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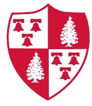

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Community-Based Programs as Spaces for Critical Consciousness, not Containment:

Exploring the Perspectives of Black Youth

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the faculty of

Montclair State University in partial fulfillment

of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Carrie Bergeson

Montclair, NJ

May 2022

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Robert Reid

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

We hereby approve the Dissertation

Community-Based Programs as Spaces for Critical Consciousness not Containment: Black Youths' Perspectives

of

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Family Science and Human Development

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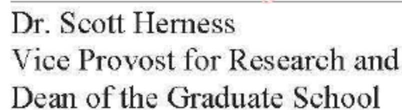

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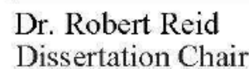

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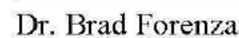

Dr. Brad Forenza

Dr. Jason Williams

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Abstract

Historically Black youth have been labeled as needing to be “saved” and “fixed” because they are “at-risk,” “broken,” and more likely to subscribe to deviant behavior. This deficit rhetoric frames community-based education programs (CBEPs) that serve Black youth as vital spaces that must prevent and save Black youth from subscribing to undesirable behaviors. Therefore, this study builds on the paucity of literature regarding CBEPs as spaces that view Black youth as valuable and worthy and encourage youth to critically examine the world around them, often withholding opportunities and resources. With critical consciousness (Freire, 1968) as the framework, this qualitative study sought to understand if critical consciousness manifested within eleven Black youth participating in a CBEP. The CBEP within this study is located in the third most densely populated community within the Northeast. Semi-structured interviews were the primary data source, and a constant comparative analysis was done to identify emerging themes across these data. Findings contribute to the small asset framing of CBEP literature and allow Black youth the opportunity to counter narrate the CBEP experiences and deficit views placed on them. Findings provide implications for future research, practice, and policymakers.

Keywords: critical consciousness, Black youth, community-based education programs

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First, thank you to my mom, who was my first fan in life. You are the definition of strength, grace, and beauty. You provided me with trust and safety throughout all the seasons of our relationship, and I do not have the words to express what that means to me; thank you to my brother, who is my longest-running friend in life. You pushed me athletically but, more importantly, educationally. Thank you for challenging me while also inspiring me. To my extended family, you all collectively witnessed the absolute labor of love that this journey was, and you never doubted me. Thank you.

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making time to talk every week. There are not enough words to encompass my appreciation for you.

To my son, Emmett, thank you for breaking me open and showing me how strong I truly am. You came at a time when my dissertation and the world were in panic and uncertainty. Yet, you showed me how to stay present and thankful in every moment. May you always know, “in life you’re going to go far; if you do it right, you’ll love where you are. Just know that wherever you go, you can always come home.”

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Dedication

To the eleven participants who shared their lived experiences with me for the sake of this research. Your experiences will be brought into every space imaginable to ensure your voices and work are heard. Also, to Mr. Smallwood, who allowed me to become part of the Silk City School Based Youth Services Program family, I am forever changed.

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Chapter One: Introduction

My dissertation started four years ago through my doctoral fellowship in which I was regularly in an urban community near the university. My doctoral fellowship worked within a Drug-Free Communities grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. This grant receives support from the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It has been working within the third largest Northeastern community since 2013. My doctoral mentor and supervisor, the principal investigator of these grant initiatives, received two additional federal grants (i.e., Partnerships for Success and Prevention Navigator) to continue community organizing, prevention, and empowerment within the focal community. Therefore, my fellowship allowed me to go into the focal community in varying ways (e.g., researcher, community coalition member, prevention education specialist). Upon entering this community as a prevention education specialist teaching evidence-informed HIV/AIDS, viral hepatitis, and risky sexual behavior curriculum to youth within local high schools, I was connected to a community-based education program, Silk City School-Based Youth Services Program*[1] (SCSBYP).

My first genuine interaction with SCSBYP beyond entering to teach an evidence-informed prevention education program came in April of 2017 when I was asked to join observations of this program with a colleague. These observations were in conjunction with my colleague's research interest in community organizations. I had entered this program space before to help run prevention education programs during the high school lunch periods, unaware this program operated before, during, and after school hours (i.e., beyond 3:30 pm). From the observations with my colleague, I learned about the community-based education program that

occurred after school hours. Within the first afternoon of entering this space and meeting the youth and adults within this program, I remain forever changed and grateful.

Community Setting

The urban Northeastern community within this study is not well known for its positive attributes. The majority of those who know of the community is aware of a well-known rapper, Fetty Wap, or because of the crime and violence that is the focus of news broadcasts. Most do not know about this city because it is the third most populated community in New Jersey. This urban community was once an industrial hub, so it is often referred to as the "Silk City" for its dominant role in silk production during the nineteenth century. Over time this once industrial silk city hub endured an industrial decline resulting in white flight, harsh periods of unemployment, poverty, and substance abuse.

Coming in at a small size of under nine square miles, this community remains the third-largest in the state, with nearly 160,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). This community is extremely racially and ethnically diverse, with over 80% of residents identifying as Black (27%) or Hispanic (61%). Many ethnicities are included within those two racial categories, a few of which include Jamaican, Nigerian, Bengali, Dominican Republic, Peruvian, and Puerto Rican. Furthermore, an additional 43% of residents identify as foreign-born citizens (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Currently, 25% of the population lives below the poverty line, with a median household income of $45,141 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Also, 20% of the population is without health insurance (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). There are 30 entrances and exits to this under 9 square mile community, which is heavily blighted with nearly 200 liquor stores and 400 tobacco selling establishments.

Those under the age of 18 make up 27% of the population, with 2018 graduation rates between 70% and 80%. This results in nearly 30% of youth leaving the school district before graduating. Like the national graduation rate for youth of color, just under 11% of youth who graduate high school within this community will graduate from a four-year university (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2016). Lastly, for those who graduate from high schools in this community, 50% rank below language arts proficiency, and 75% rank below mathematical proficiency.

With such stark community and high school statistics within this Northeastern community, the systemic and societal narrative of living in an urban community where the youth of color, specifically Black youth, are at risk of engaging in dangerous behavior places them in need of prevention and, at times, intervention. Due to this community's financial and resource-strapped nature, youth are led to have compromised futures due to the scarce opportunities available, making them vulnerable to engaging in risky behaviors. Therefore, making alternative education sites and after-school programs (e.g., community-based education programs) important spaces to mentor and foster Black youth. Further, this allows community-based education programs to be a space where youth can form a critical read of the world and be active agents of change to maneuver in a systemic society that disenfranchises them.

Program Space

Through photographs and field notes, I will describe the SCSBYP space. SCSBYP consists of one semi-large community space, which has a lot of information, resources, and images packed within. This program has varying roles and names depending on the time of day you attend (i.e., before, during, or after school hours). SCSBYP is the overarching name recognized by the community and state which operates within a local high school from sunrise to

beyond sundown. The space is considered a "one-stop-shop," per the program pamphlet, within a local high school and coordinates with existing community resources. All youth are eligible to participate in the program's services, including mental health counseling, employment counseling, substance misuse prevention education, medical linkages, learning support, healthy youth development, and much more. For this study, I will focus on the youth who participate in the after-school hours (i.e., after 3:30 pm) and programs held by SCSBYP. The youth who participate in the after-school programs invest their free time outside of regular school hours to be within this organization and engage in programs addressing community engagement and larger systematic conversations.

There are two ways to enter SCSBYP's space as the program is located within a high school. The first potential entrance is through a side door located on the side of the high school building. The second possible entrance is from within the larger high school itself. Upon entering the main door attached to the outside of the high school building, a small entranceway is compacted with storage containers for activities (e.g., basketballs, pencils, notepads). Once in the program's main communal area, you see walls almost wholly covered with pictures, posters, flags, empowering statements, and artwork. In front of the administrator's desk, there is a table nearly overflowing with resource pamphlets (e.g., single parenting, teen pregnancy, mental health, and substance abuse). Looking around the space, there are typically four tables and one large desk where the program assistant works. This individual's desk is always covered with papers, and they know where everything is despite it looking overwhelmingly cluttered and unorganized. Behind the administrator's desk are large filing cabinets and an old printer/copy machine. The remainder of the space is the communal space for the youth to hang out. This space is filled with two couches. One couch is placed on an outer wall of the area so that the

center of the room can be filled with two smaller tables and chairs around them. Another small but clearly designated student homework station sits against an outer wall. Next to the community couch is another small table with two chairs assigned to it, and a sign above the space reads “study space” and another sign that gives study tips. Surrounding the main communal area is five office spaces, the first is the program director and treasurer’s shared office, the second is a storage room, and the third is used as a spare office space often filled in the summer with older teens who help run the summer program, and the final two office spaces include the two staff that are employed with the school to work within the SCSBYP. Two staff members include a licensed social worker and a school resource liaison.

There is barely any wall space within SCSBYP that is not covered with personal pictures from trips and community service activities the youth have attended and photos of youth who have graduated high school and college. Two bulletin boards within the space are decorated multiple times within the year for various awareness months (e.g., suicide prevention month, national drug and alcohol fact week). Posters personally drawn or printed can be viewed on the remaining wall space. One example is a diversity poster that reads: **D**ifferent **I**ndividuals **V**aluing **E**ach other **R**egardless of **S**kin **I**ntellect **T**alents or **Y**ears. There are five flags hanging together within one space within this teen center. Those five flags include Trinidad and Tobago, Pan-African flag (also known as the UNIA flag, Afro-American flag, Black Liberation flag, and many other names), Puerto Rican flag, rainbow flag (representing the LGBT movement), and a Peru flag. While these flags may seem very different to someone entering the space for the first time, these flags are representative of the larger focal community. The entire area is covered with empowering and positive images and affirmations. There is not much-uncovered space within SCSBYPs walls.

At any given time during the week, you will be greeted by one of the working staff within the program, typically the program assistant, and various youth within the center. It is not uncommon during school hours to see youth spending their lunch periods within the space if they have turned in a parent consent form, and the area is easily filled at those times with 10-40 students. Often during school hours, youth enjoy their lunch, playing a game, or doing homework at any given time. Again, the atmosphere is so welcoming that you forget how compact the space is.

After school hours, the space remains open and operates with various other program names to stretch out grant funds and opportunities for youth. The after-school hour programs are intentionally geared toward community engagement and personal awareness, and growth. All for One/One for All (AFOOFA) operates within SCSBYP between 3:30-4:30 pm. Brothers United Developing Spiritually (BUDS), Sisterhood Service Self-Empowerment (UMOJA), and the Municipal Prevention Alliance Prevention Program (MAPP) all operate after 4:30 pm. These varying program names are overarching, and within the context of this study, participants refer to the space as the Teen Center, but within the study, this space will be titled SCSBYP.

Program Atmosphere

Within two years of continually coming to SCSBYP and at times meeting the group within the community at events, it is clear there are unique and intentional differences in this community-based education program atmosphere, as opposed to many others within the focal community and broader literature. As a researcher, I engaged in field notes with every interaction I had within this program, writing down my observations and discussions within 48 hours. This is ideal for observing a phenomenon such as the after-school hour programs, like SCSBYP, for

ensuring rich and accurate field descriptions which may enhance or expound on existing data and literature (Saldana, 2016)

Many community-based education programs draw on frameworks such as Positive Youth Development or a model of Risk Resilience Protective Factors when working with minority youth. However, SCSBYP does not pull on the broader well-known frameworks; this program uses aspects of Kwanzaa and Sankofa. Kwanzaa focuses on seven principles and tenants which serve as guidelines for an individual's life practice (Karenga, 1997). This African American cultural celebration was founded by Maulana Karenga in 1966 and encouraged Black descendants of slavery to question their sociopolitical positioning in the world (Sulé, Nelson, & Williams, 2021). The seven principles include Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative economics), Nia (purpose), Kuumba (creativity), and Imani (faith). McClester (1985) gives further explanation of these principles as:

- Umoja (unity) is to strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, and race.
- Kujichagulia (self-determination) is to define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves, and speak for ourselves instead of being defined, named, created for, and spoken for by others.
- Ujima (collective work and responsibility) is to build and maintain our community together and make our sisters' and brothers' problems our problems to solve them together.
- Ujamaa (cooperative economics) is to build and maintain our own stores, shops, and other businesses and to profit from them together.

- Nia (purpose) is to make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community to restore our people to their traditional greatness.
- Kuumba (creativity) is to do always as much as we can, in the way we can, to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.
- Imani (faith) is to believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, and the righteousness of our struggle (McClester, 1985, pp. 3-4)

Sankofa is a ritual used by many African and Native American nations to help discuss important issues in a group. Within SCSBYP, Sankofa modeled with a social/emotional and violence prevention curriculum is used. Sankofa is designed to instill and/or reinforce Seven Cs within youth: consciousness, connectedness, conduct, commitment, competency, creativity, and courage. This model is implemented within youth service organizations, community, and faith-based organizations nationwide. Sankofa is an Akan (West African Ghana) symbol based on a mythical bird that flies forward with its head looking backward, and when translated, means to go back and retrieve. The belief is that the past serves as a guide or wisdom to plan and build the future.

As someone with no background, awareness, or knowledge of Sankofa, this was something sacred to behold. When Sankofa begins, the atmosphere shifts within SCSBYP. The overlapping chatter and laughter stop and all the youth sit in a circle, sitting with upright posture, no slouching, and phones are away. The director of the program addresses the kids by saying “Ago,” meaning “May I have your permission to speak,” and the youth responds “Ame,” meaning “Yes! And I will listen”. The director always opens the talking circle, holding the Ankh; this wooden object is considered the symbol for life, living life in harmony with nature and one another. It is not viewed as a religious object, and when the Ankh is not being used, it is

wrapped in a mud cloth. The director always announces that the talking circle is open and that you are not allowed to speak unless you are holding the Ankh. To begin, you are asked to introduce yourself by stating your name, age, the school you attend, if applicable, and anything else you would like the group to know about you. Often the director will be more direct and ask the group to share something positive about their day or something they are proud of. Within the talking circle, you are allowed to ask to "pass," but almost every time the director will veto "pass" and encourage you to take a moment and answer the question. On various occasions, the director will let younger teens pass but hold older teens more accountable for following instructions. Once everyone sitting in the talking circle has spoken, the director indicates that the talking circle is over as the group moves into evening discussions or activities. At the end of these evening groups, the group recites the Sankofa motto, which is brought out and displayed for the teens to read. The motto states:

> I am royal lineage with a royal heritage. It is my responsibility to pass on a legacy of love, leadership, and loyalty. Through love, I will show patience and acceptance of others. Through leadership, I will show the ability to make correct choices, not popular ones. Through loyalty, I will show that I can be counted on to do my part to make life and those around me safe.

Upon observing and learning the Sankofa model in SCSBYP, I began to investigate the literature on community-based educational programs within urban communities of color.

Problem Statement

When focused narrowly on the literature, Black youth are exposed to violence at higher rates (Fauth, 2004; Ginwright, 2010; Tandon & Solomon, 2009) and are disproportionately

represented in the juvenile justice system (Gottesman, & Swarts, 2011). Furthermore, it has been well documented that Black youth are more likely to suffer from depression, fear, and anger (Garbarino, 1995; Ginwright, 2010) and have lower levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy and higher levels of self-doubt (Nebbit, 2009). As well as fewer academic and civic engagement opportunities (Ginwright, 2010; Halpern, 2005; Serio, Borden, & Perkins, 2011). However, when looking more broadly at Black youth within society, one finds Black youth are marginalized through various intersecting lenses (i.e., race, class, gender, geographic location), which places Black youth as the source of discourse within their communities in dire need of interventions to prevent, or correct, their presumed innate delinquent behaviors.

Historically, youth of color have been labeled as needing to be "saved" and "fixed" because they are "at-risk," "broken," and thus more likely to behave in deviant ways (Baldrige, 2014; Rios, 2015). This deficit societal framework perpetuates Black youth as lacking and less capable, leading to Black youth limiting how they envision or think of themselves and what is possible for their lives (Dimitriadis & Weis, 2001; Greene, 2000). This damage-centered rhetoric is not new and perpetuates a cycle of deficiency among Black youth (Tuck, 2009). Some research and literature point to Black youth as being disconnected from community life and community engagement (Lewis & Burd-Sharps, 2010; Putnam, 2000), and despite this, Black youth continue to show a tremendous capacity for community organizing and activism (Ellis-Williams, 2007; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007).

