A Community-Based Grassroots Organization in the South Bronx as a Catalyst for Youth Organizing and Activism: Analyzing the Dynamics of a Transformative Youth Program

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Abstract

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A transformative youth program is an approach to youth development that is focused on engaging youth in understanding and changing unjust conditions in their lives, thereby transforming themselves and the communities in which they live. The purpose of this research is threefold: (1) to explore the role of a transformative youth program in catalyzing youth organizing and activism; (2) to investigate how a neighborhood's social and spatial conditions shape the civic education and actions of low-income, urban ethnic youth who are engaged in a transformative program; and (3) to understand how the participants such a program perceive themselves as change agents. The research centers around youth (ages 15 to 18) attending a community-based youth program in the South Bronx that engages participants in addressing social and environmental injustices in their neighborhood of Hunts Point. Nationally, Hunts Point lies within one of the poorest congressional districts and locally, it is one of New York City's most marginalized neighborhoods. Popularly referred to as "America's Urban Armageddon," Hunts Point offers a compelling place, with a dynamic social and spatial context, for the study of a transformative youth program. The research found that (1) raising youth participants' critical consciousness, encouraging their contributions to local knowledge production and exchange,

and empowering their sense of civic efficacy are key to yielding transformative outcomes; (2) youth define their neighborhoods in terms of positive and supportive social bonds fostered in the struggle against spatial inequities; and (3) youth distinguish youth activism from activism in general, which they perceive to be what adults do, and conceptualize the former as the collective response by youth and their adult allies to community-based struggles.

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CHAPTER ONE – Introduction

Place-consciousness…encourages us to come together around common, local experiences and organize around our hopes for the future of our communities and cities. While global capitalism doesn't give a damn about the people or the natural environment of any particular place because it can move on to other people and other places, place-based civic activism is concerned about the health and safety of people and places.
- Grace Lee Boggs, *A Question of Place*

The Problem – The Need for New, Place-Based Approaches to Youth Development

The WNYC headline read, "*Hundreds of Thousands of Youth in Metro Area Adrift.*" A recent report by Measure for America examined human development across the United States and estimated 350,000 youth in the New York metropolitan area were neither attending school nor engaged in paid employment. Instead, these youth were labeled as being disconnected, adrift, "at the margins of society and missing out on the knowledge and the skills but also the purpose and identity that school and work offer" (Rodriguez October 22 2012, quoting Sarah Burd-Sharps). According to the report, human development and wellbeing, or conversely disconnection, were based on key developmental building blocks such as good health, access to education, and income opportunities (Lewis & Burd-Sharps 2010). Affluent, stable neighborhoods such as Tudor City in Manhattan had lower rates of disconnected youth (3.4 percent) compared to poor, primarily ethnic neighborhoods like Hunts Point in the Bronx, which had a significantly higher rate (35.6 percent). Homelessness, gang violence, mental illness, unhealthy communities, and family responsibilities were identified as obstacles facing disconnected youth. The report's authors recommended increasing access to vocational and technical education as possible remedies (Rodriguez October 22, 2012). In short, the

publication pinpoints problems as youth-centered primarily and prescribe solutions directed almost exclusively at youth.

My dissertation posits that youth don't need to be "fixed," but rather that they need social institutions that foster revolutionary hope and radical imaginations (Ginwright 2010, p. 78) to redress the acute barriers to development and wellbeing in their everyday lives. I envision a potentially radical shift in approaches to youth development to reorient exclusively youth-centered paradigms to focus instead on community-based developmental frameworks that emphasize transforming the setting of development itself – a neighborhood and its institutions – and those involved in its transformation – youth, adults, and communities. My dissertation explores a community-based youth program in the South Bronx and its engagement of low-income, urban ethnic youth in the struggle to redress social and environmental injustices in their neighborhood of Hunts Point. Specifically, I propose to investigate the programmatic strategies and mechanisms that catalyze youth organizing and youth activism while exploring the youth perspective on the socio-spatial conditions that shape their struggles and on their perceptions of themselves as change-agents.

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Urban youth are marginalized by inequalities borne of social and environmental injustice: racism, cycles of poverty and mass unemployment, pervasive violence and police brutality, under performing and inequitably funded schools, substandard housing and unaffordable options, politically isolated communities, family psychological distress, and deteriorated physical environments. Garbarino (1995) described such socio-structural impediments as "social toxins," poisonous to a person's wellbeing, and youth living in conditions of poverty can be most vulnerable to its cumulative effects (DeCoster, Heimer & Wittrock 2006, Fauth 2004, Ginwright 2010). The number of youth living in poverty has grown steadily in the United States to over 16 million or one in five. Most alarming is that nearly 60 percent of *all* African American/black and of *all* Hispanic/Latino youth live in poverty (Addy & Wright 2012).[1] Growing up amidst social toxins

can alter a young person's "normative calculus" such as the possibility to explore, to be curious, and to be enthusiastic about life's opportunities (Ginwright 2010, Halpern 2005).

Low-income urban ethnic youth are more likely to suffer from symptoms of social toxicity, such as depression; hopelessness, fear, and anger stemming from social isolation (Fauth 2004, Garbarino 1995, Ginwright 2010); lower levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy and higher levels of self-doubt (Nebbit 2009); fewer academic and civic opportunities (Ginwright 2010, Halpern 2005, Serio, Borden & Perkins 2011, Stoneman 2002); exposure to violence (Fauth 2004, Garbarino 1995, Ginwright 2010, Gutman, McLoyd & Tokoyama 2005, Tandon & Solomon 2009); and a higher, disproportionate representation in the juvenile justice system (Gottesman & Wile Swartz 2011).

Youth are marginalized further by the pervasive viewpoint that they are sources of strife for communities and in need of interventions to prevent or to correct their presumed innate delinquent behaviors. The contradictory representations of youth in Western culture are marked by shifts in discourse and practices that locate youth in dualistic paradigms: as fostering discord in our communities and yet as symbols of hope and future aspirations; as the core of a neo-consumer culture and yet as politically incompetent and powerless. While some societal and academic views claim youth in America are increasingly disconnected from community life and civic engagement (Lewis & Burd-Sharps 2010, Putnam 2000), others caution that social, political, and economic forces have transformed youth engagement (Ginwright 2010). Volunteerism and participation in traditional youth clubs have morphed into school walkouts, poetry slams, LGBTQ support groups, and urban farming projects. Additionally, youth engagement and activism have been associated primarily with being white, middle-class, and borne of an activist family (Kennelly 2009). However, low-income, urban ethnic youth continue to demonstrate, although frequently unrecognized and under-acknowledged, a tremendous capacity for community organizing and activism (Ginwright & Cammarota 2007, Ellis-Williams 2007).

Many youth development scholars believe that youth want to grow up in healthy, thriving communities, and they seek the opportunities to create such communities. The setting of their development marginalized by toxic conditions, youth want alternative spaces and outlets to express their frustrations and to explore the potential for change (O'Donoghue & Strobel 2007). Community-based, grassroots organizations, in particular those driven by the principles of social justice and social change, can be the alternative social institutions sought by youth and their communities. These institutions are embedded in young people's everyday lives and thus positioned strategically to support organizing and activism against social toxins and unjust environmental conditions. The social and spatial dimensions of places, including sites of injustice, can compel young people to take transformative action (Chawla 2002). Although such a contexts are frequently conceptualized as an impediment to development, they are equally critical pedagogic spaces, the setting of youth's civic education and their struggle for inclusive democracies (Kemp 2011, Sutton et al., 2006). For social groups, such as ethnic minorities and urban youth, which have been excluded historically from traditional civic arenas and from broader political representation, community-based grassroots organizations can represent places of hope and healing (Sanchez-Jankowski 2002). Conversely, the youth programs they shepherd can unite youth and adults – as adult allies – to work collaboratively in community development work, or when most transformative, to engage them in social change work (Checkoway et al., 2003, Kemp 2011, O'Donoghue & Strobel 2007, Perkins, et al., 2003, Sutton et al., 2006). The program that is the focus of this research has evidenced these qualities and is, thus, referred to as "transformative."

A compelling site for the exploration of a transformative community-based youth program is one of the nation's poorest metropolitan areas, New York City's South Bronx. Nationally, the South Bronx is one of the poorest urban congressional districts, while locally it is one of the city's most marginalized communities, impaired by significant economic, social, and environmental disparities. My research on a community-based youth program in the South

Bronx will focus on ACTION (Activists Coming to Inform Our Neighborhood), an after-school program supported by THE POINT Community Development Corporation (hereafter THE POINT). I begin this chapter with a brief overview on the history of youth activism and organizing in the Bronx. I follow with a summary of the research by identifying gaps in the existing scholarship on community-based frameworks to youth development, reviewing the questions driving the study, and describing the study site and population. I conclude the chapter by stating the importance of the research, identifying the study's delimitations and limitations, and reviewing the dissertation's organization.

Youth Struggles Against Injustice

Youth have a strong and purposeful history in the United States of taking part in social struggles as agents in organized institutions or grassroots efforts. Standing out, were the African American high school and college students who began the political demonstrations in Greensboro, North Carolina on February 1, 1960 that quickly spread to other states. A variety of student-led activities, such as sit-ins, Freedom Rides, and voter registration schools, eventually involved thousands of people of all ethnicities in the South and the North. These activities yielded numerous triumphs and tragedies, changing race relations in the United States forever (Orum 1972). As part of the Chicano Movement, "El Movimiento," which began in the 1960s, Mexican American students organized and participated in "blowouts" or high school walkouts, in California, Texas, and Arizona, seeking educational reform to address inequalities in city schools (Mariscal 2005, Rosales 1996). The political products of youth's critical social analysis, which include music, literature, and art, were borne of the activist practices of the 1960s and 1970s and represent meaningful, living insight into the youth perspective on organizing and activism. Highlighted are the political ideas and values of youth struggling collaboratively for change and inclusive democracies in their everyday environments and beyond.

The South Bronx has an equally rich history of community grassroots organizing and

youth activism. Notoriously labeled as "America's Urban Armageddon" in popular culture, the South Bronx was characterized as a devastated wasteland of abandoned buildings, quartered by expressways and thoroughfares dissecting the heart of the borough (McKee 1995). Residents were active in attempting to humanize devastated neighborhoods by building alternative landscapes and conferring meaning to the environments they appropriated (Aponte-Pares 2000). Residents erected small wood frame structures known as casitas, or little houses, planted gardens to force out car thieves and drug dealers, and built affordable housing and family shelters with the aid of architects and urban planners (McKee 1995, Sciorra & Copper 1990). Yet, their efforts remain absent from popular representations of the South Bronx. Instead, neighborhoods like Hunt Point continue to be portrayed as seedy, clandestine areas teeming with prostitutes, as popularized by the HBO documentary, "*Hookers at the Point*" (HBO 2002) and Chris Arnade's recent photography show, "*New York City's Red Light District*."[2] It is from within this disjointed, conflictual landscape of devastation and struggle that the cultural, political products of hip hop and rap music originated. The artistic genres can be conceptualized as the conscious practices of youth speaking out against the injustices and re-defining their communities (Breitbart 1998).

A compelling relationship has existed between the South Bronx as a setting exemplifying injustice and youth activism – a legacy that my study population existed within. Cobb (2007) compared the evolution of hip-hop in the South Bronx to anti-colonial movements initiated by colony immigrants in Paris and London during the 1950s. He argued that a similar "artistic communion" was created between Latino, West Indian, and African American youth in the South Bronx. Thus, early hip hop was a lyrical, political product – the provocative interpretation of social critiques by low-income urban ethnic youth. "Hip hop is as local as a zip code…its heart speaks of youth's perspective on environmental and social injustices at the intimately local level (Cobb 2007, p. 25). "Ghetto Bastard," "In the Ghetto," "Ghetto Prisoner," "Ghetto Afterlife," "Every Ghetto, Every City," and the "World is a Ghetto" are a few early titles that highlight the

structural racism facing youth in the South Bronx and emphasize their struggles for freedom and mobility.

If organizing and activism are understood in terms of “collective responses to marginalization” (Ginwright et al., 2005, p. 29), then the evolution of hip hop in the South Bronx is a history of youth-led struggle for social change. It beckons further exploration of youth organizing and activism as a place-based struggle against unjust conditions.

A Promising Context for Studying Transformative Approaches to Youth Development

Scholars have made significant efforts to document the social, economic, cultural, and political dimensions of young people’s shifting participation in the diverse approaches to their development. However, less explored are the programmatic or organizational mechanisms and strategies supporting transformative programs and catalyzing youth organizing and activism outcomes (Kemp 2011). Additionally, the socio-spatial conditions that motivate organizing and activism amongst low-income, urban ethnic youth are under theorized (Ginwright & Cammarota 2007, Ginwright, Cammarota & Noguera 2005), and the youth perspective on community-based struggles is undervalued (Hart 1997).

Given these gaps in scholarship, I intend to explore a community-based social justice youth program to better understand how transformative goals are attained, which socio-spatial conditions compel youth to take action, and how youth perceive themselves, in relation to these acts, as change agents in their communities.

Youth are particularly receptive to place-based strategies (Ginwright & Cammarota 2007, Jennings et al., 2006) such as community youth development approaches, which can increase young people’s ability to build organizational capacities (Checkoway & Gutiérrez 2006) and to contribute critically to social justice efforts (Checkoway & Gutiérrez 2006, Checkoway &

Richards-Schuster 2003, Ginwright & Cammarota 2007). When most transformative, programs can support youth to identify community-based issues, including those most salient to youth, to reflect critically on the root causes of these conditions, to identify collectively solutions to these problems, and to build their civic/organizational skills and capacities through action taking (Hosang 2003a, Hosang 2003b, Listen, Inc. 2003, MacNeil & McClean 2006, Warren et al., 2008, Yee 2008). Such programs can be conceived as "intermediary spaces" where youth and their adult allies can come together to form meaningful and collaborative relationships that are distinct from those cultivated in other, more traditional youth/adult spaces of interaction like at home with parents or at school with teachers (Walker 2011).

Community-based youth development approaches borrow strategies and organizational processes from community-organizing work (Hosang 2003b, Listen, Inc. 2003, Warren et al., 2008), thereby operationalizing practical, collaborative endeavors, and intentional learning opportunities rooted in a particular lived domain and aimed at redressing local disparities. In my dissertation, I refer to the mechanism and strategies employed by one transformative youth program as critical civic praxis, "a process that develops critical consciousness and builds capacity for young people to respond to and change oppressive conditions in their environments…[and that promotes] civic engagement among youth and elevates their capacities for social justice" (Ginwright & Cammarota 2007, p. 699).

I frame the analysis of the ACTION program using a critical civic praxis framework and identify three key dimensions: (1) the production and exchange of local knowledge, including youth-led solutions, (2) the development of critical awareness or consciousness about local problems, and (3) the fostering of youth agency and of a youth activist identity. I posit that the intergenerational research collaborations that are principal to a critical civic praxis can help youth develop the skills and the capacities to undertake critical social change.

In support of my interests, the primary questions guiding my dissertation research are:

1. What is the role of a critical civic praxis framework in supporting change in youth? In particular, how does a transformative program like ACTION utilize critical consciousness, the production and exchange of local knowledge, and action-taking by youth?

2. What socio-spatial conditions experienced by ACTION participants shape their organizing and activism within the organization and their community?

3. Within the context of living with and seeking to change unjust social and environmental conditions intentionally, how do youth envision and understand their activism? Specifically, what perspective do ACTION participants have of themselves as agents for social change within the neighborhood?

In order to explore these questions, I developed a research design grounded in participatory and interdisciplinary methods intent on fostering, whenever possible, an open-ended and shared process better able to respond to the unanticipated twists and turns of conducting live research with youth. The design included three phases of research – Initiation, Collaborative Research, and Conclusion – thereby permitting me to initiate on-going research activities, such as participant observation work, while preparing for phase-specific or one-time research inquiries, such as a focus group. Five instruments, including an observation protocol, interview and focus group guides, and a free-write journaling tool supported my research activities. Data were collected from January 2010 to October 2010, during regular ACTION program activities throughout the school year and during the summer months.

Description of the Study Program and Population

My research builds on the findings reported in *Urban Youth Programs in America: A Study of Youth, Community, and Social Justice Conducted for the Ford Foundation* (Sutton et

al., 2006), which documented the contributions of low-income and ethnic minority youth to their communities.[3] Of the 88 youth community-based, social justice programs that participated in the study, 8 were located in New York City, the largest metro area in the United States. ACTION was selected based on the program's location in the South Bronx and because of it rated high as a transformative program when considering it engagement of youth as change agents in their community; please refer to Chapter Four for details regarding the selection of the site.

Hunts Point in the South Bronx exemplifies a neighborhood of social and environmental injustice and thus makes a compelling context for the analysis of the strategies and organizational mechanisms of a transformative community-based youth program. According to the 2010 Census, residents of the Bronx has one of the lowest median incomes in the nation ($34,264) and Hunts Point has one of the lowest median incomes in the city ($20,087). Residents struggle to co-exist alongside the industrial and manufacturing facilities, such as the world's largest food distribution center, 15 open-air waste transfer stations, 2 sludge sewage treatment facilities, several massive transportation corridors, and two correctional facilities.

Comprising the study population are youth attending the ACTION program, the program's two coordinators, and other non-staff adults who provide technical assistance. THE POINT was started in 1993 by a small group of community organizers and activists who sought to create a safe, alternative space in which neighbors could gather safely, share knowledge, and collaborate on creating solutions to pressing community problems. ACTION engages youth in collaborating with adult allies to initiate community-based projects, to carry-out campaigns, and to lead information-sharing sessions with members of the community, all in the hope of redressing social and environmental justice issues. During the period of the study, youth participants carried out a number of campaigns and two participatory action projects: an urban farming initiative and a community food assessment led by a researcher from Hunter College of the City University of New York (CUNY). The campaigns and action projects are introduced in Chapter Four and described in greater detail in Appendix Two.

Importance of Dissertation Research

I aim to contribute to scholarly discourse and practitioner efforts by exploring what compels youth, especially those who are not traditionally associated with civic engagement and activism, to struggle against unjust conditions in the context of their daily lives. I intend to showcase the importance of a community-based youth program, especially one driven by social justice principles, in advancing developmental approaches by emphasizing the transformation of place, as the context of development, and of youth themselves.

The practical lessons gleaned and the knowledge learned could help social institutions to articulate more effectively their contributions to individual- and community-level change by sharpening their program theories. Growing an organization's capacity to tell its story of change accurately and effectively can strengthen the fundraising and communication efforts to continue supporting transformative programs (Sutton et al. 2006). Program designers could benefit from knowing more about the strategies and programmatic mechanisms that cultivate dimensions critical to bringing about change such as local knowledge production, critical awareness, and civic agency.

I want to contribute valuable insight into the youth perspective on the socio-spatial conditions that motivate collective struggle and support civic education, inclusive democracies, and thriving communities. It is equally important to share the insight of those working directly with youth activists as program staff and members of the community may feel that their knowledge and experiences of struggle alongside youth is not as critical or pertinent as professional knowledge.

Delimitations

This research consists of an in-depth case study of a single community-based youth program over the course of nine months and included data collection activities such weekly participant observation work and active participation in ACTION, interviews with youth and

adults affiliated with the program, and focus groups. Although the research takes a thorough look at a transformative youth program, I have identified four delimitations of my research. First, my research may not be generalizable to other community-based youth program or youth participant populations for several reasons. For one, ACTION and THE POINT were identified as forward-looking by Sutton et al. (2006) and therefore are likely not representative of the average, after-school program offered by community-based organizations. Then to, the research reflects the experiences of people associated with a single youth program offered by one community-based organization in the South Bronx. It was not feasible to include additional programs in the research or to follow program participants for more than one year. The inclusion of multiple programs would have called for the evaluation of program theories and an assessment of program implementation, which was not the intended nature of the research. Thus, the dissertation does not identify or make recommendations regarding any specific curriculum for engaging youth in community-based activism. Instead, the research highlights elements of shared decision-making and direct community action-taking that were successful in engaging ACTION participants and speaks directly to the possibility of using similar strategies to engage other marginalized populations in community-based justice work.

Second, my participant observation work does not correspond to an ethnography. The research does not assume to be an in-depth journey into the lives and experiences of the program's youth participants. Although ethnographic methods influenced the research, I observed participants of the program and individuals affiliated with THE POINT over the course of a single cycle of programming. I do not purport to have carried out an in-depth, comprehensive observation of the daily experiences of the ACTION participants, inside and beyond the program, over the course of several years. Thirdly, I did not review in-depth the theoretical underpinnings of activism and social struggle. Although similar discussions have influenced the theoretical framework supporting the research and the selection of the topic, and

are referenced throughout the body of this work, these underpinnings remain beyond the scope of the research.

And finally, I did not intend to investigate youth development or community development outcomes beyond identifying and observing ACTION participants' leadership of participatory action projects in Hunts Point. An in-depth analysis of youth development and community-level outcomes would have called for a more comprehensive conceptualization of critical civic praxis' impacts on youth and the community, pre- and post-testing of the youth, and the inclusion of a broader range of community stakeholders in the research, such as the parents or guardians, and teachers of ACTION participants, Hunts Point residents, and local leaders. The inclusion of youth development and community development outcomes in my study was beyond the scope of the research, which focused on the mechanisms and strategies employed by one transformative youth program.

However specific the geographic, social, and economic delimitations of the dissertation may appear, the resulting research may serve to enhance the scholarship on the organizational mechanisms and strategies supporting transformative programming and outcomes.

Limitations

Limitations of my research are twofold. First, participation in my dissertation research was entirely voluntary, opening the study to sampling bias. However, I did not compensate the research population for their participation, thereby minimizing the potential for coercion or the appearance of coercion. Second, I intended greater youth involvement in shaping my major findings, but, due to time constraints and the schedules of the participants, I was not able to achieve the collaborative review that I had envisioned.

Organization of the Dissertation

My dissertation is organized into seven chapters. This chapter has outlined the research

problem and the dissertation questions guiding the exploration of a transformative community-based youth program in the South Bronx. I devote Chapter Two is devoted to the formulation of my theoretical framework on critical civic praxis, the conceptual model for my research on a transformative approach to youth development in the context of a community-based social justice youth program. I begin with a review of the fluid conceptualization of youth in order to establish a baseline for youth programs relative to dominant theories on youth development. I then situate community-based youth programs within this baseline and ground my analysis of critical civic praxis as supportive of youth organizing and youth activism.

Chapter Three introduces the site of my dissertation research, the Hunts Point neighborhood as exemplifying conditions of social and environmental injustice. The chapter consists of a historical overview of the neighborhood and the South Bronx in order to relate patterns of development to contemporary problems. I continue with a description of the study site's existing conditions and review how residents' grassroots organizing emerged as an antidote to injustices. I conclude the chapter with a brief introduction of THE POINT, a community-based grassroots organization leading efforts to revitalize Hunts Point.

In Chapter Four I review the methods I used to conduct the research. I begin with a summary of methodology used to support the study of youth organizing and activism. I proceed with a description of the research population and a profile of the ACTION program. I conclude the chapter with a review of the instruments and procedures used to collect and analyze data.

My findings are divided into two chapters – Chapters Five and Six. The purpose of Chapter Five is to review the youth perspective on the social and spatial dynamics of Hunts Point and to gain deeper insight into how these youth perceived their identities as change agents within the landscape. I draw on my interviews with youth participants to piece together a conceptual map of Hunts Point in order to understand what motivates them to organize and take action against social and environmental injustices.

The goal of Chapter Six is to present my findings on the ACTION program's engagement of youth through a critical civic praxis framework. I begin with a summary of the program's overall culture in order to ground the analysis of critical civic praxis' three core dimensions: critical consciousness raising, the production and exchange of local knowledge, and the promotion of youth civic efficacy and agency.

