participants rather than the recipients of services. That is, young people perceive a distinct difference between programs that are designed to help them and those that allow them to use their skills, “connects,” and energies to assist others, or to try to make a difference. This sense of self-worth and efficacy is a core component of positive youth development.

The teens in this study viewed petty crime as normative. Many “disconnected” youth are perceived as being uninterested in community programs. This study suggests that, instead, many of these young people find themselves stuck with educational decisions made when they were younger (as high school dropouts), with limited employment prospects, engaging in antisocial behaviors because, to a certain extent, they do not see other options. Programs that assist those young people looking to reenter school, employment, or otherwise reengage with the mainstream economy are vital to helping this hard-to-reach population realize their own goals. Working alongside them to explore these goals and settle on a plan of action (rather than to set goals and plans in place for them) is essential to helping them succeed. The assumption that these young people are uninterested in participating in programming is faulty; too often, they just aren’t approached for participation.

Finally, this research suggests that programming and policy aimed at stemming delinquency or gang participation need not focus on wholesale attitudinal change, as the

belief of young people's positive perception of crime may be incorrect, as it was among the teenagers involved in this study. Instead, the tension between anti- and pro-social behavior – between teenagers' low-level criminal activity and their articulated desire to positively affect their neighborhoods – as well as the idea that many of the "teams" or "crews" are formalized social networks that are often positive influences, suggest that policymakers and community-based organizations must become more inclusive and less condemning in their approach if they hope to make an impact on delinquency and crime in communities like Red Hook, Brooklyn.

CHAPTER 4: Legal Cynicism Among Civically Engaged Youth Working with Institutions of Social Control

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I examined the relationship between civic engagement and delinquency among teenagers in Red Hook, Brooklyn, as well as looking at these teens' attitudes towards work. In this chapter I further explore Red Hook teens' relationship to crime by focusing on the attitudes of civically engaged young people towards the mechanisms of social control that address delinquency: laws, the police, and the court system. Given that high levels of legal cynicism and dissatisfaction with police are common among residents of poor, crime-ridden neighborhoods (Anderson 1999; Huang & Vaughan 1996; Sampson & Bartush 1998; Smith, Graham, and Adams 1991; Taylor et al., 2001), discovering how youth legal consciousness is shaped by the different kinds of nonpunitive, civic engagement programs and activities will help determine the types of experiences that create positive and negative dispositions towards law enforcement and the courts. This chapter seeks to uncover how youth in Red Hook perceive law, the court system, and law enforcement, and to examine the relationship between legal cynicism and positive engagement. Findings will hopefully uncover the role that youth imagine for law and legal institutions in their community, as well as their own place in working with institutions and agents of formal social control.

Attitudes Towards the Police in Red Hook

The geographic and demographic composition of the neighborhood was described in the previous chapter. It is assumed that many of Red Hook's predominantly low-income and minority youth hold ambivalent or negative attitudes towards police officers. These young people often react negatively when in the presence of law enforcement

personnel, and many police officers, in turn, regard the neighborhood's young residents with suspicion. A recent article in the *New York Times* (Lee, 2007) highlighted the tension between officers and youth in Red Hook. The article stated that: "The Red Hook projects have a large black population, a history of crime problems and, at least in a few young men, a wariness of the police." One local resident says that he "blames police practices like the stop-and-frisks for tension between the community and the police… many officers might want to stop crime in the community, but many cannot discern between common criminals and the common people who live among them." Another resident stated that police frequently stop him as he leaves or comes home, and he has to always carry his work identification badge home to prove to the police that he is employed and is not selling drugs. Pointing to a section of the Red Hook projects, "This is the war zone. If they catch you in here alone they're going to stop you. And they'll play mind games with you. Ten minutes after searching you, they'll come back by, just staring" (Lee, 2007). Distrust and antagonism between police officers and youth makes the officers' jobs harder and can easily escalate into situations in which young people get in unnecessary trouble with the law, giving them police records and putting a black mark on their futures.

As an initial response to stop and frisk practices, in the spring of 2005 the Red Hook Community Justice Center[23] began offering workshops titled "What to do When Stopped by the Police" to local teenagers. These workshops, which were based on a New York Civil Liberties Union curriculum and also brought local officers in to speak, taught teenagers about their rights and how to keep themselves safe in interactions with police officers. The workshops were well received both by local officers and teens. However,

[23] See Chapter 3 for further information on the Red Hook Community Justice Center.

while they may have been very useful in helping teenagers understand how to keep themselves out of trouble when they are stopped by the police, the Justice Center soon realized that the workshops did not tackle the core issue of mutual distrust between law enforcement officers and teenagers in Red Hook. Through conversations with teenagers and officers, the Justice Center found that both sides needed an opportunity to interact in a non-adversarial context and to get to know one another as individuals in order to break down negative stereotypes. To that end, the Justice Center developed and enhanced some of its youth programming to try to address this relationship, as well as encourage a positive relationship between the youth and the local court system. The "What to do When Stopped by the Police" workshop was included in the training for all of its youth programs, and mentor relationships were encouraged between the court officers in the building and the youth participants. The programs look very similar to the organizations discussed in Chapter 1, involving such components as theater performances and making films. One program was created specifically to develop local teenagers' skills as organizers for positive community change related to crime and delinquency, one for teenagers and police to interact in an improvisational acting/comedy setting, and one to give youth control over low-level misdemeanor trials for their peers.

The Justice Center makes for an interesting study, as it is rare for a formal institution of social control (the court) to actively offer a vast assortment of non-punitive programming under the same roof.

Youth ECHO

As described in Chapter 3, Youth ECHO (Expanding Community Horizons by Organizing) is a Red Hook Community Justice Center after-school program designed to

address the positive perceptions of youth crime thought to be held by many young people residing in the Red Hook Houses, the largest public housing development in Brooklyn, New York. See the previous chapter for a more detailed description of the program. During the time of my research for this chapter, there were 15 participants in Youth ECHO, all of whom agreed to be in this study.

