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# Organizational Characteristics and Adolescent Political Development: Exploring the Experience of Youth Activists in Youth Development Organizations

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ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS AND ADOLESCENT POLITICAL  
DEVELOPMENT: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF YOUTH ACTIVISTS IN  
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS

by

MICHAEL ARMSTRONG

Under the Direction of Roderick Watts

ABSTRACT

Interest in youth civic engagement continues to increase and a small but growing group of organizations are seeking to get young people involved in political activism. At the same time, researchers are giving more attention to the features of adolescent settings and how they relate to the overall development of young people. What remains to be absent is a contextual understanding of how the characteristics of adolescent settings contribute specifically to political development.

The purpose of this study is to identify organizational level characteristics of youth organizations that promote the political development of adolescents. Semi-structured interviews and grounded theory analysis with 15 young activists revealed a “Big Six” of organizational characteristics and properties that influence participation in societal involvement behaviors. Post hoc analyses also revealed potential relationships between political development and the Big Six. Implications for both theory and practice are discussed and directions for future research are delineated.

INDEX WORDS: Adolescence, Political development, Youth development, Organizations, Settings, Characteristics, Activism

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of Arts  
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Georgia State University

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## Introduction

If social change is a goal for community psychology, not only must individual change agents be a focus of research, but so must the settings that facilitate and impede their efforts. Kelley and Bronfenbrenner insist that social change is intrinsically multi-systematic and requires researchers to address levels of social analysis that go beyond the individual. Bronfenbrenner (1979) has demonstrated that individuals and the forces acting on them are embedded in nested social systems that are both transactional and interactive. According to Kelley's (1968) ecological analogy, individuals and their environments are interrelated and change over time. Significant change at one system level thus requires change at multiple ecological levels. Given that the actors, or rather activists, in social change are individuals and that individuals are influenced by the settings that they are a part of, it makes sense then for community researchers to understand settings to better support social change.

Recent research suggests that adolescents are particularly susceptible to the influence of settings upon their development (Camino & Zeldin, 2002; Eccles & Goodman, 2002); however, the existing research on the influence of settings on adolescent development is largely limited to their influence on socio-emotional development (Dutton, 2003; Nicholson et. al, 2004; Zeldin, 2000). Little attention has been given to the sociopolitical context of youth settings (Ginwright & James, 2002; Lewis-Charp, Yu, & Soukamneuth, 2006). As a result, the literature offers few examples of effective organization level interventions that enhance or promote political development. Most of the existing literature is limited to topics such as citizen participation and civic development which includes issues such as voting or service

learning (Boyte & Farr, 1997; O'Donoghue, Kirshner, & McLaughlin, 2002; Sherrod, Flanagan, & Youniss, 2002). Less attention has been given to social justice oriented behaviors such as influencing policy or campaign and movement building. This criticism points to a second shortcoming in the literature – the general lack of attention to adolescent political development. Youth have been viewed more as bystanders or targets of action by others, rather than as potential agents of social change (Ginwright & James, 2002; Yates & Youniss, 1998).

With both of these critiques in mind, the current study proposes a qualitative study to identify organization level characteristics that promote the political development of adolescents. Interview data from a sample of youth participating in various youth development organizations will be examined. Youth who are identified as highly engaged in political and community service activities are included in the sample.

This introduction to the current research on the role of organizational factors in youth political development will consider theories of youth political development that contribute to our understanding of what leads to social action. The section that follows will begin with a review of the literature on what is known about the environmental influences on youth development. This review draws from multiple academic disciplines and the experiences of applied youth settings. Both psychology and political science offer different perspectives on political development, while community psychology specifically, and its literature on empowerment, sociopolitical development, and the creation of settings help to frame this study. Developmental psychology's body of research that explores positive youth development, leadership development, and its burgeoning interest in civic participation and service learning, also guides the current

study. Finally, the experiences of applied youth activism provide a different perspective by directly involving young people in social change processes. The applied field's unique perspective on youth development speaks more directly to features of organizations that influence the development of youth as it relates to community youth development.

### *Political Development*

Before designing settings for youth that foster political development, we must know what political development is. Theory on this topic, at least in the US social science literature is quite limited. Political science has focused on the influence of family and school on the political attitudes of adolescents while psychology has expanded the focus of political development to include the range of civic and community activities that youth participate in. In many cases “political development” is not the terminology of choice, but the term fits the purposes of this research. Political development refers to the process of growth, including lived experience and psychological maturation, by which adolescents gain an understanding of their role in society and the capacity to then act in the social world. Several disciplines have made contributions to the construct.

Political science focuses on the process of political socialization, which involves early developmental experiences that shape future belief systems of children and adolescents—such as family and school (Sherrod, 2004). These experiences thus lend themselves to influencing attitudes, knowledge about political systems, and abstract political thinking (Adams, 1985; Rosenberg, 1988). As an example, one study demonstrated how the integration of an innovative school curriculum with increased political discussion in family homes increased the probability of participating high school students to vote in the 2004 presidential election (McDevitt & Kiouisis, 2006). Schooling

and education have received extensive attention by political scientists interested in political socialization. Indeed, political science scholars consider education to be the seminal factor in predicting levels of political knowledge, interest in political affairs, and voting participation (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980).

The socialization literature has provided important insight into the political development of adolescents. For instance, a general continuity theory has arisen from socialization research that helps to predict the likelihood of political activism. Research generally indicates that children with committed and active parents are more likely to be active in society as well (Flanagan, Bowes, Johnsson, Csapo, & Sheblanova, 1998). Others posit that individuals who are active as youth are more likely to be politically active as adults (Hart, Atkins & Ford 1998).

While shedding light on how political attitudes and knowledge are shaped by external forces, this internalization model of political socialization says little about actual political behavior (Rosenberg, 1988). Aside from voting or party affiliation, political socialization does not elaborate on other forms of political activism. The absence of a focus on actual behavior points to another limitation in political socialization research; political socialization theories are, as Yates and Youniss (1998) describe, unidirectional. The transactional nature of the environment and the individual is not acknowledged. Adolescents may be shaped by the socialization provided by family or school, but the question of how they interact with those experiences and forces is unanswered. Political socialization research has not considered youth to be active agents in their own political development (Yates and Youniss, 1998), and as such the current ways in which youth are active politically are overlooked and not linked to their development.

Another limitation in political socialization theory is its lack of recognition in the diverse experiences of adolescents. For instance, the experiences of low income urban youth are dissimilar from other youth, thus they may be lacking in some of the socialization experiences offered to more affluent youth. This difference in experience is important to capture and understand as Hart and Atkins (2002) have demonstrated that urban youth lag behind suburban adolescents in civic knowledge and civic participation due to lower levels of political participation among urban adults, educational inequities, and a lack of participation opportunities. This difference in experience due in part to socio-economic forces leads us to yet another limitation in political socialization research. The consideration of sociopolitical and historical context is largely absent from existing research on political development (Ginwright & James, 2002; Lewis-Charp et al., 2006). Research that has been dominated by quantitative methods has been limited in its ability to capture and explain the details and differences of socialization experiences that are due to sociopolitical context (Stolle and Hooghe, 2002)

Psychology has expanded upon the limitations of political socialization theory with its contributions to political development theories. Political development is not merely a process of socialization when seen from a psychological perspective. Psychological research contends that it is a complex process with multiple factors ultimately leading to how someone understands, interprets, and acts within society's political systems. Developmental and community psychologists use several terms to describe political development: civic development, citizenship development, sociopolitical development, social justice youth development, as well as political development.

The psychological perspective broadens the conceptualization of politics to include citizenship and the range of civic and community activities in which youth participate (Flanagan & Faison, 2001; Flanagan & Gallay, 1995; Sherrod et al., 2002; Yates & Youniss, 1998). Research based on this expanded definition is revealing how community and civic service experiences in adolescence play a key role in helping adults define their political stances in adulthood and in community service (Flanagan & Tucker, 1999; Yates & Youniss, 1998).

Taking these civic and community activities into account represents a shift towards a greater emphasis on the behaviors of adolescents and beyond political science's narrower focus on political attitudes. Political development can thus be better understood in terms of the actions of youth and how they understand their actions and how they relate to society. Recent research by multiple theorists demonstrates that youth's understanding of the political aspects of society is based on their participation in community and civic activities (Flanagan & Tucker, 1999; Yates & Youniss, 1998; Youniss & Yates, 1997). In fact, some scholars argue that adolescent political thinking is entirely "the product, not the precursor, of social activity and discourse" (Flanagan & Gallay, 1995, p.35). Given this relationship between political understanding and social action, a greater understanding of the activities that youth participate in is necessary.

These social action activities range from protesting policy, volunteering, organizing a petition, to working on political campaigns and violent revolution. Collectively, these behaviors have been described as societal involvement behaviors (SIBs) (Watts & Guessous, 2006). At this point, we do not understand how individuals become willing and able to engage in SIBs. This matter is especially pertinent to



adolescents whose political commitment begins to emerge as part of their identity formation (Erikson, 1968), and as scholars note, political commitment and action are related and social action is critical to both adult functioning and the maintenance of our democratic society (Flanagan & Tucker, 1999; Lerner, 2004; Sherrod et al., 2002).

Furthermore not only must the activities that youth participate in be examined, but how political understandings emerge through these activities must also be considered to fully understand their political development. Unfortunately, the social processes through which political understandings emerge from these experiences are still not fully understood (Watts, Michaels, & Jagers, 2003; Yates & Youniss, 1999). What emerges from Yates & Youniss' (1998) research of a social justice service learning project is an attempt to help explain how a greater understanding of the political world emerges from the community and civic service experiences of adolescents. Yates and Youniss posit that civic experiences in youth can become reference points that aid in the formation of political understandings and engagement. Beyond the predictive value of socialization's general continuity theory, this reference point theory describes how certain adolescent experiences, in this case with social justice service learning, are established as landmarks from which society and ideological understandings of society can be judged in the future. Implicit in this reference point theory is that the actions of youth, specifically civic, community, and social justice activities, play an integral role in their political development. Acknowledging that youth can develop politically while acting in a political manner that influences the world around them (i.e., community and civic service) is an expansion of previous socialization literature and demonstrates that youth are active and reflective agents in the political world.

Thus as active agents in the political world and in their own political development, youth require the necessary capacity and means to then act in the world and in their communities. Key to youth involvement in political and community activities is the opportunity to do so. Opportunity structures are stressed by theories in both sociology and political science that explain societal involvement (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002; Stolle & Hooghe, 2002). In addition to the need for opportunities to participate politically, two psychological constructs – sense of agency and critical social analysis – also emerge from the literature as significant to encouraging social action and receive additional attention in the subsequent section of this literature review. Stated simply, social analysis describes how individuals attribute responsibility or causation to social and political issues. The construct is linked to the identity development of adolescents and also to their activism as adults (Flanagan & Galloway, 1995). Sense of agency is referred to both as a requisite for participation and a potential product developing from youth participation in civic and community service (Watts et al., 2003; Yates & Youniss, 1998).

What literature from both psychology and political science reveals is that there is not a comprehensive developmental stage theory explaining the political development of adolescents, rather the existing research determines that multiple environmental factors, from family and schools to SIBs, influence the political development of youth. As part of this still yet undefined factor model of political development, what is clear is that psychological constructs of political development - sense of agency and social awareness - are influenced by these factors. Unfortunately, how these constructs are related to each

other and how they are related directly to the political development of youth is not fully explained by political science nor conventional psychological theory.

### *Sociopolitical Development*

Sociopolitical development (SPD) theory as described by Watts et al. (Watts et al., 2003) however, provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding how sense of agency and a critical social analysis are related to each other and to political action. Their sociopolitical development theory describes how young people acquire the knowledge, skills, and capacity to act on and in political and social systems necessary to interpret and resist oppression. A better understanding of these components of SPD theory can inform our knowledge of the political development of adolescents and may prove essential to promoting their participation in SIBs.

As rich and diverse the research is becoming about each of these components, they are still primarily understood on a conceptual and psychological level. Little is known about how these concepts relate to actual youth settings. For instance, what type of relationship between youth and adults in youth settings facilitates an increased sense of agency, and what aspects of an organization can encourage a more mature critical social analysis? There remains a need to better understand how the climate, roles and functions of youth settings can influence adolescent political development. Existing research is dominated by survey data and other quantitative measures; the specific nuances and lived experiences of individuals are lacking from the research and a qualitative study could provide further insight about contextual influences. As such, the current study is a qualitative extension of an ongoing study that has collected extensive survey data on the sociopolitical development of youth. Recognizing specific organizational features that

contribute to adolescent political development may equip community psychologists and practitioners to better nurture future activists.

### *Social Analysis*

As the cognitive cornerstone of SPD (Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil, 1999), social analysis is essential to sociopolitical development and understanding how societal involvement can be promoted in youth. This social analysis attributes causation for events in society and individual lives somewhere between individuals and social systems (Watts et al., 2003). Simply put, either individuals are at fault for their personal circumstances or larger social forces that are oppressive are to blame. A critical understanding of power and authority is implicit in the latter explanation. Freire (1970) coined the term, critical consciousness, as learning to understand history and the dynamics of social power and how existing modes of thinking serve to maintain the status-quo of oppressive structures of inequality. He argues that learning and understanding the nature of oppression and political context in which one exists must be an integral part of any education to promote social justice activism. In his early work developing SPD theory, Watts and his colleagues demonstrated how an educational curriculum consisting of products of mass culture and dialogue can increase critical thinking, the basis for critical consciousness (Watts et al., 1999). Education leading to critical consciousness was used as a strategy to promote sociopolitical development. This critical learning also occurs when youth actually participate in social change activities. For instance in their study of a service learning project, Yates and Youniss (1998) demonstrate how opportunities for youth to address social problems encourage them to reflect on the political and moral ideologies underlying society.

In light of the importance of education and opportunities for action as qualities of youth organizations, other organizational characteristics relevant to political development are suggested in SPD theory's conception of social analysis. For instance as the link between power and oppression in the larger society become clearer, issues of power, roles, and status within organizations are likely to come into question. Naturally, any dialogue about issues of power and oppression for youth in organizations must also include and account for adults because by tradition, they hold the positions of power in youth organizations. Thus in addition to opportunities for action and any education a youth organization may provide, power and the role of adults may be characteristics of youth organizations that relate to adolescent political development. A comprehensive look at what the literature suggests are the organizational qualities relevant to political development is provided in a later section of this literature review. How these characteristics translate into organizational behavior in youth development organizations is still to be determined.

### *Sense of Agency*

Sense of agency is theorized to be a moderating variable in sociopolitical development theory. It is a distinguishing factor between those who have achieved a critical level of social analysis and do not act and those who are aware and are politically active. Without the belief that one's action can create change, a critical analysis of injustice in society will not lead to action (Watts et al., 2003). Simply, sense of agency is the belief that personal or collective action can make a difference. Beyond self-efficacy which refers to the power or capacity to create a desired change, sense of agency refers to the belief in that capacity as it applies to community and political action. This is not to

say that self-efficacy is not relevant to SPD theory; specific capacities are necessary to initiate and sustain activist behaviors such as interpersonal skills to organize with like-minded individuals or facilitation skills (other skills are covered in a subsequent section). Experience in social action can enhance the skills and capacities effective for SIBs and also encourage a sense of agency (Watts et al., 2003).

A balance of action and agency for social change can thus be inferred from SPD's conception of sense of agency. This balance is also reflected in community psychology's concept of psychological empowerment which considers sense of control to be a critical component of psychological empowerment (Zimmerman, 2000). When sense of agency is considered the theoretical successor to sense of control, its relationship to empowerment becomes clearer. Empowering attitudes imbue a sense of agency for social change to emerging activists (Watts et al., 2003; Zimmerman, 2000). Beyond perceptions of competencies and control, psychological empowerment requires "active engagement in one's community and an understanding of one's sociopolitical environment" (Zimmerman, 1995, as cited in Watts et al., 1999, p.259). For youth development organizations the enduring questions related to empowerment of 'can adults actually empower youth?' and 'can youth empower other youth without actually having power in the organization?' insist that the issue of power be addressed in youth-adult relationships to affect sense of agency. The level of authority and power provided to young people in youth development organizations thus may influence their political development.

Sense of agency may be further supported through the practice of SIBs so long as the practice of social action is followed by a process of reflection. Martin-Baro (1994) describes SPD as a "synergistic relationship" between practice and reflection.

Opportunities for action followed by critical reflection can build confidence and foster a sense of agency in the “confrontation of oppression as one sees the vulnerability of the oppressor and the impact of one’s own power” (Watts et al., 2003, p. 315).

Furthermore not only must there be opportunities for action to affect sense of agency, but those opportunities must be more than meaningless, rote activities.

Community service activities that provide opportunities for intensive experiences and social interactions are strongly associated with sense of agency (Yates & Youniss, 1996).

In a subsequent study, Yates and Youniss (1998) demonstrate that when youth have the opportunity to “use social skills to redress social problems” they can experience agency and responsibility for society’s well-being. Activities and roles for youth that are not considered meaningful do not enhance sense of agency, and in fact undermine any sense of ownership youth may have with an organization or project (Larson et al., 2005; Morgan & Streb, 2001).