I conclude the dissertation with Chapter Seven in which I review all major findings relative to the research questions and put forth a revised conceptual model for critical civic praxis. Bibliographical matters, appendices and endnotes follow to complete the dissertation.

Chapter One Endnotes

[1] Additionally, 40 percent of youth between the ages of 12 and 17 live in low–income families. Comparatively, the percentage of adults living in poverty is lower; 33 percent of adults ages 18 to 64 and 34 percent of adults ages 65 and over. Published US Census federal poverty line (FPL) levels for 2011 are: $22,350 for a family of four, $18,530 for a family of three, and $14,710 for a family of two. Poor is defined as a household income less than 100 percent of the poverty threshold and low-income as being less than 200 percent of the poverty threshold. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), families need an income two times the federal poverty level.

[2] The HBO documentary was first aired in 2002. Residents complained for years that the documentary negatively and wrongly depicted the Hunts Point neighborhood as a center for prostitution. Residents noted the documentaries use of old, out-of-date images to tell the story of prostitution in neighborhood, which is also home to one of the world's largest food distribution centers. In early 2010, HBO finally agreed to stop showing the highly contested HBO documentary.

Chris Arnade's exhibit, New York City's Red Light District. Photographs published in Daily News on December 2012. Please refer to http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2252602/Hunts-Point-Bronx-Chris-Arnade-photographs-New-York-Citys-Red-Light-District.html?ICO=most_read_module; last retrieved March 28, 2013.

[3] Urban Youth Programs in America: A Study of Youth, Community, and Social Justice Conducted for the Ford Foundation (Sutton et al. 2006), is a 2.5-year investigation of justice-oriented, community based youth programs. The study revealed the important role of transformative youth programs – programs that involve youth in understanding and redressing unjust conditions – to personal and local development opportunities, emphasizing the significance of having youth engaged in local decision-making.

CHAPTER TWO – Theoretical Framework

> Positive youth development is not something adults do to young people, but rather something that young people do for themselves with a lot of help from parents and others. They are agents of their own development. To foster development, then, it follows that settings need to be youth centered, providing youth – both individually and in groups – the opportunity to be efficacious and to make a difference in their social worlds.
> - Francisco A. Villarruel, Daniel F. Perkins, Lynne M. Borden, and Joanne G. Keith, quoting the National Research Council in *Community Youth Development: Programs, Policies, and Practices*

> At the most general level…a critical pedagogy must be a pedagogy of place, that is, it must address the specificities of the experiences, problems, language, and histories that communities rely upon to construct a narrative of collective identities and possible transformation.
> - David Gruenewald quoting Peter McLaren and Henry Giroux, *The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place*

Vulnerable youth – poor urban and rural youth, ethnic minority, immigrant or undocumented youth, LGBTQ youth, and youth with mental illnesses – represent an increasingly diverse social group that is among the most marginalized in the United States. Racism, structural poverty, under-performing and inequitably funded schools, substandard housing, and deteriorated built environments are but some of the social and environmental injustices youth experience daily, in particular low-income, urban ethnic youth. All youth desire to live in thriving, peaceful communities. They seek opportunities to create the places in which they want to grow up and to be engaged in issues that matter most to them. Community-based, grassroots organizations are strategically positioned to recognize and explore the structural constraints and contextual realities young people face daily. By providing an alternative space in which youth can reflect on, critique, and act against conditions that compromise their development and the wellbeing of their communities, community-based youth programs can catalyze youth organizing and youth activism. The goal of my dissertation is to explore how one community-based youth program employs a transformative approach to youth and community development to promote youth

organizing and activism around social and environmental justice issues in the South Bronx. I will also investigate the youth perspective on the social and spatial conditions that shape their struggles and on their perceptions as change agents.

Community-based youth programs that emphasize community- and individual-level change are characterized by the adoption a transformative framework. Specifically, transformative programs are those that engage youth in "understanding and redressing the unjust conditions that hinder [their] development" (Sutton et al. 2006, pg. viii). Such community-based youth programs practice strategies and organizational processes that mimic those commonly found in community organizing work (Hosang 2003b, Listen, Inc. 2003, Warren et al. 2008). They operationalize practical, collaborative approaches using intentional, hands-on learning and skill-building opportunities that are rooted in the community's social and spatial dynamics. In my dissertation, I refer to the strategies and mechanisms used by transformative programs as critical civic praxis, "a process that develops critical consciousness and builds capacity for young people to respond to and change oppressive conditions in their environments…[and promotes] civic engagement among youth and elevates their capacities for social justice activism" (Ginwright & Cammarota 2007, p. 699). I theorize that critical civic praxis catalyzes youth organizing and activism by promoting the production and exchange of local knowledge, the development of critical consciousness, and the cultivation of youth civic agency. Thus, I frame my analysis of transformative community-based youth programs in terms of a critical civic praxis.

In support of my theoretical framework, I draw mainly on the scholarship of critical pedagogy, grounded in critical theory, and on developmental psychology and sociology, informed by environmental and educational discourse. I begin this chapter with a review of the changing historical conceptualization of youth, framing these as the assumptions underpinning the diverse approaches to youth development. I continue by establishing an overall baseline for youth programs in the United States relative to these dominant theories in the order to place

programs that engage a transformative framework in context. I then explore a model of community-based youth programming as exercising a collective, place-based justice/social change ethos that goes beyond normative approaches to youth development. I posit that critical civic praxis is this community-based, transformative framework. I argue that an intentional critical pedagogy promoting youth as social actors at the forefront of struggles for thriving communities and an inclusive democracy is achieved by (1) producing and exchanging local knowledge, including youth-led solutions, (2) developing a critical awareness or consciousness that marginalizing community conditions are systematic forms of oppression that are rooted in broader socio-structural forces, and (3) cultivating youth's civic agency to yield a stronger sense of being active change agents. I conclude the chapter by reinforcing the need for greater place-based inquiries in social justice youth development paradigms, which I continue to emphasize in Chapter Three by characterizing Hunts Point in the South Bronx as a neighborhood tackling injustice.

Defining Youth – Evolving Views on Children, Adolescents, and Teenagers

Society holds culturally embedded notions of youth (Archard 1993). Popular and scholarly perceptions range from youth as incomplete beings with the limited capacity to influence their surrounding environments to youth as change agents foremost in the struggles for material and structural change in their communities and beyond. How youth are conceptualized is neither established nor particular. Concepts transect historical, socio-cultural, political, economic, and disciplinary boundaries. What follows is a general history of the evolving views on youth in Western societies. It begins with evolving notions of "the child; as Aries (1962) argued, the concept of adolescence, the developmental stage between "the innocence of childhood and the realities of adulthood," did not emerge until the late eighteenth century (Valentine, Skelton &

Chambers 1998, p. 4). Specifically, I start with an Aristotelian construction of childhood for its grounding of personhood in concepts of citizenship and the city. Alas, children and youth continue to be characterized by society as apolitical beings and inept citizens, incapable of contributing to inclusive democracies or placemaking.

Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC) wrote that the science of politics is an investigation of actions undertaken by one who aims to achieve good for humankind and strives for happiness, which is the highest state of being (Chambliss 1982). This discourse asserts that a person remains incomplete until happiness is attainted, which one pursues by achieving noble acts. In turn, these acts are recognized as the enactment of a political being who succeeds in creating, reproducing, and representing the polis – the political arena; the body of citizens; the city. Aristotle did not believe children could be happy, "for they are not old enough to be capable of noble acts" (Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics 1.7.1098a18-19 as quoted by Chambliss 1982), and "[if] children are spoken of as happy, it is in compliment to their promise for the future" (Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics 1.9.1100a2-3 as quoted by Chambliss 1982). Aristotle argued that a child could display the potential to *become* a good citizen, but lacked the capacity to be political and to engage the polis. This view of children from Antiquities suggests they were conceptualized as different from adults because of a perceived limited capacity to uphold citizenship. The view that children were by nature apolitical and incomplete was Aristotle's long-standing pre-Christian contribution to the evolving scholarship on youth.

A significant and highly disputed contribution to historical views of children was made by French historian Philippe Aries, who carried out an "archeology of childhood images" (James et al. 1998, p. 4) for his analysis of family practices in European history. Aries (1962) remarked on the absence of children from medieval representations of society, whereby beyond infancy, children were depicted as miniature adults. He reasoned that medieval society did not regard children as conceptually different from adults (Valentine, Skelton & Chambers 1998).

> *In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist; this is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken, or despised. The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children: it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult* (Aries 1962, p.128).

Scholars have challenged Aries' thesis for being overly presentist. Aries implies the existence of a universally accepted ideal of childhood by making contemporary, value-based interpretations of historical artifacts and practices (Archard 1993, James et al. 1998).

By the late fifteenth century, children were no longer portrayed in icons as miniature adults. Instead, they were perceived as detached from the adult world on the grounds of their inherent moral weaknesses. During this period, characterized by growing public moralization, reformers shared their concerns regarding the spoiling or coddling of children. They reasoned that affection untempered by morality and moderation led to poor manners and socially inappropriate behaviors. Moralists sought to validate education, in particular church-guided instruction, as a means to safeguard innocence and reform moral weakness (Aries 1962). However, such a childhood was limited to families with the means and resources to school their children. Fifteenth century conceptualizations continued to distinguish children from adults, but prefaced the need for strict moral education as both prevention against undesirable social norms and as preparation for the responsibilities of adulthood (James & Prout 1997, Valentine et al. 1998).

The Puritan values of strict discipline, centralized authority, and public moralization reinforced earlier valuations on the role of education as a means of guiding children's moral development. Children in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were presumed to be the product of original sin and therefore innately evil and capable of performing evil deeds such as being disobedient and keeping bad company. Puritan approaches to development were not only preventive, but also highly punitive. In disciplining those "harbourers of potentially dark forces" who "veer from the 'straight and narrow' path that civilization has bequeath them" (Kellett et al.

2004, p. 10), Puritans criminalized childhood. The Court of Massachusetts Bay drafted a law in 1649 that was the first to label children as criminals and to codify punishment as treatment for delinquency.

> *If a man have a stubborn or rebellious son, of sufficient years and understanding (viz) sixteen years of age, which will not obey the voice of his Father, or the voice of his Mother, and that when they have chastened him will not harken unto them: then shall his Father and Mother being his natural parents, lay hold on him, and bring him to the Magistrates assembled in Court and testify unto them, that their son is stubborn and rebellious and will not obey their voice and chastisement, but lives in sundry notorious crimes, such a son shall be put to death*[4] (Sutton 1993, p. 10, quoting Deuteronomy 21:20-21 in the fifth book of the Hebrew Bible).

In the late seventeenth century, John Locke (1632-1704) challenged Puritan beliefs about children arguing that they were incapable of being born evil as they were blank slates (Archard 1993), a "no-thing" (James et al. 1998) and innately anything (Kellett et al. 2004). Locke viewed children as products of their environment and believed they accumulated knowledge by means of experiences in these environments. Therefore, children could not be born with evil intentions as that knowledge was a product acquired through experience with one's own environment. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) views on childhood were considered progressive compared to Locke's. Rousseau was the first to confer subjecthood on children, meaning children were valued for being children; "[nature] wants children to be children, and not merely as adults in the making" (Rousseau as quoted by Henrick 1997, p. 36). He emphasized children's developmental needs and insisted that society was responsible for contaminating their natural virtues; "God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil" (Jean-Jacques Rousseau *Emile, or on Education* 1762 as quoted by James et al. 1998, p. 13). Rousseau advocated that greater attention be focused on children's physiological and psychological needs, believing education should promote their healthy development (Archard 1993, James & Prout 1997, Kellett et al. 2004). Although Rousseau's contributions were considered radical, the nuances of his thesis on the nature of children's

development would eventually be lost to future reformers and scholars who perceived physiological and psychological needs as indicative of natural incapacities (Hendrick 1997).

Education in the United States until the mid-1850's consisted of fee-based schools and private tutoring services run predominantly by faith-based organizations. By the nineteenth century, the "innocence of childhood" and children's particular needs were well-entrenched intellectual themes amongst the middle- and upper-class families who possessed the resources to invest in their offspring's childhood (Valentine et al. 1998). In contrast, the children of poor, working class families were too valuable to the thriving industrial complex to be innocent. Discrete social and economic outcomes from the Industrial Revolution worked to marginalize poor, working-class children who were threatened by the lack of broader protections such child anti-labor laws and access to free education. These children were regarded as important public economic commodities (Kellett et al. 2004). Their small, nimble hands were the most precise and affordable tools to repair mechanized spindles and looms (Wyness, Harrison & Buchanan 2004). Working children contributed to their family's household economy while industries profited from their cheap labor costs.

School would eventually become compulsory for all children by the late nineteenth century. The policy was in part the result of increasing pressure from social reformers who previously founded a system that identified, rehabilitated, and punished juvenile delinquency. Their rediscovery of poverty and its perceived negative impacts on social norms and values resulted in compulsory schooling and the creation of a juvenile justice system that were ideologically connected by preventative philosophies. Education was viewed as preventing, "the 'dangerous classes' from continually reproducing their malevolent characteristics" (Hendrick 1997, p. 45). Middle-class and working-class families now had greater opportunities to raise their children for an extended period of time. This period of preparation, known as adolescence, was said to be an investment for a better future. Thus adolescence was conceived as a new stage of maturation valued as an apprenticeship for adulthood. The juvenile justice system grew

out of increasing middle-class concerns regarding political threats to their newly established social and economic values. Class politics gave rise to anxieties concerning poverty leading to the radical degeneration of social norms (Hendrick 1997). Adolescents in general, and, in particular those from working-class or low-income families, were labeled as wayward and at risk of deviant and criminal behavior. They were perceived as victims of their own depraved ecological circumstances while simultaneously being viewed as victimizing moralized social norms. And thus began the vilification of urban youth, a theme that continues to be pervasive. The difference between adolescents and teenagers may no longer be as relevant in popular discourse as it was in an earlier era, but there was a time when the two were recognized as distinct, contrasting labels. The 1950s were a time of renewed prosperity, during which the wayward adolescent was juxtaposed with the fun-loving, care-free teenager (Valentine, et al. 1998 citing Hebdige 1988).

Contemporary scholarship on youth varies widely. From the perspective of developmental psychology, youth are seen as lacking the capacity to adequately process the world around them. Social constructionists emphasize the role young people play in constructing their own social lives (Kellett et al. 2004), while scholars influenced by works on critical theory and social justice extend the social constructionist view to conceive youth as situated change agents able to exercise democratic rights.

Developmental psychology emphasizes distinct stages of maturation, from childhood to adolescence to adulthood. Jean Piaget (1896-1980) was a significant contributor to developmental psychology. He proposed that individuals followed four distinct stages of development along a continuum, progressing from one stage to the next through organized systems of action and thoughts, called schemas. In turn, knowledge was developed through processes of *assimilation* or *accommodation* (James et al. 1998, Kellett et al. 2004).[5] With each level of maturation, capacities, skills, and knowledge were developed further (Wyness et al. 2004).[6] Piaget's work has been criticized for being decontextualized and not grounded in the

ecology where development is occurring (Brofenbrenner 1979); for locating cognitive competence within a Westernized philosophical tradition (Archard 1993); for underestimating the cognitive ability of children; for being materially reductive (James et al. 1998); and for ignoring children's interests (Hart 1979).

Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) was a Marxist psychologist whose work focused on the participatory and relational nature of human development. Development was seen as the interplay between what children could do unassisted and what they could achieve in collaboration with others (Sabo-Flores 2008). Vygotsky referred to relational development as *zones of proximal development* (ZPD), which emphasizes a duality to development such that a child is being and doing at an individual level and at a social, relational level. Thus, development happens by means of relationships with others.

> *Every function in the child's development appears twice: first on the social level and later on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to all voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher mental functions originate as actual relations between people. (Lev Vygotsky as quoted by K. Sabo-Flores 2008, p. 21-22).*

Children's engagement in play and role play is significant to Vygostly's ZPD discourse. When children engage in play, especially free or self-initiated play, they try-on fantasized or symbolic versions of selves. These representations reflect how children perceive themselves, how they envision their possible future identities, and how they believe others perceive them. The performance of play reproduces the context of development itself - the social, political, and economic world children inhabit. Thus, play is also seen as transformative in that it promotes cognitive, social, and physical development (Katz 2004, Prout & James 1997, Sabo-Flores 2008, Schapiro 1999). It has come to be valued as a "strategy for working through the predicament of childhood" (Schapiro 1999, p. 732) and as an active imitation of patterns of work.

The theory that childhood is a socially constructed phenomenon challenges developmental concepts that posit fixed stages of cognitive, physiological, and psychological development (James & Prout 1997). This represents a significant shift away from characterizations of childhood as a preset, universal experience in which children are passive recipients of structural forces. Instead, children are actively negotiating relationships in order to create their own social lives. The conception of youth as social actors engaged in "critical cultural [practices]" and "socially transgressive actions" incorporates as fundamental political socialization or the enactment of citizen rights (Bucholtz 2002). Young people's exclusion from political practices is accepted and reinforced on the basis of their perceived intellectual incompetence and apolitical nature (Wyness et al 2004).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is one of the most significant contributions to the conceptualization of youth. Drafted in 1989, it is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world; 192 countries have adopted the CRC with the notable exception of the United States and Somalia. The treaty was developed in response to growing concerns that children around the world were not recognized as fully human and therefore, as a social group, lacked political and social protection (Chawla 2002, Cook & Hess 2007, Cunningham, Jones & Dillon 2003, Fraser et al. 2004, Hart 1997, James, Kenks & Prout 1998, Mathews & Limb 1999). The CRC defined and formalized children rights in terms of freedom of expression, prerogative to participate, protection from harm, access to education, and opportunities to prepare for individual life. The CRC clearly identifies children as citizens, and stresses potential and future expectations. Although it is essential in codifying the rights of children as a group with special needs, the CRC could also be viewed as universalizing childhood and proper parenting according to Western ideals that could exclude the lived experiences of many children and their families around the world. In addition, the CRC emphasizes a vulnerability complex, stressing children's dependence on the adult world and adult-defined parameters of children's lives.

Youth is an ambiguous, socially constructed concept. Throughout Western societies, youth have been characterized varyingly – as undistinguishable from adults and as distinct from adults based on special needs; as innately evil with the capacity for disobedience and unruliness and as innocent, naturally virtuous beings; as incomplete and incompetent beneficiaries of preventive services and as civic change agents transforming themselves and the world around them. As this historical overview has highlighted, views proselytize children as innocent and youth, especially low-income, urban ethnic youth as “in danger and dangerous” (Oswell 1998, p. 38). Over time, deficiencies have been foremost in traditional concepts, which overlook the differential experiences of race, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status as marginalizing youth (Holloway & Valentine 2000, Sherrod 2006, Sutton & Kemp 2002). In contrast, contemporary views emphasize the multiplicity of the socially constructed, situated nature of youth and how sociocultural, political, and economic forces shape youth.

Approaches to Youth Development – Establishing a Baseline for Urban Youth Programs

Since the criminalization of the "stubborn child" by the Court of Massachusetts Bay in 1649, government and non-government agencies have devised programs and policies to support young people and their families.[7] Historically, conventional approaches to youth development were intended to redress and prevent problem behaviors and deficiencies. Such approaches stereotyped youth as sources of strife in communities by branding them as “at risk” or the victims of wayward circumstances and thereby the needy recipients of remedial services (Ginwright & Cammarota 2002, Jennings et al. 2006, Sutton et al. 2006). In contrast, contemporary approaches to development frame youth in terms of assets and the promotion of positive youth development. Youth are seen as capable, resourceful agents with future aspirations and a positive sense of self who engage in developmentally beneficial activities such

as education, work, and extra curricular activities. Some approaches go beyond the theme of positive development to focus on community-based frameworks that position youth as partners in community organizing and social justice work.

Developmental theories and the fluid notion of youth are the assumptions that underpin youth programs. In this section, I review a range of approaches that are classified according to dominant views pertaining to deficit and assets-based models of development. By establishing a baseline for youth programs, I can position more precisely the critical civic praxis framework and the ACTION program that are at the heart of the research. Figure 1 below is not intended to be a detailed representation of youth programs in the United States, but rather to express a conceptual spectrum of approaches to youth development *overall*. The approaches encompass a broad range of program models, some of which are not easily categorized. From the deficit side of the spectrum, *punitive programs* assess youth as delinquents and seek to rehabilitate or punish youth for their crimes. *Prevention programs* identify youth as being at-risk of becoming delinquents if they persist in engaging in problem behaviors. Interventions focus exclusively on making young people problem-free. In contrast, assets-based and community-based approaches promote youth development and community engagement. *Positive youth development programs* support young people's healthy development by creating opportunities for youth to learn in both formal and informal settings, to develop a positive sense of self, and to build twenty-first century skills. *Community-based programs*, a relatively new area of study, go beyond promoting youth development in adult-led programs and emphasize engaging youth in community development work and empowering them as change agents who intentionally transform the underlying causes of injustices in their communities.

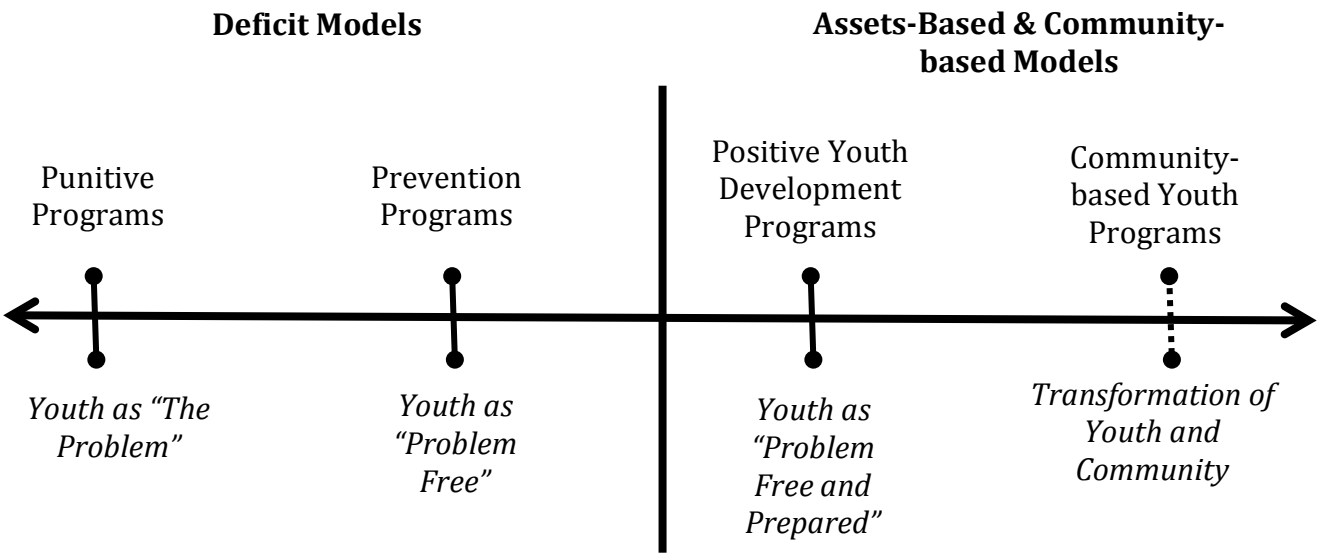

Figure 1: Conceptual Spectrum of Youth Programs

The literature defines youth programs in general as initiatives designed to involve youth (persons under the age of 18) and young adults (persons ages 18 to 25) in structured or unstructured activities, with punitive, preventive, and promotion programs yielding diverse youth development outcomes. Government agencies, schools, religious organizations, national and local non-profits, private organizations, and small community-based organizations are all providers of diverse youth programming models. Program activities can range from academic enhancement, STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) and digital media, arts and culture, sports and recreation, religion and spirituality, work services, and community engagement. What follows is a brief review of the range of youth programs, in general, as illustrated in Figure 1 above.