As such, this framing places community-based education programs as vital spaces within low-income communities of color to prevent youth from subscribing to risky and undesirable behaviors (Baldrige, 2014; Ginwright, Cammarota, & Noguera, 2005; Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem & Ferber, 2003), instead of focusing on community organizing, engagement, and

activism. Unfortunately, as a result of this deficit perspective, there is a clear shift in negative language, and larger societal discourse used to frame these youth and their connection within these community-based education programs. For example, community-based education programs have been linked to containment (i.e., keeping youth off the streets) and prevention (i.e., keeping youth from teen pregnancy and substance use) for Black youth who are deemed "at-risk" and "disadvantaged" (Halpern, 2002; Kwon, 2013; Martinez & Rury, 2012). This, in turn, infiltrates how effective these community-based education programs are, as these programs then must prove they are indeed "saving" these "at-risk" youth of color who enter their programs. With widespread labels (e.g., culturally deprived, disadvantaged, at-risk) continuing to be used to define Black youth and the challenges they have faced for decades (Beatty, 2012; Martinez & Rury, 2012), many community-based education programs resort to using such deficit rhetoric to secure funding opportunities and public acknowledgment for their work with youth (Baldrige, 2014).

However, some literature recognizes an asset narrative when discussing marginalized youth. Christens and Peterson (2012) found that community programs and organizations that include youth in organizing, activism, and research initiatives allow youth to flourish and advocate their needs. Also, youth civic development research revealed that when encouraged to engage in civic engagement, youth take on leadership roles within communities (Forenza & Happonen, 2016). Despite this, only a small body of literature looks at how successful youth community-based education programs are within communities of color. Moreover, it is essential to note that there is no distinction and measure of success for these youth community-based education programs beyond reducing risky behaviors (e.g., teen pregnancy, substance use, juvenile arrest rates).

Furthermore, most programs must ensure they are reducing risky behaviors for youth of color, although some community-based education programs shift the perspective of the youth they serve. What remains even more unexamined is Black youths' perspectives and experiences while being part of such a different type of youth community-based educational program. Therefore, it is imperative to understand how Black youth experience being part of a community-based education program that views them in a way that *values* them and *recognizes* them as active agents of change, as opposed to problems needing to be fixed or contained from potentially risky deviant behavior.

Study Aims and Research Question

This study aims to understand if Black youth from SCSBYP, are going through a personal journey toward becoming critically conscious. While SCSBYP is successful in the traditional sense of reducing teen pregnancy rates and experiences with the juvenile justice system, this study is interested in Black youths' lived experiences that invite them to form their own critical awareness of the world and critical consciousness (Freire, 1968). SCSBYP acts as a conduit within this research study, but it is crucial to note that Freire's concept of critical consciousness suggests this is a collective process as such community-based education program experience is vital to this study's context. Further, in documenting Black youth's experiences with critical consciousness, this study hopes to understand the unique nuances within the SCSBYP that seem to change the narrative Black youth often have imposed upon them (i.e., the deficit framing) and to look instead at understanding how Black youth experience a community-based education program that views them as worthy assets. This study will be guided by one overarching research question: *How does critical consciousness manifest among Black youth participating in SCSBYP?*

Definition of Terms

To remain consistent and clear with language specific to this study, I will define significant terms and phrases, as discussed in this document.

SCSBYP stands for Silk City School-Based Youth Program, which is the overarching name of this community organization. This name is used within the focal community and is recognized by the state. The program offers the following services: teen center, one-on-one counseling, family counseling, teen parenting support/child care, recreation, outings, physical examination referrals, health service referrals, employment counseling, educational counseling, leadership development, group discussions, referrals, and client transportation.

AFOOFA stands for All For One/One For All. This operates once a week at SCSBYP between 3:30-4:30 pm. The mission of this club is to unite diverse people. Activities are to provide opportunities for youth to better understand the attitudes, values, and beliefs of others. While also learning skills to promote a positive paradigm to understand prejudice within their school and the local community.

B.U.D.S is Brothers United Developing Spiritually. There are seven stages of male development within this program to support the Male Paradigm for Positive Development, Rules & Regulations, and Duties to complete the cycle. Those seven stages include God, creator of all things (Imani-faith), cultural awareness (self-determination), family empowerment (creativity), health awareness, nutrition (collective work and responsibility), community empowerment (cooperative economics), education/career (Nia-purpose) and business/entrepreneur (collective work and responsibility).

UMOJA is a program space specific to sisterhood, service, and self-empowerment.

SANKOFA is a youth social/emotional and violence prevention curriculum. Sankofa promotes a message of youth responsibility and self-control.

TEEN CENTER is the name given to SCSBYP by youth to encompass all the varying programs within the space. (i.e., AFOOFA, B.U.D.S, UMOJA).

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is presented in five chapters. The first chapter included an introduction to the topic, background information, statement of the problem, study aims, and research question. Also includes an overview of key terms. Chapter Two includes a critical literature review as it pertains to the study. Chapter Three outlines the methodology of the study. Chapter Four provides an overview of the study's findings. Lastly, Chapter Five discusses the study's results, limitations, and implications.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Framing Community-Based Education Programs

Community-based education programs (CBEPs) for youth, both formal and informal, are essential to communities of color (Baldridge et al., 2017). These programs offer youth-positive perceptions of place (Greene, 2000), meet developmental needs (Jones & Deutsch, 2013), and validate, challenge, and engage youth (Riggs, Bohnert, Guzman, & Davidson, 2010). These programs also offer space for critical conversations and reflection on sociopolitical, and cultural development for minoritized youth (i.e., Black, Latinx, oppressed youth; Baldridge, 2014; Ginwright, 2010; Kirshner, 2015; Kwon, 2013; Ngo et al., 2017). Therefore, these programs are celebrated for the academic, sociopolitical, and cultural support of minoritized youth (Baldridge, 2014; Heathfield & Fusco, 2016; Kirshner, 2015; Kwon, 2013).

CBEPs focus on community needs and cultural relevance, which results in services that are affirming to marginalized youth (Jensen & Case, 2022). However, research on CBEPs often overlooks the sociopolitical complexities within these spaces (Baldridge, 2014). Specifically, how CBEPs are diverse in philosophies, pedagogies, and funding (Baldridge, 2014), but they are often housed within larger school systems which can pose potential barriers (e.g., restricted hours, events, services, and resources offered). Furthermore, the educational system in the U.S. reflects heteronormative, white, middle-class values and norms, which often pushes all other youth (e.g., Black, Latinx, LGBTQ) to disengage or drop out. Some CBEPs are autonomous from school sites, allowing them to differentiate from school expectations and structures (Rogoff et al., 2016). When CBEPs are unaffiliated with a larger school, even if it may be physically housed within the building (Jensen & Case, 2022), it allows these programs to operate everywhere (e.g., within the community, museums, and neighboring towns). This also allows

flexibility of topics from educational obtainment to social injustices (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). With CBEPs located within schools and non-school settings, one cannot conclusively state the benefits of such programs. However, researchers note the strengths of CBEPs' ease of access to youth through school referrals (Randolph & Johnson, 2018) while also noting the continued historical unwelcoming educational and academic discrimination of minoritized youth (e.g., Hope et al., 2018; Jensen & Case, 2022).

Community-based education programs have a long-standing history of disrupting inequalities within marginalized youths lived experiences within schools and communities under systemic and toxic policies that threaten and impact their daily lives (e.g., education policies; Baldridge et al., 2017). These programs disrupt inequalities and foster minoritized youth to connect, heal, resist, and further navigate the oppressive narratives and policies placed upon them (Baldridge et al., 2017). Halpren (2002) reminds us that for well over 100 years, community-based organizations have operated separately from traditional schools and that these organizations are directly tied to community needs and, or concerns. CBEPs do not ignore the sociopolitical development of young people, while most educational policy does (e.g., zero-tolerance policy; Ginwright & James, 2002).

When looking specifically at the framing of Black youth, one finds that Black youth are marginalized by inequalities and injustices, such as racism, poverty, mass unemployment, mass incarceration, police brutality, and health disparities, to name a few (Carter & Welner, 2013; El-Amin et al., 2017). As early as 1995, Garbarino described these socio-structural barriers as "social toxins" which infiltrate an individual's well-being. More often than most other racial groups, socio-structural barriers creating "social toxins" are common in Black communities. This leaves Black youth vulnerable to many "social toxins" (e.g., poverty, violence, unemployment;

De Coster, Heimer, & Wittrock, 2006; Fauth, 2004; Ginwright, 2010). Living within such spaces can alter youth's perceptions and aspirations, inhibiting them from being less curious and less enthusiastic about life's opportunities (Ginwright, 2010; Halpern, 2005). Therefore, when looking at CBEPS that work with Black or minoritized youth, one finds the literature is split in frameworks. The first is a deficit framing, in which many believe minoritized youth *need* these spaces because they are "broken" and "at-risk" of negative life outcomes (Baldridge, 2014). The second is asset framing, in which others believe these spaces are necessary because of structural barriers that undermine educational opportunities for minoritized youth (Baldridge, 2014).

Deficit Framing of Black youth and CBEPs

Black students alone are nearly four times more likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions when compared to white non-Hispanic students, as well as nearly two times more likely to be expelled (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2016). This further cause Black youth to fall behind in school or determine they are not cut out for the system, and inevitably leave prior to graduating (Morris, 2016). Further perpetuating the deficit rhetoric that often leads Black youth towards dealing with individual risk factors (e.g., substance use, becoming teenage parents; Brown & Rodriquez, 2009).

Even within mainstream youth development literature, Black youth have largely been ignored, and if included, they have been described with a deficit lens (Ginwright & James, 2002). Institutional responses to youth of color who leave the school system before graduating often mix neoliberal beliefs of "grit," resilience, and policies to focus on controlling risky and detrimental behaviors (McInerney, 2009). Rather than supporting students of color, McInernery (2009) asserts school authorities "see young people's behavior as the problem, rather than symptomatic of deeper social and educational concerns" (p. 25). In short, problem-based

approaches (e.g., risk, resilience, protective factors, and positive youth development) attempt to instill white middle-class values to counter Black youths' deficiencies (Anderson, 1999; Cammarota, 2011; Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Historically, Black youth have long been targeted to attend community-based education programs as a preventative measure and place of containment (Halpern, 2002; Kwon, 2013; Martinez & Rury, 2012). This long-standing label and framing for Black youth extend to the community-based programs within urban communities of color that serve youth. These programs have been promoted to provide youth with an alternative to urban street life (e.g., substance abuse, crime, violence, teen pregnancy; Halpern, 2002; Kwon, 2013; Martinez & Rury, 2012). The success of community-based education programs is then placed on how well they "save" and "fix" youth of color (e.g., increase graduation rates, reduce teen pregnancy), who are continuously viewed as at-risk of negatives outcomes (e.g., poverty, lives of crime; Kwon, 2013). Martinez and Rury (2012) discussed an important historical analysis of terms used to describe Black youth with examples such as, "culturally deprived" and "culturally disadvantaged" to the eventual "at-risk." With these deficit labels and terms came policy agendas fueled at targeting Black youth (Baldrige, 2014). As a result, this framing continues to disregard the strengths of Black and minoritized youth and further limits the ways they are viewed, engaged, and educated. Specifically, sociopolitical discourse is not just about how society envisions Black youth, but also what society envisions is possible for their lives (Dimitriadis & Weis, 2001; Greene, 2000).

Urban communities of color are under-resourced and underfunded, with many of the residents within these communities left to work factory, trade, or entry-level jobs. This leaves youth in these communities with no clear pathway towards upward mobility. Balfanz, Herzog, &

Mac Iver (2007) estimated that within the school systems of urban communities of color, between a third to a half of low-income and minority students fail to graduate. The authors point out that these statistics would not be a significant issue in previous decades as trade work and unionized factories were an option for those without high school degrees (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007). Still, this continued silent epidemic within urban communities of color presently leaves youth in a situation with bleak futures filled with vulnerable and adverse life events (e.g., living in poverty, health disparities, committing crimes of poverty), as well as limiting chances for future success (Visser, 2018; Zaff, Ginsberg, Boyd, & Kakli, 2014).

Researchers, similarly, to policymakers have consistently taken a problem-based approach to deal with youth of color (Coleman, 1988; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007). This research is primarily due to public policy concerns, (e.g., crime and safety in urban communities), which typically describe Black youth behaviors as individual pathological behaviors (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Sullivan, 1989), or cultural adaptations that stem from low-income urban communities of color (Anderson 1999, Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007). This cause and effect framing obscures the fact that Black youth in low-income urban communities utilize social networks through family, peers, and after-school programs (i.e., community-based education programs), and are capable of making pro-social choices (Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammarota, 2006). Two cause and effect frameworks important to note are: Risk, Resilience, and Protective Factors, as well as Positive Youth Development (Walker, 2000). While these frameworks are important and have decades of research and literature behind them, they disregard the sociopolitical development of Black youth and communities of color (Ginwright & James, 2002). This problem-based approach has consistent assumptions that youth of color's problems derive from cultural and intellectual deficits (Cammarota, 2011; Kirk &

Goon, 1975; Valencia & Black, 2002). Problem-based approaches also assume that once these deficits are addressed, urban youth of color will develop into “normal” middle-class adults (Cammarota, 2011). As Baldrige (2014) eloquently states, “This deficit framing disregards the assets that Black and minoritized youth bring to educational spaces, thus ignoring their agency – and thereby limiting the ways they are imagined, engaged and educated” (p. 44). Further, this deficit framing extends into many social spaces, explicitly meant to support Black youth, like community-based education programs (Kwon, 2013).

Asset Framing of Black youth and CBEPs

For the asset framing CBEPs that resist objectifying and deficiently framing Black youth, it is no surprise that this leads to difficulties securing funding and receiving any public acknowledgment for their work (Baldrige, 2014). These programs offer asset narratives that believe Black youth come to CBEPs already whole and offer a programmatic space that builds relationships and raises critical sociopolitical conversations (Paris & Winn, 2013). Fine, Weis, Centrie, and Roberts (2000) stated, “These spaces are…a crack, a fissure, a fleeting or sustained set of commitments. Individual dreams, collective work, and critical thoughts are smuggled in and reimagined” (p 132).

Asset-framed CBEPs switch the narrative, and sociopolitical view placed on Black youth and provide opportunities and structure for youth to connect with peers and adults (Baldridge, 2017). They also provide a space for youth to reimagine and co-create alternatives to personal and sociopolitical issues (e.g., education policies, and community park clean-ups; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007). Baldridge, Beck, Medina, and Reeves (2017) state this approach offers minoritized youth the ability to redress inequality, heal, create, and resist the deficit sociopolitical structures.

Research has also shown that CBEPs interrupt the educational inequality linked to them based on physical (i.e., within larger school systems) and social (i.e., race and class) locations (Baldridge et al., 2017; Baldridge, 2014). This is done by creating spaces for youth to have support from adult and youth allies (Baldridge et al., 2017). Asset literature shows positive effects of adult-youth relationships (Ginwright, 2010; Riggs et al., 2010) and nurturing intergenerational relationships in culturally relevant ways (Woodland, Martin, Hill, & Worrell, 2009). Adults within asset-framed CBEPs create intergenerational relationships that encourage high expectations and opportunities for youth to address social change within local communities (Baldridge et al., 2017; Ginwright, 2007). Within these programs, there is a shift within adult-youth relationships which repositions this relationship to be less hierarchal and more of a shared struggle (Ginwright, 2007). As Jackson, Sealey-Ruiz, and Watson (2014) stated, this allows an "ethos of care to acknowledge that for the community to flourish, individuals must recognize their interconnected relationships to one another" (p 399). These adult-youth relationships go beyond trust and mutual dependence. Instead, they are sociopolitical acts that motivate youth to address and heal trauma (Ginwright, 2010). Further, these relationships are essential to asset framing CBEPs as Black youth have been systemically labeled and treated as threatening, deviant, broke, and at-risk (Baldridge et al., 2017).

When asset-framed CBEPs help Black youth make sense of their sociopolitical context and barriers, they can move towards a more just world (Baldridge et al., 2017; Ginwright, 2007). Youth begin to develop critical awareness and consciousness by advancing adult-youth relationships, challenging negative racial and ethnic concepts of themselves, and moving towards collective social change (Ginwright, 2007). As Ginwright and Cammarota (2007) state, community-based education programs in urban communities of color can provide youth with

access to networks and experiences, allowing youth a chance to engage in critical praxis (i.e., critical consciousness; Freire, 1968). Freire's (1968) conceptualization of critical consciousness involves the awareness of systemic forms of oppression that limit one's capacity for self-determination and ability to take action to address oppression.