Once again, insight into a component of SPD theory suggests certain characteristics for youth organizations that promote political development and involvement in SIBs. Regarding sense of agency, these characteristics are opportunities for meaningful action, power & authority, and adult relationships. The environment in which youth exist must support both the emergence of a critical consciousness and a sense of agency in order to facilitate SIBs (Watts et al., 2003). While the organizational characteristics suggested by both sense of agency and social analysis may be significant to the political development of youth, whether the characteristics are relevant to youth development organizations or the experiences of youth members is still to be determined. Moreover, how the constructs are then influenced by the setting characteristics is also

unknown. Further support of the organizational characteristics suggested by SPD theory is provided by additional areas of psychology.

*Setting Characteristics: “The Big Six”*

Given the established impact of environments on individuals (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Kelley, 1968), research on the political development of adolescents requires that the settings in which they are a part of (i.e., youth development organizations) be examined. Doing so may reveal specific areas of youth development organizations that can be enhanced to better promote the political development of their youth participants. Fundamental to this setting enhancement and also to creating new settings is the recognition that all settings are fallible and susceptible to recurring and shared dynamics and dilemmas (Sarason, 1972). Thus, conceptualizing environmental domains of interest across various settings is a first step in improving interventions and organizations (Moos, 1996).

Acknowledging Moos’ assertion, this study explores 6 salient characteristic domains of youth development organizations that may influence adolescent political development. The domains emerged from literature in related areas of psychology and practice (See Appendix A). The “Big Six” will serve as an a priori framework for the literature review that follows and for the analysis of the qualitative data:

- *Belief System* refers to the organizational mission and commitments that direct and motivate the activities of the youth organization. The beliefs of an organization are reflected in the organizational structure and policies.



- *Opportunity Roles & Structures* refers to how youth participate within organizations. Both the quantity and quality of the roles are important to understanding how these opportunities relate to the political development of youth.
- *Adult Relationships* refers to how the youth of an organization relate to the adult leaders of the organization. These relationships may be classified as being very authoritative and dominant to friendly and peer-like or any where in between.
- *Power & Authority* alludes to the level of ownership, decision-making, and oversight of youth organizations or projects within organizations that youth members practice and experience.
- *Education* is understood to consist of skill building and/or consciousness raising of historical, cultural, and political contexts.
- *Support System* refers to the collection of support resources within a setting that “contributes to individuals’ quality of life and to their ability to cope with stressful life situations” (Maton & Salem, 1995). Support can be provided by youth peers, adults, and institutions (e.g., funding for counselors) and can come in various forms such as social and emotional support, academic counseling, encouragement and coaching, and skill and competency training.

#### *Belief System*

How can we expect young people to develop the critical consciousness and “mature” social analysis associated with SPD and believe that social change is possible if the organizations they are a part of do not maintain a belief in activist behaviors or a commitment to social justice? It is easy to assume that the belief system of organizations may possibly influence the political development of its youth members. Current research

provides some support for this assumption; moreover, what is being revealed is that organizational beliefs and missions have some effect on specific aspects of youth development (Hosang, 2004; Maton & Salem, 1995).

Findings from both research and practice suggest a relationship between organizational belief systems and empowerment. Maton and Salem (1995) have shown us that empowering settings share a belief system that inspires growth, strengths based, and focused beyond the self. Specifically in school settings, efforts to empower students are enhanced and supported by a belief system that considers empowering students a value to be upheld, views students as equals with school staff, and supports risk taking (Short, 1994).

From an applied perspective, a commitment to and culture of empowerment is a quality of the belief system of youth organizing organizations (The Movement Strategy Center, 2004). Additionally, a culture of youth leadership that maintains high expectations for youth members and a commitment to developing a collective identity is a quality of the belief system of successful youth organizing organizations (The Movement Strategy Center, 2004). Furthermore, Hosang (2004) found that a belief system that fosters critical and reflective thinking and consciousness is also critical to the success of youth organizing organizations.

The research, although sparse, and the experiences of youth organizing organizations should not lead one to believe that belief systems are a fully developed and familiar factor in shaping the political development of youth by all organizations. On the contrary, it is often overlooked and some research recommends shifts in organizational beliefs, policies, and structures to better foster youth development. Recognizing the

limited opportunities for youth civic engagement, Camino and Zeldin (2002) advocate for a shift in organizational bylaws to include young people on governing boards and committees and a change in organizational missions to emphasize youth choices and voice as necessary to promote additional “pathways” for youth civic engagement. Likewise in response to the often overlooked prejudice of adultism, Roche (1999) notes that an organizational belief that respects and values the contribution of children is needed to redefine the concept of citizenship to include young people.

Despite the existing literature regarding the belief systems of youth organizations, it appears that what is known about belief systems is focused on the organizations themselves and does not relate to the individual development of the youth members. The relevance of organizational belief systems to the activism of youth members is still unknown. As the personal beliefs and attitudes of young people naturally shape their commitment to social change and future behaviors, the influence of organizational belief systems upon their political development remains an important question. Additionally, it is important to discern to what extent youth who display a mature SPD are committed to and familiar with their respective organization’s mission and beliefs.

#### *Opportunity Roles & Structure*

Opportunity roles are positions in an organization that offer new learning, responsibilities, organizational authority, challenges and experiences that contribute to youth development (Maton & Salem, 1995). They are the mechanisms of organizational participation. Opportunity structure refers to the availability and configuration of those roles within settings which provide meaningful opportunities for individuals to develop, grow, and participate (Maton & Salem, 1995). The significance of roles and opportunity

structures in social settings is evident in ecological theory of community psychology (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Trickett & Todd, 1972). Roles and the structures that control them define how individuals in a given setting exist in relation to other individuals and to their surrounding environment (Sarbin, 1970). Status and power is not prescribed by who a particular individual is, but by the type of role that the individual maintains in a given setting (Levine & Perkins, 1987). Thus, both the availability and the quality of role opportunities are important aspects to consider when examining opportunity roles and structure.

The significance of opportunity roles and structure becomes apparent in research of adolescent development. The field of developmental psychology has shown that opportunities to participate within organizations which both enable youth to experience a sense of belonging and that are efficacious – an opportunity that “matters” – positively influences the development of youth participants (Eccles & Goodman, 2002). Further reading of existing literature not only reveals what qualities of youth roles in organizations affect development, but the predictive value of opportunity for participation by youth becomes apparent as well. Schine (1990) has shown that opportunities to participate in community service counteract prevailing attitudes of isolation and alienation of youth from society by providing them the skills and attitudes necessary for healthy adult lives. Similarly, research on youth civic engagement reveals that participation in pro-social activities (synonymous with SIBs) by youth is a good predictor of future community service as an adult (Hart et al., 1998).

This last finding highlights that opportunities for youth to participate in SIBs clearly relate to how youth can be active in society, and as was discussed earlier youth

participation in SIBs is related to their political development. Thus, if roles and structures determine how youth participate and if participation is vital to political development, then the extent to which roles and opportunities to participate are made available to youth must be examined. The quality of those roles also becomes an important issue to be examined.

Research by Kirshner (2005) helps to clarify the relationship of opportunity roles to political development. He found that opportunities for youth activism that are meaningful, goal-oriented, and youth-centered help youth to develop necessary skills for future political action. Morgan and Streb (2001) asked questions that directly relate to the sense of agency experienced by youth in their study of youth service learning projects. Specifically, they found that service learning opportunities that provided tasks that are challenging and youth roles that offer “real” responsibilities facilitated the youth’s experience of leadership and ownership of the service project.

Research on the characteristics of empowering settings provides additional qualities of roles for youth that may influence their political development. While not exclusively germane to youth organizations, Maton and Salem (1995) have found that organizations that are empowering provide roles for participation that are pervasive, highly accessible by all members, and multifunctional. A large number of roles (*pervasive*) at multiple levels of the organization must be accessible to all members (*accessible*) as their skills and interest increase to meet the challenges of higher skilled and demanding roles; moreover as members assume roles, they must experience opportunities for skill development and learning in addition to fulfilling role functions

(*multifunctional*). As many youth organizations ascribe to be empowering for their members, these findings are certainly relevant to the current study.

Non-academic literature published by youth-serving organizations and foundations describing the experiences of successful youth organizations appears to parallel the findings of academia. The experiences of both youth organizing organizations and leadership development organizations have shown that the best practices of successful youth organizations include opportunities for participation that are meaningful, formally well-defined, and offer multiple leadership roles (LISTEN, 2000; The Movement Strategy Center, 2004; Lewis-Charp, Yu, Soukamneuth, & Lacoé, 2003). The types of roles in youth development organizations that best capture these multiple qualities tend to be leadership positions or those with decision-making capabilities. Examples of these roles include being a voting member on an organization's board of directors, a staff-like role with budgetary responsibilities, a service project coordinator, or youth grant-writer.

Despite the obvious necessity of opportunity roles for youth in youth development organizations, how the opportunity roles examined by research relate to social justice and socio-political contexts is still unclear. Community and civic service are not necessarily political in nature, but in light of psychology's expanded conception of politics they do impact political development. The aim of community and civic service appears to be preparing youth for a healthy adulthood, not responding to socio-political contexts, oppression, or necessarily social change. Given the pervasiveness and power of the status-quo it should not surprise anyone that institutions may be resistant to youth roles that address their sociopolitical context. In fact, Camino and Zeldin (2002) argue

that current institutional mechanisms and societal norms are not sufficient to promote youth participation in community governance nor to support young people as activists. Furthermore, a specific quality of successful pathways for youth civic engagement identified by the authors is that they provide facilitative policies and structures that ensure pathways for youth participation (Camino & Zeldin, 2002).

If political development is a goal of youth organizations then relevant opportunity roles for youth must be available. According to Hosang's (2004) research of youth organizing, roles for community service should be part of an integrated approach that incorporates leadership training, cultural enrichment, and holistic support. Unlike traditional youth roles and the slow nature of campaign organization, community service opportunities provide immediate gratification and positive reinforcement for youth (Hosang, 2004). Community service should not be considered irrelevant to social change efforts, rather it should be complementary to youth roles that may prove more arduous. Although examinations of community and civic service begin to scratch the surface of sociopolitical context the direct relation of opportunity roles for youth with their political development is still to be determined.

#### *Adult Relationships*

The influence of adults on the development of young people is a well established phenomenon in psychology; however the bulk of this research is concerned with the parental relationship (Eccles & Goodman, 2002). Beyond this conventional notion of adults as parents is the fact that adult leaders at schools and youth organizations also significantly influence the development of youth. Specifically, Eccles & Goodman (2002) notes that, much like parents, adult youth workers must also be supportive and caring to

accomplish good outcomes in positive youth development work. Moreover, adult leaders who are inspiring, talented, and committed to the organization are vital to the work of youth settings that are empowering (Maton & Salem, 1995).

Much of the research on youth-adult relationships in youth development organizations examines authority and responsibility. A partnership between youth and adults is a significant quality of youth civic engagement identified by Camino and Zeldin (2002). They strike a balance between what both adults and young people can offer to civic engagement activities. Adults are expected to provide guidance, support, and expertise while youth are expected to provide legitimacy, experiential knowledge and perspective, and passion for the cause. Likewise, research comparing youth-driven and adult-driven youth programs has found that a balance of both leadership techniques creates the most effective model of youth development (Larson, Walker, & Pearce, 2005).

Beyond the conceptual level, this transactional nature of effective youth-adult relationships is further supported in the work of applied settings. Research on leadership development and youth organizing has shown that effective adult leaders play the roles of both mentors and trainers (The Movement Strategy Center, 2004; Hosang, 2004). These leaders advise and guide without dominating or excluding youth participants; they also “let go” of responsibility while remaining engaged and trust the capabilities of young people (Lewis-Charp et al., 2003; The Movement Strategy Center, 2004).

In addition to responsibility, authority is a vital issue to be addressed in the youth-adult relationships of youth organizations. Roche (1999) specifically identifies being open-minded to the concept of power redistribution as an important characteristic of adult



workers in youth organizations. The recognition of young people as social actors and citizens who have much to contribute to social welfare requires shared authority (Roche, 1999). This dual significance of power and responsibility as important elements of effective youth-adult relationships is best captured in research on youth apprenticeships in activism. Kirshner (2005) finds that interactions between experts and novices during activist activities that resemble collaborative activities in which just enough guidance is provided by the adult to pursue a common goal are effective in helping the youth develop skills required for meaningful and effective political action. This method of apprenticeship learning in which the adult eventually trusts and relies on the youth's capabilities can be summed up by the maxim of modeling, coaching, and fading (Kirshner, 2005).

Kirshner's research and description most resemble and informs the current study with its orientation and focus on political activism, but specifically what is not revealed in existing research is what types of adult relationship (e.g., parental, teacher, mentor, friend, authoritarian) best promote political development. Adults are obviously leaders in youth organizations, but are they also partners, friends, mentors, and teachers to youth members and what blend of these qualities best relates to the political development of the youth? This study seeks answers to this question.

#### *Power & Authority*

According to sociological literature, power is defined as the opportunity of one party to impose their will on another party even against resistance; it is identifiable at different levels that range from actual decision making to agenda and policy setting to the shaping of norms and values (Lukes, 1974). Unfortunately, the unjust use of power has

led historically to oppressive acts in which one party or culture dominates another. Youth should not be considered an exception to the oppressive nature of power. One can infer from this conception of power that a relationship between different parties, in the case of this study between adults and youth, is necessary for power to manifest.

This notion of power as a relationship has been deficient in community psychology's emphasis on empowerment (Serrano-Garcia, 1994). Empowerment has been found to increase sense of agency in youth, affect other positive psychological changes, and remains a constant theme of youth development research (Larson, 2000; O'Donoghue, 2006). While empowerment is a focal point and objective for youth development organizations the more pragmatic notion of power – as something that is shared or relinquished by adults – is not always a shared characteristic of youth organizations. Organizations incorporating authentic power for its youth members have traditionally been focused on community organizing, movement building, and popular education focused on critical awareness of injustice (Gambone, Yu, Lewis-Charp, Sip, & Lacoé et al., 2004; Lewis-Charp, 2005). Relationships with adults in these organizations tend to be less authoritative than in conventional youth organizations and can be characterized with the labels of mentor, partner, or even friend.

Developmental psychology has also identified power for youth as an important characteristic for youth organizations. For example, Short (1994) found that the sense of ownership experienced by youth in school settings and activities was influenced by the level of leadership given to students. The significance of power is also realized by the two final questions that Morgan and Streb (2001) ask to complete their notion of experience of agency for youth in service learning projects. They asked whether youth

actually plan service learning projects and whether or not they made important decisions and their study found that youth who believed that they planned projects and made important decisions reported higher levels of sense of agency. Similarly planning, advising, and decision making authority are vital dimensions of the ownership quality of youth pathways to civic engagement (Camino & Zeldin, 2002).

The significant role of power in youth development is made apparent through research, but even in assuring a level of power for youth the potential for tokenism may limit the actual power possessed by youth. It is not enough to create leadership roles that offer only a restricted level of power; power is a dynamic characteristic that must be addressed regularly to ensure a proper balance of power between youth and adults. Roche (1999) supports this understanding of youth development and power in his examination of children's rights, participation, and citizenship; he found that constant acknowledgement of and positive action to address power differentials between young people and adults serves to empower children in their identity as citizens.

The literature's characterization of power as it relates to ownership, citizen identity, and civic engagement is promising to this study's examination of political development. The relevance of power to political development becomes highly visible in its relationship to sense of agency (Watts & Flanagan, in press). Although this relationship is not completely clear, I predict that organizations that actively acknowledge and augment power differentials between adults and youth will positively influence the political development of youth.

### *Education and Training*

Applied settings have provided more literature on the nature of education as it relates to the political development of young people than traditional academic research. The extensive research on positive youth development conducted by Eccles and Goodman (2002), however, provides some insight from research. They have recognized that comprehensive skill building that encompasses cognitive, physical, psychological, social, and cultural skills is an important feature of settings that promote positive youth development. Additionally, Hosang (2004) has identified political education as a vital component of youth organizing efforts. Thus, learning that takes place as political awareness raising or as skill building are important aspects to be considered when examining any education that takes place in youth development organizations.

Beyond the practical applications of skills or the advanced cognition that follows consciousness raising, Kirshner (2005) reveals that education of sociopolitical contexts appears to have another effect. An important experience of youth activist apprenticeships that takes place with their education is that in the process of learning cognitive dimensions of specific tasks they also develop identities as members of a social practice (Kirshner, 2005). Not only do apprentices learn about activist strategies, but they become part of a community that shares a set of similar social goals and norms. This development of a collective identity is another vital component in encouraging young people to act politically. Whether it is advanced cognition, new practical skills, or the development of a collective identity, the potential for education to impact youth political development is clear.

From an applied perspective, the emphasis for education is on social awareness raising and skill building. The applied literature makes a clear distinction between social awareness raising and skill building as forms of education and clearly underscores the importance of consciousness raising about issues and history of political and cultural relevance. Historical, cultural, and political education and awareness training is an explicit foci of youth organizing organizations (LISTEN, 2000). Likewise, formal activities designed to raise consciousness about social issues are a significant characteristic of youth-led organizations (The Movement Strategy Center, 2004), while lessons from successful leadership development organizations reveal that an aspect of leadership development is exposure to social justice issues (Lewis-Charp et al., 2003).