Deficit Models – Punitive and Prevention-based Youth Programs

The Child Savers Movement of the late nineteenth century laid the groundwork for labeling and administering society's troublesome youth, codifying a special judiciary and correctional system in the process. What resulted were the conceptualization of delinquency

and the establishment of the juvenile justice system (Platt 1969). Punitive and prevention programs today can trace their origins to efforts engineered by these early reformers. Foremost in deficit-based models are concepts of youth as incomplete beings, as beneficiaries of corrective services, and as lacking the ability to make decisions or influence the world around them.

Early punitive programs targeted the children of mostly immigrant working-class families in order to protect them from the developmentally deleterious conditions that did not correspond with established Christian, middle-class norms and values (Kellett, Robinson & Burr 2004). Efforts were meant to distinguish the malleable young offender possessing distinct needs and the hope for rehabilitation from the hardened adult criminal. The Child Savers were self-declared humanists and altruists who sought to salvage the innocence of childhood and to prevent moral corruption (Kellett et al. 2004, Platt 1969). But scholars have argued the movement's underlying goal was ultimately one of social control, in particular the regulation of low-income and immigrant families (Platt 1969).

Since the establishment of the first juvenile court in Chicago in 1899, punitive programs for young people have struggled to balance programming strategies with intended outcomes related to protection and rehabilitation with the punishment and incarceration of youth (Brown, DeJesus, Maxwell & Schiraldi 2003). As each state was permitted to establish its own specialized court, uniform codes and overarching regulations were lacking. What resulted were discrete punishments and at times, excessive sentencing practices (Sutton 1993). Racial and economic disparities were, and are, prevalent in the court's assessments and punishment of youth as criminals (Bridges & Steen 1998). Ethnic and low-income youth remain more likely than their white peers to be assessed as dangerous and likely to reoffend because of perceived negative attitudes and personality traits (Bridges & Steen 1998, Leiber & Mack 2003, Sampson & Laub 1993). According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (2011) youth of color, African American youth in particular, have historically been arrested, detained, and incarcerate

disproportionately and are more likely to receive harsher sentences, such as placement in a residential facility or adult prisons, compared to their white peers. After the Supreme Court's landmark case *In re Gault* (1967), greater constitutional protections were granted to ensure that rights and procedures similar to those of adult courts were in place: a right to counsel, due process, and to cross examination (Brown et al. 2003, Sutton 1993).

As urban communities across the United States suffered crippling social and economic crises in the 1970s, the adult prison population rose steadily as did the number of youth entering the juvenile justice system. Alarmingly, a growing number of these youth were transferred to adult courts, a strategy promoted heavily as a way to tackle juvenile delinquency (Bortner & Williams 1997, Brown et al. 2003). The 1990s "get tough" policies supporting the harsh punishment and treatment of juvenile delinquents replaced early punitive program ideologies of rehabilitation and prevention. Governments and "public figures gained political capital by portraying delinquent youths as a primary cause of societal problems" (Bortner & Williams 1997, p. xii). Society continues to portray urban youth as uncaring, disrespectful villains. Like the middle classes from the early twentieth century, the public today remains anxious about the "youth problem," even as the rate of violent crimes committed by young people has decreased considerably since the mid 1990s. Society seeks to protect itself through harsher, longer-term means to control youth instead of providing opportunities for rehabilitation and for healthy development. Researchers who work with the juvenile justice system and the urban communities disproportionally affected by its programming – ethnic and low-income – propose alternatives that incorporate elements from positive youth development programs and are based in the communities of incarcerated youth. Workforce development programs (refer to Brown et al. 2003), teen courts, and community-based restorative justice programs (National Center for Children in Poverty) are alternative approaches that can reduce recidivism rates, build twenty-first century skills (i.e., critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and team work), and develop social competencies.

Preventive approaches aim to redress the youth problem by targeting at-risk young people before they engage in problem behaviors. Early interventions launched in the 1950s and 1960s were funded by governments and responded primarily to problems, such as substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, and dropping out of school (Catalano et al. 2004). Although interventions could successfully curtail problem behaviors, preventive measures typically diagnosed problem behaviors as the consequence of a single risk factor. The contextual, interrelated, and cumulative nature of risk was not well understood or theorized. Over time, scholars began to recognize the combination of negative factors, such as structural inequality, substandard housing, underfunded schools, and repeated exposure to drugs and violence as being more detrimental collectively to healthy, positive development than the impact of a single risk factor, such as access to drugs (Fauth 2004, DeCoster et al. 2006). Longitudinal evaluations of prevention programs starting in the 1980s began to address the mounting criticism against early efforts and helped to identify predictive factors leading to problem behaviors. Thus, a second generation of preventive models expanded programs to consider both the co-occurrence of risk factors and the ecological context in which they develop (Catalano et al. 2004).

Preventive approaches remain popular with public institutions, even if evaluations have found programs to be ineffective. For example, D.A.R.E (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) is the most widely implemented school-based drug prevention program in the United States. Created in 1983, the D.A.R.E. curriculum instructs youth on how to identify and to resist peer and other social pressures to consume drugs. Thirty years of evaluations show D.A.R.E has not reduced drug use in youth. The program's focus on a single short-term outcome, the prevention of substance abuse, is not as effective as hands-on, interactive instructional strategies that target multiple risk factors while emphasizing numerous positive social developmental outcomes (Birkeland, Murphy-Graham & Weiss 2005, Ennett et al. 1994). Nonetheless, the program remains popular with school districts across the United States; interest in the program persists

as it is shown to improve the relationship between teenager and local police departments (Birkeland et al. 2005).

Deficit approaches to youth development align with dominant stereotypes of youth. Although some punitive and prevention programs can be successful in rehabilitating and preventing problems, the assumptions underlying these approaches ignore the setting in which youth development occurs.

Assets-Based Models – Positive Youth Development Programs

Scholars began to criticize the widespread popularity of deficit programs approximately two decades ago, just as socially constructed notions of childhood began to gain traction. They argued that these approaches failed to recognize the underlying causes contributing to problem behaviors and under-evaluated the role of positive factors and assets in youth development (Burt 2002, Catalano et al. 2004). Youth were marginalized by programs lacking strategies to prepare them for taking advantage of future opportunities and for assuming the responsibilities of adulthood (Sherrod 2006). Thus, youth development was no longer conceived as an outcome of punitive or preventive treatment. Instead, scholars and youth development practitioners advocated for the promotion of healthy, positive developments by encouraging formal and informal learning opportunities that foster young people's sense of self, nurture their visions for promising future aspirations, build-up their twenty-first century skills, and promote youth engagement in communities. Programs promoting these principles are known collectively as *positive youth development* (PYD).

PYD approaches recognize that young people have specific needs and that needs are met differentially based on young people's immediate context and their access to resources such as families, schools, and communities (Sherrod 2006). Development, and in particular the prediction of problem behaviors, was framed almost exclusively as the prevention and treatment of risk factors, such as social isolation, exposure to drugs, and family dysfunction (Catalano et

al. 2002, Catalano et al. 2004). The promotion of *positive* development shifts from the unitary focus on risk to recognize the conditions and attributes associated with its mitigation: assets and positive factors.

> *Talking about the promotion of youth development versus preventing youth problems is more than a semantic shift. It is a shift that can bring with it some fundamental changes in the way programs and policy are developed, implemented, and evaluated. It is precisely because most of the strategies used to prevent substance abuse and other problems are, in fact, strategies that promote development – social skills, communication skills, self-awareness, family and community commitment – that this shift is needed* (Pittman, O'Brien & Kimball 1993 as quoted by Catalano et al. 2002, p. 232).

Thompson and Lerner (2000) maintain that PYD programs should adopt holistic policies to ensure that youth have access to safe environments where they can interact with caring adults, learn, grow, and build their capacities in order to give back to the community. Based on a review of the PYD literature, successful approaches that promote youth development share a number of features, such as: (1) providing youth with a safe place that supports opportunities for belonging and reinforces pro-social norms; (2) providing youth with formal and informal learning opportunities using structured activities to build twenty-first century skills and enhance social competencies; (3) promoting supportive relationships and positive bonding experiences for youth with their peers, family members, and non-kin adults as well as encouraging positive engagement with community members; (4) fostering the development of a strong, positive sense of self and self-efficacy to encourage resilience against problem behavior; and (5) providing youth with opportunities to engage with and contribute to the well being of their communities (Catalano et al. 2004, Checkoway & Gutiérrez 2006, Checkoway & Richards-Schuster 2003, Eccles & Gootman 2002, Ginwright 2003, Ginwright & Cammarota 2007, Lerner et al. 2005, Mahoney, Eccles & Larson 2004, Sutton et al. 2006, Theokas & Lerner 2006, Thompson & Lerner 2000). Many PYD approaches consider a young person's everyday environment as key to informing program strategies (Ginwright 2003, McLaughlin et al. 1994). However, many programs are not designed explicitly to identify challenges in the community as

rooted in broader societal forces, redress the conditions that marginalize youth or engage youth in the change process.

Although most PYD evaluations concentrate on academic achievements, programs support a number of youth-level outcomes, including: (1) improving young people's psychosocial development (Checkoway & Gutiérrez 2006) such as increased positive attitudes (Durlak & Weissberg 2007) and stronger positive peer associations (Gottfredson et al. 2004); (2) improving their school performance (Durlak & Weissberg 2007); (3) increasing their ability to enhance critical life skills and build organizational capacity (Checkoway & Gutiérrez 2006); and (4) increasing their engagement with and contributions to the community (Checkoway & Gutiérrez 2006, Checkoway & Richards-Schuster 2003, Ginwright & Cammarota 2007, Sutton et al. 2006).

Positive youth development programs provide a space in for participants to develop meaningful, reciprocal relationships with their peers and, perhaps most importantly, with non-kin or non-familial adults. Adults make unique, instrumental contributions to youth development by assuming complex and diverse roles in the lives of program participants (Borden et al. 2011). Positive interactions with adults can enhance young people's social competency skills to help them thrive in adulthood, can increase self-esteem and reduce symptoms of depression, and can foster the perception of warmth and acceptance (Borden et al. 2011, Haddad, Chen & Greenberger 2011, Walker 2011). Such interactions are vital since youth, especially marginalized youth, can have limited opportunities to foster meaningful bonds with adults in the community (Jarret, Sullivan & Watkins 2005).

Some scholars and youth development practitioners argue that PYD approaches should evolve to focus exclusively on positive factors and pro-social assets (Bernard 1993, Benson 1997) while others caution for a more balanced approach that continues to recognize both the risk and protective factors pertinent to young people's developmental context (Catalano et al. 2002). Research on the impact of interventions that emphasize a combination of protective and

strength-based approaches versus strength-based approaches alone remains limited.

PYD programs embody a significant shift in the conceptualization of youth and youth development approaches. Nonetheless, many PYD programs engage a normative approach to development such that youth remain the recipients of services developed and led by adults (Kemp 2011, Sutton et al. 2006). Although program strategies can foster leadership skills and build organizational competencies in youth, the principles underlying these approaches do not empower youth as decision makers in the development and management of the program. PYD programs recognize the ecological context of development, but most program strategies do not intentionally reflect or focus on community transformation.

“God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil” (Jean-Jacques Rousseau *Emile, or on Education* 1762 as quoted by James et al. 1998, p. 13). Since then, society has placed youth at the heart of what needs to be fixed. Traditional approaches to youth development, including positive youth development models, must be turned on their heads. Youth do not grow up in programs; they live in communities. Policies and programs should concentrate efforts on fixing what society has meddled with – our built environments, our neighborhoods, and our communities.

Beyond Assets-Based Models: Community-Based Youth Programs

Youth and their adult allies seek more than being "problem-free and prepared" (Perkins et al. 2003); rather they seek opportunities to share their hopes and express their frustrations about the challenges they face everyday, to talk about and to influence decisions regarding issues they care for and that affect them directly, to understand the causes for the unjust conditions they witness in their communities, and to be empowered to redress them. Community-based, grassroots organizations are the democratic institutions that can foster safe, alternative spaces in which youth can cultivate their civic identities by exploring the uncertainties

they face and can collaborate on action to support “the struggle for an inclusive democracy” (Sutton et al. 2006, pg. 17).

Community-based grassroots organizations can play a significant role in the development of youth’s civic engagement (McLaughlin, Irby & Langman 1994). According to McLaughlin et al. (1994), community-based youth programs that foster civic engagement share three common traits: (1) they promote the potential of young people instead of adopting preventive approaches that label youth as delinquents and deficient; (2) are balanced in their approach to provide social services to meet specific needs and provide opportunities for self exploration, including the context in which development occurs; and (3) and ensure that community engagement is a key program strategy. For youth living in neighborhoods marginalized by social and environmental inequities and in which limited opportunities exist for youth to foster positive self-identities, engage civically, and build their capacity to address complex social issues, such programs are crucial. Community-based opportunities can yield longer-term outcomes such as sustaining issue-based advocacy and civic participation into adulthood (Stoneman 2002). In general, community-based youth programs are purposely:

> C*reating environments that provide constructive, affirmative, and encouraging relationships that are sustained over time with adults and peers, while concurrently providing an array of opportunities that enable youth to build their competencies and become engaged as partners in their own development as well as the development of their communities* (Perkins et al. 2003, p. 6).

Community-based youth programs encompass diverse models, ranging from normative approaches shaped by positive youth development frameworks to transformative approaches emphasizing a social justice/social change ethos (Kemp 2011, Sutton et al. 2006). An ideological merging of youth and community development theories underpins *community youth development* (CYD) programs, a model that expands on PYD approaches (Perkins et al. 2003, Kemp 2011, Sutton et al. 2006). In general, CYD programs aim to build young peoples’ organizing capacities and critical life skills using structured intergenerational activities that

encourage youth engagement in community development work (Perkins et al. 2003). Youth supporting their own positive development by intentionally creating healthy communities is the strategy's driving assumption. These programs provide a broader base of youth developmental outcomes compared to those that focus exclusively on positive youth development (Gambone et al. 2004). Although CYD programs operate primarily in low-income, predominantly ethnic neighborhoods, the model stresses the engagement, empowerment, and development of all youth; thus the socio-structural challenges facing low-income, urban ethnic youth in particular are not fundamental to the overall developmental strategy of this approach (Kemp 2011).

Social justice youth development programs (Sutton et. al, 2006) also called *youth organizing programs* (Kemp 2011), exercise transformative approaches to youth and community development. The National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine (2002) describe a transformative philosophy as the institutional operationalization of youth development measures of connection, socialization, creativity, contribution, competence, and change.[8] Programs are characterized as fostering individual and community-level change, an important distinction from PYD programs that emphasize individual-level change (Ginwright & James 2002, Jennings et al. 2006; Kemp 2011, Otis 2006, Sutton et al. 2006).

Principles of social justice/social change distinguish transformative approaches from CYD programs. Social justice is greater than the benchmark for the moral evaluations of society; rather, it addresses the three dynamics that are exercised to exclude individuals or social groups from just treatment: the lack of *recognition* for youth as social agents in their own rights, the lack of access youth have to *participate* in decision making regarding matters that affect them or are most salient to their everyday and future lives, and the presence of informal impediments or the inequitable *distribution* of risks reflecting inequities in their socio-economic and cultural status (Fraser 1997, Schlosberg 2004). Transformative approaches as the operationalization of a social justice/social change ethos identify youth as change agents and unite them with adult allies to engage collaboratively in critical reflection and social critique of

the structural barriers that marginalize both youth and communities with the intention to redress the conditions that exemplify social and environmental injustice.

Kemp (2011) identified critical placemaking, “the deliberative linking of critical reflection, youth empowerment, intergenerational alliances, and collective action to claim and reclaim place” (p. 135) as potentially fundamental to transformative approaches to community-based youth programs. Kemp argues that the analysis of transformative approaches are grounded by four dimensions: the critical reflection and analysis of socio-structural conditions that exemplify unjust conditions in youth’s lived domains, action-taking intended to transform place thereby redressing unjust conditions, promotion of youth-adult collaborations as the basis for action, and action taking as effectively building competencies (Kemp 2011).

In framing transformative approaches as a social justice/social change paradigm and as critical placemaking, scholars should consider approaches to youth participation, including how youth are recognized as social actors, the development of competencies to take action, and the competencies developed from taking action, such as cultivating critical awareness and fostering reflective and analytical capacities, and the role of youth-adult partnerships in collaborative action.

The CRC identified the rights of young people as the provision of social security (i.e., food, housing, education, and medical services), protection from harm, and the freedom of expression or freedom to participate in matters that affect them directly (Males 2003, O’Donoghue, Kirshner & McLaughlin 2002). However, claims regarding participation and thus access to political, economic, and social domains, remain the least robust or well defined of the CRC’s three dimensions (Sutton et al. 2006 referencing Hammaberg 1990). Scholars and youth development practitioners reason that youth acquire a deep sense of responsibility and empowerment when they participate in issues of consequence to them and in matters of community development or placemaking (Hart 1997). Although the CRC identifies participation as a right of all people, operationally it is not accessed equally. Exclusion from democratic

participation marginalizes youth (Ginwright & James 2002). Arnstein's (1969) "ladder of citizenship participation," which was later adapted to reflect the role of children in shifting power landscapes, described the degree to which the "have-not" citizens participate or exercise power. The first rung on the ladder describes forms of non-participation, such as the manipulation of constituents or the making of token gestures toward the have-nots. In contrast, the top rungs identified full participation as politically marginalized constituents initiating and leading initiatives and sharing decision-making with those in power. Based on Hart's (1997) adapted ladder, youth participation is considered successful when young people have an effect on projects or program processes, influence decisions or project outcomes, and bring about change (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster 2003).

Youth participation can shift according to developmental approaches. Preventive approaches emphasize participation as social control such that youth become the beneficiaries of treatments to prevent problem behavior. Promotional approaches advocate youth as being problem-free and *prepared*, thus emphasizing socialization by building youth competencies and twenty-first century skills to improve access to opportunities that yield positive outcomes and strong relationships (O'Donoghue et al. 2002, Sutton et al. 2006). In community youth development approaches, participation is conceptualized and operationalized at different levels, from the local to the global, and in different settings, from schools to communities. In order to be affective, youth participation is to be grounded in the developmental context and the processes that impact the lives of youth directly; hence, the social, economic, and political spheres of youth's everyday environments must be considered (Ginwright & James 2002, O'Donoghue et al. 2002).

The promotion of youth as community leaders is particularly salient to low-income, urban ethnic youth, a group that has historically lacked opportunities to participate in "activities that foster their civic development" (Kirshner 2008, p. 60). As community organizers and activists, low-income youth of color are no longer the "passive victims of oppression" (Ginwright et al.

2005, p. 32), but rather are change agents working collectively to identify and redress local injustices. Such opportunities nurture in youth a deep sense of belonging and self-worth, which can lead to an improved outlook or positive attitudes towards their community (Senechal 2008, Warren et al. 2008).

Youth develop a variety of critical life skills and organizational/civic competencies working along their adult allies, which can promote broader notions of civic responsibility and citizenship (Marri & Walker 2008). For example, engaging in social critique and undertaking community-based organizing and activism work can yield leadership opportunities for youth within the program and within the community at large; “creating conditions that support learners in making discoveries themselves, then putting those discoveries to use” (MacNeil & McClean 2006, p. 99). MacNeil & McClean (2006) argue that leadership development must go beyond skill-building activities, a normative positive youth development outcome, to include youth engaging leadership in direct, critical ways and should result in “youth in governance” (p. 100).

Transformative approaches draw on the organizing knowledge and collective histories of community-based grassroots groups (Ginwright & Cammarota 2002, 2006, Jennings et al. 2006, Perkins et al. 2003, Warren, Mira & Nikundiwe 2008). These organizations represent the institutional context catalyzing youth organizing and youth activism. Youth's civic identities, that is their political ideas and values, are shaped by the relationships developed with peers and adult allies within these organizations (Flanagan & Faison 2001). Thus, community-based, grassroots organizations can be viewed as incubators of civic identities and inclusive democracies.

Community-based programs represent an intermediary space where youth and non-kin adults can come together to form meaningful and collaborative relationships that are distinct from those cultivated in other, more traditional youth/adult spaces of interaction e.g., at home with parents or at school with teachers (Walker 2011). Perceived trust by youth for their adult allies is a key feature to sustaining organizing and activism among low-income urban ethnic

youth (O'Donoghue & Strobel 2007). A youth-adult relationship characterized as being close and trusting within the context of a community-based youth programs fosters youth's positive identification with an activist role and with their sense of efficacy in community-based work (O'Donoghue & Strobel 2007 p. 471). Thus, transformative approaches are critical to long-term social change strategies; sustaining issue-based advocacy and civic participation in adulthood is fostered by developing young people's collective identities through informed action taking in response to marginalizing conditions (Stoneman 2002).

Community-Based, Grassroots Organizations as Important Partners and Catalyzers of Youth Development

Low-income, urban ethnic youth in America are conditioned to believe they are a useless, devalued group blighting communities (Halpern 2005, Stoneman 2002). To society, it may appear as if youth are disconnected, increasingly unplugged from community life and civic engagement. Or perhaps, urban youth engage community life and civic engagement differently than was once perceived. As social, environmental, and economic forces have radically altered community engagement, young people's civic subcultures have also changed.

America's most marginalized communities, such as the urban and rural poor and the urban youth population, need institutional advocates to represent their interests in the competition for public resources. Local policy decisions are felt most acutely at the street level. An abstract funding cut by the state translates quickly into a tangible cessation of services at the local level. For example, children in the South Bronx are left stranded on street corners, under stifling heat, with no summer shuttle bus service to the neighborhood's only oasis: the local outdoor pool.[9] Community-based, grassroots organizations know the disparities residents face (Sanchez-Jankowski 2002). These local institutions undertake "conflictual participation" (Reynoso 2006) in public sector initiatives or assume a "challenger's stance" (Deschenes McLaughlin & Newman 2008) by confronting local governments in revising and implementing

local policies and pushing for institutional change. Local grassroots advocates campaign for their communities' capacities and values. They promote residents, including the most marginalized, as the neighborhood's greatest asset (Kretzmann & McKnights 1996).

Community grassroots groups practice an assets-based approach to community development. The approach is rooted in organizing work and challenges the predominant needs-driven discourse, however well intentioned, that guides support mechanisms to marginalized communities. Similar to theories on community-based youth programs, community-organizing concepts challenge the client/recipient paradigm that characterizes relationships with marginalized people. Instead, residents are promoted as empowered social actors, producers, and community-assets equipped with the skills and capacities to organize and take action (Deschenes et al. 2008, Listen Inc. 2003). Participatory and collaborative strategies such as conducting a power analysis to build power within one's own community, identifying community problems as issues rooted in broader societal forces, and building the capacity of residents as leaders are key to the community organizing efforts employed by these grassroots mobilizers.

Community-based, grassroots organizations are more than service providers; they are the vehicles through which residents have their voices heard and in which they unite to heal, connect, and reflect (Deschenes et al. 2008, Kretzmann & McKnight 1996). Informal institutions are alternative spaces in which to cultivate a critical awareness of the systematic conditions of oppression and to exchange knowledge on civic engagement. These spaces are important to individuals and groups such as ethnic minorities who have been excluded historically from traditional democratic forums and restricted from greater political representation (Checkoway et al. 2003, Ginwright 2010, O'Donoghue & Strobel 2007, Reynoso 2006, Sanchez-Jankowski 2002). Hart and Atkins (2002) argue that low rates of civic participation amongst urban youth can be attributed in part to a dearth of community-based resources such as community-based organizations, community and recreation centers, clubs, and programs that engage youth

directly in civic activities. However, Ginwright (2010) cautions that low-income urban youth may engage civically in unconventional ways such as providing their family with childcare or financial assistance or, more creatively, by participating in a local poetry slam. Accordingly, civic action should be analyzed in terms of place, for to do otherwise could restrict a deeper understanding of young people's civic behavior and political identities.

