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Experiences of Former Participants in Teen Advocates for Sexual Health (TASH)

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Running head: TEEN ADVOCATES FOR SEXUAL HEALTH

Experiences of Former Participants in Teen Advocates for Sexual Health (TASH)

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A Dissertation Submitted to The Graduate School at the University of Missouri-St. Louis
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the experiences of former participants in a Planned Parenthood youth development and sex education program, Teen Advocates for Sexual Health (TASH). Phenomenologically-based interviews centered the question, “What did it mean to participate in TASH?” Chapter 1 introduces the study context and synthesizes foundational literature from the fields of sex education, public health, critical pedagogy, civic engagement, youth development, and youth organizing. Chapters 2-4 each contain complete manuscripts, representing three complementary analytic approaches to a common data set and inviting multiple audiences. Chapter 2 addresses sex educators in describing TASH’s “rights-based” sex education model. Research questions included: (a) How did youth advocacy occur within a rights-based sex education program? and (b) What did advocacy experiences mean to former participants? Chapter 3 explores how TASH experiences influenced participant sociopolitical development across organizational and individual levels using a multi-leveled empowerment framework. Research questions were: (a) What empowering processes occurred on an organizational level? (b) What empowerment outcomes did former YOG participants experience? and (c) How did they relate empowerment to career decision-making? Chapter 4 examines TASH’s social justice discussion pedagogy in the context of a higher education debate on trauma trigger warnings, asking: (a) How did adult leaders design and implement discussion-related pedagogy? (b) What were former TASH participants’ experiences of discussions? and (c) How did participation in TASH dialogue inform their transitions to a civically-engaged adulthood? Findings and recommendations accompany each manuscript. Chapter 5 serves as a final comment on the body of work in the aggregate

with implications for theory, practice, and method for both author and audience. These studies highlight the potential of youth organizing groups like TASH to support the development of change agents—young people who are capable, critically aware, and committed to social change.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

When I reflect on my time as a beginning science teacher in Indiana, USA, I would characterize my teaching style as traditional. Instructional strategies were teacher-centered, focused on content rather than students. My overarching goal was to help students master the Indiana state standards so they could be successful in future science coursework and possible careers. I worked to make labs fun and lectures entertaining, but I did little to connect the curricula to students' lives. Toward the end of my first year, I began to sense something was missing. Although colleagues and administrators evaluated me favorably, I grew dissatisfied with my philosophy and classroom climate. I was not truly connecting with students. I was doing little to prepare them for the real world as my authoritative voice dominated classroom discourse. I wondered if authentic engagement was the potential missing link.

As I recalled from my teacher preparation program, authentically engaging lessons promote choice and place students in charge of their own learning. I began integrating choice into my curricula with success. For example, students became journalists who wrote science news articles on topics of their choice (Saul, Kohnen, Newman, & Pearce, 2011). Later in the semester, they transformed into engineers who designed biomimetic products inspired by nature's adaptations (Nicholas & Peterson, 2015). In each case, the learning experience centered the student voice and positioned me as a co-learner. Although an exact definition of authentic engagement still eludes me, I can say that my students took enthusiastic ownership over their projects as they pursued answers to their questions about science and sources of scientific information.

As a PhD student, I have explored the complex elements of learning environments similar to those described above (Nicholas, 2016). However, my approach to teaching and learning has since taken on a strong social justice orientation. Growing up in white middle class suburban Indianapolis, it was easy for me to ignore inequity within education and society. I attended one of the top public high schools in the state where I was labeled an honors student. This meant much of my schooling occurred within an even more homogenous group, primarily children of parents who were highly educated and financially well-off. At that time, I engaged in no critique of my educational success compared to that of students from families with less race or class privilege. This is not to say I was totally unaware of socioeconomic or racial divides in the city. They certainly existed. However, I failed to understand how I might be implicated in maintaining or addressing social problems.

Upon moving to St. Louis, MO, USA, to pursue a PhD in education, I became acutely aware of inequity and the role of education in reproducing or disrupting it (Bowles, 1972). For the first time, I felt confronted with issues around equity and schooling. As mentioned, Indianapolis certainly has its own issues that I encountered only rarely. In St. Louis, I confronted salient racial disparities every day. When commuting to University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL) from my home to the south, I noticed stark racial segregation between locales a few miles apart. While working with a local school district to support science teacher professional development, the implications of segregation became clear. UMSL's partner district was one of the poorest-performing academically in the state and had recently lost its accreditation. In the same district, 97% of students were African American, and 98% of students qualified for free and reduced

lunch (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015). Reading the Washington University report, *For the sake of all* (2014), confirmed my suspicions about the impact of segregation and poverty in St. Louis. Both correlated with health and educational disparities. About a month after I moved in St. Louis, tensions over racial disparities boiled over when unarmed African American teenager Michael Brown was fatally shot by a white police officer. The months of protest that followed illustrated the primacy of race and poverty in this region with implications far beyond police violence.

My classroom experiences at UMSL helped me make sense of these events as my educational philosophy evolved. In my first semester, I enrolled in courses on social justice, critical discourse analysis, and critical race theory. These classes helped me uncover societal assumptions around race, class, and language. Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's (1970/2000), *Pedagogy of the oppressed* had a profound influence on me. Freire's Marxist and anti-colonialist stance rejected class-based society and the neoliberal assertion that class struggle would end on its own. He also critiqued the essentialism of foregrounding race in discussions of equity, arguing complex factors, including class, should be considered. In regard to education, Freire critiqued the dominant transmission or banking model in favor of a dialogic, problem-posing communication between teachers and students. Dialogue evenly distributes power in the classroom, as all participants are teachers and students. For Freire, dialogue instantiated an epistemological relationship, a way of knowing valuing the social rather than individualistic. Dialogue could support critical examination of the world and ultimately the development of critical consciousness. This newfound awareness is emancipatory for teachers and students who potentially disrupt societal inequity.

Given these personal and scholarly experiences, I reconceptualized learning environments in terms of power distribution. The student-centered classroom became the dialogic one. The real-world projects became situated within problem-posing frameworks. Students would use increased awareness of societal inequities, a critical consciousness, to examine real-world problems. For me, shifts in power in informal and formal learning environments had the potential to redistribute societal power. As an educator, I began to see myself as an actor in a potentially oppressive system. Along with my newfound critical consciousness, I committed to affecting social change.

Health Education: A Problem of Access

My current work aims to understand the impact of learning environments' on individuals within a framework of social change. Specifically, the change I seek is related to access to health education. Prior to becoming a science teacher, I attended medical school. For as long as I can remember, I have been interested in health as it relates to biological science. I view science and health as inextricably linked. However, I find that health as a personally relevant, potentially life-saving application of science is largely excluded from science curricula. When I recently sought to integrate the science and health within an outreach program on chronic disease, I was shocked at misconceptions my sixth grade students displayed (e.g., the lungs are bones). It appeared as if they had received minimal health instruction. I found this particularly disturbing given most of my students were African American. Vast racial health disparities characterize St. Louis, with up to an 18 year life span difference between predominantly African American and predominately white zip codes (*For the sake of all*, 2014).

Epidemiological data on sexual health outcomes reveal similar trends in terms of

racial disparities. For example, *For the sake of all* (2014) reported the gonorrhea rate was 15 times higher for African American females compared to white females. However, I quickly realized that sexual health education access is a broad issue, affecting Missouri youth of all backgrounds on some level. In the most recent Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 43% of Missouri, USA, high school students reported having had sexual intercourse (Centers for Disease Control, 2013). It follows that schools could provide sexual education that would reach many sexually active Missouri teens. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2007) requires sexual education for middle and high school students within the health curricula. While Missouri policy specifies that sexual education must be factually accurate (Mo. Rev. Stat., 1988), it also stipulates sexual abstinence must be presented as “the preferred choice of behavior in relation to all sexual activity for unmarried pupils” (Mo. Rev. Stat, 2015). Moreover, this education may be insufficient due to the marginalized academic status of health and restrictive sexual education policies

Teen Advocates for Sexual Health

Planned Parenthood is one organization trying to bridge the sexual health education gap. It is a nonprofit family planning organization that has been providing low-cost reproductive health services in the U.S. and internationally since 1916 (Planned Parenthood, 2014). The organization estimates one in five women will access its reproductive services at some point in her lifetime. The organization also provides sexual health education and advocates for reproductive rights. Planned Parenthood (2014) reports 1.5 million youth and adults participate in its outreach programs annually. Because Planned Parenthood clinics offer contraception and some perform abortions, the

organization has been criticized by pro-life proponents arguing Planned Parenthood should be stripped of its federal funding. The Defund Planned Parenthood Act of 2015 passed the U.S. House of Representatives and is currently on the Senate legislative calendar (Black, 2015). Opposition to the organization has sometimes ended in violence, as when a gunman killed two civilians and a police officer at a Planned Parenthood health center in Colorado in November of 2015 (Schoichet, Stapleton, & Botelho, 2015).

As the only abortion provider in Missouri, Planned Parenthood of the St. Louis Region and Southwest Missouri has been the target of protests and more recently vandalism at one of its health centers (Lecci, 2015). Despite these threats, the organization remains open and continues to provide reproductive health services and education. Since 2001, this local Planned Parenthood affiliate has partnered with youth in its mission through the Teen Advocates for Sexual Health (TASH) program. In TASH, a diverse group of youth in grades 9-12 meet weekly at a Planned Parenthood health center to learn about sexual health as they become advocates for reproductive rights in their communities.

Several unique aspects of this program warrant exploration in terms of youth identity development, with implications for social transformation. TASH staffers encourage critical discussion of sexuality around issues of race, class, gender identity, oppression, and privilege. TASH's motto is "ignorance is nobody's ally" (Planned Parenthood of the St. Louis Region and Southwest Missouri, 2016). TASH members receive instruction about Missouri policies on reproductive rights and school health curricula. They are encouraged to advocate for these issues through civic engagement practices such as: presenting at local school boards, lobbying at the state capitol,

contacting politicians, and voting at age 18. As a guest at a recent TASH meeting, I spoke to several program alumni who referred to TASH's impact on their career goals and continued advocacy. Given the program's emphases on political action and critical dialogue, studying TASH adds to what is known about the impact of critically-oriented youth organizing programs as it relates to youth and society.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

Across three manuscripts, my purpose was to explore distinct yet related aspects of the experiences of former TASH participants. The question uniting these works was, "what did TASH mean to former participants?" The three papers varied in audience and purpose but shared a phenomenologically-based qualitative study design. Because a common data collection procedure was utilized, three "studies" are a product of different analytic approaches to a single data set. As I provide detailed explanations of interview and analytic procedures with each paper, my methodological overview here is brief.

Former TASH members who chose to participate in the study were asked to reflect on the meaning of their experiences as TASH youths. Participants completed interviews following Seidman's (2012) three-interview series (see Appendix A, B for protocols). Seidman describes his approach as phenomenologically-based, given its emphases on the transitory nature of human experience, subjective understanding, lived experience, and meaning-making in context. Interview #1 addressed the participants' life histories prior to TASH, with a specific focus on sexual health education and advocacy. Interview #2 focused on participants' specific experiences in TASH. Interview #3 allowed participants to reflect on the meaning of TASH.

The first paper addresses a practitioner audience of sex educators, examining

TASH as a “rights-based” sex education model in practice. Research questions included:

- 1) How does youth advocacy occur within a rights-based sex education program?
- 2) What do advocacy experiences mean to former participants?

The second article is directed at scholars and practitioners in the fields of career development and youth organizing (YO). This study explored how YOG experiences influenced participant SPD across organizational and individual levels using a multi-leveled empowerment framework: Questions were:

- 1) What empowering processes occurred on an organizational level?
- 2) What empowerment outcomes did former YOG participants experience?
- 3) How did they relate empowerment to career decision-making?

The final article was written to appeal to a higher education community and justice educators. This study explored how TASH engaged youth in social justice education (SJE) dialogue. The following research questions were addressed:

- 1) How did adult leaders design and implement discussion-related pedagogy?
- 2) What were youth experiences of TASH discussions?
- 3) How did participation in TASH dialogue inform their transitions to adulthood?

Conceptual Frames

Across manuscripts, conceptual frames varied with study purpose and questions. Below, I present excerpts of a larger literature review that informed the entirety of the research process (see Appendix C).

Youth development. Erikson (1968) argued that developing youth must resolve crises, or pivotal moments, as they progress through the life cycle. Within adolescence, youth are challenged to resolve identity through acceptance of ideology, the “guardian of

identity” (p. 131). Erikson believed that this process was essential for the continuity of society, as youth both take up and renew ideological traditions. This progression is both individual and cultural,

In youth, ego strength emerges from the mutual confirmation of individual and community, in the sense that society recognizes the young individual as a bearer of fresh energy and that the individual so confirmed recognizes society of the living process which inspires loyalty and receives it, maintain the allegiance as it attracts it, honors confidence as it demands it (p. 241).

As such, Erikson urged youth involvement in experiences that would support identity development.

While Erikson’s recommendations for youth civic engagement remained general, Youniss and Yates (1997) applied Erikson’s (1968) assertions about ideology and identity in a youth community service context. Youniss and Yates engaged in a year-long ethnography on Washington, D.C. high school students enrolled in a social justice course with service requirement at a local soup kitchen. The researchers found the program allowed students to construct identity through reflection on social issues and building political-moral responsibility. When contacted six years later, students were adamant about the impact of the course. Even those who did not subscribe to its social justice ideology used it as a point of departure for current thinking. According to Youniss and Yates (1997), their findings are compatible with Erikson’s assertions, as “service within the context of a clear ideological framework and nurture adolescents’ emerging identities” (p. 78).

Youth organizing. While some concepts from studies of community service are useful in conceptualizing TASH, the program is more accurately classified as a youth organizing group. Rogers, Mediratta, and Shah (2012) describe youth organizing groups as “distinctive sites of learning” characterized by their voluntary nature, critical orientation, real-world contexts, and developmental focuses (p. 52). A critical orientation is distinct from the social justice ideology that some community service programs may espouse (Youniss & Yates, 1997) in requiring youth to analyze power and oppression and situate themselves within societal inequity. Rather than a moral responsibility or empathy toward the Other, this critical consciousness is the impetus for cycles of reflection and action (Freire, 1970/2000). The approach differs from charity work or political party involvement that characterize some forms of youth civic engagement (Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Without a critical stance, Watts and Flanagan (2007) caution youth civic engagement can function to maintain the status quo.

Sociopolitical development. Many scholars have centered their analyses of development within youth organizing on sociopolitical development (SPD). Specifically, they have examined critical components of programs through Freire’s (1970/2000) notion of critical consciousness or *conscientização*. Based on his literacy work with Brazilian farmers, Freire framed society as a contradiction between the oppressed and oppressors. According to Freire, the oppressed could gain power and freedom through conscientization, a transformative process by which one becomes aware of social inequities. The realization of the contradiction opens possibilities for emancipatory action. Through their work with African American youth activists, Watts and colleagues proposed a theory of sociopolitical development (SPD), a manifestation of critical

consciousness development (Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil, 1999; Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003). Their five-stage model is a progression of critical consciousness anchored by “acritical” and “liberation” (Watts et al., 2003, p. 188). Watts and Flanagan (2007) describe this framework as combining elements from developmental and liberation psychology.

Watts, Diemer, and Voight (2011) have gone on to describe critical consciousness as composed of “three core constructs: critical reflection (or critical social analysis), political efficacy (or sense of agency), and critical action” (p. 52). In applying the three part framework to the results of a civic education survey, Diemer and Rapa (2016) found agency did not mediate the relationship between critical reflection and action, defying expectations based on the model. However, they did find that perceptions of inequality were correlated with engagement in social action. In their review of measures of critical consciousness, Diemer, McWhirter, Ozer, and Rapa (2015) called for further exploration of the ways in which critical consciousness development may not deviate from a stage-like progression. Rather, it may remain in flux with as identities including race, class, gender identity, and sexuality intersect. Similarly, Diemer et al. (2015) suggest inquiry into the critical consciousness in those who have not experienced certain types of oppression.

Youth organizing alumni. Connor (2011/2014) studied the academic, relational, sociopolitical outcomes of a youth organizing program with Freirian programmatic elements. Connor interviewed former participants of the Philadelphia Student Union (PSU), a student activist group focused on issues of quality and equity within the Philadelphia’s public schools. PSU members advocate for concerns such as teacher

quality, district privatization, and school funding. Conner (2011) asked program alumni about how participation affected their life decisions and trajectories. He found that participants' responses reflected PSU's influence in academic, professional, relational, and sociopolitical domains. Most alumni remained committed to issues at the center of PSU's advocacy work into adulthood. Participants related these effects to PSU program features including organizing, workshops, and discussion.

In subsequent work with PSU, Conner (2014) asked program alumni about what and how they learned in the program. Connor categorized responses as learning outcomes of social analysis, self-knowledge, or communication skills. He then connected specific learning outcomes to Freirian elements of the learning environment. For example, he described critical consciousness as reflected in learning outcomes of social analysis, self-knowledge, and communication skills. These were related to learning environment elements consistent with a Freirian problem-posing critical pedagogy, such as open dialogue and relevance.

Significance

While significance is fully explored within each manuscript, I describe some general implications here and in the final chapter. This study contributes to the literature on sociopolitical development in youth organizing and the role of critical consciousness in several ways. First, only a handful of studies examine the experiences of former youth organizing participants (Conner 2011/14; Terriquez, 2015). Of those, none utilize a structure like Seidman's (2012) three interview series, which lends itself to analyzing developmental processes and meaning-making through reflection. Phenomenological interviewing yields rich data about participant experiences. Second, most studies address

critical consciousness development in minority youth, and scholars have called for diverse perspectives (Diemer, McWhirter, Ozer, & Rapa, 2015; Godfrey & Grayman, 2014). Similarly, Watts et al. (2003) warn against standardizing developmental outcomes stating, “to press for equal outcomes turns the process of critical consciousness development into indoctrination” (p. 187). The racial, socioeconomic, gender identity, and sexual diversity within TASH facilitates this direction of inquiry. These different statuses are in flux and predict individualized journeys of critical consciousness development (Diemer et al., 2015). Moreover, attending to these nuances addresses questions about how allies develop. As in, how does a white privileged heterosexual male become an ally to causes of TASH members with a less privileged status? Third, none of the youth organizations profiled in the literature attend to sexual health education issues. As I have argued, sexual health education is a highly divisive, value-laden issue in the US. TASH is somewhat of a sociopolitical crucible for participant transformation with implications at the societal level.

Findings may impact policy and Planned Parenthood. Because TASH occurs in an informal space, it is not constrained by regulations regarding sexual education content taught in MO schools. Therefore, TASH is a space conducive to novel approaches. Studying TASH can show the limits and possibilities of sex education. Potentially, study insights could be translated for classroom use. The study results to inform TASH programming and facilitate sharing of the TASH model across affiliates. They may use the findings as rationale for continued funding from the government and private donors. Additionally, TASH participants may use the findings as evidence for comprehensive sexual education lobbying efforts.

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Chapter 2: Teen Advocates for Sexual Health (TASH): A rights-based program “in action”

Abstract

This article is the first to examine advocacy experiences of rights-based sex education participants. Planned Parenthood program Teen Advocates for Sexual Health (TASH) provides critically-oriented rights-based sex education in St. Louis, MO, USA. Responding to the state’s restrictive school-based sex education policies, TASH youth have opportunities to engage in reproductive and sexual rights advocacy. In-depth interviews with staff and former youth participants explain how TASH incorporates advocacy. A combination of education, community, and action opportunities supported lasting empowerment and social responsibility. Rights-based programs with advocacy hold potential for civic engagement outcomes. Implementation considerations for educators and institutions are provided.

Introduction

In recent years, a rights-based approach to sex education has gained international endorsement (IPPF, 2010; UNESCO, 2009; WHO, 2010). Seeking to define the rights-based approach, Berglas, Constantine, and Ozer (2014) identified four common principles described by international sex education experts,

1) an underlying principle that youth have sexual rights; 2) an expansion of programmatic goals beyond reducing unintended pregnancy and STDs; 3) a broadening of curricula content to include such issues as gender norms, sexual orientation, sexual expression and pleasure, violence, and individual rights and responsibilities in relationships; 4) and a participatory teaching strategy that engages youth in critical thinking about their sexuality and sexual choices (numbers added, p. 63).

These authors and others have begun to examine the experiences of youth participating in rights-based sex education. Studies have demonstrated preliminary support for the approach's influence on youth's understanding of sexual relationship rights compared to basic sex education (Berglas, Angulo-Olaiz, Jerman, Desai, & Constantine, 2014; Constantine et al., 2015).

Despite initial positive reports and the view of sexual rights as universal, rights-based programs cannot reach all youth. Fortunately, rights-based programs hold the unique potential for engaging youth as advocates for the sexual rights of all. In addition to fostering personal empowerment, programs could support social empowerment and civic engagement among participants (Berglas et al., 2014). Alongside sexual rights, IPPF (2010) considers this kind of "meaningful participation" as a right for all young

people (p. 18). Specifically, IPPF calls for capacity building to engage youth leadership in sexual and reproductive rights movements globally and locally.

While our understanding of civic engagement in sex education is still emerging, the field of youth organizing sheds light onto the promise of civic engagement therein. Often housed in community-based organizations (CBOs), youth organizing programs support critical thinking and advocating around issues ranging from educational inequality to immigrant rights (Rogers, Mediratta, & Shah, 2012). Such organizations support youth personal, interpersonal, and sociopolitical development (Delgado & Staples, 2008; Ginwright & James, 2002; Kirshner, 2007; Watts, Abdul-Adil, & Pratt, 2002). Programs may influence youth organizing participants into adulthood, continuing advocacy begun as teens (Conner, 2011/2014; Terriquez, 2015).

A rights-based program in St. Louis, MO, USA, innovatively combines rights-based sex education and youth organizing in service of sexual and reproductive rights for all. Since 2001, Planned Parenthood of the St. Louis Region and Southwest Missouri (PPSLR) has partnered with a diverse group of youth in grades 9-12 through Teen Advocates for Sexual Health (TASH). The program meets every other week at a PPSLR health center and functions as a rights-based program on two levels. First, the program provides rights-based sex education to participants. Second, youth have the opportunity to become advocates for comprehensive sex education and sexual and reproductive rights in their communities.

The rights of Missouri youth and hence TASH participants are particularly threatened by state legislation. Missouri law requires public and charter schools to teach HIV prevention but allows individual school districts to decide whether to provide sex

education (Mo. Rev. Stat. § 170.015-1, 2015; Mo. Rev. Stat. § 191.668.1, 1988).

Participating schools must provide abstinence-until-marriage instruction. Moreover, the policies are out of sync with the reality of Missouri youth sexual activity. In the most recent Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 38% of Missouri, USA, high school students reported having had sexual intercourse (Centers for Disease Control, [CDC], 2015).

While Planned Parenthood describes itself as the largest provider of comprehensive sex education in the U.S., abortion providers are barred from supporting sex education within Missouri public schools (Mo. Rev. Stat. § 170.015-1; Planned Parenthood Action Fund, 2016).

As legislative barriers preclude peer advocacy programs, teen participants, “TASHers,” are active in other ways including lobbying at the state legislature, campaigning for school-based comprehensive sex education, engaging in community outreach, and informally peer advocating. Importantly, TASH views its mission as long-term, supporting what could be the next generation of advocates and activists. Many alumni are now in college and career, with a subset formally committed to the reproductive justice issues raised in TASH. This qualitative study examined TASH as a rights-based model “in action” through the perspectives of adult leaders and former youth participants. An analysis of in-depth interviews addresses the following questions: How does youth advocacy occur within a rights-based sex education program? What do advocacy experiences mean to former participants?

Methods

Participant recruitment. Participants in this study include two current or former TASH staff and six former youth participants. Judy Lipsitz, TASH program coordinator,

agreed to assist in contacting potential participants. To protect former member privacy she asked former TASH members if they would like to hear more about a study involving former TASH participants. With permission from those interested, Judy shared names and contact information with me, and I emailed them explain the study. Out of the ten potential participants contacted, eight agreed to participate and two did not respond. Based on discussions with Judy, I sought to achieve a sample that represented a diversity of TASH perspectives in terms of gender identity, race, and sexuality (Table 1). The sampling of the site and participants was purposive, in that they were “information rich” in terms of my research questions about the program and its meaning (Patton, 2002, p. 230).

Table 1

Participant Characteristics (self-identified)

	TASH Role	Years Active	Age	Sex	Race
Charisse	former Planned Parenthood VP of Education and Diversity, social justice educator	2008-2013	55+	cis female	African American
Judy	program coordinator, co-creator	2001-present	70	female	White
*Aubrey	former youth participant, founded a TASH chapter	2005-2008	26	female	Black
*Heather	former youth participant, TASH volunteer sex educator	2005-2008	26	female	White
*Kayla	former youth participant	2012-2015	19	cis female	White
*Michael	former youth participant	2010-2013	21	male	White
*Pat	former youth participant	2005-2008	26	not disclosed	White
*Taylor	former youth participant	2008-2012	22	cis female	White

*pseudonym

Interview procedure. Participants were asked to reflect on advocacy experiences as TASH youths or staff. They completed semi-structured interviews following Seidman's (2012) three-interview series. Seidman describes his approach as phenomenologically-based, given its emphases on the transitory nature of human experience, subjective understanding, lived experience, and meaning-making in context. Interview #1 focused the participants' life histories prior to TASH, with a specific focus on sexual health education and advocacy. Interview #2 focused on participants' specific experiences in TASH. Interview #3 allowed participants to reflect on the meaning of participation in TASH (see Appendices A, B for protocols). Each interview ranged from 30-90 minutes in length with the three interviews generally spaced out over a 2-3 week period. In total, 25 interviews were conducted, nearly 24 hours audio was recorded, and over 700 pages were transcribed.

Analysis. Qualitative data analysis involved alternating inductive and deductive processes. Throughout the analysis, constant comparison was used. According to Corbin and Strauss (1990), "as an incident is noted, it should be compared to other incidents for similarities and differences" (p. 9). Detailed analytic memos were also kept. In the first of analysis, each interview transcript each was segmented arranged into an extended macrostructure or outline (Gee, 2011). Second, initial coding occurred on this reduced transcript and led to the identification of emergent themes. Third, I arranged the three interviews from each individual into a narrative form or "profile" in order to get a holistic sense of each participant's story, in context (Seidman, 2012). Fourth, I compared profiles

across participants and located common themes. Lastly, I arranged the themes by corresponding research question (see Appendix D for codebook).

To increase consistency (reliability) and credibility (validity), qualitative designs may draw from multiple data sources (Merriam, 2009). Seidman, (2009) defends the use of in-depth interviews alone, conceptualizing validity as what is true for that participant at the time. He argues in-depth interviews enhance this notion of validity in four ways. First, interviews keep participant comments in context, allowing the researcher to make more valid interpretations. Second, interviews support comparisons across participants. Third, the three-interview structure allows the researcher to compare within each participant series, providing a measure of “internal consistency” and a better understanding of anomalies (p. 27). Fourth, as participants in a reflective process, the interviewees clarify meaning for themselves and the researcher. Seidman adds that comparison of findings with literature can also constitute a form of “external consistency” (p. 29). Finally, I asked each participant to “member check,” or review the analysis for accuracy prior to sharing it publicly (Merriam, 2009).