Police Teen Theater Program

The Police Teen Theater Program engages young people and police officers from southwest Brooklyn, meeting once a week over the course of 10-weeks to participate in a college-level improvisation class given by a teaching artist. The program is free for all participants, and teenagers who attend all sessions receive a stipend. The curriculum focuses on building acting skills as well as providing the group with an opportunity to discuss important community issues such as gangs, peer pressure, violence, and stereotypes. These issues often appear in the original content that the group creates in class, both in written journal entries and improvised scenes. The goals of the program include increasing trust and respect between local police and teens, and debunking the negative stereotypes of these groups in the community. The program culminates in a final performance, *Riot Act*, which is open to the public. During the time of my research, there were 22 young people who participated in the Police Teen Theater Program, 12 of whom participated in this study.

Youth Court

The Red Hook Youth Court trains local teenagers to serve as jurors, judges, and attorneys, handling real-life cases involving their peers in southwest Brooklyn. The goal of this court is to use positive peer pressure to ensure that young people committing low-

level crimes pay back the community and receive the help they need to avoid further involvement in the justice system. The Youth Court handles approximately 150 cases per year, involving young people ages 10-18 who have been cited for low-level offenses, such as vandalism, fare evasion, assault, and truancy. These are cases that typically receive Youth Division cards, or "YD cards," a police notation that results in neither sanctions nor links to social services, but a letter is sent home to parents.[24] Due to a partnership with the New York Police Department, officers in the 72, 76, and 78 precincts in Brooklyn refer juveniles who have admitted their involvement in committing a low-level misdemeanor to the Youth Court, where they go before a jury of their peers. If found guilty, sanctions for respondents include community service, letters of apology, essays or skills-building workshops on topics like conflict resolution and goal setting. After all hearings, Youth Court members survey their peer defendants, asking them three questions:

1. Do you feel like you fully understood the Youth Court process?
2. Do you feel like you had enough opportunity to be heard?
3. Do you feel like your sanction was fair?

To ensure that respondents are judged by a true cross section of their peers, Youth Court members – ranging from 14 to 18 years of age – are widely recruited from the community for this one-year program. There is no minimum grade point average nor is any previous experience required for participation. Young people who have previously had a case with the Youth Court or in the traditional court are strongly encouraged to apply. Participants receive 30 hours of pre-service training on critical thinking, precision questioning, active listening, and youth court protocols. In addition, they participate in

[24] Additionally, the notation stays on record, and can affect whether, if the young person is arrested for another offense, he or she gets released or taken into the police station.

on-going, intensive youth development and team-building activities to help cultivate their leadership skills, and receive a bi-weekly stipend. During the time of this study, 106 teens were members of Youth Court, all of whom participated in the research.

In the remainder of this chapter, I outline some of the literature on legal cynicism and procedural fairness as it relates to attitudes towards law, the court system, and police. I then describe the methodology and sample of this study, which looks at data collected from 133 civically engaged youths in southwest Brooklyn, and their attitudes towards these legal institutions. I explain the results of the study, concluding with its relevance for criminal justice practitioners, educators, legislators, and community organizers who recognize the important role of the citizenry in controlling crime and disorder, and who seek to create partnerships between law enforcement and young citizens.

Literature Review

There has been much focus in the last decade on legal cynicism – a low level of trust in the law, legal, and criminal justice institutions – and its origins and relationship to criminal behavior, particularly in poor neighborhoods and communities of color. Hagan and Albonetti (1982) examined perceptions of "criminal injustice" – disrespect, bias, or unequal treatment by law enforcement officials, juries, and the courts – and found that blacks and members of the lowest social class were more likely to perceive criminal injustice than whites and the upper class, respectively. While this relationship was true for perceptions of injustice related to many of the legal system players such as the court and judges, the relationship between race and perceptions of injustice was particularly strong for items involving the police, confirming other studies (Block, 1971; Hahn, 1971; Huang & Vaughan, 1996; Smith, Graham, & Adams, 1991; Smith & Hawkins, 1973).

Additionally, other research showed that racial and ethnic minority group members are distrustful and less confident in the police and courts (Rottman, 2000; Tyler & Huo, 2002; Tyler & Waksladk, 2004).

Carr, Napolitano, and Keating (2007) examined the origins of legal cynicism among youth from high-crime urban neighborhoods, finding that most youth in these areas are negatively disposed toward police and that this is grounded in their lived experience of negative encounters with law enforcement. They also found that these attitudes were not about young people rejecting the rule of law outright (Anderson, 1999) leading to a legitimization crisis (Habermas, 1990) but rather about cultural attenuation (Warner, 2003), where youth can be cynical of police but still believe that police should have a role in crime control as long as they are procedurally just.

Sampson and Bartusch (1998) argued that legal cynicism, or "anomie" about law, is distinct from subcultural tolerance of deviance (see discussion of this literature in Chapter 3), and instead an important source of it is the social-ecological structure of neighborhoods. Inner-city contexts of racial segregation and concentrated disadvantage breed cynicism and perceptions of legal injustice. Moreover, as Sampson and Bartusch (1998), Shoemaker & Williams (1987) and Ellison (1991) found, even though crime may be concentrated in segregated and disadvantaged neighborhoods, there is not consistent evidence implying that the people inhabiting these communities are *tolerant* of crime. However, personal views that crime and delinquency are wrong do not necessarily translate into support for the mechanisms used to enforce social control (i.e., laws, courts, police).

Thus, as the literature described above demonstrates, legal cynicism is high among poor communities of color. However, as Tyler (2001) suggested, public trust and confidence in police and courts is not related to performance or outcomes, but on how fairly people feel they were treated. The idea of fairness vis-à-vis justice was clearly defined by John Rawls (1971) in his *A Theory of Justice*. He said that perfect procedural justice had two characteristics: 1) an independent criterion for what constitutes a fair or just outcome of the procedure, and 2) a procedure that guarantees that the fair outcome will be achieved. Tyler (2001) defined people's feelings of procedural fairness as it relates to legal institutions as including four components: being treated fairly, being treated with dignity, shown care for their concerns, and being recognized as having rights as citizens. He also put forth (1990) that citizens generally hold favorable views towards institutions that are perceived as unbiased, while holding negative views of those that are believed to be partisan or discriminatory.

