YOUTH AND ADULT PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN COMMUNITY-BASED YOUTH PROGRAMS

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Abstract: This study examined perceptions and experiences of youth and adults engaged in various types of community-based youth-adult relationships. Involvement and interaction rating scales were completed by 108 participants involved in community groups from 12 communities in 10 states. The rating scale measured three constructs: youth involvement, adult involvement, and youth- adult interaction. Significant gender differences in participants' perceptions were found on all three constructs, with females being more positive. Rural participants were found to be significantly more positive than urban participants on the construct of youth involvement. Finally, significant differences were found between all participants within categories of the youth-adult relationship continuum. Participants in youth-led collaborations were significantly more positive toward youth involvement than participants in adult-led collaborations. Moreover, adults in youth-adult partnerships were significantly more positive toward youth involvement and youth-adult interaction than those adults in adult-led collaborations.

Keywords: positive youth development; youth-adult relationships; youth-adult partnerships; youth-adult perceptions

Strengthening local youth and adult relationships could potentially be a successful strategy for addressing community issues and a tremendous learning process for both youth and adults. However, adults all too frequently perceive youth as most often in need of assistance rather than being community assets. According to evidence from empirical studies, adults in the United States are ambivalent at best about youth and their roles in society (Guzman, Lippman, Moore, & O'Hare, 2003; Rennekamp, 1993; Zeldin, 2000). The stereotyping of youth by adults limits the potential of young people at the community level (Camino, 2000; Gilliam & Bales, 2001; Glassner, 1999; Klindera, 2001; Yohalem, 2003; Yohalem & Pittman, 2001; Zeldin & Topitzes, 2002). Several scholars have indicated that young people

can and will solve community problems if empowered through participation (Flanagan & Faison, 2001; Kaba, 2000; McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman, 1994; Ostrom, Lerner, & Freel, 1995; Villarruel, Perkins, Borden, & Keith, 2003; Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes, & Calvert, 2000). However, preconceived negative stereotypes often foster the widening degree of separation between adults and young people that restricts youth participation (Benson, 1997; Irby, Ferber, Pittman, Tolman, & Yohalem, 2001).

Adult Perceptions of Youth

Studies have reported adults' perceptions of youth as being less than accurate and unaware of positive trends in youth development (Gilliam & Bales, 2001; Guzman et al., 2003). Many believe teens are "different" than they were in the past and that teens have rejected traditional American values. Stereotypes perceived by adults constrain the potential of young people at the community level by hindering their ability to relate to adults, even causing youth to doubt their own competence (Glassner, 1999; Guzman et al., 2003; Kaplan, 1997; Klindera, 2001; Males, 1999; Zeldin & Topitzes, 2002). Furthermore, the experiences of adults when they were young are crucial in understanding youth-adult relationships (Galbo, 1983). Youth-adult relationships are a challenge for some adults because working with young people may cause memories of their own negative experiences as a youth to resurface (Atwater, 1983; Gilliam & Bales, 2001). For instance, studies have revealed that "storm and stress" (e.g., identity crisis, rebellion, and parental disappointment) during the adolescent years of parents correlate with relationships between their own teen-aged children (Scheer & Unger, 1995).

Youth Perceptions of Adults

Several researchers have pursued scholarship that focuses on the influence of youth-adult relationships and the influence on the attitudes of youth. Lynch and Cicchetti (1997) conducted a study reporting that middle school students had more positive perceptions of their relationships with peers and less positive perceptions of their relationships with adults than elementary school students. In addition, Lempers and Clark-Lempers (1992) reported similar findings, noting that relationships with parents rated highest by all adolescents whereas teachers were rated the lowest.

One dilemma that appears to widen the gap between youth and adults is that both young people and adults have limited experience in working as partners (Zeldin, Larson, Camino, & O'Connor, 2005). Many youth programs fit into the traditional program structure wherein youth are receivers and adults are the providers. As youth enter their middle-adolescent (ages 14-17) years, they become identity seekers and need to have more decision-making power. Thus, traditional programs may perpetuate the impression of adult authority, ignoring the identity-seeking nature of adolescents and in turn discouraging motivated youth. As a result, negative perceptions abound, and successful intergenerational social ties

remain a foreign experience for the majority of youth and adults in the United States (Zeldin et al., 2005).