In terms of sampling, TASH may hold greater meaning for participants in my sample relative to the average TASH participant. Those I interviewed were still formally or informally associated with the organization. Their experiences are not intended to represent those of all TASH members. Moreover, these context-bound results are assumed to be transferable rather than generalizable on the population level (Merriam, 2009). Submission to the University of Missouri- St. Louis Institutional Review Board ensured participant rights and confidentiality.

Researcher's role. As a qualitative researcher, I assume that my life experiences, assumptions, and relationship to the study affect any investigation. As such, I share them for the reader's consideration. I taught middle school science before pursuing a Ph.D. in education. I am interested in the relationship between education, health, and social justice. Based on experiences as a student and an educator, I believe that critical social analysis is a key social justice pedagogy. When I was introduced to TASH by a colleague, I wanted to understand learning environments that supported health equity. These interests aligned with TASH's advertised philosophy and aims (PPSLR, 2016). I attended two TASH meetings prior to initiating the study. The group initially struck me as youth-centered, with Judy as a safe and affirming leadership presence. Despite my experience working with youth, I was impressed by the self-initiated and program-supported advocacy experiences youth conveyed. I spoke to several program alumni who eagerly shared TASH's impact on their careers and continued advocacy. These observations framed my thinking as I studied how TASH worked, attending to what resonated with former participants into adulthood.

Findings

Overview of findings. The findings are divided into three sections relevant to understanding TASH advocacy. First, I provide an overview of program context and structure based on interviews with program coordinator, Judy. Second, I explore how TASH works in terms of a rights-based approach to learning environment and pedagogy (Berglas et al., 2014). Judy and social justice educator Charisse contribute to this explanation. In the third section, I explore the meaning of TASH advocacy through the

perspectives of former TASH participants. In the discussion, I draw parallels between what mattered to them and the program conception described by adult leaders.

TASH context In 2000, the PPSLR board set out to create a comprehensive sex education program for teens that could also address political constraints on sex education affecting youth broadly. Teen Advocates for Sexual Health (TASH) would provide a place where teens could participate in rights-based sexual health advocacy. Although all participating teens would receive sex education, the board hoped some teens might continue advocacy into adulthood. PPSLR hired veteran youth development professional (YDP), Judy Lipsitz, as program coordinator. Judy took the job in part because of her growing awareness of the teens' "lack of knowledge about their own bodies and their own sexuality." To inform recruitment efforts and program design, Judy assembled a community panel made up of parents, teens, counselors, educators, and PPSLR staff.

The panel agreed that when it comes to sexual health, "every teen is at risk, it's just the level of risk." Youth are denied information, uniting them regardless of race, class, or schooling experiences. Therefore, Judy's recruitment efforts included a wide cross-section of St. Louis area high schools. When she contacted teachers from previous youth work, she was surprised to be "turned away." Planned Parenthood became a "barrier" to reaching interested teens. In general, she has had more success communicating with school counselors. In 2001, TASH held its first meeting with 13 teens. From there, the program expanded via word of mouth. Judy says, "the greatest recruiters are the teens themselves." Today, membership averages 30-40 students from St. Louis area high schools. All youth have parental permission to participate. The group is highly diverse in terms of race, class, gender identity, and sexuality. Once involved,

teens may remain active throughout high school for up to four years.

Judy is largely responsible for the design and implementation of TASH. She provides program continuity by maintaining contact with the future, current, and past members. Of her role, she says, “I am responsible for the organization of the meeting down to the last chip that we serve.” That being said, PPSLR supports these efforts and those described in the following section in terms of human and financial resources. PPSLR commits expertise from multiple departments in service of TASH’s twin aims of sex education and advocacy. This allows Judy to invite representatives of education and political departments to lead sessions on specific topics. Employees of the education department as well as volunteer educators provide comprehensive sex education and addressees related topics including relationships, sexuality, gender identity, and notions of masculinity and femininity. The political department leads sessions on reproductive rights legislation and provides trainings on activism (e.g., how to lobby at the state legislature). Charisse Jackson, former Vice President of Education and Diversity, often joined TASH to facilitate social justice sessions during her tenure. In terms of financial support, PPSLR funds provide food at every meeting. PPSLR attends to program access by offering bus passes for teens with transportation issues. Annually, the affiliate sends a select number of youth to a national conference. Finally, PPSLR provides additional advocacy and organizing opportunities for interested teens through its political department.

How TASH works: Head, heart, and feet. After a recent retreat, Judy described how TASHers reflected on the day’s learning,

they're given pieces of paper that have 'head, heart, and feet,' and the head means 'what did I learn today?' the heart is, 'how am I feeling?' and the feet is 'what action I want to take,' and, I would say that at least 50-60% of them said, I 'felt a sense of empowerment to do something,

This simple activity exemplifies TASH's approach to advocacy. In this section, I use the framework of head, heart, and feet to examine how TASH expands a rights-based educational approach, empowering youth to action.

Head. Given the political climate in Missouri, many youth join the program with little or no formal sex education. Therefore, providing medically-accurate sex education is one of the top priorities in TASH.

Judy invites trained PPSLR sex educators to facilitate sessions. Like other rights-based programs, TASH utilizes a broad sex education curriculum that includes gender identity, sexual orientation, and healthy relationships in addition to topics like preventing pregnancy and STDs. TASH adapts Advocates for Youth's (2016) rights-based framework of sexual health advocacy,

TASH creates, develops, plans and implements programs that move toward a greater understanding and appreciation of healthy sexuality based on teen rights, respect and responsibility. TASH teaches/trains teens about sexual health and sexuality and how to be advocates in their communities (PPSLR, 2016)

Judy adds, "we feel that denying those rights is unjust and that's our base for how we work with students at every single meeting."

TASH seeks not only to educate but to support the development of reproductive advocates and activists. Taking up the "R" in Responsibility, TASH deviates from rights-

based models described elsewhere as it lays the educational foundation for political action (Berglas et al., 2014). In providing members the tools to become advocates, TASH invites trained community organizers from PPSLR's political department to lead sessions on reproductive rights legislation and advocacy. Key issues are school-based comprehensive sex education, teen dating violence, and inclusive school climate. Youth might learn about how to testify in front of the state legislature, collect petitions, or speak to their local school board. Youth become versed in the political process and current reproductive health legislation. Social justice educator Charisse characterizes this portion of TASH as, "better than civics class."

TASH has always been social justice-oriented, particularly in reference to disparities in sex education and healthcare access. With contributions from Charisse, these lessons have become a formalized part of curricula. TASHers have critical conversations about how reproductive rights issues intersect race and class within frameworks of privilege and oppression. As such, TASH aims to help students uncover assumptions and critique messages from society, peers, and parents. These conversations are often challenging but TASH views discomfort was an integral part of learning. Charisse would encourage TASHers,

your best learning comes on the other side of your discomfort, so, if you an work your way, if you get to space of where you're uncomfortable, and you can push it, your learning's right there, but if you retreat and try to get into a comfortable space, then you're not pushing yourself to learn anything

An intersectional approach to the anti-oppression curriculum connects other "isms" to sexual health access. Judy emphasizes, "social justice is about intersectionality, meaning

that fighting for access to sexual health is also fighting for um against racial discrimination because so many that's tied up with access.”

In TASH, youth are asked to critically reflect upon their learnings in sexual health, political system knowledge, and social justice. Judy asserts that TASH is an environment where, “we don't tell you what to think...we put you in an atmosphere where you are challenged to think.” According to existing scholarship, rights-based programs tend to engage youth in critical in terms of their own sexuality or sexual behavior (Berglas et al., 2014). Like much of TASH pedagogy, critical thinking lays the groundwork for awareness beyond themselves. Charisse summarizes, “the overall goal is for them to be able to get out and critically think and participate in this world with open eyes, and a different awareness.” As such, TASH reflections are explicitly tied to action. Judy views TASHers as “messengers” for sexual health in their community, developing “talking points” and “take aways” at the end of each event. Teens are asked, “what can you do about it?” For example, Judy and the other facilitators encourage youth to advocate for enthusiastic consent,

let's say we have a conversation, a whole session focused on “what do we mean by enthusiastic consent in a sexual relationship?” We turn to them, and they've gained enough knowledge that we say, “learning leaves this room, names and stories don't," we always encourage them, “go home, talk to your family, talk to your friends, talk about the issues, get them talking, get them asking questions”

Heart.

I appreciate so much the challenges they face and realizing that um all these young people want is to be their authentic selves, and they just want to be respected and embraced as their authentic selves (Judy, Interview 2)

According to (Berglas et al., 2014), rights-based programs strive to be participatory or youth-centered. The aim of these approaches is to support critical reflection and real-world connections. As an advocacy program, the TASH learning environment empowers participants beyond reflection to action. To do this, TASH supports the emotional and psychological well-being of youth, empowering them in program advocacy and beyond. As they become advocates, youth must believe they can make a difference. To Judy, empowerment could be “just general sense of ‘hey, I can do that,’ or the courage to say ‘I want to try and do it and that maybe there’ll be people out there that’ll listen to me.’” Although Judy relies on PPSLR “expert” collaboration for educational and political components, her personal mission lies in the empowering TASH community. She sees herself as “trying to debunk the myth of teen apathy.” Culturally, she points to adultist cultural assumptions that “all (teens) care about is their social life and nothing else.” Judy has found just the opposite, stating, “after being around so many youth and seeing the great capacity they have to offer and their passion.” Therefore, much of this empowerment work counters the effects of societal adultism on how teens see themselves. Judy’s youth empowerment orientation is a key influence in TASH. According to Charisse, “(Judy) had a big vision, you know, for those young people, and her vision was realized every time.”

In support of empowerment, Judy and the other adult leaders share power with youth. Importantly, they communicate this power dynamic explicitly. Charisse provides an example of the language used,

I think we let them know in the beginning of the process that this is gonna be your organization and not ours, um, so, it's that old saying that, youth are our future leaders, and Judy and I used to say, "no, they're our leaders right now,"

Additionally, adult leaders facilitate dialogue which is flexible in meeting student needs. For example, a conversation may shift topic based on student interests despite adult agendas. Judy says, "we want them to know their voices are heard, and we're not just dismissing, and we're so task-oriented." TASH elicits student feedback on an ongoing basis via debriefing sessions, surveys, and evaluations. Student inputs inform what topics and issues are addressed. Youth have the opportunity to lead portions of meetings and discussions on issues of personal interest. Recently, a subset of TASHers formed the Teen Political Action Committee (TPAC) to further TASH's political organizing efforts. In particular, Judy believes returning students are most involved and have leadership opportunities. They facilitate meetings, mentor new people, and attend national conferences. In short, Charisse says, "we (adults) stepped out and let them take agency over their own process."

Sharing power is only one aspect of TASH's empowering environment. Learning and advocacy occur within the safety of the TASH community. As mentioned previously, TASH views discomfort as a part of learning. However, TASHers learn become aware of their own feelings, distinguishing discomfort from feeling unsafe, unable to learn, or shut-down. In this way, TASHers share responsibility for their own emotional safety and

are empowered to take action if they feel unsafe. TASHers may intervene in the discussion, temporarily leave the space, or discuss the issue with an adult leader.

For challenging discussions to occur, trust must be present within the community. According to Charisse, “when you learn things together, and you watch people take risks together, it’s pretty bonding.” She explains that trust was also based on the fact that “everybody was there for pretty much the same reason...to learn about sexual health.” Formal and informal community building occurs. For example, TASHers observe community norms such as the use of “oops” and “ouch” during discussion. TASH uses a large portion of its budget to provide food prior to each meeting. To Judy, this time is significant in that it,

creates a real social bond and a way to get to know each other and that's to me another benefit of the program is that young people are exposed to people very different from them in their little sheltered community where they live, and I think it's been a you know, I think it opens their eyes to “well not everybody lives like I do.”

The adult leaders cultivate trusting relationships with the teens. For Charisse, Judy’s relationship with youth is a “very special gift.” She suspects the teens feel “(Judy) accepts me for who I am, in fact encourages me to be who I am.” Charisse describes Judy’s dedication,

she gives and gives and gives and gives and gives and gives and gives and cares and cares and loves and loves and supports and supports and, just driven, driven, um, there’s not, I haven’t seen anything that she wouldn’t do for any of those TASH students, whether they’ve out of TASH 10, 15 years or whether they’re

just coming in the door, she's just that dedicated

Judy and Charisse position themselves as co-learners within the space. Charisse reflects, "they gave me all kinds of joy and learning," and "I really miss being in that space with them while we were learning together." Judy communicates this often to the teens,

I've learned a lot and I think the teens themselves have helped me. I always say to them "you make me a better person" um, they've opened my eyes to the many issues that they're dealing with, they're tremendous

Fees. Given the educational and socioemotional support of the TASH community, students are empowered become messengers and activists for sexual education and reproductive rights within their schools and communities. According to Charisse, advocacy in TASH occurred on three levels. It "meant advocacy in a concrete, legislative type of way, uh where they go to lobby, where they participate in ...making sure people got called on bills, and all those concrete legislative pieces that they participated in." She connects these activities back to TASH learning, asserting, "there was something legislative every TASH meeting...it kept them involved in politics, it kept them involved in seeing how the political process worked, so that they were able to effectively advocate, um, for reproductive rights and health." Second, "they were advocates in their schools, so when they left TASH, they went out and advocated...they'd go to the principal or the counselor or whoever to make a case for...comprehensive sex education in their schools." She again attributes this kind of advocacy to TASH political education, "(teens) were very much trained, you know, we would say, you know, if you see an opening, you know, formally, form some sort of committee to go and advocate for something in your

school, do it, you know, we stand behind you.” Third, “(TASHers) would be the go-to people around accurate sex education, for their non-TASH peers.”

In addition to the levels brought forward by Charisse, it’s noteworthy that not all of these activities were formally organized by TASH. For example, TASH organizes trips providing teens the opportunity to lobby on behalf of reproductive rights at the state legislature. TASH also supports outreach activities such as tabling at community events and volunteering at St. Louis’ gay pride festival. TASHers have the option of organizing and campaigning with PPSLR’s political department. However, much of TASH advocacy occurs outside of the program. This makes sense given the TASH practice of reflection and asking, “what can I do?” This happens as youth testify before their own school boards, advocating for comprehensive sex education. Informally, students may initiate discussions sexual health and reproductive rights with family and peers. Consistent with other elements of the learning environment, TASH provides support and opportunity. TASHers chose when and how to participate.

The examples above illustrate the way in which the TASH environment might give TASHers the “sense of empowerment to do something,” as Judy puts it. However, she sees the relationship between action and empowerment as reciprocal.

as they continue to be part of TASH, and I think that they begin to realize that they can make a difference. I think through the work that we do politically, they realize that they may not have a vote, but they have a voice, and that they can influence public policy by the actions they’re taking, so I think that it is something that does become part of who they are

For Judy, this internalization of the TASH mission stays with teens beyond program participation. It signals the development of a “deep sense of social responsibility” she has recognized in youth leaders throughout her career. Similarly, Charisse sees the value of youth participation for future political empowerment. She might tell TASHers, “just go down to the capitol, that’s your place.” She adds, when you learn (the political process) at an early age, they can be very effective in the future.”

Meaning of TASH advocacy. As mentioned previously, the sample of participants in the present study is not assumed to be representative of all TASH youth. As they are still in contact with TASH, they may have been more invested in TASH than the average participant. Heather, former TASHer and current volunteer sex educator, describes these differences in engagement as three groups. She prefaces her statement by asserting that participation differences are not hierarchical. First, “you’ve got the few who are there for the food and the free condoms, which whatevs, you’re hungry and you need some condoms.” The second group is “probably the majority, who think that TASH is really cool and think it’s fun to talk about sex and learn about stuff, and fancy themselves as affecting political change...but at the end of the day they, that’s not what’s going to be the guiding force in their life.” The third group are “the few who...TASH is the thing that makes their heart beat, and I would count myself as one of those.” The majority of the reflections below fit best into this final category.

Aubrey.

TASH means to me, empowering youth and giving them the information to advocate for those who aren’t able to be empowered, um, so, not only being

empowered themselves, but giving them the tools and resources to go advocate for those who don't have that in hopes that all youth would have that, one day

When Aubrey was a high school freshman, she became sexually active. However, she had received no formal sex education in her Catholic schooling. Her father, a Planned Parenthood board member, dropped her off at a TASH meeting with the directive to “ask for Judy.” Aubrey reflects, “(my parents) weren’t ready to have those conversations with me yet but knew I needed to hear them.” Despite being “thrown in” to TASH, Aubrey knew immediately she wanted to stay. Her TASH peers seemed “well-versed and mature and like they could make a difference.” She wondered, “where am I?” with sex being discussed so openly. Aubrey was struck that an adult, Judy, was not judging the conversation about sex. Judy was the “empowerment push” for the group, believing in what young people can do despite other adults dismissing them.

In youth-centered discussions, facilitators would ask challenging questions to help youth connect content to their advocacy efforts outside of the space. Aubrey was very involved in TASH advocacy at different levels. Formally, she attended in lobby days and testified in front of a Missouri comprehensive sex education panel. Within the community, she acted in the teen dating violence skits written by TASHers. Notably, publicity related to this event led to Aubrey losing a leadership position within her Catholic high school. Within her school, she became a “go to person,” for sexual health, distributing condoms and dental dams from her locker and accompanying peers to Planned Parenthood. In reference to peer advocacy, Aubrey says, “it felt empowering to be a resource.”

Before TASH, Aubrey and her family assumed she would become a pharmacist. She pursued this trajectory into college but realized she was “missing something.” TASH had helped her find her passion for sexual health, access, and comprehensive sex education. After an internship at the CDC, Aubrey changed course and pursue public health. While working toward her MPH, Aubrey started her own chapter of TASH with support from Judy in a southern U.S. city. She wanted others to have the same experiences because it helped her. Today, she works on a U.S. national social media campaign for sexual minority youth. Her preferred focus is adolescent reproductive health. Someday, she hopes to earn her doctorate in women, gender, and sexuality studies. She also aspires to open her own clinic/sex center for “everything sexual.” Aspects of her personal mission align closely with TASH’s. Aubrey would like “to see increased access, that adolescents actually get access to information so they can make an informed decision, and access to health centers where they feel comfortable.” She would also like youth to feel empowered to use the knowledge, “that they do have control over their bodies and the decisions and choices that they want to make, and hopefully with the information, from the access, they get to the knowledge that they do.”

When reflecting on TASH’s impact on her, Aubrey says, “(it) has been so influential in my life, you know, it’s like the beginning of who I am really, as far as like the issues that matter to me. Aubrey asserts that it creates “change agents and game changers.” It supports “early, lasting empowerment.” TASH is a safe space with no stigma or discrimination where youth learn valuable information.

Heather.

TASH was the perfect combination of the knowledge I needed, the loving mother Judy who makes you feel amazing, and the peers that cared and asked hard questions

As a teen, Heather was figuring out who she was, “just floating through the world.” Active in church, she privately questioned the worldview she was “programmed to believe.” When a friend showed her a TASH flyer, Heather decided to join as a fun way to get community service hours required by her high school. She also suspected it might “piss off” her Catholic parents. Heather received no formal sex education and lacked basic anatomic awareness. She illustrates this pointedly, saying “I literally did not know how many holes my genitals had, and so I joined TASH.” Generally, she sought an experience to help her make sense of her world.

At her first TASH meeting, Heather realized immediately that it was the place for her. Heather’s “mind was blown” and her “bubbles were popped.” She witnessed peers thoughtfully discussing the complexities of reproductive issues, challenging her assumptions. TASH changed the way she thought dialogue worked by asking open-ended questions and making real world connections. She thought, “the universe sent me the opportunity to find people who would help me learn how to think.” Moreover, Heather found a home. Judy and the facilitators made her want to be there and feel valued. Judy, specifically, “is love” and “makes you feel amazing.”

Although Heather was initially overwhelmed by information volume and culture shock, she emerged as a vocal leader. She, “just wanted to talk about sexual health advocacy all the time.” Heather participated in lobby days, performed in the teen dating

violence play, and lobbied for comprehensive sex education in her school district.

Heather “heavily recruited” new TASHers from her high school. Outside of TASH, she founded a chapter of Spiritual Youth for Reproductive Freedom and engaged in abortion clinic counter-protesting.

TASH was a “big determining factor of everything” for Heather. Participation fostered a knowledge and passion that began a “lineage of reproductive justice work.” Heather’s family expected that she would pursue medicine in college. While Heather began as a “pre-med” wanting to know about anatomy, she ultimately cared about systemic health change. Heather relates her TASH experience to her “freeing and terrifying” decision to pursue social work,

and I knew that I cared about health and reproduction and that those things were really critical to how people got to live their lives, I knew that, how different my life was when I didn't have any understanding, and didn't feel control over my own reproduction and what it felt like when I did have that, so, I mean that led me to be a health social work major.

Heather later earned an MSW and currently works for a local nonprofit that addresses the effects of toxic stress and trauma on well-being. Additionally, she is a TASH volunteer sex educator. Heather identifies with youth who are the least knowledgeable, adjusting her instruction to meet their needs. A committed advocate, she hopes she “never stops being invested in knowledge about the world and taking action.” Heather’s advocacy centers around sharing information. She also credits TASH with encouraging her to staying engaged with her electeds and legislation. Heather

summarizes TASH's impact on her, "you've got the few who, like, TASH is the thing that makes their heart beat, and I would count myself as one of those."

Michael. When Michael joined TASH, he was lacking knowledge but "open" and "ready to learn" about social justice. He had a general interest in human rights but considered himself "politically minded" rather than "politically active." He asserts, "at that age you can't really be politically active unless you're on a campaign or out on the streets protesting." He describes himself as a sheltered and comfortable, white middle-class male. Michael was introduced to TASH by a "senior I had a crush on." His brother's girlfriend was also a member.

Michael immediately liked the TASH community, appreciating the "thoughtful" and "genuine" conversations occurring. In this space, he discovered his love of having conversations about social issues. Michael became increasingly aware of social issues and his own privilege through Charisse's anti-oppression curriculum,

(it) really gave me good knowledge on something I, um, as I said I'm middle class white guy, I'm not like educated in the, especially then I was uneducated in the struggles that a black female will have in the same world that I am existing

These challenging lessons were embedded within TASH community that was "a 100% safe space where difficult conversations can be held.

During TASH, Michael became a better communicator, a better listener to the diverse perspectives in the community. These dispositions developed as he evolved into an "active community member" with a "strong voice." He began having conversations with peers who thought of him as a "trusted member" of the community in regard to sex education and healthcare access. Michael considers this kind of work to be the "core" of

TASH. The philosophy was, “you are educated, go out and educate the community.” Additionally, Michael participated in more formal TASH opportunities. He attended a national conference and advocated at the state level. Michael spoke to the value of sex education within a face-to-face community of peers. He once told a state congressman, “before TASH I used Wikipedia and Google, and I think that’s unacceptable, and this is why I love TASH.”

Michael continued to seek out those conversations formally and informally, “all because of TASH.” He chose to major in human studies and has found his TASH knowledge and skills helpful. TASH gave him a “base knowledge” so he was not “dumfounded” in his coursework. Michael is considering combining human studies with his previous interest in environmental issues in “advocacy-based,” “people-based” work. Michael defines an advocate as,

someone who is knowledgeable about whatever situation and is able to have these important conversations, and challenge people who would rather not think about it or who would rather be in a position of opposition to whatever you’re talking about

His own advocate identity aligns, as he seeks to connect those with diverse perspectives on social issues, engaging others in challenging conversations. Michael’s advocacy has translated into a variety of contexts, including an urban beautification project to paint murals on St. Louis dumpsters. He viewed the blight of unused dumpsters as a “disconnect” between the community and city property. The project united diverse constituencies for the betterment of the city. He summarizes TASH’s impact on him, saying,

I think that it's sometimes hard to give credit to everything, or to give every piece of credit to one thing, but TASH is one of these things where it's almost an exception to that, it really does, it is a fundamental piece of people's growing up if they participate

Taylor.

I don't think my politics would be the way they are without having done TASH, I don't think, like I would be the person that I am, without having done TASH.

In Taylor's family, doing political work for certain causes was the norm. Taylor worked for reproductive justice alongside her mother, a teacher and Planned Parenthood activist. She had "rigid" career plans that included working on campaigns or being a press secretary. As a teen, she was "eternally frustrated" that adults were not taking her political ambitions seriously. She suspected adults regarded her as nothing more than "sort of cute and maybe well-read for a child." Hence, she was drawn to TASH's political component rather than the sex education. Taylor summarizes her motivation for joining,

I just sort of felt like I wanted a community of peers who are like trying to do similar things or like talking about similar things, um, and TASH was just an organized way for me to do reproductive justice sort of work.

In TASH, Taylor was taken seriously. With support from TASH peers and adults, she emerged as a leader. She served on the national Planned Parenthood youth advisory board and created a new community outreach event, Loop Day. Taylor acted as political liaison between the affiliate's political department and TASH. She advocated for comprehensive sex education at with her school district. Appreciating that TASH adults spent time developing her leadership skills, she designed ways to do the same for others.

As an informal peer advocate, she ran an “underground condom ring,” to ensure her peers had access to contraception. Her well-stocked TASH binder became a sex education resource for peers fearful of parental Internet monitoring.

Taylor was praised for her political work, which “solidified” her career plan while in TASH. However, TASH expanded her ideas of “worlds that existed” in terms of possible careers. She was first introduced to “people they call organizers,” foreshadowing her future job. Charisse Jackson’s lessons on power analysis provided political explanations for her existing feelings. As her politics shifted radically left, she applied her learnings beyond TASH. She views TASH as a “gateway space” to the things beyond. It was “very formative” in figuring out what she wanted to do. This process continued into college where she surrounded herself with peers interested in systems of oppression and reproductive justice.

Recently, Taylor graduated from college and began working as a reproductive justice grassroots organizer. Politically, she made her way to the “far left flank” of the movement. This distances Taylor from Planned Parenthood, which she critiques for assuming a moderate, defensive position. Of this tension, she says, “it’s a really weird space to be in to challenging the folks that mentored you.” Still, her TASH experience aided this new trajectory. Taylor met her current supervisor, a former Planned Parenthood political staffer, as a TASH youth. Today, leftist thinking and power analysis begun in TASH inform her organizing. Importantly, Taylor qualifies TASH influence on her. She attributes some of her life changes to normal development. In sum, TASH was the right space at the right time for her.

Pat.

it's exciting to be at that age and being allowed to talk about sex, because you're not any other time, and that's really about it

Pat joined TASH in order to spend more time with a girl she was interested in. Pat took health class online through her high school, and it had no memorable sex education component. She was particularly committed to her church. She also worked on the “very poorly run” John Kerry presidential campaign. Pat “always had strong opinions on various issues,” including being decisively prochoice.

Of her involvement with TASH, Pat says, “I’m the type of person who if I’m doing something, I’m doing it.” Pat “did everything” in TASH including national conference attendance, advocacy at the state level, and lobbying for comprehensive sex education curricula within her school district. She wrote and acted in the teen dating violence play. In her school, she distributed condoms and discussed issues with peers. During TASH discussions, facilitators prepared youth for challenging real world discussions with adults. TASHers were “trying to say to adults that yeah, we're not adults, but guess what, these are important issues and just because it makes you uncomfy doesn't make it not real.” In summers, Pat worked with Planned Parenthood’s political department doing petition data entry.