In light of SPD theory, the relationship of consciousness raising to SPD is obvious. Raising awareness lends to the development of critical consciousness, an evolving understanding of the systemic forces shaping society, which is an essential element of the worldview and social analysis components of SPD theory (Watts & Flanagan, in press). SPD theory's connection to skill building is less obvious, but no less important. Action towards social change requires the skills and capacity to enable and support activist behaviors. Some valuable activist skills include: interpersonal skills to organize with like-minded individuals, facilitation skills, writing skills, networking and fundraising, and leadership skills. Whether education through skill building, consciousness raising, or a combination of the two better facilitates or promotes SPD is still to be determined, as is how organizations differently utilize education to influence the political development of their youth participants.

### *Support System*

Social support for adolescents has received a great deal of attention in psychological research. While much of the research has focused on how social support can promote wellness and its protective effects on adolescent development (Barrera & Bonds, 2005; Barrera & Prelow, 2000; ), a growing body of literature is also focused on how support can reduce incidences of adolescent delinquency (Britner, Balcazar, Blechman, Blinn-Pike, & Larose, 2006; Henrich, Brookmeyer, Shrier, & Shahar, 2006; Thompson, Flood, & Goodvin, 2006). More recently, the emergence of positive youth development programs has shifted attention to how adults can support adolescent development to promote the development of skills and competencies (Cash & Anderson-Butcher, 2006). Unfortunately, less attention has been given to how various forms of support can specifically promote pro-social and activist behaviors, such as efforts to challenge various forms of oppression. Recent research, however, is beginning to show how increased levels of perceived support by adolescents from peers, family, and the community can significantly and positively impact the critical consciousness of youth (Diemer et al., 2006).

Despite the limited literature acknowledging the benefit of support in nurturing activist behaviors in youth, some research provides promising directions. For instance, Maton and Salem's (1995) research on empowering settings remains relevant to understanding how youth settings can support the political development of adolescents. They define an empowering support system broadly as the collection of support resources within a setting that "contributes to individuals' quality of life and to their ability to cope with stressful life situations" (p. 646). They acknowledge that a viable support system

can empower individuals by supporting them as they deal with oppressive conditions in their lives and by helping them cope with the challenges and stress of enhancing control over one's life. Maton and Salem (1995) characterize support systems of empowering settings as: encompassing, peer-based, and providing a psychological sense of community.

Camino and Zeldin (2002) examine support systems for adolescent development from the perspective of organizations that seek to promote youth civic engagement. They recognize that youth civic engagement is most often accomplished through youth-adult partnerships in which the youth desire, need, and expect certain types of support from adults that include: coaching, dialoging, and connections to institutional resources and community leaders. Particularly in youth organizing settings where youth organizers face personal and institutional challenges in creating pathways for youth civic action, peer support for young activists and institutional support that provides information and tools for organizing are also especially important (Camino & Zeldin, 2002).

Continuing a look at youth organizing, Hosang (2004) has identified unifying elements within the field of youth organizing and one common element among this field is the need for the social support of adolescents. He identifies that many organizing groups still struggle to support their members in coping with "life's day-to-day pressures". For these groups, support in the form of counseling, academic support, and cultural enrichment by adult staff best complement organizing efforts (Hosang, 2004). Eccles and Goodman (2002) further reiterate the importance of adult relationships to adolescent development in youth settings by acknowledging that an important quality of these relationships is whether or not adults in youth settings are supportive and caring.

Thus it is clear that the literature on support systems recognizes how adults are realizing the importance of support to adolescent development. What remains to be known is whether or not participating youth recognize support systems in their organizations as a meaningful quality of their organization and if and how it influences their political development.

### Research Questions

As revealed by the literature, two sets of constructs are important to consider when investigating the relationship between youth settings and adolescent political development. The first set, the Big Six, is comprised of the previously defined a priori characteristics of youth serving organizations:

- *Belief System*
- *Opportunity Structures*
- *Adult Relationships*
- *Power & Authority*
- *Education*
- *Support*

The second set of constructs includes the relevant psychological variables of SPD theory:

- *Social Analysis*
- *Sense of Agency*

This study examines the Big Six in depth and explores how the organizational characteristics may be related to the two psychological elements of sociopolitical development theory described above. Consistent with community psychology, this strategy emphasizes the interface of person and environment—in this case the organizational environment. The data analysis explored two sets of research questions.

The primary research question is:



1. Do youth note, and describe as meaningful, any of the six a priori domains related to the political development of youth in their experiences at their organization?
  - a. Do any consistent themes emerge across respondents?
  - b. What are their implications for the creation of youth settings?

Secondary to this study, but still relevant to understanding how youth settings can influence adolescents is examining how the characteristics of youth organizations may relate to their personal and political development. As such, a secondary set of research questions was explored in post hoc analysis.

2. Do youth link any of the six a priori domains related to political development of youth to their own personal or political development?
  - a. Do any consistent themes emerge across respondents?

## Methods

### *Research Design*

Given that the aim of this study is to understand how organizational settings influence adolescent political development and to uncover any relationships between constructs I drew from grounded theory methodology to understand the topic. Using inductive reasoning, grounded theory seeks to develop theoretical insights from data and not merely to describe the meaning of phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). To do this, analyses progressed from coding to cross-case and content analysis.

### *Participants*

Participants in this study included high school-aged adolescents who were active in various youth development organizations throughout metropolitan Atlanta (N=15). All but 2 of the participants identified as African-American while the remaining two

identified as White. Eleven of the participants were female and the mean age for this sample was 16. Of particular interest were experiences associated with leadership and sociopolitical activism as they occur in youth organizations. Both purposeful and theoretical sampling methods were employed to ensure that the selected participants were the most relevant to the research questions and to the development of theory. These methods are among the distinctive sampling strategies used in qualitative research (Patton, 1990). More specifically, the aim of the sampling approach was to exclusively sample youth with a record of political, civic and community-service experience.

Thus, two different recruitment techniques were implemented. The first was to select a sub-set of participants for interviews from an ongoing study about youth sociopolitical development (*Youth in Action*). Youth who qualified as participants from this source scored in the top twentieth percentile (20%) of both the *Youth Involvement Inventory* and the *Experience of Agency* scales (See Appendix B for a detailed list of qualifying participants and see the instrument section for additional information on these measures). This ensured that all of those selected using this recruitment technique were highly active in their respective organizations and that they have experienced a high level of agency in the community and political activities. They thus represented a potentially valuable source of information regarding the organizations they participate in.

The second recruitment technique relied on the Youth Adult Alliance of Atlanta (YAA). Adult staff from the range of youth development organizations that are members of YAA were consulted based on their professional experience to nominate the most active youth in their respective organizations. YAA is an alliance of youth development organizations in Atlanta that are committed to youth-led work and youth-adult

partnerships and member organizations of this Alliance are relevant to the proposed study's interest in the characteristics of youth settings that promote political development. See Appendix C for a visual representation of the sources for each participant.

### *Instruments*

As previously mentioned, two specific measures were used to select interview participants using the first recruitment technique (see above) – the *Youth Inventory of Involvement* scale and *Experience of Agency* scale. A further description of each scale is provided below.

*Youth Inventory of Involvement (YII)* (Pancer, Pratt & Hunsberger, 2000). This 30-item scale was developed to assess type and amount of youth societal involvement behavior. Of the four subscales that comprise this scale, each of which represents a different kind of societal involvement: political activities, community activities, helping activities, and responding activities; only the political and community activities will be used to select participants for the proposed study. Respondents indicate how much, in the past year, they have participated in each of the activities using a 5-point scale that ranges from “I never did this over the past year” to “I did this a lot over the past year”. Based on the research of the measure's creators that involved two large samples of Canadian youth aged 16-19, Alpha for the YII was .90 and test-retest reliability over two years was .61. Alphas for the two relevant subscales – political activities and community activities – are based on recent research by Watts, Armstrong, Cartman, and Guessous (in press); Alpha for YII political activities was .85 and Alpha for YII community activities was .74.

*Experience of Agency (EOA)* (Morgan & Streb, 2001). This 4-item scale was created by its authors to assess the level of student “voice” in the design and

implementation of service-learning projects with four yes or no items: “I had real responsibilities,” “I had challenging tasks,” “I helped plan the project,” “I made important decisions.” These items were adapted for the current study to assess the extent to which participants had been involved in community or political projects that allowed them to exert and further develop their individual sense of agency. Based on recent research by Watts and colleagues (in press) involving a large sample of high school youth in Atlanta, Alpha for EOA was .99.

### *Procedure*

After obtaining IRB approval and prior to collecting interview data two pilot interviews were conducted by two graduate students to aid in the development of interview questions and protocol. All interviews used in this study were conducted by the researcher. After parental consent was acquired via organization staff or by the researcher meeting parents directly, fifteen participants were invited to the GSU campus or to select a public venue to conduct the interview. Each of the youth participated in a 30- to 60-minute semi-structured interview, during which they answered questions about their experiences in the activities of their respective youth development organization. The interviewers followed an interview script with questions relating to each of the six a priori organizational domains of interest while also probing for more in-depth answers (see Appendix D). Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim.

### *Data Analysis*

The data for this study consisted of audio recordings from 15 interviews. Informed by grounded theory, data analysis entailed ongoing coding, comparison, and confirmation to ensure that the emerging framework of organizational qualities was

grounded in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Interpretive and pattern coding are essential to generating theory beyond basic descriptive analysis and to maintaining a sufficient level of analytical rigor (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

All data was transcribed into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package. Using a system of nodes and attributes, the program provides functions for categorizing, defining, editing, searching and merging codes and categories. Nodes are used to organize the data thematically or into hierarchical tree structures (Richards, 2000), and these tree structures were used to capture the hierarchical organization of categories, subcategories, and properties. For the purpose of this study, the domains of interest (i.e., The Big Six) are referred to as *categories* and were treated as separate category throughout the coding process; emerging dimensions of these categories deemed important and interesting are referred to as *subcategories*, and further qualities of these subcategories are referred to as *properties*. The conceptual structure that emerged from the organization of the tree nodes guided the formation of the final coding scheme, and each code was given a clear and comprehensive operational description to facilitate a reliable coding process.

Open coding was utilized in the current study and is described by Strauss and Corbin (1990) as that which “fractures the data and allows one to identify some categories, their properties and dimensional locations” (p. 97). Thus, open coding served as an inductive approach to analysis; however in the case of the present study a blend of inductive and deductive approaches were used. The a priori organizational domains deductively guided the collection and analysis of the data and served as categories; while open coding of the data inductively revealed the subcategories and properties of the

categories. Various techniques associated with content analysis were also used and included: clustering, counting, and comparing and contrasting. A combination of both grounded theory and content analysis strategies were used in different phases of the analysis to best achieve the purposes of the present study: to identify meaningful characteristics of organizations associated with adolescent political development and then to uncover any relationships among the constructs of interest.

#### *Preliminary Open Coding*

The researcher began the analysis by open coding the first 5 interviews. Next, a team of two graduate students and one undergraduate research assistant reviewed the interview transcripts and developed categories, sub-categories, and preliminary properties through an iterative process of clustering, counting, and confirmation. During this preliminary open coding phase, complete thoughts, sentences, and unique words in the transcripts were noted by the reviewers. Counting determines if emerging properties and patterns are present throughout the data and not simply unique to individual cases. Reviewers made comments and notes on meaningful themes, concepts, and properties in the transcripts that related to each of the six a priori categories.

Once this initial review was complete, reviewers clustered like items together (pertaining to similar phenomenon) within the appropriate categories. Clustering takes place when a coder groups and conceptualizes objects or properties that have similar patterns or characteristics (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After clustering like items reviewers developed conceptual labels for the clusters that grouped items together but were abstract enough to capture the various meanings within the cluster. Following each

individual review, the reviewers met together to discuss what each found and to refine an initial coding scheme.

Following Miles and Huberman's (1994) recommendation, a provisional coding scheme was developed from the preliminary open coding. The open coding process revealed a preliminary system of sub-categories and properties that further described the a priori categories; the coding scheme provided a better idea of what types of dimensions were to emerge once the analysis was complete. The provisional coding scheme also served to further refine and ground the research questions for the present study in the experiences of youth participants.

#### *Focused Open Coding*

Coding was not complete with the creation of a provisional coding scheme. I then coded an additional five interview transcripts. This new data was continually compared and contrasted to the categories and properties that emerged from the first round of open coding. This process confirmed existing codes as new ones emerged and continued until saturation occurred – the point at which no new information from the data added to my understanding of the categories and when it appeared that the emergent properties and categories best captured and described the constructs of interest (Creswell, 1998) – and a second version of the coding scheme was complete.

Once this version of the coding scheme was complete two graduate students familiar with SPD theory assisted me in refining the revised coding scheme. I briefed my associates on the scheme and they then coded a random sample of the data, drawn from two randomly selected uncoded transcripts. Once their coding was complete, they were asked to critically evaluate the coding scheme based on its face validity and degree of

saturation. The associates made two significant recommendations concerning the coding scheme: additional themes that were overlooked by the scheme and a new exploratory category of interest called “Growth & Change.” One associate recommended collapsing two lists of detailed properties into a single sub-category so as to simplify the coding process and to increase intercoder agreement. Adjustments were made to the codebook based on the feedback of the judges.

#### *Intercoder Agreement*

Once this third revision of the coding scheme was complete intercoder agreement was assessed. An individual who was not familiar with SPD theory assisted me in determining the validity of the coding scheme. After reviewing the coding scheme with this associate and training her in locating and coding themes in the transcripts, we each independently coded a another random sample of two uncoded transcripts, equivalent to 13% of the data, and exceeding the minimum sample size of 10% recommended by content analysis experts (Lombard et al., 2005).

The transcripts were not pre-structured into codable sections prior to any of the independent coding. Thus, without any static denominator from which to think about perfect agreement the transcripts were treated as continuous data by the judges. Additionally, text passages coded by each judge were coded into multiple categories (categories were not mutually exclusive) or no category at all. For all of these reasons, the likelihood of chance agreement was low and the use of simple agreement (number of agreements ÷ number of instances where either judge used the category) was acceptable. Agreement percentages were computed separately for each of the coding scheme’s seven categories. For exploratory studies such as the present study, a minimum agreement level



of 70% is acceptable (Lombard et al., 2005). After judging the first transcript, moderate-to-high levels of intercoder agreement were achieved for all seven categories and an acceptable level of overall agreement was achieved, as detailed in Table 1; however, I considered the levels of three categories (i.e., Opportunity Structure, Adult Relationships, Power & Authority) to be unacceptable as they contrasted with the other categories that had higher levels of agreement.

Thus, after assessing agreement on the first transcript my associate and I compared codes and discussed areas of disagreement. Adjustments were then made based on feedback from and discussion with the associate, thereby yielding a fourth version of the coding scheme. The primary adjustments to the scheme included further collapsing of detailed properties into their hierarchical sub-categories as each judge agreed upon coding similar sub-categories, but differed on coding the properties.

The reliability of this coding scheme was then assessed by coding a second randomly selected transcript. After judging the second transcript, indices for the three problematic categories increased, and moderate-to-high levels of intercoder agreement were achieved for the remaining categories, as detailed in Table 1. Moreover, a higher level of overall agreement was also achieved. Final and minor revisions were then made to the coding scheme, thereby yielding its final version (see Appendix E).

Table 1

*Intercoder Percentage Agreements*

Category	Intercoder Agreement #1			Intercoder Agreement #2			Average Agreement
	#	#	%	#	#	%	
	Agree	Disagree	Agreement	Agree	Disagree	Agreement	
BELIEF SYSTEM & MISSION	7	2	78%	5	2	71%	75%
OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE	10	4	71%	13	4	76%	74%
ADULT RELATIONSHIPS	15	7	68%	12	5	71%	70%
POWER & AUTHORITY	18	8	69%	12	4	75%	72%
EDUCATION & TRAINING	3	1	75%	7	2	78%	77%
SUPPORT	8	3	73%	13	3	81%	77%
GROWTH & CHANGE	5	1	83%	6	2	75%	79%
TOTALS	66	26	71.7%	68	22	75.6%	73.7%

*Delineating Themes and Relationships*

Having calibrated my coding judgments to those of my associates at an acceptable level of agreement, I served as the sole coder for the remaining 11 transcripts, doing so directly from the NVivo user interface. Once all transcripts were coded, the categories, sub-categories, and properties were systematically examined to ascertain how each participant discussed and described them. Two different approaches were simultaneously used in formulating themes. First, codes that appeared in more than one-third of cases

were considered meaningful descriptive qualities for each respective category and were examined in further depth. Thus, for purposes of assessing the value of the Big Six, high coding frequencies were interpreted as an indication of meaningfulness. Additionally so as not to lose other meaningful themes, I pursued coded passages that did not meet the one-third threshold but appeared to represent unique and interesting experiences.

Each coded passage was reviewed and analyzed to determine themes and facets of each category. The themes and descriptions offered in Section I were delineated using a process of continual comparison and contrasting. Atypical but theoretically meaningful themes also received additional attention and these findings are presented in Section II. Lastly, all coded passages were re-examined at the most detailed level of sub-category or property achieved to extract themes related to the second set of research questions. Themes related to whether and how participants described personal or political development in relation to the organizational categories were explored. Descriptive and explanatory matrix displays were used and were central to my organization and command of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

## Results

This study's findings are presented in three sections. The first section addresses the first set of research questions by reviewing the sub-categories, properties, and themes of the a priori categories that emerged from the interview data. This section primarily reviews how respondents noted and experienced each of the Big Six. Assessment of what meaning they ascribed to the categories is limited in this section to the high frequency coding of sub-categories, properties, and themes. For the purposes of this study, frequency of category codes does not imply any theoretical relationships between the Big

Six; it does however provide a systematic manner to order the presentation of findings. The order in which findings for each of the Big Six are presented is based on the number of codes assigned to the categories, proceeding from the Big Six category with the highest number of codes (i.e., Opportunity Structure) to the fewest (i.e., Belief System & Mission). The second section discusses unexpected findings: these are themes not directly related to the research questions but are salient nonetheless. These themes were related to organizational impediments to youth participation. To address the secondary set of research questions, the third section presents themes related to personal growth and development as reported by the participants. Post hoc analyses allude to potential relationships between personal and political growth to themes from the Big Six.