As Wissler (1995), Lind & Tyler (1988), and Paternoster et al. (1977) showed, people are willing to accept decisions when they think criminal justice officials or legal institutions are acting fairly. Similarly, Tyler and Huo (2002) suggested that when citizens perceive justice system agencies to be fair, they are more likely to comply with the law, legal authorities, and court mandates, increasing institutional confidence (Tyler, 2001).

Understanding legal cynicism and its relationship to procedural fairness is important, as research has shown the importance of contact with the police and satisfaction with the interaction help form attitudes and dispositions (Huang and Vaughn, 1996; Worrall, 1999). Additionally, there is growing concern that perceived injustice

itself causes criminal behavior (LaFree, 1998; Mann, 1993; Russell, 1998; Tyler, 1990). This potential link between attitudes and behavior adds urgency to developing a better understanding of perceptions of criminal injustice among youth, as the studies described heretofore have mostly been about the adult population. This study fills a gap in the literature by looking at these issues with teenagers in southwest Brooklyn, and focusing on attitudes towards the police as well as laws and courts.

This chapter seeks to answer the following questions:

- How do youth perceive the criminal justice system? Do youth distinguish between the system's players/entities (police, courts, laws) or are their attitudes consistent?
- How does previous exposure to the police affect attitudes towards the police and other criminal justice agencies?
- What is the relationship between legal cynicism, procedural fairness, and positive engagement?

Methodology

Between October 2008 and April 2010, I administered a survey to teenagers entering one of three programs at the Red Hook Community Justice Center: Youth Court, Youth ECHO, or the Police Teen Theater Program. The youth survey instrument was intended to measure young people's attitudes towards and interactions with the police, the court system, and laws.

Participant Characteristics

There were 133 teenagers involved in this study. Table 4.1 presents demographic information for the survey respondents. Fifty-nine percent were female, 41 percent male, 50 percent lived in public housing, and 99 percent were in school. The majority (80 percent) were involved with the Youth Court program.

Table 4.1: Participant Demographics	
Female	59.4%
Race/Ethnicity	
Black Non-Hispanic	49.2%
Hispanic	48.5%
Other Non-Hispanic	2.3%
Living in Public Housing	49.6%
Currently in School	98.5%
8th grade	22.0%
9th grade	40.9%
10th grade	19.7%
11th grade	10.2%
12th grade	5.5%
GED program	1.6%
Program	
Youth Court	79.7%
Youth ECHO	11.3%
Police Teen Theater Program	9.0%

Note: n=133 but can be as low as 128 for some data elements due to missing data.

To gauge legal cynicism, three primary scales were created. The first section of the survey instrument involved 26 questions assessing respondents' attitudes towards criminal justice agencies and the legal system. Exploratory factor analysis revealed an eleven-item *negative attitudes towards police scale* that included the following questions: "I trust the police," "The police do a good job," "The police are there to protect people like me," "The police harass teenagers more than they harass older people" (reverse coded), "The police harass people who are not white more than other people" (reverse coded), "The police pick on me" (reverse coded), "I am annoyed by the way the police behave" (reverse coded), "I believe the police in my neighborhood use racial profiling" (reverse coding), "Police officers have a difficult job," "Police officers generally want to work with teenagers rather than against them," and "I feel safer when there is a police officer around." Responses were on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly agree," coded as 1, to "Strongly disagree," coded as 6. The coding for five of these

questions was reverse coded so that "Strongly agree" was coded as 6 and "Strongly disagree" as 1. The mean of these eleven items was then calculated, with a higher mean representing more negative attitudes towards the police. A reliability analysis produced a Cronbach's alpha of .826.

Next a *lack of confidence in the court scale* (alpha = .740) was created from three items designed to measure how fair respondents felt the court system is. With the same Likert scale discussed above, the coding for one question was again reversed. Questions in this scale included "The court system is fair," "The court system is racist" (reverse coded), and "The court system cares about people like me." The mean of these three items was then calculated, with a higher mean indicating less confidence in and more negative attitudes towards the court system.

A third scale, *lack of fairness of laws*, was created based on factor analysis using the following three items: "Laws protect only white people," "Laws protect only rich people," and "Laws protect only adults." Responses were on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree." These three questions were reverse coded that "Strongly agree" was coded as 6 and "Strongly disagree" as 1. The mean of the scale was calculated, with a higher mean on this scale representing the feeling that laws protect some groups of people more than others. A reliability analysis produced a Cronbach's alpha of .860.

Other variables related to laws, police, and the court system included whether they had "been stopped by the police within the last 12 months," whether they had "had a positive or negative experience with a police officer in the last six months," whether they had "been to court for something that [they] had done or [were] told [they] had done

wrong in the last six months," and whether or not they agreed with the statement, "Laws are enforced more when some people break them than when others do."

Finally, participants were asked if they were regularly involved in activities at various institutions such as a church group, school government, a sports team, choir, an academic club, or a part-time job. Responses were coded 0 for no and 1 for yes. A continuous variable, *community involvement*, was created by summing the responses to these six questions so that it reflected the number of programs and institutions each respondent was an active member of. This variable ranged from 0 to 6.

OLS Regression Models

Independent samples t-tests (95% confidence interval) were used to determine whether there were differences in the legal cynicism scales by various demographic characteristics, as well as by recent interactions with criminal justice institutions. A Pearson's correlation was used to reveal correlations between the three scales. To investigate the relationship between interactions with criminal justice agents (e.g., the police) and attitudes towards the police, two multiple regression models were employed with the dependent variable being the mean of the *negative attitudes towards the police scale*. Analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, version 16.0 (SPSS 16).