Therefore, I term these asset framed CBEPs as *transformative community-based education programs.* These TCBEPs provide youth opportunities to engage in community engagement and space to discuss community and cultural issues deemed important to them while also learning about local and more extensive political processes (Baldridge et al., 2017). Having the opportunity and space to engage in civic and cultural topics allows youth to link interactions with others to personal growing ideologies, which in turn raises critical consciousness (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007) and offers minoritized youth to redress systemic barriers collectively.

Transformative Community-Based Education Programs

Noguera and Cannella (2006) suggested, "Society has disinvested itself of association with the responsibility to a generation of youth…our institutions have effectively disowned their children" (p 346). Thus, transformative community-based education programs are imperative to research, literature, and communities. TCBEPs are comprised of three intentional aspects of operation. The first is utilizing a bottom-up approach, in which these programs focus on locale or community issues. These organizations can act as conduits that generate, exchange and disseminate local knowledge (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007). These programs are "mom-and-pop" small-sized programs (Mclaughlin, 2000). For many programs, the leadership often shifts from youth who participated and have chosen to remain in leadership roles as they age. One example of the bottom-up approach is the school-to-prison pipeline within urban communities of

color. There is a direct concern for youth, families, and local communities. This is not specific to urban communities, as it is a prominent social and political concern within the U.S. Transformative community-based education programs' bottom-up approach necessitates these connections with youth in intentional ways. Some different ways these programs address such critical topics are by going to community awareness and advocacy events (e.g., Black Lives Matter Marches), watching informative movies (e.g., *Detroit*), attending workshops (e.g., healthy relationship development and education), and using personal community examples.

The second intentional aspect of transformative community-based education programs is shifting a deficit lens to an asset-based lens. This involves moving away from an "at-risk" view of youth to one of at-promise (Rios, 2015) and recognizing youth as active agents of individual and civic change. Adult workers within these community-based education programs encourage youth to read the world, question the world (i.e., sociocultural and sociopolitical), and shift the narrative towards a more asset-based, critically conscious space (Kwon, 2008). Essentially, the few unique and successful TCBEPs foster Black youth from viewing their urban lives as a space they must survive into a space where they engage "in real-world issues that shape their daily lives such as school safety, school closure, and police harassment, youth learn to move past victimization and confront unjust social and economic conditions" (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007, p. 699).

The third aspect of TCBEPs is that the programs' identity is tied to social justice and civic engagement. Social justice and civic engagement in TCBEPs range from political (e.g., substance abuse, unemployment) to non-political (e.g., community park clean-up, church block parties) events. These programs often involve their youth in broad yet intentional events that align with their social justice and civic engagement ethos in some way. An example of a political

event includes marching in Pride events within their local community and neighboring ones. An example of a non-political event includes attending a community church block party to bring the community together in a collective space. Both political and non-political events are imperative to attune to the TBCEPs ethos (i.e., social justice and civic engagement).

Similar to transformative community-based education programs, McLaughlin (2000) found that local mom-and-pop operations, faith-based programs, local affiliates of national organizations, and others were among programs that attract and retain youth of color in urban communities. McLaughlin also found three common characteristics for youth's choices to join these programs: a) youth decision making and community involvement, b) learning environment with committed adults, and c) consistent reflection on and evaluation of how things were going for the participants. The authors also suggested moving youth of color towards becoming more critically conscious, a framework created by Paulo Freire (1968) is crucial. Specifically, Paulo Freire calls for a deeper reflection and advocates for educational space and pedagogy that is an intentional approach to merging learning action-oriented skills with individual and collective lived experiences to transform oppressed individuals and communities. Ginwright and Cammarota (2002) stated, "critical consciousness and social action provide young people with tools to understand and change the underlying cause of social and historical processes that perpetuate the problems they face daily" (p. 88) and affirm that these forces, in particular, are important for youth of color who often "struggle with issues of identity, racism, sexism, police brutality, and poverty" (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002, p. 82). This approach aims to organize and educate youth of color to aid in youths' critical consciousness within their communities and the world (Ginwright, 2015; Ginwright & James, 2002; Kwon, 2008). However, literature recognizing youth as agents of change who engage in critical consciousness is still evolving

(Forenza, Rogers, & Lardier, 2017; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Iwasaki, Springett, Dashora, McLaughlin, & McHugh, 2014), and even more sparse when recognizing Black youth.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Consciousness

Paulo Freire (1968, 1994, 2000, 2010) developed the concepts and framework of Critical Consciousness as an approach to aid those who are oppressed and marginalized to begin to read the world. Freire (1968) wrote, “The awakening of critical consciousness leads the way to an expression of social discontent precisely because these discontents are real components of an oppressive situation (p. 36). As an individual’s critical consciousness deepens, so can one’s sense of self-efficacy and confidence to seize power and seek out others to take transgressive social action collaboratively (Ginwright, 2010).

Literature often focuses on a response to the marginalization that occurs because of an individual’s race, ethnicity, and social class (e.g., Aldana, Rowley, Checkoway, & Richards-Schuster, 2012; Forenza, 2018; Campbell & Macphail, 2002; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2015). Critical consciousness is described as a way in which marginalized and oppressed people analyze, navigate, and challenge the oppressive social forces shaping their life and community (Duncan-Andrade, & Morrell, 2008; Seider, Tamerat, Clark, & Soutter, 2017). Even in the late 1900s Watts and Abdul-Adil (1998) attribute this to the fact that minority individuals face oppressive systems and forces, along with normative developmental challenges, that are not experienced by non-minorities. Freire defines “praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 2010, p. 51). Furthermore, critical consciousness involves “a fundamental understanding of oppressive elements, hierarchical structures, and one’s place in

society, and it is developed through education, analysis of personal experiences, and critical dialogue" (Albright, Hurd, & Hussain, 2017, p. 369).

In Freire's (1968) book, *Pedagogy of The Oppressed,* various concepts are discussed in the process for marginalized and oppressed individuals to move towards praxis (i.e., become critically conscious). Education and how one engages in education are important when moving towards an individual's own praxis and critical consciousness. Freire discusses how teachers-students engage in education. *Banking* is the notion that teachers bank or dispose ideas and knowledge into students. This transforms students into receiving objects and "attempts to control thinking and action" (Freire, 2010, p. 41). Freire poses education should abandon this banking interaction from teacher-student and focus on a *problem-posing* concept. Problem-posing education embodies communication between teacher-student. Essentially the teacher is no longer solely teaching the student; instead, problem-posing education involves constant communication, reflection, and questioning between the teacher-student. Through this open dialogue, students are allowed space to discuss and question perspectives and realities.

Another concept an individual becomes aware of during the growth of praxis is the reflection and realization of humanization or the pursuit of humanity. Freire describes the pursuit of humanity as a way for teachers and students to "become subjects of the educational process by overcoming authoritarianism and an alienating intellectualism; it enables people to overcome their false perception of reality" (Freire, 2010, p. 86). Freire notes that the pursuit of full humanity cannot be carried out in isolation or individually. Rather this is done through fellowship and solidarity (e.g., transformative community-based spaces).

While education is an important interaction that can lead individuals to engage and form praxis Freire discusses how individuals are not liberated simply by chance but through the individual's journey (i.e., praxis) and recognition of the necessity to fight for it (p. 45). Therefore, the process or journey to praxis is a combination of individualism and collectivism. "Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in action-reflection" (Freire, 1968, p. 88). As such, dialogue, action, and reflection are not possible without the infusion of love. As such, collectivism is important to one's journey to praxis and critical consciousness. Further, dialogue must also incorporate faith, hope, and critical thinking. "Faith in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in their vocation to be more fully human" (p. 90). Hope is carried out only in communion with others; as Freire discusses, dialogue cannot be carried out in a climate of hopelessness. An individual must be hopeful in their fight and in their waiting for their realities and world to transform. For example, an individual remaining optimistic and empowered, despite pushback to create a new extracurricular group within their school to discuss and represent their heritage. Lastly, true dialogue does not exist without the engagement of critical thinking. Freire states that critical thinking is:

> "thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them – thinking which perceives reality as a process, as transformation, rather than as static entity – thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved' (p. 92).

In summary, critical consciousness involves intentional aspects that TCBEPs employ and, therefore can act as conduits where critical consciousness may manifest or be further developed for Black youth. As Ginwright and Cammarota (2007) describe, "a process that develops critical

consciousness and builds capacity for young people to respond to and change oppressive conditions in their environments" (p. 699). These transformative approaches within TCBEPs emphasize social justice and social change ethos (Kemp, 2011). With community-based education programs strategically able to recognize and explore structural and contextual barriers Black youth face daily, these programs can provide alternative spaces where youth can reflect, critique, and act against oppressive conditions within their communities and daily lives. Such community-based education programs can yield long-term outcomes such as civic participation and issue-based advocacy into adulthood (Stoneman, 2002).

Critical Consciousness and Black Youth

As early as the 1960's youth have often served and led social change and activism movements (e.g., marches, sit-ins, demonstrations; Diemer et al., 2020; El-Amin et al., 2017). Recently, scholarly attention to marginalized youth has increased, specifically looking at youth activism and social change (Diemer et al., 2020; Forenza & Havlicek, (in press); Heberle et al., 2020; Hope et al., 2018) with very recent and nationally recognized Black deaths (e.g., George Floyd, Breonna Taylor). And yet, while scholarship continues looking at marginalized youth and critical action and social change, the literature on critical consciousness for marginalized youth remains narrowly examined. What is even more scarce is scholarly attention to critical consciousness and Black youth.

Current research has found that critical consciousness expands marginalized youth's commitment to civic engagement, social justice, and activism (Ginwright, 2010; Sulé, Nelson, & Williams, 2021; Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011). Education research has shown critical consciousness also increases academic engagement and achievement (Carter, 2008), which is important for Black youth in two ways. The first is, most community-based education programs

are located within larger school buildings and offer resources free of charge. Second, educational disparities impact other systemic barriers for Black youth (e.g., economic disparities).

Carter (2008) suggests that critical consciousness specifically focused on racism, motivates Black youth to resist oppressive sociopolitical forces within education systems and have academic success. Furthermore, when Black youth can critically view and understand oppressive systems, like the education system, they are able to view the achievement gap as part of a collective struggle to push against oppressive educational barriers (Carter, 2008; El-Amin et al., 2017). El-Amin and authors (2017) examined five northeastern urban schools that had CC within their mission. They found three strategies that allowed Black students to move from becoming critically conscious to actively going against educational barriers and achieving academic success. Authors found three strategies from the five urban schools that include: teaching the language of inequality, creating space to interrogate racism, and teaching youth how to take action. As the authors eloquently state, Black youth are often examined from an educational standpoint as the educational and academic disparities between Black students and other racial groups directly link to larger structural injustices against Black individuals and communities (El-Amim, 2017). Such structural injustices include economic opportunities, health disparities, police brutality, and unequal allocation of school resources (Carter & Welner, 2013; El-Amin et al., 2017). Again, placing a heavy and systemic sociopolitical burden on Black youth, and yet continuing to show despite this, Black youth continue to lead the way to push back and resist oppressive structures and engage in social action. As scholars and educators who work with Black youth, one cannot continue to ignore profound social injustices and not examine the ways critical consciousness fosters Black youth to continue to engage in social activism and civic engagement, despite the historical sociopolitical oppressive structures working against them.

Therefore, the gap in literature this study aims to address is how Black youth manifest critical consciousness within a community-based education program that is housed within an institution that historically withholds equal opportunities. Also, this study aims to extend the theoretical framework of critical consciousness and Black youth.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This study aimed to explore Black youths' experiences within a specific community-based education program that addressed critical views placed on the youth and the world around them. As previously discussed, the research question for this study was: *How does critical consciousness manifest among Black youth participating in SCSBYP?* This chapter will present the SCSBYP atmosphere, study context, research design, recruitment, participants, data collection, trustworthiness, researcher positionality, limitations, and significance.

Program Atmosphere

As previously mentioned, TCBEPs are typically mom-and-pop operated, meaning they are often smaller spaces and run by local individuals or families. The same individual has operated SCSBYP for over 30 years, and the small staff has consisted of the same local individuals for most of the time. All individuals working within this program are those who have been born and raised in the focal community.

The program space consists of one semi-large community space, which has a lot of resources and empowering images packed within it. There are two ways to enter this space; the first is through a door located on the side of a larger high school in the community or an entrance directly from the high school. Upon entering the main door attached to the outside of the larger high school building, there is a small entranceway that is full of storage containers for activities (e.g., basketballs, pencils, notepads). Once in the main communal area of the program, one would notice all the walls were almost completely covered with pictures, posters, flags, empowering statements, and artwork. In front of the administrator's desk, there is a table nearly overflowing with resource pamphlets (e.g., single parenting, teen pregnancy, mental health, and substance abuse). Looking around the space, there is a desk where the program assistant

works. This individual's desk is always covered with papers, and they know where everything is despite it looking overwhelmingly cluttered and unorganized. Behind the desk are a large filing cabinet and an old printer/copy machine. The remainder of the space is the communal space for the youth to hang out. This space is filled by one couch placed on separate outer walls of the room so that the center of the room is able to be filled with two smaller tables and chairs around them. There is another small but clearly designated student homework station that sits against one outer wall as well. Next to the community couch is another small table with two chairs designated to it, above reads study space, and then a homemade study tips sign. Surrounding the main communal space are five doors, one to the program director and treasurers' shared office, one to a storage room. One that is used as a spare office space often filled in the summer with older teens who help run the summer program, and the other two office spaces are for school staff that works within the SCSBYP as well, a licensed social worker, and the budget and finance individual.

Again, the walls within this space are filled with personal pictures from trips and community service activities the youth have attended over the years. Also included are photos of youth who have graduated high school and college. Posters that are personally drawn or printed are placed on the remaining wall space. One example is a diversity poster that reads: **D**ifferent **I**ndividuals **V**aluing **E**ach other **R**egardless of **S**kin **I**ntellect **T**alents or **Y**ears. There are flags hanging together in one space within this teen center, specifically those of Trinidad and Tobago, Pan-African flag (also known as the UNIA flag, Afro-American flag, Black Liberation flag, and many other names), Puerto Rican flag, rainbow flag (representing the LGBT movement), and a Peruvian flag. While these flags may initially seem very different, they represent the identification of members of the focal community. The entire space is covered with empowering

and positive images and affirmations, and there is not much-uncovered space within the SCSBYP.

At any given time during the week, you will be greeted by one of the program staff, typically the program assistant and/or various youth at the center. It is not uncommon to find youth spending their lunch periods within the space (for those who have submitted a parent consent form) or to encounter anywhere between 10-40 youth enjoying their lunch, playing a game, or doing homework at any given time. After school hours, the space remains open and operates with various other program names to stretch out grant funds and opportunities with the teens (i.e., AFOOFA, Umoja, B.U.D.S). The atmosphere is so welcoming that you nearly forget how compact the space truly is.

Study Context

From my nearly four years of experience within this community-based educational program, I have had the opportunity to enter this space in various roles which helps to situate the context of this study. First, as a doctoral fellow observing this program with a fellow doctoral student, I had weekly observations which lasted two months. Upon completion of those observations, I became the point person to run an HIV/AIDS, viral hepatitis, and risky sexual behavior prevention education program during their weeklong summer camp. In addition, I have entered this space by shifting between a researcher observing and taking field notes to a doctoral fellow working on various prevention education projects and data collection initiatives.

As a researcher, I was interested in how Black youth interpreted their personal experiences and the experiences within this community-based education program, especially in ways that helped construct their critical read of the world. As a privileged individual who has

entered this space in varying roles over the years, I was interested in understanding how the critical conversations and activities within this program resonate and impact the youth who choose to be part of this organizational space. Due to my multiple positionalities within SCSBYP, every methodological detail is important, and I acknowledge an intrapersonal connected lens that was used to interview participants and take field notes.

Research Design

This study implemented a basic qualitative design, which included two rounds of semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions and years of field notes taken at SCSBYS. Due to the nature of the research question, basic qualitative design is ideal as this design seeks to understand "(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; p. 24). Qualitative research focuses on the construction of the ongoing meaning of an individual's experiences and perspectives. During the proposal of this study, field notes were retrospectively included to provide context to understand specific events and memories participants discussed within interviews. The current study's field notes included previous years of interactions within SCSBYP (e.g., community events, weekly group meetings, stopping into SCSBYP to say hello while in the community). All field notes were taken within 48 hours of attending any event. All field notes include information such as the date, roughly how many teens were present in group, and the conversation, topic, or activity that occurred. They also included notes on observations I made, such as specific things said by teens or the adults within SCSBYP that seemed to create a response or reaction within the group. All field notes were typed and saved within one large continuous word document. Furthermore, fieldnotes aid in description and further aid analysis, specifically within this study in aiding triangulation.