For the sake of clarity, the a priori categories of interest are capitalized and in bold font (e.g., **Adult Relationships**), sub-categories and micro-categories are italicized (e.g., *personality*), and themes and properties are underlined (e.g., caring). Before exploring for themes descriptive quantitative analyses were conducted. Tables 3 and 4 provide the number and percentage of participants who received each code. As each transcript may have received each code any number of times, the table reveals the total number of passages coded as well as the average number of coded passages per transcript. Figure 1 visually displays the distribution of coded passages per transcript.

Figure 1

*Distribution of coded passages per transcript*

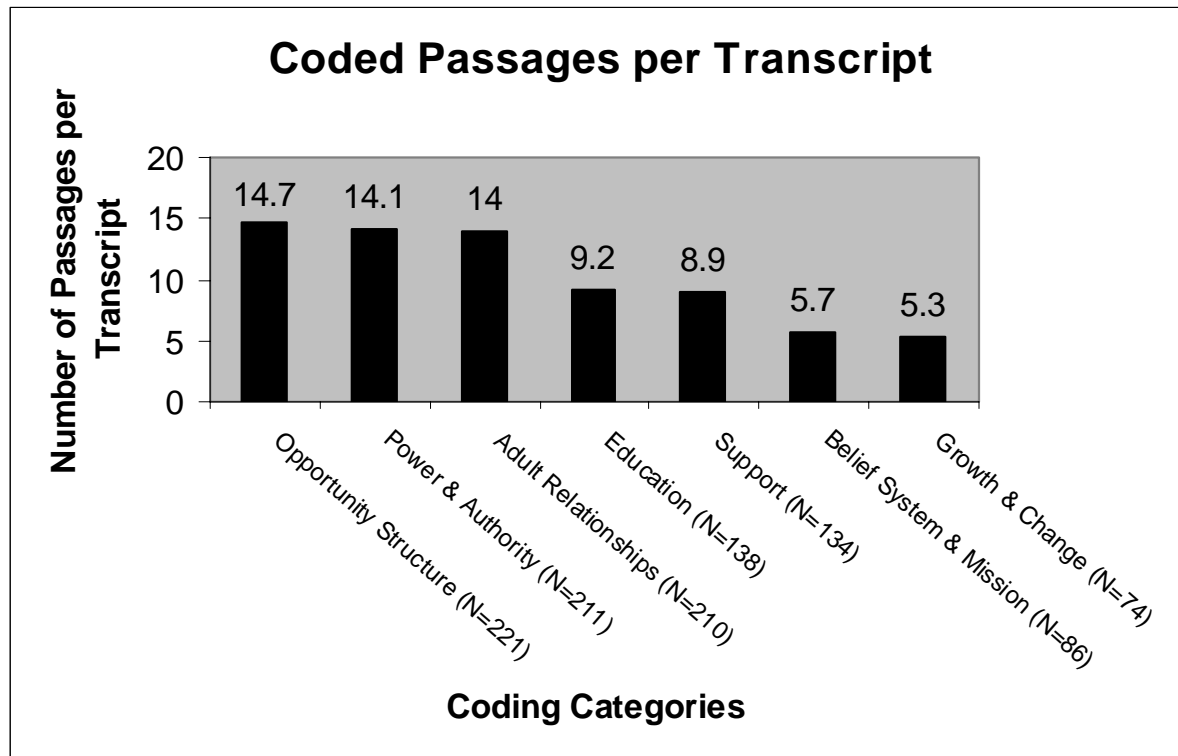


Table 2  
*Summary of Codes for Opportunity Structure, Power & Authority, and Adult Relationships*

	N Transcripts	% of Transcripts <sup>a</sup>	N Passages <sup>b</sup>	Average # of Passages per Transcript <sup>c</sup>
<b>OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE:</b>				
Multiple Opportunities	13	87%	32	2.5
High Quality	14	93%	131	9.4
Roles & Activities	15	100%	79	5.3
<i>Leadership</i>	12	80%	51	4.3
<i>Mentor</i>	2	13%	5	2.5
<i>Mediator</i>	2	13%	2	1.0
<i>Volunteer &amp; Service</i>	9	60%	21	2.3
<i>Teamwork</i>	6	40%	14	2.3
<b>OVERALL:</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>221<sup>d</sup></b>	<b>14.7</b>
<b>POWER &amp; AUTHORITY:</b>				
Location of Power	15	100%	126	8.4
<i>Youth</i>	11	73%	21	1.9
<i>Adults</i>	12	80%	37	3.1
<i>Balance of Power</i>	13	87%	69	5.3
Extent of Youth Power	15	100%	79	5.3
<i>Decision-making</i>	15	100%	59	3.9
<i>Advisory</i>	9	60%	18	2.0
<i>Control Org. Resources</i>	1	7%	2	2.0
Decision Making Structure	14	93%	86	6.1
<i>Hierarchical</i>	7	47%	18	2.6
<i>Communal</i>	14	93%	68	4.9
<b>OVERALL:</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>211<sup>d</sup></b>	<b>14.1</b>
<b>ADULT RELATIONSHIPS:</b>				
Good Relationship	15	100%	46	3.1
Personality	13	87%	99	7.6
<i>Approachable</i>	10	67%	27	2.7
<i>Trust youth capabilities</i>	11	73%	36	3.3
<i>Knowledgeable</i>	9	60%	16	1.8
<i>Genuine &amp; Dedicated</i>	12	80%	26	2.2
<i>Caring</i>	8	53%	23	2.9
Role	15	100%	127	8.5
<i>Mentor</i>	14	93%	73	5.2
<i>Mediator</i>	6	40%	9	1.5
<i>Teacher</i>	12	80%	21	1.8
<i>Friend</i>	8	53%	12	1.5
<i>Supervisor/Boss</i>	13	87%	30	2.3
<b>OVERALL:</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>210<sup>d</sup></b>	<b>14.0</b>

Note. As any one passage in a transcript could have been assigned multiple codes, the overall totals for each Big Six category do not reflect the sum of codes assigned to sub-categories, micro-categories, and properties.

<sup>a</sup>Percent of transcripts was calculated as a proportion of transcripts coded to the total number of transcripts (N=15).

<sup>b</sup>Passages that were coded in multiple sub- or micro-categories were only counted once. This applies to all totals under 'N Passages'. <sup>c</sup>Passages per transcript were calculated by dividing 'N Transcripts' into 'N Passages'. <sup>d</sup>The overall total for each Big Six category (as calculated by NVivo) is the number of passages that received at least one code related to each respective Big Six category.

Table 3

*Summary of Codes for Education, Support, Belief System & Mission, and Growth & Change*

	<b>N Transcripts</b>	<b>% of Transcripts<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>N Passages<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>Average # of Passages per Transcript<sup>c</sup></b>
<b>EDUCATION:</b>				
Subject	14	93%	52	3.7
Purpose	14	93%	64	4.6
<i>Consciousness Raising</i>	12	80%	41	3.4
<i>Motivate</i>	4	27%	6	1.5
<i>Preparation</i>	10	67%	30	3.0
Training	14	93%	57	4.1
<i>Interpersonal Skill Building</i>	11	73%	19	1.7
<i>Expertise Building</i>	11	73%	40	3.6
<b>OVERALL:</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>138<sup>d</sup></b>	<b>9.2</b>
<b>SUPPORT:</b>				
Type	15	100%	98	6.5
<i>Technical &amp; Organizational</i>	12	80%	38	3.2
<i>Socio-emotional</i>	14	93%	63	4.5
Source	15	100%	119	7.9
<i>Adults</i>	15	100%	68	4.5
<i>Youth</i>	14	93%	53	3.8
<b>OVERALL:</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>134<sup>d</sup></b>	<b>8.9</b>
<b>BELIEF SYSTEM &amp; MISSION:</b>				
Service & Volunteerism	6	40%	12	2.0
Education	9	60%	28	3.1
Social Change & Justice	7	47%	15	2.1
Positive Youth Development	13	87%	33	2.5
<b>OVERALL:</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>86<sup>d</sup></b>	<b>5.7</b>
<b>GROWTH &amp; CHANGE:</b>				
Personal	13	87%	52	4.0
Worldview	14	93%	35	2.5
<b>OVERALL:</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>74<sup>d</sup></b>	<b>5.3</b>

*Note.* As any one passage in a transcript could have been assigned multiple codes, the overall totals for each Big Six category do not reflect the sum of codes assigned to sub-categories, micro-categories, and properties.

<sup>a</sup>Percent of transcripts was calculated as a proportion of transcripts coded to the total number of transcripts (N=15).

<sup>b</sup>Passages that were coded in multiple sub- or micro-categories were only counted once. This applies to all totals

under 'N Passages'. <sup>c</sup>Passages per transcript were calculated by dividing 'N Transcripts' into 'N Passages'. <sup>d</sup>The overall total for each Big Six category (as calculated by NVivo) is the number of passages that received at least one code related to each respective Big Six category.

*Section I: Themes within the Big Six*

*Opportunity Structures*

Nearly all the youth (87%) explicitly referred to *multiple opportunities* for participation in their respective organizations. For the two participants that did not, one was a part of an organization that closed operations after the project she was working on ended and the other simply joined his organization for a single project, which does not mean there were not *multiple opportunities* available, only that he was not interested.

*Multiple opportunities* is one of 3 sub-categories that emerged from youth descriptions about their opportunities to be active and involved in their organization; the other sub-categories are: 1) *Roles & Activities* and 2) *High Quality Opportunities*. Several themes and properties emerged within these sub-categories that further describe the category of **Opportunity Structure**.

Three specific micro-categories within the *roles & activities* sub-category emerged to describe opportunities for youth to be active in their organizations. Although 5 micro-categories were original to the coding scheme, the codes for Mentor and Mediator roles and activities did not appear in the minimum of one-third of the cases, nor did they provide insight into the research questions. The three micro-categories of *roles & activities* that did satisfy the minimum requirement were: 1) *Leadership*, 2) *Volunteer & Service*, and 3) *Teamwork*.

Various themes emerged to describe the *leadership* roles that youth experienced in their organizations. Most of the youth (N=12) participated in either formal or informal opportunities for *leadership*. Formal leadership roles ranged from holding an office like president, to serving as a project leader, to being a teacher to younger children, and to



being a member on the organization's board of directors. Informal leadership roles centered on specific activities or projects rather than on regular organizational operations. Examples of these informal leadership roles included: Facilitating a brainstorm session, serving as a spokesperson for youth concerns from one's school or community, writing an article for a newspaper, negotiating with adult staff, and serving as a role model for younger youth and children. In describing their *leadership* roles and activities, both formal and informal, youth also demonstrated a responsibility for the successes and failures of projects. For example:

This is being involved with actually running a newspaper, with not having directions handed down, but looking to see what you need to do, and doing it because I have to make the decision or the paper will go out without my story in it. Or the entire issue might be affected because I didn't go to the photo shoot. It's all about responsibility, when you have a taste of this responsibility...you step up to the plate.

- Brandy

While not as prevalent as *leadership* activities, the micro-category of *volunteer & service* activities called for further exploration (N=9). Upon further examination, two themes emerged to describe the *volunteer & service* experiences that the youth described were available to them in their organizations. First, the foci of community service were vulnerable or indigent populations such as: foster children, visually impaired children, the homeless, recovering drug addicts, and low income communities. Secondly, *service and volunteer* activities were provided in conjunction with other activities and opportunities. Youth described their *volunteer & service* activities as related to their *leadership* roles and activities. Over half of the participants (67%) described their *leadership* roles in the context of community service activities.

A final micro-category of the *roles & activities* sub-category was opportunity for *teamwork*. Youth described how some of the opportunities they had to participate in

leadership and service occurred in groups. Their experiences of *teamwork* emphasized that group decisions and discussions were essential to the objectives of projects and the goals of the organization. Despite the stress on accomplishing goals and objectives in *teamwork*, the youth also described how interactions and personal relationships were an important element to *teamwork*. Although *teamwork* emphasizes shared responsibilities it did not negate individual responsibilities. Youth described individual responsibilities in the context of group responsibility. For example:

One time, on tour we have individual assignments like controlling the costumes, calling people about logistics, or cleaning out the van. I feel that when you accomplish your individual goals you contribute to the group you are a leader cause you are contributing to the group as a whole and it is not individualistic... We are a group, we are dancers and if one person is down you have to lift me. If you're not feeling well, you're gonna hurt me and everybody else so we had to keep everybody focused.  
-Shannon

In contrast to *roles & activities* which capture the specific roles available to youth in their organizations, the sub-category of *high quality* refers to how the youth described those roles and activities. Specific properties emerged to define which opportunities were of *high quality*. The property of *high quality* opportunities that was most prevalent in youth descriptions was difference making. In fact, 201 passages contained the word 'difference' or other words and phrases associated with difference making throughout youth descriptions of their opportunities for participation. Other words or phrases that were associated with difference making opportunities included: helpful, important, make change, affects people, make better, and contributing to the world. The social levels that the youth felt they were making a difference ranged from individual lives of other youth and children and the local community, to macro-systems such as governmental institutions and school systems, to the larger world and society. For instance:

Because it involves all children in the educational system from elementary to high school and so if we do what we think is going to happen then a change will come about, a good change will come about that will help affect, trickle down into the lower levels.

-Nikki

Another property of *high quality* opportunities that emerged was that youth described possessing real responsibility in their opportunities to participate in their organizations. Responsibility was characterized by the youth as having decision making authority. For instance, many youth noted having to make a number of difficult decisions either as a member of a board of directors or as a leader of specific projects. Additionally, youth articulated having a personal choice in their individual tasks and duties, in setting agendas, and in creating new youth-led projects.

*High quality* opportunities were also described as being challenging to the youth. Participant illustrations of being challenged consisted of being challenged by both individual responsibilities and by group tasks. Individually, the youth described being challenged by the necessity to learn new skills (e.g., software programs like Excel or Illustrator) and by learning and exercising leadership skills such as facilitating or moderating group meetings. Many participants also described being challenged by group tasks related to community organizing for specific projects and for recruitment. Aside from the intrinsic difficulties of recruiting and organizing, the youth also noted that these group tasks challenged their “people skills” in having to interact with diverse groups. Despite the challenge of the opportunities available to them, the youth recognized the value of the activities in the long term. For example:

The shows, even though Spring Break practices are rigorous and long, they really brought us together and made us a family. At the end of the shows all of your hard work pays off.

-Shannon

A final property of *high quality* opportunities was that they were described as being important. Youth considered opportunities that were meaningful, educational, or helpful to others to be important. Youth found meaning in how the experiences impacted them personally. Youth noted that their participation in their organizations changed their perspective of the world. Youth noted that their experiences either broadened their view of the world “outside of these four walls” or helped them to “see the world differently.” Lastly, youth expressed personal satisfaction in “touching” someone and helping another individual. For example:

The most important was the one where we went to the shelter cause it touched my heart on the inside to know that I could help someone. At the time I was only 15 years old and didn't think that I could touch someone in that way like the way my teachers touch me and it showed me that I could help, so that task that I did meant more to me than anything.

-Tiffany

#### *Power & Authority*

In all cases, youth described their organizations as either providing power to youth (73%) or providing a balance of power between youth and adults (87%). In no case did adults at the organizations have absolute control. There was, however, a range in the *extent of power* that youth possessed and a number of themes emerged in the participant's descriptions of the power they exercised in their organizations. Likewise, themes emerged in how the youth described the *decision making structure* of their organizations.

Themes for the *extent of youth power* emerged in the two micro-categories of *advisory* and *decision-making* authority. Youth power characterized as *advisory* refers to instances when youth gave advice, shared ideas, made recommendations, petitioned, or expressed disagreement to adult leaders without actually making a decision or necessarily creating change. For example:

There's supposed to be student input through the elected steering committee where each grade has representatives but, frankly, all that does is decide stuff like the school dances and social aspects like that. Really, decisions are made by this invisible power within the administration that shifts around so that you really don't know which person you talk to, who has the power.

-Charlie

The youth exercised their *advisory* power in one-on-one encounters, formal group meetings, steering committees, youth boards, and via signed petitions. For all but one participant, the *extent of youth power* was not limited to just *advisory* authority; they also experienced *decision-making* power.

*Decision making* authority was exercised more often on specific projects like community service projects, action research projects, and popular education events. While the youth described making various decisions related to specific projects, fewer described decisions they had made regarding larger issues that affected the daily operations of the organizations. Some examples of these organizational decisions that some youth did describe ranged from strategic planning decisions on boards of directors to the hiring of adult staff. For example:

Yesterday Keosha was talking about how she was sad that Roger was moving on to a different job, and she was talking about how she had hired him. I thought it was a joke. But she did everything, went through the process of going over his résumé, she made the decision to bring him on board and be at [this organization] in his current position. She wasn't even 18 and she did that. When I say we're really involved we're really involved. If we got anymore responsibility we'd be completely running the paper.