Results

A summary of the scale means and other descriptive statistics for the variables is presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Measures of Legal Cynicism and Interactions with Criminal Justice Institutions	
Mean Negative Attitudes Towards Police Scale	3.39
Mean Lack of Confidence in the Court Scale	2.72
Mean Lack of Fairness of Laws Scale	2.24
Agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "Laws are enforced more when some people break them than when others do."	79.7%
I have been stopped by the police within the last 12 months.	40.9%
I have had a positive experience with a police officer in the last 6 months.	45.8%
I have had a negative experience with a police officer in the last 6 months.	35.1%
In the last six months, I have been to a court for something I did wrong or for something that I was told I did wrong.	12.1%

Note: n=133 but can be as low as 128 for some data elements due to missing data.

Bivariate Relationships

Next I looked at whether the legal cynicism scales varied by demographic characteristics or by interactions with criminal justice agencies. Table 4.3 shows these results. Asterisks indicate significant differences between the number starred and the number directly below it.

Table 4.3: Means on Legal Cynicism Scales by Demographics and Experience with Criminal Justice Agencies	Negative Attitudes Towards Police Scale	Lack of Confidence in the Court Scale	Lack of Fairness of Laws Scale
Male	3.38	2.65	2.03
Female	3.37	2.73	2.33
Black Non-Hispanic	3.28	2.72	2.15
Hispanic	3.48	2.69	2.24
Live in public housing	3.54*	2.80	2.22
Live in private housing	3.21	2.61	2.19
Stopped by the police in last year	3.63**	2.93*	2.38
Not stopped by the police the last year	3.21	2.55	2.10
Had a positive experience with a police officer in last 6 months	3.15**	2.45**	1.99*
Did not have a positive experience with a police officer in last 6 months	3.56	2.91	2.39
Had a negative experience with a police officer in last 6 months	3.80***	2.93*	2.28
Did not have a negative experience with a police officer in last 6 months	3.14	2.58	2.17
Been to court in last 6 months	3.47	2.79	1.91
Had not been to court in last 6 months	3.36	2.68	2.25

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

There were no significant differences in the legal cynicism scales by gender, Hispanic vs. Black non-Hispanic, or by whether or not the respondent had been to court in the last 6 months. Those who lived in public housing had significantly more negative attitudes towards the police than those who did not (3.54 vs. 3.21, $p < .01$). Respondents who had been stopped by the police in the last year had more negative attitudes towards the police ($p < .01$) and less confidence in the court system ($p < .05$) than those who had not been stopped in the last year. Those who had a positive experience with a police officer in the last six months had significantly lower means on all three legal cynicism scales than those who had not, indicating more confidence in the police, courts, and laws. Similarly, those who had a negative experience with a police officer in the last year had

significantly higher means on the negative attitudes towards police and lack of confidence in the court system scales, indicating more cynicism towards those criminal justice institutions than those who had not had a negative experience with a police officer in the previous six months. Finally, as expected, all three scales were significantly correlated with each other ($p < .001$), as shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Legal Cynicism Scales Correlations

	(1)	(2)	(3)
(1) Negative attitudes towards police scale	1.00	.486***	.445***
(2) Lack of confidence in the court scale	486***	1.00	.411***
(3) Lack of fairness of laws scale	.445***	. 411***	1.00

**p<.001; n = 133 but can be as low as 129 due to missing data.

Multivariate Relationships

Table 4.5 shows the results of Model 1, an ordinary least squares regression that looks at the effects of the various independent variables on negative attitudes towards the police.

Table 4.5: The Effects of Interactions with the Police, Court Involvement, Demographic Characteristics, and Church and Community Involvement on Negative Attitudes towards the Police

	Unstandardized Regression Coefficient	*Beta*
Was stopped by the police within the last 12 months.	.294*	.182
Had a positive experience with a police officer in the last 6 months.	-.234+	-.147
Had a negative experience with a police officer in the last 6 months.	.530***	.321
Had been to court for something they did or were told they did wrong in the last 6 months	-.153	-.061
Female	.038	.024
Hispanic	.161	.102
New York City public housing resident	.272*	.171
Number of church and community institutions active in	-.060	-.097
Constant	3.066	
Adjusted R^2	.235	

+ p<.10 *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001; n=123

Being female, being Hispanic, and having more connections to a church or other community institutions did not have a significant effect on negative attitudes towards the police. NYC public housing residents had, on average, statistically more negative attitudes towards the police than those not in public housing ($p < .05$). Those who had been stopped by the police in the last 12 months had significantly more negative attitudes towards the police than those who had not ($p < .05$). Having had a negative interaction with the police in the last six months was also a strongly significant predictor ($p < .001$) of negative attitudes towards the police. Similarly, the effect of having had a positive interaction with the police in the last six months approached significance ($p < .10$), indicating that such an interaction, on average, translated into a modest decrease in negative attitudes towards the police scale. The adjusted R^2 was .235, meaning that this model explained almost 24 percent of the variation of the negative attitudes towards the police, a remarkably high figure considering that the model only included eight independent predictors.

Model 2 added two additional independent variables: lack of confidence in the court scale, and lack of fairness of laws scale. The multivariate regression results are shown in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: The Effects of Interactions with the Police, Court Involvement, Demographic Characteristics, Church and Community Involvement, Lack of Confidence in the Court, and Lack of Fairness of Laws on Negative Attitudes towards the Police

	Unstandardized Regression Coefficient	*Beta*
Was stopped by the police within the last 12 months.	.147	.092
Had a positive experience with a police officer in the last 6 months.	-.094	-.059
Had a negative experience with a police officer in the last 6 months.	.475***	.287
Had been to court for something they did or were told they did wrong in the last 6 months	-.071	-.028
Female	-.065	-.040
Hispanic	.188+	.119
New York City public housing resident	.211+	.132
Number of church and community institutions active in	-.023	-.037
Lack of confidence in the Court Scale	.231***	.263
Lack of Fairness of Laws Scale	.216***	.299
Constant	1.982	
Adjusted R^2	.424	

+ p<.10 *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001; n=121

When the two new variables are added, having been stopped by the police in the last 12 months and having had a positive experience with a police officer in the last six months no longer are significant predictors of negative attitudes towards the police. The three most significant ($p < .001$) predictors are having had a negative interaction with the police in the last six months, lack of confidence in the court, and feelings of lack of fairness of laws. The effects of being a public housing resident and being Hispanic approached significance ($p < .10$), indicating that living in NYCHA housing or being Hispanic, on average, may be translated into an increase in negative attitudes towards police. The predictive power of this model was very high. The adjusted R^2 was .424, meaning that the independent variables in the model had explained 42 percent of the variation in terms of negative attitudes towards the police.