Community-based, grassroots organizations are spaces that foster "revolutionary hope and radical imaginations" (Ginwright 2010, p. 78). Low-income, urban ethnic youth in particular benefit from philosophies that promote the engagement and empowerment of youth in effective participation in personal and social change (Sutton 2007).

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Whereas early approaches to youth development emphasized punitive and preventive treatments, thus labeling youth as both in danger and dangerous, approaches advanced in the 1990s promoted the positive development of youth. More recent approaches relate youth development to that of community development and advocate for shifting away from individual-level change to collective transformation of self and community using a social justice framework. Justice-oriented, community-based youth programs are believed to bring about socio-structural change in communities marginalized by conditions exemplifying injustice, thereby transforming the context of development and youth themselves. These programs foster opportunities for youth-led initiatives that are developmentally efficacious, stimulate reflection and action-taking on issues of social and environmental justice, and advance the mobilization of civic responsibility (Jennings et al. 2006, Otis 2006). The varied organizational strategies characteristic of such programs include youth/adult collaborations to build youth leadership and organizational competencies, learning through hands-on community-based projects, and engaging in critical reflection and social critique to direct change. In the following section, I propose how to frame the analysis of a community-based youth program in terms of a critical

civic praxis framework, namely place-based critical pedagogy, in order to identity the strategies that exemplify transformative youth programs.

Transformative Approaches to Youth Development: Critical Civic Praxis as a Place-Based Critical Pedagogy for Social Justice Community-Based Youth Programs

In *Pedagogy of Freedom*, Freire (1998) reinforces a longstanding ethic for popular education: a need to understand and respect the knowledge of children and youth in their own right, especially, as it relates to young people's everyday realities. Freire calls for deeper reflection into the impacts of engaging pedagogies not geared towards social change. He advocates for an approach that embraces an "intimate connection" between basic knowledge – such as what is taught in school – and complex and emergent knowledge that is the "fruit of lived experiences" (p. 36). Such pedagogy is regarded as an intentional approach that merges the learning of action-oriented skills with individual and collective lived experiences in order to transform individuals and their communities for the benefit of society as a whole.

Community-based youth programs, and in particular those influenced by a transformative philosophy, engage strategies and organizational processes grounded in community-organizing work (Hosang 2003b, Listen, Inc. 2003, Warren et al. 2008). Operationalized, these are practical, collaborative, and intentional strategies that are grounded in the community, assets and risks included, and geared to support youth and community transformation from the ground-up.

I posit, that in order to effectuate a transformative framework, community-based youth programs should develop and implement a critical civic praxis. That is, I advocate an intentional place-based critical pedagogy to support the engagement of youth in critical reflection on and analysis of the social and spatial dynamics of their community, to help youth and their adult

allies recognize such conditions as systematic of broader social forces, and to identify opportunities for collaborative action intended to redress conditions that marginalize both youth and the community. Ginwright and Cammarota (2007) define critical civic praxis as:

> *A process that develops critical consciousness and builds capacity for young people to respond and change oppressive conditions in their environments. [It] is the organizational process that promotes civic engagement among youth and elevates their critical consciousness and capacities for social justice activism* (p. 699).

Briefly, in my research, I make a distinction between the modifiers "community-based" and "place-based." As reviewed in the previous section, community-based describes those bottom-up organizations that focus specifically on one locale or community. Unlike non-profits and government institutions that do not serve a particular location, community-based organizations are set-up to meet the needs of a specific geographic community and use approaches (such as youth programming) that are appropriate to that locale. Community-based also describes activities or projects that are directed at a particular locale, for example advocacy work can be community-based versus regionally- or nationally-based. Place-based, instead, describes a cognitive process – a way of knowing and engaging people that is influenced by the social, spatial, ecological, and historical specificities of place. It also describes the opportunities or challenges that derive from the specificities of place, for example placed-based inequities in education. In this research, I use the term almost exclusively to describe an instructional theory, characterizing the community-based organization that is at the center of my research as employing a place-based pedagogy, namely critical civic praxis, as the underpinning of its transformative youth program.

I propose to frame the analysis of a community-based youth program using a critical civic praxis framework and identify three key dimensions – the production and exchange of local knowledge, the development and nurturing of critical consciousness, and the fostering of youth agency and of a youth civic and activist identity. Critical civic praxis: sustains the *production and exchange of local knowledge*, including youth-led solutions; aids in the *development of critical*

awareness or consciousness of community-based problems and specifically the problematic community conditions that are systemic forms of oppression; and cultivates *youth agency* and strong civic identities to further youth's self-conceptualization as change agents who can organize and take action against social and environmental injustices. Figure 2 is a graphic representation of the critical civic praxis framework.

Ginwright and Cammarota (2007) do not foreground place in their conceptualization of critical civic praxis. Thus, a possible critique against the framework is that place although implied is not made explicit. Gruenewald (2003) argues that inherent, although not explicit, to Freirean discourse on critical pedagogy is place, both the social and the spatial or ecological context of people's situationality, or the cultural context in which they find themselves. In defense of a "critical pedagogy of place," Gruenewald (2003) harmonizes two educational traditions, critical pedagogy and place-based education, to emphasize people's socio-ecological relationships, which when combined empower people to confront and challenge systems of domination and oppression (Gruenewald 2003). Thus, place-based pedagogies are instrumental to civic education for inclusive democracies. Although Gruenewald's work emphasizes school-based systems and educators, his message of a critical pedagogy of place is germane to the critical civic praxis framework of a community-based youth program.

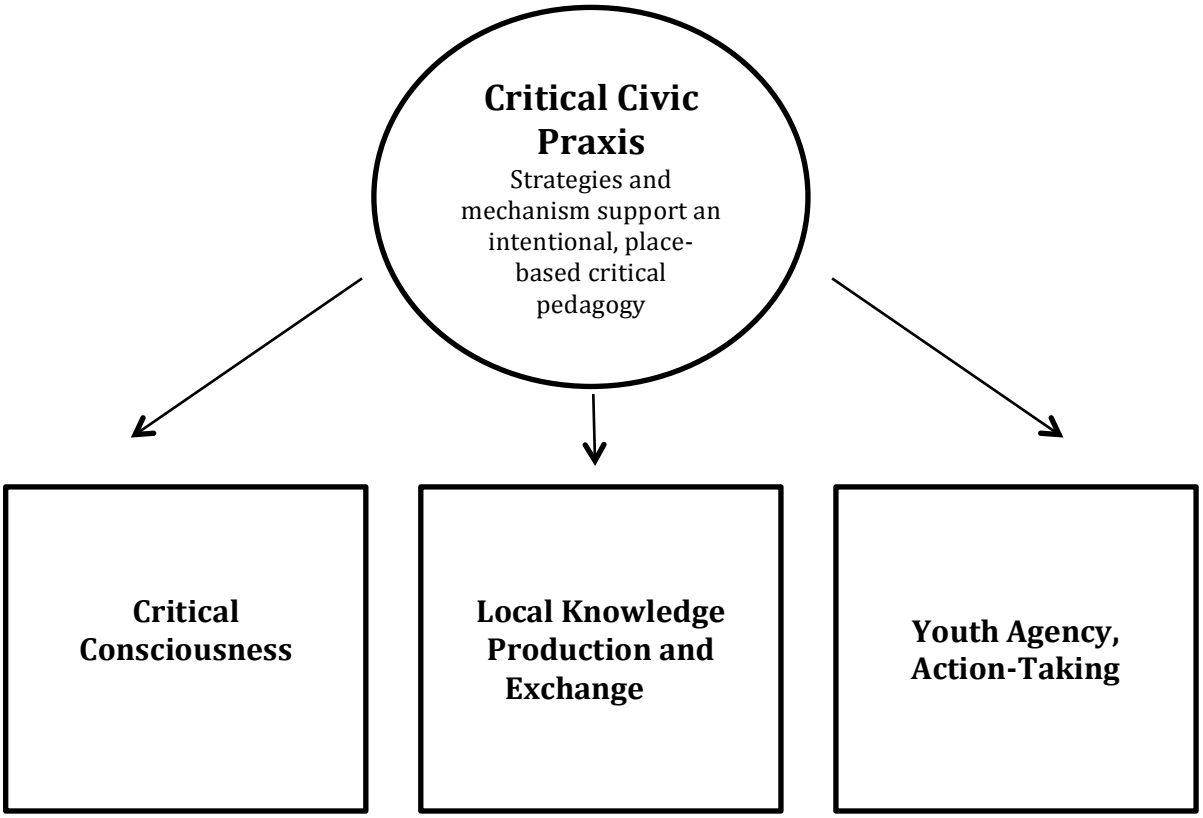

Figure 2: Critical Civic Praxis Framework

Thus, I posit critical civic praxis as a pedagogy of freedom for its potential to promote, catalyze, and sustain youth organizing and youth activism through a purposeful and skillful engagement of broad social analysis. Community-based, grassroots organizations can act as conduits for the generation, exchange, and dissemination of local knowledge (Ginwright & Cammorota 2007), which in turn is instrumental to critical consciousness raising in individuals and collectively, especially amongst those marginalized by social and environmental injustices (Freire 1968). The opportunity to untangle the layers of economic, social, and environmental conditions that encompass personal and collective struggles for power can help youth to recognize new possibilities for their future selves and that of their community.

Local Knowledge Production

I conceptualize local knowledge production as practical and place-based. It is partial in

nature, regarded as either limited or conjectured and is acquired or evidenced by everyday experiences in addition to collective memories (Corburn 2005). In contrast, I conceptualize professional knowledge as generalized, empirical ways of knowing. Complex and sophisticated, it is produced and exercised by members of a profession and verified through standard means. Conventional research may question the capacity of local knowledge producers to comprehend complex problems and herewith understand possible solutions. However, the complex nature of social justice and social change work cannot privilege either local or professional knowledge as the unilateral source for answers (Greenwood & Levin 2005). Local knowledge should not be romanticized; like youth development, it is synthesized within a particular lived domain and thus proximal to the solutions for community-based problems.

In his work on environmental health research, Corburn (2005) identifies four contributions made by local knowledge: (1) *epistemology* – local knowledge makes cognitive contributions in order to correct reductionist trends in professional policy work; (2) *procedural democracy* – local knowledge raises previously marginalized voices and improves their access to decision-making processes on matters of local distribution and yields opportunities for the hybridizing of professional and local knowledge; (3) *effectiveness* – local knowledge can identify real world, low-cost strategies; (4) *distributive justice* – instead of merely inquiring about the rick level, local knowledge asks, who are the persons at risk? Knowledge produced and exchanged locally, in addition to being hybridized with professional discourse, is instrumental to addressing social justice claims of "just distribution justly arrived at" (Harvey 2009, p. 98).

> *Local knowledge has authority beyond the often assumed parochial, subjective, and emotional world of the community members who hold it. Local knowledge also has problematized our conventional understanding of professional knowledge, particularly questioning the dichotomy between professional and lay expertise. The porous boundaries between local and professional knowledge suggests that planners and policy makers interested in democratic practice ought to pay attention to local knowledge as they manage processes that legitimate some information as relevant for decision making* (Corburn 2005, p. 76).

Youth can draw from their lived experiences to contribute to local knowledge production

and exchange when community-based programs provide them with intermediary spaces that foster deeper reflection and exploration. Youth can contribute by way of simple observations and mundane daily rituals; they can contribute by identifying and framing community problems in terms of socio-structural barriers; they can contribute by asking questions regarding the underlying causes for these problems and by collecting information to tell their stories; they can contribute by synthesizing individual experiences into a collective narrative from the derived inspiration and energy; and they can contribute by developing and applying solutions to address these problems (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster 2003, Ginwright & Cammorota 2007, Jennings et al. 2006, Otis 2006). By engaging a critical civic praxis, community-based youth programs can legitimize the contributions made by youth to local knowledge by amplifying the narratives of their everyday lived experiences, thus promoting critical social change.

Hands-on projects and youth-led initiatives characteristic of community-based youth programs can facilitate the exchange or hybridization of locally sourced narratives with that of professional knowledge. Youth working in partnership with local and professional adults organize local knowledge to inform action and supplement policy decision-making. Adults who provide youth-led initiatives with technical assistance can help build the capacities and skills of their younger allies to communicate, by emphasizing the work to be achieved and their perception of youth as key partners who can and should be involved in this type of work (Halpern 2005). Intergenerational collaboration has the potential to connect local insight with specialized tools and techniques to yield local knowledge contributions to procedural democracy (by increasing young people's capacity to access decision-making processes) and distributive justice (by facilitating youth capacity to redress identified local problems).

Critical Consciousness

A critical awareness, or conscientization, of diverse forms of oppression can be cultivated at both an individual and a collective level by producing and exchanging local

knowledge (Freire 1968).

> *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* (Wefford in the preface of Freire's Educacao como Pratica da Liberdade 1967 as quoted in Freire 1968/2000, p. 36).

Freire (1968) argued that individuals who are critically aware of oppression's marginalizing effects to limit their ability to take action have reached a stage of critical consciousness that frees them to reflect more deeply and to perceive new possibilities for resistance. The critically conscious become "transformers of [their] world" (Freire 1968/2000, p. 73). For low-income, urban ethnic youth, the path to critical consciousness can be liberating, characterized as a shift away from self-blame towards recognition of the systemic and root causes for injustices, isolation, and exclusion (Ginwright 2010). As critical consciousness deepens, so can one's sense of self-efficacy and competence as a social actor who can seize power and seek out others in an effort to take transgressive social action collaboratively (Ginwright 2010, VeneKlassen & Miller 2002).

Youth can achieve awareness by engaging, along with their adult allies in reflective and reflexive processes, both individually and collectively. Reflective processes call upon youth to contemplate their particular lived experiences in order to recognize underlying assumptions and preconceptions that normalize stereotypes. Youth engage reflexive processes by means of individual contemplation or in dialogue with others, to examine how their actions affect those around them as well as those distanced by uneven power dynamics. Fine et al. (2000) referred to these spaces of shared dialogues as "free spaces" or "homesteading" spaces – spaces that entail finding "unsuspecting places within their geographic locations, their public institutions and their spiritual lives to sculpt real and imaginary corners for peace, solace, communion, personal and collective identity work" (p. 132). Community-based youth programs are the safe, alternative spaces that help foster shared dialogue and nurture personal and collective identity work that can support youth as transformers of their world.

Youth Civic Agency

Social resistance movements across the United States and globally have relied heavily on young people engaging in social and political action through intentional and strategic forms of resistance (Noguera & Cannella 2006). Although Noguera and Cannella (2006) asserted that many social scientists have been slow to recognize the power and outcomes of youth agency, contributors to youth development literature advocate that youth are autonomous social agents and producers of knowledge, culture, and action in their own right. Participants of community-based programs, many of whom carry the burden of being labeled by society as a "youth at risk" often speak of hope for themselves and for their communities (McLaughlin 1994). The opportunity for young people to make significant discoveries about themselves lends itself to putting those discoveries into practice at the local level (MacNeil & McClean 2006).

Community-based youth programs that encourage youth-led initiatives can promote the development of agency in youth participants by instilling a sense of ownership over the process of organizing and taking action, for example by designing projects, undertaking research, seeking feedback from adult allies and community members, and putting plans into action. Thus civic agency is promoted when youth become designers, researchers, and key stakeholders in community-based efforts. In their struggles for civic recognition, representation and equity, youth are effective community leaders seeking social justice.

Summary of Critical Civic Praxis

Critical civic praxis supports the raising of critical consciousness, the production and exchange of local knowledge, and the development of youth civic agency. I propose that these three dimensions are key constructs in yielding transformative youth- and community-level outcomes. Specifically, I posit that youth who engage in critical civic praxis in a community-based program geared toward social justice and who are themselves marginalized by

discriminatory social and spatial practices can develop their civic and organizational skills while undertaking neighborhood level social change work.

Conclusion

Discourse on the built environment and place-based inquiries are often lacking in social justice paradigms (Furman & Gruenewald 2004, Sutton & Kemp 2002). An yet research demonstrates that youth are particularly receptive to place-based strategies (Ginwright & Cammarota 2007, Jennings et al. 2006) such as community youth development approaches, which can increase young people's ability to build organizational capacities (Checkoway & Gutiérrez 2006) and contribute critically to social justice efforts (Checkoway & Gutiérrez 2006, Checkoway & Richards-Schuster 2003, Ginwright & Cammarota 2007).

My dissertation seeks to investigate the role of a transformative youth program and of community conditions in shaping how low-income, urban ethnic youth struggle against place-based processes of exclusion and inequity. In particular, my work aims to understand the role of a practical and intentional pedagogy, or critical civic praxis, to promote youth organizing and activism. How youth perceive themselves as change agents in their communities is key to both an investigation of the processes of transformation and its youth-level outcomes.

In the following chapter, I introduce the Hunts Point neighborhood, a compelling site for the exploration of a community-based youth program that promotes social justice. The purpose is to demonstrate the importance of context, or place, to exercising a critical civic praxis, as well as the importance of having a history of community organizing against social and environmental injustices.

Chapter Two Endnotes

[4] Refer to Deuteronomy 21:20-21 in the fifth book of the Hebrew Bible.

[5] Four stages of maturation: the sensory-motor stage (ages 0-2), the pre-operational or pre-conceptual stage (ages 2-7), the concrete operational stage (ages 7 to 11), and finally, the formal operations stage (ages 11 to adult). A*ssimilation*, a process for understanding new information by assimilating it in what is already known, or *accommodation*, a change in scheme or adjustment to thinking to accommodate new information or events.

[6] The model capitalizes on two assumptions: *"…first, that children are natural rather than social phenomena; and secondly that part of this naturalness extends to the inevitable process of their maturation. This belief in children's naturalness derives from the universal experience of being a child and the persistent and commonplace experience of having and relating to children; the belief in the inevitability and even 'good' of their maturation emanates form a combination of post Darwinian developmental cultural aspirations and, conflated with these, the post-enlightenment confusion of growth and progress" (James et al 1998, p. 17).*

[7] The Puritan system of belief dominated the moralist and reformer doctrines of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England, and eventually in America's early colonies. Thomas Hobbes' (1588-1679) work on the significance of a social contract in support of the authority of a absolute sovereign can be applied to the analysis of the 'evil child' by stressing the power in parental authority over children in the deliverance of knowledge to rescue children from the 'worst excess' of his/herself (James et al. 1998). In its most severe incarnation, authority over the evil or stubborn child was criminalization by the Court of Massachusetts Bay in 1649:

[8] Refer to Sutton et al. 2006 for definitions of these constructs.

[9] During the spring of 2009 (and) the MTA cut the Barretto Shuttle after one year of operation. Beekman March 19 2009 (Bronx Times).

CHAPTER THREE – Hunts Point: The History of a Neighborhood Tackling Injustice

Authentic knowledge of space must address the question of its production.
– Henri Lefebvre*, The Production of Space*

The power of place – the power of ordinary urban landscapes to nurture citizen's public memory, to emphasize shared time in the form of shared territory – remains untapped for most working people's neighborhoods in most American cities, and most ethnic history and most women's history. The sense of civic identity that shared history can convey is missing. And even bitter experiences and fights communities have lost need to be remembered – so as not to diminish their importance.
- Dolores Hayden, The Power of Place, *Urban Landscapes as Public History*

Hunts Point is like a flower slowly trying to get back to health.
– ACTION youth participant F06_17

For nine months, I followed the participants of THE POINT's ACTION program as they led and implemented grassroots strategies to tackle problems in their neighborhood. During these months, I traveled to Hunts Point two to three times a week, making the 45-minute journey from Midtown Manhattan on one of the city's most congested subway lines, the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) #6. My first impression of Hunts Point was that of a fortress, but not the type that guards citizens from outside incursion, but rather one that shields the outside world from it. At the Hunts Point Avenue station, I would often see police on patrol. They stood and watched, their hands gripping tightly their weighted duty belts or their arms folded across their chests, as small crowds gathered at the bottom of the steps or filed past the turnstiles. Outside was a small plaza – a traffic island actually – its red bricks gritty from the estimated 10,000 trucks a day that traveled along the Bruckner Boulevard. Teens would skateboard along its narrow edge, where the boulevard's northbound lanes branched off into the neighborhood. At the intersection with Hunts Point Avenue, chain-linked fences enclosed the boulevard. Overhead, the elevated expressway rumbled, overshadowing the corner where I stood waiting for the lights to change.

Enormous diesel trucks were everywhere. Idling, the truck's cabs juddered as their gearshifts screeched. Few walked across the Bruckner Boulevard casually. Like me, they sprinted. We ran toward a boarded-up building on the corner with the small red-painted boxed windows and a ramshackle gabled roof. Across the street was a high-fenced railroad overpass. Large tires and smashed appliances obstructed what small view there was of Manhattan in the distance. I turned down Garrison Avenue, a street lined with auto repair shops. The west side of Garrison had no sidewalk, only used truck tires stacked haphazardly against a chain-linked fence.

I would often see a small queue of children, walking hand in hand, escorted from one of the local elementary schools by City Year coordinators. City Year personnel are easy to recognize: they all wear a pair of khaki pants with a white shirt and a red jacket emblazed with the organization's yellow, black, and red crest. I have come to recognize the organization as common in many of New York City's poverty-concentrated neighborhoods. They were walking over to THE POINT, a brick building behind a wall topped with barbed wire. Prior to 1993, THE POINT was an abandoned warehouse, one of many in a long inventory of derelict structures, forgotten like the hundreds of other vacant buildings afflicting Hunts Points. Residents created this community-based grassroots organization in response to the community's need for a "life space" (Bressi 1997) – a place to be safe, socialize, learn, unite, and be active. THE POINT is but one example of critical placemaking by residents in order to redress social and environmental injustices in the neighborhood.