-Brandy

When exercising *decision making* authority, the youth described making decisions as a part of formal decision making bodies such as in elected office, steering committees, youth boards, intern staff, and organizational board of directors. In addition to the organizational decisions previously mentioned and trivial decisions such as where to eat meals, the types of decisions youth had made included: establishing rules of order,

creating and coordinating projects to work on, deciding on admitting and dismissing youth members, and evaluating projects and events.

How decisions were made in the youth organizations came to define the sub-category *decision making structure* and various themes emerged in the two micro-categories of the sub-category: *Communal* and *Hierarchical* structures. Youth described *communal* decision making structures and processes in a more positive light than *hierarchical* ones. *Communal* decision making refers to decisions made as a group through processes of consensus, voting, or compromise. Although the youth considered the process of consensus to be challenging and time-consuming, they recognized that it valued everyone's opinion and provided opportunities for everyone to express themselves. For instance:

We come to a consensus. Earlier this year when I joined we were deciding on the logo for [our organization] and you had to choose which ones you wanted and it came down to two. You don't leave the staff meeting until everybody comes to consensus, everybody must agree with it. I kind of like it that way considering nobody's disappointed, however it's upsetting when you have to sit there for an hour and half deciding about the logo...

- Raven

When consensus failed the youth described that groups would make decisions by voting. The youth also described how adults were a part of the consensus process. Adults served two functions in the consensus process; they would aid the process with advice and guidance, and they would facilitate the process to ensure all youth could give input. A final theme related to *communal* structures of *decision making* was how the process made the youth feel. Youth described feeling important when their opinions influenced how someone else thought. For example:

When a problem comes up and I give my opinion I feel like that my opinion matters and can sway how others feel about it.

-John

Less than half of the participants (47%) referred to *hierarchical* structures and processes of *decision making*. For those who did, *hierarchical* processes occurred in addition to *communal* processes and were employed by adults that they did not work with directly like Executive Directors or other program staff. *Hierarchical* decisions were “top-down” decisions made by adults without youth input. The participants clearly communicated that they did not like *hierarchical* decision making. They were suspicious of *hierarchical* decisions because they expressed not knowing how they were made. This *decision making structure* made them feel powerless, angry, and unmotivated to comply.

It makes me feel angry cause I know all the teens want one thing, but because of one person we have to change things for her, not the rest of the group.  
-Robert

For those organizations with missions explicitly emphasizing youth leadership, the youth were cognizant of the discrepancy of *hierarchical* decisions. For instance, an 18 year old African American girl expressed her dismay when she experienced *hierarchical* decision making by an adult she didn't work with on a daily basis:

It kind of shocked me cause I never bumped into any problems like that at [this organization]. It was always 'we're going to talk to each other and you're going to help me make this decision, it's a 50/50 thing.  
-Shannon

### *Adult Relationships*

All participants (100%) described having good relationships with adults in their organizations, and several themes emerged in the category of **Adult Relationships** which provide a rich description of the adults and relationships with them at the organizations the participating youth were active in. Experiences with organizational adults were organized into three sub-categories: 1) *Good Relationships*, 2) *Personality*, and 3) *Roles*.

Four properties of *good relationships* with adults at the organizations emerged in the youth's descriptions. The first property was the availability of the adults at the organizations to the youth. A consistent presence came to define adults who were available. The youth used words like "always", "every time", and "around" to describe the presence of the adults that they related to best. The youth did not necessarily describe adults who were not available in negative terms; they simply did not relate to them.

A second property was good communication between the youth and organization's adults. Whether the communication between the youth and adults was for relational, instructional, or educational purposes, the adults were able to communicate in a manner that was respectful to the youth. Youth expressed feeling equal to the adults in their communications. For example:

It was never like I'm an adult and you are a child so whatever I say goes. It was I'm not going to talk down to you, I am going to talk to you. You're my equal right now, whatever you need I'm going to be here for you.  
-Shannon

A third property of *good relationships* with adults at the organizations was how they were described as informal. The youth contrasted strict, traditional relationships such as with school teachers, to their relationships with their organization's adult staff. They described their relationships as "comfortable", "flexible", and "laid back". Two additional indications of informal relationships were that the youth referred to the adults by their first names and that they gathered socially outside of the organization.

A fourth and final property of *good relationships* was that understood boundaries existed for the youth in their relationships with the adults. Boundaries refer to clear distinctions between youth and adults and a respect for the adults as "elders" and "authority figures". Despite feeling equal with the adults, the youth acknowledged that



the adults were deserving of respect and that there were some lines “you can’t cross” with them. For instance:

It’s good, it’s great really. Everyone knows there are boundaries that you can’t cross. You have to respect the adults and the adults have to respect you. So it’s pretty good because that’s how it is in the real world.  
-Dedra

Five properties also emerged to describe the *personality* of adults at the youth organizations. The property referred to most by participants (N=12) was being genuine and dedicated, which refers to a fervent commitment to youth and to the mission of the organization. These adults were described as “real” and “passionate”, and the youth recognized that the adults practiced what they preached by demonstrating the behaviors they were asking of the youth (e.g., attending protests, volunteering, staying connected to the community). Another property of adults that many of the youth explicitly highlighted was that they were trusting of youth capabilities, which allowed the youth to act and decide without the fear of adult intrusion. For example:

By letting us hold workshops. If they didn’t trust us we wouldn’t be able to do it. They trust us and they educate us on what to say and what to do. And they are then like o.k. it’s your turn to go out there and do it. They tell us we can do anything we set our minds to...She also tell us that sometimes adults aren’t always right, just like kids aren’t always right, but you have to get to a point where you can agree to disagree on some things. She makes us think outside the box and try harder. Be more than mediocre, be more than average.  
-Dedra

Other youth described the adults at their organizations as approachable: they felt comfortable going to adults for advice or “just to talk.” Likewise, these adults were described as being “open to talk”. Adults were also described as being knowledgeable about the issues the organization focused on and also knowledgeable about the unique experiences of youth. For example:

She's been through so much like she understands what we're going through, maybe not exactly, but she tries to zone in on what's going on and tries to understand what we're going through.

-Samantha

Caring is a fifth and final property for adult *personality*. The youth described feeling a genuine concern for their well-being from the adults at their organization.

Although the female participants emphasized the care they felt from adults, one male participant did describe the care he felt from his organization's adults:

Life in general cause when you're around somebody who cares it kind of forces you to care because we all born with hearts. If you choose to be cold hearted and you're around somebody who's caring it forces you to care to. It's like, 'if he cares about me, I should care about myself, and if I care about myself I care about him too.' It makes you a better person.

-John

Lastly, five micro-categories emerged to describe the final sub-category of **Adult Relationships**, *roles*. Youth illustrated multiple *roles* that adults served in their organization, and these *roles* are captured as: a) *Mentor*, b) *Mediator*, c) *Teacher*, d) *Friend*, and e) *Supervisor & Boss*. Adults who were described as a *mentor* engaged in three processes. All but one of the participants illustrated how adults who were described as a *mentor* challenged how the youth thought about the world and themselves, motivated and encouraged them, and gave them advice and guidance on personal and organizational issues. For example:

If you tell them about something you want to be involved in, they can encourage you to accomplish whatever you set your mind to. If you want to talk about something about doing a workshop, just long as you know how to facilitate then they'll be right behind you.

-Christi

Adults were also described as serving as *mediators* of conflict and negotiations between other youth and between youth and adults. A third characterization of the *role* of adults was that of *teacher*. Youth described these adults as having specific areas of

expertise and constantly teaching. Additionally, three themes related to reasons for teaching emerged in how the youth described adult *teachers*: 1) to teach new perspectives, 2) to uncover youth abilities, and 3) to motivate and encourage the youth.

This last reason is best captured by a 16 year old White male who described the role of an adult advisor:

He sort of gets up and delivers a sort of kick-butt motivational lecture about how, 'Look 60% of the country doesn't like this war. Why isn't 60% of the country you know, why haven't you been able to mobilize them. You're here squabbling and you're four people in a school where probably most people are at least theoretically anti-war. You guys need to get it together.'

-Charlie

Youth also described adults in the role of *friend*. Aside from actually using the word 'friend' to describe their relationships with the adults, youth also described adults who were *friends* as caring, personal, and fun. Even though the youth considered their organization's adult staff to be friends, they made a clear distinction between personal issues and organizational business. For example:

It's like a friendly business relationship. Sometime it's strictly business, sometimes we'll have a conversation about life, sometime we'll go and just talk...I feel like they care, everything isn't about business, sometimes it's about your own life, sometimes it's about their life, a personal connection. It's like they're friends and business partners.

-John

A final *role* that adults served was that of *supervisor and boss*. This role was not exclusive; in all cases, adults who were described as a *supervisor and boss* also served as one of the previously mentioned *roles*. The role of *supervisor and boss* was to lead the youth, advocate for the youth, provide resources, serve administrative and fundraising functions, and be a taskmaster to ensure assignment completion. These adults were not necessarily described in a negative light, the youth noted that often the adults were more

aware of what youth needed versus what youth may want, and their authority to make those decisions was necessary. For example:

If it had to come down to adults to make a decision, because we are youth and we won't always decide on what's best for us, we basically decide what we want to do and if it came to a situation like that they would make it.  
-Shannon

### *Education*

All participants (100%) described being taught something at their organization and a number of themes emerged from how they described the **Education** they received. These themes were organized into three sub-categories: a) *Subject Matter*, b) *Purpose*, and c) *Training*. *Subject matter* captured the knowledge youth learned while *training* referred to skills and expertise they gained. Within *subject matter* a number of topics and issues were described by the youth. As seen in Table 4, four themes emerged to capture the examples of *subject matter* described by the youth. Just as the list of what youth were taught is diverse, so too is how they learned them. Various activities were used to teach the various subjects and are also displayed in Table 4.

Table 4

*Educational Subject Matter and Activities*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Examples of Topics</b>	<b>Activities</b>
<u>History &amp; Culture</u>	Religion, Racism, Sexism, Liberation Movements	Discussions & Conversations Workshops & Seminars Media – books, newspapers, videos Lectures
<u>Current Events &amp; Social Issues</u>	Child Prostitution, Drugs, Gangs, Homelessness, Foster Care, Homophobia, Immigration	Discussions & Conversations Research (Library & Internet) Workshops & Seminars Media – books, newspapers, videos Lectures
<u>Politics</u>	Elections, International Affairs, Educational Systems, Justice and Prison System, Sexual Politics	Discussions & Conversations Research (Library & Internet) Workshops & Seminars Media – books, newspapers, videos
<u>Arts &amp; Media</u>	Dance, Creative Writing, Journalism, Freedom of Speech	Discussions & Conversations One-on-one Teaching Experience

Themes related to the perceived *purpose* of their **Education** were organized into two micro-categories: 1) *to prepare for projects* and 2) *consciousness raising*. Three types of projects the youth described being prepared for by their **Education** were: a) Action Research, b) Journalistic Reporting on Social Issues, and c) Public Workshops and Performances. Each of these types of projects served to educate the public, and the youth recognized that they were being educated on various topics so that they could go out and educate others. For example:

As soon as we learn about it we spit it back out to the audiences and they learn about things to. We did this piece called Remaining Awake, about Dr. Martin Luther King,, Jr. We do it to his speech. It's about segregation and how the world is still segregated. It really opens peoples' eyes.

-Samantha

Multiple themes emerged within the second *purpose* for educating the youth, to *raise consciousness*. Definitions for *consciousness raising* emerged from how the youth described this purpose. Being *conscious* entails an ability to think critically and a recognition that oppression still exists in the world. For example:

We just started talking about school and how we had better computers than they did, so we were just like, “It’s not fair” so all of a sudden we were like let’s make it a research project about the inequalities of North and South Fulton County Schools... I learned about these inequalities as a big problem.

-Jamila

You have people in the world who don’t agree with homosexuality, people who don’t like Jews, skin color, you have immigrants who don’t full rights as human beings. This stuff is still going on.

-Samantha

On a more personal level, the youth described being “open-minded”, recognizing multiple perspectives on issues, and understanding the shared experiences of other people as elements of a *raised consciousness*. One girl described how she came to believe homelessness to be a social problem:

... I’ve never been homeless however I do know from my experiences of having to move around a lot, that my family has been close to being put out of homes, so I can kind of relate and I know that I’m fortunate to have a roof over my head and I don’t think it’s fair somebody else is abandoned or not treated with respect.

-Raven

In addition to sharing meanings of *consciousness*, youth also described three things *consciousness raising* accomplishes. First, a critical awareness of specific issues helps to identify targets for action. For instance, a 15 year old African American girl illustrated how after her youth team discussed and learned about inequities in the Fulton county school system that they decided to design an action research project to address the inequities. Secondly, youth described becoming motivated to address issues they were critically conscious of. For example:

Well, things aren't as hunky dory, well I never really thought everything was okay but, it was just more eye-opening to understand that things are a lot worse than I originally assumed. Especially about certain social situations and discrimination practices and all that. But, it just made us more enthused about helping and changing things.

- Serena

Lastly, some respondents realized that with changes to their consciousness they also discovered personal opinions and were able to communicate them to others. For example:

Again in my school when I have ROTC class we have to talk about current events, and now that I am a part of [this organization] I put my own perspective into something like is saying the Pledge a contradiction, cause if this is such a free world then why are there homeless people?

- Christi

In addition to gaining knowledge through **Education**, youth also described gaining and refining skills and expertise through *training* that they received at their organization. The themes within this sub-category are organized into the micro-categories of *interpersonal skills training* and *expertise building*. The primary theme within *interpersonal skills training* was youth described learning people skills particularly in working with people who were different from them in race, religion, and culture. To do this, the youth illustrated how they were trained to communicate more effectively and how to better address conflict and differences of opinion. A part of this communication was learning to speak up for themselves and how to express their opinions. For example:

I've learned how to interact with people who have different beliefs than me because we tend to be on the more leftist fringe of political spectrum but we have, that gets really weird... So we have to figure out how to interact and where our goals meet and then how to all act them as one in that because some people want to act with organizations that are affiliated with the communist party in America and then a lot of the people in [this organization] really don't like the communist party and some of the outside forced in Atlanta that we're forced to work with so basically in [this organization] there's always this game of trying to find common ground without giving up too much of your own belief.

- Charlie

The methods of *interpersonal skills training* that the youth described receiving varied from experiential “on-the-job” training, to formal workshops and role playing, to informal discussions with peers and adult staff.

These same methods were applied to how the youth experienced *expertise building*. The areas of *expertise* that youth described being trained on were organized by four topic areas (i.e., themes): a) Research skills, b) Technology skills, c) Financial literacy, and d) Leadership skills. For greater clarity, these themes are outlined and illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5

*Overview of Skill Building Sets*

<b>SKILL SET</b>	<b>DEFINITION</b>	<b>EXAMPLES</b>
<u>Research</u>	Referring to how to find and generate information	Exploring Internet Databases, Designing research projects, Developing survey instruments, Interviewing stakeholders, Analyzing data
<u>Technology</u>	Referring to computer, internet, and software fluency	Designing web pages, Using new programs (e.g., Excel, Photoshop, & Illustrator)
<u>Financial Literacy</u>	Learning to manage money	Saving money, balancing check books, understanding opportunity costs and benefits (e.g., buying necessities vs. buying wants).
<u>Leadership</u>	Referring to effective coordinating and directing of projects, meetings, and classes	Facilitating meetings, making informed and representative decisions, Listening skills, teaching peers and younger children

Themes also emerged that describe how the youth interpreted the need for expertise. First, the youth recognized that the areas of expertise they were learning about were essential to campaign work. Aside from that theme, they believed that their new found abilities help to “better” themselves and prepare them for the future. For example:



The leadership training helped me see that college could be fun. I first never thought I'd go to college. I was the kind of person who would graduate high school and work from there, but they made me see college as a fun place to be and now I want to go to school.

-John

A final theme relates to how the youth felt a responsibility to teach their younger peers and leave a legacy for them. For instance:

I was trained on facilitating, cause you need to know how to facilitate eventually cause everyone goes off to college and when the older members are gone you're going to be the oldest and you have to know how to leave the legacy or teach the other people coming in to know how to do what your doing or to do it even better. I had to come here and get training. You're not just sitting there being told what to do, you end up doing it yourself, but you don't realize cause they're with you step-by-step.

- Christi

Also, to teach the younger kids you have to go through training, we have to read books about sex, and we had to talk to Amy about how to teach and not judge them, so if a 6 year old comes up to you and asks what a rubber is you don't freak out. So, we had to learn a lot, and then of course dancing, but also what dancing means. You can't come to [this organization] and just dance, you have to know how to provoke emotions through dance.

- Samantha

### *Support System*

All participating youth (100%) referred to receiving some type of **Support** from within their organization. The themes that emerged to describe this category were organized into two sub-categories: a) *Support Type* and b) *Support Source*. These support-related themes were further classified into the micro-categories of *technical and organizational* support and *socio-emotional* support.

*Technical and organizational* support refers to assistance, advocacy, and encouragement related to the operations of the organization. For instance, one participant illustrated how an adult at his organization provided logistical and networking support for their efforts to address unfair policies.

[She] helped me find contacts in the gay community when we were working on the gay marriage ban, and later on this parental permission rule to join school clubs, and she acted as transportation for us when we actually went to the different events that we went to.