Before TASH, Pat had considered careers in oboe and ministry. Pat credits TASH for sparking her academic interests. According to Pat, “TASH really got me reading” in queer theory. In college, Pat majored in gender studies and obtained certificates in LGBT studies and African American studies. During a period of post-college unemployment, Pat again volunteered with Planned Parenthood’s political department doing data entry,

petitioning, and phone banking. During this time, Pat also published two letters to the editor regarding reproductive rights. Ultimately, the experience led to Pat being hired as the affiliate's health center assistant.

Pat expresses ambivalence about TASH's impact on her. She recognizes TASH's influence on her formal life course,

TASH is the main reason why I was a women's studies major in college and is the main reason why I'm now working at Planned Parenthood, so not trying to say like it's the worst thing in the world but it was a big part of my life, yes

Pat credits TASH with building upon her existing public speaking skills, particularly in the area of media speaking. However, she maintains that other organizations would have had a similar impact, "when I was in TASH, like it was, like it was a cool thing to do, but I'm sure I would've felt the same way about any similar community organization."

Unlike the other participants, her politics remained unchanged. Pat asserts, "I've always had the opinions I've had." Pat was frustrated with programmatic elements of TASH. Apologizing for her criticism, she describes TASH as "disjointed" and "all over the place." It is difficult to be "all these things all at once," including peer to peer, lobbying, dating violence, and media literacy. Meetings left Pat wondering, "what did I accomplish today?"

Kayla.

the education part of it really came for me from TASH, because I saw first-hand how powerful it was just to give people correct information, just that, in and of itself is such an empowering tool, and I think that harnessing that could really make waves in lessening domestic violence

While watching the *Daily Show* one night, Kayla reached a tipping point in her anger at the media's legitimizing portrayal of rape. She herself had been in an emotionally and sexually abusive relationship prior to TASH but failed to recognize it as such. She had been homeschooled, and she did not see how the sex education provided by her mother related to her. At the time, she was having symptoms of PTSD and becoming socially isolated. Kayla appreciated Planned Parenthood's work and marched with them on occasion. She was aware of TASH but did not join due to extracurricular conflicts. I "still did not have the time but I have to make the time, this is important," This incident prompted Kayla to hand-deliver her application to Judy. She walked into the first meeting knowing her "life would be changed."

In TASH, Kayla participated in comprehensive sex education. Lessons on healthy relationships and self-acceptance resonated. During a discussion on enthusiastic consent, Kayla realized she had been raped. She reflects on the lasting impact of this moment,

I consider TASH to be a life-saving community for me because without them, I don't think I would've realized that what was happening to me was in fact abuse, I would not have been able to connect those things without TASH.

The TASH staff referred her to outside mental health treatment. Soon, Kayla became a strong advocate within the group regarding youth domestic violence. The political and social justice portions of TASH also influenced Kayla. With subcommittee Teen Political Action Committee (TPAC), Kayla helped expand TASH's organizing efforts and prepared other youth for events. Charisse Jackson's anti-oppression curricula helped Kayla understand of access issues surrounding reproductive health. With an awareness

beyond herself, she became cognizant of how to use her privilege as a cis-gender white woman.

Before TASH, Kayla planned to become a professional dancer. Notably, Kayla participated in a Planned Parenthood women's filibuster at the state capitol to oppose an extension to the mandatory waiting period for abortions. She credits this event as a major "turning point" in her decision to pursue political activism and public health,

Dancing with something I did for myself, and I didn't feel like I could in good conscience do that for the rest of my life when there were so many people who need help, and there is so much room for change, and we have such a dire need for people to be creating a change, and so I think maybe in another life I would still be a performer, but in this one I just feel like I have a very clear calling, if you will, and TASH is absolutely the reason I found that, I would not have been able to make that decision without them.

Today, Kayla is a college sophomore continuing to "stand up in the face of injustice" in venues including the college lecture hall and social media. Kayla's father once expressed concern about her formal association with Planned Parenthood. Now, Kayla maintains it is "the most important thing on my resume," as she pursues a double major in social work and gender, women's, and sexuality studies. Although a catalyst for career change was "macro" work at the state level, she prefers "micro" level work based on relationships and community. At this point, Kayla asserts, "TASH is part of who I am." Kayla's current focus is youth preventative education on domestic violence. In the introductory quote to this section, Kayla connects TASH's mission to her own.

Discussion

Though in-depth interviews, the present study described the functioning of a rights-based sex education program. An analysis of in-depth interviews addressed the following questions: How does youth advocacy occur within a rights-based sex education program? What do advocacy experiences mean to former participants? On a program-level, I have represented the TASH learning environment across three interdependent domains: head (education needs), heart (socioemotional needs), and feet (advocacy/action). Education is foundational to the program's action component. TASH provides rights-based sex education with critical reflection that connects learning to intended action. TASH offers political training, equipping TASHers with the skills to advocate formally and informally. The heart of TASH is its emotionally safe and empowering community. Program coordinator Judy makes it her mission to counter adultist stereotypes about teen apathy. She hopes youth come to believe, as she does, that they are "leaders today." In embodying this stance, adult leaders share power with youth, positioning themselves as co-learners and eliciting youth feedback to inform meetings. Moreover, adult leaders allow TASHers to navigate uncomfortable conversations with little intervention. TASHers are individually and collectively responsible for maintaining the safety of the community. Observance of community norms and bonding over food also strengthen social bonds.

Former youth participants in TASH provided perspectives on what mattered most in the learning environment. When asked about their TASH experience, responses articulate across the head, heart, and feet domains. For example, Heather, Kayla, and Aubrey speak to the value of the sex ed knowledge in their personal and professional lives. Michael and Taylor emphasize how critical social analysis continues to inform their

thinking. Participants mention feeling valued, taken seriously, and accepted in the TASH space. Several described it as an empowering learning environment. Much of the credit for this safety goes to Judy. Pat, Kayla, and Aubrey cite TASH as helping them obtain jobs and internships, highlighting its resume and skill building potential. While in TASH, they participated advocacy of many levels and types. Today, they share a sustained commitment to issues relating to sexual health, comprehensive sex education, reproductive justice, and social justice broadly.

While useful in terms of the “big picture,” the categories head, heart, and feet proved limiting in representing meaning for individual participants in three ways. First, their stories overlap interdependent domains, and TASHers recognize its complexity. For example, Heather, Kayla, and Aubrey found the combination of knowledge and empowerment to be meaningful while Michael emphasized knowledge and community. Pat pointed to sex ed knowledge and political training. This is also not to say that the other categories were not meaningful. They were certainly all active in the organization. Second, the unique life histories of individual participants influence experiences and reflections. For example, Kayla is the only participant to characterize TASH as a “life-saving” space. This follows from her life history of trauma from domestic violence. On a third and related note, participants had many outside influences on their life trajectories apart from TASH. These findings do not indicate that TASH caused them to become adult advocates. It was but one meaningful factor alongside family, religious, school, and other CBOs.

This study adds to what is known about the potential of rights-based sex education programs to support youth civic engagement in two ways. 1) It deepens our

understanding of the experiences of youth in rights-based programs (Berglas, Angulo-Olaiz, et al., 2014, 2014; Constantine et al., 2015). The present study balances program-level perspectives with participant experiences to create a fuller representation of program processes and meaning. Additionally, the use of reflective interviews allowed discernment what mattered most to TASHers years after participation. 2) The study is the first to apply a youth-organizing lens to explore similar processes within a rights-based sex education context. As such, it contributes to a youth organizing literature focused on how civic engagement adolescence supports lasting personal and sociopolitical development (Conner, 2014; Flanagan, 2013; Terriquez, 2015). Taken together, these findings move toward a typology of rights-based sex education that incorporates action. This kind of model has implications on two levels. First, provides rights-based sex education that benefits participants. Second, it works toward the sexual and reproductive rights of all, an international priority under the umbrella of human rights (UNESCO, 2009; WHO, 2010). Specifically, IPPF (2010) calls for youth engagement and capacity building in this regard.

The empowering education and capacity building described here cannot occur without institutional support. In this case, PPSLR provided key material and human resources supporting TASH in head, heart, and feet. The expertise from the affiliate's political and education departments is fundamental to the structure of TASH. PPSLR supports community-building by funding food, transportation to meetings, and retreats. Even with this financial support, transportation continues to be a barrier in reaching youth of diverse backgrounds and identities in St. Louis region. Importantly, the affiliate makes social action opportunities available to youth outside of TASH time, e.g., petitioning,

campaign participation, community organizing. This reflective study design highlighted these opportunities as a form of social capital, consistent with emerging scholarship on participation in youth programs (Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005). TASH and Planned Parenthood networks helped several participants obtain internships and jobs related to their continued commitments begun in TASH.

Importantly, PPSLR chose to hire a YDP in Judy rather than sex educator to coordinate TASH. She is also a 70-year-old part-time employee who has remained with the program despite turnover in other departments. This alone provides continuity and preserves institutional memory, an issue that threatens the sustainability of youth programs within many CBOs (Lewis-Charp, Yu, Sengouvanh, & Lacoë, 2003). While Judy has become increasingly versed in sex education and political issues relevant to TASH, her role is not to formally educate. The title “program coordinator” is accurate but also insufficient. Aubrey’s description of Judy as the “heart” and “empowerment push” of TASH is telling. Returning to the head, heart, feet framework, YDPs like Judy play a critical role in creating the safe, empowering environment that supports learning and advocacy. In a general sense, sex education scholars have recognized the potential YDPs within CBOs to provide sex education and resources (Gupta et al., 2015; McCarthy et al., 2015). Taken together, these studies and the present work underscore the importance of a developmentally-oriented “heart” in community-based sex education. For rights-based programs like TASH, the heart and the head empowering youth advocates in interdependent ways.

Several areas of future research would deepen our current understand of rights-based programming. 1) As this study focused on the advocacy component of TASH, the

sex education went largely unexplored. Although interview questions did not directly address the impact of the sex education within this model, many participants brought it forward. Several found the sex education personally empowering, and this fueled their advocacy going forward. This aspect of head, heart, and feet is worth pursuing. 2) The advocacy in TASH was largely based on the community and state levels in reference to issues of local relevance. Certainly, the sociopolitical realities of any context would dictate program's advocacy focus. This document or the TASH manual are context-bound. I encourage scholarship about attending to how context and place influence program design and implementation. 3) The present study profiled TASHers who became life-long advocates. As Heather mentioned, this is not the case for all TASHers and it is not an expectation. Flexible participation is the program's ethos: TASHers described it as an "open-ended" space where youth are offered information to make their own choices. Still, it is important to further explore the interaction between program and individual factors. Questions remain such as: who does and does not become an advocate after participating in a rights-based advocacy program? Who becomes an advocate after participating in other kinds of sex education programs?

Conclusion

These findings expand possibilities for incorporating advocacy into rights-based sex education. Former teen advocates became socially responsible adults. To this point, I have outlined key elements of this typology and challenges to implementation. Some final insights seem worth sharing as we consider integrating action into rights-based programs. Certainly, these findings hold great potential for "mobilizing" youth to join us in the fight for reproductive justice. In doing this, we run the risk of inadvertently

imposing our beliefs on youth, an injustice of its own. However, a holistic approach to learning modeled in TASH, one addressing head, heart, and feet, guards against imposition of our values and encourages critical questioning. That is, youth are empowered *to decide* as much as they are empowered *to become* advocates.

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Chapter 3: Becoming change agents: Empowerment within and beyond a youth organizing group

Key words

empowerment civic engagement sexual education
youth development sociopolitical development social justice education

Abstract

Within U.S. community-based organizations, youth organizing groups (YOGs) support youth civic engagement around relevant sociopolitical issues. Given the potential personal and societal benefits of YOG participation, it is important to understand how organizations support participant outcomes. The present study explores how YOG experiences influenced a specific participant outcome, sociopolitical development, across organizational and individual levels of empowerment. Former YOG participants and adult leaders were interviewed using a phenomenologically-based approach. A conceptual model demonstrates the influence of YOG organizational-level empowering processes (e.g., critically-oriented education, community, and civic engagement) on participant empowerment outcomes (e.g., political efficacy, critical awareness, and participatory behaviors). This YOG empowerment influenced career-decision-making, an example of sociopolitical development, as participants (1) translated YOG interests into career paths, (2) sought to empower others as the YOG empowered them, and (3) drew upon YOG social and human capital. As civic engagement opportunities, YOGs have the potential to support youth empowerment that is generative, benefitting society as well as participants themselves. Implications for YOG scholars and programmers are provided.

Introduction

In 2016, the United Nations (UN) devoted its *World youth report* to youth civic engagement and the “right of children and young people to have their voices heard” (p. 15). The UN called for global youth to engage in relevant issues including unemployment, peacekeeping, and political representation. The UN urged governmental and community action in expanding opportunities for youth civic engagement, citing both individual and community benefits of participation.

In the U.S., civic engagement has been recognized as fundamental to democracy (Dewey, 1916) and key in the transition to adulthood (Erikson, 1968). Historically, U.S. schools, community organizations, and other institutions offer formal civic engagement opportunities (Sherrod, Flanagan, & Youniss, 2002; Youniss & Yates, 1997). However, youth least likely to have access to conventional opportunities are most likely to be affected by community issues (Lewis-Charp, Yu, Sengouvanh, & Lacoé, 2003; Mira, 2013; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). To provide access to relevant, civic engagement opportunities for all youth, some U.S. community-based organizations introduced youth-organizing groups (YOGs). These “distinctive sites of learning” are characterized by their voluntary nature, critical orientation, real-world contexts, and developmental focuses (Rogers, Mediratta, & Shah, 2012, p. 52). Youth participants or youth organizers take up local issues with global significance (e.g., educational access and immigrant rights).

YOG scholars (Delgado, 2015; Kirshner, 2015; Lewis-Charp et. al, 2003) have argued these civic engagement sites may support individual (e.g., self-efficacy, skill development) and societal (e.g., critical awareness, social responsibility) participant outcomes. Recognizing the potential of YOGs, Watts and Guessous (2006) integrated

both categories in a sociopolitical development (SPD) framework for understanding the relationship between YOG learning experiences and outcomes including actions and commitments. Using SPD, researchers have begun to understand the influence of YOG experiences on participants' personal, relational, professional lives (Conner, 2011; Mira, 2013). While previous work documented participant outcomes, less is known about the relationship between participants' YOG experiences and SPD outcomes. As extant SPD scholarship draws primarily from the perspectives of YOG participants, the voices of organizational-level stakeholders (e.g., adult leaders and program developers) would inform this line of inquiry.

The purpose of this reflective qualitative study was to explore how YOG experiences influenced participant SPD across organizational and individual levels. Zimmerman's (2000) multi-leveled empowerment framework supported integration of across levels of SPD analyses, distinguishing between organizational-level "empowering" processes and individual "empowerment" outcomes (p. 47). Here, as elsewhere (Conner, 2011), career decision-making was viewed as an important indicator of SPD for participants transitioning to adulthood. In-depth interviews were conducted with former participants and adult staff of Planned Parenthood's Teen Advocates for Sexual Health (TASH), a sexual health YOG in St. Louis, MO, USA, aimed at enhancing access to comprehensive sex education. TASH's philosophy on empowerment is evident in its objective that youth, "know the power to create change and influence public policy" (Planned Parenthood of the St. Louis Region [PPSLR], 2016). The following research questions were addressed: 1) What empowering processes occurred on an organizational level? 2) What empowerment outcomes did former YOG participants experience? and 3)

How did they relate empowerment to career decision-making?

Conceptual Frames

Defining youth organizing. Upon conducting a review of literature, Rogers et. al (2012) defined youth organizing as a kind of civic engagement involving the, “systematic development of youth power to confront inequities that negatively affect young people and their communities” (p. 47). Specifically, YOGs are formal youth programming within community-based organizations, varying terms of size, youth demographics, issues taken up, level of youth leadership, and coordination with larger social movements. For example, undocumented U.S. immigrant YOGs coordinated national campaigns for access to higher education (Kirshner, 2015). In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA, students organized campaigns around educational equity issues including teacher quality and school privatization within their own district (Conner, 2011). In a national survey of YOGs, top issues were educational reform, community issues, immigrant rights, gender issues, and youth employment (Braxton, Buford, & Marasigan, 2013). Because issues are youth-selected, YOGs are viewed as more accessible to marginalized youth than conventional forms of civic engagement (Rogers et al., 2012; Watts & Guessous, 2006). This is reflected in the fact that most YOG participants are young people of color between ages 13 and 18 (Braxton et al., 2013).

As the name implies, youth organizing has roots in community organizing (Alinsky, 1971). In both kinds of organizing, participants identify issues of concern and organize collective action campaigns. Importantly, YOGs are not simply youth counterparts of community organizing groups. In addition to building the organizing capacities of members, YOGs incorporate critical social analysis, support identity

development, and build leadership skills (Conner, 2012; Lewis-Charp, et al., 2003; Rogers et al., 2012). Many YOGs take a Freirian (1970/2000) empowerment approach to youth programming, seeking to overcome societal oppression (Conner, 2014; Jennings, Parra-Medina, Hilfinger-Messias, & McLoughlin, 2006). In doing so, YOGs may practice adult-youth power sharing and provide emotional support alongside intellectual challenge (Dibenedetto, 1991).

Outcomes of YOG participation. Youth organizing scholarship addresses participant outcomes on two interdependent levels, individual and social. Cycles of reflection and sociopolitical action, Freire's praxis (1970/2000), link these two kinds of outcomes (Lewis-Charp et al., 2003). Kirshner (2015) sees YOGs as "a distinctive brand of civic engagement—one that is generative, because it contributes to a public good, but is also self-interested, because it seeks to improve life chances or quality of life in one's own community" (p. 13). In YOGs, participants "move along a continuum" from "an inward focus on *self-work* to an outward focus on *community-work*" (Lewis-Charp et al., 2003, p. 75, emphasis original). Similarly, Delgado (2015) asserts that development of social responsibility, praxis, and agency are fundamental in programs supporting youth social action. The potential for short-term YOG personal outcomes is well-documented, including leadership skills and high-quality relationships with adults (Lewis-Charp et al., 2003; Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009). Youth-serving organizations, including YOGs, may also build human and social capital (Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005; Souto-Otero, 2016).

Recent YOG scholarship called for attention to societal-level outcomes. On this level, Rogers et al. (2012) distinguish between what they term participatory and

transformative civic development outcomes. Participatory outcomes include understanding the political process and using of political knowledge to take strategic action within existing systems. Transformative outcomes result from youth organizing's critical lens wherein the interrogation of power drives critical social action. The authors link civic development to identity construction—youth see themselves as “agents of change who have a role in improving the community” (p. 56).

Sociopolitical development. Recognizing the need for an integrated framework of self and societal outcomes, Watts and colleagues proposed a sociopolitical development (SPD) model (Watts & Guessous, 2006; Watts et. al, 2003). Drawing from developmental and liberation psychology, SPD is a “process by which individuals acquire the knowledge, analytical skills, emotional faculties, and the capacity for action in political and social systems necessary to interpret and resist oppression” (Watts et al., 2003, p. 185). SPD is a framework for understanding the relationship between sociopolitical learning experiences (e.g., critical social analysis) and outcomes (e.g., commitment and action) moderated by agency and opportunity structures (Watts & Flanagan, 2007; Watts & Guessous, 2006). The model's notion of critical social analysis is based on Freirian (1990) liberation psychology, emphasizing the interrogation of existing power structures, increased critical consciousness, and social justice aims. Without this kind of power analysis, they caution, youth civic engagement can maintain the sociopolitical status quo (Watts & Flanagan, 2007).

The SPD framework has been used in several qualitative studies of YOG participant outcomes. For instance, Mira (2013) created a framework illustrating the relationship between YOG participant personal development, community awareness, and

active community engagement. YOG involvement fostered personal development (e.g., sense of agency, skill building) and community awareness (e.g., relationships, social analysis, opportunity structures), enabling community engagement through commitments and actions. Connor (2011) found that YOG participation influenced former organizers' commitments and actions in academic, professional, relational, and sociopolitical domains as they transitioned to adulthood. She suggests general relationships between YOG characteristics (e.g., curriculum, philosophy, networking connections) and these domains. Importantly, Conner (2011) describes how former YOG participants came to view themselves as “change agents” and “leaders” in varied aspects of their lives (p. 936). Actualizing this identity, most participants pursued prosocial careers such as teaching, counseling, and community organizing (Conner, 2011).

Empowerment. The aforementioned SPD analyses of YOGs attended closely to outcomes, proposing tentative links from YOG experiences and participant outcomes across domains. Further work is needed to understand the relationship between YOG experiences and SPD outcomes, including career decision-making. Addressing this question means gaining a richer understanding of the interactions between people and programs, expanding analyses to include the voices of adult YOG leaders alongside youth participants. In doing so, it is useful to conceptualize SPD on two levels, the organizational and individual. This perspective accounts for (1) ways in which YOGs themselves support SPD and (2) participants' experiences of SPD outcomes.

The current SPD model is limited to YOG participant perspectives, offering participant agency, self-efficacy, and empowerment as possible moderators between organizational experiences and societal involvement outcomes (Watts & Guessous,

2006). In the present study, Zimmerman's (2000) multi-layered concept of empowerment was used to integrate individual and organizational levels of YOG influence. Rooted in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977), empowerment is a "theoretical model for understanding the processes and efforts to exert control and influence over decisions that affect one's life, organizational functioning, and the quality of community life" (p. 43). Zimmerman views empowerment on three interrelated levels of analysis: individual, organizational, and community. Within each level Zimmerman, distinguishes between "empowering" processes and "empowerment" outcomes of the processes (p. 47). As the levels are interrelated, the model accounts for ways in which empowering organizations may support individual empowerment. For instance, an organization might share leadership (empowering process), and participating individuals may experience an increased sense of control (empowerment outcome). Within Zimmerman's framework, individual-level empowerment is most elaborated. Individual or personal empowerment includes three components: (1) sense of control i.e., locus of control, self-efficacy, and motivation; (2) critical awareness; and (3) participatory behaviors. Zimmerman references Bandura's (1977) general notion of self-efficacy, the belief in one's ability to achieve desired goals. He goes on to highlight political efficacy (Zimmerman, 1989) as particularly relevant to empowerment theorizing, given its emphasis on social change goals.

Zimmerman's (2000) theoretical model complements a community psychology value-orientation that works toward social change; first, by building on strengths and promoting health rather than identifying risk factors; and second, by recognizing environmental influences instead of blaming community members for problems. Within

this approach, critical awareness is defined broadly as the, “capability to analyze and understand one’s social and political environment” (p. 50). Critical awareness includes the capacity to understand how powerful people and intuitions are connected to issues of concern, knowing when to engage in conflict, and the ability to gather resources needed to achieve desired goals. As such, this model tends to view critical awareness in terms of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), while SPD takes a more overt social justice stance owing to Freirian (1990) liberatory psychology.

Methods

Teen Advocates for Sexual Health (TASH). PPSLR founded TASH 2001 to expand youth sexual health education access in a state with restrictive sex education policies. While Missouri schools are required to teach HIV prevention, the decision to provide sex education occurs on the district level (Mo. Rev. Stat. § 170.015-1, 2015; Mo. Rev. Stat. § 191.668.1, 1988). To comply with federal funding requirements, participating schools provide abstinence-until-marriage instruction. PPSLR recognized a disconnect between policy and youth practices, evidenced by the fact that 38% of Missouri high school students reported having sexual intercourse (Centers for Disease Control, [CDC], 2015). Youth within some TASH demographics are additionally vulnerable in terms of sexual health outcomes, with racial disparities well-documented in the St. Louis region. (*For the sake of all*, 2014).

TASH counters restrictive sex education policy in two ways: (1) by providing critically-oriented sex education access for members, and (2) by doing political work to ensure sexual health and education access for all Missouri youth. Judy Lipsitz, teen program coordinator, is largely responsible for implementing its mission. She provides

continuity by organizing meetings and maintaining contact with the future, current, and past members. Within meetings, Judy invites representatives of PPSLR's education and political departments to lead sessions on specific topics. The education department provides rights-based (Advocates for Youth, 2016) comprehensive sex education and addresses related topics including relationships, sexuality, gender identity, and notions of masculinity and femininity. TASH takes a social justice approach, particularly in reference to disparities in sex education and healthcare access. The political department leads sessions on sex education legislation and provides trainings which prepare youth for formal and informal civic engagement opportunities. While TASH does not provide a formal structure for alumni involvement, alumni are welcome at meetings and events. Some former TASHers maintain contact with Judy into adulthood.

Although it began with 13 members or "TASHers," today's membership averages 30-40 youth from St. Louis-area high schools. The group of 14-18-year-olds is diverse in terms of race, class, gender identity, and sexuality. TASH meets every other week during the academic year and for several additional weekend "retreats" on specific topics (e.g., sex education, legislation, social justice). Students generally reside within a 50 mile radius of St. Louis city and are offered bus passes if unable to secure transportation. New members tend to hear about TASH from members or school counselors. Interested teens complete an application and obtain notarized parental permission. Once involved, teens may remain active throughout high school. Teens determine their level of involvement but are expected to attend meetings unless they communicate otherwise.

Participants. Study participants are two TASH staff and six former TASH youth (see Table 1). Program coordinator Judy Lipsitz initiated contact with potential

participants. Protecting their privacy, she asked former TASH youth if they would like to hear more about a study of their experiences in the program. Upon gaining permission, Judy provided me names and contact information for ten potential participants. Upon emailing those interested, eight agreed to participate and two did not reply. With assistance from Judy, I sought a sample representative of TASH diversity in terms of racial, gender, and sexual identities. As participants represented “information rich” cases in terms of research questions about program experiences, sampling can be considered purposeful (Patton, 2002, p. 230).

Table 1

Participant Characteristics (self-identified)

	TASH Role	Years Active	Age	Sex	Race
Charisse	Former Planned Parenthood VP of Education and Diversity, social justice educator	2008-2013	55+	cis Female	African American
Judy	Program coordinator, co-creator	2001-present	70	Cis female	White
*Aubrey	Former youth participant, founded a TASH chapter	2005-2008	26	Female	Black
*Heather	Former youth participant, TASH volunteer sex educator	2005-2008	26	Female	White
*Kayla	Former youth participant	2012-2015	19	Cis female	White
*Michael	Former youth participant	2010-2013	21	Male	White
*Pat	Former youth participant	2005-2008	26	Not disclosed	White
*Taylor	Former youth participant	2008-2012	22	Cis female	White

Note. *pseudonym

Interview structure. Across three semi-structured interviews, participants were asked to reflect on TASH experiences. The approach to interviewing was phenomenologically-based (Seidman, 2012), focusing on lived experience, meaning-making in context, subjective understanding, and the transitory nature of human experience. Interview #1 addressed participant's life histories prior to TASH involvement. Interview #2 centered on participant experiences while active in TASH. Interview #3 asked participants to reflect on the meaning of TASH participation personally, relationally, and professionally (see Appendices A and B for protocols). Each interview averaged 30-90 minutes in duration with the three interviews generally occurring within a two to three week timespan. In total, 25 interviews were completed. Over 700 pages were transcribed from the 24 hours of audio-recordings. Submission to the University of Missouri-St. Louis Institutional Review Board ensured participant rights and confidentiality.