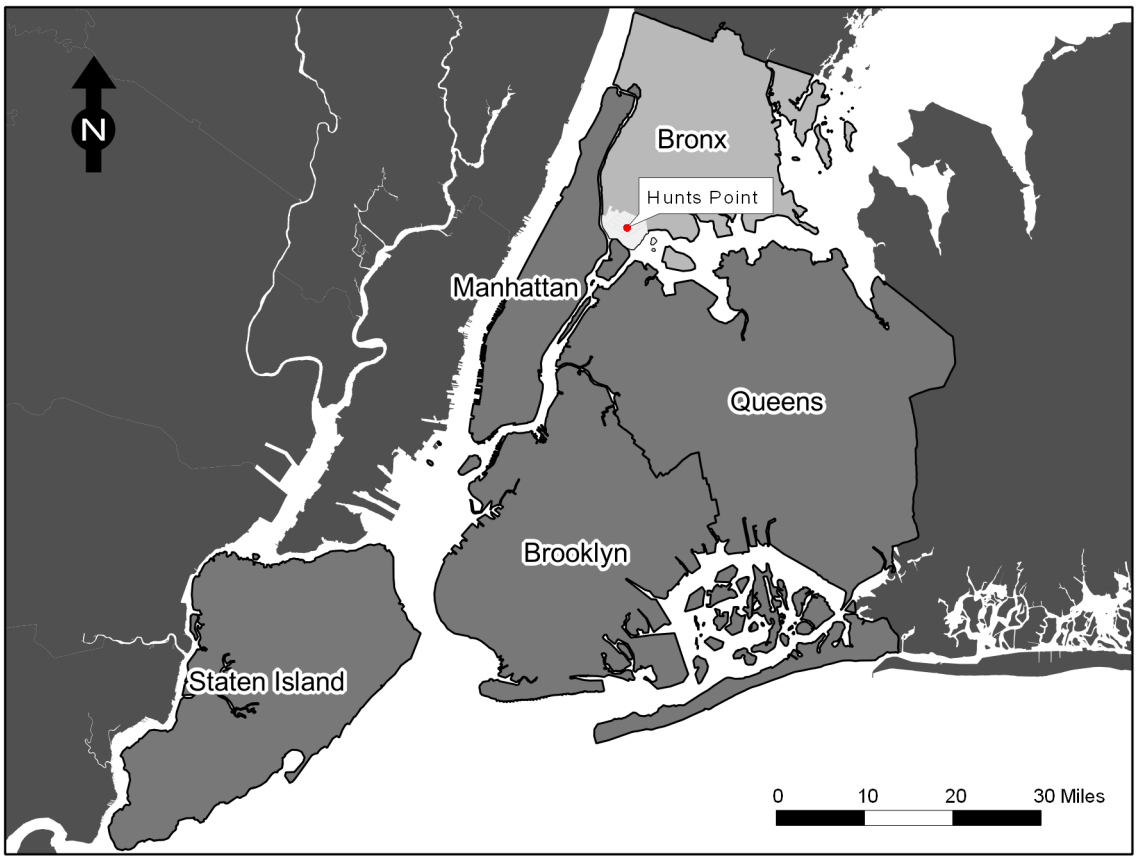

Figure 3: Map of Hunts Point in New York City. Map by Frank Donnelly

The small peninsula of the South Bronx is the metropolitan region's most strategically located under-developed land (please refer to Figure 3). Over 12,000 people live in the waterfront community of Hunts Point alongside a number of industrial uses and their corollaries. Chief among them is one of the world's largest food distribution centers, which occupies half of the neighborhood and generates over $3 billion annually. Nationally, Hunts Point lies within one of the poorest congressional districts; locally, it is one of the city's most marginalized neighborhoods. Plagued with the notorious moniker, "America's Urban Armageddon," Hunts Point offers a compelling context for the study of a transformative youth program because injustice - such as exclusionary forces and processes of inequity, and the struggle for inclusive democracies - are deeply rooted in place (Kemp 2011).

Hunts Point exemplifies environmental racism – a low-income community of color exposed disproportionately to burdens such as: unjust social policies, an abundance of environmentally toxic land uses, limited access to green spaces and recreational opportunities, and limited access to health care providers and healthful foods. Residents of Hunt Point are more likely to suffer from and to be hospitalized for mental illness, obesity, and diabetes compared to those living in more economically stable neighborhoods. For decades, grassroots organizations have struggled alongside residents to humanize a neighborhood crippled by poverty, drugs, and prostitution, overtaken by correctional facilities, poisoned by industrial practices, and dissected by a vast transportation complex.

How did Hunts Point become structurally a low-resource community? What led to the conditions exemplifying injustice? And how have these injustices compelled residents and community-based, grassroots groups to take action by appropriating environments and creating meaningful places as antidotes? The South Bronx is a microcosm of the overlapping histories shaped by discriminatory regional and national policies and decades of disinvestment.

In this chapter, I introduce Hunts Point as a captivating site for exploring a community-based youth program's transformative strategies and its effects on the low-income, urban ethnic youth who engaged in critical civic praxis. I begin with a history of the area to relate historical patterns of development to the neighborhood's most acute contemporary problems. I continue with a profile of Hunts Point today to describe conditions that exemplify social disparities and environmental injustice and highlight community-led activism intended to change marginalizing conditions. I conclude the chapter by introducing THE POINT as the organizational context for a transformative youth program, which is described in greater detail in Chapter Four.

Historical Background

> *The very process of urban growth and community creation, within which space and structures were commodities for sale and profit as well as accommodations for waves of different ethnic and racial groups and classes, engendered the conditions that resulted in*

> *the extreme neighborhood deterioration of the borough. The urban crisis in the Bronx was not just a race and crime problem as it was usually portrayed in the media; nor was it just the discrimination and residential segregation of a racist society; nor was it even the result of postwar liberalism and big government. Instead, the devastation of the Bronx was influenced by the economic transactions, political decisions, and human choices that created the city and its ethnic and racial neighborhoods in the first place and then continually re-created them* (Gonzalez 2004, p. 1).

To understand the evolution of Hunts Point as a neighborhood experiencing environmental injustice, I review the historical geographies of economic, social, and political processes set in motion decades ago. What arises is a distinctively local dilemma, the problematization of the South Bronx as a uniquely troubled place necessitating government-led redevelopment with limited community participation and Hunts Point as a place of ongoing local struggle to create meaning and well-being.

1890 to 1930: Transportation and the Development of the South Bronx

Up until the late nineteenth century, Hunts Point, along with much of the South Bronx, was the country destination for Manhattan's wealthy elite. Large estates with manor houses and small farms made up what was formerly known as West Farms, Westchester County (Gonzales 2004). The New York and Harlem Railroad, the region's first, was built in 1841 and prompted the area's first wave of development (Olmsted 1998).[10] Proximity to midtown Manhattan made the expansion of rapid transit highly desirable and encouraged major landholders to subdivide and sell their estates into smaller lots. New towns soon developed off the shores and inland from the Harlem and Bronx Rivers.

Estate subdivision and local developers, known as promoters, played a key role in the rapid development of West Farms. The city's prosperous clerks and merchants began to leave Manhattan's increasingly congested neighborhoods for the newer, smaller country towns along the rivers' shores as the expanding railroad facilitated their daily commute to and from city. As the population in West Farms grew, so did the demand for more housing, new community services (such as schools and libraries), and other public infrastructure (such as additional

transportation options and public parks). The area's rate of growth in the late nineteenth century was three times that of New York City as a whole and four times the national rate (Tobier 1998). From the 1870s to 1890s, a number of the newly developed towns were annexed to the city; by 1898 the area became an official borough of the City of New York, the Bronx. Local promoters not only drove demand for development, but also prescribed a physical layout for the new borough. Landowners and service providers sought to make the southern-most portion of the Bronx competitive with the newly developing suburbs in New Jersey and Brooklyn. Speculation encouraged the sale and resale of lots multiple times, which inflated the cost of the land and made the construction of single-family homes unprofitable. Instead of a slow progression from farmlands and country cottages to suburbs, the rapid commodification of land set the foundation for the development of a city.

Not all portions of the South Bronx urbanized at the same rate, however. Areas that remained unconnected by rapid transit, such as Hunts Point, would have to wait until 1904, when the Interborough Rapid Transit (IRT) Company's elevated railway and subways were constructed (Bronx Historical Society 2008). Hunts Point property owners privately funded the construction of a new subway stop, the Intervale Avenue station, in the hopes of increasing the value of their lands and stimulating development. The advent of subways ushered-in concrete sidewalks, tree lined boulevards, and an unbroken wall of densely built multi-family apartment buildings. Desirable urban amenities and open spaces were thus at a premium. The newly constructed apartments were modern; some were considered luxurious compared to the dark and unsanitary conditions of tenements that were predominant prior to the 1901 Tenement House Law.[11] When the IRT began operations, Hunts Point and Crotona (the neighborhood to its west) had a population of approximately 19,000; by 1920, these neighborhoods had 153,000 inhabitants (Gonzalez 2004). [12]

1930 to 1940: The Beginning of Disinvestment

Early twentieth century residents of the South Bronx were primarily of German extraction along with native-born Americans; Irish, Italian, and British immigrants were also dominant ethnic groups in the region (Gonzalez 2004). These early residents were characterized as financially comfortable with middle-class outlooks and aspirations. African American and Puerto Rican residents were also scattered throughout the South Bronx, but these small communities remained highly segregated, living predominantly in substandard housing (Gonzalez 2004). With the on-going construction of the subways came the "subway residents." Some immigrant families, mostly Russian and Eastern European, living in the tenement districts of lower Manhattan, like the prosperous clerks and merchants of the late nineteenth century, had the financial wherewithal to leave their cramped neighborhoods (Gonzalez 2004). As the economy prospered locally as well as nationally, the Bronx families who had settled at the beginning of the 1900s began to leave, following the subway lines northward to single-family homes or newer construction, making room for new immigrant families forced out of lower Manhattan by slum clearance.

The Great Depression hindered the aspirations of all in the United States. Unemployment soared and the Bronx continued to struggle with high unemployment even after the nation had recovered. Unlike their early Bronx predecessors, residents relocating to the area were no longer of comfortable middle-class means. New Deal public works projects meant to replace the stock of aging, substandard housing instead funded the construction of the Tri-borough Bridge, a foreshadow of land uses to come. Invariably, such projects increased vehicular traffic traversing the South Bronx, befouling the dense residential neighborhoods. Land values began to decrease;[13] as Hunts Point became a less desirable place to live, the area failed to attract newer developments such as the luxury apartments, departments stores, and theaters that were being constructed along the Grand Concourse to the northwest.

The Federal Housing Authority (FHA) and private lending institutions had redlined much of the South Bronx in the 1930s, discriminating against ethnic minorities who wished to become homeowners and curtailing business and redevelopment opportunities in the area.[14] After the Second World War, the FHA and Veterans Affairs (VA) devised programs to reduce the cost of home ownership for returning war veterans, which consequently encouraged the construction of single-family homes. A second-wave of long time residents, including returning members of the armed forces, left the South Bronx for new housing opportunities further north in the borough and beyond. At the same time, 170,000 people, mostly ethnic minorities, were displaced by slum clearance in Manhattan (Hermalyn & Ultan 2010).

Significant demographic shifts resulted from national policies that curtailed international immigration (i.e., the National Origins Acts of 1924) as well as from local practices that supported strong pro-suburban, but ethnically discriminatory housing and redevelopment policies. Although filtering – the process of neighborhood change from one group of residents to another – had taken place in the South Bronx for decades, the rate of change and the sheer number of new residents in the late 1930s marked a sharp contrast with earlier eras.

As mostly low-income African American and Puerto Rican residents began to move into Hunts Point, developers began looking to profit from the conversion of aging, substandard housing into commercial or industrial uses. However, when this vision of Hunts Point was not realized, private enterprises turned to the local government for assistance and encouraged the development of subsidized, low-rent housing to help thwart the economic downturn.[15] Of the four sites proposed in New York City for public housing, three were located in the South Bronx, one of which was located in Hunts Point. A few short decades later, this public housing project would become one of the city's most drug-infested and crime-ridden areas. The surrounding police district was known as Fort Apache, after a 1976 crime novel on the struggles between police and residents in the battered neighborhood.[16] Regardless of the viable communities with

established social networks that made up the South Bronx, areas such as Hunts Point were labeled slums in need of clearing (Gonzalez 2004).

As the rest of the Bronx was losing manufacturing jobs, industries remained and began concentrating in Hunts Point. The Grit Chamber was the area's first heavy industrial facility. The solid waste processing plant was built in 1937 along the Motts Haven waterfront, adjacent to Hunts Point (Gonzalez 2004). Construction of the Cross-Bronx Expressway began in 1948 and further fractured the borough by delineating a North and a South Bronx. One of the many urban renewal projects commissioned by Robert Moses, the expressway decimated vibrant communities, displaced thousands of families, and set in motion the demise of several South Bronx neighborhoods.

> *The one-mile of the Cross-Bronx Expressway through East Tremont was completed in 1960. By 1965, the community's "very good, solid housing stock," the apartment buildings that had been so precious to the people who had lived in them, were ravaged hulks. Windows, glassless except for the jagged edges around their frames, starred out on the street like sightless eyes. The entrances to those building were carpeted with shards of glass from what had been the doors to their lobbies. In those lobbies, what remained of the walls was covered in obscenities. And not much remained. Plaster from the walls lay in heaps in corners; the bare wood which had been exposed was shattered and broken…And yet they were homes – homes for tens of thousands of people. They were homes for welfare tenants and for the poorest of the working poor, for families that drift from one apartment to another without, seemingly, never paying a month's rent in full – urban gypsies* (Caro 1975, pg. 893).

1950-1970: "Ladies & Gentlemen, the Bronx is Burning"[17]

By the late 1940s and early 1950s, hundreds of thousands of African Americans from the South migrated north in search of better opportunities.[18] Locally, a great migration of sorts was taking place as well, prompted by the city's redevelopment programs. As the city continued to clear out black and Spanish Harlem, African American and Puerto Rican families were left with few options for housing. Many of these families would relocate to the South Bronx, settling into the residential blocks that had not been upgraded in decades. Puerto Rican families settled primarily in Hunts Point. Sadly, some of these same families would be displaced again in the

1950s and 1960s when city officials, needing to expand the public housing program, once again looked to the South Bronx.[19] In deploying various redevelopment programs throughout the decades, the city would become a majority landowner in Hunts Points, which would become one of the country's most disinvested neighborhoods.

Gruesome turf wars between rival youth gangs were common during the late 1950s to the mid 1960s on disinvested streets among boarded-up shops. And conditions continued to deteriorate in the 1960s. Nearly abandoned by the city and with little police surveillance, Hunts Point was leading the nation in homicide rates. Residents had a 1 in 20 chance of dying of natural causes; instead homicide and drugs were the leading causes of death (Severo September 24, 1969; October 6, 1977). Enraged, a group of female residents protested against the lack of police protection and marched to the 42nd Police Precinct (in later years, it would be known as Fort Apache) demanding gun permits (Gonzalez 2004, *New York Times* September 26 1969). Referred to locally as a "gun permit walk," the women chanted: "Gun Power, Gun Power…We Want guns" and "Have Gun, will Kill" (*New York Times* September 26 1969).

In mid-April 1960 the city government acquired a 126-acre site in Hunts Point to be leased to a wholesale produce distribution market (*New York Times* April 13 1960). The acquisition was propelled by growing concerns that New Jersey state officials would entice local produce wholesalers, operating in the crowded Washington Market in lower Manhattan, to move their businesses across the river (*New York Times* April 13 1960, Grutzner February 22 1960). The South Bronx's vast transportation complex, which includes the Tri-Borough Bridge, the Cross Bronx Expressway, and the Bruckner Expressway, has long been regarded as a contributor to the area's demise and made relocation of industrial and manufacturing uses attractive. City officials marketed Hunts Point as an ideal location for a produce market as both railroads and expressways facilitated the ferrying of food goods from regional points into New York City. At the time, the area acquired for the market was characterized simply as "vacant land with a few auto graveyards" (Grutzner February 22 1960.).

Local and national governments cut funds to social programs and pushed for the privatization of public services during the 1970s. With few financial incentives and limited borrowing opportunities to upgrade low-rent or rent-stabilized units, landlords let their properties fall into disrepair. This was one of the many consequences of redlining and other post WWII housing initiatives such as rent control (albeit a necessary mechanism to control rent in New York City). In February 1970, 55 members of the US senate introduced a proposal asking that New York City slums be recognized as disaster areas in need of emergency funds to alleviate inhumane living conditions (*New York Times* February 18, 1970).

> *[In] basic ways, portions of the Hunts Point section of the southeast Bronx have ceased to be a part of New York City…Repeated visits to Hunts Point uncover so much that is not supposed to be America in 1969 that the visitor wonders if he has suddenly entered a time machine and been transported back to frontier days. Nearly everything seems touched by lawlessness* (Severo September 24, 1969).

In support of this effort, over 200 teachers, administrators, and teaching aides from two schools in Hunts Point sent a desperate petition to the mayor describing the heatless and drug-infested conditions suffered by their students and their families, pleading that Hunts Point be declared a disaster area (Campbell February 11, 1970).

As city services were cut in the areas with the greatest need, residents who could leave, fled. But for many, escaping Hunts Point was not an option. Those left behind felt alienated, abandoned, and trapped by lawlessness. Hunts Point's residents were "literally living in a stage of siege" (Severo, September 24, 1969). Residents who stayed:

> *Are afraid of the heroin addicts who steal from them, afraid of the pushers who sell cut-rate heroin to their children, and [are] hostile toward a city government that they feel has forgotten them* (Severo January 14 1970).

While the city continued to relocate families to public housing in the South Bronx, businesses closed their shops and buildings emptied, as landlords were unable to attract new, more economically stable tenants. Some landlords stopped maintaining their buildings altogether. Stranded residents were left to fend for themselves, families fought to stay warm in their

heatless apartments and struggled to maintain dignity when boilers were turned off or water stopped running all together (Campbell February 11, 1970, Verhovek November 10 1987). Others landlords abandoned their properties and stopped paying taxes, convinced the city would seize their buildings for urban renewal. Some property owners went further; in a devastating turn, owners set their buildings ablaze to collect the insurance money.[20] On Monday, June 2, 1975, forty fires raced through the South Bronx, devouring 70 blocks (Vidal June 4 1975). Soon, such grizzly days were to became all too common in Hunts Point, transforming the dense community into a wasteland of burned-out lots, a few blossoming milkweeds the only sign of life amidst the charred rubble. Families whose homes had been burned down by deadbeat landlords or set ablaze by arsonists were homeless (Treaster June 11 1970, *New York Times* January 16 1973). The burned out portions of Hunts Point no longer resembled the United States. One resident, Jorge Luis Manzo, used scraps of wood he scavenged to build a small wooden shack on an abandoned lot adjacent to his burned apartment building (*New York Times* June 4 1975). In all, fires would devour more than 100,000 housing units (Tobier 1998).

1980 to 1990: Getting THE POINT – Community-Led Reinvestment

By the end of the 1970s, the Bronx had lost 20 percent of its population (Goodwin June 14 1981, Tobier 1998). Many other residents who initially refused to be pushed out of their community would leave eventually, devastated by the relentless violence and the city's neglect. Hunts Point, plagued by absentee landlords and widespread arson, became the symbol for urban decay in the United States. On October 5, 1977, then President Jimmy Carter made an unplanned visit to Charlotte Street in the South Bronx. Overwhelmed or apathetic about the scene before him, President Carter promised Federal aid. Following extensive political maneuvering the expected funds were never made available (Tobier 1998).[21]

A city's fiscal health influences the stability and overall wellbeing of a neighborhood. In the 1970s, New York City slid into an economic crisis and nearly declared bankruptcy. Consequently, the Bronx and Brooklyn led the nation in the number of housing units lost to abandonment and demolition (Goodwin June 14, 1981). Decades of disinvestment by both the city and the federal government, coupled with years of arson left Hunts Point with an abundance of vacant land, much of which was seized by the city.

What emerged from the borough's history were two distinct Bronxes – a north and a south; each standing in stark contrast with the other. As families prospered, they moved northwards, which created a distinctly local dynamic, that of the "South Bronx problem" (Tobier 1998). Unlike the northern section of the Bronx, the South Bronx of the 1980s onwards was a segregated area of poor ethnic minorities; less than seven percent of the population was white and nearly one in three residents received some form of public assistance (Chavez & Meislin June 14 1987).[22] Residents struggled to live alongside the increasingly toxic environmental conditions brought on by the expanding food distribution center and the growing number of waste management facilities. They were strained by high rates of violent crime, prostitution, and drug dealing. But, they fought back. With limited opportunities to pursue alternative housing, residents attempted to humanize the wasteland by building alternative landscapes and conferring meaning to the environments they appropriated (Aponte-Parés 2000). They erected small wood frame structures known as casitas, or little houses, planted gardens to force out car thieves and drug dealers, and built affordable housing and family shelters with the aid of architects and urban planners (McKee 1995; Sciorra & Copper 1990). The grassroots strategies that emerged ignited a resident-led revitalization of Hunts Points and other South Bronx neighborhoods.

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The history of Hunts Point is one of struggle against the eradication of place. Politically conceived and economically driven, the forces that shaped and re-shaped the South Bronx for a

century did not acknowledge the significance of this place. Urban renewal programs as policies of placelessness delegitimized local knowledge, social networks, and values (Relph 1976), which alienated thousands of low-income residents and ethnic minorities. In the following section, I introduce what these redevelopment policies yielded in terms of daily experiences for Hunts Point residents. I highlight how residents and community-based grassroots organizations appropriated spaces and conferred meaning to the places as intentional acts of resistance and struggle against injustice.

An Overview of Hunts Point

Advocates for Children of New York listed Hunts Point as one of the highest risk neighborhoods in the city for children and youth. In its annual ranking, *Keeping Track of New York City's Children* (2010), the Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. indicated that children and youth residing in South Bronx neighborhoods were at *highest* risk because of poor economic conditions, housing, safety, and education and at *high* risk because of poor health and community life. [23]

Toxic lands are plentiful in Hunts Point. According to an inventory compiled by three local CBOs – THE POINT, Sustainable South Bronx, and Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice – Hunts Point has over 107 brownfield sites (Telegrafi 2010). The alliance is looking to brownfields as potential sites for redevelopment opportunities to meet the growing communities' needs for housing, community resources, and open space.

In the following section, I describe the neighborhood's existing conditions and focus on the contextual realities characteristic of the social disparities and environmental injustices endured by residents.

Geographic Profile

Hunts Point is a peninsula located in the South Bronx section of New York City and sits at the confluence of the Bronx River and the East River (please refer to Map 1 in Appendix One). The neighborhood covers nearly 690 acres and makes up a majority of Bronx Community District 2.[24] The Bruckner Expressway is the neighborhood's western and northern boundary, while the Bronx River is its eastern boundary, and the East River its southern boundary (See Figure 4 below). The area is dominated by industrial, manufacturing, transportation, and utility uses, in particular the Hunts Point Food Distribution Center. Residential uses are concentrated in the north-central portion of Hunts Point, along both sides of Hunts Point Avenue (please refer to Map 1 in Appendix One).

Figure 4: View of the Bruckner Expressway and Manhattan from THE POINT, Hunts Point; photograph courtesy of Julie Poncelet

Demographic Profile

Young people ages 24 and under make up 35 percent of Hunts Point's population; of these, 88 percent are under the age of 17. Fewer students in the Bronx, just over 50 percent, graduate high school compared to the citywide average of 65 percent (Citizens' Committee for

Children of New York, Inc. 2010). Students in the Hunts Point are more likely to depend on free and reduced-fee lunches compared to the rest of the city (87 percent compared to 76 percent) and score considerably lower on state and city standardized reading tests (Hunts Point 42 percent versus citywide 59 percent) and math tests (Hunts Point 63 percent versus citywide 76 percent) (Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. 2010). Approximately one third of adults in Hunts Point have completed high school[25] and nearly half of the adults have less than a high school education;[26] four percent have a bachelor's degree.[27] Hispanics or Latinos make-up a majority of the neighborhood's population (71 percent) with most identifying ethically as Puerto Rican and Dominican.

In 2010, nearly 16 million children in the United States were living in poverty, which translates into one in five children (Macartney 2011), but in Hunts Point, one in two children were living below the federal poverty line. Hunts Point is a poverty-concentrated neighborhood, meaning a neighborhood where at least 20 percent of the residents are living at and below the federal poverty line.[28] The neighborhood has one of the metropolitan region's lowest median household income, $20,087, which is considerably lower than borough ($34,264) and citywide ($50,285) averages.[29] Seventy percent of the neighborhood's population is identified as doing poorly or struggling with poverty. Nearly half (42 percent) of all families residing in Hunts Point live below the federal poverty line; of these families, 69 percent are led by single female householders.[30] Most elementary and middle school children living in the Bronx (90 percent) receive free lunches at school, a key indicator of poverty (Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. 2010). And although the percentage of children receiving cash assistance decreased from 21 percent in 2008 to 18 percent in 2010, the number of children living below federal poverty levels has remained consistent at 40 percent (Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc., 2010).

Hunts Point is a neighborhood of renters who occupy 91 percent of the available housing units, a rate that is higher than borough (81 percent) and citywide (69 percent) averages. Not

uncommon in New York City, especially in low-income neighborhoods, one in three renters (36 percent) is spending at least half, if not more, of their monthly income on rent.[31] Substandard housing stock is one of the many factors contributing to Hunts Point high risk rating by the Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (2010); in the South Bronx, over one third (39 percent) of the available housing units are considered to be in fair or poor condition.