- Charlie

Other forms of *technical and organizational* support that youth identified as receiving are listed below:

- Providing resources
- Coordinating logistics
- Communicating with other adults
- Supporting youth decisions
- Orienting youth to organizational rules and norms
- Providing ideas
- Sharing leadership responsibilities
- Encouraging group participation

*Socio-emotional* support refers to support that was supplemental to the operation of the organization; the support was not directly related to activities or projects of the organization, instead it related to the personal lives of the youth. This type of support encompassed a wide range of issues and challenges that the youth experienced external to their organization such as with family, school, and health problems. For instance, youth described receiving academic support in the form of college recommendations and college application fees. Additionally, the youth described feeling comfortable to mention problems they were experiencing for guidance. Illustrations of support related to issues of physical and mental health demonstrated the extraordinary lengths adult staff and youth members took to support youth. For example:

They know about our lives and what's going on. They help outside in our lives, like my friend Tumi has a knee problem, and one of the adults in [our organization], Randi, is paying for her to go to an orthopedic doctor. Then we did this cool think for my friend with a speech impediment, she stutters a lot. Amy got her a speech therapist and the therapist came to the group to help her with her stuttering through the group and movement. I know that if I have something to say or need to talk to somebody I can definitely talk to the people in [this organization] without judgment.

-Samantha

*Socio-emotional* support was not always problem-oriented. Youth described experiencing improved self-esteem from the positive affirmation they consistently received in their organizations. This affirmation came in the form of complements, encouragement to reach for personal goals, helping others voice their opinions, and attendance by organization adults and youth at personal events such as High School graduations, football games, and theatrical performances.

Given that there were only two *sources of support* for youth in their organizations (i.e., Adults or Youth), it was not necessary to delineate between them. Nevertheless, co-occurrence analysis revealed whether adults and youth were responsible for providing the various *types of support* outlined above. Both types of support were described to have come from both adults and youth. As displayed in Table 6, more youth described receiving *socio-emotional* support from other youth than adults while more cases of *technical and organizational* support were described to have come from adults than from youth. In all instances of youth supporting other youth, the supporting youth was described as being older than the one receiving support.

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Table 6

*Support: Co-occurrence Matrix*

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	<b>Technical &amp; Organizational</b>		<b>Socio-emotional</b>	
	# of Transcripts	# of Passages Referenced	# of Transcripts	# of Passages Referenced
<b>Adults</b>	10	24	10	28
<b>Youth</b>	8	13	13	36

### *Belief System & Mission*

A number of themes emerged from how participants described the **Belief Systems and Missions** of their organizations. Themes related to this category were organized into four sub-categories: a) *Education*, b) *Service & Volunteerism*, c) *Social Change & Justice*, and d) *Positive Youth Development*. Most youth (87%) described their organization's **Belief System and Mission** in terms of *positive youth development*, while fewer (40%) provided descriptions relating to *service and volunteerism*.

Youth who described their organization's mission in terms of *education* identified three priorities. First, educational issues described as important were diverse, but they always included political or social issues, such as violence, homelessness, sexual politics, segregation, drugs, gangs, and crime. A second priority for *education*-related missions was the need to raise public awareness around issues of importance to the youth. This need is driven by the desire to make the public aware of issues that directly affect youth on a daily basis. Raising public awareness is also pursued to encourage and make possible social change. For instance:

Make sure that youth have a positive place to meet to talk about our issues and bring those issues into the public to who we know can work on them with us and help us get them out to the grownups... We are a political youth group, we touch bases on drugs, gangs, sex and violence, black on black crime, politics and we make sure issues the people face in the community that we live in, that we get them out there to the public-Dedra

For many youth, consciousness-raising work on social issues was an essential part of education. Awareness and change were also the motivation for the third priority of educating youth. Education can broaden youth conceptions of the world, give them the tools to educate others, and convince other youth to become more active in their

communities. One participant captured the awakening experience of being educated by her organization when she said:

I would definitely say more awareness is important because sometimes as an 18 year old in Atlanta I feel clueless. Especially in Fairburn, I feel so isolated from the outside world... awareness that there is something going on besides what's just happening in our lives; the world is not just Atlanta or just Gwinnet or Fairburn, it's bigger than all of that.  
-Brandy

Another participant's description of her organization's mission revealed her strategy for educating youth and convincing them to become active:

Well the mission is to help them to understand to be there for each other and, you know, treat everybody as equals and to, you know, take our experience from what we learned from the program and, you know, put it on them and hopefully they'll catch onto it and maybe try to influence them to be more active in their communities as they get of age.  
-Serena

For youth who described their organization's mission as *service and volunteerism* two themes were salient. In describing how they understood their organization's mission, and in their illustrations of community service, youth expressed a responsibility to their local community. The recipients of service were described as individuals in their local neighborhood, school, or other less fortunate youth. Often the phrase "giving back" was used by youth as a rationale for organizational missions of *service and volunteerism*. The second theme for missions of *service and volunteerism* was an apparent sense of agency. Service was seen as a means of making a difference in the lives of local community members and the youth expressed a belief that they could be the ones to make that difference. For example:

I think it is important to let us know that we can do things on our own to help make our community and other communities better...I think that it is important to realize that we as young people can do stuff to help other people and I think that sometimes we don't really realize that and so I think that being in the youth action team that we have this responsibility as youth to get involved in our community and I think that is important.  
-Nikki

For organizational missions that became sub-categorized as *social change and justice* actions to address and change inequitable social systems were paramount. The activities derived from these missions provided authentic experiences of agency. A 15 year old African American girl who was working on a project addressing inequity in her school system stated that, “it makes me feel like I’m doing something right to help the other kids”. Similarly, another participant noted:

We’re always working toward something tangible – getting X amount of people at this protest and you really feel like when it works successfully, you really feel like you’ve made a difference and that’s great, like, outside of just [my organization] ,maybe in Atlanta, or the nation, or the world.

-Charlie

An additional theme emerging from organizations youth described as committed to *social change and justice* was the experience of collaboration with adults. Recognizing the power that adults hold, youth who were a part of the organizations committed to social change clearly acknowledged that collaboration is imperative. For instance:

A lot of adults say we are the future, but they bring us down, and we bring them down too. We need to come together and agree on some things that we all know. The youth need to fix things, but the adults need to fix how they talk to the youth. That’s a big thing right now. The reason a lot of things are happening today is because the youth feel like they can’t go to the adults. If we could go to the adults a lot more, I feel like a lot of the issues will be fixed.

- Dedra

Youth who described their organization’s mission as *positive youth development* provided three themes related to youth development. Predominant among these themes was a focus on leadership development. The youth were keenly aware that their organizations were preparing them to be future leaders. As the youth understood them, elements of leadership included responsibility, good values, and being a role model to younger children. A 16 year old African American male noted that in addition to being a

product of the *positive youth development* mission of his organization, he could help accomplish the mission “because I feel that I’m a leader and have a lot of say so, so I think that I am somewhat of a role model and if I do the right thing than I guess other people will follow.”

An additional theme related to organizational missions of *positive youth development* that many youth described was the need to increase the self-worth of youth. Increases in self-worth were accompanied by expressions of finding and communicating one’s “voice”. Youth did not consider self-esteem secondary to the mission of their organizations, but rather it was integral. For instance:

They [Adults] are always talking about trying to help high risk kids. But I think it’s about finding kids who want to make a difference by raising there self-esteem, raising there confidence...  
-Samantha

A final theme that emerged from organizational missions sub-categorized as *positive youth development* was creating safe spaces for youth to learn and express themselves. Contrasting their organizations to the traditional youth setting of school, the youth emphasized the importance of having safe spaces to be themselves and to interact with other youth. The youth characterized these spaces as comfortable, positive, and open. These elements were essential to creating what one 16 year old White male referred to as a “community of trust.”

## *Section II: Impediments to Participation*

The negative aspects and attributes of organizations as seen by participants were not central to the research questions, so the original coding scheme did not include them. However, nearly all participants (N=14) offered some. The themes that emerged from this data provide some post hoc insight into potential impediments to youth activism in youth

development organizations as shown in Table 7. The table reveals the co-occurrence of negative themes and **Opportunity Structures, Adult Relationships, and Power & Authority.**

Table 7

*Negative Descriptions: Co-Occurrence Matrix*

	<b>Opportunity Structures</b>		<b>Adult Relationships</b>		<b>Power &amp; Authority</b>	
	<i>Transcripts Coded (out of 15)</i>	<i>Passages Coded</i>	<i>Transcripts Coded (out of 15)</i>	<i>Passages Coded</i>	<i>Transcripts Coded (out of 15)</i>	<i>Passages Coded</i>
<b>Negative References</b>	8	25	12	40	6	12

Three themes emerged from the **Power & Authority** coded passages that were also coded for negative references. The youth described feeling powerless and unmotivated to accomplish tasks and projects in which they had no decision-making authority. Rather than feeling like partners in the organization, the youth felt no ownership in the process of developing projects or participating in them. The youth illustrated how a lack of motivation and ownership in these sorts of activities made participation feel more like an obligation rather than a personal choice. Thus, a result of an absence of youth power was poor participation in organizational activities. For example:

I think that the adults make decisions we don't agree with that we just go along with. For example, we had workshops that we have to go to even if we feel like we're never going to need this. If I'm not going to have fun I'm not going or enjoying it. I won't put forth my best effort. A lot of times we need to be heard cause we do a lot we don't want to do....It feels like school, the adults know what we need, and even if we don't know, we do it because they tell us to do it. It's like 'you're going to do this'.

-John



More so than with **Power & Authority** (N=6), participants (N=8) made negative references in the context of describing **Opportunity Structures**, and themes emerged from their descriptions. Opportunities for participation that resulted from adult decisions without youth consultation were described as unimportant to the youth. Those opportunities that were described as unimportant and without meaning were often menial tasks or chores in which the youth described having no responsibility. Conversely, participants described dissatisfaction with a lack of opportunities for action. During times of limited opportunities for participation in their organizations the youth recalled desires for more action and considerations of abandoning the organization. They described these times of no action as “theoretical” and all “talk”. For instance:

Well I wish it could have been more active. I didn't really like staying inside all the time and a lot of times I didn't really think we got much done. And I think we could have been a lot more active as far as going out into the community instead of just sitting around and trying to figure out what's best and not going out and actually asking people what they think would make a difference.  
-Serena

Lastly, the greatest co-occurrence of negative references and a Big Six category was reported in passages coded for **Adult Relationships**. Despite the large number of co-occurring passages (N=40), two themes emerged to capture the descriptions of negative adult relationships within the organizations of participating youth. The predominant theme that emerged from these descriptions was an objection to adults that projected an air of superiority. For example:

It's not difficult, but they have authority so when you say something, but some of them say 'I'm older and I've lived longer and I've seen things you haven't', and that is true, but you need someone who's not going to say that because you don't need to hear that at that time. Even though there not bragging, it is just you feel like they have more power and they are just on a higher level than you are.  
- Christi

Secondly, a lack of communication emerged as a quality of the negative relationships that were described by the youth. As a result of these negative relationships, the youth described experiencing similar feelings of being hurt and being made to feel immature and ignorant.

### *Section III: Growth & Change*

This final section presents findings that pertain to the secondary set of research questions. The questions inquire about the personal and political development of youth in relation to the Big Six. To examine this question, I referred to passages that were coded as **Growth and Change**. All but one of the participants described experiencing growth or change from their experiences in their organization. **Growth and Change** provide a useful criterion for “meaningfulness” (as asked in research question 1) that goes beyond coding frequencies. As displayed in Table 8, themes related to **Growth and Change** emerged within all six a priori categories of interest (i.e., the Big Six); for example, 11 participants reported experiencing growth or change in passages that were also coded for **Education**. These themes were organized into the sub-categories of *Personal Growth* and *Worldview*. *Personal growth* refers to changes in how the youth perceived themselves and *worldview* refers to changes in how the youth perceived the world around them.

Table 8

*Growth & Change: Co-occurrence Matrix*

<i>Category</i>	<b>Growth &amp; Change</b>		<b>Personal Growth</b>		<b>Change in Worldview</b>	
	Transcripts coded	Passages coded	Transcripts coded	Passages coded	Transcripts coded	Passages coded
Belief System & Mission	4	4	3	3	2	2
Opportunity Structure	5	8	3	5	3	4
Adult Relationships	8	17	8	15	6	7
Power & Authority	4	5	3	3	3	3
Education	11	25	10	17	8	12
Support	2	7	2	7	0	0

*Worldview*

While several themes emerged in the descriptions of changes in *worldview* that youth experienced, they can all be represented in the theme of social analysis. A majority of the youth exhibited a growing awareness of social phenomenon indicated by the topics they chose to illustrate or describe as important to them. Some examples of these topics included politics, race, HIV and AIDS, homelessness and poverty, and the Middle East. Many of the youth mentioned having their “eyes opened” from what they were becoming aware of. They described broadening their perspectives on the range of issues by working with diverse groups of youth and adults. One youth referred to realizing that the world and its social problems are “bigger than you”.

The youth also demonstrated maturing critical thinking capabilities in how they recognized the effects of and attributed causation for the issues they became aware of.

The youth described caring more about issues and asking more questions about the causes and effects of social problems. They described how they were unaware of systems-level sources for social problems until they “looked deep inside” specific issues. The youth were also concerned about both how local events, such as school system budgeting, and societal level events, such as the war in Iraq, affected them and their communities. Further illustrations of this critical thinking were demonstrated in stories of how the youth questioned authority figures and more mundane activities such as saying the Pledge of Allegiance in school.

### *Personal Growth*

Several themes also emerged in the sub-category of *personal growth* and the two specific areas of growth that captured these themes were agency and self-concept (see Table 9 for examples). Many youth described coming to realize that they can make a difference in the world. From individual choices, such as taking action to get into college, to recognizing that their collective actions with their organizations could create change beyond Atlanta to perhaps “making the world a better place”, this sense of agency was applied to multiple societal-levels. As demonstrations of their agency, the youth illustrated new found abilities to confront individuals in their lives to create change.

At the school I attend there is a lot of racism. Usually I let things just brush off me, but with [this organization] I’ve learned how to go to the person you need to go to to talk about it, tell them what needs to be changed, and give examples of what I’ve seen. I have the ability to walk up to people and tell them what things need to be changed. I do it respectfully but I still get my point across.

-Dedra

The youth also described how the changes and difference that they’ve helped to bring about with their organizations motivated them to go out and make a difference through the rest of their lives. For instance:

... once you get a taste of this and being so involved, you can't help but try to go somewhere else and make a difference. While I might be here making all these decisions with the staff, then I'll go back as Secretary of my senior class I'm usually just there to write down what is said. At first it was like, 'let's use this color for graduation'. Now I'm like, 'listen, half of our seniors are not going to graduate, we need to do something'. But people did listen. It's helped me with leadership at school, it's helping me voice my opinions and myself better.

-Brandy

The theme of agency is related to the theme of self concept in that the experiences of agency that the youth noted were also described to have influenced their concept of who they were. For instance, a number of youth described coming to believe that they were "worth something" because they were able to "help people"; while others noted explicitly that they have higher self-esteem from their experiences of making a difference. Improvements in self-worth were also expressed in relation to the recognition that what they said was important and could lead to make change. For example:

...once I felt like I was worth something than I acted like I was worth something, once I feel like what I say counts than what I say counts. It's kind of like a mind thing, once you change your mind set you will be a success.

- John

Improvement to levels of confidence was another notable theme regarding self concept that emerged from how the youth described their *personal growth*. This confidence derived from experiences of speaking up at their organizations, being educated and aware of social issues, and from positive affirmations from adults and youth from their organizations. "Speaking up" and "finding voice" were events that many of the youth noted as important to their self-concept. One girl shared her experience from an exercise designed to explore the voice of women:

It's about women finding their voices, it starts out in a passive aggressive tone. There is this part where everybody is punching and yelling. We go 'I'm fine really, I'm fine.' You know how you mask your emotions. Then it goes on through a lot of aggressive movements and a lot of passive aggressive stuff. In the end it is more assertive. Finally you're free. Every time I do it, it liberates me, cause I get to do this part where they grab me and wrap their arms around me

and I get to punch, punch, punch at what ever I'm mad at or who ever I'm mad at. I get to get it all out. It's nice to be able to do that.  
-Samantha

### *Post hoc Analysis*

The co-occurrence of codes displayed in Table 8 suggests that the themes for each respective domain may be interrelated (Richards, 2005). As a preliminary exploration, post hoc analysis was conducted to explore any relationships between the organizational domains of interest (i.e., the Big Six) and the growth and change the youth experienced in their organizations. The themes of **Growth & Change** outlined in the previous section emerged as significant and cut across each of the Big Six, although according to Table 8 only three categories – **Opportunity Structures**, **Adult Relationships**, and **Education** – had five or more co-occurring codes (the minimum threshold for further analysis) with **Growth & Change**. As such, a content-analytic matrix was used to explore how the organizational domains may be related to the developmental categories. Table 9 briefly captures the relationships under study and each cell contains a quote that illustrates one way in which experiences of **Growth & Change** may relate to **Opportunity Structures**, **Adult Relationships**, and **Education**.