The first semi-structured one-on-one interview was to gain a better understanding of the participant's personal experiences within SCYSBP. While probing to see what aspects of their lives may be fostering their journey towards critical consciousness (e.g., SCSBYP, parents, peers, church, etc.). Three participants were preparing to head to college in differing states, so those interviews were collected first and analyzed first to honor their time and lived experiences prior to moving. The remaining eight second round interviews were to gain further understanding and clarity of participants' journeys. Information gathered via semi-structured open-ended interviews was used to understand how Black youth described their experience towards reading the world in a critical consciousness manner within SCSBYP.

Qualitative research is based on the belief that knowledge is an ongoing construction from engagement with people trying to understand or make meaning of an experience or phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, using a combination of in-depth semi-structured, face-to-face individual and, at times, dyadic interviews to begin to understand how Black youth from the SCSBYP experience and understand their journey towards critical consciousness. Two interviews included two pairs of teens interviewing together. This was done per the participant's comfort level and echoed by the program director as potentially helpful in knowing the participant's personalities. Interview questions were created through an understanding of the literature surrounding asset narrative framing of community-based education programs and incorporated years of previous field notes and interactions within SCSBYP. All questions were iterative and remained within the scope of the research question to allow for flexibility and further understanding of each participant's experience.

Recruitment

Upon institutional review board (IRB) approval, a non-probability purposive sample (Trochim, 2006) of potential youth within the SCSBYP was used to recruit ten participants. Non-probability sample recruitment aims to interview those with the knowledge, experience, and information being studied. As Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) state, the best interviews occur with participants who want to share their stories and knowledge. Therefore, an informal meeting was held with potentially interested youth, as directed by the SCSBYP Program Director. Due to the initial rapport with this community-based education program, this informal meeting was a collaborative effort between the Program Director and me to make sure a convenient time and setting were used. During this meeting, participants were presented with the procedures, timeline, and potential risks and benefits of this study. Interested parties were allowed time to ask questions, discuss thoughts and concerns, and given time to decide if they wished to participate. The first ten teens (i.e., five males and five females) who met inclusion criteria (see Participants below) were given priority as time was a consideration of this study (i.e., college-bound participants, researcher timeline for graduation).

Inclusion criteria included participants who self-identify as African American or Black in race or ethnicity and had been active participants in the community-based education program for at least six consecutive months. Active membership was determined as those who came to SCSBYP daily, only missing events and workshops due to important and conflicting engagements (i.e., doctors' appointments, work requirements). The program director suggested reaching out to various individuals, and again the first ten interested participants were given priority. Once participants and/or guardians felt all questions and concerns were addressed, informed consent, assent, and guardian consent were signed. All participants received copies of

informed consent to retain for their own records. The final sample consisted of eleven participants who were identified after answering all questions and concerns and who completed informed consent and assent.

Participants

The target population for this study was ten self-identified Black or African American youth who met the inclusion criteria. There was no target age limit; instead, a range of ages and time spent within SCSBYP was sought to capture a range of experiences. Eleven participants were included, five males and six females. Small sample sizes are typical for studies exploring phenomena where little is known to saturate the data (Mason, 2010). Furthermore, eleven participants allowed for saturation to occur. Saturation varies considerably without formal answers as to how many participants are needed; therefore, more data does not always mean new data (Mason, 2010). As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggest, “interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know” (p. 113). Again, the goal of this sample size was to understand the youths’ journey towards critical consciousness and any nuances within SCSBYP that aid in that process. Again, the research question was answered after meeting with eleven participants, as saturation was met with no further themes emerging.

Participant Descriptions

Participants met inclusion criteria if they self-identified as African American or Black in race or ethnicity and were active participants in the community-based education program for at least six consecutive months. Participants were also identified by the Program Director as committed members of SCSBYP (i.e., coming to the program consistently and regularly) and community engagement (i.e., attending community events and outings). Interviewing youth of all ages (i.e., 14-19 years old) and stages (i.e., under a year within the program to over four years

within the program) within the program provided a broad range of experiences and awareness of their journey toward critical consciousness. The participants' demographic information is also represented in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Demographic Information

Name	Age	Race	Ethnicity	Gender	Grade	Years in Program
Nina	18	African-American	Black/Puerto Rican	Female	Senior	1 year
Mary	17	Black	Puerto Rican	Female	Junior	1 year
Carter	17	African-American	African-American	Male	Senior	4+ years
Nathen	17	African-American	*blank	Male	Junior	4+ years
Tim	15	African-American	African-American	Male	Sophomore	4+ years
Sadie	18	African-American	Jamaican	Female	Senior	4+ years
Jordan	16	African-American	*blank	Male	Sophomore	4+years
Kevin	16	African-American/Black American	American	Male	Sophomore	4+ years
Tiffany	16	Black	Jamaican	Female	Junior	1 year
Ivy	17	African-American	Puerto Rican	Female	Senior	3 years
Jasmine	16	African American/Black/Native American	African American/Black	Female	Junior	1 year

Upon completing the recruitment process, I was satisfied with the range of participants and experiences represented.

Data Collection

All interviews included a brief demographic form (Appendix D) and were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. All transcripts were uploaded to NVivo 11 and saved on a flash drive. Audio files were saved on the researchers' desktop and a flash drive with password protection. Eleven in-depth interviews, minus one, occurred on-site at the SCSBYP. One interview was held at a community center within the local community due to timing conflicts. One-on-one interviews were conducted in one of the five office spaces located within SCSBYP. All participants were interviewed twice, and four participants requested to be interviewed in pairs. This flexibility was allowed to honor the participant's comfort level.

In-depth semi-structured interviews allowed participants the flexibility to answer specific questions while also giving them the opportunity to discuss other aspects that may be of importance to them (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Within each interview, probing questions were used to examine if/how SCYBSP or other aspects of participants' lives were a part of participants' journey towards critical consciousness. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommended recording interviews to fully capture the attention and conversation with participants. All audio recordings, informed consent, and assent forms, and the researcher's field notes were stored on a flash drive located within a locked file cabinet within my apartment.

Upon the completion of all interviews, three participants were asked to discuss findings with me to further member-check and triangulate data (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Member-checking was completed to enhance the studies' trustworthiness and allow the participants to give feedback and make changes to the data, as needed, to ensure clarity and accuracy (see trustworthiness section below). Due to COVID-19 restraints, member-checking was conducted

via telephone, with a second phone used to audio record the conversations to aid in the transcription process.

Data Analysis

The data included in this study consisted of demographic questionnaires, transcriptions of audio recorded interviews, and the researchers' field notes occurring between the beginning of May 2019 to the end of January 2020. Member-checking occurred in May of 2020. After conducting initial interviews, audio files were transcribed verbatim and uploaded into NVivo 11. Upon completion of all data collection, I engaged in a constant comparative analysis to identify emerging themes across the data (Merriam, 2009). The preferred qualitative analysis is done in tandem with data collection, as the research question is established and purposeful recruitment is done to understand the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, analysis was ongoing and iterative to guide follow-up interviews. The analysis started immediately after the first interview was complete. This analysis included "coding an incident for a category and comparing it with the previous incidents coded in the same category" (Glaser, 1965, p. 439). This analysis aimed to find themes and patterns across the data within participants' experiences. This analysis involved open coding, focused coding, and then creating larger categories. The data analysis process included coding phrases, sentences, or paragraphs that were relevant to the overarching research question (Bhattacharya, 2017). As Bhattacharya (2017) illuminates, working with hard-to-reach populations often means adapting traditional qualitative procedures to ensure you honor and capture the participant's voices and lived experiences, which was considered within this study. During this analysis, I compared participants' experiences with Freire's CC theoretical framework across all participant interviews. This deductive approach

with Freire's framework allowed me to gain understanding and improve upon probes and clarify questions with participants throughout follow-up interviews.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that rigor in qualitative research derives from various aspects, such as researchers' presence, the rapport between researcher and participants, triangulation of data, and rich description. Therefore, to ensure continuous rigor within this study, upon collection and interpretation of findings I went back to my previous years of field notes, looking specifically at instances that touched on topics and experiences participants were discussing. I then compared previous field notes to present documented memos and interactions with participants and SCSBYP to help expand rich data descriptions and aid in the context of findings. Throughout this process, I consulted with my dissertation committee and critical friends. Critical friends' groups are when an individual seeks to discuss aspects of the study with those who are unlike them (e.g., race, age, sexual orientation). Within my critical friend's group, I consulted various friends at varying points to ensure various positionalities and expertise were challenging me to critically examine the findings and interactions within SCSBYP. Consulting with various individuals (i.e., committee members and critical friends) helped me remain objective and enhanced this study's rigor while ensuring shifts in perspective and approach as needed. Lastly, saturation within data analysis was supported as no new information and insights were being discussed, and analysis had produced robust themes that informed the current studies' theoretical framework (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Trustworthiness

Guba and Lincoln (1981) developed criteria to ensure the rigor of qualitative research and also to assess a qualitative study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. This study adheres to Guba and Lincoln's (1981) criteria by having "prolonged engagement in

the field" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127) which enhances trustworthiness (Morrow, 2005) but also could lead to increase potential bias. To address any potential bias, journaling and processing of field notes and each interview throughout data collection (Parker, 2004) occurred. Furthermore, having continuous debriefing sessions with my dissertation committee and critical friends was important to discuss my research progress and experiences.

Member-checking was also included to enhance the trustworthiness of the current study. Participants were asked to clarify and expand upon emerging themes identified and coded by the researcher. Once all interviews were complete, one last round of member-checking occurred, allowing three participants to provide feedback on the data by engaging with excerpts from the study. Due to COVID-19, I was unable to physically give participants excerpts from the study. Instead, I read excerpts from various interviews and allowed time to discuss themes. This allowed participants to clarify, confirm, and edit data as needed.

Confirmability is maintained with an audit trail throughout the research process. Patton (2002) defined an audit trail as step-by-step explanations of the research decisions and procedures any person could trace or replicate. To keep an audit trail, I kept all files (i.e., field notes, prior observations, transcripts, and photos) secured on a flash drive within a file cabinet and NVivo 11. Each stage of the study (i.e., design, data collection, and analysis process) was reflected upon and monitored throughout to ensure the trustworthiness and validity of the findings.

Researcher Positionality

Since entering SCSBYP's space in April of 2017, I have continued to return in multiple capacities: a) as a prevention specialist teaching an HIV/AIDS, substance use, and viral hepatitis

curriculum, b) by running focus groups for prevention knowledge, c) asking the youth for their feedback on pieces of prevention education curriculum, and d) joining the youth at city council meetings to help support an alcohol ordinance to ensure a safer environment for the youth. Other times I entered the SCSBYP in a more relaxed nature, to observe the program on a Tuesday or Thursday evening or to swing by and say hello after a meeting within the community. Often these laid-back visits and interactions include playing games or eating a meal with the youth. I have seen a few teens graduate high school and begin college. I have also had the honor of seeing students currently in college return to SCSBYP during the summer to help run SCSBYP summer camp. My personal connection with this program has led me to hold multiple positionalities over the years.

Acknowledging and working with the apparent and deep intersection that comes with being a white female seeking to work with a population that is not only marginalized but hard to reach is something that must be honored and discussed. As a white female, I embody a group that has a historical and continued hand in oppressing the group of which my participants are part of. Therefore, gaining the trust of Black youth also means gaining trust from elders and the community (i.e., SCSBYP director, older teens, parents, etc.), which is no small task. The years I observed this organization meant being very intentional with my time, preparing to enter the space, and being fully present. I deeply recognized I was entering their sacred space and recognized my privilege to be able to enter a space as a minority but leave that space and enter a world that privileges me for varying intersections (i.e., white, female, highly educated). Again, to gain the trust of the Black youth, I was aware I needed to gain the trust of the elders in the space. I was introduced to the program director by my fellow colleague working within the same lab at the time. During this meeting, I made sure to express thanks and sat back in the shadows as much

as possible to ensure I did not overstep as the new and very different person in the space. The program director made it clear that I was to interact however I saw fit, and he would ask me for my opinion and expertise during group interactions. Every time I visited this space, I ensured I respected all the elders and checked in with them, then made time to talk with the youth slowly. I remained consistent and came as often as I could and was able to teach evidence informed curriculum to this group of students within the first few months of entering their space as an observer. Having this added interaction where the youth could see me as a prevention educator and not just someone who comes to observe and hang out with them once every other week allowed a continued sense of trust. Furthermore, teaching an evidence-informed curriculum that touched on topics that can be uncomfortable to discuss with elders, such as HIV/Aids and risky sexual health concerns, allowed me to build rapport with the youth. Over time, as I became close with the two most trusted elders in the program space (i.e., the program director and front desk administrator), I was able to gain insight regarding certain youth within the program to aid in my understanding and interactions with various youth. Therefore, to any researcher planning to work with marginalized and oppressed groups, I deeply encourage doing the work to look inward first at yourself before entering any population's lives and space. Looking critically inward at your privilege, intersections, motivations, and intent, as you are the outsider coming in and honoring those you seek to work with is of utmost importance.

Allen (2004) argued that researcher status often changes throughout a research project, becoming at times fluid between insider and outsider. 'Insiders' are considered individuals who have a place in the social group being studied, often before the study begins (Moore, 2012). 'Outsiders' are individuals that are non-members of the social group being studied (Moore, 2012). Therefore, acknowledging and understanding positionality is imperative within research.

As an outsider, I hold multiple positions. I am a white female who grew up in a southern "urban" community within a middle-class family. I place quotations around urban as my community was urban in definition solely because it is a region surrounding a city developed by commercial buildings, homes, and bridges. Yet, I grew up within a suburban area as my neighborhood was not directly placed within the developed city area. Nonetheless, I have no emotional or physical understanding of what my participants have experienced. Growing up in a southern urban community, there are barely any similarities. While my community was heavily populated, all homes had front and/or backyards, and we were unable to walk to places within the community due to the size of our community. Public transportation does not run throughout the entire community. Race and ethnicity are not as diverse as the community within this study. A majority of those within the community I was raised in would identify as white, and minority groups lived in smaller pockets within the community. Also, my school system was very privileged in comparison to the participants. There were no gates around my schools, no trash (e.g., alcoholic beverages, fast food bags) on the ground and surrounding community (e.g., parks, neighborhoods), and all water sources within my schools were tested and potable. Lastly, most students in my high school graduated and went on to four-year universities or trade programs without hesitation of financial strain. The same cannot be said for all high schools within the focal community. Also, most teachers within my high school looked like me. So, my overall school experience and community upbringing were that of a privileged white middle-class lifestyle. Furthermore, I hold two higher educational degrees while working on the highest academic degree one can obtain. Also, I am the researcher within the context of this study. Lastly, while I may experience prejudice from individuals due to my gender, I have never faced societal racism, discrimination, or oppression; therefore, my lived experience and capacity

to move throughout the world safely is vastly different than that of the current study's participants.

When considering my insider positions within the study, I straddle between being a trusted facilitator (i.e., focus groups), educator (i.e., HIV/AIDS, viral hepatitis, and substance use prevention curriculum), and friendly adult ally. Through engaging with this program for over three years, I have had the privilege of gaining older youths' trust, which allows younger youth in the program to assume trust in me without needing as much time to build rapport. Furthermore, I have built strong relationships with the adults who run this program. This results in youth seeing deep respect, trust, and appreciation between the adults in the space/community and me, allowing them to be able to trust me. While I have gained a stronger sense of credibility within this community-based education program through my continuous presence and efforts leading up to this research study, having multiple positions (i.e., as an insider and outsider) makes being aware and understanding the impact of these positions of upmost importance to this research study.

Limitations

Explaining limitations is also essential to the integrity of this study; therefore, discussing limitations is imperative. Limitations include the geographic area, small sample size, and the use of one community-based education program. All participants are committed members of this community-based educational program; therefore, their experiences will differ from those of others who are not as committed. My years of experience and various roles within this community-based organization can also be viewed as a limitation. While I have gained the trust of each participant and various members of this organization, I am not like any participants in their lived experiences. Lastly, with a small sample and extremely focused location, this study

cannot be generalizable to other youth in other transformative community-based educational programs.