Discussion

This study set out to answer three questions: 1) How do youth perceive law, court systems, and law enforcement?; 2) How does previous exposure to the police affect attitudes towards the police and other criminal justice agencies?; and 3) What is the relationship between legal cynicism, procedural fairness, and institutional connections in the community? As I showed in Chapter 3, teens in Red Hook drift between worlds: they may participate in delinquent activities, but they are simultaneously working to positively change their community, showing their actions aren't necessarily about being a part of a subculture of delinquency. Similarly, the results of this study are consistent with Sampson and Bartusch's (1998) theory that legal cynicism is distinct from a subcultural tolerance of deviance. The young people in the sample had all voluntarily chosen to come to a local courthouse to participate in an after-school program that addressed the relationship between teens and formal criminal justice mechanisms of social control. Yet, they had extremely negative attitudes towards the police. While their confidence in the court system and attitudes towards whom laws protect were more positive (perhaps in part due to having had less interaction with the courts and laws than with police), still 80 percent believed that laws are enforced unfairly. However, their very participation in Youth ECHO, the Police Teen Theater Program, or Youth Court speaks to a desire to change these systems, not an approval of deviant behaviors that challenge them.

Youth Court participants, in particular, are actively sanctioning their peers who break the law to such things as community service and skills-building workshops. Thus, though they have negative attitudes towards criminal justice agencies, these attitudes do not translate into negative attitudes towards criminal justice, or tolerance of criminal

behavior. This supports Shoemaker & Williams' (1987) and Ellison's (1991) findings. Additionally, the fact that Youth Court members administer a survey to their peers to gauge respondents' feelings about process and fairness implies an understanding that in doing criminal justice differently, what is most important is improving public trust and confidence in the system by treating those coming through it fairly (Tyler, 2001). Indeed, the Youth Court members' focus on creating fair trials for their peers who had gotten in trouble translated into an extremely high compliance rate. In 2009, of the 160 cases that were heard, 91% complied with the sanctions the members ordered (Center for Court Innovation, 2010), confirming Tyler and Huo's (2002) thesis that when people perceive the court to be fair, they are more likely to comply with their mandates.

Those in public housing had more negative attitudes towards the police than those who did not. In Brooklyn, police tend to patrol the pedestrian walkways in NYCHA housing, as well as its surrounding areas. As Lee (2007) indicated, residents of the Red Hook projects are accustomed to being stopped for no reason. Those who had been stopped by the police in the last year had more negative attitudes towards the police than those who had not been stopped, potentially indicating that being stopped for no valid reason other than race, ethnicity, or class, results in more negative attitudes. Recent positive or negative interactions with the police are correlated with more positive or negative attitudes, respectively, towards them. Though the youth clearly distinguish between the different legal players (police, laws, courts), their attitudes towards them were all significantly and positively correlated, potentially indicating that attitudes towards one of them may have an impact on their attitudes towards the others.

The results of the regression model confirm Carr, Napolitano, and Keating's (2007) theory about the origins of legal cynicism among youth from high-crime urban neighborhoods. Just as they found that negative dispositions toward police were grounded in lived experience of negative encounters with law enforcement, this study found that having had a negative interaction with a police officer in the last six months was the greatest significant predictor of having more negative attitudes toward the police. Additionally, having more confidence in the court or more of a feeling that laws protect people equally results in more positive attitudes towards the police. These three legal cynicism scales were reciprocal: they were all significant and positive predictors of each other.

In general, teens in southwest Brooklyn have extremely negative attitudes towards police officers, and less negative attitudes towards the court system and laws. Though they distinguish between these three entities, young people's attitudes towards them are fairly similar. Particularly regarding police, having had recent negative interactions with police officers shapes youth attitudes. Interestingly, having had a positive interaction with police was not a statistically significant predictor of more positive attitudes towards the police. Being more linked to community institutions was also not a significant predictor of more positive attitudes towards the police; there was no significant relationship between having more connections or involvement with institutions (e.g., church) and measures of legal cynicism. Finally, having greater confidence in the court system and having more of a feeling that laws are fair predicted more positive attitudes towards the police.

Conclusion and Implications for Further Research

What are the implications for policy and practice of a more accurate understanding of young people's legal cynicism? It is important to note that while youth are highly cynical of the police, laws, and the court system, they do not actively condone resistance to them, nor do they reject rule of law outright, as Anderson (1999) hypothesized. Their attitudes appear not to be part of a subcultural system of deviance. Rather, they see a place for themselves in working with institutions and agents of formal social control, as evidenced by their participation in youth programs run out of a courthouse that seek to reach out to law enforcement officials to break down stereotypes police and teens have about each other, to design campaigns to convince their peers to obey laws, or take on the role of the court and sanction their peers for disobeying the laws.

Therefore, youth civic engagement programs that seek to address legal cynicism among young people should seek to involve young people more in the criminal justice processes. Moreover, there is an understanding that roots of this legal cynicism stem from feelings of racism, bias, and inequitable enforcement. Therefore, criminal justice institutions – particularly those in the juvenile court system and the police as enforcers of the law – should require their employees to be trained on and required to adhere to principals of procedural fairness. The greater the procedural fairness, the more confidence young people will have in criminal justice agencies, the more they will view them as legitimate, and will comply or defer to their decisions. Additionally, for Red Hook youth, maintaining order is irrespective of the role of the police, it's about loyalty to their community.

While the findings of this chapter are important, there remain unanswered questions that further research should investigate. First, this study only looks at a disconnected urban area where crime is high and the population is predominantly Black and Hispanic. Would the findings be replicated in urban areas with a large White youth population, or with any population in suburban areas? Second, a more qualitative narrative is necessary to understand the reasons that young people, especially those in poor, high-crime areas who are so affected by saturated policing and those who have negative attitudes towards them, are still interested in working with these formal mechanisms of social control. Is it because they believe these institutions can be effective in controlling crime, or is it because youth are looking for the types of responses that they know from experience, albeit advocating for more fair versions of them?