Analytic approach. This qualitative data analysis utilized tools from Grounded Theory: alternating inductive and deductive processes, constant comparison, open-coding and conceptualization into categories and their relationships (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Detailed analytic memos were also documented. Codes were derived from three sources: (1) researcher codes, the analysts' interpretation based on the data's context; (2) literature codes, concepts from relevant scholarship; and (3) in vivo codes, participants' exact words (Merriam, 2009). Seven major analytic tasks occurred, though the actual process was more iterative than this linear representation. First, I open-coded each interview line-by-line. Second, I arranged codes into an outline or macrostructure consistent with the format of the transcript (Gee, 2011). This reduced the transcript while preserving

structure and context. Third, initial categories were identified. Fourth, I arranged the three interview series from each participant into a profile or narrative form (Seidman, 2012). Fifth, I compared profiles across participants, developing and refining a set of common categories and subcategories. Sixth, I organized these categories within Zimmerman's (2000) multi-leveled empowerment model. In doing so, I sorted the data within a broader framework: (1) organizational-level empowering processes, from the perspectives of TASH adult leaders; and (2) individual-level empowerment outcomes, from the perspectives of former youth participants. I further organized individual level-outcomes according to Zimmerman's (2000) three components of empowerment: political efficacy, critical awareness, and participatory behaviors. Seventh, after additional rounds of refinement, I created a conceptual model to represent the findings (see Figure 1).

While some qualitative designs increase consistency (reliability), and credibility (validity) through multiple data sources, Seidman (2009) believes in-depth interviews alone are sufficient. Seidman defines validity as the participant's truth at a given moment in time. As such, in-depth interviews improve validity in four ways. First, the interviews allow the researcher to draw upon rich context when making interpretations. Second, interviews can be compared across participants. Third, the three-interview series provides "internal consistency" by allowing comparison within each participant series (Seidman, 2009, p. 27). Fourth, participants themselves increase validity by clarifying meaning through the reflective interview process. As an additional measure of validity, participants completed a "member check" of the analysis prior to sharing it publicly (Merriam, 2009).

As qualitative researchers, it is important to acknowledge how assumptions and life experiences affect our work. Therefore, I provide this background information for the reader's consideration. Prior to pursuing a Ph.D. in education, I taught middle school science. Broadly, I am interested in the intersections of health, social justice, and education. Upon learning about TASH, I recognized its potential as an educational environment supporting health equity. I attended two TASH meetings prior to initiating the study, observing youth participants who seemed engaged and passionate about its causes. While there, I met several TASH alumni who spoke of its impact on their college and career choices. From there, I was eager to interview former participants.

Findings

In the three sections that follow, I explore how TASH experiences influenced participant SPD (Watts & Guessous, 2006) through a multi-level empowerment framework (Zimmerman, 2000). A conceptual model accompanies the findings (see Figure 1). First, I attend to organizational-level empowering processes through the perspectives of TASH adult leaders. Second, I draw from the experiences of former youth participants, describing individual-level empowerment outcomes in relation to organizational-level empowering processes. Third, I apply the conceptual model to a specific example of participant empowerment, career-decision-making.

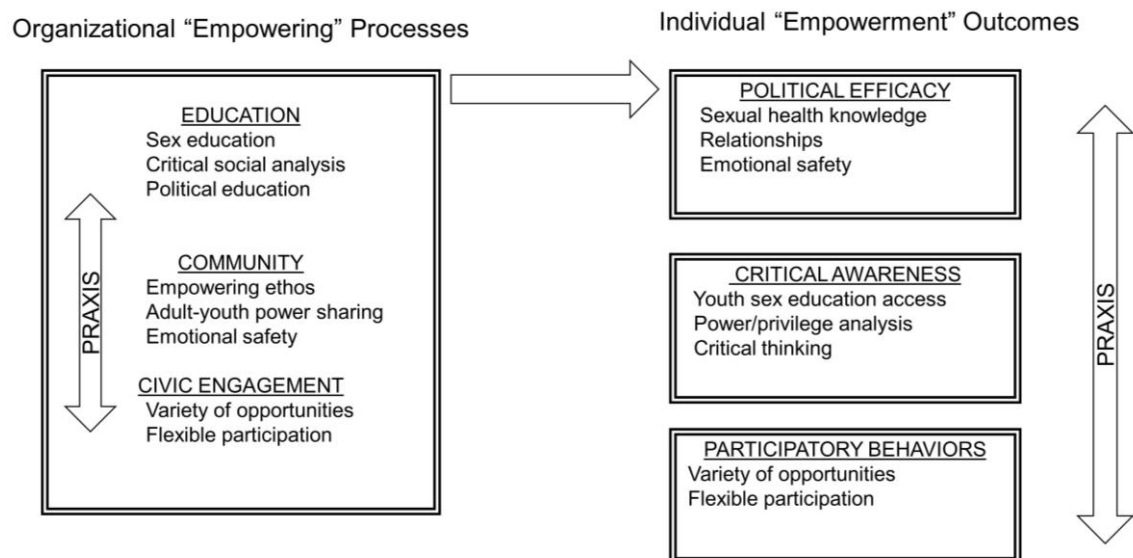


Figure 1. Conceptual model of multi-leveled empowerment in a youth organizing group.

Organizational-level empowering processes. Adult leaders identified three important aspects of the TASH organization: education, community, and civic engagement. Here, I provide an overview of each component, attending to their relatedness. For a more detailed explanation of TASH program functioning within the PPSLR setting, see Nicholas (in draft).

Education. TASH education has three components, supported by a combination of PPSLR departments: sex education, critical social analysis, and political education. Given the Missouri political climate, many youth join TASH to obtain medically accurate sex education. TASH considers itself a rights-based sex education program. To Judy, that means assuming, “teens deserve access to medically accurate health information, they need to know where they can go for services.” In addition to sex education on STD and pregnancy prevention, the curriculum includes topics like healthy relationships, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Judy situates sex education within TASH’s broader empowering mission,

When I think about TASH, I think about empowering a group of young people to understand what sexuality means, the comprehensiveness, all the components of sexuality and that sexuality is part of who they are and understanding all the components and how their body works and the biological issues, the emotional issues, all the parameters and also understanding that, and understanding how they have control and power over many things but they're also outside forces that impact their sexual health.

In carrying out this mission, TASH combines sex education with critical social analysis and political training. Heather views these components as “advocacy development” wherein “you learn how systems and policies influence folks’ ability to have and make empowered choices about their bodies and then you learn how to affect change.” As such, TASH youth learn about threats to youth sex education access, confronting intersections between sexual health, sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression. TASH initially focused on issues of equity and sexual education access, formally implementing an anti-oppression curriculum in 2008. Generally, TASH leaders sought to support participants’ critical thinking. According to Charisse, “the overall goal is for them to be able to get out and critically think and participate in this world with open eyes, and a different awareness.” TASHers are encouraged to ask questions and develop their own viewpoints. As Judy echoes, “we don’t tell you what to think...we put you in an atmosphere where you are challenged to think.”

TASH’s political department prepares TASHers to translate knowledge into action. Charisse summarizes, “there was something legislative every TASH meeting...it kept them involved in politics, it kept them involved in seeing how the political process

worked, so that they were able to effectively advocate, um, for reproductive rights and health.” Youth receive trainings on how to approach their local school board, collect petitions, or address the state legislature.

Community. The TASH community is designed to provide a safe and empowering space for learning and action. Much of its empowering ethos stems from Judy’s desire to challenge adultist cultural norms. She believes youth,

care deeply about making this world more fair, more equitable, and they want to do something to make a difference. And at least in my experience, they debunk all the issue of teen of apathy, um they may not be interested in everything but who what person is, but they do care enough to go out and want to make a difference and they want to make a difference in the area of reproductive justice.

According to Charisse, she and Judy conveyed their confidence in youth directly to TASHers,

I think we let them know in the beginning of the process that this is gonna be your organization and not ours; so, it’s that old saying that, youth are our future leaders, and Judy and I used to say, ‘no, they’re our leaders right now.’

Moreover, the adult leaders position themselves as co-learners alongside youth. Judy emphasizes, “I’ve learned a lot and I think the teens themselves have helped me. I always say to them, ‘you make me a better person.’ They’ve opened my eyes to the many issues that they’re dealing with, they’re tremendous.”

As another expression of these beliefs, TASH adults share power with youth. TASH provides leadership opportunities locally (e.g., meeting facilitation, committee involvement) and at a national level with Planned Parenthood. Judy strives to be flexible

and allow students to steer meetings, saying, “we want them to know their voices are heard, and we’re not just dismissing, and we’re so task-oriented.” TASH also continuously solicits youth feedback on program topics and implementation.

Given potentially challenging subject matter on sexual health and social justice, TASH attends to youth emotional safety. Consistent with other TASH structures and strategies, power sharing defines TASH’s approach to this issue. Here, adult leaders model how to distinguish between (1) feeling uncomfortable, sometimes a part of learning, and (2) feeling emotionally unsafe and unable to learn. Heather describes this approach, aimed at supporting youth self-awareness,

We explain to them that uncomfortable is a learning goal, and that’s where we want you to be; unsafe is where that stops, and that’s what we don’t want to be, and usually they’re pretty good at articulating like how it feels to be shut down, you know, to be shut down or turned off, is a funny phrase, but, sort of tuned in to being able to be in that space.

Introduced as a community norm, youth are encouraged to speak up on behalf of safety, for themselves or others. When this instruction occurs, youth are given additional options, including opting out of discussions or activities. Heather clarifies, “sometimes the safe way to be in that space is to not be in that space, and so that’s also something we try to really protect the students right to do.” As a social worker, Heather views TASH safety and adult-youth relationships as distinct from other educational settings.

Specifically, TASH practices may support a trauma-informed notion of youth resiliency that also empowers youth sociopolitically. Heather summarizes these implications, saying, “when you’re giving students connection and safety, you’re teaching them things

and making them feel empowered to make change.”

Civic engagement. TASH offers a variety of formal and informal opportunities for youth civic engagement, organized by both adult and youth leaders. Charisse divides TASH advocacy into three levels: legislative, school, and peer. On the legislative level, TASHers might collect petitions or testify about comprehensive sex education at the state capitol. Within their schools, TASH youth are encouraged to “make the case” for comprehensive education to school administrators or schoolboards. For their peers outside of TASH, they are the “go-to people around accurate sex education,” according to Charisse.

With multiple routes to engagement, TASH invites teens to participate on their terms. Consistent with the power-sharing stance described, TASH youth have flexibility in their level of involvement in both meetings and other opportunities. Heather views these differences within three, non-hierarchical groups. The first group is “the few who are there for the food and the free condoms.” The second and largest group is those “who think that TASH is really cool and think it’s fun to talk about sex and learn about stuff, and fancy themselves as affecting political change.” However, “at the end of the day they, (TASH) is not what’s going to be the guiding force in their life.” The third group are, “the few who...TASH is the thing that makes their heart beat.”

Praxis. TASH engages in cycles of reflection and action, praxis (Freire, 1970/2000) in support of its social change aims. After each TASH meeting, adults lead youth in reflection about what actions they might take to address sex education and social justice issues raised. Judy views TASHers as “messengers” for sexual health who bring TASH learnings into the community. She supports them in developing “take aways” and

“talking points” at the conclusion of each TASH event. Judy describes one such discussion after a discussion on enthusiastic consent,

Let's say we have a conversation, a whole session focused on ‘what do we mean by enthusiastic consent in a sexual relationship?’ We turn to them, and they've gained enough knowledge that we say, ‘learning leaves this room, names and stories don't,’ we always encourage them, ‘go home, talk to your family, talk to your friends, talk about the issues, get them talking, get them asking questions’

To continue the cycle, at the beginning of every meeting, Judy asks the question, “What’s goin’ on, TASH?” At this time, TASHers discuss current advocacy work and share life events. In other words, they pivot from action back to reflection.

Individual-level empowering outcomes. While the previous section focused on organizational-level empowering processes, the next section explores individual-level empowerment outcomes (Zimmerman, 2000). As such, I center the perspectives of former TASH participants while attending to empowerment across levels.

Political-efficacy. A kind of self-efficacy specific to sociopolitical aims, Zimmerman (1989) defines political efficacy as the belief in one’s ability to contribute to social change. Community organizations may provide opportunities that build political efficacy among participants (Zimmerman, 2000). Several aspects of TASH influenced participants’ political efficacy. First, TASHers appreciated the program’s approach to sex education. Michael asserts, TASH sex education is, “way past sex,” clarifying “it is sex, but it is also race issues; it is sex, but it is also human relations.” Several participants mentioned the personal impact of the sex education. Heather lacked basic anatomical awareness prior to TASH. She appreciated the basics, what she terms the “nuts and bolts”

of the sex education which, “meant me getting to have a very different relationship with my body and sexuality than I would’ve gotten to have without it.” Kayla considers the sex education to be “life-saving,” as the instruction on healthy relationships allowed her recognize she had been in an abusive relationship prior to TASH. Additionally, sex education sparked an intellectual interest for some participants. Pat says, the education “got me reading” about queer theory during high school.

Second, relationships within the community supported political efficacy. In terms of adult-youth relationships, Aubrey describes Judy’s empowering role in the face of adultist assumptions of youth capabilities,

Judy was like, the heart of the group, like, just really gave us that empowerment push, like ‘you all are not just young people, you aren’t people who don’t know anything just because you’re young, you all can do this, you can talk in front of a senator, you can go lobby to congress’

For Pat, this kind of empowerment relates to the meaning of advocacy, which is “trying to say to adults that yeah, we’re not adults, but guess what, these are important issues and just because it makes you uncomfy doesn’t make it not real.” The empowering adult philosophy is also reflected in characterizations of adult-youth relationships. Kayla says,

I never felt like I was being talked to as a child, um, I felt like I was being talked to as a peer and as someone whose opinions and, um, ideas were really respected by the adult educators, and that meant so much to me, because I think often, adults listen without really hearing

Similarly, Taylor compares adult-youth relationships in TASH with those in school,

It was really frustrating to like, eternally frustrating to me, that like no one took

me seriously or thought like my ideas had weight, or thought that like, I was anything more than just like sort of cute and maybe sort of well-read for a child, um, I think, in TASH, I can't really recall any instances in TASH where adult facilitators did not take people seriously.

As with adult-youth relationships, peer relationships contributed to empowerment via political efficacy. At Aubrey's first meeting, she was impressed with peers who were "asking questions and really feeling like they could make a difference." For Heather, these were people her age who "cared about things and wanted to ask hard questions." Taylor valued like-minded peers who were "trying to do similar things" in terms of reproductive justice organizing.

Third, beyond empowering relationships, many youth describe TASH as a "safe" and "nonjudgmental" space. According to Aubrey, safety means "you may not agree with what everyone's saying, but you should never feel like threatened or that this isn't a safe space for you to be who you are." TASHers shared responsibility in maintaining a safe community. Although some conversations were challenging or uncomfortable, they were encouraged to speak up if they felt unsafe. According to Kayla, safety relates to TASH's position that youth should choose how and when they participate, saying, "a big component of creating a safe space because you could participate as much or as little as you needed to."

Critical awareness. Zimmerman (2000) views critical awareness as "the capability to analyze and understand one's social and political environment" (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 50). Specifically, Watts and Flanagan (2007) see critical awareness as increased critical consciousness (Freire, 1970/2000), awareness of societal

inequities. Consistent with both definitions, TASH critical awareness was a product of discussing sex education in the context of access issues, power, and privilege. In terms of access, TASHers became aware of their right to sex education. As Kayla sees it,

The whole point of TASH is that like teenagers or young adults that deserve to be told, you know, correct information that's medically accurate about their bodies and about their sexuality and things that are very imperative to their growth and well-being.

According Taylor, an important part of this discussing access was explaining why sex education is “denied to a lot of young people” and “denied to some people more than others.” To these conversations, TASHers brought first-hand experiences of being denied information. Some TASHers had received no formal sex education. Aubrey, who attended a Catholic school, recalls, “other places, in my life at the time, just weren't giving the information.” Others criticize their school-based sex education as inadequate or inaccurate. Taylor describes it as being taught “vague nonsense” where student questions were dismissed as “inappropriate.” To Michael, sex education class was “a fear thing” in terms of STD risks with “barely a mention of condoms.” This pattern held true beyond the classroom. For example, Pat's school nurse would not supply tampons. Kayla, who was homeschooled, describes her father as “sheltering” her from the information when she first expressed interest in joining TASH.

Many participants spoke of TASH critical social analysis in terms of changes in their own critical awareness, including and beyond sex education access. Heather experienced critical education as, “just constantly having my mind blown.” Before TASH, Michael described himself as “sheltered” and “comfortable” as a “middle-class

white guy.” During TASH, he gained awareness of the “struggle of an oppressive ladder, of the existence of the hegemonic structures.” Kayla became aware of her privilege and role in social change,

I think TASH really raised my awareness of how I’m guilty of doing that in certain ways, um, so when I hear racial slurs being used, just kind of letting it slide and not taking the responsibility of standing up and speaking out, um, or taking my personal responsibility for like the privilege that I do hold, and the ways that I sometimes exercise that privilege in unfair ways, and examining what I can be doing to use my privilege to create positive change, and not enact negative change

Taylor connects TASH critical education to the community itself in what she terms, “diversity with a power analysis.” That is, the community critically reflected on its own interpersonal dynamics and the existence of TASH within systems of oppression. Within this context, Michael discovered a “love” of having critical conversations with people from diverse perspectives. To Aubrey, bringing diverse students from different schools together,

allowed for so many more opinions, because all of us were going through completely different things, living on completely different sides of town, going to public schools and private schools, so, the opinions at the table weren't all the same, and some were more conservative on stuff, and some were more liberal, so it was great to hear those opinions

Generally, participants characterized TASH discussions as more critical and “open-ended,” compared to those occurring in other learning environments. Michael sees TASH

as more “contextualized” and “higher-level” learning than formal schooling. Similarly, Taylor says,

I don't feel like TASH gave me like sure answers to anything, it's just like, oh, these like, these sorts of things work in this way, this is how we understand like systems of power, but like what are you gonna do about them? there's a lot of thing you could do about them, I think that's a more open-ended approach.

Heather compares TASH to church learning experiences, saying, “I feel like my experience with church was about being told answers, and my experience with TASH was being asked questions.” Aubrey says,

I guess don't think TASH has one ideology, I think TASH is like trying to help you find your voice, and help you figure out where you stand and how you feel about certain things, so I don't think it's like saying, ‘you come here, you have to support comprehensive sex education,’ but I think it's saying like, ‘take these things into consideration, things you may not know about,’

Pat gives an example of an open-ended activity, a values clarification activity with no right or wrong answers, “there was this paper that had a statement and then you'd either strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree, and the trick is that's not the right answer to any of those questions,” which included items such as, “a 12 year old is too young to get pregnant.”

Before discussing participatory behaviors, the relationship between political efficacy and critical awareness is worth initial comment. When asked about pre-TASH political activity, Michael relates knowledge to his own sense of political efficacy,

I was too sheltered and too comfortable to be politically active. I, also I would say I was politically-minded versus active because I didn't have the terms, I didn't have the knowledge, I didn't have the education to be politically active

While Michael points specifically to knowledge, others were struck by disparities in sex education access, an awareness that others were being denied the information provided in TASH. Aubrey shares,

Once I became informed, I was recognizing that clearly, a lot of my peers aren't informed, because we all thought the same things, and now that I know all of this stuff, I know everybody else isn't being taught this stuff

In this sense, critical awareness supported political efficacy in terms of a passion for educating others.

Participatory behaviors. Zimmerman (2000) defines participatory behaviors as “taking action to exert control by participating in community organizations or activities” (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 47). Watts and Guessous (2006) view participation as including commitments in addition to behaviors. As a group, this sample of TASHers were both highly committed and involved. Pat “did everything” in TASH. Taylor was “throwing herself” into the organization. Michael became an “active community member” with a “strong voice.” In several instances, participation itself fueled passion for TASH issues. Aubrey, for instance, shares, “I didn't realize I was so passionate about sexual health and access to comprehensive sex education until I dove in.” Heather discovered her passion and found that she “just wanted to talk about sexual health advocacy all the time.”

This kind of participation can be empowering, nurturing political efficacy. Kayla illustrates this potential, asserting her political capacities in contrast to low societal

expectations of youth,

TASH empowers young people to actually be able to create change. A common misconception, um, especially among high schoolers is that like, you're not 18, so you can't vote yet, so there's really nothing you can do, period, um, and that's just not true...I was lobbying in the capitol before I was able to vote, long before I was able to vote, and um, you can be writing letters and calling people and there's so much action to be done

Kayla suggests participation builds political efficacy in by "showing teens they can make a difference" in their communities and personal lives. When given the education and "tools" to do so, the desire to create change only grows.

Within the TASH organization, these active participants became "go-to" youth leaders, facilitating discussions and recruiting new members. A subset of TASHers formed the Teen Political Action Committee (TPAC) to further TASH's organizing. Informally, they advocated within their families and communities, Kayla's "micro-level" work. She adds, "TASH happens everywhere." This kind of advocacy was meaningful to participants, who saw themselves as resources within their communities. Michael emphasizes, "one of the core things about TASH...is that you are educated and to go out and then educate your community." Participants recalled examples of this kind of advocacy. Michael says,

There are certain instances where I, friends of mine new I was in TASH, and they were comfortable talking to me, and so I had some conversations, I took a friend to Planned Parenthood, I you know, we, I was a quiet member of my community, people knew that they could talk to me and trust me and that I was knowledgeable

Taylor used resources from her TASH binder to “bridge a barrier” for peers reluctant to search the Internet for sexual health information due to parental computer monitoring. Aubrey distributed condoms and dental dams from her school locker and accompanied peers to Planned Parenthood upon request. Again referencing awareness of peers’ lack of knowledge, she says, “being a resource to people, I found that very empowering.” Kayla continues to field text messages and phone-calls from her young brother and his friends who jokingly suggest she should teach a sex education class.

However, not all TASH experiences supported political efficacy, frustrating otherwise youth who saw themselves as able to make a difference. Ultimately, safety concerns sometimes limited TASH political activity on the grounds of the Planned Parenthood affiliate itself, where many TASH meetings and retreats occurred. Taylor recalls a “super disempowering” occasion wherein Planned Parenthood officials denied TASH’s request to counter-protest pro-life activists outside the facility. Additionally, several TASHers reported frustration with formal channels of political power, doing the “macro-level” work in Kayla’s words. Pat mentions an incident where legislators were “hostile” and “had made up their mind” before she testified. Michael shares mixed feelings about interactions with Washington, D.C. legislators, saying “it was a cool experience for my own growth, but I didn’t feel like I really had any impact.”

Praxis. Consistent with reflections from adult leaders, participant experiences evidence reflection-action cycles of praxis that support social change (Freire, 1970/2000). In reference to sociopolitical issues raised in TASH, participants remembered being asked “what are you gonna do about it?” and envisioning formal and informal action within TASH and the community. According to Pat, Judy was “encouraging us to keep

having that discussion when we got home.” Heather’s definition of advocacy relates aligns with the notion of praxis. For Heather, advocacy means, “you’re gonna not only to learn something but to do something about it” on multiple levels,

Whether it’s an advocate by being an unofficial peer educator, teaching your friends about that, or very like tangibly advocating for change of a policy and systems level, and using the knowledge you have about how policy impacts people to try and change it.

As mentioned in the section above, participatory behaviors also fostered political efficacy, sustaining the reflection-action cycle of praxis. Importantly, some TASHers shared differing views of the reflection-action relationship. While valuing the community, Michael sees TASH as emphasizing reflection more than action. He states, “the community that I fell into, it was...more conversation rather than lets organize and do something about it, and I think that’s one of the things that TASH does well but also does poorly is do something about it.”

Career decision-making. Through the combination of educational, community, and advocacy experiences, TASHers emerged efficacious, with knowledge, critical awareness, and experience as participants in social change. As young adults facing major life decisions, TASH learnings and capacities to informed their next steps. As Michael maintains, TASH is “a fundamental piece of people’s growing up.” Specifically, many of participants spoke about TASH’s impact on their college and career decisions (see Table 2). The remaining sections apply the conceptual model (see Figure 1) to this specific example of participant empowerment.

Table 2

Career Decisions of Former TASH Participants

Participant	Pre-TASH Career Interest	Post-TASH Education	Post-TASH Career or Interest
*Aubrey	Pharmacist	Master's in Public Health (MPH)	National social media campaign for adolescent sexual health
*Heather	Medical doctor	Master's in Social Work (MSW)	Community-wide effort addressing the effects of toxic stress and trauma on well-being
*Kayla	Professional dancer	College sophomore studying Social Work	Domestic violence prevention
*Michael	Environmental issues	College senior majoring in Human Studies	Undecided, interested in community engagement around environment issues
*Pat	Minister OR musician	Women's Studies major, LGBT Studies and African American Studies certificates	Planned Parenthood health center assistant
*Taylor	Conventional politics	Political Science, Spanish	Reproductive justice community organizer

Note. *pseudonym

Career interests. Participants translated TASH interests and commitments into college and career pursuits, crediting specific program experiences. In terms of academic interests, TASH prompted Pat to read about queer theory and cites the program's sex education as the "main reason" why she became a women's studies major. As mentioned, Taylor joined TASH intent on a career in conventional political work. Although she does not fully credit TASH with her path to community organizing, its critical analysis helped

her “make sense” of the world. She asserts, “I don't think my politics would be the way they are without having done TASH, I don't think, like I would be the person that I am, without having done TASH.” Although Michael maintains his pre-TASH interest in environmental issues, he majored in human studies because of TASH. He explains, “the advocacy experience and...the love of talking about it, really drove me to studying culture and race in society issues in gender issues.” A college senior, he sees his future in “advocacy-based,” “people-based work.”

Social responsibility. Given their heightened critical awareness and political efficacy, TASHers considered their role in society when weighing career options. Specifically, they discussed a growing a personal commitment to creating social change, a sense of social responsibility (Youniss & Yates, 1997) that was also critically aware. To Kayla, this meant realizing, “the social change that I want to see isn't going to be created because someone else is going to decide to do it.” As one expression of social responsibility, TASHers expressed personal missions to empower others in the way that TASH empowers youth. Aubrey explains,

TASH means to me, empowering youth and giving them the information to advocate for those who aren't able to be empowered, um, so, not only being empowered themselves, but giving them the tools and resources to go advocate for those who don't have that in hopes that all youth would have that, one day.

She refers to empowered TASHers as, “change agents and game changers.” As such, Aubrey, Heather and Kayla drew on their TASH experiences of empowerment, selecting careers that would allow them to provide the same for others. Initially planning to study pharmacy, Aubrey TASH opened her eyes to disparities in adolescent sexual health and

information access. This awareness became a passion, as Aubrey pursued a career in public health working on those very issues. Heather explains her shift from pre-medicine to social work in terms of her own empowerment through TASH sex education and critical awareness,

I knew that I cared about health and reproduction and that those things were really critical to how people got to live their lives, I knew that, how different my life was when I didn't have any understanding, and didn't feel control over my own reproduction and what it felt like when I did have that, so, I mean that led me to be a health social work major.

Kayla connects her empowerment through TASH's domestic violence education to her decision to pursue social work. She says, "I saw first-hand how powerful it was just to give people correct information, just that, in and of itself is such an empowering tool, and I think that harnessing that could really make waves in lessening domestic violence."

Kayla describes her career decision-making process in a way that exemplifies the role of social responsibility. Here, she explains why she chose social work instead of professional dance, her previous career intention,

Dancing with something I did for myself, and I didn't feel like I could in good conscience do that for the rest of my life when there were so many people who need help, and there is so much room for change, and we have such a dire need for people to be creating a change.