For a comprehensive overview of the demographic data for Hunts Point in comparison to Bronx Country and New York City, please refer to Appendix One, Table One.

Land Use Profile

Hunts Point residents share their neighborhood with a number of industrial, manufacturing, and commercial land uses. The neighborhood's most prominent landlord is the city of New York, specifically, the New York City Economic Development Corporation.[32] The neighborhood's key revitalization strategies – the redevelopment of city-owned land into capital facilities (i.e., social housing and transportation infrastructure) and industrial parks – may be responsible for a number of environmental justice and public health concerns, such as the city's highest rates of asthma in children, the highest proportion of adults with diabetes (17 percent), and high rates of obesity (New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene 2006). Asthma-related hospitalization and death rates are eight times the national average and have been linked to the neighborhood's land uses (Lena et al., 2002, Whu et al., 2007).[33]

I continue with a description of the neighborhood's industrial land uses and community resources and highlight patterns of community-based struggles against social and environmental injustices.

Major Industrial Uses. "Are those canoes?" I asked one of the ACTION coordinators. We were on our knees, weeding around the seedlings that had begun to sprout in the small plot at THE POINT's Riverside Campus. It was late spring and I was startled to

see canoes launched from Hunts Point Riverside Park and slip quietly into the Bronx River. The sound of the water lapping against the red fiberglass vessels made this feel like a different place, a world away from what was formerly an abandoned lot on the northeastern edge of Hunts Point. I walked towards the water's edge and remarked: "Canoes? In the Bronx River!"

The 23-mile Bronx River is narrow just north of the Bruckner Expressway. It twists and turns, its banks lined with smooth grey boulders and low-hanging trees. The river is unexpectedly lush for an industrialized landscape. The red silos of an abandoned concrete manufacturer are visible from a small inlet. The structures that stand tall above the water's edge represent a celebration of sorts; the redevelopment of a brownfield into a segment of the new Bronx River Greenway. But past the inlet, few canoes venture further south where the river begins to widen. Where the Bronx River meets the East River lies the Hunts Point Food Distribution Center, one of the world's largest. Viewed from above, the center resembles a computer chip; a methodically arranged collection of circuitry made up of long rows of hangers and docked trucks (refer to Figure 5 below).

Figure 5: Hunts Point Food Distribution Center; photograph courtesy of Hunts Point Food Distribution Center

The Hunts Point Food Distribution Center opened in 1967 with the construction of the Hunts Point Terminal Produce Market. In 1974, the Hunts Point Cooperative Meat Market was developed. In 2005, the Fulton Fish Market was relocated to the center after 180 years of business in lower Manhattan. Although the New York City Economic Development Corporation acts as landlord and as property manager for the 329-acre site, which grew considerably from its original 126 acres, each of the three markets is managed independently. Over 150 public and private wholesalers operate in the Hunts Point Food Distribution Center employing over 6,000 people.

Over 10,000 trucks travel through Hunts Point every day, most servicing the distribution center (Lena et al., 2002). Local grassroots CBOs and public health advocates argued that the area's industries, especially the heavy truck traffic generated by the distribution center, were linked to high rates of asthma. In 1999 THE POINT commissioned a study to identify patterns of truck traffic throughout the neighborhood

and to evaluate its spatial distribution relative to airborne particle concentration. Residents worked with researchers from Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health to estimate that as many 276 trucks traveled through Hunts Point every hour (Lena et al., 2002).[34] Airborne elemental carbon, a component of diesel exhaust particulate (DEP) associated with large trucks is suspected of "transporting allergens and toxic compounds deep into [a person's] respiratory tree" (p. 1010). DEP levels were elevated in Hunts Point and correlated with the spatial distribution of truck traffic. The most susceptible residents, children, were exposed to and ingested considerably higher than normal rates of DEP, which is directly associated with adverse respiratory problems such as asthma.

> *[An] 8-year-old child who spends 12 hrs./day resting, 10 hrs. engaged in light activity, and 2 hrs engaged in heavy activity would have a 24-hr cumulative dose of 28.4 μg DEP…This amounts to a cumulative dose of 396 μg DEP over 2 weeks. Based on our data, a maximum exposure for a child from the community [of Hunts Point] over a 24-hr period would be 67.8 μg. A 2-week dose at maximum exposure levels would be 949 μg* (p. 1014).

The study's findings supported changes to the truck routes throughout the area and recommended greater community involvement in the distribution center's operations.

Although specific truck routes are designated for access into and from Hunts Point, the study's findings substantiated local concerns that trucks were using residential streets to bypass traffic and gain quicker access to the distribution center or major thoroughfares. Traffic studies commissioned by the New York State Department of Transportation (URS/Goodkind & O'Dea 2004) and the City of New York Department of Transportation (Edwards & Kelcey 2007) confirmed the use of non-truck routes to access the center. According to the URS/Goodkind & O'Dea report (2004), truck drivers surveyed identified approximately 50 different routes they used on a regular basis; over 15 percent of the routes were not legally designated. In July 2004, new regulations

reduced the number and the frequency of trucks using residential streets, while maintaining access to the neighborhood's industrial areas.[35]

Other Noxious Uses. He walked out of the second floor loft and onto THE POINT's roof wearing a rather odd pair of fish bowl goggles. Bemused, I asked the ACTION youth participant why he needed these (refer to Figure 6) "Skateboarding in Hunts Point," he replied. It was April and windy in New York City. He said the goggles were necessary to skate in the new park. When the winds blow strong, debris from the surrounding industrial plants is kicked up. "Safety first," he smirked.

Intrigued, I went to visit Barretto Point Park (refer to Figure 6). As I approach the river, the Hunts Point Waste Water Treatment Plant seemed to block my access. I crossed the street and cut through an empty parking lot; most of the asphalt was broken-up. The vibrant green grass and the gnarled shape of the newly planted trees were startling. They appeared strange against to the still white domed tanks and the grey edges of the industrial plant. A tall fence surrounded the park like many other spaces in Hunts Point. The black paint was still glossy. Inside the park was a wide circular path leading away from the one-story playhouse to a small crescent-shaped beach. The newly placed pebbles fell into the East River. In the distance, the water reflected New York's main jail complex – Rikers Island.

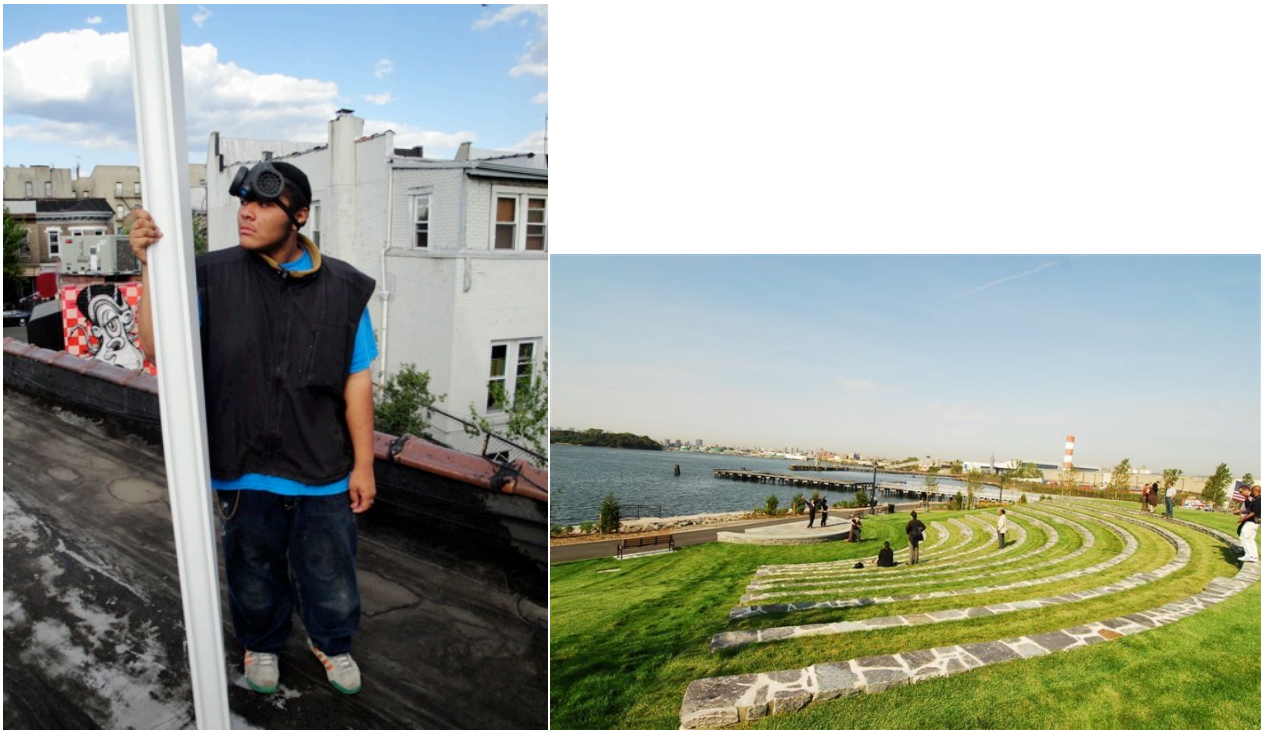

Figure 6: Left, ACTION Youth Participant; photograph courtesy of Julie Poncelet. Right, Barretto Point Park; photograph courtesy of Malcolm Pinckney

Barretto Point Park is located on the southwestern edge of Hunts Point, the only patch of green along the northern shores of the East River. It is flanked by two sewage treatment facilities. The air is putrefied during the hot summer months. On windy days, debris blows through the air and the stench lingers throughout the neighborhood.

In no uncertain terms, Hunts Point is a dumping ground for New York City's waste. The neighborhood houses 15 open-air waste transfer stations all of which are within a mile of each other and represent approximately one quarter of the stations operated by the city (Williams 2008, Sustainable South Bronx 2009). The stations process 100 percent of the waste generated by the Bronx and roughly 40 percent of combined waste for the City of New York.

Residents complain frequently about the noxious and acrid smells emitted by the two sewage plants: the Hunts Point Water Pollution Control Plant and the New York

Organic Fertilizer Company (NYOFCo).[36] The smell of rotten eggs, feces, and raw sewage forces residents to remain indoors, a most challenging feat during the sweltering summer months, especially in a low-income neighborhood where few have the resources to maintain a functioning air conditioner.

In 2008, the Natural Resources Defense Council filed a lawsuit against the City of New York and NYOFCo on behalf of *Mothers on the Move*, a local grassroots organization, and 10 Hunts Point residents (Dolnick & Navaro June 30, 2010; Warren July 10, 2008). The city had maintained a $34 million-a-year contract with the facility, which converts sewage sludge into fertilizer pellets (Dolnick & Navaro June 30, 2010; Warren July 10, 2008).[37] In June 2010, a settlement was reached, ending the city's annual contract and calling for new requirements to control noxious odors generated by all sewage treatment facilities within city limits (refer to Figure 7). As part of the settlement the city agreed to make improvements to Barretto Point Park and contributed $500,000 for the site's cleanup.

Figure 7: Mothers on the Move NYOFCo Settlement; photograph courtesy of Mothers on the Move

A vast transportation complex dissects the South Bronx. The major roadways traversing the neighborhood are the elevated Bruckner Expressway, developed by

Robert Mosses, and the Bruckner Boulevard, which stretches along side the expressway. The New York City Economic Development Corporation estimates that over 5,000 passenger vehicles travel through on a daily basis, bypassing Hunts Point.

The area remains a preferred location for the ever-expanding corrections system in New York City. Currently, there are two correctional detention centers located in Hunts Point: the Vernon C. Bain Correctional Center and Spofford Juvenile Detention Center. The Vernon C. Bain facility is an 870-bed barge docked along the East River, adjacent to the Fulton Fish Market (refer to Figure 8). The Spofford facility, formally a detention center for juvenile delinquents, was closed in 1998 but continues to operate as an intake and administrative site for the New York Department of Youth and Family Justice. In 2006, the New York City Department of Corrections proposed a new $375 million, 2,000 bed-facility as a possible reuse of the defunct Oak Point Energy site.[38] Outraged, residents in collaboration with grassroots CBOs formed a coalition, *Community in Unity*, in opposition to the jail proposal (Hirsch 2010, August 12; Williams 2008, March 5).[39] In August 2010, after significant efforts by *Community in Unity*, the city abandoned its plan to construct a third prison facility in Hunts Point.

> *This is certainly welcome news for the neighborhood, which has been a victim of the prison industrial complex," explained Kellie Terry-Sepulveda Executive Director of THE POINT Community Development Corporation* (Hirsch 2010, August 12).
>
> *We actually stopped a jail from being built in the poorest congressional district in the country. We did it with no money." Lisa Ortega of the advocacy organization Rights for Prisoners with Psychiatric Disabilities* (Hirsch 2010, August 12).

Following this defeat, the city decided it would relocate the Vernon C. Bain barge to Rikers Island; to date, the barge remains docked in Hunts Point.

Figure 8: Vernon C. Bain Correctional Facility. Photography courtesy of Reivax New York Press

In 2003, at the request of New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, a planning advisory group called the *Hunts Point Task Force* was developed to help address concerns regarding the neighborhood's future. The task force, made-up of elected officials, members of the community, and representatives of the area's industrial and commercial businesses, released the Hunts Point Vision Plan in 2004 recommending: (1) optimizing land use, including the redevelopment of brownfields and rezoning to expand opportunities for industrial development while buffering residential areas; (2) implementing workforce solutions to improve employment options for Hunts Point residents; (3) creating connections to improve access to the waterfront and increase pedestrian safety in the neighborhood; and (4) improving traffic safety and efficiency such as introducing new truck routes to and from the food distribution center.[40] The plan made no mention of affordable, safe housing and other, key community services - critical needs identified by the community.

Parks and Open Space. Hunts Point has one of the lowest resident-to-park ratios in the city with approximately a half-acre of parkland per 1,000 residents; the area is well below

New York City's recommended ratio is of 2.5 acres per 1,000 residents (Sustainable South Bronx February 2008). While the neighborhood has over 6 miles of waterfront and an uninterrupted view of Manhattan, residents had access to only 200 feet of the waterfront for many years. Until 2006, Hunts Point had only three parks: Julio Carballo Ball fields, which includes ball fields and the Manida Street Recreation Center, the Hunts Point Playground, and Drake Park (NYC Department of Parks and Recreation December 2003). In 2006, Barretto Point Park was opened off the banks of the East River and, in 2007, the Hunts Point Riverside Park opened along the Bronx River (New York City Department of Parks and Recreation 2006a, 2006b, 2007). As of 2008, the city government planned to invest approximately $550 million to improve parks and waterfront access in the South Bronx; the foremost project being the South Bronx Greenway in Hunts Point (NYC Department of Parks and Recreation December 2007). A detailed plan for the South Bronx Greenway, which would provide access to 1.5 miles of waterfront, was released in 2006 following the Hunts Point Vision plan's recommendation for improved access and optimization of land uses along the rivers.[41]

Community Resources. Hunts Point is an underserved community; residents have limited access to civic resources such as libraries, open spaces, well-performing and well-funded schools, quality housing options, medical care facilities, and healthy, fresh food. It has no high school so teenagers living in Hunts Point must travel outside of the neighborhood and, in many cases, outside of the borough, to attend school. The neighborhood has six elementary and middle schools, one senior center, one facility offering Head Start programming,[42] and one library, which is located on the northern side of Bruckner Boulevard, in the Longwood neighborhood.

A food desert is defined by residents' limited access to healthy, fresh, and affordable foods, a condition that can lead to numerous health problems such as obesity,

diabetes, and high blood pressure (Gordon et al. 2011). Hunts Point is such a place. Fast food establishments and take-out restaurants are commonplace in the neighborhood but there are no sit-down restaurant options (Sustainable South Bronx February 2008). The juxtaposition of Hunts Point as a food desert and the presence of the world's largest food distribution center is startling.

The residents of Hunts Point struggle to live alongside toxic land uses and its dangerous corollaries, but they also struggle to change their noxious surroundings. In the following section, I summarize the history of organizing and activism by community-based organizations to describe a heritage of transformative action as the formative context in which a social justice-driven youth program can develop and thrive.

A History of Community-Based Grassroots Organizing and Activism against Social and Environmental Injustice

In the early summer of 1975, after another devastating season of arson, residents left their homes to congregate at Mr. Matos little shop. There was yet another fire. Residents left behind their belongings in a moment of certain danger to gather and protect a cherished community resource – the last neighborhood grocery store. "We serve the whole area here, including the housing project and they're afraid they might lose the last store left [in Hunts Point]," explained Mr. Matos (*New York Times* June 4 1975).

> *This is a complaint about the total disregard by all city agencies regarding our street. We're referring to Simpson Street in the Bronx. This whole street is one big garbage dump…if we got rid of all the sanitation inspectors, building inspectors, police and school teachers in this area, we assure you that this jungle could not be worse than it is at present* (excerpt from letter to New York City Mayor, John Lindsay, from the Simpson Street Committee,[43] quoted by Severo January 14 1970).

> *We are enraged that, during the coldest January in the city's history, literally hundreds of children have lived in heatless apartments…Our schools attempt to educate the children*

> *from Simpson and Fox Streets, but education in the schools cannot go on while children sleep in heatless rooms, bathe in cold water, stumble over garbage in their hallways and are accosted by junkies needing money for a fix (*excerpt from petition to New York City Mayor, John Lindsay, from teachers, administrators, and teachers aides at Public School 20 and 150 in Hunts Point quoted by Campbell February 11 1970).

Residents alongside grassroots community-based organizations have mobilized and struggled around unjust environmental and social conditions in Hunts Point for decades. In the 1970s, they rallied against the incessant waves of arson transforming the neighborhood into a barren wasteland. They demanded from the city basic community services; safe and affordable housing, police, clean streets, access to health care facilities, and well-funded schools.

The alliance between grassroots groups and residents continued to develop during the 1980s but shifted to focus on improving access to safe and affordable housing. These alliances lobbied for funds, supported the planning and construction of housing projects, and fought-back when the city's only presence was a wrecking ball. From where President Carter once stood arose the 89-unit single-family ranch-style housing project of Charlotte Gardens in Claremont, one of the northern-most neighborhoods in the South Bronx. With support from several community-based organizations such as the *Mid-Bronx Desporadoes* and *Local Initiatives Support Corporation,* the housing project was developed from 1983 to 1986 using city funds (Chavez & Meislin June 14 1987, Stewart November 2 1997). On December 10, 1997, during a visit to Charlotte Gardens, then President Bill Clinton declared the project a "miracle" of the Bronx (Ferrer 1998).

As the alliances labored to drive local-level policies to improve housing and to implement projects, several other smaller miracles of rehabilitated or new housing were constructed throughout the neighborhood, but a comprehensive vision for the redevelopment of the South Bronx was not codified. The *South Bronx People for Change* (SBPC), a church sponsored housing advocacy group, feared the city did not support an overall housing strategy that would safeguard access to affordable housing for South Bronx residents. Its director, Angel Garcia,

believed the city had other plans; to raze the South Bronx in order to bank the land for future commercial and industrial development. From 1985 to 1987, the city demolished 442 units in the borough; 440 units were located in the South Bronx (Chavez & Meislin June 14 1987). Housing advocates argued that renovations were more cost effective than new construction, thereby questioning the motives of city officials supporting the widespread demolition of buildings. Locals were never notified about which buildings would be demolished or when the demolition would take place. On more than one occasion, the buildings demolished had been sought out by community-based organizations wishing to renovate the units as part of their locally-driven efforts to provide affordable housing.

By the late 1990s, grassroots groups played a broader, more integral role in the redevelopment of the South Bronx. Pursuant to the 1993 Comprehensive Community Revitalization Program (CCRP), Community Development Corporations (CDCs) were provided with support from a number of funders to address quality-of-life physical planning issues (Phillips, Rao & Danyluk 1998).

Today, community-based grassroots organizations in Hunts Point continue to redress the enduring consequences of past and current economic and development policies. To survive in a world of limited resources, these groups have formed coalitions with their strategic partners to mobilize around specific issues and to leverage funds for community-based initiatives. A common theme across many of these collaborative efforts is dealing with the most conspicuous and perhaps unforeseen outcomes of the burgeoning industrial complex in Hunts Point: poor public health. Public health epidemics, such as rising rates of obesity and asthma, are the real-life repercussions of discriminatory development and economic policies confronting, at a disproportionate rate, the area's low-income communities of color. In support of their efforts, organizations in Hunts Point have initiated partnerships that engage key institutional sectors critical to bringing positive social change in public health efforts: the non-profit, public, and private sectors. Community-based grassroots groups have undertaken activism in pursuing

such initiatives by actively engaging this locally sourced trio of partners to redesign, revise, and implement local initiatives and policies to redress public health problems in Hunts Point.

THE POINT Community Development Corporation

The site of my dissertation research is a community-based grassroots organization, THE POINT Community Development Corporation (CDC), located in the heart of the Hunts Point section of the South Bronx. Like many other local social institutions driven by principles of social justice, THE POINT operates with a limited budget and a small number of full-time staff and volunteers. Its efforts are grounded in the community's collective identity and its history of local organizing. THE POINT has forged strong bonds with local partners, such as organizations engaged in advocacy work or providing educational and health services, which has helped to strengthen its efforts in the community. My research population consisted of the youth participants, adult staff members, and other non-staff adults affiliated with THE POINT's community-based youth program, ACTION. In the following section, I provide an overview of the organization's mission and accomplishments. The ACTION program and the research population, as the focus of my research, are described in great details in Chapter Four.

THE POINT as a Social Justice Enterprise

In 1993, four local activists named Maria Torres, Paul Lipson, Mildred Ruiz, and Stephen Sapp began renovating an abandoned warehouse off Garrison Avenue. The activists were united in their mutual conviction that residents were a neighborhood's greatest assets, with the capacities to bring about meaningful social change in their community. THE POINT's founders advocated for an assets-based model of community development, an approach that challenged the needs-driven discourse dominating community development practice (Kretzmann and McKnight 1996). In 1994, THE POINT CDC came into being.[44]

THE POINT began as a response to growing community concerns regarding the lack of local development opportunities and access to safe life spaces – places to socialize, shop, and be active (Bressi 1997). Founded on the principles of community development, social and environment activism through the arts, and positive youth development, THE POINT's mission is to organize broad community support around important local issues and functions as a key center for the production and exchange of local knowledge on community-driven advocacy issues. Many of the organization's efforts focus on acute environmental problems, such that it refers to Hunts Point as an *EJ neighborhood,* an environmental justice neighborhood.

THE POINT, which has an operating budget of $1.7 million,[45] provides residents, including youth and their families, with a variety of targeted services and supports numerous arts, education, and activism programs.

Brief History of THE POINT*.* Over time, THE POINT has operated partnerships with several well-established organizations that share a common goal: to transform individuals and communities positively through the arts and activism. THE POINT established its first partnership in 1996 with the International Center of Photography (ICP) to launch an ICP photography program.[46] As one walks through THE POINT's front doors, a series of sleek and stirring black and white photographs lines the wall - images taken by ICP participants. The small informal gallery is also a compelling locally sourced study of visual anthropology. By 1998, THE POINT had established itself as an accomplished provider of community-based youth development programming receiving recognition from Union Square Award, an organization founded to support grassroots activism in New York City.[47] THE POINT was an innovator of in recent approaches that related youth development to community development. A year later, THE POINT's Live from the Edge Theater was the recipient of a New York Dance and Performance

(Bessie) Award and an OBIE Grant award. THE POINT began partnering with Cirque du Monde, Cirque du Soleil's main social outreach program in 2002.[48] During THE POINT's annual Town Hall, young acrobats entertain meeting participants with routines of exciting athletic feats. By 2004 THE POINT had teamed up with another prominent social outreach partner: the youth volunteer service organization City Year New York.[49] City Year volunteers help manage THE POINT's after-school program, working with elementary and middle school aged-children.