Young people growing up in poor, urban neighborhoods like Red Hook do not seem to want to be alienated from the police and the legal system. Though negatively disposed towards criminal justice agencies, young people are not interested in nor are in a state of normlessness (Merton, 1938). Much potential exists to meaningfully partner with young people for the purpose of greater fairness in process, in greater justice. Public policy would benefit by actively involving young people in community-based youth crime-reduction programs.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusion and Future Directions for the Field and Research

There are scant opportunities for teenagers to participate in political processes and civic dialogue, and poor and minority youth have particularly low levels of civic, community, and political participation. Recognizing this, organizations that run after-school youth activities have attempted to fill these gaps by offering structured programs that engage young people around collective action designed to address issues of public importance. This dissertation sought to understand this type of youth civic engagement programming in New York City. Specifically, I wanted to examine what the programs looked like, what has made some effective, and how the participants could shed light on the relationship between positive engagement and attitudes and behaviors regarding delinquency, crime, and criminal justice agents.

Major Findings

In Chapter 1 I showed how youth civic engagement programs have experienced three types of organizational isomorphism that have contributed to the solidification and homogenization of youth civic engagement programming. First, they have undergone mimetic isomorphism: they are implementing the same types of arts and media programming that have been successful in the past with teenagers, but they have added a social justice youth development component. Additionally, because the goals of civic engagement are ambiguous, organizations end up replicating each other's work in order to try to give meaning and definition to the work they are doing. Second, the organizations have gone through coercive isomorphism, whereby resource dependence has led them to adapt their programming to include academic-related activities so they can then be eligible for funding marked for educational purposes. Coercive isomorphism

can also be seen in how the organizations need to report to funders on very similar outputs and outcomes, most of which end up being process-related due to ambiguous goals. Finally, the organizations have experienced normative isomorphism: they all have well-educated leaders that share similar educational and professional backgrounds. They therefore have developed their programs in a similar fashion, while using the same internal and external languages to describe their mission and purpose. The main funders of this field are primarily local foundations who are themselves experiencing their own isomorphism as they interact through groups such as Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing. These funders give money to the same types of programs, require the same evaluation indicators, and sometimes even share the same employees.

After describing what the field of youth civic engagement programming looks like, Chapter 2 sought to push back on the goal displacement (due to the ambiguous goals discussed in Chapter 1) that the organizations in the field have gone through. Returning to one of the original aims of youth civic engagement – giving teenagers more of a voice in their communities and in politics – the findings show what successful campaigns look like, and uncovers concrete "how to" strategies and tactics for youth influencing policymakers, including:

- *Building coalitions:* Collaborating with and building on the work of other youth groups -- and also with adult groups -- is a necessary factor for success.
- *Identifying and understanding issues of power:* Youth advocates should be able to clearly identify who has the power to implement their recommendation and direct their presentations to those people.
- *Authenticity of youth voice vs. professionalism:* When policymakers hear from teenagers, they want to hear about their own experiences and recommendations as teenagers, not as "mini-adults." At the same time, some policymakers state that they want youth to come in and present in a professional manner.
- *Personal narratives:* Personal stories can help make policy recommendations compelling.

- *Methods of advocacy:* Advocacy method should vary by the public status of the person you are trying to influence. The more public the figure, the more public the campaign to influence him or her should be.
- *Understanding implications:* Youth should make clear that they understand the implications of their policy recommendations, including why alternatives would not work, who is affected by their recommendations and how, and what the fiscal impact of their proposal is.
- *Branding:* Policymakers want to hear from young people but often do not have the access to them in the necessary timeframe. Therefore, youth programs should brand their group as a source of trustworthy young people that policymakers can go to at any time for thoughtful youth input.

Additionally, adult partners need to identify realistic measures of success that falls within the length of the program, and youth need to be given significant responsibility so that they feel ownership over the work, increasing their commitment to making change.

Chapter 3 examined one specific youth organizing program in Red Hook, Brooklyn, and investigated the relationship between positive engagement and delinquency. Findings showed that attitudes and behaviors of the young people participating in this study were complex, most closely following Matza's (1964) theory of delinquency, where he posited that youths drift between delinquent and conventional norms and actions. The teenagers in this study often found themselves moving between different worlds and behaviors: delinquent and conventional, antisocial and pro-social. The youths who were most frequently in trouble were the most outspoken in their campaigns against crime. The findings suggest that delinquency in Red Hook is most closely related to feelings of boredom that young people have when living in a physically and socially isolated neighborhood. Moreover, delinquency grows out of financial or social necessity, particularly in the case of dealing drugs. While many participants engaged in delinquent behavior, they simultaneously embraced prosocial behaviors and advocated a desire to improve the quality of their neighborhood through positive action.

Finally, Chapter 4 looked at teenagers who were active participants in one of three youth civic engagement programs in Red Hook. I examined how these youth perceive law, the court system, and law enforcement, and looked at the relationship between legal cynicism and positive engagement. Findings showed that these young people have extremely negative attitudes towards formal criminal justice mechanisms of social control, particularly the police. Their negativity stems in part from negative interactions with the police, and also their belief that the different criminal justice agents are not fair, disrespectful, and treat different people differently. They do, however, see a place for themselves in working with the criminal justice system, indicating that their negative attitudes towards criminal justice agents does not necessarily translate into a negative view of criminal justice or tolerance of criminal behavior. As evidenced by their participation in Youth ECHO, Police Teen Theater Program, and Youth Court, they are interested in working to make these institutions more equitable.

Concerns and Future Directions for the Field of After-School Youth Civic Engagement Programs

After nearly a decade of work in the youth civic engagement field, I have seen many promising practices and successful campaigns. In addition to the cases studies I described in Chapter 2, I have seen and written about other accomplishments in the field (see, for example, Swaner, 2010). But these victories, while laudable and important, are few and far between, and the frustrations and weaknesses I find with the field seem to overpower its satisfaction and the strengths.