Social contact between those groups that are often segregated (e.g., by age, gender, and race) can lead to more positive perceptions and reduced prejudices (Allport, 1954). Building on the work of Allport and other intergroup contact theorists (Caspi, 1984; Pettigrew, 1998), certain variables may facilitate positive attitudes between youth and adults just as certain variables facilitate the development of more positive attitudes toward racial and ethnic groups.

Intergroup Contact Theory

Intergroup contact theory is based on social psychology research centering on the desegregation of schools during the civil rights movement. Much of the literature stems from Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, which argues that bringing members of different groups together in an interactive setting will have positive effects on in-group members' (i.e., those possessing power, privilege, and status) attitudes toward out-group members (i.e., those outside of the in-group circle that are less connected and often seen as undesirables) and ultimately lead to reduced prejudices (Brewer & Miller, 1984; Hewstone, 1996; Pettigrew, 1998). According to Allport, four key conditions must be present to achieve successful intergroup relationships: (a) equal status existing among group members; (b) individuals in groups having active, goal-oriented endeavors or common goals; (c) intergroup cooperation that exposes members to the personal qualities and skills of others; and (d) a sense of shared values and support of authorities, laws, or customs.

There is much debate as to how much contact constitutes greater levels of reduced biases and more positive attitudes. Pettigrew (1998) offered evidence that intergroup contact has positive effects even when all of the key conditions presented by Allport (1954) are not met. Lee, Farrell, and Link (2004) reported recent findings that supported this argument. In their national study of the public's attitudes toward the homeless, all types of exposure (i.e., observations, face-to-face interaction, out-group membership, and information from third-party sources) were found to positively affect attitudes of the public. Pettigrew also presented the need for in-group reappraisal, which forces a group to dismiss paradigms and embrace new perspectives that reshape their attitudes toward individuals outside of the in-group's social network.

Intergroup contact theory can be useful in constructing a theoretical framework for the development of youth-adult relationships, because the theory proposes that group interaction can promote mutual learning and equal voice through working together in pursuit of common goals. For youth-adult partnering to be successful, there must be a sharing of power among youth and adults that in essence reflects Allport's (1954) condition of equal status among group members. Youth and adults are more likely to have higher levels of interest in community efforts if they have ownership in a project and feel as though their time and commitment make a difference (Cargo, Grams, Ottoson, Ward, & Green, 2003; Forum

for Youth Investment, 2004; Mitra, 2003; Mueller, Wunrow, & Einspruch, 2000). This resonates with Allport's conditions of intergroup cooperation and importance of sharing common goals. Finally, the intergroup contact theory literature states the importance of having those members who support authority, norms, laws, and/or customs. This is closely related to the literature of youth development that calls for movement from youth tokenism to higher levels of participation while providing mutual respect for individuals (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Hart, 1992; Hohenemser & Marshall, 2002; Lerner, 2004; Perkins, Borden, & Villarruel, 2001). Thus, intergroup contact theory presents criteria that mirror the benefits of youth-adult interaction while also aiming to address parallel issues that often jeopardize the success of community partnering.

This Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of youth and adults toward their involvement and interaction when working together on community projects. The major research question addressed by this study was, What are the perceptions of youth and adults toward their involvement and interaction with one another when working together on community projects?

The continuum of youth-adult relationship model (Jones & Perkins, 2005) was employed to examine the youth-adult relationships within these community efforts. This model includes five key categories to identify groups consisting of varied levels of youth and adult involvement. The continuum focuses on individual choices and enables organizations to exist at any point depending on the level of engagement of youth and adults. The categories on the continuum of youth-adult relationships include adult-centered leadership, adult-led collaboration, youth-adult partnership, youth-led collaboration, and youth-centered leadership.