Career supports. When viewed as college and career supports, TASH education, capacities, and experiences could be considered valuable forms of capital (Souto-Otero, 2016). For example, TASH knowledge and skills became human capital for young adults

choosing majors, taking courses, and applying for jobs. TASH informed course and major decision-making as participants worked with their advisors. Because of her TASH experience, Heather enrolled in a peer advocacy course reserved for senior students and became president of the associated organization. Academically, TASH enabled student success. Michael credits TASH for giving him a “really strong base knowledge” so he was not “dumbfounded” in courses. He has become better communicator, someone more open to conversations, more comfortable expressing uncertainty, and able to “stretch” himself to understand others. TASH participation gave Kayla a “head start” in terms of college discussion participation. Pat appreciated public speaking skills honed during TASH media trainings. Participants list TASH on their resume in support of their leadership, advocacy, and sexual health experience. Kayla asserts, “TASH touches on pretty much every skill that would be considered...to have résumé value.” Aubrey shares specific TASH civic engagement experiences with prospective employers to evidence her passion for sexual health information access.

TASH relationships became social capital as former participants registered for courses, built new networks and sought employment opportunities. Of adult-youth relationships, Taylor says, “TASH expanded my notion of like what an adult is” in terms of career possibilities. She first learned about “people they call organizers” during TASH. Although she remained “solidified” in her plan to pursue conventional politics at the time, Taylor ultimately became a community organizer. In a less direct sense, participants realized they could formalize and continue their TASH commitments within careers. Kayla remained doubtful she could get academic credit for continuing her TASH work until she was sitting in her first social work class. She was “incredibly excited” it

had become a “true career path.”

Several participants are currently or were previously Planned Parenthood employees. In college, Aubrey worked as a Planned Parenthood outreach coordinator and started a TASH chapter in a southern U.S. city. TASH and her employment experiences are “super pertinent” to her adolescent public health work. Pat is a health center assistant and former volunteer with PPSLR’s political department. Although today she distances herself from Planned Parenthood politically, Taylor works for a reproductive justice organizing group headed by a mentor she met during TASH.

Discussion

This reflective qualitative study explored how YOG experiences influenced participant SPD across organizational and individual levels using a multi-leveled empowerment framework. In-depth interviews with adult leaders and former participants of TASH addressed the research questions: (1) What empowering processes occurred on an organizational level? (2) What empowerment outcomes did former YOG participants experience? and (3) How did they relate empowerment to career decision-making? YOG organizational-level empowering processes (e.g., critically-oriented education, community, and civic engagement) influenced participant empowerment outcomes (e.g., political efficacy, critical awareness, and participatory behaviors). Participants identified as change agents, possessing both the ability and desire to affect social change. Empowerment influenced career decision-making as former participants (a) translated YOG interests into career interests, (b) sought to empower others as TASH empowered them, and (c) were supported by TASH human and social capital.

Future directions. Broadly, the study speaks to the importance of providing civic engagement opportunities where youth voices can be heard (UN, 2016). In the U.S., YOGs serve as a model for community organizations wishing to provide civic engagement opportunities and support youth SPD. Compared to other YOG studies reviewed, TASH prioritized developmental over organizing goals —it focused on broad advocacy goals through variety of opportunities rather than campaigns targeting specific policies (Conner, 2016; Kirshner, 2015). Therefore, campaign successes would be an inappropriate way to describe the influence of TASH. As scholars, we must attend to how variations in YOG program structure inform participant experiences and outcomes.

SPD (Watts & Guessous, 2006) and a multi-leveled empowerment framework (Zimmerman, 2000) were combined successfully to explain the relationship between organizational-level empowering processes and individual level empowerment outcomes. The empowerment framework extends prior work that relied on SPD alone (Conner, 2011, Mira, 2013), affording robust analyses of the influence of program structures on participant experiences. The addition of YOG organizational-level informants, atypical in previous SPD scholarship, provided the perspectives needed to link processes and outcomes. While both models draw upon social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977), SPD takes a Freirian (1990) orientation. As such, SPD accounted for a notion of empowerment that went beyond efficacy, appropriate for understanding a YOG's social justice approach. Despite these affordances, the combination of SPD and a multi-leveled empowerment framework can only begin to address the complex nature of the relationships between empowering processes and empowerment outcomes. More work is

needed to understand how people and programs interact, within and beyond the YOG field.

The present study adds to what is known about YOGs as empowering civic engagement sites that may support SPD, including career-decision making (Conner, 2011). However, the career-decision-making portion of the findings would benefit from further development. With its emphasis on self-efficacy and career development, Social Cognitive Career Theory ([SCCT] Lent, Brown, Hackett, 1994), could inform these lines of inquiry. For instance, SCCT could add to explanation of how youth consider generative outcomes, those beyond themselves, when making career decisions (Shoffner, Newsome, Minton, & Morris, 2015). SCCT also attends to contextual supports, external factors influencing career development (Lent, Brown, Hackett, 2000). While the present study recognized human and social capital as supports, participant factors and opportunity structures beyond TASH were relatively unexplored. Attending to these kinds of supports could more fully account for YOG participant context.

YOG scholarship illustrates that youth care deeply about a variety of issues affecting their communities (Braxton et al., 2013). Although health is a common YOG issue in the U.S., sexual health has received little attention. TASH exemplifies the importance of sexual health issues in a sociopolitical context that limits youth access to sexual healthcare and education. While TASH views these access issues as important to all youth, it acknowledges that some demographics are disproportionately affected. This is exemplified by racial and class disparities in sexual health indicators such as teen pregnancy and STI rates (*For the sake of all*, 2014). Given the restrictive sex education policies in many states (Guttmacher Institute, 2016), YOGs should consider taking up

sexual health for its public health and civic engagement potential. Conceivably, a public health dimension would also expand YOG funding streams.

The present study highlighted the potential of YOG programming to address career decision-making. Alumni involvement would be a natural way for this this to occur, given YOGs may involve former members on a variety of levels. However, the implications of involving alumni or others in formal career development programming are unexplored.

Limitations. In qualitative research, findings are meant to be transferable rather than generalizable; the work is highly context-bound with regards to setting, program, and participant characteristics (Merriam, 2009). In this case, findings are specific to a subset of participants of a Midwestern urban YOG centered on sexual health. Moreover, the study sample is not meant to be representative of the average TASH member. Recruitment occurred through the program coordinator. As such, the study sample may be reflective of more active former participants who sustained relationships with adult leader rather than the organization at large. Additionally, the present sample could not account for the career choices of non-participants in the study. This comparative line of inquiry could further explain how participant and program factors influence development.

Conclusion

Attempting to balance clarity and complexity, I used career-decision making to illustrate TASH's influence on sociopolitical development. Yet, this approach cannot fully capture what becoming a change agent meant in their lives. While TASH empowerment certainly impacted academic and professional choices, it more broadly

influenced the kinds of parents, partners, friends, and citizens they became. In a way, youth participants internalized the empowering TASH mission. Judy explains,

As they continue to be part of TASH, and I think that they begin to realize that they can make a difference. I think through the work that we do politically, they realize that they may not have a vote, but they have a voice, and that they can influence public policy by the actions they're taking, so I think that it is something that does become part of who they are.

As such, career choices should be taken in the context of holistic participant sociopolitical development.

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Chapter 4: “We go there to have uncomfortable conversations:” Reflections on social justice dialogue in a youth development organization

Keywords

academic freedom trauma trigger warning
social justice education (critical) youth development youth empowerment

Abstract

Intended to protect college student mental health, some view trauma triggers as threats to critical thinking, academic freedom, and democracy. The present study explored how social justice education (SJE) might address these tensions through the experiences of participants in an empowering youth development group. In SJE discussions, adult leaders taught youth participants to distinguish between pedagogically productive discomfort and feeling emotionally unsafe. This self-awareness equipped them for difficult SJE conversations by: (1) enabling them to remain engaged in challenging SJE discussions, (2) equipping youth with a normative script for action if they felt unsafe, and (3) sharing responsibility for safety amongst youth and adult community members. SJE pedagogy influenced communication skills as youth continued social justice advocacy into adulthood. Findings expand possibilities for attending to psychological needs of students while supporting critical thinking and democratic discourse. Recommendations address higher education and SJE audiences.

Introduction

Among psychologists and advocacy groups, there is a growing consensus about the role of trauma triggers, stimuli which may cause an individual with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to re-experience trauma (Veraldi & Veraldi, 2015). Within higher education, there is great discord about what these insights mean for student mental health, student learning, and academic freedom. Higher education institutions and the instructors therein have historically pushed students out of their comfort zones with course content (American Association of University Professors, [AAUP], 2014; Vatz, 2016). In support of this kind of critical thinking, instructors may incorporate topics like rape, combat, and other forms of violence. While many students experience a kind of productive discomfort when learning about these subjects, students with PTSD may be triggered in a way that impedes learning (Carter, 2015; Rae, 2016). Seeking to protect students from triggering content, some universities now suggest or require syllabus trigger warnings, alerts about potentially upsetting course material (Flaherty, 2014).

Unsurprisingly, these events have drawn both media headlines and criticism within the higher education community. Notably, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP, 2014) opposed adding trigger warnings to syllabi, citing the threat to academic freedom. Under broadened interpretations of Title IX, omitted trigger warnings or a misstep in discussion facilitation could have legal ramifications (AAUP, 2016). Others have argued these kind of policies infantilize students by shielding them from discomfort, policing free speech, and leaving them thinking in distorted, less critical ways (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2015). Similarly, Giroux (2006) asserts potentially triggering discussions provide a foundation for critical thinking and the preservation of democracy

and free speech.

As educators, this conversation implicates us directly and prompts critical reexamination of pedagogy in light of politics. My goal in the present article is to inform our thoughtful reflection and action with student interests centered. The question at the heart of the debate then becomes, “how can we honor the emotional and psychological needs of our students while challenging them?” Although this question may seem attached to the current political climate, scholars in the field of social justice education (SJE) have long grappled with the “pressure cooker” of cognitive and emotional demands on students discussing oppression (Adams & Bell, 2016, p. 34). While discomfort is integral to SJE learning, it must occur within an emotionally safe environment where students share responsibility for managing emotional safety (Griffin, 1997). Primarily addressing practitioners, SJE authors provide guidance on supporting dialogue within safe spaces (Bell, Goodman, & Oullet, 2016). SJE and trauma-informed pedagogy have little scholarly overlap to date, and the possibility of conflating uncomfortable learning with trauma gives me pause in bringing them into conversation (Carter, 2015; Lockhart, 2016; Rae, 2016). With this caution in mind, SJE still stands out as a previously unexplored way to enter the discussion about honoring psychological needs while challenging students.

Although theoretical foundations and practical guidance for SJE practitioners is readily available (Adams & Bell, 2016), we are left wanting to understand *how* SJE practices actually occur in educational spaces. Scholarly work on the subject is scant, mostly centering on higher education (Carter, 2015). As such, the present study explored lived experiences of SJE pedagogy in an informal education program for high school

youth. Teen Advocates for Sexual Health (TASH) is a sexual education and youth development program in St. Louis, Missouri, affiliated with Planned Parenthood of the St. Louis Region (PPSLR). A diverse group of 30-40 St. Louis-area teens gather voluntarily biweekly to participate in sex education programming that also encourages them to become sexual health advocates within their own communities (PPSLR, 2016). Three key elements of program structure have been identified (Nicholas, in draftb): (1) critically-oriented sex education; (2) grassroots organizing and political systems training; and (3) an emotionally safe, empowering community.

As an informal youth program, implications for the aforementioned debate in higher education may seem unclear or irrelevant; but in this article I claim that an understanding of TASH's SJE dialogue has wide applicability. TASH discussion topics include sexual practices, relationships, teen dating violence, and societal gender norms. As an SJE dialogue, a social justice lens is applied though-out (e.g., how privilege and oppression relate to sexual health). As indicated above, these kinds of discussions are potentially uncomfortable and triggering in higher education settings, let alone among high school students. However, TASH youth and adults were seemingly able to navigate them in service of larger educational and empowerment aims. The purpose of this study was to explore how TASH engaged youth in SJE dialogue, through the perspectives of adult leaders and former youth participants. The following research questions were addressed: (1) How did adult leaders design and implement discussion-related pedagogy? (2) What were participant experiences of discussions? and (3) How did participation in TASH dialogue inform youth transitions to adulthood?

Conceptual Frame: Social Justice Education

Social justice education (SJE) was originally put forth and refined in versions of the handbook, *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice* (Adams & Bell, 2016). This approach to social justice teaching aligns with TASH's stance—as described by social justice educator and study participant, Charisse Jackson. SJE operates on both theoretical and practical levels as (1) an interdisciplinary framework for understanding multiple, intersectional forms of oppression, and (2) a source for accompanying pedagogical principles and practices. One of the co-editors explains,

The goal of social justice education is to enable educators to develop the critical analytical tools necessary to understand the structural features of oppression and their own socialization within oppressive systems. Social justice education aims to help participants develop awareness, knowledge, and processes to examine issues of justice/injustice in their personal lives, communities, institutions, and the broader society (Bell, 2016, p. 4)

This kind of learning is requires both immense affective and cognitive resources. As one SJE scholar put it, “confronting social justice is both painful AND joyful” (Griffin, 1997, p. 66). Given the aims of SJE, pedagogy and practices are informed by an interdisciplinary framework referencing influential scholars: (1) activist consciousness-raising movements: Paulo Freire; (2) social learning, social psychology, and educational reform: Allport, Lewin, and Dewey; (3) cognitive, life span, and social identity development models; and (4) social identity formation and development (Adams, 2016).

Given the social thread binding the SJE epistemologies, pedagogy addresses learning processes in group dialogue. Although interdisciplinarity is central to SJE, Kegan's (1982) work on cognitive development most closely informs SJE pedagogy on

engaging students in challenging discussions. Briefly, in situations that contradict our worldview, we may experience cognitive dissonance. According to Kegan (1982), we either assimilate conflicting information into our existing worldview or change our view to accommodate the new experience. Adams (2016) then asserts that “SJE can be seen as a ‘pressure cooker’ for cognitive dissonance which, presented in ways that are not overwhelming, opens possibilities for more abstract, complex, and critical thinking” (p. 34). Cognitive development theory is translated into three SJE assumptions: (1) personally relevant meaning-making is valued alongside knowledge acquisition, (2) cognitive dissonance is integral to the learning process, and (3) cognitive dissonance may produce either assimilation or accommodation.

Moving from the pedagogical to the practical, SJE facilitators are instructed on how to scaffold participants dealing with dissonant information. Importantly, this pedagogy and associated strategies are integrated in broader facilitating environments, designed to support all phases of SJE learning (Bell et al., 2016). As little is known about how practitioners apply these principles in real-world settings, my description is adapted from SJE handbooks. Using visuals, facilitators might introduce some shared terminology, described here:

The experiences and subjects they feel comfortable and knowledgeable about (their “comfort zone”) will be challenged as they are encouraged to engage with new information and experiences and consider new insights (their “learning edge”). The “comfort zone” can be visualized as a circle with a learning edge on its periphery, conveying to seemingly contradictory expectation simultaneously: first, the “learning edge” is located on, not beyond, the periphery of comfort, yet

not so far outside to seem unreachable; and second, the notion of a comfort zone this periphery is a learning edge helps to distinguish between “comfort” (which we do not aim for, since we are looking for challenge and growth” and “safety” (which we require to avoid emotional or physical danger) (Adams, 2016, p. 39).

This kind of exercise serves several functions. First, it acknowledges the challenges of SJE while positioning discomfort, “the learning edge,” as integral to learning. Second, it empowers participants to share responsibility for their reactions and safety. Third, it scaffolds the nuanced distinction between experiences of safety and comfort with visuals and terms. Fourth, it builds a common language within the community for coping with challenging content.

Methods

TASH Program Description. Founded PPSLR in 2001, TASH was created in response to state sex education policies that limit access to comprehensive sex education and emphasize abstinence until marriage (Mo. Rev. Stat. § 170.015-1, 2015; Mo. Rev. Stat. § 191.668.1, 1988). To PPSLR, these policies failed to address the needs of Missouri high school students, 38% of whom report having had sexual intercourse (Centers for Disease Control, 2015). Given this context, TASH is a youth development program that seeks to (1) provide access to sex education for participants, and (2) support youth advocacy to ensure access for all youth.

TASH has grown from 13 regular members or “TASHers,” to an average of 30-40 St. Louis-area high school students. Members represent the city’s diversity in terms of race, class, gender identity, and sexuality. The group meets at PPSLR every other week during the academic year and for several topical weekend retreats (e.g., social justice,

legislation, and sex education). Most TASHers live within a 50 mile radius of PPSLR and receive bus passes if transportation is an attendance barrier. Prospective TASHers typically learn about the organization through members; although TASH also shares information with school counselors.

Teen program coordinator, Judy Lipsitz, has been largely responsible for TASH implementation since its inception. Her duties include organizing events and maintaining contact with previous, current, and potential TASHers, coordinating with the other departments. For example, PPSLR sex educators provide comprehensive sex education and attend to related topics (e.g. healthy relationships, gender, and sexuality). The political department keeps TASHers updated on sex education legislation and mobilizes interested members through community organizing and advocacy trainings (e.g., how to communicate with elected officials).

The TASH program structure has three interdependent components (for full description, see Nicholas, indraftb): social justice-oriented sex education, empowering community, and opportunities for civic engagement. With encouragement from adult leaders, TASH youth apply their learnings by becoming sexual health advocates in their communities. Informally, they initiate conversations about sexual health with family or peers. Formally, they participate in community outreach events or lobby for comprehensive sexual education at local school boards or state legislature.

Participants. Study participants were two TASH staff and six former TASH youth. To identify potential participants, Judy Lipsitz asked staff and former youth participants if they would like to hear more about a study related to their TASH experiences. Once permission was given, she provided me the contact information from

ten interested individuals. After contacting all ten, eight agreed to participate and two did not respond (Table 1). Judy and I valued and pursued a sample representative of TASH's diverse identities in terms of race, gender identity, and sexuality. Sampling should be considered purposive in that participants were "information rich" cases in terms of their ability to address research questions about TASH experiences across the program's history (Patton, 2002, p. 230).

Table 1

Participant Characteristics (self-identified)

	TASH Role	Years Active	Age	Sex	Race
Charisse Jackson	former Planned Parenthood VP of Education and Diversity, social justice educator	2008-2013	55+	cis female	African American
Judy Lipsitz	program coordinator, co-creator	2001-present	70	female	White
*Aubrey	former youth participant, founded a TASH chapter	2005-2008	26	female	Black
*Heather	former youth participant, TASH volunteer sex educator	2005-2008	26	female	White
*Kayla	former youth participant	2012-2015	19	cis female	White
*Michael	former youth participant	2010-2013	21	male	White
*Pat	former youth participant	2005-2008	26	not disclosed	White
*Taylor	former youth participant	2008-2012	22	cis female	White

*pseudonym

Interview procedure. Participants were asked to reflect on TASH experiences across three semi-structured individual interviews. I utilized Seidman's (2012) phenomenologically-based approach to qualitative interviewing, attending to lived experience, meaning-making in context, the transitory nature of human experience, and subjective understanding. Interview #1 focused on participants' life histories prior to TASH. Interview #2 centered on participant experiences, asking the central question "what was it like to be in TASH?" In interview #3, participants reflected on the meaning of experiences in their personal and professional lives, addressing the overarching question, "what did it mean to be in TASH?" (see Appendix A, B for protocols). Each of three interviews ranged from 30-90 minutes, with the complete three-interview series typically occurring within a two to three week time span. The 25 total interviews totaled 24 hours of audio-recordings. Once transcribed, the interviews amounted to 700 pages. The project occurred under the auspices of the University of Missouri-St. Louis Institutional Review Board, ensuring participant rights and confidentiality.

Analytic approach. In this qualitative data analysis, I used tools from Grounded Theory including constant comparison, iterative inductive and deductive processes, open-coding, conceptualization, and category formation (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I also documented my thinking using analytic memos. The analytic procedure included six key steps:

1. line-by-line open-coding of each interview
2. arranging initial codes into a macrostructure or outline mirroring the transcript format, reducing the transcript while preserving structure (Gee, 2011)
3. identification of initial categories

4. arranging each participant's three-interview series into a profile, a narrative representation in context (Seidman, 2009)
5. comparison across participant profiles, developing and refining common categories (see Appendix D for codebook)
6. organizing categories by corresponding research questions, preparation for manuscript writing

The interview protocol was comprehensive, shedding light on research questions within the present study and two others (Nicholas, indrafta/b). As the current study attends to a defined set of questions around social justice dialogue, specific, relevant portions of transcripts were selected for qualitative analysis. For instance, I first learned about TASH's discussion pedagogy when I asked Judy about addressing group conflict. In her response, she emphasized the importance of helping youth make a key distinction between feeling uncomfortable and feeling emotionally unsafe. Only later did I realize this language belonged to SJE pedagogy. However, because the language and distinction seemed meaningful to Judy, I used her words to ask all participants about it directly. For instance, Heather brought up safety when discussing TASH dialogue. I then asked,

You mentioned the word safety, and I'll share what Judy told me about safety, and see what you think, she says, it's okay to be uncomfortable but it's not okay to be unsafe, feel unsafe, so what's your take on that?

Because they relate to TASH experiences, discussions of SJE pedagogy generally occurred within context of interview 2. These sections addressed the first two research questions about pedagogy. Segments relating to the third research question, on TASH's transitions to adulthood, were mostly identified within the interview 3. However, these

kinds of responses were broadly distributed within this meaning-making interview (#3) rather than tied to specific question(s). For example, the code “communication skills” was significant. (see Appendix D for codebook).

The small sample size of the study may raise concerns about credibility (validity). However, Seidman (2009) asserts in-depth interviews are sufficient. Owing to his phenomenological approach, validity should be viewed as a participant’s truth at a given moment. In this sense, in-depth interviews bolster validity in four ways: (1) they provide rich context for researcher interpretations, (2) they facilitate comparison across participants, (3) they allow a measure of “internal-consistency” when comparing within an individual’s three-interview series, and (4) participants clarify their own meaning through the process of reflection, enhancing validity (Seidman, 2009, p. 27). As an additional measure of validity, participants were given an opportunity to review the analysis prior to sharing it publicly (Merriam, 2009).

As qualitative researchers, we must be aware of assumptions and life experiences that impact our work. Prior to my Ph.D. studies, I was a middle school science teacher who rarely considered social justice. My worldview has since shifted, and intersectional social justice is now part of my mission. Upon learning about TASH, I noted its potential to support health equity and youth empowerment. I attended two meetings, witnessing a student-centered organization made up of passionate adults and youth. Several TASH alumni shared its impact on their lives as they became adults. I did not observe SJE pedagogy in action during my visits, but I could not have recognized it at the time. Still, the study has inspired me to implement SJE pedagogy in future teaching endeavors. I believe we often underestimate youth ability and desire to engage in difficult

conversations. These kinds of discussions have the potential to build relationships, support critical thinking, and nurture democracy. However, we must balance these realizations with our concern for the psychological health of our students.

Findings

The following sections explore how TASH engaged youth in SJE dialogue from the perspective of adult leaders and former youth participants. First, adult leaders explain SJE discussion pedagogy, situating it within TASH's broader empowerment ethos. Next, former participants share their experiences of TASH discussions and SJE pedagogy. In the final section, former youth participants explain how participation in SJE dialogue informed their academic, career, and personal lives beyond TASH.

Safety/discomfort pedagogy. TASH supports participant empowerment through its education, empowering community ethos, and civic engagement opportunities (Nicholas, indraftb). Here, the term ethos refers to organizational culture. Namely, adult leaders believe in power of youth to make a difference. Expressing this stance, they frequently make affirming statements and help youth connect learning to meaningful action. As an organization, adults share power, providing leadership opportunities and being responsive to youth feedback. Additionally, norms or "Ground Rules" guide community interaction (see Appendix E). To Judy, these 12 norms are meant to promote youth "ownership" within the community (e.g., respect for all values, confidentiality, and sensitivity to diversity). Once introduced, TASH returns to the Ground Rules prior to each meeting. Judy describes norms around group communication,

We set norms at the beginning of the year on how we will, you know talk about things like using 'I statements' or 'allowed to pass' or 'don't monopolize'...so we

do have norms and we remind them of the norms all through the year.’

The empowering community ethos supports social justice education in which sexual health access is viewed in terms of intersectional systems of oppression (e.g., race, class, gender). Much of this education is discussion-based. Judy acknowledges, “we talk about very sensitive issues, often they're controversial issues or value-laden.” Rather than avoiding these kind of conversations, TASH views them as integral to its education and advocacy aims. Moreover, TASH’s empowerment ethos assumes that youth are capable of engaging in challenging, potentially uncomfortable conversations. Similarly, Charisse asserts, “taking a risk was part of the community norms.”

In supporting difficult dialogues, TASH adults embrace discomfort as integral to the learning process. Social justice educator Charisse summarizes the relationship between learning and discomfort, taken from her SJE training,

The whole thing was ‘lean into discomfort,’ and there’s a theory called, ‘being on the edge’ or something; your best learning comes on the other side of your discomfort, so, if you can work your way, if you get to space of where you’re uncomfortable, and you can push it, your learning’s right there, but if you retreat and try to get into a comfortable space, then you’re not pushing yourself to learn anything.

Over the years, the pedagogy became increasingly formalized alongside an anti-oppression curriculum. Volunteer sex educators, including Heather, refined it and built it into the program’s culture. Today, adult leaders explicitly share their stance on discomfort and learning with youth, who are asked to distinguish between feeling uncomfortable and feeling emotionally unsafe. Judy describes this instruction, which

occurs alongside other community norms,

We talk and we do a whole session at the beginning of the year, maybe not a whole session but maybe 30 minutes with, 'I feel comfortable, I feel unsafe.' Um, there is a difference between being comfortable and uncomfortable and not feeling safe. (Being unsafe) is not permissible in this room. It's ok to be uncomfortable because some of the things they're experiencing they're growing with that discomfort, and they're learning from each other.

Similarly, Heather elaborates,

We explain to them that uncomfortable is a learning goal, and that's where we want you to be; unsafe is where that stops, and that's what we don't want to be, and usually they're pretty good at articulating like how it feels to be shut down, you know, to be shut down or turned off, is a funny phrase, but, sort of tuned in to being able to be in that space.

Heather acknowledges that one of the challenges is that the two states can be easily conflated,

There's a difference between being safe and constantly being affirmed and told you're right, and I think when you don't define it, like parse out, whenever someone feels challenged, and actually feels uncomfortable, they might feel like that safe space is compromised, but it's not actually if you parse it down; they're still able to engage him learn, which means that there's still safety.

By teaching and modeling self-awareness, adults share responsibility for group safety with youth. While Judy indicated it is not "permissible" to be unsafe in TASH, her later comments recognize safety as more of an ideal than a reality. She goes on to describe

strategies youth may use if they feel unsafe. An extension of empowering community norms, these strategies are re-introduced in the context of each session. First, youth might address the group directly or intervene on a peer's behalf. Second, youth may opt out of the specific discussion or speak privately with an adult leader. This might occur in potentially triggering discussion (e.g., sexual assault), wherein the Ground Rule "allowed to pass" could mean exiting the meeting space. Heather puts it simply, "sometimes like the safe way to be in that space is to not be in that space, and so that's also something we try to really protect the students right to do."