Significance

This study contributes new knowledge about youths lived experiences which should be considered in political and professional spaces, and confirms aspects of Freire's critical conscious framework. There is a gap in the current literature focused on studies exploring Black youth within community-based educational programs, especially those using an asset narrative. This gap has led to perpetuated deficit framing that encompasses how policies and grants are written for community-based education programs. This deficit narrative has further trickled down to those who work with Black youth and even impacted the ways Black youth envision themselves and their worth. This study further brings to the forefront the continued loss of voice and lived realities of those who are impacted (i.e., Black youth). Lastly, this study contributes to the decades of theoretical framework and knowledge of *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1968). In addition to publication, the results of this study will be formatted into a resource that the Director of this transformative community-based educational program can use to support the SCSBYP (e.g., applying for grants, creating informational pamphlets, etc.).

Chapter 4: Findings

Findings are organized into three themes: *Transformative Space, Narrative switching,* and *Energy.* As Freire (1968) conceptualized critical consciousness, Transformative Space and Narrative switching expound upon the theoretical framework and how the oppressed move into their own praxis. However, the nuanced piece of participants' journey towards CC within SCSBYP is the *energy* of this space. The energy within the program (i.e., the relationship between adults, peers, activities, and conversations) creates an aura for many participants, which encourages returning to the space consistently. As participants move towards their own praxis, the *energy* within SCSBYP acts as the bridge of personal growth, paired with the transformative space (i.e., environmental CC connection) and narrative switching (i.e., identity CC connection), which is further described below.

Transformative Space

Transformative community-based education programs refer to the environmental connection participants make while participating at SCSBYP; this is best illustrated when you parse apart and elaborate on the three distinctions of transformative community-based education programs. This environmental connection allows participants to critically read the world and understand their struggle within a larger systemic structure while motivating participants to actively push against those structures. This further supports the theoretical framework, as Freire states the awakening of critical consciousness leads to an individual's discontent with larger oppressive structures. Transformative spaces use three important programmatic pieces to foster this environmental critical conscious response, which includes: a bottom-up approach, secondly, a shift from the deficit lens to an asset lens, and lastly, social justice and/or civic engagement ethos.

Bottom-up Approach. SCSBYPs bottom-up approach focuses on focal community issues while allowing space to further discuss larger societal concerns or issues impacting youth. For many participants, this approach began with broad experiences within the focal community, allowing opportunities in various forms. As one participant described: "I enjoy the work that we also do. The places we go, like retreats and such. I like all of those." Another male participant echoed: "Yeah, a lot of community service. A lot of presentations that we do, a lot of…just giving back, a lot of uh programs we went to that helped teach us about stuff." Some examples include community park clean-ups, march in awareness campaigns (e.g., Cancer Research and Black Lives Matter), running a community smoking awareness event, and attending community empowerment events (e.g., building and installing book houses). Furthermore, SCSBYP also discusses and celebrates the seven principles of Kwanzaa, specifically during the week of Kwanzaa and throughout the year with various conversations and events (e.g., end of the summer camp parent presentation). The seven principles, as described earlier, encourage descendants of slavery to question the sociopolitical positions and to engender community enrichment (Sulé, Nelson, & Williams, 2021). This further expounds on the theoretical framing that acknowledges analyzing, navigating, and challenging oppressive forces from the bottom-up shaping one's life (i.e., bottom) community and racial group. (i.e., up).

Through these community events, participants expressed becoming more aware of the up portion of the bottom-up approach. Often illustrated as "seeing" their community in a critical focus, as one participant described, "So like basically… use to see stuff and really not pay attention but the program has helped [me] see." Participants often described viewing the community in a much more conscious manner, especially when looking at aspects considered undesirable and morally unacceptable (e.g., unhoused individuals). This focal community

involvement awoke a different type of educational experience for participants. All SCSBYP educational experiences were tied to the community and environmental awareness of the world around them. Participants got to engage with other community members of all ages and walks of life and begin to see the larger community beyond their immediate surroundings (i.e., family, friends, SCSBYP). As was illustrated in the summer of 2018, during a community event to "take back the park" within the community, which was blighted with addicts. A community-organized event to occupy the park with music, resources, and the inauguration of a tiny library house (i.e., a small birdhouse shape box where you can drop off books and pick up a book for free). While I was attending this event as a community resource, once I finished my work and hung around to observe the teens within SCSBYP, teens played within the park, and a few spoke about the addicts currently within the park. One teen got my attention as they were concerned an addict needed help, sleeping through the loud music and event occurring within the park. The program director encouraged the teens to talk with community partners to learn about the resources and individuals working within the community. Many teens left resource tables smiling and taking information. By the end of the event, the teens discussed how their community is stronger when individuals work together for a common goal, such as cleaning up a park that allows other youth to meet outside of school hours. This led to a sense of community as a whole versus a community divided, "Seeing other people from the community cleaning up and just advocating, trying to build the community instead of ruin it," as one participant explained.

These direct community-driven events allowed participants to engage in various community concerns (e.g., park-clean ups, church block parties, advocacy events) and allowed for individual and group reflections on the engagement and knowledge they experienced, which is an important component of the theoretical framework. Being able to reflect on experiences and

knowledge pushes individuals towards critical consciousness (Freire, 1968). One female described the involvement of focal community experiences as:

> "[they] have us handing out flyers. Doing little workshops and stuff with the people around [town] … So when they take you out and show you, yeah, this is happening and we educating the kids, I think that's a big learning step for us. It's one thing just to just tell us…But then, just show us and tell other people is a learning experience.

These bottom-up community experiences were not hands-off passive experiences to behold. Intentional community and individual group experiences are tailored to further live out the seven principles of Kwanzaa in a direct way. SYSBYP engaged in intentional community events that further illuminated topics being discussed within the program in a broader societal view. In the fall of 2018, SCSBYP was able to use a small grant to plan and host a community event revolving around the dangers of tobacco use. The youth at SCSBYP met various times, discussed how to get the work out and what they should include, and worked closely with a community partner (P-CASA, i.e., my doctoral fellowship) to have up-to-date information. After the event was run, SCSBYP discussed the pros and cons of the event and the lessons they learned. The program director directly connected tobacco product sales and urban communities of color. As youth began to question if other communities around them had as many tobacco selling establishments and how many friends and family members used the excuse "smoking helps my stress" or "smoking helps me relax." This very critical and direct conversation allowed the youth to see a connection between their communities' problems and larger systemic narratives, such as public health concerns.

Within SCSBYP, conversations and outings center around specific and local community events that foster discussions and growth around culture, community, and family. Participants describe SCSBYP as a space for new awareness and knowledge of their community compared to others around them. As one female expressed:

> I didn't even know what gentrification was before really. Since they [adults] brought it up, and makes me more aware of what's happening in my community because before I be like 'what is that?' or I wouldn't care but now that I see it and like, like I see people going through it, like people can't afford to live in they own community that they were raised in.

Bottom-up approaches work to allow youth to see themselves in their community while then looking at themselves and their communities within larger political systems.

Another way SCSBYP transforms the understanding of youth as individuals within their community, culture, and large societal systems is to use problem-posing education (Freire, 1968). This form of education involves constant communication, reflection, and questioning between teachers (adults in SCYBSP) and students (youth in SCSBYP). This problem-posing education allowed participants to question perspectives and realities as the theoretical framework describes (Freire, 1968). One male reflects:

> I think I need to be more involved with my community. I need to know more about myself, and the more I know about myself the more I know about the people around me and how I should treat them and how I should view them.

This awareness to question themselves and perspectives they hold regarding themselves, community, and the world was eye-opening for many participants, "I would describe it as an eye opener to how you view the world and how you view yourself" and expanded their view to larger systemic injustice. As this participant went on to state:

> It's like an eye opener to how I, how I see everyone and how I see like socially, economically…It's like a lot of people they stay in their own little world and that's fine and so like today we learned about 'is it, do you think we should learn about the truth or should be justify our ignorance', and I said we should know the truth.

Participants soon moved into questioning larger systems (i.e., education and criminal justice systems) as their praxis became more refined. Specifically, within the educational system, participants expressed the physical disparities, water fountains containing signs that stated the water was not tested to be consumed, and the lack of support they felt from teachers (e.g., taking time to explain and aid in their learning process). Participants also noted the lack of representation within their schools: "I always thought that was weird. I've had one Black teacher since I was here." Yet, what was most heavily discussed regarding the larger school system was the lack of representation and knowledge of their culture as Black and African Americans. As one participant described the difference between their school and SCSBYP as:

> I feel like at school we only learn about what's in the book and, and it's easy to miss something in the book. I know you're suppose to learn about African American history, but you don't get it. And here [SCSBYP] you learn pretty much about the stuff you don't know, you learn about your culture.

Various participants shared how they felt about the lack of knowledge and discussion relating to their culture, heritage, and history as "they teach us the same white history every year. I really do feel like I haven't learned anything new since the 8th grade" and "the only thing they teach in every grade is we used to be slaves…they never saw us as nothing more than just slaves." Other participants described how school systems leaned into the narrative that slavery, segregation, and civil rights were distant topics.

> We had a whole speakeasy, we did all of that jazz, and I bet if I lived in that day I probably wouldn't even be invited to the speakeasy, so why am I reenacting something I probably wouldn't be invited to? It doesn't make any sense. It's just annoying because I'm reenacting stuff, I wouldn't be able to go to if I was younger. I would be worrying about bigger things.

This led to participants reflecting on the educational systems' lack of curriculum inclusion and information that regarded them as valid proponents. Participants were clear that American history did not include their culture or heritage; as one participant stated, "I just feel like they don't think it's as important."

The criminal justice system was another larger system that came to the focus with this bottom-up approach to community educational experiences SCSBYP offered to the teens. Participants discussed the criminal justice system barriers (i.e., police brutality, disproportionate incarceration rates) as something that was not isolated to their community. One participant reflected on police brutality within the community and then connected this to larger systemic awareness as:

> I feel like that happened because he was Black and probably, so they [police] looked at him as less of a man for being high. And they looked at him for being Black so looked at him as less than. Then he was high, so they looked at him probably as a drug addict, so they looked at him as even more than less than a person. They feel they could do whatever.

This awareness of police brutality and power within their community was clear with over-policing, lack of trust between the community and police, and the critical awareness that there is "not police brutality itself, youth police brutality." Some participants shared they experienced youth police brutality and showed an awareness of their lack of rights based on their social location, "I'm walking down the street, and they do a stop and search. I get stopped and searched, that's illegal. I am a minor, but they would not care." Although participants were keenly aware of their legal rights, they were able to connect a larger systemic narrative for their place within this dynamic. As this female participant went on to state:

> If I refuse to be stopped and searched yeah it would be taken to a different extent. And I've seen that plenty of times in [town], I've seen it myself. I've actually, no one knows, I have been stopped and searched before.

Participants were keenly aware that the criminal justice system and educational system view them as disposable like many other systems. One participant described Black youth as "they get left back so much they just give up." Again, this very clear awareness that they, as Black youth, are up against many barriers beyond the clear and immediate eye for most to notice, let alone feel comfortable discussing and taking steps to go against the system.

Yet, despite the awareness that came from bottom-up approaches to community events to more prominent oppressive sociopolitical systems, participants still wanted to "take everything I learned from here and spread it everywhere else." Participants saw strength within their community, SCSBYP, and envisioned the larger impact of their knowledge and skills as "the group impact was people knew more about us, that we do more for [town] than other groups usually do. We stand and address the issue to higher-ups, so we can change it." This bottom-up approach within TCBEPs awakened a critical awareness and connection of focal community concerns and issues to larger societal systems within participants.

Shifting from a Deficit to Asset Lens is the second distinction of transformative community-based education programs, shifting the oppressive and negative lens placed on Black youth within community-based education programs. TCBEPs view the youth that attends their programs as at-promise instead of at-risk, seeing youth as active participants in a world that overlooks them and underestimates them (Rios, 2015). Therefore, the adults running these programs speak to youth, themselves, the community, and the larger narrative around being Black in America in an asset base tone (i.e., celebrating). As the theoretical framework posits, problem-posing education can lead to individuals being liberated from oppressive structures and encourage a necessity to fight against such oppressive systems. This theoretical concept is further exemplified by the ways participants described their aspirations despite discussing the evident inequality they experienced within their schools.

As the theoretical framework suggests, many participants shifted this asset narrative first within themselves, stating things like, "I feel like this group it just, it teaches you more about yourself" and "They help you find what you're good at." Some participants stayed stoic and showed growing pride in themselves and the community despite the awareness of the negative

intersections (i.e., race and class). One male stated, "It's like I lived here. They haven't. They just go off with what they hear from other people. And it's like I know what my city has to offer and what it has within it." This asset lens allowed participants to recognize the stigma and deficits placed on them due to their geographic location and racial identity. Recognizing the deficit lens while being in a TCBEP that celebrates them and the community-led to this asset shirt when discussing how they view themselves and the community:

> People look at the bad side of [town] not the good, and like how every youth, they think every youth, how do I say it…they think every teenager does the same. Smoke, drink, and stuff like that. But it's really not true, we actually have good teens that give back to the community.

This sense of collective work and responsibility (i.e., Ujima) showed participants building and maintaining their community. Participants made it clear there are differences within groups (e.g., community-based programs) as well as among groups (e.g., transformative community-based education programs). As one female participant expressed, "Just because one person is this and one person is that and one person is…doesn't mean everybody's like that. Everybody's different!" Shifting away from an all-encompassing deficit lens allowed participants to have a weight lifted from them that often withheld them from celebrating themselves and their community. A female participant expressed this as, "You come here [SCSBYP] and they open your mind and your like 'whoa I didn't know that'. And it's just like I'll literally say it's an eye opener to your views on the world and your views on yourself." This sense of faith (i.e., Imani) showed a sense of deep belief and respect for the adults within SCSBYP and the things they learned.

This shift in language and further movement toward one's praxis allowed participants to celebrate themselves and their community despite the deficit systemic views.

As Freire describes, SCSBYP aligned with the critical conscious notion of problem-posing education, which describes open communication, reflection, and analysis occurring between the teacher-student dynamic, learning from one another. This was illuminated during the fall of 2019 during a weekly group meeting. The topic this evening was social engineering and how power and historical oppression are within our society's history. Adults and youth discussed crimes committed by various individuals and how those individuals are described within communities and portrayed on the news. Teens described an awareness that narratives fit certain individuals despite what the actual truth may be. The most prominent depiction of this came when teens discussed Treyvon Martin vs. Brock Turner. Teens were unaware a judge made a statement that Turner would not do well in prison and began to question why there is a type of individual who would do well in prison. The conversation finished with remembering to celebrate the true reality of the rich history and ways their ancestors fought for while also being critically aware of what others will view them as due to social engineering that is deeply rooted within our societal systems. One male participant celebrated his community despite the societal reputation, "As soon as I came here, I was like 'wow our community is beautiful and there is so much good people out here' and I didn't even try to look for them."

This continuous asset framing and celebration of the youth and the community further shifted the youths' perspectives of how others should be viewed within the community (i.e., Kujichagulia). As a female participant explained, "It [SCSBYP] shows me what [town] could really be like. If everyone in our community, everyone that leads these programs and leads events, if they were the leaders of [town] we'd be a great city." Again, participants hear and see

the “bad” qualities of their community yet were able to shift this lens into one that is more humanizing of others. Participants were not only able to humanize others but did so while not dehumanizing other social characteristics (e.g., a recovering addict, unhoused individuals). A female participant described this humanization of addicts within the community as:

> The perspective it was more mentally of how I seen other people. Like we went to like different events and stuff and there were different people who talked about this is mainly around like drug addicts, and they talked about you know ‘I resorted to this, but I changed and wanted to be a better person’. And now I look at everybody who’s on the streets and like they probably have a back story to them not just what we see.

As Freire (1968) describes, individuals becoming critically conscious, individuals can reflect and realize a pursuit of humanity. This pursuit of humanity cannot be carried out in isolation but rather within the fellowship, as participants within SCSBYP do. Participants are better able to overcome a false perception of reality and view larger contextual nuances (e.g., a drug addict being more than just their addiction).

Social Justice and Civic Engagement is the third and final aspect of transformative community-based education programs. This allows for critical conversations to be discussed and shown to youth who attend the programs. Not all TCBEPs utilized both social justice and civic engagement within their program’s ethos, but for SCSBYP, both are equally represented, along with Kwanzaa principles and celebration. As critical consciousness depicts, it is imperative to understand oppressive elements and hierarchal structures to journey into critical consciousness. Therefore, having social justice and civic engagement ethos allows oppressive elements and hierarchal structures to be pointed out and discussed.