Table 9

*Illustrative quotes for the relationship of Growth & Change to Opportunity Structures, Adult Relationships, and Education*

		<b>Opportunity Structures</b>	<b>Adult Relationships</b>	<b>Education</b>
<b>Personal Growth</b>	Agency	<p>“This is being involved with actually running a newspaper, with not having directions handed down, but looking to see what you need to do, and doing it because I have to make the decision or the paper will go out without my story in it. Or the entire issue might be affected because I didn’t go to the photo shoot. It’s all about responsibility, when you have a taste of this responsibility...you step up to the plate.”</p> <p><i>African American female, 18, <u>real responsibility</u></i></p>	<p>“Yeah with the whole school thing. I used to think that school was just a place they forced me to go to, and I had to go to get it over with, and he[adult] was like ‘you don’t really have to just deal with how they treat you in school, you can make a difference,’ and that’s where the whole project came from looking at inequalities between schools.”</p> <p><i>African American male, 17, <u>genuine &amp; dedicated</u></i></p>	<p>“I guess in PAX I’ve learned how to interact with people who have different beliefs than me...there’s always this game of trying to find common ground without giving up too much of your own belief...when we are meeting, we’re always working toward something tangible – getting X amount of people at this protest and you really feel like when it works successfully, you really feel like you’ve made a difference and that’s great, like outside of just [this org.]. Maybe in Atlanta, or the nation, or the world.”</p> <p><i>White male, 16, <u>interpersonal training</u></i></p>
	Self-Concept	<p>“With MITS my confidence has sky rocketed. I would be like one of those kids in the back of the room, I would just think I am awful. Confidence has really helped me and also performances really help others.”</p> <p><i>White female, 16, <u>high quality</u></i></p>	<p>“Yeah, I see myself as a more open-minded person now, a less judgmental person, a more creative person as I terms of venting my feelings. She [adult] helped me with that a lot. There’s never just one way to do things, there are several ways to do one thing. She helped me see that I can be flexible.”</p> <p><i>African American female, 18, <u>mentor</u></i></p>	<p>“When I came here I saw that I could be a leader and I used that as an example in my other activities, so in my classroom if the teacher says something wrong and everyone is just sitting there I speak up and say ‘you know you got that wrong,’ and I’m not afraid to say it cause she was wrong and everyone makes mistakes. I’ve always spoken up cause I’m an outspoken person, but now I’m just more outgoing and I feel more confident.”</p> <p><i>African American female, 15, <u>leadership</u></i></p>
<b>Worldview</b>	Social Analysis	<p>“Because I stay in a neighborhood where violence is prominent and we are a low income family and me doing some things for low income families while I come from a low income family is something that really touched me cause I now understand what it’s like on the other end of the stick, me giving and not receiving.”</p> <p><i>African American female, 18, <u>meaningful</u></i></p>	<p>“Yes, before I joined I was someone who thought that European Americans always looked as Blacks as unequal, inferior to them. There was always some kind of ethnocentric way with European Americans. When I met Dana [adult] it was like that didn’t matter. She explained to us that her parents were racist. For me to hear that she grew up with those parents and for you to love me the way you would love another white person, that opened my eyes to understand that not every white American is a racist. I look at things without preconceived notions anymore.”</p> <p><i>African American female, 18, <u>caring</u></i></p>	<p>“Well, things aren’t as hunky dory, well I never really thought everything was okay but, it was just more eye-opening to understand that things are a lot worse than I originally assumed. Especially about certain social situations and discrimination practices and all that. But, it just made us more enthused about helping and changing things...I just felt that, you know, they were grooming us to be aware and that things we can do can make a difference so, even about voting and all that.”</p> <p><i>African American female, 16, <u>raise awareness</u></i></p>

## Discussion

The current study predicted a “Big Six” of organizational characteristics as fundamental to the experience of young activists in youth development organizations, and it provides a glimpse into how these organizations influence political development. The findings revealed that specific qualities of the Big Six were indeed meaningful to the young people in the sample. The discussion section will begin with a review of the findings related to the first research question in light of existing research. To address the secondary research question, a broader discussion of the relevance of the findings for theory on the political development of youth and also for practice will follow. Table 10 provides a thematic summary of the findings that will be referred to in both of these discussions.

### *Belief System & Mission*

When an organization’s belief system and mission emphasizes the individual and collective capabilities young people have through opportunities that derive from the mission, participating youth frequently note how it contributes to their sense of agency and responsibility. This is consistent with the work of Camino and Zeldin (2002), who noted how increased opportunities for youth engagement are driven by organizational missions. Whether the purpose was to raise public awareness, develop future leaders, or to address injustices, missions with these characteristics tended to shift the focus of the youth to a community level of analysis. No matter what sub-category of mission and belief they represented, the youth described their organizations and its opportunities for participation in relation to the larger outside community; youth described how they were either serving (i.e., *Service & Volunteerism*), learning (i.e., *Education*), acting (i.e., *Social*



Table 10

*Summary of the Big Six & Impediments to Participation*

<b>Belief System &amp; Mission</b>	<b>Opportunity Structures</b>	<b>Adult Relationships</b>	<b>Power &amp; Authority</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Support</b>	<b>Impediments to Participation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focused on the outside community</li> <li>• Empowers youth to utilize their strengths and capabilities as leaders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple Opportunities &amp; Roles</li> <li>• High Quality Opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good Relationships</li> <li>• Facilitated by Good Personalities of Adults</li> <li>• Adult roles that emphasize partnership and guidance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equitable</li> <li>• Utilizes communal processes of decision-making</li> <li>• Provides safe space for youth to exercise power and decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purposeful <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Preparation</li> <li>○ Consciousness Raising</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Offers diverse range of subjects and skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encompassing internal and external domains</li> <li>• Provided by youth and adults</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low Quality Opportunities</li> <li>• No Youth Power</li> <li>• Adults are authoritative rather than partners to youth</li> </ul>

*Justice*), or leading (i.e., *Positive Youth Development*) out of a sense of responsibility to make a difference in their communities. Actual descriptions of experiences of agency were present in themes related to two sub-categories of organizational missions – 1) *Social Change & Justice* and 2) *Service & Volunteerism*.

Another important feature of the organizational belief systems that was critical to accomplishing the mission was valuing the contributions of youth by empowering them to assume leadership roles. The theme of youth leadership development was clearly emphasized in the sub-category that had the highest frequency of codes, *positive youth development* (N=13). The significance of empowerment and a focus on the larger community as features of organizational missions that were conceived in this study is reflected in relevant scholarly literature.

Specifically, research from community psychology supports this study's conception of an empowering organizational belief system and mission focused on the outside community. In his study of manhood development in community-based programs for African-American youth, Watts (1993) demonstrates how a concern for other people (i.e., a focus beyond the self to the outside community) characterized as "giving back" may be a significant component of empowerment. Likewise, the characteristic of a strengths-based and altruistic belief system is consistent with the findings of Maton and Salem (1995) who relate such a belief system to empowering settings. As an example, Yates and Youniss (1998) demonstrated how when a youth project focus is on serving the community youth can experience an emerging sense of agency and responsibility for society's well-being.

### *Opportunity Structures*

An extensive opportunity structure, one that offers multiple roles that are of high quality, seems to produce the richest experiences of agency. As described by this sample, high quality roles and opportunities for participation confer real responsibility, are important and challenging, and are perceived by youth to make a difference. The specific opportunities consistently described as high in quality in this study were leadership roles, collective efforts, and projects focused on the community. Of all the passages coded for high quality opportunity descriptions half were made in reference to leadership roles and nearly as many about experiences of teamwork. Reference to community service projects was also common. Existing research confirms the significance of these qualities of opportunities and roles to influence the development of adolescents.

Morgan and Streb's (2001) conception of "student voice" in projects is similar to the high quality opportunities identified in this study. Voice is defined as help in planning projects, making important decisions, exposure to challenging tasks, and possessing real responsibilities; the researchers contend these types of experiences are essential to developing a sense of agency through societal involvement behaviors. Over 100 references to "voice" were coded in this sample, and all but one respondent made at least one mention of it. Moreover, post hoc analyses revealed how these high quality opportunities may be related to a developing sense of agency. A number of youth described their emerging sense of agency in connection with high-quality experiences. The significance of opportunities for participation that are of high quality is further substantiated by research linking them to adolescent moral-political development and future political action ((Kirshner, 2005; Hart et al., 1998).

### *Adult Relationships*

Youth frequently mentioned the personalities and roles of adults and how they influenced their relationships with youth members. Adults who were described as available, informal, open in communication, and respectful of boundaries appeared to have a favorable influence on the development of social analysis and self-concept of youth. The positive adult roles and their related themes described by this sample emphasized partnership and guidance over authority and superiority. Egalitarian adult roles, such as mentor, friend, teacher, and mediator, were mentioned by respondents four times more often than the only adult role emphasizing adult authority, boss or supervisor.

As mentors and teachers, the adults described by participants encouraged a developing social analysis by challenging pre-conceived notions of the world in addition to motivating youth to participate in societal involvement behaviors. As friends to the youth, adults influenced the self-concept of youth by being approachable and caring. Other personality traits facilitating good relationships with participating youth that were frequently mentioned included being genuine and dedicated, knowledgeable, and trusting of youth capabilities. While all of the youth described having a good relationship with adults at their organization, 87% of the participants provided descriptions of their adult staff with one or more of these positive personality traits.

The significance of good relationships with adults and how this study depicted them is reflected in relevant scholarly literature. Research comparing youth-driven and adult-driven youth programs has found that a balance of leadership between youth and adults define the most effective models of youth development (Larson et al., 2005; Kirshner, 2005). This balance requires adult leaders to trust the capabilities of youth to

lead. Moreover, good outcomes for positive youth development work such as increased self-esteem are dependent in part on adult youth workers being supportive and caring (Eccles & Goodman, 2002). Still further, Maton and Salem (1995) provide additional qualities of adult leaders similar to ones identified by participating youth such as being inspiring, talented, and committed to the organization, which are vital to the work of youth settings that are empowering.

### *Power & Authority*

Organizations that maintain an equitable balance of power between adult staff and youth members have the potential to provide youth with authentic experiences of agency through opportunities to exercise decision-making authority. For the youth in this study, a balance of power gave decision-making authority to them in addition to any advisory roles they may have played. For instance, the highest frequency count for the *extent of youth power* sub-category was for *decision-making authority*. The mechanism most frequently described by participants to facilitate youth power was communal decision making structures and processes.

Increased levels of decision making authority can empower adolescents, and in turn research continues to reveal that empowerment can increase sense of agency in youth (Larson, 2000; O'Donoghue, 2006). A belief that one's actions in an organization or on a project can make a difference requires a level of ownership in that project or organization. To increase the sense of ownership youth feel in civic engagement experiences, Camino and Zeldin (2002) identified three vital dimensions of youth power – planning, advising, and decision making authority – that need to be increased. Each of these dimensions was illustrated by youth in this study. Similarly, Short (1994) found that the level of leadership

given to youth directly influences the sense of ownership they experience in school settings.

### *Education*

Education provided by youth settings that is purposeful and offers a diverse range of subjects and skills seems to promote critical social analysis and an experience of agency for youth. The increasing social awareness referred to and the growing levels of critical thinking demonstrated by participants in this study are hallmarks of social analysis (Watts et al., 2003). As described by respondents, the purposes for their education to raise awareness, to recognize oppression, to think critically, and to open minds clearly demonstrates that the youth linked the education they received to a larger social context. How the youth related their education to the world around them is reflected in the most frequently coded education micro-category, *consciousness raising*, which was conceived as thinking critically, being open-minded, and recognizing multiple perspectives of other people. Furthermore, the four *subject matter* themes that emerged, History & Culture, Current Events & Social Issues, Politics, Arts & Media, each of which represent an aspect of sociopolitical context, were consistent with findings from Hosang (2004). **Education** and *consciousness-raising* were often mentioned in conjunction with the youth's "awakening" experiences.

Similarly, knowledge and skills were often mentioned in conjunction with youth experiences of making a difference (i.e., agency). Training thus can be considered an essential element of the education youth can receive in organizations. The skills youth in this study were trained on were diverse, but they enabled the youth to contribute to the success of projects and the organization. From interpersonal training to skill building, the

collection of trainings provided to the youth in this study (see Table 5) is similar to the comprehensive skill building Eccles and Goodman (2002) describe as an important feature of successful positive youth development settings.

### *Support System*

A support system for youth is associated with youth political development. Nearly all the transcripts mentioned the receipt of technical and organizational support from adults and other youth. Clearly, youth did not always possess the capabilities to accomplish projects alone and support was needed for their success.

Beyond organizational projects, the *socio-emotional* support given to youth may further the development of self-concepts consisting of confidence and high self-esteem. The significance of this point is made evident by the high frequency of *socio-emotional* support codes for the sub-category *type of support*. For this study, *socio-emotional* support was provided within organizations, but it was also provided beyond the organization in the personal lives of the youth. From assistance with homework and college applications, to attending football games of youth members, to subsidizing physical and mental healthcare expenses, the youth often described support they received from adult staff external to the operation of the organization.

The holistic support that participants in this study described is similar to the social support that Hosang (2004) identified as the best type of support to complement the work of youth organizations. Likewise, Maton and Salem (1995) characterize support systems of empowering settings as encompassing organizational and personal issues for members of an organization. Moreover, the peer-based nature of support systems of empowering settings identified by Maton and Salem (1995) is reflected in how this study characterized

support. Participants in this study described receiving both types of support from both adults and youth. This finding is also similar to the results of Camino and Zeldin's (2002) research that identified peer support for young activists as important to youth civic engagement.

### *Impediments to Participation*

Unexpectedly and in addition to positive findings, this study revealed emerging themes related to impediments to youth participation in youth development organizations. While some may assume that the antithesis of each identified characteristic can be considered an obstacle to youth participation, this study revealed three specific organizational domains salient to the youth's experience that are potential negative influences to participation. Low quality **opportunities** and roles for youth are not constructive to the activism of youth in youth development organizations. Indeed, multiple researchers have demonstrated that activities and roles for youth that are rote and meaningless undermine a developing sense of agency and any sense of ownership youth may have with an organization or project (Larson et al., 2005; Morgan & Streb, 2001). Fifty-three percent of this study's participants (N=8) echo the findings of previous research by describing the opportunities and roles in their organizations they did not want to participate in as unimportant and lacking in "real" responsibility.

Likewise, a lack of youth **power and authority** in organizations may limit the opportunities for youth to experience agency just as relationships with authoritative **adults** may negatively impact their experience. Rather than feeling empowered or experiencing feelings of making a difference, many of the youth described feeling unmotivated and powerless working on projects in which they had no decision-making authority. This is



significant as Roche (1999) has noted, shared authority is necessary to recognizing and convincing youth that they are social actors who can contribute to and change society. The highest frequency count of negative descriptions was for **adult relationships** which suggest that adults play a large role in either creating or limiting negative experiences for youth in their organizations. Multiple researchers have noted how authoritative adults who do not advise and guide, but rather dominate or exclude youth participation hinder the agentic capabilities of youth by limiting opportunities for meaningful participation (Kirshner, 2005; Lewis-Charp et al., 2003).

*Implications for political development theory*

Although exploratory, the themes that emerged from post hoc analyses offer theoretical propositions related to the political development of adolescents. Specifically, two themes that emerged from the experiences of the youth lend support to the constructs that make-up the predictor and moderator variables in Sociopolitical Development (SPD) theory as described by Watts, Michaels, and Jagers (2003) — social analysis and sense of agency, respectively.

For those youth who described experiencing a change in their worldview maturing social analysis seemed to be essential. Learning about social problems such as Poverty, War, and Sex played a role in many instances. Practical experience contributed as well; their “eyes opened” by working on various projects and with diverse groups of people. As part of this maturation, they developed their own theories of cause and effect. They also described an increasing interest and curiosity about the causes and effects of social problems.

The emergence of critical social analysis demonstrated by the youth in this sample is consistent with additional research on political development. For instance, Yates and Youniss (1996) explain how the heightened awareness associated with a critical social analysis occurs as activism can provoke youth to think about themselves in relation to others who are less fortunate, to compare their own lives to other lives that are different than theirs, and to stimulate them to think about the political and moral dimensions of society. Moreover, the potential for critical social analysis to promote future activism is made evident by Reinders and Youniss (2006) who note that adolescent decisions for future activity in civic engagement and volunteerism were preceded by experiences of self-awareness in relation to society. Despite the value research places on social analysis and how experiences in youth organizations might encourage it, SPD theory predicts that social analysis alone is not enough to lead to action; youth in this study spoke of the role agency played in their experiences and development. Most of the youth described a growing sense of agency as part of their personal growth, which they experienced through project work. Critical to their developing sense of agency were the opportunities to experience it. As a part of their experience with high-quality opportunities, the youth came to realize that their actions as an individual and also as a collective part of their organizations could make a difference. This is consistent with Kirshner's (2005) assertion that young people can come to recognize and appreciate personal agency in the context of collective action toward a common goal. This experience of agency occurred for this sample at various societal levels – individual, community, and global.

It is also important to note the additional theoretical domain emerging from the experiences of participants in this study, self-concept. Although not central to SPD theory,

it emerged as a potential outcome of experiences in youth development outcomes. Indeed, research demonstrates how the development of a stable self-concept is critical to identity formation and how an adolescent recognizes their place within a community and in society (Erikson, 1968; Harter, 1990). For the sake of parsimony and given the focus of this study, the constructs associated with self-concept were not explored or discussed in depth; however as a potentially important outcome of experiences in youth development organizations, self-concept serves as a reminder that political identity is but one piece in the complexity of adolescent identity.