Community-based organizations doing youth civic engagement programming are responding to a democratic deficit – a lack of youth involvement and input in policy decision-making – and filling an essential gap in the formal political and educational

spheres of teenagers. Getting young people to engage in civic dialogue is extremely important, and advocating for opportunities for them to have a voice in framing discourse and addressing social issues is undoubtedly necessary. Additionally, for many youth, pro-social behavior is about loyalty to their community, and the reclamation of public space must be built into these programs. However, there are not enough organizations doing this work, and those that exist are chronically underfunded. Moreover, because of the nature of doing "non-profit" work, they are heavily influenced by funders who want to see impact. As shown in Chapter 1, this often means outputs, or counts of number of youth served. In order to get more money, the community organizations often sacrifice depth of programming for breadth of reach so they can serve more teens.

The rise of the field of after-school youth civic engagement programming closely mirrors the rise of neoliberal policies in the United States, rendering the idea of popular struggle among young people (and, indeed among adults as well) unlikely. This is largely in part because foundations are interested in measurable outcomes and "success stories." The youth civic engagement field is facing a Catch-22: while funding provides youth organizations with the ability to do engagement work, it also restricts that work in three significant ways.

First, many who are funded to do this work are in large urban areas, and they're often forced to depict the youth they work with as victims, using words such as "disadvantaged" and "at-risk." In Chapter 3 I discussed the reaction of some youth to this conceptualization, when participants in a youth organizing program in Red Hook were upset that a local newspaper stated that the program was "giving at-risk youth a chance." A patronizing discourse has been embedded in the field as organizations try to

show that they are helping "the ones who need it most" in order to garner more funding, because funders want to be seen as giving aid to victims.[25] This also makes the organizations see themselves more as service providers than anything else.

Second, the reliance on funding agencies will lead to discouragement of an historical and theoretical understanding of the structures of power that create the inequalities, the silencing of voice, and the social problems that youth civic engagement programs seek to address. Instead of focusing on radical change (e.g., youth being given permanent not patronizing roles in helping to create policy), there has been a shift in organizational focus and time devoted to demonstrating the successes that funders want to see. Hence the emphasis on academic outcomes for participants and accountability to funders as opposed to accountability to the young people or the idea of "social justice." Employees spend too much time trying to prove to funders that they are still relevant and worthy of continued funding. In the current model, non-profit organizations are accountable solely to the funders, not to the youth or the movements, and this dynamic needs to be reversed.

Finally, by giving money to youth civic engagement programs, funders are creating *controlled* (i.e., overly structured) environments where youth can come together and engage in advocating for social justice, but where they aren't really able to engage in radical social change because of the restrictions placed on the parent organization[26]. The very existence of this field allows for the claim that people are doing things to give youth more voice, but there is often a disconnect between rhetoric and reality. The programs

[25] Some programs do indeed create a counter-discourse, but this often does not enter the larger discourse in the field (i.e., among the funders and the majority of organizations; in their public language).
[26] There are some exceptions, as described in Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammarota (2006), but most of these exceptions are not getting major funding.

often deliver a “world of pseudo-satisfactions that is superficially exciting but hollow at its core” (Harvey, 2005).

There is an additional concern for the field regarding funders: traditionally, funding for youth programs follows trends, and non-profits must find ways to ride whatever the current wave may be. Foundations are always looking to do something new and “cutting edge,” addressing whatever the major concerns are at the moment vis-à-vis youth. For a while after the focus on violence prevention, the focus became “lights on after-school,” trying to address the concerns over the large number of children taking care of themselves after the school day ends, and the idea that on school days, the hours between 3pm and 6pm are the peak hours for juvenile crime and experimentation with drugs, alcohol, cigarettes and sex. Then a few years later the funding shifted towards arts education, trying to get after-school programs to help young people build artistic skills and instill in them a life-long appreciation of the arts. A few years went by, and again a shift, this time to childhood obesity. After-school programs once more adapted their programming to include nutritional and physical activity components so as to be able to follow the funding. How long will it be before funders shift to something else and youth civic engagement programs, in order to maintain their financial support, begin to incorporate various components to their programs that have nothing to do with their goal of increasing the voice of young people and supporting them in civic dialogue?

A final concern for the field is that in doing youth work, we often judge the outcome of our efforts by the noble intentions of those of us doing the work. Not only is the evaluation of these programs misdirected and often irrelevant to their actual goals, there are no longitudinal studies that show how participation in these programs actually

affects young people in terms of their continued engagement in civic discourse (e.g., through political activism, community education, etc.) after they leave the structured environment of the after-school program. These longitudinal studies are needed.

In order to shift away from these issues, youth must be engaged outside of the non-profit model. Instead of the organizing and engagement of young people happening through these youth development organizations, it must happen in addition to them. The field, as it is now, is imbalanced. There needs to be more grassroots movements working together with non-profit groups. As I said earlier, the organizations engaging youth are filling an important gap, and there should be more of them, but there will always be the problem of resource dependence. Schools, however, can be sites of helping to alleviating this dilemma. In an ideal world, schools would be transformed into more democratic institutions that allow students the opportunity to engage at a new level. Instead of teaching to tests, schools would be fostering civic dialogue among students. Instead of teaching students to be passive consumers of information[27], they would be creating spaces where youth become active and critical thinkers. Instead of acting as centers of social control, schools would be allowing students the opportunity to practice democratic decision-making, helping them see how their contributions can make a difference in their own education. More schools like the alternative high school Lois Brown Easton (2005) describes, where democracy is enacted, students' personal voices are valued, and the students have power, responsibility, and authority over their own education.