Participants shared the enjoyment of civic engagement and social justice-centered topics and trips. They recognized the importance of "A lot of community service, a lot of presentations…just giving back" (i.e., Umoja, unity). While participants recognized the joy these events and conversations brought, they expressed awareness that these tasks were helping the community even if they did not see immediate results. One female participant explained, "I feel like every time I come here [SCSBYP] it's like a step closer to getting involved with our community and changing it and making it better for the upcoming generations." (i.e., Kuumba, creativity). Another participant further described the civic engagement and social justice ethos as, "It's overwhelming at times, but it's worth it. It's something someone else is benefiting off of what we doing…if we clean a bench another homeless person could sleep there."

The youth within SCSBYP are heavily involved in social justice and civic engagement that goes beyond their community at times. However, those events, workshops, or resources are always centered around topics important to their community and identities as Black youth. A female participant describes the time commitment that is centered around various social justice and civic engagement topics as:

> We did mental health training, two mental health trainings. It was one that was one month long. We had to get up at 6 am on Saturday's to get ready to drive all the way to Trenton. Sittin in class that was about a good three hours and then drive all the way back home. And then sometimes we got home and we still have something else to do in the community.

Although the civic engagement and social justice events were at times overwhelming and time-consuming participants shared a deep respect and joy from the events, which again led to a very

critical read of the larger community. Many participants connected their civic engagement and social justice-driven events, workshops, and activism as a reason they happily engaged and returned. As a participant expressed:

> I keep coming back here because I kind of like the work that we do. Not even kinda, I like the work that we do, it's like, I like going out there in our community, and like, honestly, they [SCSBYP] give me a second point of view of our community.

The direct civic engagement within their focal community-led participants to directly discuss the direct impact they experienced with a social justice lens. "We educated a lot of kids, and I felt that had an impact. I was part of that" one participant recalled SCSBYP planning and running an educational event to raise awareness of the dangers of tobacco use. Civic engagement connected to social justice (i.e., why their community was so heavily blighted with tobacco selling establishments) allowed many participants to express what they believed. As one participant described:

> The thing I found cool about it was uh, like you said the whole community actually rise, like not really rise but came together to speak on the issue that everybody knew but not many people actually go to. So that's what I found good about what I thought, people had one good common goal.

This idea of a common goal began to shift from the immediate surroundings for participants (i.e., Ujima, collective work, and responsibility) into larger awareness of systemic social injustices for Black individuals. As one female stated, "They love Black culture, but don't love Black people." During the summer of 2017, SCSBYP youth worked hard, again with the help of many community partners (my doctoral fellowship being one of them), to help push

through an alcohol ordinance within their community. I was present for all these town hall meetings, and so were the SCSBYP youth, no matter how late the meetings ran. During one of the meetings, a fellow liquor store owner spoke to oppose the ordinance stating changing business hours would take money from his family and children's livelihood. One younger youth leaned over and expressed, "Ms. Carrie, they are worried about their family, but they are killing us and our community." As the theoretical framework states, it is essential within one's journey towards being critically conscious to work against social structures that improve the collective, not just the individual (Freire, 1968).

Another female participant further went on to describe a daily social injustice as, "If I wear dreads, it don't matter. My brother wears dreads, it matters. But my brother wears shorts, it doesn't matter. If I wear shorts, it matters." Participants were keenly aware of the social injustices placed on them within their community and larger social systems that impacted their daily choices. Most notable is the criminal justice system, "they [police] just killing us for no reason, and then they don't get in trouble for it at all…oh, suspended with pay. You ended somebody's life". Further echoed by a female participant, "I feel like that's just white privilege and a broken system. Some of these judges are racist. I feel like a lot of people are still racist in America, even though they don't want to say it." Many described a more just system as:

> We all have our rights, and it just should be equal for everybody. If you do the same crime as a white person, you should have the same consequences. A white person do the same crime as a Black person, Hispanic person, they should have the same sentence, the same consequence.

This social justice awareness was one that participants felt strongly about, and not that they should be the ones doing the work and constantly educating others, but instead that everyone should be learning about everyone. This realization that the education and awareness of injustice is something that involves everyone learning. Another female participant eloquently stated, "Everybody down here [SCSBYP] is Black. I don't see a lot of Hispanic people in this program; I don't see a lot of white people…But even when there aren't that many people, we still learned about everything else."

Narrative Switching

Narrative switching was most often expressed once participants moved from what Freire explains as moving from space with a lack of agency into a space of being active agents of change. In short, narrative switching occurred when participants realized they did not have to remain passive to injustices and oppressive labels being placed on them from various sociopolitical systems. This was best illustrated when participants actively changed the narrative and expressed why the narrative needed switching in the first place. As a male participant describes learning about his heritage more deeply at SCSBYP, which made him reexamine his choice of words, "we recently learned about the slave ships, and he [director of SCSBYP] said they weren't slaves before. So, they're not called slave ships." He further described his heritage as, "I've learned that just about every race came from African Americans. And I know that we also have a richer culture than what people say we do."

Freire (1968) states that "cultural awareness, heritage, community awareness/activism" (p. 86) are key proponents of moving into one's own praxis. Participants were acutely aware of the portrayal of their culture and heritage within the various sociopolitical systems, specifically the education system. As one male stated, "we did more than just pick cotton for a living, we did

more than that," and as another participant said, "So when it comes to teaching culture, they just go by the textbook version, but not the right textbook version, the edited version instead." Participants expressed a keen awareness of how the school system views and discusses Black and African American culture and heritage.

After learning and discussing their culture and heritage within SCSBYP, participants began to clearly identify perpetuated and oppressive narratives; as a female described, "I feel like they think it's not as important…African Americans have a lot to do with it [history of U.S.]. There's so much culture in America that people whitewash it so much." Participants describe the societal narratives as unequal, "everybody is not on an equal playing field" and "I know it's always been like this. I've been at sort of a disadvantage in life." As participants began to see the sociopolitical narrative placed on them, the collective asset narrative TCBEP that is SCSBYP seemed to allow participants to move away from a place of passive acceptance toward being active agents of change in their lives and community. As the theoretical framework describes, this narrative switching also allowed participants to see the larger narrative being taught and perpetuated from various sociopolitical systems and again fight for the larger collective to be more discussed and understood. Narrative switching encouraged participants to shift from a deficit lens into a lens of empowerment with further knowledge and awareness of themselves and their Black heritage and culture. As one participant expressed the negative images and sociopolitical views of being a Black female as "I feel like it's placed on me," and further went on to switch the narrative to, "I thought I was ugly because people always picked on my big lips and my big nose. Little did they know I just didn't grow into it yet". Another female participant described the narrative around Black females as:

> I feel like I deserve for people to know me and any other Black girl from [town]. They deserve to be known. Because I feel like you can, just because you come from an impoverished place, doesn't mean you can't do nothing. You can do anything.

This narrative switch into an active, positive agency of change further expounds the theoretical framework, as narrative switching involves being active agents of change in their daily lives. This extended to daily choices of words to represent themselves, all beyond how they describe SCSBYP. One such example shared by a female participant was:

> I feel so much better about myself, I also like to empower people, so when I'm doing what I have to do in the community, I hope little girls see me because I know a lot of girls, black girls get bullied. And I want them to see me, look at me, I'm embracing myself, and I'm also helping the community, and I want you to do the same!

As participants learned more about themselves in a society that does not discuss their lived experiences, participants were able to actively go against the oppressive narrative. Another participant described the active, positive narrative switch within a society that does not show value to them as, "I see myself as so much better. I feel beautiful. I feel like I'm a five-star person living in a two-star world."

When participants moved further along in their awareness of praxis, they were better able to recognize the deficit narrative placed on things they cannot control, such as their race and their urban community. As one participant eloquently stated, "it's not a preference anymore when you start degrading somebody else based on their skin color," and "people judging from the outside are going to judge us on negative stuff." One participant was able to describe sociopolitical views on communities like there's as:

> I feel like I should mean something. Because I feel like a lot of people think that when you come from an impoverished community, you won't do anything with yourself, with your life. Which is why they don't pay us any mind. But they always have something to say about it.

As another participant explained the oppressive sociopolitical views on communities like theirs as "a society where that environment isn't even appreciated. It's not helped, no one care about it because it's not their problem." This awareness that their communities' intersections in the larger view of society were something participants discussed and quickly shifted the narrative into perspective. One female exemplified this, "I feel like it's the way Black people portray themselves for why they keep getting into trouble' and now I'm like why would I say that?"

Participants' ability to recognize and switch the narrative was especially expressed when discussing social stigma around their community (i.e., impoverished urban community of color). One male clarified, "other communities go through the same stuff, like, we might ride pass certain towns, and they may look pretty nice but probably have the same problems we have here." Participants expressed the frustration of this narrative on their community, "it sucks…I'm proud of where I live!" This frustration was quickly met with narrative switching into an empowerment narrative that stemmed from SCSBYP conversations as participants stated things like, "I feel like this program brings up conversations that nobody wants to talk about." This program "helped me realize I'm amongst like something that's bigger than myself." Many participants expressed confidence in being active agents of change surrounding the oppressive and negative narratives of being Black youth from an urban community. Participants were clear about the narrative that should be taking place when discussing SCSBYP and the transformative, empowering program they experience as:

> It's not that [the director] didn't keep me from being violent. If I wanted to be violent, I'd be violent. [The director] didn't keep me from jail, cuz if I wanted to do something to go to jail, I'd go to jail. He [the director] didn't himself keep me. But his information did. His knowledge, his wisdom, you know? It's not that this program is for people who you know are on their way there, or they need to be steered in a new direction. This program provides the comfort of life that we know is not real.

Participants also had a clear message for people in positions of power at conferences and writing manuscripts and policies about them and programs like SCSBYP:

> This is what the people at the conference do. They make the book cover with 1,000 pages, but never put any writing in it. They always make a cover for us, and no one ever opens up, they never come here, speak to use, open up the book, and never have anything to write down. So, people just look at our cover and be like "uh-huh", and just leave it at that. Don't judge a book by its cover.

They further exemplified their praxis, as they clearly articulated the active narrative switch to every aspect that held any oppressive narrative on them or the Black community.

Energy

Energy refers to the various emotional growth aspects within adult-youth relationships, peer-to-peer relationships, community relationships, and the overall atmosphere created from SCSBYP's fellowship. As one participant illustrates this growth as:

> This group is just a positive space to be in while you physically and mentally grow. It's like you're not going to put a flower in a junkyard and expect it to grow beautifully. It's

> going to die. And it's just like putting it in a garden with other flowers. It's going to grow. So that's what this group is. It's not like it's a 'Oh let's help, let's help!' They're going to help, but you've got to grow on your own.

This energy is a nuanced piece that may connect more closely with the theoretical framework's concept, the pursuit of humanity. As Freire notes, the pursuit of humanity cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism; it is done through fellowship and solidarity (Freire, 1968). For many, the collective energy within SCSBYP captivated them from the moment they stepped into the space and continued to pull them back, "it's special for everything." Others described this energetic pull as "like the minute the first day here. I loved it", and "I feel like as soon as I come to [SCSBYP] it's just like, it just brings me closer to where I think I need to be." As Freire's theoretical framework describes, the pursuit of humanity is not an isolated journey; it is through fellowship (i.e., energy). The energy of SCSBYP seemed to allow participants a space to discern reality as a process and not a static entity, further aiding in identity empowerment (i.e., narrative switching). Yet, for some participants, the reverse occurred, with narrative switching first as they are critically aware of the deficit narrative placed on them and, in turn, change that into an asset narrative and view themselves in a larger sociopolitical context (i.e., transformative space).

SCSBYP energy directly shifted when the Sankofa model with the Ankh was brought out, and the group circle began. Sankofa is not run every time SCSBYP meets, but it is used any time an important and serious topic needs to be discussed within-group (e.g., discussing police brutality and violence within their community). With so many critical components to the nuances within a TCBEP like SCSBYP (i.e., Sanoka, Kwanzaa), this space emboldens the critical thinking, and the energy further encourages them to stay engaged within SCSBYP. One female participant explained this as:

> Basically like the energy here I like, I haven't felt it nowhere else inside of school wise, like the reason I keep coming back is the people the energy…when I come to group I'm more into it because we focus on things…and we focus on things that are important in our community, so it makes me feel like I'm doing something good for my community and for myself.

Participants were clear the energy of SCSBYP encompassed the relationships with adults, peers, themselves, and the community. One participant described the relationship with the adults as, "I know I can come here and someone really cares about how I am" another participant described the very critical awareness of their relationship with peers in SCSBYP against others as:

> It's like a family with no problems. And not because, not because everything has their own issues, obviously. Maybe some people don't like each other, but if I don't like you and we're in this space [SCSBYP] you best believe we gunna act like best friends…and [the adults] make us communicate.

Participants also described the level of expectation upon entering the space and seemed to always "match the energy" no matter how they felt that day. As a male explained this as:

> It's like this. Everybody happy to do anything. It's that one person with the attitude, and then it just switched the whole wave of everybody else. You'd just be like, I don't know. It's like stuff [energy] rubs off on people.

Energy fostered participants toward seeing their ability to change the view of themselves and the world around them. Specifically, by keeping their energy and realizing the world is not static, as a female participant described, "You are in control of how you react to things. So, I feel

like energy is really just your aura, like the way you come across to people…when you control it, you're you." as another participant echoed this notion, "I feel like the main thing you learn when you walk into this room is it's ok to be who you are." While a bottom-up problem-posing educational approach and validating narrative switching helped the journey and allowed teens the opportunity to see themselves and the world in a different light, the *energy* within SCSBYP proves to be the bridge that gives teens a space to question the world around them and question themselves as individuals throughout the critical conscious journey.

For many participants, this theoretical awareness of the collective praxis was the first space they learned about Kwanzaa, which led to them learning, understanding, and celebrating their community, culture, and heritage. This particular education was expressed as a key proponent of the *energy* within the program and journey towards CC. The energy fostered growth into confident critical change agents. As a participant stated, "self-love and it taught me to strike my insecurities," and "I wasn't like very outspoken when I first showed up I was more to myself…I didn't know much about myself at all." All participants discussed learning more about themselves and changing with the energy they felt and received within SCYBSP. One female expressed: "I think I am more outspoken, and I know more about myself because I know more about my heritage and who I am." To further explain the energy that shifts and promotes praxis, one male participant discussed the bridge as: "I actually enjoy learning about the African history since we don't learn that much in school." Many participants described the various relationships within SCSBYP as part of the energy being felt and matched. Most notably was the director of the program's relationship with participants. As one female reflected on the Directors energy impact as:

> I think [the director] did a great job on like how Black people are seen in a different light, because even in our own community we, we judge each other based off of appearance, based off of how we talk, but we don't know what other people have been through to get to where they are. And there's not need for that.

This energy that shifted teens' perspective shifted personal energy within them and outward energy towards others as a collective. As one teen stated, "Too many people already hate us, we can't hate each other." This direct awareness of energy within SCSBYP (i.e., the youth, the adults, the community) was critical to both the transformative space and narrative switching. It allowed participants to connect themselves to being active agents of change in their lives, community, and the world around them. One participant eloquently stated this as:

> If we're trying to make a change here it's actually kind of working. You could pretty much make anything happen. Somebody see's us a group and somebody might start a group in their community, and somebody else start a group, and it could really change the country then the world.

Further revealing a potential nuanced piece to the theoretical framework of praxis that can be described as the pursuit of humanity within an individual's journey towards critical consciousness.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study was designed to explore if and how Black youth manifest critical consciousness while participating at SCSBYP. The eleven participants had varying years of constant engagement within the TCBEP, from at least one year to beyond four years of experience to allow for a range of engagement and experience, among many other differing intersections. While the literature surrounding transformative community-based educational programs is still evolving (Baldridge, 2017; Freire, 1968, Ginwright, 2007; 2009), this study aimed to add to the existing literature and expand the existing aspects of the theoretical framework of critical consciousness. While this study did not uncover new aspects of Freire's (1968) critical consciousness framework, this study expounded on various aspects while adding a nuanced piece imperative to TCBEPs (i.e., energy) working with Black youth. Therefore, in this chapter, I will discuss the findings relative to the theoretical framework and outline implications for research, practice, and policy within community-based educational programming. Lastly, I offer study limitations and final thoughts and conclusions.

Contributions to Existing Literature

The eleven voices from the present study depict critical consciousness does manifest within the Black youth actively engaging in SCSBYP. Freire's framework posits that marginalized individuals who become critically conscious are then able to navigate the world which oppresses them and actively engage in chancing the oppressive systems which impact them. Lastly, findings point to the power and need to further examine critical consciousness within TCBEPs. These community-based programs have small and intentional nuances which may further aid in critical consciousness for Black youth.