An adult-centered leadership relationship consists of programs that are conceived and driven completely by adults. An adult-led collaboration includes programs or situations where adults provide some guidance for youth but the youth have some input in decision making, albeit limited by adults' discretion. The youth-adult partnership is located centrally on the continuum. This is a point of stasis where a partnership is achieved between youth and adults. Youth and adult participants have equal chances in utilizing skills, decision making, mutual learning, and independently carrying out tasks to reach common goals. Youth-led collaborations are programs or projects where youth primarily develop the ideas and make decisions while adults provide assistance when needed. Youth-centered leadership includes programs or activities led exclusively by youth with little or no adult involvement (see Jones & Perkins, 2005).

METHOD

This study included a convenience sample (Patton, 1990) of youth and adults that was part of a larger evaluation study of the Engaging Youth Serving Commu-

nity (EYSC) Initiative of the Northeast 4-H Region State Cooperative Extension Services. The EYSC Initiative targeted rural communities to provide youth and adults with opportunities to work together (see http://www.fourhcouncil.edu/RuralYouthDevProgram.aspx). Those states participating in the EYSC Initiative were Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and West Virginia. In addition, two groups from the greater Philadelphia area were recruited for this project to provide an urban sample to examine any distinct differences between rural and urban participants. These urban groups were selected to be in this study because they were in the beginning stages of bringing youth and adults together to promote community change. Having groups in the initial stages allowed the researchers to more adequately evaluate the dynamics that occurred as youth and adults encountered varied experiences of working together. If the groups were in the mid to late stages of their projects, the researchers may not have been able to capture through observations the changing experiences and actions of the participants over time.

Approximately 51% of the participants were youth (n = 55), whereas 49% were adults (n = 53). The youth participants comprised 33 females (31%) and 22 males (39%), whereas the adults consisted of 42 women (20%) and 11 men (10%). Thus, a total of 69% of the sample were females and 31% were males. The largest ethnic group was European American (n = 52, 48%), followed by African American (n = 37, 34%), Hispanic Americans (n = 6, 6%), Asian Americans (n = 5, 5%), Native Americans (n = 1, 1%) and others (n = 7, 6%). Forty-one percent (n = 44) of the participants lived in rural areas, whereas 44% (n = 47) reported living in urban areas. The remaining 16% (n = 17) indicated living in suburban communities. Of the 108 participants responding, 36% indicated that this was their first time participating in a youth-adult partnering effort in their community.

Approximately 41% (n = 22) of the youth were 15 to 16 years of age, followed by 33% (n = 18) aged 17 to 18, and 24% (n = 13) aged 13 to 14. The majority of the adults (90%, n = 48) were ages 26 and older, whereas 10% (n = 6) were between the ages of 19 and 25.[1] All of the African American participants were from urban areas, whereas the rural groups consisted primarily of European American participants. There were only a few adult male participants among all groups, and most of them were members of the two urban groups (8 out of a total of 11 adult male participants).

Data Collection
EYSC group coordinators were requested to complete a "Group Activity Rating Scale" that rated a group's progress on a community project (on a scale of 1 to 5) and to indicate the type of youth-adult relationship, based on the continuum

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1 There was only one 19-year-old in the 19 to 25-year-old adult category. This participant was a former youth member of his group who had taken on adult responsibilities.

of youth-adult relationships. Generally, the coordinator was a state 4-H youth development specialist or area 4-H youth development agent or educator. The coordinator categorized the groups into one of the above-mentioned relationships (i.e., adult-centered leadership, adult-led collaboration, youth-adult partnership, youth-led collaboration, or youth-centered leadership) and provided the name and contact information of each group's adult leader. Coordinators indicated the level of participation and progress with a community project by rating the group's activities by using the "Group Activity Rating Scale" (see Jones, 2004). The "Group Activity Rating Scale" consisted of nine items on a 5-point scale that assessed whether the group was more of an adult-driven or youth-driven program or project, or a youth-adult partnership. Once the coordinator's rating scale was received with the contact information of the adult leader, the groups' adult leaders were then contacted by e-mail or phone. The adult leaders were asked to describe the type of project or projects the group was working on, the number of youth and adults involved, and the schedule of group meetings.