As Heather noted, distinguishing between feeling unsafe and uncomfortable can be a challenge for youth. Another difficulty can be balancing self-disclosure with addressing the topic under discussion. While the issues discussed in TASH are personally relevant, Judy maintains that it is not a "therapy group"—the purpose of TASH is to discuss issues related to sex education rather than personal problems. Moreover, TASH is equipped to meet the full range of participant psychological and emotional needs. Support beyond the program context is sometimes necessary, with adults referring youth to mental health services and other social supports in the community as the need arose. Additionally, the adult leaders are mandatory reporters of child abuse and neglect.

Youth experiences: Out of the comfort zone. Former TASHers describe the relationship between discomfort and learning. Taylor credits Charisse with her understanding of the subject, saying she was, "really big on a kind of like pedagogy that talks a lot about leaning in to discomfort, and thinking about why you're uncomfortable." Michael asserts, "we go (to TASH) to have uncomfortable conversations, to step out of the comfort zone." These notions are closely tied to the distinction between being unsafe

and being uncomfortable. Michael adds, “you have to become uncomfortable to have these conversations, and without being unsafe or threatening.” Generally, Taylor viewed the adult leaders as “really determined to create a space that was safe but often uncomfortable.” Kayla explains,

I just don't think you can learn well if you don't feel safe, and it's not about feeling comfortable, there have been many many TASH sessions that I've attended that I felt incredibly uncomfortable in, because pushing your boundaries should make you feel uncomfortable, but, um, I think the the difference between feeling uncomfortable in the face of learning new things, and feeling safe is that, a safe space should mean that you know, even when you start feeling uncomfortable, it's going to be ok, like you will come out of this uncomfortable feeling alive and well and respected and understood by your peers

Taylor illustrates safety and discomfort with an anecdote about her first TASH meeting, which had her blushing in embarrassment,

I felt really uncomfortable but I didn't feel unsafe, I felt like other people shared my discomfort, and it was like, it was gonna be ok, we were gonna work through it, I didn't feel like I was being targeted, didn't feel like it was like not okay to like struggle to process things or not ok to feel uncomfortable,' then think about, 'well, why am I uncomfortable?'

Instead of “shutting down” at the discomfort, she reflected on its source, realizing,

I was uncomfortable because we were talking about sex openly, and so like leaning into that discomfort was like, 'ok, I'm uncomfortable with this because I've been taught however passively or actively that we shouldn't talk about this,

that this is like shameful.’

In part, recognition of the cause of her feeling allowed her to continue participating in TASH.

Beyond explicit training on safety and discomfort, other community norms supported the pedagogy. The community shared the responsibility for safety; youth and adults took ownership. Kayla explains, “the adults educators would be there to kind of help navigate if need be, but it was our discussion, and, I don’t think that’s an opportunity given to a lot of youth.” Aubrey adds, “while they weren’t necessarily like involved in a conversation, they were very highly attentive to the conversation.” Several TASHers mentioned the use of “oops” and “ouch” to prompt discussion of safety or conflict. Similarly, Taylor says, “we had solid discussion norms that were tied into, like classic like, step up, step back kind of stuff that were tied into the anti-oppression curriculum.” According to Michael, someone feeling unsafe might simply say, “hey, that’s not cool,” and the group would seek to understand why that individual felt unsafe. He asserts “that’s why the safe space works, and when, even when in conflicting conversations, it’s still safe.” In the event the person or people feeling unsafe do not raise a concern, other TASH youth or adults may speak up.

Kayla credits the safety/discomfort pedagogy and TASH community norms with enabling her to participate safely in potentially triggering discussions. As a survivor of and vocal advocate around teen domestic violence, Kayla describes how she navigated triggering conversations centering on abuse and trauma,

Something that I thought they did really well was, if you ever want to go to the bathroom or get a snack or something, you know, you never had to raise your

hand, you just went, and like did what you needed to do, and similarly if you ever felt triggered by a conversation you could leave, and that, I definitely took advantage of that a couple times, like there were a few times when we would be discussing topics related to abuse or, and I would feel to triggered, and I would leave, and the great thing about those like open housekeeping rules is you know, I was embarrassed about feeling triggered, I could say that I went to the bathroom if asked, which you know, usually wouldn't be, or it was also completely acceptable to to pull you know, one of your other peers or one of the adult educators aside and be like, 'I need some support right now,' you could always count on having someone who would go out and talk with you, if you work on too long, Judy would usually come and check on you, but you know, wanted to be left alone, that was fine too. So, I think that was a big, big component of creating a safe space because you could participate as much or as little as you needed...

After she was sexually assaulted in high school, Heather also exercised her right not to be in the space when triggered during TASH discussions.

Even with these norms in place, study participants speculate that not all TASHers felt safe. Although Kayla identifies as a cis white woman, she raised concerns about gender inclusive language and the possibility of misgendering. Alternatively, some participants may have continued to conflate safety and (dis)comfort. She gave the example of white people confronting white supremacy for the first time. Taylor attends to this nuance,

I think it's hard to like walk that line, for a lot of people, and for a lot of people who have never been uncomfortable, like being made uncomfortable feels unsafe,

and that doesn't mean that they're like actually unsafe, always, but it means that they are experiencing like a real like feeling of discomfort which they are unfamiliar with.

Like adult leaders, youth also expressed frustration when personal stories overshadowed educational group dialogue around issues. Michael saw this challenge as a byproduct of "agency" afforded to TASH youth,

We would get bogged down into everybody has to say their own story, and while your story is important, we are all talking about similar things, so let's move on the conversation and get more complex, um so, I think that when given to student control, sometimes it evolves into a 'this is my story, and let me say this to make me feel good.'

Michael, who valued deep, political conversations would sometimes felt some members would prefer TASH be more "like a support group rather than educational experience." He qualifies this criticism, echoing TASH's community norms around respect and acceptance saying, "to make a safe space you have to accept them as well."

Distinctions should be made between the experiences of two TASH cohorts within the study. The safety/discomfort pedagogy was formalized within TASH around the time when Charisse joined, alongside an anti-oppression curriculum. Pat, Aubrey, and Heather participated in TASH prior to this shift. This subgroup of TASHers did not have experiences relating to safety/discomfort but did comment on safety. Pat saw Judy as desiring to create a safe space for youth to talk about a sexual health, a challenging aim given the personal and stereotypically taboo topic. Aubrey provided a more general take on TASH safety, relating it to a sense of nonjudgment and validation. She states, "you

may not agree with what everyone's saying, but you should never feel like threatened or that this isn't a safe space for you to be who you are." As a former TASH youth and a current volunteer sex educator, Heather sees her TASH youth experience of "safety" as different, less formal. While safety was discussed, "there wasn't that distinction that was made, that encouragement to be uncomfortable, it was more like, eh, a Kumbaya." As a sex educator in today's TASH, Heather sees the distinction as important. To help youth learn, Heather wants them to feel safe in being wrong and addressing sexual health misconceptions.

Influence of participation. As mentioned above, the safety/discomfort pedagogy supports interdependent aspects of program structure, described fully elsewhere (Nicholas, in draftb). Broadly, according to Judy, "TASHers are encouraged to be messengers for sexual health." After each session, TASHers are asked, "what can you do about it?" TASH youth are encouraged to initiate sexual health conversations beyond the TASH community with friends and family. To Pat, Judy was "was encouraging us to keep having that discussion when we got home." Therefore, discussion amongst teens as "more of the practice for when we would take it into the real world." They took their learning into the real world, on three main levels, according to Charisse. The first, "meant advocacy in a concrete, legislative type of way, uh where they go to lobby, where they participate in ...making sure people got called on bills." Second, "they were advocates in their schools, so when they left TASH, they went out and advocated...they'd go to the principal or the counselor or whoever to make a case for...comprehensive sex education in their schools." Third, "they would be the go-to people around accurate sex education, for their non-TASH peers."

Although formal legislative advocacy was important, participants tended to mention TASH-specific communication skills in reference to informal advocacy experiences. To Michael, TASH was “creating educated members of (participants’) own communities and having them be the trusted member instead of like TASH facilitating a trusting group.” TASHers positioned themselves as resources for sexual health information in the community, expanding access beyond TASH. Several participants covertly distributed condoms and dental dams within their schools. Others volunteered to connect peers to sexual health resources, including Planned Parenthood. It is not to say that these efforts were always well received. Aubrey’s Catholic high school punished her for revealing her affiliation with the school in publicity for TASH’s teen dating violence play. However, TASHers were resourceful and persistent. For example, when Pat got in trouble at school for distributing condoms, she took the opportunity to lobby her administration for expanded sex education. “I know I did have some conversations with the administrators about how I didn’t think a couple of days in the middle of a health class was enough, and they were just incredulous.”

In taking these actions, TASHers recognized their growing ability to initiate and participate in uncomfortable conversations. Taylor describes this change in reference to challenging her high school sex education teacher,

I think before TASH, like I never would’ve interrupted a teacher to say like ‘no you’re wrong about emergency contraception, you don’t know what you’re talking about,’ because I was just sort of like a teacher’s pet and the like good, follow-the-rules kind of person.

Participants continued to draw upon these skills explicitly as they graduated from high

school, left TASH, and participated in new educational spaces. In her first year of college, Kayla summoned her TASH learnings when confronting a college professor,

I think maybe one of the most direct impacts I've ever seen of TASH having on my life is last semester, I was in a intro to social work class and it was a big lecture class, I think it was like 120, 130 people in that class, and the teacher said something that I considered to be very slut shaming and kind of object defined women's bodies, and she just kind of kept going, and I was just kind of sitting there getting angry, and I was like 'man, I wish this was TASH that I could say something,' then I realize like, 'wait, why can't I say anything?' So, I raise my hand and I confronted the teacher

Combined with other TASH skills, knowledge, and social capital, this communication skillset enabled youth to formalize their sense of change agency by pursuing TASH-related careers (Nicholas, in drafta). That is, the ability to engage in uncomfortable conversations about sexual health and social justice partially influence related career choice (e.g., social work, human studies, women's studies, and public health).

Professionally, Aubrey started her own chapter of TASH in a southern U.S. city. She describes how she strives to create a safe space there,

I remember what it was to be a youth looking for that safe space and finding it in adults, so, I try to keep that in mind when I interact with my youth, um, not to, I remember the things that made me feel good, being around them, that they weren't judgmental, that they allowed, that they were listening and not speaking over me, that they didn't make me feel like cuz they were an adult, they were so much smarter than me, like, so it allowed me to feel like I could be myself, so I

think, as an adult, I keep, I never want to make any youth feel, what I felt outside of TASH, so I try to really be Judy in my life ((laughter)), I try to really be understanding, and be accepting,

She applies TASH's notion of safety to her parenting, saying "hopefully as a parent, probably, I hope is the main goal of TASH, that I'm nonjudgy, and listen and understand so that my daughter can feel her safe space is with me."

Discussion

The present study explored how a youth development organization, TASH, engaged youth participants in SJE dialogue. This study is the first to examine SJE discussion pedagogy through lived experiences of the learning environment (Adams & Bell, 2016). Moreover, the reflective design allowed glimpses into the ways in which SJE influenced participants into adulthood. In-depth interviews with TASH staff and former participants addressed the research questions: (1) How did adult leaders design and implement discussion-related pedagogy? (2) What were participant experiences of discussions? and (3) How did participation in TASH dialogue inform youth transitions to adulthood?

Adult leaders integrated an SJE approach into the program structure over time. They viewed discomfort as productive, a sign of being on one's "learning edge." Additionally, TASH's youth empowerment ethos meant that young advocates were confronted with rather than shielded from uncomfortable conversations. Within the context of community norms, adult leaders supported participants' self-awareness to distinguish between safety and discomfort in SJE discussions, a key competency for engaging in difficult SJE conversations (Bell et al., 2016; Griffin, 1997). This instruction

included options for action if one felt unsafe. Importantly, former TASHers vouched for the training's effectiveness in helping them make the distinction. This instruction and resulting self-awareness equipped TASHers for difficult conversations by: (1) enabling them to remain engaged even when they were out of their comfort zones, (2) giving them a normative script for action if they felt unsafe, and (3) distributing responsibility for safety to all community members, rather than just adult leaders. As former participants transitioned to adulthood, TASH communication skills informed their continued formal and informal advocacy efforts. Examples include initiating uncomfortable conversations, standing up to authority, professional discussion participation, and creating safe spaces for dialogue.

Considering recommendations, I return to the broader introductory question, "How can we honor the emotional and psychological needs of our students while challenging them?" Alongside pedagogical insights, study context is highly informative. Relative to the debate on higher education, the current study of high school students speaks to both the desire and ability of young people to engage in difficult conversations. Not only did they participate, they were eager to do so. Michael exemplified this attitude, stating, "we go (to TASH) to have uncomfortable conversations." These young people serve as counter-narratives of strength, opposing caricatures of fragile college students bent on political correctness (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2015; Vatz, 2016).

Generally, findings might inform the practice of educators seeking to support critical thinking in service of social justice (Giroux, 2006), serving as a model for equipping students with shared language and self-awareness in group discussion. However, findings point to the complexity of enacting these practices in educational

settings in two ways. First, educators are encouraged attend to community culture while implementing SJE discussion pedagogy, as it is situated within broader empowering community ethos of adult-youth power sharing and affirmation of youth's ability to make a difference. Moreover, TASH lays a foundation for SJE discussions by introducing and continuously returning to community norms around group communication. Without these empowering community foundations, SJE discussion pedagogy would likely fall apart. Second, additional work is needed to understand how TASH's SJE approach and others could be implemented in formal settings. While formal settings could expand access to this kind of educational opportunity, one could imagine many challenges (e.g., curricular alignment, SJE professional development, reluctance to address social justice issues). Moreover, TASH is a self-selected group of students throughout the St. Louis-area high schools. Several study participants mentioned they appreciated the anonymity of TASH that is not present in school discussions on sex education or other topics.

While I have argued for the broad applicability of TASH pedagogy, one aspect is particularly germane to the higher education conversation on trauma triggers. Avenues for non-participation were critical to implementation of SJE discussions and practices in TASH, where individuals who experienced trauma sought to participate in potentially triggering discussions. Although designed to facilitate participation, pedagogies and strategies have limits. For instance, trigger warnings are designed to prepare individuals for potentially triggering content but cannot prevent one from being triggered (Thorpe, 2016). Moreover, the extreme variability in triggers would make it nearly impossible to identify every potential trigger (Veraldi & Veraldi, 2015). Therefore, we must take steps to ensure access for all students on both the classroom and university levels. This means

compliance with ADA and Title IX and connecting students to mental health services (Hickey, 2016; Veraldi & Veraldi, 2015).

The present study only begins to address the questions raised here, due in part to methodological limitations. Still, where this study is bound, opportunities for contributions abound. First, qualitative research is said to be transferable rather than generalizable (Merriam, 2009). Applicability in other settings is dependent on similarity to the context of a youth development group in St. Louis centered on sex education access. Future studies might then explore the phenomenon across locales, participant characteristics, educational settings, and social justice issues. For instance, studying demographically heterogeneous groups like TASH could offer insights into how those with differing experiences of oppression participate in SJE dialogue. Second, the study's phenomenological approach, by design, attended to experience and meaning-making relative to SJE pedagogy. A next step might be to understand the classroom practices and discourse complementing experiences of pedagogy. Third, the characteristics of the study sample are comment-worthy. Conceivably, participants remaining in contact with TASH would have been more active within the organization and activities (e.g., discussion). Participants also qualified their TASH experiences of safety and discomfort, suspecting some of their peers felt unsafe. Furthermore, as participation in TASH is voluntary, it may appeal to individuals seeking the kind of challenge SJE dialogue presents. As such, more work is needed to assess how individual and program factors influence SJE discussion participation. Fourth, I inserted SJE pedagogy into the present trigger warning conversation, but there are limits to its applicability at the moment. Although some of my participants discussed trauma and triggers explicitly, it was in the context of my

questioning around TASH's safety/discomfort pedagogy and group dynamics. A new line of SJE empirical research would examine SJE pedagogy in light of trauma triggers and the current campus climate. For instance, pre and post designs could assess efficacy of an SJE intervention.

Conclusion

While the present study was contextualized within the educational field, I end by addressing a broader audience. Discussions in U.S. educational settings model wider social processes, where people from diverse backgrounds are asked to engage in democratic discourse and form consensus. From the Senate floor to the school board room, our current political reality is divisive. The present study inspires a sense of hope for unity, a belief in young citizens committed to working across difference. The benefits of such learning opportunities extend not only to participants, but to society at large. What lessons might society take from these educational settings?

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Chapter 5: Coda

General Reflections

This chapter represents final thoughts on the corpus, including recommendations for future research and my personal reflections. I begin by sharing my thinking about the relationship between the three pieces. They were written in the order presented here, and a certain progression is evident. Chapter 2, “Rights-based program,” is an orientation to TASH. The analysis largely occurred on the program structure-level. As such, it represents a descriptive account or case study of program functioning. Progressing, I sowed the seeds from the first paper, referencing the descriptive study as I moved to interpretation. Chapter 3, “Change agents” is the most theoretical paper, synthesizing two frameworks on an individual-level of analysis. Rather than attending to TASH broadly, it featured a specific TASH influence and form of change agency, participant career development. That is, TASH program structure contributed to a study that foregrounded developmental processes. Chapter 4, “Uncomfortable conversations” focuses on the implications of one aspect of TASH pedagogy. While acknowledging the influence of pedagogy on participant development (e.g., Chapter 3), this paper operates on both pedagogical and political levels of analysis. In doing so, this work has the broadest implications within educational communities. It may also be the most controversial, evoking contested discourses around academic freedom, student mental health, and socially just education.

Interviewing Approach

To this point, I have not reflected on my experiences of Seidman’s (2009/2012) phenomenological-approach to interviewing. The three-interview series differed

fundamentally from my previous qualitative interviews. By design, the series produced more data than single interviews. However, it was the quality not the quantity of the data that impressed me. In each manuscript, I referenced Seidman's defense of the validity of the interview series. Now having used the approach, I agree with him on all accounts. The interviewing relationship develops over time and multiple interactions. Compared to one-shot interviews, the series was richer and supported a greater degree of self-disclosure. Moreover, participants clarified their own meaning across interviews, returning to the anecdotes, refining, and elaborating.

At times during the analytic process, I was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of data and identifying what to include in the manuscripts. Although I only presented a fraction of the data in, other sections served as a gage of internal validity. This was particularly true of Interview #1, life history. Admittedly, I was concerned that large portions of participant profiles would be "wasted" if they did not make it into the final product. However, these interviews became my contextual anchors for the data presented. With the other data doing the "behind the scenes" analytic work, I was confident the data chosen reflected participant meaning. If analyzing *single* interviews today, I would not be so confident. Furthermore, single interviews strike me as uncondusive to the kind of meaning-making processes occurring in my interviews. Colleagues have shared my experience of Seidman's approach, anecdotally. Therefore, comparative work on the affordances of single vs. multiple-interview approaches could inform validity questions.

Future Research

In each paper, I have attended to issues around sampling. The study is the first to examine a YOG on sexual health and reproductive justice, issues certainly relevant to

many young people. It makes sense that a program sponsored by a reproductive health provider would take up reproductive justice advocacy, rather than another issue.

However, a range of social issues hold importance for certain people in certain places at certain times. As the findings are bound by the context of the study, more work is needed to address questions such as: How does YOG issue choice vary with local political contexts? How do programs fit within the broader aims of community organizations? How do community organizations support youth civic engagement? What attracts or deters youth from participation (e.g., program factors, access issues or individual factors)? Identity, for instance, was central to participant meaning-making.

I walk away from this project with the profound sense that all youth would benefit from the kind of experience TASH provided. That is, TASH supported youth in confronting injustice head-on and nurtured a life-long sense of social responsibility. As shared in the introductory chapter, this kind of social justice work is in line with my educational mission. My own scholarly and teaching practices will forever be inspired by TASH lessons on critical education, community, and action. Therefore, I believe the individual, community, and societal benefits of this kind of program should be distributed widely. In working toward this aim, I am interested in the expansion of a TASH-inspired model in diverse STEM education settings. While the term “citizen scientist,” has often referenced citizen engagement in the research processes, I use it here to imagine a more participatory notion of civic engagement in STEM issues aligned with TASH’s change agency.

Although I conceive of sex education and health education as part of STEM, the school-based sex education political climate described in Chapter 2 is still quite

restrictive. I have serious doubts about reproductive justice programming being accepted within public schools. However, I believe environmental justice issues hold promise in terms of compatibility within formal and informal settings under the STEM umbrella (Environmental Protection Agency [EPA], 2016). Youth “citizen scientists” could engage with global issues of local importance, such as climate change, clean water, and health.

In my experience, youth care deeply about many issues at the intersection of health, place (environment), and equity. When I was involved with the Science Literacy through Science Journalism Project, over 50% of students wrote news articles about health (Saul, Kohnen, Newman, & Pearce, 2011). Some youth even tackled the intersection of health and place. Notably, a student profiled a recently condemned apartment complex, bringing attention to the health risks of mold in the community (SciJourn.org, 2011). When I worked with sixth graders in a program on chronic disease and place, they eagerly initiated conversations with caregivers about health habits. We also engaged in critical discussions about health disparities in their communities. As a STEM literacy coach, I spoke with math teachers desiring to incorporate the lead contamination in Flint, MI, (and later St. Louis, MO) into their curricula. We sought to integrate social justice concepts about disparity with mathematical understandings of proportion and disproportion.

This interdisciplinary work would synthesize the fields including issue-based STEM education, environmental justice, youth development, and civic engagement. An initial step might be to qualitatively profile and compare entities already doing environmental justice work with youth. It is also essential to consider the sociocultural factors influencing implementation of this kind of model on multiple levels.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol - TASH staff

Questions will include the following, presented in a natural discourse. The order of the questions is flexible based on participant responses. This format is consistent with the conventions of semi-structured interviewing (Flick, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Seidman, E., 2012).

The First Interview

Explain: *This first interview has to do with your experiences that led to you to start TASH.*

- How did you decide to start TASH?
 - Decisions made regarding content, structure, community practices
- Why was there a need for TASH?
- What did you imagine TASH could be?
- Describe how you got the word out to students about TASH.
- What were your first memories of TASH?
- Describe your life around the time you started TASH.
- What kind education experience did you have prior to TASH?
 - health education? sexual education?
- Describe your activities in your community prior to TASH.
- What did you know about reproductive rights prior to joining TASH?
- Would you have described yourself as a politically active?
- Did you know anyone at the time who could be considered an advocate or activist?
- How many years were you involved with TASH?

The Second Interview

Explain: This interview will focus on your experiences as a leader in TASH.

Main question: “When we talk about “TASH” what are we talking about?”

Sub-questions:

- What is “TASH?”
 - people? policies? events? affiliation? physical space?
- What was your role in TASH?
 - How did it change over time?
 - How did TASH change?
- What was the role of the students in TASH?
- What TASH events did you participate in?
 - Fieldtrips to Jefferson City? TASH retreats? Community-building activities?
- TASH stands for Teen Advocates for Sexual Health. What does that mean to you?
- What kind of advocacy did you engage in with TASH?
- TASH is described as “anti-oppression.” What does that mean to you?
 - How do you model this anti-oppression stance?
- How was conflict or controversy approached within TASH?
- What kind of leader did you try to be?
- Please compare TASH’s approach to sexual health education to approaches outside the TASH community.
- TASH describes itself as “rights-based.” What does that mean to you?
- How would you describe the relationship between TASH and Planned Parenthood?
- Who tended to join and remain active in TASH?
- Please tell me about a success you had in TASH.
- Please tell me about a challenge you had in TASH.

The Third Interview

Explain: This interview will provide an opportunity for you to reflect on your TASH experience.

Main question: “What, if anything, did you take away from leading TASH?”

Sub-questions:

- What aspects of TASH made an impression on you?
- Why do you continue leading TASH?
- How is TASH today different from when you started it?
- How has TASH affected your scope of awareness?
 - Changed your worldview?
- What do you believe about your ability to affect political change?
 - Social change?
- Would you describe yourself as an advocate?
 - In what ways? For reproductive rights? Other causes?
 - For whom? Why?
- What socio-political issues are important to you?
- Describe your current sociopolitical participation.
 - Voting? Writing to legislators? Working for campaigns? Protests? Social media?
- What is TASH advocating for today?
- How has TASH affected your friendships or relationships?
- What advice would you give high school students who are considering joining TASH?
- What do you hope students take away from TASH?

Questions will include the following, presented in a natural discourse. The order of the questions is flexible based on participant responses. This format is consistent with the conventions of semi-structured interviewing (Flick, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Seidman, E., 2012).

Appendix B: Interview Protocol - TASH alums

The First Interview

Explain: *This first interview has to do with your experiences that drew you to join TASH.*

- How did you find out about TASH?
 - Peer? School counselor? Teacher? Planned Parenthood?
 - How did you decide to join TASH?
 - What were your first memories of TASH?
 - Describe your life around the time you joined TASH.
 - What kind of sexual education did your high school provide?
 - Abstinence only? Abstinence preferred? Comprehensive sexual education?
 - Describe your activities in your school and community prior to TASH:
 - Sports? Extracurricular? Community service? Scouts or other youth organizations?
Church youth groups?
 - What did you know about reproductive rights prior to joining TASH?
 - Would you have described yourself as a politically active?
 - Did you know anyone at the time who could be considered an advocate or activist?
- Demographic questions:
- What is your current age?
 - How many years were you involved with TASH?
 - Where did you attend high school?
 - Where do you live now?
 - What is your current occupation?

The Second Interview

Explain: This interview will focus on your experiences as a participant in TASH.

Main question: “When we talk about “TASH” what are we talking about?”

Sub-questions:

- What is “TASH?”
 - people? policies? events? affiliation? physical space?
- What was your role in TASH?
 - How did it change over time?
- What TASH events did you participate in?
 - Fieldtrips to Jefferson City? TASH retreats? Community-building activities?
- TASH stands for Teen Advocates for Sexual Health. What does that mean to you?
- What kind of advocacy did you engage in during your time in TASH?
- TASH describes itself as “anti-oppression.” What does that mean to you?
- How was conflict or controversy approached within TASH?
- How did TASH leadership affect your participation?
- Please compare TASH’s approach to sexual health education to approaches outside the TASH community.
 - At school? In other settings like church, scouts, etc?
- TASH describes itself as “rights-based.” What does that mean to you?
- How would you describe the relationship between TASH and Planned Parenthood?
- Who tended to join and remain active in TASH?
- Who tended to drop out of TASH?
- Please tell me about a success you had in TASH.
- Please tell me about a challenge you had in TASH.
- Why did you continue participating in TASH?

The Third Interview

Explain: This interview will provide an opportunity for you to reflect on your TASH experience.

Main question: “What, if anything, did you take away from your participation in TASH?”

Sub-questions:

- What aspects of TASH made an impression on you when you were an active member?
 - At that time?
 - As you reflect back on your TASH experiences?
- How has TASH affected any life decisions like choices of college major and career?
 - How might your life have turned out differently if you didn’t participate in TASH?
- How has TASH affected your scope of awareness?
 - Changed your worldview?
- How has TASH’s anti-oppression message affected the way you see the world today?
- What do you believe about your ability to affect political change?
 - Social change?
- Would you still describe yourself as an advocate?
 - In what ways? For reproductive rights? Other causes?
 - For whom? Why?
- What socio-political issues are important to you?
- Describe your current sociopolitical participation.