In 2008, THE POINT engaged its staff in an outcomes-mapping process based on logic-model visuals (also referred to as a Theory of Change, an outcomes mapping methodology), in order to better articulate the organization's short-term and long-term outcomes for youth and for the community as a whole.[50] As a result of the process, THE POINT identified its ultimate outcome as being, "people in the community create the community they want to live in" (THE POINT n.d.). In the coming years, THE POINT plans to continue contributing to this dynamic organizational planning tool, which ultimately guides much of its programming, awareness campaigns, and action projects.

THE POINT has received numerous other awards such as the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities *Coming Up Taller Award* in 2005, the New York City Mayor's *Award for Arts and Culture* in 2007, and the *Place Matters Award* presented by City Lore and the Municipal Arts Society.

Programs at THE POINT. THE POINT's guiding principle in developing programs is assets-based community development. Specifically, THE POINT firmly believes that Hunts Point residents, youth in particular, have the capacity and knowledge to bring about change in their neighborhood, and that harnessing this human power is the key to their success and to their neighborhood's success. THE POINT's methodology reaffirms

a community-based youth development approach, which asserts that youth are not burdens in a community, but instead important neighborhood stakeholders and producers of knowledge and change in their own right. Early youth programs at THE POINT were implemented in response to growing concerns and anger over the 1990s get-tough policies targeting urban youth, especially youth of color. And while assets-based models such as the positive youth development programs described in Chapter Two provided an alternative approach to harsh punitive measures, standard PYD curriculums did not reflect (or recognize) the socio-spatial context of growing up in the South Bronx. Instead, THE POINT grounded its youth programming in a community development ethos and engaged youth in understanding and changing the unjust conditions in their lives while providing them with diverse, hands-on opportunities to grow essential life skills.

Programs offered through THE POINT fall under two broad categories: youth programs and arts and culture programs. However, these categories are very much intertwined. THE POINT's youth programs aim, "[to] support the academic, artistic, and positive social development of young people and engage them as active participants in community development" (THE POINT n.d.). While the arts and culture programs are, "dedicated to the cultivation and preservation of South Bronx culture and making the arts economically and geographically accessible to Hunts Point residents" (THE POINT n.d.). Please refer to Table One in Appendix Two for a breakdown of the programs offered at THE POINT.

Conclusion

Hunts Point is a neighborhood of extremes: America's Urban Armageddon, a symbol of urban decay, New York City's dumping ground, a poverty-concentrated and low-resource

neighborhood, a food desert, the ghetto. Hunts Point and the South Bronx have been called a great many things, but none of which capture the totality of their dynamics. The Hunts Point I experienced through ACTION was described as home, fun, and comfortable, as well as being shady or complicated. It is a place with a rich and complex history; a microcosm shaped by a century of converging and, at times, conflicting regional and national policies.

The tension between placelessness and placemaking characterizes the neighborhood's struggle against exclusionary practices and the forces of inequity. Hunts Point may exemplify injustice, but it is also home to thousands of predominately Hispanic youth. It makes for an intriguing context for the exploration of community-based approaches to youth development, in particular one that seeks to transform both youth and their community by exercising an intentional, critical pedagogy driven by social justice principles. I describe the methods I used to carry-out my research at ACTION in the following chapter.

Chapter Three Endnotes

[10] The New York and Harlem Railroad is now the Metro Transportation Authority's (MTA) Metro North Railroad – Harlem line.

[11]Substandard housing were units built prior to the 1901 Tenement House Law. The Tenement House Law, also known as The New Law, was designed to eliminate the construction of dark and unsanitary tenement buildings. The law mandated more fire protection, light, and air in addition to new sanitary regulation regarding separate toilet facilities for each unit. The law also made it unprofitable to build a multi-family building on a lot size smaller than 40 x 100 feet. See Gonzalez 2004, page 68-69.

[12] Crotona is a South Bronx neighborhood.

[13] The large infrastructure projects that characterized the Robert Moses era of New York City's development were disastrous for the Bronx. The Cross-Bronx Expressway, which was approved in 1944 but built nearly a decade later, decimated blocks of densely populated neighborhoods so that people could bypass the Bronx entirely.

[14] Redlining is the discriminatory practice of demarking geographic areas to limit access and/or increase the cost of various services such as financial and banking, usually based on ethnicity/race. Redlining was used predominantly by mortgage lenders to identify neighborhood considered at high risk of defaulting on loans. Neighborhoods were considered at high risk based on low-income levels, ethnicity of residents, and 'non traditional' households. Please refer to Gregory, D., Johnston, R., Pratt, G., Watts, M., and Whatmore, S. (Eds.). (2009). The Dictionary of Human Geography (5th ed.). West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

[15] The Housing Act of 1937 made it possible for many cities to seek government funding to replace deteriorated housing stock, while making home more affordable to those who qualified. Please refer to U.S. Department Housing and Urban Development found at http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD; last retrieved May 31, 2012.

[16] Police District 42 renamed "Apache Fort" either after the novel by the same name and/or a 1981 movie called "Apache Fort, The Bronx" about the struggle between police, criminals, and residents living in a deteriorated South Bronx.

[18] The Great Migration is characterized by the significant redistribution of rural African Americans and blacks from the South to northern states during the 1930s to 1960s. Factors such as a significant decline in foreign immigration, which reduced competition for low-skilled jobs in northern states, and changes in the labor markets of southern states, such as the mechanization of cotton growing, contributed to this shift in population (please refer to Klein 2004).

[19] For an in depth history of local housing and redevelopment policies of this era in New York City, please refer to the Caro, R. (1974).*The Power Broker.* NY, NY: Random House, Inc.

[20] According to Gonzalez (2004), when affordable fire protection insurance became available in the 1970s, some individuals purchased properties in the South Bronx with the intent to set them on fire and collect the insurance money. (pg. 126).

[21] Former President Jimmy Carter visited the South Bronx in the fall of 1977. Following his visit to Charlotte Street, President Carter promised federal aid. In preparation for the funds, the South Bronx Development Corporation (SBDC) was formed in 1978 by then Mayor Koch. Plans were developed for the redevelopment of the South Bronx, heading by Edward Logue; high-rise multi-family buildings dominated the schemes. Following the change in administrations in 1981, the federal aid offered during Carter's presidency was never realized (Tobier 1998).

[22] This figured is compared with 11 percent of residents living in the North Bronx receiving some form of public assistance.

[23] The categories are defined according to: *Economic Conditions* – median household income, adult unemployment rate, percent of children receiving public assistance, percent of children living below poverty line, percent of families with incomes below $15,000; *Wealth* – bank deposits per capita, percent of home ownership, percent of luxury rental, median family income, percent of families at self-sufficiency standard; *Health* – infant mortality rate per 1,000 births, percent of infants at low birth weight, percent of mothers with late or no prenatal care; *Youth* – percent birth to teens (15 -19 years), percent of 16-19 years not in school and not high school graduate, youth arrested for felonies and misdemeanors (20 and under); *Community life* – felony reports per 1,000 residents, percent clean streets; *Safety* – consolidated investigation of abuse and neglect per 1,000 children, reported violent felonies per 1,000 children; *Environment* – lead paint violations per 1,000 children (1-4 years), facilities per square-mile storing > 10,000 lbs. of hazardous waste; *Education* – percent of students in graduates 3 through 8 who meet state and city reading and math standards.

[24] New York City is comprised of five boroughs: Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan, and Staten Island. The five boroughs are further divided into 59 Community Districts, appointed advisory groups that play a role in a variety of local matters such as land use and zoning, community needs and the delivery of community services. Bronx Community District 2 includes the neighborhoods of Hunts Point and Longwood (northwest of the Bruckner Expressway) and the Hunts Point Food Distribution Center.

[25] For population age 25 and over with a revised margin of error +/- 2%; based on 2006-2010 American Community Survey for Hunts Point census tracts. I revised the margin errors using formulas from U.S. Census Bureau. (2009). *A Compass for Understanding and Using American Community Survey Data: What Researchers Need to Know* U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC.

[26] For population age 25 and over with a revised margin of error +/- 5%; based on 2006-2010 American Community Survey for Hunts Point census tracts.

[27] For population age 25 and over with a revised margin of error +/- 2%; based on 2006-2010 American Community Survey for Hunts Point census tracts.

[28] New York 16th Congressional District includes the Bronx neighborhoods Bedford Park, East Tremont, Fordham, Hunts Point, Melrose, Highbridge Morrisiana, Mott Haven, and University Heights.

[29] Median household income is calculated based on census data from the 2006-2010 American Community Survey. The revised margin of errors for Hunt Point median household income is +/-

$15.581; the inclusion of prison facilities in Hunt Point census tract accounts for the great variability in the margin or error. The margins of errors for Bronx County and New York City are +/- $477 and +/- $216 respectively.

[30] Figure includes households with related children under the age of 18.

[31] According to Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. (2010) this is the highest rate of any borough.

[32] NYCEDC is tasked with managing city-owned assets to drive economic growth through strategic partnerships. For addition information about the New York City Economic Development Corporation, please refer to: http://www.nycedc.com/about-nycedc; last retrieved on May 10, 2012.

[33] Although the rate of childhood asthma has decreased by 65 percent in the past decade, the rate of adult asthma has increased by 20 percent in Hunts Points (New York City's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene 2003, 2006). The decrease in asthma hospitalization rates is in part attributed to improvements in asthma management. The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's (DOHMH) Childhood Asthmas Initiative operates throughout the City of New York and provides community-specific interventions. Community-specific interventions are managed through a partnership between DOHMH Public Health Offices (PHO), which are located in high-risk communities to address health disparities, and community-based organizations.

[34] Researchers consulted with THE POINT and Hunts Points residents to identify seven potential monitoring sites in the neighborhood, based on criteria described in the study. Traffic counting and air monitoring was conducted by teams of two that included student interns and/or residents (the student interns were not ACTION participants). Student interns and residents were trained by Columbia University staff, who also supervised the monitoring sites. Traffic counting and air sampling was conducted in July and August 1999. Please refer to the following study for a complete description of the methods and procedures: Lena, T. S., Ochieng, V., Cater, M. Holguin-Veras, J., and Kinney, P. L. (2002). Elemental Carbon and $PM_{2.5}$ Levels in an Urban Community Heavily Impacted by Truck Traffic. *Environmental Health Perspectives*,110 (10); 1009-1015.

[35] Garrison Avenue and Hunts Point Avenue are a block away from THE POINT CDC and were removed from the truck route system in 2004 (Edwards & Kelsey Report 2007).

[36] NYOFCo – The company that owned the New York Organic Fertilizer Company, Synargo Technologies, which is based in Houston, Texas is a public traded company. In 2004, a number of residents from Hunts Point bought shares in Synargo Technologies in the hopes that as shareholders they would be able to persuade the company to take the steps necessary to eliminate the noxious orders emitted by the treatment facility (Warren 2008).

[37] The process of converting sewage sludge into fertilizer pellets for agricultural application is not approved by the state of New York (Sustainable South Bronx 2009).

[38] The Oak Point Energy Site was formerly the Oak Point garbage dump, which was abandoned in 1990 amidst crippling debt ($60 Million) and suspected ties to illegal activities (specifically, linked to the Gambino crime family). In 2004, there was plan to develop a large energy plant on the site, significant enough to provide the city with one tenth of its energy needs (Urbina 2004,

August 16). The site is one of the largest privately owned pieces of underdeveloped commercial land in the city. Although the energy plant was never developed, the NYC Economic Development Corporation was in negotiation with the site's owner to purchase the land to develop a $375 million jail facility (Hu 2004, April 26).

[39] The coalition, Community in Unity, included Bronx Defenders, Sustainable South Bronx, Critical Resistant, and THE POINT CDC.

[40] For complete details, please refer to the Hunt Point Vision Plan available from the New York City Economic Development Corporation, http://www.nycedc.com/project/hunts-point-peninsula; last retrieved May 8, 2012.

[41] For complete details, please refer to the South Bronx Greenway Plan available from the New York City Economic Development Corporation http://www.nycedc.com/project/south-bronx-greenway; last retrieve May 8, 2012.

[42] The Head Start Program is offered by the federal government through the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families. The program promotes the school readiness of children ages birth to five from low-income families by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development. The Head Start program provides a learning environment that supports children's growth in the following domains: (1) language and literacy; (2) cognition and general knowledge; (3) physical development and health; (4) social and emotional development; and (5) approaches to learning. For complete detail, please refer to the Head Start Program administration page available from the Department of Health and Human Services, http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc; last retrieved on May 8, 2012.

[43] Simpson Street Committee was an anti-poverty group.

[44] THE POINT Community Development Corporation is an established non-profit 501(c)(3).

[45] THE POINT's location on Garrison Avenue includes a 220-seat live theater, a neighborhood internet center, a professional dance studio, a youth-run video-editing facility, a 4,000 square foot incubator for neighborhood-owned businesses, and a photography center operated in conjunction with the International Center for Photography.

[46] According to its website, ICP is a museum and school dedicated to the understanding and appreciation of photography. ICP creates programs of the highest quality to advance knowledge of the medium. These include exhibitions, collections, and education for the general public, members, students, and professionals in the field of photography. Since its founding in 1974 by Cornell Capa (1918–2008) in the historic Willard Straight House, ICP has presented over 500 exhibitions, bringing the work of more than 3,000 photographers and other artists to the public in one-person and group exhibitions and provided thousands of classes and workshops that have enriched tens of thousands of students. ICP was founded as an institution to keep the legacy of "Concerned Photography" alive and has seen enormous growth in its exhibitions, collections, education programs, and staff. All kinds of photography were included in this expansion. http://www.icp.org/ ; last retrieved on May 31, 2012

[47] Union Square Awards, please refer to http://www.unionsquareawards.org/; last retrieved on May 31, 2012

[48] Cirque du Monde, please refer to http://www.cirquedusoleil.com/en/about/global-citizenship/community/social-circus/cirque-du-monde.aspx; last retrieved on May 31, 2012

[49] City Year New York, please refer to http://www.cityyear.org/newyork.aspx; last retrieved on May 31, 2012

[50] Theory of Change or outcomes mapping is a method to help organizations set overall intentions and strategies, monitor contributions to outcomes, and target priority areas for detailed evaluation studies. This method provides program staff with a continuous system for thinking holistically and strategically about how they intend to achieve results.

CHAPTER FOUR – Methodology

> Critical ethnography begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* domain. By "ethical responsibility," I mean a compelling sense of duty and commitment based on moral principals of human freedom and well-being, and hence a compassion for the suffering of living beings. The conditions of existence within a particular context are not as they *could* be for specific subjects; as a result, the researcher feels a moral obligation to make a contribution toward changing those conditions toward greater freedom and equity thus the ethnographer also takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the *status quo*, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control. Therefore, the critical ethnographer resists domestication and moves from "what is" to "what could be"…Because the critical ethnographer is committed to the art and craft of fieldwork, empirical methodologies become the foundation for inquiry, and it is here "on the ground" of Others that the researcher encounters social conditions that become the point of departure for research…We now begin to probe other possibilities that will challenge institutions, regimes of knowledge, and social practices that limit choices, constrain meaning, and denigrate identities and communities. [emphasis in original]
> - D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*

THE POINT is a cavernous space, its industrial past camouflaged only slightly. Large horizontal windows line the edge of the high ceilings. Alcoves and offices pock the warm-colored cinder block walls, concealing stairwells and small rooms. Narrow awnings advertise the spaces occupied by City Year, UNITAS, and ICP, lending the interior space an outdoors, market-like feel. At one end of the expansive room, past the round metal tables in front of the independently operated café, are the double black doors that lead to a performance theater. At the other end, squat blue chairs are tucked under heavy brown tables, the space designating where the K-8 after-school program meets daily. Past the tables is a narrow steel staircase leading to a low-ceiling loft on the second floor. This is the ACTION program's space (please refer to Figure 9). From this loft, I observed ACTION participants initiate community-based action projects on food justice and support campaigns on local issues that youth, as residents and activists in Hunts Point, identified collaboratively as meaningful to them. The goal of the following chapter is to

introduce the research population and the ACTION program, and to describe the steps I undertook to complete the research.

Figure 9: ACTION Program Space at THE POINT; Photograph courtesy of Julie Poncelet

In the previous chapter, I introduced Hunts Point as a site of prolonged structural injustice, a place of juxtaposition, as both marginalized by environmental toxins and thriving on account of established social networks. The neighborhood represents a layered research landscape sensitive to an iterative approach that is responsive to emergent activities and adaptive to the needs of participants. Such an approach is critical with projects such as this, where initial observation work can influence subsequent collaborations with research participants. The research was carried out in three phases: Initiation (January to February 2010), Collaborative Research (February to May 2010), and Conclusion (May to August 2010). The design provided me with sufficient structure to initiate on-going research activities, such as

participant observation work and interviews, while being flexible enough to accommodate one-time research inquiries, such as focus groups and unexpected program activities, such as an afternoon spent weeding in the farm plot along the Bronx River. Research activities were guided by five protocols: (1) a participant observation matrix, (2) interviews for the three research populations (i.e., youth participants, adult staff, and adult non-staff), (3) a booklet for youth participants to make free-write journal contributions, (4) a series of focus groups that delved deeper into key research themes, and (5) a data analysis focus group for the collaborative review of major findings with youth participants.

As I embarked on a nine-month journey to investigate the operationalization of a critical civic praxis framework as a means of promoting youth organizing and activism, I quickly learned quickly that as prepared as I *thought* I was for what *migh*t happen, the richness of open-ended, live research lies in its twists and turns. To capture the deep meanings of young people's struggles and their intentional transformation of place, or critical placemaking, is to be immersed in its ongoing development. I begin this methods chapter with a summary of the methodologies underlying the research and proceed with a description of the ACTION program, the research populations, and the activities they undertook, in particular, the two interconnected food justice projects that were the focus of ACTION's work in 2009-2010: an urban farming initiative and a community food assessment led by a researcher from Hunter College of the City University of New York (CUNY). I review the instruments and procedures used to explore the critical civic praxis framework of this transformative youth program and highlight changes to planned procedures given the dynamic nature of the process. I conclude the chapter with an overview of the data analysis procedures.

Overview of Research Methodologies

As a researcher and evaluator, I believe evaluation to be a tool capable of supporting social change and social justice work and make reference to Madison's (2005) words frequently. The

positioning of researchers and evaluators in terms of their ethical responsibility to uncover the underlying assumptions in order to address unjust practices has become part of my professional ethos. I sought research methods that would be flexible enough, while remaining sufficiently rigorous, to explore the structural constraints and contextual realities of youth activists' everyday lives in the South Bronx. To that end, I concentrated on participatory research methods that crossed traditional disciplinary borders by connecting varied discourses and integrating diverse knowledge, experiences, and perspectives. The primary research questions guiding my research were:

1. What is the role of a critical civic praxis framework in supporting change in youth? In particular, how does a transformative program like ACTION utilize critical consciousness, the production and exchange of local knowledge, and action-taking by youth?

2. What socio-spatial conditions experienced by ACTION participants shape their organizing and activism within the organization and their community?

3. Within the context of living with and seeking to transform unjust social and environmental conditions intentionally, how do youth envision and understand their activism? Specifically, what perspective do ACTION participants have of themselves as agents for social change within the neighborhood?

Exploring a Transformative Youth Program

Critical scholars who work with youth as both research subjects and co-researchers encourage the implementation of interdisciplinary qualitative research practices that are open and receptive to emergent experiences and the co-production of knowledge (Jessor 1996). Socially critical, qualitative methodologies such as critical ethnography and participatory action research (PAR), from the fields of anthropology, developmental and environmental psychology,

education, and urban theory, are ideally suited for the exploration of a transformative youth program.[51] Sutton and Kemp (2006) noted that in order for interdisciplinary research initiatives to effectuate meaningful social change in communities, “the right mix of disciplinary knowledge and effective community participation” must be brought together (p. 125). Thus, while ethnographic practice can describe people's everyday struggles in narrative form, participatory and collaborative research methods attempt to produce collective knowledge – that of both the researcher and the researched – by exposing unjust conditions in order to bring about social change collaboratively using place-centered strategies (Cahill 2000, 2004, Fraser et al. 2004, Hart 1997, Kirshner & O’Donoghue 2001, Nieuwenhuys 2004, Thorp 2006). The merging of interdisciplinary methodologies capitalizes on methodological pluralism, an epistemological openness that is both driven by theory as well as receptive to emergent experiences and knowledge (Jessor 1996). A goal was for my research to have “depth of field” or “legs that [are] useful to struggles of injustice” (Fine & Weis 2005, p. 65), thereby benefiting from and being equally amenable to broader insights in order to address complex social and environmental justice issues (Garland et al. 2006).

Broadly defined, ethnography *the method* is the practice of inquiring about and representing the "beings and doings" of people based on participant observation and narrative inquiries gathered from deeply entrenched experiences from the field (Denzin & Lincold 2005, Goodall 2000, Johnston et al. 1994, Kellett et al. 2004, Shweder 1996). Whereas ethnography, *the theory,* is the practice of an interpretative methodology (Denzin & Lincold 2005, Johnston, Gregory & Smith 1994, Madison 2005). Ethnographic methods call for living amongst research participants and taking part in their daily lives, typically requiring an extended commitment of at least one year or more. The nature of my involvement with ACTION precluded a full ethnographic immersion in Hunts Point, but necessitates nonetheless a specific ethnographic lens, namely that of critical ethnography.

As asserted eloquently by Madison (2005), critical ethnography is grounded in the knowledge and experiences of unjust realities, seeking ultimately a “greater social justice so as to uncover racist, classist, or sexist norms in research and to keep the understanding of culture problematic or open to challenge” (Barton 2001, p. 912). Rooted in a particular lived experience, critical ethnography is plural; it is integrally linked to distribution, recognition, and participation – the trivalent conceptualization of social justice (Fraser 1997, Scholsberg 2004, Youth 2000).

In performing critical ethnographic research, a researcher engages participants in their community to interpret, inspire, and build their capacity to galvanize social change strategies (Barton 2001, Gordon 2000, Madison 2005). The approach complements applied participatory and collaborative methodologies such as community-based participatory research and PAR, bringing critical insight to such components of the research (Hemment 2007). To engage low-income, urban ethnic youth using participatory methods is to privilege their experiences and perspectives as the voices of experts in their world. This requires a significant epistemological shift in traditional research practices that locate adult knowledge above the contributions of others, especially young people of color (Pattman & Kehily 2004). Participatory methods that actively seek out collaborations with marginalized or vulnerable populations, such as low-income urban ethnic youth, privilege different ways of knowing (Breibart 1995, Hart 1992) and advocate for significant and meaningful connections to the research participant's everyday life (Jans 2004). This is a direct challenge to conventional, extractive social science initiatives that typically do not emphasize collaboration with research participants (Hemment 2007).

Engaging in open-ended and shared research with low-income, urban ethnic youth raises questions about my relationship with them, especially as it concerns my positionality, as a white, older, educated, and comparatively affluent person in a position of power negotiating my role relative to youth participants of color from the South Bronx (Leard & Lashua 2006). Participant observation work, for example can emphasize the political aspect of knowledge production (Nieuwenhuys 2004), thereby calling upon a recognition and acceptance of

difference and multiplicity, and the need for creating spaces for open dialogue (Barton 2001, Leard & Lashua 2006). The traditional development of a research project can create a landscape of power where differences between the dichotomous roles of the subject (the researcher) and the object (the researched) are conceived of as a distance (Nieuwenhuys 2004, Rose 1997). An open-ended and shared research initiative challenges this distance by deliberately emphasizing "methods and techniques of inquiry that allow for the expression of different values, views and interpretations" (Nieuwenhuys 2004, p. 211).