The "Involvement and Interaction Rating Scale" was used as a survey instrument to assess youth's and adults' perceptions of three constructs (i.e., youth involvement, adult involvement, and youth-adult interaction) pertaining to a community project group (Jones, 2004; Jones & Perkins, 2005). The group participants were asked to rate the quality of their existing youth-adult relationship with members of their group. Previous studies have reported that participants' perceptions of their relationships is a key indicator of determining program quality and effectiveness (Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002; Pinquart, Wenzel, & Sorensen, 2000; Rhodes, 2002).

Relationship quality was rated on a 10-point scale that assessed the given constructs (i.e., youth involvement, adult involvement, and youth-adult interaction). The scale ranged from 1 to 2 (very poor); 3 to 4 (poor); 5 to 6 (fair); 7 to 8 (good); 9 to 10 (excellent). The 38-item rating scale included bipolar statements (i.e., positive and negative) to measure participants' perceptions of their experiences. Parallel forms were developed for youth and adult participants. Negative statements were reverse coded to reflect positive aspects. The constructs used were selected and adapted from existing instruments (see Camino, 2002; Yohalem, 2002; Zeldin, Day, & Matyzik, n.d.) related to this study to more accurately fit the uniqueness of this investigation. Some of the items were based on the mentoring and youth-adult partnership literature and were modified to fit the emphasis of the current study on youth-adult relationships within community projects.

The "Involvement and Interaction Rating Scale" contained items that measured youth involvement. These items were used to assess whether young people demonstrated high or low levels of youth voice and decision making, responsibility, and commitment to the project. A high rating in youth involvement indicated that youth worked primarily with their peers to carry out a task (e.g., organizing an event) related to the project. A high rating in adult involvement entailed only adults working

together in a given situation (e.g., administrative duties). The construct adult involvement utilized items that measured adults' support through their commitment to nurturing youth voice and decision making and dedication to the project. A high rating of youth-adult interaction and partnering indicated that youth and adults worked collectively, both engaging in one or more components of the project and fully exercising an equal opportunity to utilize decision making and other leadership skills. High youth-adult interaction would also reflect civility and mutual respect for one another. A comparison of individual responses between the groups was made to determine the differences in relationship quality, experiences, and level of youth and adult involvement to distinguish contrasts between the various types of continuum relationships.

Rating Scale Development

The "Involvement and Interaction Rating Scale" was reviewed for content and construct validity and cultural sensitivity by a panel of faculty and graduate students with knowledge in survey design (for a complete description, see Jones, 2004; Jones & Perkins, 2005). An evaluation team from the United Way's Center for Youth Development (Philadelphia) also reviewed the instrument. Adaptations were made based on feedback from the panel and the evaluation team. As a measure of reliability for the "Involvement and Interaction Rating Scale", a post hoc test was conducted that reported an overall Cronbach's alpha of .94. The instrument contained three groups of items that measured the following attitudinal constructs: youth involvement, adult involvement, and youth-adult interaction. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients were Youth Involvement (.83), Adult Involvement (.84), and Youth-Adult Interaction (.87).

The nature of this investigation lent itself to some limitations. First, the generalizability of the results does not extend beyond those participants and groups involved in the small convenience sample. The sample size of this study limited the use of appropriate inferential statistics (e.g., ANOVA and *t* tests). Second, although the researcher made two to four site visits to four groups, a more thorough investigation of the dynamics of group interactions might have been conducted if more frequent visits were completed. Third, the study was limited to examining specific types of community groups, thus posing a restriction on examining various types of organizations (e.g., schools and faith-based institutions) as an influential context affecting youth-adult relationships.

<div align="center">RESULTS</div>

Several forms of statistical data analyses were employed. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data. ANOVA and independent *t* tests were also used to develop models to measure and compare the perceptions of the youth and adult participants. Table 1 lists the groups by state or location and classification along the continuum according to the groups' adult leaders. This information was pertinent

to the study, for these classifications were used to make comparisons between the groups. The mean score, in parentheses, notes how they ranked on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being an adult-centered leadership and 5 being a youth-centered leadership. However, all groups were categorized into three relationships: 2 = adult-led collaboration, 3 = youth-adult partnership, and 4 = youth-led collaboration. The researchers expected to find all groups within these three categories, because the purpose of the groups was to encourage youth and adults to work together. Thus, all of these groups were expected to reflect some level of youth-adult cooperation. During initial conversations, the adult leaders of each group all informed the researchers that their groups were youth-adult partnerships.