- Voting? Writing to legislators? Working for campaigns? Protests? Social media?
- Describe your current involvement with TASH.
 - If still involved: Why have you stayed involved with TASH?
- How common would you say your TASH experiences were?
- How has TASH affected your friendships or relationships?
- How has TASH influenced your ideas about what it means to be an adult?
- What advice would you give high school students who are considering joining TASH?

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Appendix C: Literature Review

Overview

In this chapter, I begin by situating sexual education policy in the U.S. and Missouri when compared to evidence-based approaches. In doing so, I provide a context for TASH's political work in advocating for specific educational reforms. I also present studies featuring Planned Parenthood's role as a sexual health education provider in partnership with youth. Next, I situate TASH within the youth development literature that conceives of organizing as a site of youth development. Specifically, I outline youth organizing scholarship that focuses the role of critical consciousness in sociopolitical development. Finally, I review studies that seek to understand how former youth organizing participants relate programmatic elements to developmental impacts. In reviewing the literature, I establish how the present study adds to the small but growing body of literature that examines sociopolitical development from the perspectives of former youth organizers.

Comprehensive Sexual Education

Planned Parenthood describes itself as the "largest provider of comprehensive sex education in our communities" with over 1.8 million youth and parents served in the U.S. annually (Planned Parenthood Action Fund, 2016, "Planned Parenthood & Sex Ed," para. 1). One of Planned Parenthood's political priorities is advocating for comprehensive sexual education and against abstinence-only education. As a youth affiliate of Planned Parenthood Action Fund, TASH also participates in this advocacy effort at local and state levels (TASH, 2016). Therefore, a discussion of comprehensive sexual education and abstinence education in the U.S. and Missouri is relevant.

In the CDC-funded report, *Emerging answers 2007: Research findings on programs to reduce teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases*, leading sexual education researcher Douglas Kirby (2007) reported on the features of effective pregnancy and STD/HIV prevention programs implemented with youth aged 12-18 in the U.S. from 1990-2007. One major category of analysis was curriculum-based programs, the kind often implemented with youth in school and community settings. Kirby notes that curriculum-based programs fall on a continuum between comprehensive sex education and abstinence education. Comprehensive sex education programs “encourage abstinence as the safest choice but also encourage young people who are having sex to always use condoms or other measures of contraception” (Kirby, 2007, p. 15). In contrast, abstinence programs expect youth to delay sexual activity until marriage. Kirby reported that abstinence programs have not been found to delay initiation of sex or reduce the number of sexual partners. He clarifies that the impact was neutral, as the programs did not increase risky sexual behavior. In turn, Kirby found that two-thirds of comprehensive programs had positive behavioral effects, including delaying sex, increasing contraceptive use, decreased number of sexual partners, and decreased frequency of sex.

Sexual education in Missouri. Missouri law requires public and charter schools to teach human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) prevention beginning in sixth grade (Mo. Rev. Stat. § 191.668.1, 1988). The State allows individual school districts to decide whether to provide sex education (Mo. Rev. Stat. § 170.015-1, 2015). If a school offers sex education, Missouri parents may elect to have their children opt-out of the school’s programming. Mo. Rev. Stat. § 170.015-1 specifies that any schools electing to teach sex

education must present “medically and factually accurate” information that is age-appropriate. However, the statute complies with federal abstinence law, rather than the tenets of comprehensive sexual education (42 U.S.C. § 710, 2010). According to Kirby (2007), abstinence-until-marriage is the strictest interpretation of abstinence education. Missouri law states that “educational programs shall stress moral responsibility in and restraint from sexual activity” (Mo. Rev. Stat. § 191.668.1). Course materials must stress abstinence from sexual activity until marriage as “the preferred choice of behavior,” (Mo. Rev. Stat. § 170.015-1). The policy emphasizes that abstinence is the only 100% effective way to prevent sexually transmitted diseases (STDS), pregnancy, and negative psychological and academic outcomes associated with youth sexual activity. The curricular materials must encourage adoption in the case of adolescent pregnancy. Additionally, the policy restricts sexual education providers in stating:

No school district or charter school, or its personnel or agents, shall provide abortion services, or permit a person or entity to offer, sponsor, or furnish in any manner any course materials or instruction relating to human sexuality or sexually transmitted diseases to its students if such person or entity is a provider of abortion services (Mo. Rev. Stat. § 170.015-1).

As the only abortion provider in the state, this policy effectively bars Planned Parenthood from supporting sex education within Missouri public schools.

State policies have consequences for the allocation of federal sexual education grants. According to the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS, 2014), the state of Missouri received almost \$1.8 million in teen pregnancy prevention funding in Fiscal Year 2014. Of that, \$848,933 (47%) funded

programming through the Title V State Abstinence Education Program. Funding recipients of this grant must comply with federal abstinence policy as described above (42 U.S.C. § 710, 2010). Another \$906,096 (50%) was allocated through Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP). This program is the first to specifically support comprehensive sexual education. The remaining dollars funded youth sexual health reporting (SIECUS, 2014).

A report from the Guttmacher Institute (2016) helps put Missouri policy into perspective compared to other U.S. states and the District of Columbia. Missouri is one of 28 states that do not mandate sexual education, but one of 33 states that do mandate HIV education. Notably, Missouri is one of 19 states that require emphasis on abstinence until marriage if sexual education is provided. However, TASH and Planned Parenthood see a mismatch between policy and the reality of adolescent sexual activity (Planned Parenthood Action Fund, 2016). In 2013, 43% of Missouri high school students reported current or past sexual activity (CDC, 2013). In terms of teen pregnancy, 30.0 births per 1,000 teens aged 15–19 were documented in Missouri compared to the national average of 26.5 (CDC, 2015). Kirby (2007) urges sexual health educators to consider the U.S. fertility indicators relative to other industrialized countries:

Adolescent (aged 15-19) Birth Rate in Industrialized Counties		
Country	most recent year of measurement	live births per 1000
Australia	2013	14.5
Canada	2009	14.1
Japan	2013	4.4
France	2012	9.4
Germany	2013	7.8
Norway	2013	5.6
Sweden	2013	5.3
UK and Northern	2013	17.3

Ireland		
United States	2013	26.5

Table 1. Data obtained from United Nations (2014) *Demographic yearbook*

Even though the U.S. fertility rate has dropped, the U.S. rate is still significantly higher than the other industrialized countries (CDC, 2015). Thus, TASH and Planned Parenthood argue that abstinence-until-marriage programs fail to meet the needs of sexually active teens and that comprehensive sex education is more appropriate throughout the U.S. As evident in reports from Kirby (2007) and SIECUS (2014), much sex education programming and funding is aimed at reducing the teen pregnancy rate.

The section above provided context related to TASH's political agenda, advocating for comprehensive sexual education. TASH, Planned Parenthood, and others support evidence-based approaches to sex education that address the needs of sexually active teens and those who choose to abstain. I have also argued that Missouri legislation prevents a major provider of comprehensive sex education, Planned Parenthood, from supporting schools in their sex education efforts. Combined with abstinence-until-marriage legislation, Missouri's restrictive policies are the focus of TASH's organizing efforts seeking to expand access to sex education.

Planned Parenthood Scholarship on Youth Sexual Health

In Missouri, it is illegal for Planned Parenthood or any other abortion provider to participate in sexual health education in public schools (Mo. Rev. Stat, 2015). However, this has not prevented Planned Parenthood from supporting sex education in other states or in community settings. A diverse body of literature exists relative to Planned Parenthood and youth sexual health. According to these works, the organization has partnered with universities, K-12 schools, and other community organizations. Sexual

health education interventions I will describe in this section occurred in both formal and informal settings, within the U.S. and internationally.

Other states, including California, allow Planned Parenthood to support sexual education efforts in schools. According to Marques and Ressa (2013), Planned Parenthood of Los Angeles (L.A.), California, U.S., has been an approved sexual education provider of L.A. Unified School District for 18 years serving over 80 middle and high schools. The authors describe the two-year field testing of a comprehensive sexual education initiative with four L.A. high schools. The initiative differed from previous programming in two ways. First, whereas past programming was characterized by the one-way transmission of accurate information, the program under study aimed to be more dialogic. This was achieved in part through the use of video clips to prompt discussion about sex and relationships. Although accurate information remained an important focus, researchers widened the focus to include short-term goals of knowledge of rights, access to healthcare, and development of self-efficacy. Long-term goals included a decrease in the number of sexual partners, reduced risk of STIs and pregnancy, and increased access to reproductive health services. Second, the program expanded beyond the classroom to engage teens, parents, and others in “dynamic partnership between teens who know and understand their rights and trusted adults and institutions that have the capacity to protect teens’ rights and deliver on their obligations to teens” (p. 127). Program components included a 12-week classroom curriculum, after-school training for a subset of peer-advocates, and workshops for parents on supporting teen sexual health. The authors’ account centers primarily on program conceptualization and initial implementation. However, they report preliminary findings that students are

increasingly carrying condoms and reporting increased comfort in discussing sexuality compared to students not involved in the initiative.

Planned Parenthood has also partnered with youth in informal settings in the U.S. and abroad. Planned Parenthood of Toronto worked with local teens (aged 13-17) over a five year period on the Toronto Teen Survey of teen sexual health needs and barriers (Flicker et al., 2010a; Flicker et al., 2010b). The research team describes its Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) design in which teens were involved in all steps of the research process. Teen participants on the Youth Advisory Committee collaborated with researchers and community stakeholders on problem conception, survey design, survey administration, focus-group facilitation, and data analysis (Flicker et al., 2010a). Throughout these processes, the authors utilized a critical youth empowerment model, as youth participants were challenged to consider issues in their community, including economic and health disparities (Flicker et al., 2010b). Specifically, the critical youth empowerment model is characterized by a safe environment, meaningful participation, equitable distribution of power between youth and adults, critical reflection, sociopolitical participation, and empowerment on both community and individual levels (Jennings, Parra-Medina, Hilfinger-Messias, & McLoughlin, 2006). The authors intended to utilize results to inform a city-wide adolescent sexual health access and education initiative, specifically aimed STI prevention.

In a multi-site partnership, the Shanghai Institute of Planned Parenthood Research engaged youth participants (aged 15-19) in exploring factors related to healthcare access and utilization within disadvantaged urban areas (Mmari et al., 2014). Project sites included Baltimore, U.S., Johannesburg, South Africa, New Delhi, India, Shanghai,

China, and Ibadan Nigeria. In addition to participating in interviews and community mapping, the researchers asked the adolescents to collect data using Photovoice. In this method, participants were asked to photograph the meaning of health in their community. Later, participants dialogued about the meaning of the images to create captions to construct a visual narrative. Upon analysis, the researchers found that women ranked reproductive health as their greatest health concern.

In Ecuador and Nicaragua, Planned Parenthood Global trained youth peer providers (aged 10-20) to provide contraception and sexual health education to their peers (Tebbetts & Redwine, 2013). The addition of contraception to education distinguishes peer providers from educators. The intervention was designed to increase access to sexual healthcare and information in areas with high rates of pregnancy and STIs. The researchers cite evidence of the program's support of knowledge-building and personal growth in areas such as self-esteem, maturity, decision-making, and relationship negotiation.

The studies profiled above demonstrate the outcomes of Planned Parenthood projects addressing youth. These programs serve as models for how contextual elements of programs like TASH support youth partnership and development.

Conceptual Frames

The majority of the Planned Parenthood studies reported health behavior and psychological outcomes (e.g., self-efficacy), rather than those related to sociopolitical development. Given TASH's emphasis on sociopolitical action, it is necessary to situate TASH relative to youth development paradigms that address civic engagement and social action.

Youth development. In his foundational work, *Identity: Youth and crisis*, Erikson (1968) argued adolescence was a critical period for youth identity development. In this period and other developmental stages, youth face crises. Erikson defines a crisis as, “a necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another, marshaling resources or growth, recovery, or further differentiation” (Erikson, 1968, p. 16). For Erikson, identity development is an individual and social process wherein youth forge identity by affiliating with various sociopolitical political, economic, or religious ideologies. Youth who do not embrace ideologies in this time period risk value confusion. However, Erikson is quick to point out that youth identity development transcends individual developmental processes and is essential to society at large. Erikson (1968) believed in the potential of youth to both maintain tradition and renew society,

Adolescence is thus a vital regenerator in the process of social evolution, for youth can offer its loyalties and energies both to the conservation of that which continues to feel true and to into the revolutionary correction of that which has lost its rejuvenated significance (p. 134).

However, youth ideological affiliation and integration into society would not just spontaneously occur. Youth needed to participate in experiences facilitating the process. Reaffirming youth’s vital role in societal continuity, Erikson called for,

the involvement of youth in many kinds of experiences if they only reveal the essence of some aspect of this era youth to join – as the beneficiaries and guardians of tradition at the practitioners and inventors in technology, as renewers and innovators of ethical strength, and rebels bent on destruction of the outlets

and as deviants with fanatical commitments. This, at least seems to be the potential of youth and psychosocial evolution... (p. 256).

Erikson stopped short of recommending specific types of development-promoting experiences. Thirty years later, Youniss and Yates (1997) applied Erikson's (1968) views on ideology and development to a specific context, youth community service. Their participants were 160 students from a Catholic high school in the D.C. area who were primarily, Black, middle-class, and non-Catholics. The students were enrolled in a social justice course requiring them to volunteer at a local soup kitchen. The authors described the study as ethnographically-based, as data collection included questionnaires, essays, observations, and discussion groups over the course of one school year. Youniss and Yates (1997) present their study as a counter narrative to societal views of youth as apathetic and self-interested. They also argue that youth have insufficient opportunities to participate in the types of socialization experiences Erikson (1968) viewed as critical to individual and societal development. Youniss and Yates (1997) add that youth are often segregated from adults and excluded from participation as, "unfortunately, society is so structured that youth are not needed, and are often not welcomed, in the economic, civil, and cultural tasks of continually renewing society" (p. x).

Youniss and Yates' (1997) findings counter deficit perspectives of youth and are consistent with Erikson's writings about the role of ideology in supporting identity development. The authors found the combination of social justice instruction and participation in community service facilitate this process. Their experiences stimulated student critical reflection on social problems, such as the root causes of the homelessness they encountered at the soup kitchen. Students also gained agency and a sense of moral

responsibility for social problems. For example, they questioned the fairness of the uneven societal distribution of wealth and how they could affect change. The course's Judeo-Christian social justice ideology also allowed them to affiliate with a historical tradition. When Youniss and Yates contacted participants six years later, they found the social justice ideology served as a reference point for participant thinking even if they no longer subscribed to it. Put differently, the ideology was still part of continuing identity processes.

Youth organizing. While Youniss and Yates (1997) modestly claim youth experiences in coursework and service, “may help an activist sense of identity emerge” (p. 113), studies of youth organizing/activism have specifically examined activist development. TASH falls within this classification. In their review of youth organizing literature, Rogers, Mediratta, and Shah (2012) define youth organizing as youth-led “voluntary associations focused on youth development and social change” (p. 44). Scholars in the field have pointed to the potential of youth organizing as a developmental context (Delgado & Staples, 2008; Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammarota, 2006; 2006; Kirshner, 2007; Kirshner & Ginwright, 2012; Oakes & Rogers, 2006).

According to Kirshner (2007), youth activism groups are distinct learning sites in four ways. First, they support collective problem-solving. Groups can accomplish more than individuals with the support of more advanced peers or adults. Second, groups promote youth-adult interaction in the form of shared leadership or apprenticeship. Third, youth organizing groups provide space for exploration of alternative frames of identity as youth come to view themselves as competent sociopolitical actors. This is consistent with emphases on ideological exploration during adolescent identity development (Erikson,

1968; Youniss & Yates, 1997). Fourth, groups provide bridges between youth and academic and civic institutions. For example, youth may combine academic communication skills with organizing training as they lobby school boards or other institutions.

Rogers et al. (2012) assert youth organizing groups can support civic learning and development, while contributing to the public good. They distinguish youth organizing groups from other forms of youth civic engagement (e.g., student government, community service, political party participation). Like most traditional civic engagement opportunities, youth organizing groups are voluntary and focused on youth development. However, youth organizing groups are unique in their application of a critical orientation to real-world contexts. Said differently, youth organizing groups encourage youth to identify and address inequities which directly affect them and their communities.

A critical orientation supports youth in confronting oppression as they connect local issues to systemic and structural inequities. According to Rogers et al. (2012), these elements also have implications for civic learning outcomes. In their “Typology of Civic Development Outcomes,” the authors classify outcomes as participatory or transformative:

Typology of Civic Development Outcomes		
	PARTICIPATORY	TRANSFORMATIVE
Civic Knowledge and Skills	I Gather, analyze, report data; Engage in systems analysis; Understand formal politics.	II Recognize power within social relations; Analyze root cause of problems; Understand schema for social change.
Civic Identity	III Address public problems; Interact with state officials and civic leaders; Work with and galvanize action in others.	IV Challenge race and class inequality; Embrace sense of solidarity with others who are oppressed; Envision self as part of movement for social change.

Fig. 1 from Rogers, Mediratta, and Shah (2012, p. 52)

Participatory outcomes include utilization of evidence, an understanding of the political process, and the use of political knowledge to take informed, strategic action. These outcomes occur within existing social and political systems. Transformative outcomes result from youth organizing's critical lens. The interrogation of power relations and the status quo becomes the impetus for critical collective social action. It is also worth noting that youth may construct civic identities corresponding to participatory and transformative outcomes as they begin to see themselves as "agents of change who have a role in improving the community" (p. 56).

To continue the growth of the youth organizing field, Rogers et al. (2012) call for further studies connecting elements of youth organizing to specific civic and learning outcomes. They caution that the civic outcomes described are not predestined, and much more research is needed to maximize the potential of youth organizing. The authors also

urge scholars to study the long-term impacts of programs and youth. They stress the advantage of longitudinal studies, as they “can help us see whether participation produces civically engaged adults, and, if so, among whom and under what conditions” (p. 62).

Sociopolitical development (SPD). Thus far, I have argued youth organizing groups constitute distinctive developmental sites. Here, I propose a conceptual framework for understanding sociopolitical development in TASH and other youth organizing groups.

Watts and Abdul-Adil (1998) began examining SPD through their work with young African American men. They argue that previous psychological approaches to adolescent development have been limited, focusing on the personal development. According to Watts and Abdul-Adil, this “exclusive focus on individual psychosocial development neglects collective consciousness and action against social injustice” (p. 64). As such, approaches are not sufficient to explain developmental trajectories of individuals in groups facing societal oppression. For example, young, African American men in urban areas face developmental challenges beyond those typical of adolescence. The authors cite higher rates of homicide, incarceration, unemployment, and substances abuse compared to other racial and gender identities. Thus, scholars should widen their focus to include SPD in hopes of combatting societal oppression. Moreover, studying development at the community or societal level can lend context to personal development. The authors view the personal and the sociopolitical as complementary, describing them as “two sides of the same human-development coin” (p. 64).

The authors view oppression in terms of processes and outcomes resulting from asymmetrical power relations. Without knowledge of process, outcomes like higher

homicide and drug abuse rates may be deemed pathological. The authors highlight the benefits of viewing racial oppression as a process, as this conception “trains our attention on the means by which inequality is created and sustained” (p. 66). Watts and Abdul-Adil define critical consciousness (CC) as the awareness of disparate outcomes and why they exist. They adopt Freire’s (1970/2000) notion of CC (e.g., conscientization or *conscientização*) which originated from his literacy work with poor Brazilian farmers. Freire described society as a contradiction between the oppressed and oppressors. As such, the oppressed could obtain power and freedom through conscientization, a transformative process that begins with the realization of societal inequities. This realization opens possibilities for emancipatory action and social change. As such, CC is requisite for social transformation.

Watts and Abdul-Adil (1998) propose a five-stage model of SPD that rests on the development of CC, which they maintain necessary to resist societal oppression. 1) In the Acritical Stage, asymmetry is not interrogated and one believes that inequities are due to people getting what they deserve. 2) In the Adaptive Stage, people may be aware if inequity but feel that it cannot be changed. 3) The Pre-critical stage includes acknowledgement of asymmetry. 4) Those in the Critical Stage develop CC and may recognize that asymmetry is unjust and social change is needed. 5) In the Liberation Stage, CC becomes integrated with the self. Participation in social action is frequent.

Continuing work with the “Youth Warriors Program,” Watts and Abdul-Adil (1999) described how the program supported CC development in African American high school freshmen (aged 14-16). The program was designed based on Freire’s (1974/2013) practices for CC and aimed at developing critical awareness and possibilities for

transformation. The intervention utilized a rap video and other mass media products to stimulate dialogue and sociopolitical critique about the violence and destructive behaviors portrayed. The project facilitators posed questions aimed at eliciting CC such as “What did you see?” and “What did it mean?” (Watts & Abdul-Adil, 1999, p. 70). To determine whether the program design increased CC, the authors used content analysis to code for CC in recordings of group discourse. Wherever possible, the codes were aligned with the type of question posed. For example “what did you see?” and “what did it mean?” became “perception” and “inference” categories of CC response, respectively (Watts & Abdul-Adil, 1999, p. 73). The proportion of participant responses indicative of CC increased over the 8-week intervention.

Continuing work on SPD, Watts et al. (2003) critiqued the stage model of Watts and Abdul-Adil (1998). The authors interviewed young African American activists (aged 26-35) in social-change organizations about factors that influenced their development. Their analysis revealed the stage model focused on the psychological aspects of development (e.g., CC) without accounting for life events and social contexts. The authors reported the model “did little to capture the role that settings, roles, and specific experiences played in (activist) development” (Watts et. al, 2003, p. 190). Given this new perspective, they advocated for giving greater weight to ecological and transactional perspectives in moving toward a theoretical framework of SPD. The authors modeled the transactional approach, considering meaningful activist experiences as the unit of analysis. Their ecological approach demonstrated interactions between social and psychological factors within those experiences. Watts et al. (2003) integrate their current thinking about SPD with past theorizing in writing that SPD could be viewed as, “the

cumulative effect of many transactions over time that increase sociopolitical understanding (insight and ideology) and the capacity for effective action (liberation behavior)” (p. 192).

Watts et al. (2011) reviewed literature on CC conceptualization and measurement within the field of youth civic and political development. They noted scholars in the field are currently grappling with the relationship between critical reflection and critical action. Specifically, they examining the psychological antecedents of critical action and whether critical reflection is sufficient to influence action. Based on their review, they theorize the reflection/action relationship in terms of three core constructs of CC: “critical reflection (or critical social analysis), political efficacy (sense of agency), and critical action” (p. 52). Critical reflection involves awareness of societal inequities, an identification of their root causes and a rejection of inequity on moral grounds. Political efficacy is the perceived capacity to affect social change, individually or collectively. Critical action may occur individually or collectively and is aimed at unjust systemic practices or policies. This framework is rooted in Freire's (1974/2013) conceptualization of CC, in which the relationship between reflection and action as reciprocal, and cyclical. Increased reflection could lead to action, which could lead to more reflection, and so on.

Upon examining the ways in which the three core constructs were conceptualized and measured quantitatively, the authors propose several areas for future research. First, they urge scholars to attend to historical knowledge and social identity theory as part of critical reflection. Social identities including race, ethnicity, and sexuality may relate to CC and collective social action. Second, in terms of critical action, Watts et al. (2011) recommend qualitative studies to lend insight into the subjective meanings of these

actions, as well as to validate the other two core constructs. They also advocate for the inclusion of privileged youth, in addition to marginalized youth, in studies of social justice action.

Diemer and colleagues have conducted several studies to quantitatively examine youth CC development (Diemer & Li, 2011; Diemer et al., 2015; Diemer & Rapa, 2016). Diemer and Li (2011) analyzed the predictors of CC in marginalized youth (aged 15-25). They examined the results of a survey of youth attitudes about politics and government, as well as political participation. Particularly, they were interested in how CC predicts voting behavior, an indicator of political participation. They defined marginalized youth as low socioeconomic status (SES) white youth and youth of color. The authors assert that these groups are more likely to have experienced structural oppression and historically been less likely to participate politically.

Diemer and Li (2011) examined the same core components of CC as described by Watts et al., (2011): critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action. However, they categorized political efficacy with critical action under the action component, informing a two-part model. Their study focused on the antecedents of the action components of CC. They hypothesized that sociopolitical supports could help youth understand inequity and their ability to enact change, leading to increased sociopolitical control, social action, and ultimately voting behavior. Sociopolitical support was defined as discussing politics and current events with teachers, peers, and parents. The authors found that parental and peer sociopolitical support had significant direct effects on sociopolitical control and social action. Sociopolitical control and social action, in turn, had significant direct effects on voting behavior. The authors draw implications in terms

of the potential for CC to address disparities in political participation for youth marginalized in terms of race and socioeconomic status. They note their study is limited in that it did not measure or account for critical reflection.

Diemer and Rapa (2016) examined the three-part CC framework (Watts et al., 2011) through their analysis of a national civic education survey of adolescents (average age 15 years). Specifically, the authors analyzed responses of poor and working class African American and Latino adolescents about their current beliefs and expected actions. The researchers sought to better understand the relationship between elements of critical reflection and different types of action. Critical reflection was theorized as having both egalitarian and perceived inequality subcomponents. Types of action were characterized as critical (e.g., protesting) or conventional (e.g. voting). A key finding was that perceptions of inequality significantly predicted critical social action, consistent with previous CC theorizing. However, work stopped short of illuminating “complex patterns of associations” between elements of critical reflection and varying types of action. (p. 237). Consistent with the three-part model, the researchers hypothesized that agency (political efficacy) would mediate the relationship between critical reflection and action. However, their analysis did not support this relationship. Although marginalized youth were centered in this study, the authors encouraged the study of CC in more privileged groups.

In their review of CC measures, Diemer et al. (2015) voice support for the three-part model developed by Watts et al., 2011, describing its components as “canonical” dimensions of CC (p. 18). They provide important recommendations for CC scholars. First, the authors argue that CC is nuanced, as individuals experience unique

intersectionalities of race, class, and gender identity . One person may experience differing levels of CC based on these statuses. Diemer et al. give the example of male youth of color having heightened CC in terms of racial than gender identities. Second, the authors critique measures that ascribe to a stage model of CC development. They favor a model of statuses that individuals occupy at any given time, rather than a one-way, linear, progression of CC development. Third, as much work has been done on CC in marginalized youth, they encourage research on privileged groups. Individuals in these groups may experience marginalization related to an aspect of identity (e.g., sexuality) or become allies to members of a marginalized group (e.g., gay rights activism). They speculate as to whether CC is even the appropriate lens for studying those developmental processes. Fourth, the authors speak to the value of mixed-methods approaches in addition to the advancements in quantitative measurements in the field. Quantitative measures allow researchers to measure the outcomes of interventions and to study the relationships between CC components. However, they are limited in their ability to explain how CC develops and is experienced. According to Diemer et al. (2015), qualitative perspectives could “yield further insights into what young people actually and how they think regarding key dimensions of CC, to enable ‘showing’ in addition to the ‘telling’ they do on self-report measures.” (p. 818). Qualitative inquiry could also validate existing CC measures and identify new areas for CC research. They cite the Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) study, conducted by Ozer and Douglas (2013), as an exemplar of a mixed-methods approach.