Giving teenagers *meaningful* roles in creating policy – be it on the local, state, or federal level – is important for the sustainability of the field. As Chapter 4 showed,

[27] This is what Freire (1970) referred to as the "banking" concept of education, which he said "transforms students into receiving objects. It attempts to control thinking and action, leads men and women to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power" (77).

despite their cynicism, youth see a place for themselves in improving the systems that affect their lives, making them more relevant and more fair. They *want* to be involved. The U.S. must look to models that have worked elsewhere for involving youth in policymaking.[28] For example, in Newcastle (United Kingdom), the city has involved 450 children and young people from across the city in the procurement process for the city's £2.25 million Children's Fund (Participatory Budgeting Unit website). Providers who seek to secure the funding from the city have to present and pitch their ideas to the young people, making them think differently about their services and how they involve youth. The youth then evaluate all the proposals and bids, and choose which they believe should get funded. This is similar to a youth council that exists in Barra Mansa, Brazil, where 18 boys and 18 girls are elected by their peers to determine how a portion of the municipal budget is spent on addressing children's priorities. While Brazil widely uses participatory budgeting to increase citizen involvement in urban governance, this extends that participation to include youth as well.

The field needs to move in another direction as well. As shown in Chapter 3, many young people are often involved in crime because they indicate that there's nothing else to do. Moreover, many who are considered delinquent are disconnected from mainstream institutions such as school and are therefore never approached for after-school programs. Youth organizations must make more of a concerted effort to reach these young people. Additionally, many youth belong to "teams" or "crews" that serve as important social networks for them, and that enables them to exert positive peer pressure on its members and motivate other youth. Instead of pathologizing youth as the criminal

[28] The United States is one of only two countries in the world that has not ratified the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child. Ratification may be a good place to start to indicate a desire to take seriously children and young people's right to participate in matters that affect them.

justice system and the media often do, non-profits should work alongside them, providing them with a sort of "technical assistance" to support their engagement in policy dialogue and social movements. One of the findings of this dissertation is that young people perceive a distinct difference between programs that are designed to help them and those that allow them to use their skills, "connects," and energies to assist others, or to try to make a difference. If they're seen as recipients of service delivery, they are less likely to want to be engaged. One of the non-profits discussed in this dissertation, Make the Road NY, has done this by allowing youth to become members of the organization who have say in how it operates, what its focus is, and how it spends its money. More need to do so.

Future Directions for Research on Youth Civic Engagement

Given that the funding focus on evaluation is not going to go away, youth civic engagement researchers should look to new models of research that provide a venue for youth-involvement and leadership in the evaluation processes. As Youth in Focus (2004) explains, evaluation is a method heavily grounded in politics:

> *Everything is political and the drive towards evaluation is one of the most political movements in the current funding world. It is a two sided coin – when done for the right reasons, with the needed resources and support, evaluation becomes what it should be: a way for groups to take the time to reflect on their work to get feedback from participants, partners and the external environment and to find ways of becoming more effective....At the same time, evaluation can serve as a dodge for the discomfort that some funders may have with supporting social justice and social change work. (ii)*

Because evaluation is not value-free, researchers doing evaluation of youth civic engagement programs should embrace community-based participatory research (CBPR). CBPR has been defined as a methodology that promotes active community involvement in the processes that shape research and intervention strategies, as well as in the conduct

of research studies (O'Fallon et al, 2000). Minkler and Wallerstein (2003) have argued that CBPR is not a method or set of methods but rather an orientation to research that changes the role of the researcher and the "researched." Involving young people in the evaluation process is necessary for having the opportunity to ask and answer the questions that matter most to their communities, as well as push back on the traditional researcher/subject power dynamic. Youth participatory evaluation – including youth as members of participatory evaluation teams – will benefit not only the young people, their programs, and their communities, but the evaluation itself (Sabo-Flores, 2008). Moreover, as Fine (2008) has argued, youth participatory action research "deepens the very social practices of objectivity, validity, and generalizability" (221).

One of the major gaps in research in this field has been lack of longitudinal analyses on what the trajectories of the young people in these after-school civic engagement programs look like after the exit the program. One of the challenges I have faced in the past regarding follow-up studies on and with urban youth has been the mobility of the young people: they've moved from the homes they had when I first met them, they've changed phone numbers, and I have a general inability to track them down. But this may not be an issue for conducting future research with many of the young people involved in the studies of this dissertation. There is something unique about Red Hook. Its physical isolation from the rest of Brooklyn and the community that fosters leads to a large number of people growing up in the Red Hook houses and staying there their whole lives. It is very likely that the young people I interviewed will be easy to get in touch with. Because I still work in Red Hook, and have formed strong relationships with community members in the Houses, and because in Red Hook "everyone knows

everyone," even if phone numbers have changed, I believe I will be able to find the participants.

I have two follow-up studies planned. The first is with the Youth ECHO participants. August 2011 will be three years from the first graduating cohort, and most of the participants will have graduated from high school or be ready to, assuming they have remained in school. I plan on conducting in-depth interviews on how participation in Youth ECHO shaped their last three years, as well as whether they continued to have involvement with trying to effect positive change within their community. I also would like to ask about their crime patterns since they exited the program. The second follow-up study is with the Youth Court members five years after graduating from the program. Many had identified that they joined the Youth Court program because they wanted to go into law and help improve the criminal justice system. Follow-up interviews will focus on if they have attended college, and if so, what they studied or are currently studying, and if they still plan on going into the justice field. I would also like to have them take the same survey I administered to them before they started their Youth Court training to gauge change in measures of legal cynicism.

Final Thoughts

I often feel caught in my own Catch-22 vis-à-vis youth engagement work. Though I want to spend my time supporting, strategizing and collaborating with youth for a movement for social justice, I also cannot afford to not be receiving a salary with benefits. So I find myself working within these non-profits, doing important work, but constantly being limited by organizational constraints. This is part of what made me want to write this dissertation: I wanted to better understand the field, to uncover the

underlying issues surrounding my own feelings of inefficacy. Over the course of researching and writing about youth civic engagement, I have learned a lot that will inform my practice: how and why these youth programs look the way they do; how they can be more effective in their work and push back on goal displacement; who gets involved and why; who is not asked to get involved and why not; and how engagement is not necessarily a strategy for influencing youth culture regarding delinquency. With a better understanding – both theoretical and practical – of youth and engagement, I hope to work to push the field to a more informed praxis.

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