Table 1: Classification of Youth-Adult Groups (Mean Rating) by State/Location

Adult-Led Collaboration (n = 5)	Youth-Adult Partnership (n = 5)	Youth-Led Collaboration (n = 2)
Philadelphia-area Group 1 (2.3)	Massachusetts (2.7)	Delaware (4.1)
New Jersey (2.3)	Pennsylvania (3.1)	New York (4.3)
Philadelphia-area Group 2 (2.3)	Maine (2.8)	
Connecticut (2.3)	New Hampshire (2.7)	
Vermont (2.7) a	West Virginia (3.0)	

Note: The mean score, in parentheses, notes how each site ranked on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being an adult-centered leadership and 5 being a youth-centered leadership.
a. Although the mean score for Vermont is at the youth-adult partnership range of 3, the group leader indicated that the group was an adult-led collaboration. This may be due to the fact that the adult in the group was in the process of getting more youth and adults involved, but no progress had been made at the time of data collection for this study.

Participants completed the "Involvement and Interaction Rating Scale" to indicate their perceptions toward their experiences working together as a group. Mean scores were computed as a separate index variable for each of the three constructs (i.e., youth involvement, adult involvement, and youth-adult interaction). A *t* test was used to determine significant gender differences in perceptions of the three constructs between participants. As shown in Table 2, both female and male participants had positive perceptions of the level of youth involvement in their groups; however, females were significantly more positive than males on their ratings of youth involvement (mean of 7.38 and 6.53, respectively), adult involvement (mean of 7.77 and 6.96, respectively), and youth-adult interaction (7.14 and 6.50, respectively).

In addition to the above comparisons, *t* tests were computed to determine if there were significant differences between youth and adult participants' perceptions. All participants had positive perceptions toward youth involvement, adult involvement, and youth-adult interaction. Although no significant differences were found, mean scores indicate that adults had a tendency to be more positive on all

three constructs compared to youth participants.

Table 2: Youth Involvement, Adult Involvement, and Youth-Adult Interaction as Perceived by Female and Male Participants

Group	n	M	SD	t	df	p
Youth involvement						
Females	64	7.38	1.36	2.83	90	.006**
Males	28	6.53	1.25			
Adult involvement						
Females	70	7.77	1.58	2.32	97	.022*
Males	29	6.96	1.61			
Youth-adult interactiont						
Females	67	7.14	1.23	2.11	91	.038*
Males	26	6.50	1.53			

Note: Scale ranged from 1 to 10.
*p < .05. **p < .01.

An ANOVA was employed to test for ethnic differences existing between participants about their perceptions of youth involvement, adult involvement, and youth-adult interaction. The one-way ANOVA indicated no significant differences between African Americans, European Americans, and Other participants (i.e., Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, and Others). All participants had positive perceptions; however, European Americans had a tendency to have more positive perceptions of the constructs compared to African Americans and Other participants.

An ANOVA was used to determine the relationship between the location of the groups (i.e., rural = 44, urban = 47, and suburban = 17) and the participants' perceptions of youth involvement, adult involvement, and youth-adult interaction (see Table 3). Significant differences were found between rural and urban participants' perceptions of youth involvement. Rural participants were more positive toward the level of youth involvement within their groups than the urban groups (7.50 and 6.67, respectively). No significant differences were found by location in terms of adult involvement and youth-adult interaction. However, there was an apparent trend in the rural participants' (7.30) perceptions of youth-adult interaction as compared to the suburban (6.83) and urban groups (6.59); thus, rural participants' perceptions were more positive.