Youth organizing alumni. Conner (2011/2014) studied the impacts of youth organizing from the perspectives of program alumni, seeking to connect programmatic

features to outcomes. Like Kirshner and Ginwright (2012), Conner (2011) views youth organizing as a developmental context. He points to studies of finding associations between youth organizing participation and positive developmental and academic domains. Conner (2011) highlights work by Mediratta, Shah, and McAlister (2009), in which the researchers documented increased organizational and leadership skills. The same study found youth organizers' expressed intention to continue activism beyond the program duration (Mediratta et al, 2009). However, Conner (2011) cites the need for long-term studies, as youth organizing scholarship has yet to establish whether intentions may be translated into reality.

Connor (2011) critiques other alumni studies for utilizing a predetermined set of outcomes. He argues civic engagement and political participation should be determined by participants, not researchers. Conner writes that researchers must be flexible in their approaches, as youth may “invent new means of communication and new means of action, often rejecting or side-stepping conventional, adult-sanctioned forms of participation” (p. 925). Aligned with this thinking, he used a qualitative case study design. He interviewed former participants in the Philadelphia Student Union (PSU) about how involvement affected life decisions and trajectories. PSU is a leadership development program that engages youth in activism related to quality and equity within Philadelphia public school system. Issues of interest include teacher quality, district privatization, and school funding. According to Conner, the program's philosophy is Freirian, seeking to empower youth in critical reflection and action. Conner describes the ways in which PSU alumni remain connected to the program. The PSU executive director is a former participant, along with many program staff and interns. Alumni also serve on

the board of directors, attend PSU events, connect via social media, and provide financial support. Conner recruited participants via these existing alumni connections. He acknowledges the limitations of this self-selected sample, which may be positively biased in their characterizations of PSU participation.

Upon analysis, Conner (2011) found that PSU influenced former members in four domains: academic, professional, relational and sociopolitical. The participants reported PSU influenced academic decisions, such as whether to drop out of high school or the choice of a college major. Similarly, PSU influenced choice of profession. In the relational realm, PSU affected how participants perceive and treat others who may differ from them. Sociopolitically, PSU raised members' awareness of their place in the world and ability to affect change. It is noteworthy that Conner does not consider CC explicitly in the context of sociopolitical outcomes. However, CC is analogous to his conceptualizing of sociopolitical development in terms of social analysis, commitment, efficacy, agency, and action (Watts & Guessous, 2006). Programmatic elements of PSU contributing to these domains generally include participation in organizing, workshops, and discussions. They also cited the impact of role-models and PSU's philosophy toward youth, education, and social change. Most maintained their commitment to issues addressed in PSU. They expressed these commitments in various ways, some of which could be considered traditional political participation (e.g., voting, community service), while other ways could be considered nontraditional (e.g., creating politically-oriented art, social media posts).

In a subsequent study of the same PSU alumni interviews, Conner (2014) analyzed participants' responses to questions about what and how they learned social

analysis, self-knowledge, and communication skills. Consistent with the tenets of the learning sciences, the study was aimed at identifying the features of a youth organizing program that had demonstrated effectiveness in promoting individual (Conner, 2011) and social change (Conner, Zaino, & Scarola, 2013). Participants' responses about learning outcomes and the learning environment reflected the Freirian critical pedagogy integral to PSU philosophy. For example, the PSU learning environment was described as an open atmosphere with and relevant content. Conner (2014) adds that the dialogue within PSU was designed to be problem-posing, asking students to identify their own assumptions, as well as the root causes of societal problems. Alumni described learning outcomes that Conner coded as critical social analysis and self-knowledge. Taken together, the responses reflected the Freirian notion of CC. Conner notes that a Freirian lens is seldom used in the learning sciences, as the field seeks to pursue "agonistic research agendas focused on questions of how best to promote learning" rather than transformative lines of inquiry (p. 480). Moreover, he urges scholars in the field to consider sociopolitical factors in learning environments.

Summary

This chapter examined the context of TASH's organizing efforts and presented SPD as a conceptual framework for studying developmental experiences of former members. The present study will contribute to the understanding of how youth organizing alumni view their participation in several ways. First, the study will add to what is known about how alumni describe experiences involving SPD and CC. Second, the study will further explicate programmatic factors that support reported SPD and CC development. Third, a qualitative design will provide in-depth insights that complement quantitative

work that has dominated the field. Fourth, the diversity within TASH will allow me to attend to differential expressions of CC based on race, class, gender identity, and sexuality. Finally, the study will be the first to explore the SPD impacts of programming organized around sexual health education issues. The controversial nature of these issues may impact CC, SPD, and other outcomes.

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Appendix D: Interview Codebooks

Chapter 2

Table A- “Head” – How TASH addresses youth knowledge needs

category	subcategory	definition	example participant initial. interview # ex. J.1 is Judy interview #1
sex education		rights-based comprehensive sex education	TASH creates, develops, plans and implements programs that move toward a greater understanding and appreciation of healthy sexuality based on teen rights, respect and responsibility. TASH teaches/trains teens about sexual health and sexuality and how to be advocates in their communities (PPSLR, 2016)
political education		political training in preparation for advocacy	“there was something legislative every TASH meeting...it kept them involved in politics, it kept them involved in seeing how the political process worked, so that they were able to effectively advocate, um, for reproductive rights and health.” C.2

social justice education	learning and discomfort	pedagogy about the relationship between learning and discomfort	“your best learning comes on the other side of your discomfort, so, if you an work your way, if you get to space of where you’re uncomfortable, and you can push it, your learning’s right there, but if you retreat and try to get into a comfortable space, then you’re not pushing yourself to learn anything” C.2
	intersectionality	acknowledgement of relationship between systems of oppression	"social justice is about intersectionality, meaning that fighting for access to sexual health is also fighting for um against racial discrimination because so many that's tied up with access." J.2
	critical thinking	support for critical thinking	<p>“we don't tell you what to think...we put you in an atmosphere where you are challenged to think.” J.2</p> <p>“the universe sent me the opportunity to find people who would help me learn how to think.” H.2</p>
praxis		cycles of reflection on learning and action	<p>Judy views TASHers as “messengers” for sexual health in their community, developing “talking points” and “take aways” at the end of each event. Teens are asked, “what can you do about it?” J.1</p> <p>“one of the core things about TASH...is that you are educated and to go out and then educate your community.” M.2</p>

Chapter 2

Table B- “Heart” – How TASH addresses youth socioemotional needs within the community

category	subcategory	definition	example participant initial. interview # ex. J.1 is Judy interview #1
youth empowerment	anti-adultism	general stance supporting youth agency and self-efficacy and countering notions of teen apathy	<p>I think we let them know in the beginning of the process that this is gonna be your organization and not ours, um, so, it’s that old saying that, youth are our future leaders, and Judy and I used to say, “no, they’re our leaders right now,” C.2</p> <p>“it was really frustrating to like, eternally frustrating to me, that like no one took me seriously or thought like my ideas had weight, or thought that like, I was anything more than just like sort of cute and maybe sort of well-read for a child, um, I think, in TASH, I can’t really recall any instances in TASH where adult facilitators did not take people seriously.” T.3</p>
	power distribution	degree of power sharing between adults and youth	<p>On flexibility with meeting agendas, Judy says, “we want them to know their voices are heard, and we’re not just dismissing, and we’re so task-oriented.” J.1</p> <p>In discussion, Charisse says, “we (adults) stepped out and let them take agency over their own process.” C.2</p> <p>“I think TASH could have benefited from a more formal process of developing leadership” T.2</p>

emotional safety	community-building	supporting the development of relationships within the community	food before each meeting “creates a real social bond and a way to get to know each other and that's to me another benefit of the program is that young people are exposed to people very different from them in their little sheltered community where they live, and I think it's been a you know, I think it opens their eyes to ‘well not everybody lives like I do.’ J.2
	adult youth relationships	validation and non-judgment characterizing these relationships	<p>“I've learned a lot and I think the teens themselves have helped me. I always say to them “you make me a better person” um, they've opened my eyes to the many issues that they're dealing with, they're tremendous” J.1</p> <p>“Judy was just the best, right, she made you want to be there, she made you just feel like so valued,” (H.2.)</p> <p>“wow an adult that like is sitting here talking to us about sex, and there's no judgment,” A.1</p>
	peer to peer relationships		<p>Aubrey's TASH peers seemed “well-versed and mature and like they could make a difference.” A.1</p> <p>Michael immediately liked the TASH community, appreciating the “thoughtful” and “genuine” conversations occurring. M.1</p>

Chapter 2

Table C- “Feet” – How TASH addresses youth action or advocacy needs

category	subcategory	definition	example participant initial. interview # ex. J.1 is Judy interview #1
participation setting or level	formal/legislative	in vivo code	It “meant advocacy in a concrete, legislative type of way, uh where they go to lobby, where they participate in ...making sure people got called on bills, and all those concrete legislative pieces that they participated in.” C.2
	school/community	in vivo code	“they were advocates in their schools, so when they left TASH, they went out and advocated...they’d go to the principal or the counselor or whoever to make a case for...comprehensive sex education in their schools.” C.2
	peer	in vivo code	Third, “(TASHers) would be the go-to people around accurate sex education, for their non-TASH peers.” C.2
degree of engagement		variations in TASHer participation	According to Heather all participants have the goal of “increasing knowledge and efficacy in effecting change.” The majority are there to have fun and talk about sex and learn. There are the “few who are there for the food and free condoms.” There are a few who TASH “makes their heart beat” and it “guides their lives” they had their sexual health, reproductive health, social justice framework either first learned or strengthened their understanding of” in TASH. (H.3)

			So, I think that was a big, big component of creating a safe space because you could participate as much or as little as you needed to to feel comfortable,” (K.2)
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Chapter 2

Table D - Meaning of TASH advocacy for former youth participants

category	subcategory	example
knowledge	sexual health	“you know, I went to TASH literally not knowing how many holes there are in the female anatomy, and having a really closed off relationship with my own body, and TASH was interesting because, I still had a pretty closed off relationship with my own body when I left, but it was not a knowledge gap any longer,” H.3
	political	“I don’t think my politics would be the way they are without having done TASH T.3”
	social justice/critical awareness	Heather’s “mind was blown” and her “bubbles were popped.” H.1 Charisse’s anti-oppression curriculum, “really gave me good knowledge on something I, um, as I said I’m middle class white guy, I’m not like educated in the, especially then I was uneducated in the struggles that a black female will have in the same world that I am existing” M.2
empowerment	personal	“I consider TASH to be a life-saving community for me because without them, I don’t think I would’ve realized that what was happening to me was in fact abuse,” K.2 “I knew that, how different my life was when I didn't have any understanding, and didn't feel control over my own reproduction and what it felt like when I did have that, so, I mean that led me to be a health social work major.” H.3

	social	<p>“it felt empowering to be a resource.” A.2</p> <p>“I think before TASH, like I never would’ve interrupted a teacher to say like ‘no you’re wrong about emergency contraception, you don’t know what you’re talking about” T.1</p> <p>“because I saw first-hand how powerful it was just to give people correct information, just that, in and of itself is such an empowering tool, and I think that harnessing that could really make waves in lessening domestic violence” K.3</p>
identity	level of impact (high to low)	<p>“(it) has been so influential in my life, you know, it’s like the beginning of who I am really, as far as like the issues that matter to me” A.3</p> <p>TASH was a “big determining factor of everything” H.3</p> <p>“when I was in TASH, like it was, like it was a cool thing to do, but I’m sure I would’ve felt the same way about any similar community organization.” P.3</p>
social responsibility		<p>“Dancing with something I did for myself, and I didn’t feel like I could in good conscience do that for the rest of my life when there were so many people who need help, and there is so much room for change, and we have such a dire need for people to be creating a change” K.2</p>
career/career	decision-making	<p>“I knew that, how different my life was when I didn't have any understanding, and didn't feel control over my own reproduction and what it felt like when I did have that, so, I mean that led me to be a health social work major.” H.3</p> <p>“TASH expanded her ideas of “worlds that existed” in terms of possible careers. She was first introduced to “people they call organizers,” foreshadowing her future job.” T. 3</p>

	skills and knowledge	<p>“one of the ways that TASH really was an assistance, it gave me the base understanding that I could then go off to college and not be dumbfounded by the ideas that’s, you know, and really dig even deeper into the gender studies ideas I was learning about because I have this base knowledge that TASH really gave me.” M.1</p> <p>**I feel like TASH touches on pretty much every skill that would be considered, uh, to have resume value, so, just from kind of a broad, general spectrum, the leadership skills that I learned, just in, being invited to lead certain activities or help navigate discussions, and then also working with TPAC, Teen Political Action Committee, to plan different events for TASH” K.3</p>
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Chapter 3

Table A: Organizational-level “Empowering” Processes (Zimmerman, 2000)

category	subcategory	description (Unless otherwise noted, derived from researcher’s interpretation of data context)	example participant initial. interview # ex. J.1 is Judy interview #1
education	sex education	description of TASH’s approach to sex education	“the mission basically of TASH but it's so much more is um to improve the sexual health of teens. And it's just a short mission, but when I think about TASH, I think about empowering a group of young people to um understand what sexuality means, the comprehensiveness, all the components of sexuality and that sexuality is part of who they are and understanding all the components and how their body works and the biological issues, the emotional issues, all the parameters and also understanding that, and understanding how they have control and power over many things but they're also um outside forces that impact their sexual health” J.1
	critical social analysis	description of instruction addressing power, privilege, and oppression	<p>“And we did a lot with that um it and then we pick certain issues sex education, um, such as access is that teens deserve access to medically accurate sexual health information, they need the resources, they need to know where they can go for services. Um and that it's too long the whole issue of talking to young people has been taboo, so we focus basically on access and sex education” J.1</p> <p>“we don't tell you what to think...we put you in an atmosphere where you are challenged to think.” J.2</p>

			“the overall goal is for them to be able to get out and critically think and participate in this world with open eyes, and a different awareness, so, I think TASH was super important in establishing that for them” C.2.472
	political education	description of political training in preparation for advocacy	“there was something legislative every TASH meeting...it kept them involved in politics, it kept them involved in seeing how the political process worked, so that they were able to effectively advocate, um, for reproductive rights and health.” C.2
community	empowering ethos	adult leaders stance about youth’s ability to make a difference	<p>“TASH students that they care deeply about making this world more fair, more equitable, and they want to do something to make a difference. And at least in my experience, they debunk all the issue of teen of apathy, um they may not be interested in everything but who what person is, but they do care enough to go out and want to make a difference and they want to make a difference in the area of reproductive justice” J.1</p> <p>“I think we let them know in the beginning of the process that this is gonna be your organization and not ours, um, so, it’s that old saying that, youth are our future leaders, and Judy and I used to say, “no, they’re our leaders right now,” C.2</p>
	adult-youth power sharing	efforts by adult leaders to share power with youth	Judy strives to be flexible and allow students steer meetings, saying, “we want them to know their voices are heard, and we’re not just dismissing, and we’re so task-oriented.” J.1
	safety	adult’s efforts to support youth emotional “safety” (in vivo code)	“We explain to them that uncomfortable is a learning goal, and that’s where we want you to be; unsafe is where that stops, and that’s what we don’t want to be,” H.2

civic engagement	variety of opportunities	description of opportunities in multiple settings	Charisse described three levels: (1) legislative (2) school (3), peer (C.2)
	flexible participation	TASHers choose how they want to be involved	According to Heather all participants have the goal of “increasing knowledge and efficacy in effecting change.” The majority are there to have fun and talk about sex and learn. There are the “few who are there for the food and free condoms.” There are a few who TASH “makes their heart beat” and it “guides their lives” they had their sexual health, reproductive health, social justice framework either first learned or strengthened their understanding of” in TASH. (H.3)
praxis		cycles of reflection and action that support social transformation (Freire, 1970/2000)	“we always encourage them, ‘go home, talk to your family, talk to your friends, talk about the issues, get them talking, get them asking questions”” J.1

Table B: Individual-level Empowerment Outcomes (Zimmerman, 2000)

category	subcategory	description (Unless otherwise noted, derived from researcher's interpretation of data context)	example participant initial. interview # ex. J.1 is Judy interview #1
political efficacy		belief in one's ability to contribute to social change (Zimmerman, 1989)	<p>"TASH empowers young people to actually be able to create change," K.3</p> <p>"It felt empowering to be a resource." A.2</p>
	sexual health knowledge	the personal impact of TASH sex education	Heather appreciated the basics, what she terms the "nuts and bolts" of the sex education which, "meant me getting to have a very different relationship with my body and sexuality than I would've gotten to have without it." H.2
	relationships	adult and peer relationships	<p>"Judy was like, the heart of the group, like, just really gave us that empowerment push, like 'you all are not just young people, you aren't people who don't know anything just because you're young, you all can do this, you can talk in front of a senator, you can go lobby to congress'" A.2</p> <p>"in TASH, I can't really recall any instances in TASH where adult facilitators did not take people seriously." T.3</p> <p>At Aubrey's first meeting, she was impressed with peers who were "asking questions and really feeling like they could make a difference." A.1</p>

	safety	emotional “safety” within the community (in vivo code)	<p>“you may not agree with what everyone’s saying, but you should never feel like threatened or that this isn’t a safe space for you to be who you are.” A.2</p> <p>“a big component of creating a safe space because you could participate as much or as little as you needed to.” K.2</p>
critical awareness		<p>“the capability to analyze and understand one’s social and political environment” (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 50).</p> <p>increased critical consciousness (Watts & Flanagan, 2007)</p>	
	youth sex education access	awareness of disparities in access	<p>Michael’s class was a “fear thing” about STD risks with “barely a mention of condoms.” M.1</p> <p>access was explaining why sex education is “denied to a lot of young people” and “denied to some people more than others.” T. 2</p> <p>“Once I became informed, I was recognizing that clearly, a lot of my peers aren’t informed, because we all thought the same things, and now that I know all of this stuff, I know everybody else isn’t being taught this stuff:” A.2</p>
	power/privilege awareness	changes in one’s critical awareness in reference to a variety of issues	During TASH, Michael gained awareness of the “struggle of an oppressive ladder, of the existence of the hegemonic structures.” M.2

	critical thinking	how TASH supported critical thinking	<p>“I don’t feel like TASH gave me like sure answers to anything, it’s just like, oh, these like, these sorts of things work in this way, this is how we understand like systems of power, but like what are you gonna do about them? there’s a lot of thing you could do about them, I think that’s a more open-ended approach.” T.3</p> <p>Pat described a values clarification activity with no right or wrong answers, “there was this paper that had a statement and then you'd either strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree, and the trick is that's not the right answer to any of those questions.” An example Pat gave was, “a 12 year old is too young to get pregnant.” P.2</p>
participatory behaviors		<p>“taking action to exert control by participating in community organizations or activities” (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 47)</p> <p>societal involvement that includes commitments and behaviors (Watts and Guessous, 2006)</p>	
	variety of opportunities	description of opportunities in a variety of settings	<p>“whether it’s an advocate by being an unofficial peer educator, teaching your friends about that, or very like tangibly advocating for change of a policy and systems level, and using the knowledge you have about how policy impacts people to try and change it.” H.2</p>

	flexible participation	TASHers choose how much they want to participate	“a big component of creating a safe space because you could participate as much or as little as you needed to.” K.2
Praxis		cycles of reflection and action that support social transformation (Freire, 1970/2000)	<p>Judy was “encouraging us to keep having that discussion when we got home.” P.2</p> <p>Advocacy means, “you’re gonna not only to learn something but to do something about it.” H.2</p> <p>“the community that I fell into, it was more talking about more conversation rather than lets organize and do something about it, and I think that’s one of the things that TASH does well but also does poorly is do something about it” M. 1</p>

Table C: The Influence of TASH on Career Decision-making

category	subcategory	description (Unless otherwise noted, derived from researcher's interpretation of data context)	example participant initial. interview # ex. J.1 is Judy interview #1
Career supports	interests	career-related interests and passions (in vivo code)	<p>“the advocacy experience and...the love of talking about it, really drove me to studying culture and race in society issues in gender issues.” M.3</p> <p>TASH prompted Pat to read about queer theory and cites the program's sex education as the “main reason” why she became a women's studies major and works at Planned Parenthood. P.2</p>
	human capital	knowledge and skills (Souto-Otero, 2016)	<p>Michael credits TASH for giving him a “really strong base knowledge” so he was not “dumbfounded” in courses. M.3</p> <p>“I feel like TASH touches on pretty much every skill that would be considered, uh, to have resume value, so, just from kind of a broad, general spectrum, the leadership skills that I learned, just in, being invited to lead certain activities or help navigate discussions, and then also working with TPAC, Teen Political Action Committee, to plan different events for TASH” K.3</p>
	social capital	capital based on relationships and networking (Souto-Otero, 2016)	<p>Taylor works for a reproductive justice organizing group headed by a mentor she met during TASH.</p> <p>Taylor first learned about “people they call organizers” during TASH, her eventual career (T.3)</p>

			Pat is a health center assistant and former volunteer with the St. Louis Planned Parenthood affiliate's political department. K.3
	social responsibility	personal commitment to society (Youniss & Yates, 1997)	<p>“the social change that I want to see isn't going to be created because someone else is going to decide to do it.” K.3</p> <p>“it's kind of like started with like wanting to know about anatomy, and it turned into caring about systemic health change.” H.3</p>
	change agency	the capacity and commitment to creating social change by empowering others (in vivo code)	<p>According to Aubrey, TASH creates “change agents and game changers.” It supports “early, lasting empowerment.” A.3</p> <p>TASH means to me, empowering youth and giving them the information to advocate for those who aren't able to be empowered, um, so, not only being empowered themselves, but giving them the tools and resources to go advocate for those who don't have that in hopes that all youth would have that, one day. A.3</p> <p>“I saw first-hand how powerful it was just to give people correct information, just that, in and of itself is such an empowering tool, and I think that harnessing that could really make waves in lessening domestic violence.” K.2</p> <p>I knew that I cared about health and reproduction and that those things were really critical to how people got to live their lives, I knew that, how different my life was when I didn't have any understanding, and didn't feel control over my own reproduction and what it felt like when I did have that, so, I mean that led me to be a health social work major. H.2</p>

Chapter 4

category	subcategory	definition	example
discomfort and learning pedagogy		addressing the relationship between discomfort and learning	participant initial. interview # ex. J.1 is Judy interview #1 “your best learning comes on the other side of your discomfort, so, if you can work your way, if you get to space of where you’re uncomfortable, and you can push it, your learning’s right there, but if you retreat and try to get into a comfortable space, then you’re not pushing yourself to learn anything” C.2
discomfort and learning practices	self-awareness	supporting youth in distinguishing between feeling uncomfortable and feeling emotionally unsafe	“we talk and we do a whole session at the beginning of the year, maybe not a whole session but maybe 30 minutes with, ‘I feel comfortable, I feel unsafe.’ Um, there is a difference between being comfortable and uncomfortable and not feeling safe. (Being unsafe) is not permissible in this room. It’s ok to be uncomfortable because some of the things they’re experiencing they’re growing with that discomfort, and they’re learning from each other” J. 1
	community norms	integration of safety and discomfort pedagogy into community norms	“taking a risk was part of the community norms, you know, take a risk, make a mistake, as, you know, that was part of what we taught.” C. 2
	shared responsibility for safety	adults gave explicit instruction on what to do if feeling unsafe	sometimes like the safe way to be in that space is to not be in that space, and so that’s also something we try to really protect the students right to do.” H.2

participant experiences of pedagogy	self-awareness	ability to distinguish between safety and comfort feelings	“the difference between feeling uncomfortable in the face of learning new things, and feeling safe is that, a safe space should mean that you know, even when you start feeling uncomfortable, it’s going to be ok, like you will come out of this uncomfortable” K.3
	community norms	integration of safety and discomfort pedagogy into community norms	<p>“we had solid discussion norms that were tied into, like classic like, step up, step back kind of stuff that were tied into the anti-oppression curriculum.” T.2</p> <p>“something that I thought they did really well was, if you ever want to go to the bathroom or get a snack or something, you know, you never had to raise your hand, you just went, and like did what you needed to do, and similarly if you ever felt triggered by a conversation you could leave.” K.2</p>
	attitude toward discomfort	desire to engage in uncomfortable discussions	“we go (to TASH) to have uncomfortable conversations, to step out of the comfort zone.” M.2
	remaining engaged	able to stay involved in an uncomfortable conversation, due to awareness	“I felt really uncomfortable but I didn’t feel unsafe, I felt like other people shared my discomfort, and it was like, it was gonna be ok, we were gonna work through it, I didn’t feel like I was being targeted, didn’t feel like it was like not okay to like struggle to process things or not ok to feel uncomfortable,’ then think about, ‘well, why am I uncomfortable?’ T.2
	shared responsibility for safety	TASH youth took steps to ensure their own and community safety	“like there were a few times when we would be discussing topics related to abuse or, and I would feel to triggered, and I would leave, and the great thing about those like open

			housekeeping rules is you know, I was embarrassed about feeling triggered” K.2
	feeling safe	variation in feelings of safety within TASH	“I’m sure that people, like different people in TASH felt different levels of safety” T. 2
influence of pedagogy	engagement in TASH-related conversations	initiation of dialogue around TASH issues (e.g., sexual health and social justice)	<p>“I did have some conversations with the administrators about how I didn’t think a couple of days in the middle of a health class was enough, and they were just incredulous.” P.3</p> <p>“I think before TASH, like I never would’ve interrupted a teacher to say like ‘no you’re wrong about emergency contraception, you don’t know what you’re talking about,’ because I was just sort of like a teacher’s pet and the like good, follow the rules kind of person. T.1</p>
	communication skills	in vivo code (emphasis added)	“(TASH) has allowed me to begin the process of changing how I communicate with others , and that’s kind of really how it affects my relationships of now, and not only having that base, but also having communication skills where we can talk about serious controversy all or or deemed taboo conversations without flipping or not knowing what to say. M.3
	desire to create safe spaces	valuing the role of safety in TASH and seeking to create that for others	<p>“I remember what it was to be a youth looking for that safe space and finding it in adults, so, I try to keep that in mind when I interact with my youth,” A.3</p> <p>“as a parent, probably, I hope is the main goal of TASH, that I’m nonjudgy, and listen and understand so that my daughter can feel her safe space is with me.” A.3</p>

Appendix E: TASH Ground Rules

Ground Rules

1. **Respect**- Give your undivided attention to the person who is talking. Agree to disagree. *Your values are no better than my values- respect for all values.*
2. **Confidentiality**- Outside of TASH meetings, we can talk about what was said, but not who said it.
3. **Openness** – We will be as open and honest as possible, but we won't disclose or discuss others' personal or private issues or lives. It's ok to discuss situations as general examples, but we won't use names.
4. **Sensitivity to Diversity** – We will remember that members in the group may differ in cultural background and/or sexual orientation. We will be careful about making insensitive or careless remarks.
5. **Right to Pass** – It is always ok to pass, to say that I don't want to share on this particular issue.
6. **Anonymity** – It's ok to ask a question anonymously (using TASH suggestion/comment box), and the program coordinator will respond to all questions/comments.
7. **There are No "Dumb" Questions** – Any question you have is worth asking: someone else probably has the same question.
8. **Acceptance**- It is ok to feel uncomfortable. We recognize it is often difficult to talk about sensitive and personal topics.
9. **"I"- statements**- It is preferable to share feelings and values using sentences that begin with "I" as opposed to "you."
10. **Make no assumptions** – It is important not to make assumptions about group members' values, sexual behavior, life experiences, or feelings.
11. **Have a Good Time** – TASH is about working and having fun while doing meaningful work.
12. **Arrive on time!**