Research has shown that CBEPs interrupt inequalities, particularly within the education system, where most CBEPs are located. This was supported within the present study as a transparent space allowed participants a space to express, validate and challenge their lived experiences within the education system. As many participants described, they did not see themselves represented within the larger school systems curriculum or support for their school's funding. One participant eloquently stated other people (i.e., people in power) have never seen them as more than slaves, so no one bothers to discuss the culture and history beyond slavery. Which resonated with many participants describing Black identity as being either ignored in the educational system or inaccurately portrayed with only deficit views. Participants described the education system as "whitewash" and not inclusive to their ancestors, and lacked any celebration of people who looked like them unless it was the yearly Black history month which always included Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. However, participants described learning an asset narrative surrounding Black culture and history from their time at SCSBYP. This coincides with Sulé, Nelson, & Williams's (2021) recent study, which looked at a CBEP and critical consciousness. Black youth within this study described receiving an asset narrate and rich cultural education, which led to participants having a sense of unification. This unification led to self-reflexivity when youth were provided asset-framed and accurate Black history and culture fostering their journey to being critically conscious. Similarly, participants within the present study describe narrative switching from the exposure SCSBYP provided surrounding Black history and culture.

In conjunction with the theoretical framework, the dialogue within SCSBYP encouraged faith, hope, and critical thinking, as participants discussed the community work (i.e., transformative space), allowed exploration and critical reflection internally and collectively as a

larger group. Connecting youth to their community further strengthens their sense of self and connection to their community, both as Black individuals and in the geographic community they live in. In other words, the dialogue encouraged and renewed a sense of faith which allowed participants to recreate labels and dialogue about themselves and their community, which were more asset framed and extended the current small literature around this (Sulé, Nelson, & Williams, 2021).

Hope and critical thinking were two other aspects of the theoretical framework elaborated within the present study. Hope is carried out in fellowship and collectivism, which was expanded upon within the current study's findings. Participants described hope to fight and work towards change for Black youth and the larger Black community. This hope extended beyond participants just aiming for immediate change as participants remained hopeful the current work would impact future generations. As described by Freire, critical thinking is the ability to break away from dichotomous thinking and be aware of lived realities as a process. Participants echoed this awareness as they described various times; they caught themselves thinking dichotomously and described the change in their view. One shared example for many participants was being able to see others for more than just one circumstance or one label (e.g., addicts, unhoused individuals). This critical thinking is done in a way that removes the dichotomous frame and humanizes individuals, further displaying participants' critical read of the world (i.e., critically conscious; Freire, 1968).

Present findings further extend Freire's theoretical concept of problem-posing teaching. Problem-posing education removes the hierarchy between teacher-student relationships and allows for a mutual discussion of topics where both parties pose problems and give solutions. Participants describe SCSBYP as a space where they are encouraged to ask questions and hear

different perspectives while learning and respecting all cultures. A constant communication and reflection relationship exists within the program's energy (i.e., peer relationships, adult relationships, community relationships). Traditional banking teaching does not allow students to be active participants in the teaching and learning process and stifles the journey towards becoming critically conscious. Many participants also shared the lack of support they felt within the education system as they received more education about themselves and Black culture and heritage within SCSBYP. This involvement with SCSBYP supports asset narratives, building positive relationships, and raising critical sociopolitical conversations as necessary proponents for Black youth to process and move towards critical consciousness. This finding is further supported by Sulé, Nelson, and Williams's (2021) study, which found that a CBEP serving Black youth that discussed and celebrated cultural connections led to self-reclamation. This self-reclamation allowed participants to refuse deficit labels and views perpetuated onto them. Just as Sulé, Nelson, and Williams (2021) discuss within their findings, SCSBYP also embraces Black culture and history, which provides tools for youth to reclaim themselves and embrace self-love that is not reflected in larger sociopolitical systems. As one participant eloquently stated, people love Black culture but do not love Black people, yet, participants still chose to embrace self-love and disregard sociopolitical systems and narratives which are not inclusive or celebratory of Blackness.

SCSBYP also provides youth tools and activities to engage and change the cause of sociopolitical discourse, as exemplified in the three aspects of transformative space and further aligned with a recent and similar study (Sulé, Nelson, & Williams, 2021). While previous literature has found Black youth have lower levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy and higher levels of self-doubt (Nebbit, 2009). Through the findings within the present study (i.e.,

transformative space), participants described high levels of self-esteem and lower levels of self-doubt and instead celebrated being Black and honoring their ancestors while working to change the world for the upcoming generations. Previous literature points to fewer academic and civic engagement opportunities for Black youth (Ginwright, 2010; Halpern, 2005; Serio, Borden, & Perkins, 2011), although participants within this study described the opposite. Having at times an overwhelming responsibility for academic and civic engagement opportunities with SCSBYP meant giving up weekends to be involved in opportunities. This finding provides clarity that academic and civic engagement opportunities are of interest to Black youth and areas they feel confident stepping into and help move barriers to shift to a more just world (Baldridge et al., 2017; Ginwright, 2007), even if that meant participating in civic engagement and social justice events after school hours and on weekends. This aspect of SCSBYP alone should be an essential note for how we determine the success of CBEPs, instead of looking at success as containment and reduction from deviant behaviors.

While this concept of critical consciousness with Black youth is still evolving there are studies that have similar aims and findings, such as Murray and Milner (2015) proposed pedagogical strategies to promote sociopolitical consciousness with Black youth in after school programs. Forenza (2018) outlines critical consciousness manifesting with state foster care advisory boards, and as recently as 2021, Sulé, Nelson, and Williams demonstrated the value of asset pedagogies (e.g., Kwanzaa) in community-based education programs to manifest critical consciousness. All studies have pointed to engaging youth in sociopolitical conversations and civic engagements. Again, the current study validates the nature of discussing, reflecting, and engaging in sociopolitical conversations and events, which encouraged narrative switching for many participants as they moved towards their own critical consciousness. Organizational spaces

such as SCSBYP act as conduits that generate, exchange, and disseminate knowledge (Ginwright & Cammarotoa, 2017). To create spaces that can foster youth to reflect and want to act upon the world to transform it takes many things, such as adult-youth relationships (Freire, 1968). Asset literature shows positive effects of adult-youth relationships (Ginwright, 2010; Riggs et al., 2010) and nurturing intergenerational relationships in culturally appropriate ways (Woodland et al., 2009). Adults within asset-framed CBEPs create intergenerational relationships that encourage high expectations and opportunities for youth to address social change within local communities (Baldridge et al., 2017; Ginwright, 2007), which the finding of this study confirmed. Participants were able to challenge negative racial and ethnic concepts about themselves and more towards collective change (Ginwright, 2007) individually and collectively. Transformative space requires constantly shifting the narrative to an asset lens, leading to a narrative switch that begins to occur in daily language and view of the world. As one participant described the awareness that slaves' ships were slave ships because we enslaved them. This awareness of how one uses words and understands the words in a larger context of the world further showed participants' ability to reflect and actively shift narratives and understanding. Again, these adult-youth relationships go beyond trust and mutual dependence, leading to critically conscious awareness of a shared narrative, not a singular struggle.

As Freire explains, critical consciousness involves reflecting on one's position in the world and becoming an active agent to change and challenge oppressive systems (i.e., praxis). Similarly, agentic power, a finding within a previous study (Sulé, Nelson, & Williams, 2021), described the mindset and behaviors that reflected Black youth being active change agents within their community; the participants within this study reflected agentic power (i.e., praxis). Within narrative switching, participants discussed Black excellence, career aspirations, commitment to

community activism, and social justice, further echoing critical consciousness being able to allow youth a space to analyze, process, navigate and challenge social forces on their lives and communities. Breaking participants away from the constraint stigmas that surround their social and racial location, which in turn expands on the ways critical consciousness is met through education, analysis of personal experiences, and critical dialogue (Freire, 1968). Therefore, as the research question posed: *How does critical consciousness manifest among Black youth participating in SCSBYP,* was able to expand Freire's theoretical framework further and concur with the similar work of Sulé, Nelson, and Williams (2021).

Kwanzaa Considerations

While Kwanzaa was not a central focus of the present study, all participants mentioned the tenants and celebration of Kwanzaa. SCSBYP incorporates the seven Kwanzaa principles within their programs which need further exploration in connection to the critical consciousness and success of CBEPs. A similar and recent study noted the connection of Kwanzaa to critical consciousness within a CBEP (Sulé, Nelson, & Williams, 2021). Sulé and colleagues (2021) found that self-reflexivity fostered an inward exploration and critical reflection of the world and systems around them. Thus, adding to the existing theoretical framework in which critical consciousness deepens one's sense of self-confidence and self-efficacy to move from a passive agent into an active agent of change.

Similar to Sulé et al. (2021) findings, in the present study, the seven tenants of Kwanzaa are illuminated throughout participants' expression of critical consciousness journey. Kuumba (i.e., creativity) is the principle of doing as much as one can to leave the community in a more beautiful and beneficial space for the next generation. Various mentions were made to community work benefiting the next generation within the present study. Kujichagulia (i.e., self-

determination) is the principle that Black individuals and communities take back the narrative placed upon them and define, create and speak narratives that fit themselves. This could be tied back to SCSBYPs narrative switching. Nia (i.e., purpose) principle is towards bringing the narrative and voice to one that celebrates the community's greatness and could be further examined within the deficit to asset narrative switching of transformative space. Ujamaa (i.e., cooperative economics) refers to maintaining the community (e.g., stores, people) to profit together as a unified community. Within the field notes, participants pushed forward a community ordinance to reduce liquor store hours of sale to reframe focus and maintain their community. Umoja (i.e., unity) strives for and maintains unity in the family, community, and race. Which can be further explored as the community service and educational opportunities SCSBYP attends to unite as a group and as a collective community. Imani (i.e., faith) believe with all their heart in the righteousness of their struggle. Various participants express the righteousness of their struggle and the collective Black community within this study. Lastly, Ujima (i.e., collective work and responsibility) is focused on our problems as a collective, not an individualistic issue, which the participants within this study expressed. Also, this concept aligns closely with the current studies' theoretical framework, in which critical consciousness cannot be carried out in a silo and involves fellowship and solidarity. In summary, the principles and celebration of Kwanzaa within a TCBEP warrant much closer examination in conjunction with how critical consciousness manifests for Black youth and other marginalized youth. This particular cultural celebration may extend the theoretical framework or may aid in switching the way we measure the success of TCBEPs with an asset narrative lens.

Implications

Research

Future research should further explore the process and manifestation of critical consciousness for Black youth within community-based education programs. Particularly how these spaces offer more than just confinement from deviant behaviors and instead provide space for Black youth to recognize, process, and heal from generational trauma and systemic oppression and marginalization. Research should explore the roles of race, class, gender, and geographic location among Black youth. Often when examining intersectionality, individuals get lost in one oppressive aspect of a group's identity (i.e., race or sexuality) instead of examining how various nuanced intersections (i.e., race, class, gender, geographic location, etc.) are oppressive for a group lived experience. Therefore, research should not pigeonhole to one intersection of Black youths' lives and examine all intersections for everyone as this may aid in removing the overarching deficit narrative and begin to humanize Black youth. This requires a shift in research to acknowledge differences within groups and among groups and shift the narrative from one that is all-encompassing of the larger collective of what it means to be a Black youth. Continuing to place one all-encompassing narrative around Black youth from urban communities tokenizes them. It does not allow for various intersections from within the larger group of Black youth to be heard. Furthermore, research must keep sociopolitical factors at the forefront when exploring various Black youths' perspectives, as differing intersections may enhance or dissuade involvement in community-based education programs.

When looking specifically at methodological implications, research should utilize longitudinal research, community-based participatory research, and quantitative surveys to disseminate more generalized findings. Longitudinal studies may garner results that show

measurable success beyond traditional community-based education programs in reducing risky behavior. Community-based participatory research is a collaborative methodology that removes the hierarchy and barrier between researcher and participant, which is often a huge barrier when working with marginalized individuals and groups. Furthermore, community-based participatory research pursues action or change and research to occur simultaneously. This should appeal to researchers and participants wanting to examine a system and pursue changing that system. This specific methodology may also aid in Black youth becoming critically conscious of the world around them while removing distrust with research communities. Lastly, quantitative surveys would help to reach larger sample sizes more quickly, which may be useful in creating and maintaining asset narrative surveys that more clearly align with Black youths' process towards critical consciousness.

With more generalizable findings, research can conduct an evaluation of community-based education programs to re-examine the success of such spaces beyond the traditional reduction of risky behaviors. Other noteworthy frameworks to examine successful community-based education programs include critical race theory (Bell, 2004; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1996) and organizational empowerment (Zimmerman, 2000). CRT is rooted in storytelling and racial hierarchies, which are the backbone of how the U.S. was founded (Bell, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Therefore, using CRT as a framework allows for counternarratives that are needed to challenge dominant preconceived narratives about how Black youth experience the world. Organizational empowerment is another noteworthy framework for successful community-based education programs. As Peterson and Zimmerman (2004) state, "empowerment is an active, participatory process through which individuals, organizations and communities gain greater control, efficacy, and social justice" (p. 129;

Rappaport, 1987; Solomon, 1976). To understand community-based education programs' success, organizational empowerment must be considered as these spaces aim to encourage civic engagement and social justice.

Practice

Practice working with marginalized and oppressed populations attending community-based education programs ideally should undergo comprehensive large-scale programmatic evaluations. One size does not fit all and further does a disservice to all; as such, I advocated for the use of a consistently evaluated, culturally comprehensive model. We cannot become stagnant in a culturally competent model as various intersections, and social justice concerns will be everchanging and important to Black youths' lives. Therefore, having a model that is held accountable and adjusted every five to eight years is ideal.

Educators should become familiar with various affirming cultural models (e.g., Sankofa and Kwanzaa), which is an aspect that cannot be further ignored when working with Black youth participating in community-based education programs. Along with educators learning affirming cultural models, asset narratives should be included. One such example that encompasses both affirming and asset narrative content is Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa was founded by Maulana Karenga in 1966 and is an African American cultural celebration in which seven principles serve as guidelines for an individual's daily life and a source of identity (Karenga, 1997). For many Black youth, identity is an area of their lived experiences that is not celebrated or reflected in daily nuances and systems of the larger society. Until recently, we had not seen a Black individual holding a position of power (e.g., President Obama, Vice President Kamala Harris) and celebrated (e.g., Amanda Gorman, Cheick Camara, and Ermias Tadesse) for this. Therefore, including various aspects of culturally appropriate models in community-based education

programs that celebrate Black culture and identity warrants further use when working with this population and determining success.

Countless cultural awareness and cultural competence training have been created and provided but adding Black youths' perspectives is often not considered or included. Adding Black youths' voices and experiences may also empower them to advocate for their own praxis. Furthermore, having Black youths' experiences represented in various spaces (e.g., professional development and practice) is paramount to showing Black youth can and should be heard and represented as these spaces make decisions surrounding their daily lives. A few examples include how community-based education programs are funded, what educational programs are offered within urban communities of color, and how various systems (e.g., education) withhold opportunities for Black youth due to white standards and norms.

Lastly, language practiced within community-based education programs should be tailored to asset narrative framing, validating lived experiences and cultural norms as the bare minimum, always. Again, Kwanzaa is a concept that educators and practitioners should be aware of and infuse into programs and services, and further naming and discussing systems like the education system that continue to recognize and celebrate primarily white evangelical holidays (e.g., Thanksgiving and Christmas break). Although there are 50 holidays between Thanksgiving and the new year, having a larger understanding of the population we work with and looking at the systems that are failing them is imperative. I firmly believe having a comprehensive, inclusive, and accountable model will create social change for all parties (i.e., Black youth, community-based education programs, funding streams, educators, and researchers).

Policy

Policymakers benefit from this study as it pertains to understanding the voices of Black youth who are oppressed in civic and political conversations, along with the community-based educational programs that work with this population and rely on grants to continue operation. Targeting poor communities of color as spaces in need of saving further silences the experiences of those within these spaces by not allowing those living in the space to inform people in positions of power what they need. This further perpetuates the white savior complex that communities of color need to be saved and that middle-class white lifestyles are the overarching and most desirable goal.

Instead, policymakers would benefit from meeting communities where they are at while incorporating youth voices and experiences to contribute to community activism and larger policy. For example, immediate community activism includes student-lead events such as community clean-ups and applying for small grant initiatives (e.g., smoking awareness campaigns). Local community policymakers should also consider youth advisory boards (Forenza & Happonen, 2016) to contribute to youth civic engagement and activism within communities labeled “problematic,” “impoverished,” and “dangerous.” It has long been misunderstood that youth are apolitical and do not engage in civic activities; therefore, including youth advisory boards within local community governments is another way to reclaim the narrative placed on Black youth.