Table 3: A Comparison of Rural, Suburban, and Urban Participants' Perceptions Toward Youth Involvement, Adult Involvement, and Youth-Adult Interaction

Perception	Rural		Suburban		Urban		F	P
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Youth involvement	7.50	1.32	7.16	1.49	6.67	1.29	3.78	.027*
n	41		15		36			
Adult involvement	7.75	1.43	7.59	1.71	7.28	1.77	.879	.418
n	42		17		40			
Youth-adult interactiont	7.30	1.18	6.83	1.33	6.59	1.46	2.98	.056
n	44		13		36			

Note: Scale ranged from 1 to 10. Mean values were statistically significant only between rural and urban groups.
*p < .05.

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An ANOVA was also employed to determine any significant differences between participants' perceptions based on their continuum classification (i.e., adult-led collaboration, youth-adult partnership, and youth-led collaboration). Mean scores indicated that participants in youth-led collaborations had more positive perceptions of the level of youth involvement, adult involvement, and youth-adult interaction when compared to participants in adult-led collaborations and youth-adult partnerships (see Table 4). A significant difference in perceptions towards youth involvement was found between those participants in adult-led collaborations (6.74) and those in youth-led collaborations (8.00).

To determine whether there were differences in the perceptions of adults in the various types of youth-adult relationships (i.e., adult-led collaboration, youth-adult partnership, and youth-led collaboration), an ANOVA was employed. Significant differences were found between the perceptions of adults in youth-adult partnerships and adult-led collaborations (see Table 5). Adults in youth-adult partnerships had more positive perceptions of youth involvement (7.85) compared to adults in adult-led collaborations (6.64). In addition, adults in youth-adult partnerships (7.69) had more positive perceptions of youth-adult interaction than adults in adult-led collaborations (6.63).

An ANOVA was also employed to determine whether any significant differences existed among the youth participants in the continuum classifications (i.e., adult-led collaboration, youth-adult partnership, and youth-led collaboration). Youth participants in youth-led collaborations had higher overall mean scores, although not significant, toward the level of youth involvement, adult involvement, and youth-adult interaction compared to the other youth-adult relationships.

Table 4: A Comparison of Participants' Perceptions Toward Youth Involvement, Adult Involvement, and Youth-Adult Interaction Based on Relationship Category

Perception	Adult-Led Collaboration		Youth-Adult Partnership		Youth-Led Collaboration		F	P
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Youth involvement	6.74	1.21	7.34	1.56	8.00	1.11	5.92	.004**
n	50		27		15			
Adult involvement	7.42	1.66	7.43	1.72	8.06	1.25	1.09	.341
n	53		29		17			
Youth-adult interaction	6.77	1.37	7.00	1.39	7.53	1.03	1.87	.160
n	49		29		15			

Note: These relationship categories were based on the coordinators'/adult leaders' classification of their groups. Scale ranged from 1 to 10. Mean values were statistically significant only between individuals in adult-led and youth-led collaborations.
**$p < .01$.

Table 5: A Comparison of Adult Participants' Perceptions Toward Youth Involvement, Adult Involvement, and Youth-Adult Interaction Based on Adults' Relationship Category

Perception	Adult-Led Collaboration		Youth-Adult Partnership		Youth-Led Collaboration		F	P
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Youth involvement	6.64	1.11	7.85	1.43	8.00	1.44	5.34	.009**
n	23		15		6			
Adult involvement	7.53	1.31	8.06	1.46	8.14	0.98	1.07	.351
n	26		16		7			
Youth-adult interaction	6.63	1.02	7.69	1.25	7.84	0.56	5.75	.006**
n	21		16		6			

Note: Scale ranged from 1 to 10. Mean values were statistically significant only between individuals in adult-led collaborations and youth-adult partnerships.
**$p < .01$.

DISCUSSION

Much discourse on the importance of youth-adult relationships has surfaced in recent years. Positive youth-adult interaction is an important protective factor in a young person's life (Perkins & Borden, 2003). This research provides relevant information that contributes to understanding various types of youth-adult relationships that exist within community-based programs. One concern is to redirect the negative perceptions that can weaken the progress of youth-adult partnering efforts (Guzman et al., 2003; Lynch & Cicchetti, 1997). Researchers (Gilliam & Bales,

2001; Scheer & Unger, 1995) have found that adults view the lives of young people through their own lenses, thus relating to their younger years. Hence, this often causes youth to become even more disconnected and doubtful of their potential as community leaders (Guzman et al., 2003). Many of the traditional structures of youth programs do not meet the needs of young people who, as they progress through their adolescent years, search for more opportunities to make decisions and experience autonomy.