### *Limitations*

The strengths of the current study, in as far as it is descriptive and inductive, are also the source of its limitations. Research is rarely without external influences or bias, and qualitative research is no exception due in part to its seemingly subjective nature. One limitation of this study is the potential theoretical bias of the researcher. My previous exposure to sociopolitical development theory and research may have biased what domains I focused on and those I may have overlooked. Although the organizational domains of interest were deductively derived through the literature, the coding scheme, qualities, and properties of these domains were inductively developed; the analytical plan included precautionary measures to prevent erroneous conclusions. I involved coders who were less familiar or unfamiliar with the subject matter, and incorporated their ideas freely as a way to reduce researcher bias.

A second limitation of this study is the breadth of the sample; only nine settings were represented. While this was a diverse set of youth development organizations, not all types of youth settings were represented. For example, it would have been useful to

include religious youth groups, traditional youth development organizations like the Boy and Girl Scouts of America, and non-profit organizations that are not focused on youth development but employ youth volunteers and interns. A comparison group may have been helpful as well, as a way of determining whether less-active youth could have made similar gains in sociopolitical development based on simple maturation alone. Lastly, the psychological components related to the growth and change participants described experiencing – social analysis, sense of agency, and self-concept – were not directly assessed thus definitive or causal links to the organizational characteristics remain speculative.

#### *Implications for Practice*

The characteristics derived from the shared experiences of this sample provide a provisional framework by which to design youth development organizations so as to increase the activism of adolescents. Aside from developing new youth organizations, the greater challenge may be intervening in and modifying existing youth development organizations as organizations and individuals tend to be resistant to change (Lewin, 1951). However, the Big Six may be more easily applicable to youth development organizations already committed to increasing youth activism and the political development of their members. While it is difficult to envision an organization attempting to modify its nature and operations according to each of the Big Six simultaneously, some characteristics may be more amendable independently and may not require major shifts in mission or operations. A few specific examples of potential modifications for four of the Big Six are listed below:

- Education
  - Develop curricula that includes sociopolitical topics to specifically contribute to consciousness raising (see Arnold, Burke, James, Martin, & Thomas, 1991, for a specific guide)
- Adult Relationships
  - Require adult staff training in developing youth-adult partnerships (Zeldin, Camino, & Mook, 2005) and/or Apprenticeship relationships (Kirshner, 2005)
- Opportunity Structures
  - Increase the availability of leadership roles for youth
  - Develop opportunities for community service that provide authentic experiences of agency
- Power & Authority
  - Utilize communal structures of decision-making that include the equal authority of youth members

#### *Future Research*

As this research was largely exploratory, confirmation of these findings with a broader range of organizations is indicated. Potential fruitful lines of research are highlighted by this study's findings. One direction for future inquiry is determining the extent to which the Big Six are represented in other youth settings. Moreover, additional research is necessary to determine which specific characteristics or what combinations of the Big Six are present in diverse youth settings that best promote youth activism and political development. The psychological outcomes of interest emerging from this study –

social analysis and sense of agency – present still other directions for future research; quantitative measurement could determine any direct relationships between the Big Six and the outcomes. Despite the early nature of this research and the absence of causal links, this study offers an understanding of the youth activist experience and the organizations they are a part of from the perspective of those who experience it—the youth themselves. It also lends insight into influences of settings, and given the diminishing levels of civic and political engagement by teenagers and young adults, this line of inquiry should continue.

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Appendix A  
Setting Characteristic Literature Review Matrix

	<b>Opportunity Structure</b>	<b>Power &amp; Authority</b>	<b>Adult Relationships</b>	<b>Belief System</b>	<b>Education &amp; Training</b>	<b>Support System</b>
<b>ACADEMIC LITERATURE</b>						
<b>Maton &amp; Salem –</b> Characteristics of Empowering Settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pervasive</li> <li>• Highly accessible</li> <li>• Multifunctional</li> </ul>	<b>Leaders that are:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspiring</li> <li>• Talented</li> <li>• Committed to org. and members</li> </ul>	<b>Leaders that are:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspiring</li> <li>• Talented</li> <li>• Committed to org. and members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspires Growth</li> <li>• Strengths Based</li> <li>• Focused beyond self</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encompassing</li> <li>• Peer-based</li> <li>• Sense of Community</li> </ul>
<b>Morgan &amp; Streb -</b> Service Learning		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Real Responsibilities?</li> <li>• Challenging Tasks?</li> <li>• Plan the project?</li> <li>• Made important decisions?</li> </ul>				
<b>Short –</b> Empowering students in school settings		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ownership in school by students increased by responsibility and leadership opportunities</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowering students as a value</li> <li>• Students seen as “equals” with staff</li> <li>• Take risks, allowed to make mistakes</li> </ul>		
<b>Hart &amp; Atkins</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opps. for prosocial action is good predictor of future community service</li> </ul>					
<b>Roche –</b> Children’s Rights, Participation, and Citizenship		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledge issue of power in adult/child relations</li> <li>• Positive action required to address power imbalance</li> <li>• Empower children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open mind to redistribution of power</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect and value contribution of children</li> </ul>		
<b>Hosang –</b> Youth organizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opps. for community service provide immediate gratification and positive reinforcement</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentors</li> <li>• Political strategists</li> <li>• Trainers</li> <li>• Fundraisers</li> <li>• Generally Talented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster critical and reflective thinking and consciousness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership Development</li> <li>• Political education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic &amp; Personal support necessary</li> <li>• Holistic social/coping support</li> </ul>

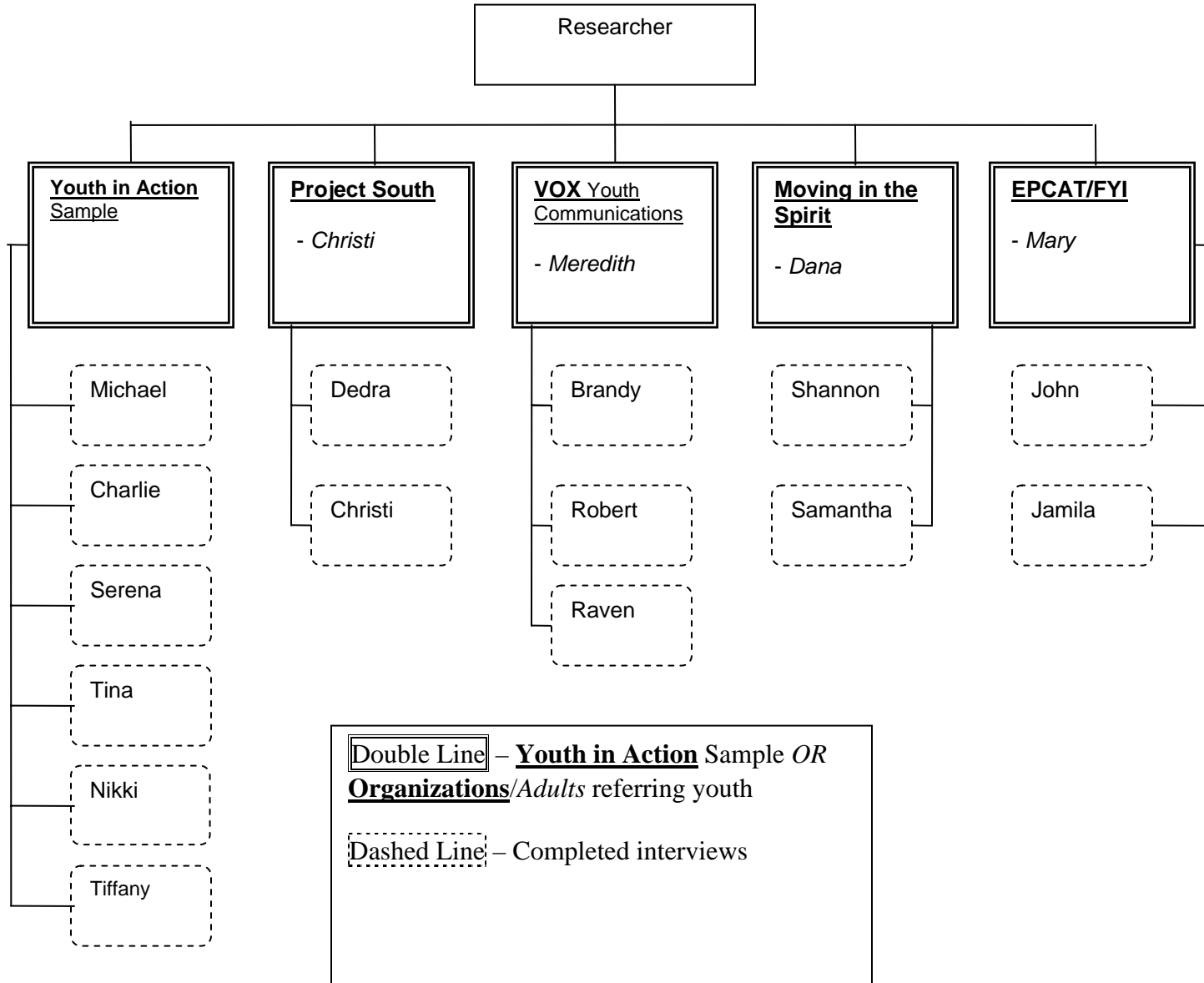
	<b>Opportunity Structure</b>	<b>Power &amp; Authority</b>	<b>Adult Relationships</b>	<b>Belief System</b>	<b>Education &amp; Training</b>	<b>Support System</b>
<b>Evans et. al</b> – Adult/group influences on participation			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult involvement indirectly effects youth participation, mediated by group characteristics</li> </ul>			
<b>Eccles</b> – Positive youth development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opps. to belong</li> <li>• Opps. for efficacy – “mattering”</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Norms of org. are positive</li> <li>• Safety assured</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skill building important</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good communication</li> </ul>
<b>Schine</b> - Community Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opp. Structure for comm. service beneficial for youth development</li> </ul>					
<b>APPLIED LITERATURE</b>						
<b>LISTEN, Inc. Youth Organizing Model</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple leadership opps.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integral leadership roles</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of collective identity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historical, Cultural, and Political Education and Awareness Training</li> </ul>	
<b>Lessons in Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal/Well-defined</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Step back and have faith”</li> <li>• Let go of responsibility but remain engaged.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expose youth to social justice issues</li> </ul>	
<b>Making Space/ Making Change</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple leadership opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training</li> <li>• Advise</li> <li>• Guide</li> <li>• No dominance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitment to/Culture of youth leadership and empowerment</li> <li>• High expectations of youth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consciousness raising activities</li> <li>• Leadership development activities/workshops</li> <li>• Change perceptions of adults</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer support</li> <li>• Adult mentors</li> </ul>

Appendix B  
 Youth in Action Participant Interview Criteria Matrix

<b>YOUTH INVENTORY OF INVOLVEMENT - DEPTH OF INVOLVEMENT (MEAN)</b>			
		<b>HIGH (Top 20%)</b>	<b>LOW (Bottom 20%)</b>
<b>EXPERIENCE OF AGENCY (COUNT)</b>	<b>HIGH (Top 20%)</b>	1008 Project South 1029 Capital 1030 Capital 1036 Capital area mosaiac 1060 Project South 1091 Community Care 1107 Carver Boys and Girls Club 1110 Carver Boys and girls club 1113 Aim 2003 Paideia 2005 Paideia 2006 Paideia 2012 Paideia 2014 Paideia	1004 Moving In the Spirit 1038 Capital Area Mosaic 1047 Mercury 1106 Aim 2008 Paideia 2010 Paideia 2018 Pace Academy
	<b>LOW (Bottom 20%)</b>	1005 Moving In the Spirit 1010 Project South 1011 Mercury 1012 Mercury 1022 Mercury 1037 Capital area mosaiac 1051 Mercury 1053 Mercury 1065 Ga State 1070 Ga State 1076 Community Care 1093 Community Care 1098 Community Care 1108 Carver Boys and girls club 1114 Aim 2011 Paideia	1000 Paideia 1002 Moving in the Spirit 1013 Mercury 1014 Mercury 1023 Mercury 1028 Capital 1034 Mercury 1035 Mercury 1043 Mercury 1044 Mercury 1045 Mercury 1046 Mercury 1054 Project south 1059 Project South 1061 Ga State 1066 Ga State 1083 Community Care 1097 Community Care

\*\*Note: Qualifying interview participants from *Youth in Action* study are in the top-left quadrant of the matrix.

Appendix C  
Interview Participant Tree



*Note.* For confidentiality, participant names have been changed in this chart and in all quotations.

## Appendix D Interview Script

### 1) Youth Role Opportunities:

- What are some projects you've had to participate in  (name of organization) ?
- What was it about this project that makes it more memorable to you than others?
- Tell me about some of the other activities or projects you've actually been involved in at \_\_\_\_\_.
- Do you feel like you made a difference? How?
- What are some opportunities to participate in that you did not? Why?
- What project/activities do you think was the most important? Why?
  - Was there an activity that \_\_\_\_\_ did not offer that you wish they had? Why do you think it wasn't offered?

### 2) Belief System of Organization:

- How would you describe the mission or purpose of \_\_\_\_\_?
- What are the main things that you think that \_\_\_\_\_ is trying to accomplish?
- What do you think is the most important part of \_\_\_\_\_'s mission?
- How does the mission make you feel?
- What are some of your favorite parts of participating in \_\_\_\_\_?
- What are some of your least favorite parts of participating in \_\_\_\_\_?

### 3) Youth Power/Authority:

- How are decisions made in the project/organization?
- Have you helped to make any important decisions in the project?
- What can you do if you disagree with a decision?
- Tell me about some responsibilities you have in \_\_\_\_\_?
- Do you think that young people should have more or less power (responsibility) in \_\_\_\_\_? Why?

### 4) Youth-Adult Relationships:

- What do adults do in your organization/project?
- How would you describe your relationship with the adults?
- How does your adult leader support the youth of the organization?
- How do adult leaders influence your participation?
- Think of your favorite adult to work with. Tell me why they are your favorite.
- Now think of who is your least favorite adult to work with. Tell me why they are they are your least favorite.

### 5) Social and Technical Support System:

- Who do you turn to when you need help or have a problem?
- Do you think that the adults provide enough support to you in the organization?
- Tell me about a time when they helped you.
- Do you think that other young people support you? Have you supported another young person?
- Tell me about a time when this happened.

### 6) Education and Training:

- Did you have to learn anything new to work on this project (for \_\_\_\_\_)?
- How did you learn what you needed to know?
- What sort of training has your organization provided to prepare you for different projects?
- Have your opinions or views of the world changed from what you have learned in \_\_\_\_\_? How?

Appendix E  
Final Coding Scheme

Categories	Categories
<p><b>I. Belief System &amp; Mission</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <i>Service &amp; Volunteerism</i></li> <li>2) <i>Education</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <i>Consciousness Raising</i></li> </ol> </li> <li>3) <i>Social Change/Justice</i></li> <li>4) <i>Leadership Development</i></li> </ol>	<p><b>II. Opportunity Structure</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Multiple Opportunities</i></li> <li>2. <i>High Quality</i></li> <li>3. <i>Roles &amp; Activities</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <i>Leadership</i></li> <li>b. <i>Mentor</i></li> <li>c. <i>Mediator</i></li> <li>d. <i>Volunteer/Service</i></li> <li>e. <i>Teamwork</i></li> </ol> </li> </ol>
<p><b>III. Adult Relationships</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <i>Good Relationships</i></li> <li>2) <i>Personality</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <i>Available</i></li> <li>b) <i>Approachable &amp; Trusting</i></li> <li>c) <i>Knowledgeable</i></li> <li>d) <i>Genuine &amp; Dedicated</i></li> <li>e) <i>Fun</i></li> </ol> </li> <li>3) <i>Role</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <i>Mentor</i></li> <li>b) <i>Mediator</i></li> <li>c) <i>Teacher</i></li> <li>d) <i>Friend</i></li> <li>e) <i>Supervisor</i></li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p><b>IV. Power &amp; Authority</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <i>Location of Power</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <i>Youth</i></li> <li>b) <i>Adults</i></li> <li>c) <i>Balance of power</i></li> </ol> </li> <li>2) <i>Extent of Youth Power</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <i>Decision-making</i></li> <li>b) <i>Advisory</i></li> <li>c) <i>Control Organizational Resources</i></li> </ol> </li> <li>3) <i>Decision-making Structure</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <i>Hierarchical</i></li> <li>b) <i>Communal</i></li> </ol> </li> </ol>
<p><b>V. Education &amp; Training</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <i>Subject</i></li> <li>2) <i>Purpose</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <i>Consciousness Raising</i></li> <li>b) <i>Motivation</i></li> <li>c) <i>Preparation</i></li> </ol> </li> <li>3) <i>Training</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <i>Interpersonal Skill Building</i></li> <li>b) <i>Expertise Building</i></li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p><b>VI. Support</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <i>Type of Support</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <i>Technical &amp; Organizational</i></li> <li>b) <i>Socio-emotional</i></li> </ol> </li> <li>2) <i>Source of Support</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <i>Adults</i></li> <li>b) <i>Youth</i></li> </ol> </li> </ol>
<p><b>VII. Growth &amp; Change</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <i>Personal Growth</i></li> <li>2) <i>World Views</i></li> </ol>	