As for larger policy implications, funding streams should broaden descriptions and funding for community-based educational programs that are successful in ways that are often not highlighted or recognized (i.e., transformative community-based education programs). Further moving from funding spaces aimed to contain Black youth from deviant and risky behaviors, and

instead adjust the larger narrative to an asset frame. This narrative shift allows community-based education programs and Black youth to continue to shed awareness that they are successful in various ways beyond large traditional standards that focus only on reducing unwanted behaviors. These programs and youth can further illuminate the success they feel internally and reflect this with civic engagement and reclaim why community-based education programs are so “needed” within communities of color.

Limitations

This study included only a small sample (i.e., eleven participants) within the SCSBYP and therefore is only generalizable to the eleven participants, which is a common critique of qualitative research methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study excludes various teens: non-Black identifying teens, teens new to SCSBYP, and alumni of the program. The social location of the present study was within the epicenter of the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, to ensure the health and safety of participants and the researcher shelter in place orders switched the method of triangulation and member-checking to phone calls. Only three participants were reached via phone to safely member-check and triangulate findings. This was not within the scope of the original methodology, which included all participants being given a space and time to hear study findings and provide feedback and final thoughts. This is also a limitation as telephone interviews are not ideal as they lack hand gestures, facial expressions, and other means of showing emotions through communication (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

Furthermore, this study employed specific recruitment and qualitative methodology, presenting limitations. The current program has been owned and operated by the same individual for over 30 years, and this study only engaged eleven participants. A few of those participants are considered legacy members of the organizations as they are the second and even third

generation within a family to attend the program. Therefore, recruitment involving a combined and targeted effort with the help of the program director could have led to potential inclusion bias, and participants may have felt more pressure to volunteer. Also, this study relied on basic qualitative methodology (i.e., interviews), whereas having brief critical consciousness surveys, photos, and artifacts could have yielded richer findings.

While the researcher has spent a significant amount of time within the program's space in varying capacities over the years, being a white, highly educated female presents a limitation.

Participants are keenly aware of the oppression and marginalization the Black and African American communities have faced. As a white, highly educated woman, despite my rapport with this program and participants, I still am part of a group that has a continued hand in oppressing those who look like the participants. Therefore, my racial, ethnic, and sociodemographic background is a potential limitation within this study. Despite these limitations, through analysis methods, triangulation, and member-checking, this study presents the manifestation and journey of critical consciousness for eleven Black teens within SCSBYP.

Final Thoughts

This qualitative study utilized semi-structured in-depth interviews and years of field observations, notes, and memos. Years of field observations, notes, and memos were done prior to this study yet are extremely important. Gaining trust within marginalized, oppressed, and hard-to-reach populations take time and careful consideration, especially as someone who is not part of that group and represents a group that has often been a source of harm. Therefore, the years of observation, notes, and memos contributed to the overall success of completing this study and increased rigor.

Findings within this study shed light on the personal experiences of eleven teens with varying years' worth of experience within a community-based education program, SCSBYP, and their journey towards critical consciousness. The themes within this study illustrate Freire's educational framework as one that holds true to varying marginalized groups and individuals. The nuanced piece that came from this study is the *energy* within SCSBYP, which aided in the journey towards CC for all participants. The energy within this transformative community-based education program offers youth a space to openly learn, communicate and build knowledge and friendships surrounding their community, culture, and family. Which are also aspects of the African American celebration known as Kwanzaa and Sankofa model. Having these intentional aspects within the transformative community-based educational space also pushed teens towards recognizing the disadvantages in their immediate surroundings and larger systems while becoming confident change agents in their daily lives, community, and planning for their futures.

Findings from this study have implications for research, policy, and practice with Black youth participating in community-based education programs. Particularly how society frames Black youth and the social engineering we indoctrinate on individuals and groups. One clear example of this social engineering includes the public narrative of Treyvon Martin vs. Brock Turner. As a society, we must turn judgments into curiosity to see individuals and groups of people as simply that, people. Instead of continuing to pass moral judgments down, which further perpetuate oppressive narratives. I believe this study shows the continued need to shift to asset narrative around Black youth within community-based education programs and larger societal spaces (i.e., policy and grant opportunities) while allowing Black youth the opportunity to reclaim and readdress the narrative placed upon them.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Parent/Guardian Consent Form

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Education and Human Services
Department of Family Science and Human Development
Voice: 973-655-6785

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

Please read below with care. You can ask questions at any time, now or later. You can talk to other people before you sign this form.

Title: Community-Based Programs as Spaces for Critical Consciousness not Containment: Black Youths Perspectives
Study Number: FY18-19-1381

Why is this study being done? This study is being done to understand Black youths personal journey towards becoming critically conscious.

What will happen while you are in the study?
Your child would be asked to participate in two one-on-one interviews with myself, Carrie Bergeson. Along with participating in two focus groups with the other participants and myself. All of the interviews and focus groups will be held at Silk City School Based Youth Services Program. During all meeting your child will be audiotaped so I can transcribe interviews and focus group meetings. All questions will ask your child to discuss and explain their experiences with Silk City School Based Youth Services Program over the years.

Time: This study will involve multiple interviews. Two 90 minutes interviews for each one-on-one interview, and two 60 minute focus group meetings. This study will take about 5 hours total.

Risks: The risks are no greater than those in ordinary life. Your child may feel uncomfortable sharing certain experiences. Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. Whether or not your child decide to be involved in this study, his/her participation within the after school community-based program will not be affected.

Benefits: Your opinion is valuable and while it may not benefit you directly to participate in this study, others may benefit from understanding your experiences in this after school program.

Compensation: There is no compensation for being in this study.

Who will know that you are in this study?
Although the researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others. Please do not share anything in the focus group, you are not comfortable sharing.

You should know that New Jersey requires that any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to child abuse or acts of child abuse shall report the same immediately to the Division of Youth and Family Services.

Does your child or dependent have to be in the study?
Your child or dependent does not have to be in this study. She/he is a volunteer! It is okay if she/he wants to stop at any time and not be in the study. She/he does not have to answer any questions that she/he does not want to answer. Nothing will happen to your child or dependent.

Do you have any questions about this study? Email or phone the student researcher, Carrie Bergeson at bergesonc1@montclair.edu or phone 336-624-3985. Or feel free to contact Dr. Robert Reid, the faculty sponsor of this research project at: reidr@montclair.edu or 973-655-6785.

Do you have any questions about your rights as a research participant? Phone or email the IRB Chair, Dr. Katrina Bulkley, at 973-655-5189 or reviewboard@montclair.edu.

It is okay to use his/her data in other studies:
Please initial: _______ Yes _______ No

As part of this study, it is okay to audiotape child or dependent:
Please initial: _______ Yes _______ No

One copy of this consent form is for you to keep.

Statement of Consent
I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement, and possible risks and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. My signature also indicates that I am 18 years of age or older and have received a copy of this consent form.

____________________	____________________	__________
Print your name here	Sign your name here	Date
____________________	____________________	__________
Name of Principal Investigator	Signature	Date

Appendix B

Assent Form

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Education and Human Services
Department of Family Science and Human Development
Voice: 973-655-6785

ASSENT FORM

Please read below with care. You can ask questions at any time, now or later. You can talk to other people before you sign this form.

Who am I? I am Carrie Bergeson, I am a doctoral candidate at Montclair State University in the Family Science and Human Development Department.

Why is this study being done? I want to understand your experiences and thoughts about being part of an after school community-based education program. Specifically, Silk City School Based Youth Services program.

What will happen while you are in the study? If you choose to be in this study, we will sit down and do a one-on-one interview two times, then participate with other participants in a focus group to allow everyone a chance to discuss in a group setting their thoughts and experiences as well. During all meetings you will be audiotaped so I can transcribe all interviews and focus group meetings.

Time: This study will include two 90 minutes interviews one-on-one interview with the main researcher, Carrie Bergeson. Along with two 60 minute focus group meetings with all participants in the study and me. This study will take about 5 hours in total.

Risks: The risks are no greater than those in ordinary life. You may feel nervous or embarrassed to share your experiences with me.

Benefits: Your opinion is valuable and while it may not benefit you directly to participate in this study, others may benefit from understanding your experiences in this after school program.

Compensation: There is no compensation for being in this study.

Who will know that you are in this study?
So you, your parents and I will know that you are in this study. But, due to the nature of focus groups, privacy cannot be guaranteed. I will remind everyone to respect others and not repeat what is said in the focus group. Please do not share anything in the focus group you are not comfortable sharing.

Do you have to be in the study?
You do not have to be in this study. I won't get mad with you if you say no. It is okay if you change your mind at any time and leave the study. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Nothing will happen to you.

Do you have any questions about this study? Email or phone the student researcher, Carrie Bergeson at bergesonc1@montclair.edu or phone 336-624-3985. Or feel free to contact Dr. Robert Reid, the faculty sponsor of this research project at: reidr@montclair.edu or 973-655-6785.

Do you have any questions about your rights as a research participant? Phone or email the IRB Chair, Dr. Katrina Bulkley, at 973-655-5189 or reviewboard@montclair.edu.

It is okay to use my data in other studies:
Please initial: ______ Yes ______ No

As part of this study, it is okay to audiotape me:
Please initial: ______ Yes ______ No

______________________	______________________	__________
Name of Research Participant	Signature	Date
Name of Witness	Signature	Date
Name of Principal Investigator	Signature	Date
Name of Faculty Sponsor	Signature	Date

Appendix C

Adult Consent Form

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Education and Human Services
Department of Family Science and Human Development
Voice: 973-655-6785

ADULT CONSENT FORM

Please read below with care. You can ask questions at any time, now or later. You can talk to other people before you sign this form.

Title: Community-Based Programs as Spaces for Critical Consciousness not Containment: Black Youths Perspectives
Study Number: FY18-19-1381

Why is this study being done? This study is being done to understand Black youths personal journey towards becoming critically conscious.

What will happen while you are in the study?
You will be asked to participate in two one-on-one interviews with myself, Carrie Bergeson. Along with participating in two focus groups with the other participants and myself. All of the interviews and focus groups will be held at Silk City School Based Youth Services Program. During all meeting you will be audiotaped so I can transcribe interviews and focus group meetings. All questions will ask you to discuss and explain your experiences with Silk City School Based Youth Services Program over the years.

Time: This study will involve multiple interviews. Two 90 minutes interviews for each one-on-one interview, and two 60 minute focus group meetings. This study will take about 5 hours total.

Risks: The risks are no greater than those in ordinary life. Your child may feel uncomfortable sharing certain experiences. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Whether or not you decide to be involved in this study, your participation within the after school community-based program will not be affected.

Benefits: Your opinion is valuable and while it may not benefit you directly to participate in this study, others may benefit from understanding your experiences in this after school program.

Compensation: There is no compensation for being in this study.

Who will know that you are in this study?
Although the researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others. Please do not share anything in the focus group, you are not comfortable sharing.

You should know that New Jersey requires that any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to child abuse or acts of child abuse shall report the same immediately to the Division of Youth and Family Services.

Do you have to be in the study?
You do not have to be in this study. You are a volunteer! It is okay if you want to stop at any time and not be included in the study. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

Do you have any questions about this study? Email or phone the student researcher, Carrie Bergeson at bergesonc1@montclair.edu or phone 336-624-3985. Or feel free to contact Dr. Robert Reid, the faculty sponsor of this research project at: reidr@montclair.edu or 973-655-6785.

Do you have any questions about your rights as a research participant? Phone or email the IRB Chair, Dr. Katrina Bulkley, at 973-655-5189 or reviewboard@montclair.edu.

It is okay to use my data in other studies:
Please initial: ______ Yes ______ No

As part of this study, it is okay to audiotape me:
Please initial: ______ Yes ______ No

One copy of this consent form is for you to keep.

Statement of Consent
I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement, and possible risks and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. My signature also indicates that I am 18 years of age or older and have received a copy of this consent form.

______________________ ______________________ ____________
Print your name here Sign your name here Date

______________________ ______________________ ____________
Name of Principal Investigator Signature Date

Appendix D

Demographic Form

Demographic Form

1. What is your age: __________

2. What is your race: (Circle)
African American
Black
Hispanic/Latino
White Non-Hispanic
Asian
Middle Eastern
Other (Please specify): ______________________________

3. What is your ethnicity: (Please specify) ___________________________
Ex: Bengali, Haitian, Korean, Iranian, Puerto Rican, Colombian, Italian

4. What is your gender identity?: (Circle)
Female
Male
Other: (Please specify): ____________________________

5. What grade are you currently in?: (Circle)
Junior
Senior

6. How long have you been part of the SBYSP?: (Circle)
1 year
2 years
3 years
4 or more years

7. Are you part of any extracurricular programs?: Yes No
____

8. Are you part of any school clubs?: Yes No
Please specify: ____

9. Do you play any school sports?: Yes No
Please specify: ____

10. Do you have a job?: (Circle) Yes No
How many hours a week do you work? (Please specify): _________________

11. Who do you live with? (Please specify):
____

Appendix E

Initial Interview Guide

Initial Interview Guide

1. Why did you get involved with SSBP?
- Can you describe for me what the process is like to become part of the program?

2. If you were to describe the belief system that you think SSBP has what would you say? How would you describe it?
- If asked to describe belief system: this is a set of belief's a group or person believes in. Example being, churches often have a set of beliefs, activist groups have beliefs (e.g., LGBT and BLM)

3. What bonds you or connects you with other teens or adults in this program?
- Can you tell me of a time when you experienced this bond, support or connection to others in the group?

4. What are the reasons you continue to come back and be active in this program?

5. What kinds of things have you gotten out of your involvement in this program?

6. What kinds of things have you learned through your involvement in SSBP?

7. Describe a time for me at SSBP when you felt like you had an impact working for chance in Paterson.
- If they are blank, prime the pump: talking to someone in office, etc. etc. etc.

7a. How did you prepare to do that?
7b. What was that like for you as a part of the group? As individual?
7c. Could you imagine yourself doing more of that kind of thing? Why or why not?

8. One struggle in Paterson is that not many teens go to college or necessarily see a future for themselves, how do you understand that? What do you think about this?
- What do you imagine for your own future?
- Who/what has supported your thinking (or planning) for your future?

9. If someone was to describe your participation in the SSBP what would they say about it?
- How do you think others would describe this program?

10. Can you think back to when you first joined and stated coming to this program to now, what do you feel you have learned about yourself through being in this program?

Appendix F

Initial Follow-up Interview Guide

Second Interview Guide

1. In the first interviews, many of you mentioned that you didn't learn much about your own culture in school. Would you say that describes your experience?
- **If they agree:** How do you understand that? OR why do you think that was so?
- **If they disagree:** Describe that for me OR Tell me about that.

2. Were there times in school that you learned about the larger community of Paterson? If so, tell me about that.

3. Compare for me your learning experience at the teen center with your school experience.
- What have you learned about your own culture at the teen center?
- And what have you learned about the larger community of Paterson?

4. When you think about Paterson in comparison to other communities what kinds of things do you think about?

5. I have heard about a lot of community events (e.g., cleanups, kicks butts day, When They See Us panel) you all have done together, and those experiences seem to have given you opportunities to go to different areas in Paterson. How has that affected how you see your community?

6. When you learn about your own culture and the community Paterson, how does it affect how you think about or see yourself?
- How do you see the world around you?
- As an African American and/or as a community member of Paterson?

7. How much do you talk about what you learn/do at the teen center at home? How do your parents/guardians respond?

Appendix G

Follow-Up College Bound Interview Guide

Second Interview with college bound teens

1. So you are about to leave/preparing to leave for college how does that feel? How are you feeling?
- I know you've been part of this program for awhile. Describe for me how you've grown during the time you've been a part of ____.

2. Describe for me how you think your involvement here has helped you prepare for college.
- What is it about this place that has helped you grow?

3. In what ways has Mr. Smallwood (or other adults at this program) helped to prepare you for life after high school?

4. If I were to first meet you at college, describe for me who I would meet. Who is this young adult arriving at college?

5. What do you see for yourself and your future?

6. If you were implement a program similar to this one for youth in this community, what would it look like? What issues would it address?
- Why would those areas be important? Why would you include them in a program for this community?

7. How did you first experience those issues? What have you done to better understand (or avoid or combat, etc.) those issues? *How* did you organize or work against them?
- How this agency helped you understand (or address, etc.) these issues?
- In what ways, if any, have you helped others to understand (or address, etc.) these issues?