Given the sample's gender makeup (i.e., the majority of adults being females), the researchers expected females to be more positive toward their experiences. Females had more positive perceptions in regard to the level of youth involvement, adult involvement, and youth-adult interaction. One way to potentially increase adolescent males' perceptions is to provide them with role models; therefore, youth service providers may need to try creative recruiting strategies to attract male adults to initiatives that involve youth and adults working together. This would include providing programs that appeal to adolescent and adult males (e.g., experiential learning opportunities that employ hands-on participation and sports-related activities). These strategies must enable adults to capitalize on their own personal strengths to fully engage youth's interests. Several youth and adults in this study expressed becoming discouraged when their skills were not considered, valued, and utilized. Regardless of gender or age, volunteers need to be presented with tasks that best utilize their skills and abilities (Glassner, 1999; Zeldin, 2000), which may in turn increase their commitment toward working together as partners to make their communities better places to live.

This study further contributes to the literature by resonating the salience of intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954), which illustrates the value of groups from different backgrounds coming together. Although the contact hypothesis first arose in the 1950s as a means to examine adult learning within groups, there have been no studies to utilize these contexts as a conceptual framework to include youth. In this study, though no significant differences were found between the perceptions of the ethnic groups, European American participants had slightly higher mean scores on all three constructs compared to African Americans and other ethnic groups. All of the African American participants were in urban communities. The less positive perceptions of these participants may be a result of certain cultural aspects that exist among these communities. For example, among African American participants there may be strong beliefs that youth being vocal is often illustrative of aggression and disrespect toward adults, hence deterring higher levels of youth involvement and youth-adult interaction. Allowing youth within a particular culture to experience serving as a partner may enlighten adults on how youth can have a voice while remaining civil and respectful.

Findings also revealed significant differences between rural and urban participants, with those in rural areas being more positive toward youth involvement. This was due, in part, to the groups located in rural areas participating in the EYSC

Initiative that specifically targeted youth who were considered ready for this type of project. The rural sample involved youth who were fairly active in the 4-H Youth Development program for several years prior to the EYSC initiative, and these youth knew the adults involved in their groups. Hence, youth were understandably more positive toward working with adults with whom they have had past interactions. In addition, at least 40% of the youth from rural areas were equipped with a 2-day training before engaging in their projects and had previously worked with some if not all of the adults in their groups. Urban youth received a minimum amount of hands-on training, and only a few of these youth knew the adults in their groups. Not having a long-term relationship with the adults in the group appears, at least in part, to explain why urban youth had lower ratings of their experiences with adults. Youth involvement among the urban groups was also perceived to be at a low level by youth and adults possibly because the youth had less experience with the youth-adult partnering model. Thirty-six percent of the total sample indicated being first-time participants in a community partnership, with 44% of these being affiliated with the urban groups. Given the skills, level of responsibility, and attitude required for youth and adults to work effectively as equal partners, it is not surprising that these individuals would have less positive perceptions of their experiences. These findings indicate that efforts must be in place to foster trust between youth and adults who do not have a history of working together. Moreover, training and skill development may be needed for both youth and adults if they are going to success-fully navigate these partnerships. Finally, these findings provide further evidence of the importance of context as a potential mediating variable that may require unique approaches when forming partnerships.

Although other studies have only distinguished between adult-driven and youth-driven programs, this study identified three of five types of youth-adult re-lationships (i.e., adult-led collaboration, youth-adult partnership, and youth-led collaboration). In regard to the type of relationship, the participants in youth-led collaborations, compared to participants in adult-led collaborations, tended to be more positive toward youth involvement. This finding is not surprising, because of the increased enthusiasm and level of responsibility that was afforded to the young people in this relationship. Thus, the youth provided positive ratings of the youth-adult interaction because they had a major role in the project, whereas the adults were positive due to youth taking on this responsibility and fully utilizing their lead-ership skills. This finding provides ecological validity to the continuum of the youth-adult relationship model (Jones & Perkins, 2005).

Adults in youth-adult partnerships had more positive perceptions of youth involvement and youth-adult interaction than adults in adult-led collaborations. Adults in the youth-adult partnerships category believed that they had achieved a genuine partnership with youth. However, as indicated by their lower rating, the youth in the category of youth-adult partnership did not perceive the group to be a "partnership" with high levels of youth involvement and youth-adult interaction.

These young people felt as though their opinions were not valued as much as the adults perceived them to be. Moreover, these youth perceived that they had little voice in major decision-making roles. This finding has implications for youth, adults, and youth development professionals attempting to establish successful youth-adult partnerships. First, some training and preparation may be needed to ensure that participants understand what it means to engage youth on a community team (see Scheve, Perkins, & Mincemoyer, 2005). Second, perceptions of both youth and adults must be examined on an ongoing basis to form adaptations to a group's structure and decision-making process. This is imperative when aspiring to move toward a mutual reciprocity of respect and learning among group members. Third, perhaps the use of an official buddy system between adults and youth is needed to increase the likelihood that adults take an active mentoring role while serving as a young person's confidant.

Clearly, more in-depth research is needed to further explore the difference between adults and youth within community groups. Although all youth-adult relationships have some positive aspects and are important in the lives of young people due to levels of some social contact, those participants in youth-led collaborations were more positive toward their experiences. Therefore, community-based collaborative efforts and youth service providers may want to incorporate youth-led approaches (e.g., youth managing a 4-H after-school program, chairing a fundraising campaign, or spearheading a canned food drive) within programs that enable youth to put into practice those skills (e.g., decision-making and communication) that are essential in these endeavors. By providing training and incorporating youth-driven approaches, youth may have a more affirmative belief that they are not just consumers of services but full partners contributing to their own development and that of the community. Adults, in turn, have a clearer indication that their support aided in empowering youth with the expertise to affect their community.

Youth-serving organizations and community collaborative efforts need to ensure that youth and adults, particularly in urban areas, form social ties and develop a similar sense of community connectedness that may exist in smaller localities. Larger urban communities often lack the condition in which all neighbors know one another. Bringing people together so that they may become engaged in the community can potentially allow residents to develop a feeling of belonging, an established network base, and trust-worthiness among neighbors, thus generating social capital (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). Youth and adults working together may decrease negative perceptions among groups by allowing people to get to know one another who are usually in separate groups (i.e., in-group and out-group; Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998). Intergenerational closure (Coleman, 1988; Swisher & Whitlock, 2004) is also cultivated and serves to build a higher degree of relationship networks across ages while simultaneously maximizing the potential for community mobilization. However, more studies of youth and adults working together over longer periods of time are necessary to confirm whether partnering efforts ac-

tually have long-term impact on the perceptions of individuals toward one another and their community.

Those youth in rural areas did, in fact, have strong social connections that reflected positive group contact; however, it is unclear whether the youth with no history in 4-H or similar forms of youth development programs would report positive perceptions. Even if a true partnership is not achieved in the process, the assuring effects of social connections between group members (youth and adults) can produce favorable results. The aforementioned relationships included the essential element of youth interacting with caring adults, regardless of the continuum category. Initially forming a positive relationship creates an environment where the attributes of a true partnership can flourish (e.g., trust, communication, mutual learning; see Camino, 2000).

This study describes an alternative framework to traditional concepts of youth-adult interaction by presenting insight on the potential benefits of youth-adult partnering. Intergroup contact theory presents criteria that mirror the benefits of youth-adult interaction while addressing parallel issues that often jeopardize the success of community partnering. The in-group/out-group phenomenon is tantamount to investigating contextual factors that influence the positive and negative dynamics associated with youth-adult partnerships. Scholars and practitioners need to work together to research and provide meaningful opportunities embedded in a community youth development framework, thus inculcating the positive ongoing relationships with adults that youth need in nurturing their leadership potential.

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