Initiation of the Research

The research builds on the findings reported in *Urban Youth Programs in America: A Study of Youth, Community, and Social Justice Conducted for the Ford Foundation* (Sutton et al. 2006).[52] As noted in the introduction, New York City was selected as a captivating context for the research because of its great cultural diversity and because it has the highest population density and some of the poorest neighborhoods in the country. To select a program, I reviewed the study's assessment of the values underpinning each of the 88 participant programs; the assessment was an aggregate measure of six dimensions of transformation – connection, socialization, creativity, contribution, competence, and change.[53] This aggregate measure assessed a program's focus on engaging youth as change agents:

> *In transforming the root causes of youth and community marginality via critical analysis of youth/society relations [and it's] attentive[ness] to differences among youth in opportunities, social location, and identity. Underlying premise: both youth and communities benefit from socially transformative action* (Sutton et al. 2006, p 107).

Before reaching out to programs, I sought input from two of the report's authors to ensure I would not contact organizations that were involved with ongoing academic research.[54] Based on this feedback, I began reaching out to program directors according to the aggregated scores to assess interest in participating in the research.

I contacted THE POINT, the program with the highest score on the list,[55] in early February 2009. Almost immediately, by mid-February, the ACTION program's coordinator and

THE POINT's Executive Director had agreed to participate in the research. Following the approval of the proposed research by the University of Washington's Human Subject's Division,[56] I organized an initial meeting with the program's two coordinators and the Executive Director in early January the following year. THE POINT collected signed research consent forms and by mid-January 2010, I began attending the program's weekly meetings in the fourth month of the 2009-2010 program year.

Given the open-ended nature of the research, I was uncertain what my involvement with ACTION would entail. Should I introduce and co-lead with the youth a new participatory action project or should I contribute to existing efforts? Based on my initial observation work, I decided to focus on observing and supporting a mature transformative youth program.[57]

Description of the Program

Figure 10: THE POINT CDC; Photograph courtesy of THE POINT

The ACTION program at THE POINT is:

> *[A] teen community leadership program...[that] engages stipended young people who work to identify social and environmental justice issues facing the Hunts Point section of the South Bronx with the goal of creating and implementing ongoing youth-led solutions. Working together with community members and fellow community organizations, [the program] serves as a community link for the re-envisioning of Hunts Point. We implement grassroots techniques in community planning and policy, and disseminate such information to the community. [Program staff serve] as role models for positive change for the current generation in Hunts Point* (THE POINT n.d.).

ACTION operates annually, running from October to June and meeting three times a week (i.e., Monday, Wednesday, and Friday) for a total of 8 hours a week. Depending on funding, the program can continue operating during the summer months, as was the case in the year of my observations. Youth participants receive a small stipend to sustain their participation in the program as community researchers.[58]

Two coordinators led the ACTION program, although other staff from THE POINT would provide support for specific tasks or events. The coordinators managed the overall operation of the program, such as paying the participant's stipends and organizing capacity-building opportunities and field trips. However, a balance between youth-led/adult-led decision-making defined the program. Depending on the nature of an activity or task, authority and responsibility could shift between youth participants and adult coordinators. Coordinators worked with participants to co-develop daily and weekly goals and to manage project timelines; activities, events, and other obligations were listed on the program's calendar, which hung in the middle of the program's space.

ACTION did not follow a structured curriculum, choosing instead to engage participants through a project-based learning approach supported by practical, workshop style sessions intended to build young people's capacities and skills to collaborate on conducting research: to collect, analyze, and report data, and to carry-out specific tasks in support of campaigns and action-projects.[59] Coordinators, members of the community, or individuals affiliated with local and national organizations led sessions to provide targeted assistance, such as on habitat preservation or blogging. Three organizations provided assistance to the ACTION program in

2009-2010: (1) The Audubon Society led the *Happening Habitat Campaign*[60] and focused on nature conservation in the South Bronx; (2) Hunter College of The City University of New York led the *Health Equity Project*[61], a community food assessment carried out by participants; and (3) the Bronx River Alliance[62] supported numerous initiatives, such as the *Go Green Campaign*[63] and the *Urban Farming Project*,[64] by teaching participants about water harvesting and helping with the installation of a water recycling system at THE POINT. Individuals affiliated with specific environmental initiatives would, on occasion, provide one-time demonstrations. For example, an environmental artist from The New School[65] who was working on restoring oyster beds in New York and New Jersey[66] led a hands-on workshop on the importance of restoring oyster beds.

ACTION's project-based approach was structured around carrying-out community-based campaigns and participatory action projects. Campaigns were information gathering and knowledge sharing activities intended to inform participants and Hunts Point residents of specific neighborhood issues, such as the reuse of the Sheridan Expressway or the protest against a third correctional facility (please refer to Appendix Two for a description of ACTION campaigns for 2009-2010). Participatory action projects were informed by current and/or previous campaigns, but went beyond the goal of knowledge sharing to include the creation of youth-led solutions and action-taking in collaboration with the coordinators and other adults. Sometimes campaigns and projects were carried over from previous years, based on the interests and talents of current participants, ensuring continuity across program years for ongoing knowledge exchange and the deeper exploration into the root causes of injustice in Hunts Point. The urban farming project and a community food assessment, both of which are described in greater detail in subsequent sections, were the core projects conducted during the 2009-2010 program year.

Description of the Research Population

I recruited three constituent groups to participate in the research: ACTION youth participants, ACTION coordinators (adult staff), and adult community members or other adults who were familiar with the program (referred to as adult non-staff).[67] The research population was not compensated for its participation, thereby minimizing the potential for or appearance of coercion. Pre-data collection developmental work with staff of ACTION and THE POINT was limited to a review of my proposed research design.

Youth Participants

I recruited 19 high school students, eleven female participants (n=11) and eight male participants (n=8), who were enrolled in the 2009-2010 ACTION program.[68] The youth lived mainly in Hunts Point or in other South Bronx neighborhoods. In February 2010, two male participants left the program.[69] Ultimately, I interviewed and collected demographic information from ten female participants (n=10) and five male participants (n=5). A majority of youth identified as Hispanic or Latina/Latino, African American, or black, and ranged in age from 15 to 18 years. Over half of the participants (n=9) had been in the program for three years or more. Please refer to Table 1 below for an overview of the youth research population.

TABLE 1: RESEARCH POPULATION – YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

Ethnicity	Gender		Age			
	Female	***Male***	***15***	***16***	***17***	***18***
African American	1				1	
African American/Caucasian	1			1		
Black		1		1		
Black/African American		1				1
Hispanic/Latino-Latina	4	2	1	2	2	1
Hispanic/Dominican	1				1	
Puerto-Rican	2			1	1	
Puerto Rican/Black		1				1
I do not wish to categorize myself	1				1	
TOTALS	**10**	**5**	**1**	**5**	**6**	**3**

TABLE 1: RESEARCH POPULATION – YOUTH PARTICIPANTS						
Ethnicity	**Gender**		**Age**			
	Female	***Male***	***15***	***16***	***17***	***18***
Number of Years in the Program						
One Year (First Year)	4					
Two Years	2					
Three Years or More	9					
TOTALS	**15**					
**Demographic Data (self-reported) collected during the interview.*						

Adult Participants

I recruited both of the program's coordinators as well as non-staff adults to participate in the research.[70] The female coordinator was a resident of Hunts Point and a former member of the ACTION program. Of the five non-staff adults I recruited, I was able to interview only two participants, representing the Audubon Society and CUNY's Hunter College.[71] Please refer to Table 2 for an overview of the adult research population.

TABLE 2: RESEARCH POPULATION – ADULT PARTICIPANTS*				
THE POINT STAFF (The Coordinators)				
Ethnicity (self-reported)	**Gender**		**Age**	**Highest Degree**
	Female	***Male***		
Black	1		23	Undergraduate – Arts & Media
White		1	28	Masters – Urban Policy Analysis & Management
TOTALS	**1**	**1**		
NON-STAFF				
Ethnicity (self-reported)	**Gender**		**Age**	**Highest Degree**
	Female	***Male***		
Asian/Asian American	1		44	Masters – Public Health
White		1	34	Masters – Education
TOTALS	**1**	**1**		
**Demographic Data (self-reported) collected during the interview.*				

ACTION Program Activities Observed

During my time with ACTION, I observed many group discussions, participated in a number of farming and community reconnaissance activities, and attended numerous ACTION special events; these activities are summarized in Table 3 and are organized according to the three phases of the research.

Table 3: ACTIVITIES OBSERVED

Month/Research Phase	Phase One: Initiation	Phase Two: Collaborative Research	Phase Three: Conclusion
January	Campaign and Participatory Action Project Brainstorming – Selection and Development		
February	Campaign Development - Research and Planning Participatory Action Project Development – Research and Initial Planning	Campaign and Participatory Action Project Development – Ongoing and Outreach	
March		Campaign Dissemination: o Town Hall Meeting Participatory Action Project – planning and implementation: Health Equity Project and Urban Farming Initiative	
April		Participatory Action Project: o Urban Farming Initiative – Planning and Implementation o Health Equity Project – Planning and Data Collection	
May		Participatory Action Project: o Urban Farming Initiative – Planning and Implementation	Participatory Action Project: o Health Equity Project – Data analysis and Reporting
June			

Table 3: ACTIVITIES OBSERVED			
Month/Research Phase	**Phase One: Initiation**	**Phase Two: Collaborative Research**	**Phase Three: Conclusion**
		Participatory Action Project: o Urban Farming Initiative – Implementation	Participatory Action Project: o Health Equity Project – Data Analysis and Reporting
July			Participatory Action Project: o Urban Farming Initiative – Implementation
August			Participatory Action Project: o Urban Farming Initiative – Implementation

As I began my research in January, I missed the initiation of the program year in October, when returning participants choose new members, and the mid-year family dinner in December. The program is unique in that youth lead the selection for new participants, overseeing the interviews and facilitating a collaborative review of candidates.

In January, youth participants finalized their brainstorming on possible campaigns and participatory action projects to undertake.[72] With their coordinators' support, participants elected not to initiate new campaigns with the exception of a gender empowerment awareness group, *W.O.M.E.N*. (Where Our Minds Empower Needs). Instead, the ACTION youth decided to focus on refining existing campaigns, including in particular further exploration of such topics as healthy food and wellbeing, urban farming, and green or environmentally friendly community initiatives. In February, the group began planning for THE POINT's annual Town Hall, which was scheduled to take place in March. This community meeting was a knowledge sharing opportunity where ACTION participants and THE POINT staff drew attention to key community issues and presented their findings on previous campaigns to residents. At this time, coordinators led participants to prioritize their ideas for participatory action projects, which youth

wanted to reflect their interests in food justice and improving the health of residents and themselves. Accordingly two projects were initiated: an urban farming initiative and a community food assessment to be led by Hunter College researchers. The goal of the urban farm initiative was to educate participants, and through them, residents, on healthy food options through small-scale urban agriculture. [73] The youth imagined creating a revenue-generating farmers market for THE POINT in the future. The farm consisted of two gardens, one small plot outside THE POINT's building and a second site in Hunts Point Riverside Park less than half a mile away from the center (please refer to Figure 11). In preparation, the soils were tested for toxicity and participants learned about optimal farming techniques such as companion planting.[74]

Figure 11: ACTION Urban Farm Initiative – To the left, the plot at the Riverside Campus for Arts and the Environment in Riverside Park; photograph courtesy of THE POINT. To the right, the plot outside THE POINT, CDC; photograph courtesy of Julie Poncelet.

The *Health Equity Project* (HEP), a CUNY Hunter College initiative, corresponded to youth identified interests in healthy food and so ACTION participations and the coordinators agreed to take part in the project, which was introduced to them by a HEP researcher working with other youth programs in the South Bronx. HEP researchers worked with participants to complete a community food assessment to identify which foods are accessible and affordable in Hunts Point. The assessment would give the group a comprehensive list of all food related businesses in the neighborhood such as bodegas, grocery stores, and restaurants, in addition to an inventory of the types of food available from these businesses. Youth worked in small groups to survey residents about their food needs, engaging people on the street, in front of corner stores or in bodegas, on playgrounds, and at the Hunts Point subway station. The community food assessment included three Hunter College IRB-approved instruments: a resident interview protocol, a fresh fruits and vegetable inventory list, and purveyor/site introductory information sheet.[75] ACTION participants collected and analyzed data and presented their key findings at a local conference, The *Bronx Food Summit* in May.

ACTION's two participatory action projects focused on community access to fresh, affordable healthy foods – food justice. Public health epidemics such as obesity and diabetes are the real-life repercussions of the environmental injustices that confront communities like Hunts Points. The availability and access to food in children's or young people's food environments at home, at school, and in the community can have a significant impact on their eating behaviors and overall health. Exposure to these food environments can influence the healthfulness – or conversely, unhealthiness – of their diets (CDC 2011). According to a 2008 study by the New York City (NYC) Department of City Planning (DHMH), and NYC Economic Development Corporation *Going to the Market: New York City's Neighborhood Grocery Store and Supermarket Storage*, Hunts Point is a high needs community because of its population density, its high rates of obesity, and its low rates of fresh fruits and vegetables consumption. Similar findings were highlighted a report from the NYC DHMH's, *New York City Bodega*

Initiative 2010, which stated that neighborhoods in the South Bronx suffered from high rates of obesity and diabetes, both health problems associated with limited access to nutritious foods (New York City Department of Planning 2010).

In February and March, ACTION participants worked in small groups to research their campaign topics and prepare presentation boards to summarize their findings and recommendations. Participants were responsible for all of their own data collection and reporting, but had access to several sources, including campaign presentations and information compiled by former participants.[76] The Town Hall meeting was held on March 17, 2010, during which youth presented their campaign poster boards and introduced the urban farming project. According to staff from THE POINT, it was the most well attended Town Hall to date.

From March through June, ACTION participants, coordinators, and non-staff adults, including myself, researched, planned, and implemented the program's two main participatory action projects. The two projects were complementary, yet distinct. For example, the HEP community food assessment completed by youth informed the selection of vegetables and fruits to be harvested in ACTION's urban farm. Once the group decided what to cultivate, ACTION worked with Fun Friday participants, THE POINT's K-8 after-school program, to seed the plants (please refer to Figure 12 below). The resulting seedlings were transplanted into the plots prepared by the youth.

Figure 12: ACTION and Fun Friday Participant Seedlings for Urban Farm Initiative; photograph courtesy of Julie Poncelet

Throughout the late spring and into the summer, ACTION participants, along with their coordinators and non-staff adults, continued to work the farm plots (Figure 13 below). Although HEP had ended by June 2010, the Hunter College researchers continued to meet with ACTION participants to discuss the possibility of initiating a project to address challenges facing public schools in providing a healthful food environment. This brief summer discussion would eventually become a new participatory action project for the 2010-2011 program year.

Figure 13: ACTION Urban Farm Initiative; photographs courtesy of Julie Poncelet

Research Design

Carrying out the research in three separate, but cumulative phases facilitated the building of relationships with the research population and made it easier to integrate data collection activities into the program's routine. I designed the first phase of the research to: (1) recruit and seek consent from participants and affiliates of THE POINT, (2) initiate participant observation work, (3) begin interviewing research participants, and (4) familiarize myself with the neighborhood.

The purpose of the second phase was to: (1) support any participatory action project(s) initiated by ACTION, (2) continue research activities from phase one, and (3) collect free-write journal contributions from youth.

The third and final phase of the research was designed as an opportunity to: (1) conclude activities initiated previously and (2) introduce a series of focus groups with the youth participants to discuss the key themes from the research and collaboratively review major findings.

Research Protocols

In addition to the consent forms for youth and adult participants, I developed five protocols for the study, which are as follows: (1) a participant observation matrix, (2) interviews for the three research populations (i.e., youth participants, adult staff, and adult non-staff), (3) a booklet for youth participants to make free-write journal contributions, (4) a series of focus groups that delved deeper into key research themes, and (5) a data analysis focus group for the collaborative review of major findings with youth participants. Please Refer to Appendix Three for the Research Protocols.

Participant Observation Protocol. I developed a participant observation protocol to guide the collection of data pertaining to the critical civic praxis framework, focusing on the four key research themes of: (1) cultivating critical consciousness, (2) cultivating and contributing to local knowledge production and exchange, (3) developing and exercising youth agency and (4) engaging informal learning strategies and putting into action organizational processes. Each construct was operationalized along a continuum from high frequency (daily to weekly, depending on the activity) to low frequency (weekly to monthly, depending on the activity) using a series of questions, likely scenarios, and descriptions of possible outcomes. The protocol included a total of 50 possible observations.

Interview Protocols. An Interview protocol was developed for each of the three research populations: youth participants, adult staff members, and adult non-staff. Protocol questions were developed based on the works of Patton (1990, 2008, 2011) and Madison (2005), as their approaches are grounded in local knowledge; it privileges, in the words of participants, what is of importance or value and how they experience and

react to phenomena specific to Hunts Point's socio-spatial context. Instrumental to this qualitative approach is the openness of responses, in contrast to imposing categories that may not represent what participants know and do. I structured the interview protocols to include:

- *Behavior or experience questions*: actions and "ways of doing" in relation to (a) the socio-spatial context (community conditions and social settings) and (b) the development of and contribution to local knowledge. For example, from the youth participant protocol: What strengths and skills do you bring to the program?
- *Opinion or value questions*: conviction, judgment, and beliefs about (a) the socio-spatial context (community conditions and social settings) identified by the respondent and how the respondent might change this context, and (b) social and environmental injustice and experiences of inequality and oppression. For example, from the youth participant protocol: What does social justice (or injustice) mean to you and your participation in the ACTION Program.
- *Feeling questions*: emotions, sentiments, and passions about (a) how the respondent feels about the socio-spatial context (community conditions and social settings) in Hunts Point and (b) what it is like being a young person in this neighborhood. For example, from the youth participant protocol: What are the challenges you face as a young person in your neighborhood? Describe and Explain?
- *Knowledge or descriptive questions*: addressing information and learning the respondent holds regarding (a) the socio-spatial context (community conditions and social settings), and (b) their perceptions and descriptions of themselves as change agents. For example, from the youth participant protocol: What does the phrase "youth as agents of social change" mean to you? How are you encouraged to be a agent of social change in Hunts Point?

- *Contrast questions*: preconceptions and assumptions about (a) the socio-spatial context (community conditions and social settings), (b) being a young person in Hunts Point, and (c) being a youth activist and a change agent. For example, from the youth participant protocol: Overall, do you think your neighborhood is a good place to grow-up? Explain. Would you change anything and why?
- *Sensory questions*: the sensations the respondent has when in contact with the socio-spatial context (community conditions and social settings) in Hunts Point. For example, from the youth participant protocol: What are the physical or environmental things you like and don't like about your neighborhood and why? Explain and describe.
- *Background/demographic questions*: personal information about the respondent, such as her or his name, date of birth, and self-identified gender and ethnicity.[77]

Using this framework, I developed three, four-part open-ended interview protocols tailored to each constituency. The youth participant protocol had a total of 20 questions, the adult staff members' protocol had 26 questions, and the adult non-staff protocol had 19 questions. The four parts included in each of the three constituent interview protocols, with slightly modified questions, were: (1) Program Involvement and Structure, (2) Neighborhood Characteristics such as Social and Community Conditions, (3) Youth Characteristics, and (4) Social Justice and Activism Values. The protocols included a total of six questions from the report "*Urban Youth Programs in America: A Study of Youth, Community, and Social Justice Conducted for the Ford Foundation"* (Sutton et al. 2006); these are marked with an asterisk in the individual instruments provided in Appendix Three.

The face-to-face interviews were designed to be completed in approximately 20 to 60 minutes, depending on the constituents.

Journal Protocol. The youth participant journal protocol was an independent, free-write contribution to the research. As described previously in Chapter Two, transformative youth programs and community-based organizations can function as the primary context supporting the development of critical consciousness and the production of local knowledge on social and environmental forms of oppression. Thus, youth perceptions of these processes and their developing awareness were central to my research objectives. The independently written journal entries were to focus on young people's experiences in the program and in Hunts Point.

The journal was as a six-page booklet that included: (1) a cover page, (2) an assent form to use excerpts from the journal, (3) basic instructions and (4) three blank pages where youth could make written contributions. Youth participants could complete the journals during or after program hours, depending on their availability and desire to contribute. The journals could be deposited a sealed box, which would keep submissions secure. There was no intended frequency of use or submission.

Focus Group Protocol. I developed four focus group protocols, one for each of the research's key themes: (1) youth participation and participatory action projects, (2) critical consciousness and the development and exchange of local knowledge, (3) action, activism, and social change in Hunts Point and finally, pulling it all together, (4) youth participants as agents for social change. Through the focus groups, I was seeking insight that would support or challenge the dominant scholar and advocate views of youth found in the literature.

Focus groups were designed to take approximately one to two hours to complete. The sessions began with a statement of the goals for seeking youth input and with a clear set of instructions initiated sessions. The protocols were structured in four

parts: (1) Step One – rules of engagement/rules of the focus group, (2) Step Two – introducing the theme of the focus group, (3) Step Three – focus group theme in ACTION, and (4) Step Four: concluding the focus group. Materials needed were large sticky-back sheets and markers for note taking during the discussion, and dots of varying colors to be used to select the comments youth participants agreed with the most and the least. Program coordinators were not invited to participate in the focus group in order to provide participants with a safe space, free of possible judgment.

Collaborative Data Analysis Focus Group Protocol. The research was somewhat unique in that I intended to involve the youth participants in a collaborative review of my major findings (summary or aggregate data only). This protocol was designed to be implemented similarly to the aforementioned focus groups and was structured as follows: (1) Step One – rules of engagement/rules of the focus group, (2) Step Two – introducing and discussing the summarized data with participants, and (3) Step Three – concluding the focus group.

Research Data Collection

Although youth participants never showed any direct uneasiness with my presence, I was, initially, an unknown in their space. Sitting at the edge of the table, journal and pen in hand, I watched, listened, and wrote. I was a stranger amongst an already formed group; the program began in October and it was now January and nearly half of the participants had been active in ACTION for two to three years. After several weeks, the youth began engaging me in informal conversation and welcomed me with boisterous greetings and hugs. I eventually became a partner and was regarded as an ally – an honorary member of ACTION. As an embedded researcher and a participant, I observed while simultaneously participating in the program's

weekly "doings," thereby furthering my relationships with the youth, both individually and collectively, as well as with the coordinators. The collection of data and the data itself are grounded in the rhythms of the program and thus richer because of my integrated, hands-on approach.

Data Collection

In the following section, I review how data were collected; Table 4 provides a summary of the research activities implemented throughout the three phases of the research. I conclude the section with some reflections on the challenges characteristic of conducting open-ended, live research.

Table 4: DATA COLLECTION SCHEDULE – RESEARCH PHASES AND USE OF PROTOCOLS

Phases	January 2010	February 2010	March 2010	April 2010	May 2010	June 2010	July 2010	August 2010
One: Initiation	*Start* participant observation work *Start* neighborhood reconnaissance work							
Two: Collaborative Research		*Start* research participant Interviews *Continue* Participant observation work *Start/support* participatory action project *Start/Conclude* youth participant journals						
Three: Conclusion					*Conclude* Interviews with research participants *Conclude* participant observation work *Conclude* my involvement with participatory action project *Start/Conclude* Focus Group			

Participant Observations. My observation work consisted of regular weekly attendance and participation in the ACTION program's activities throughout all three phases of the research. Guided by the observation matrix, I recorded the following in my field journals: (1) the interactions and exchange between youth participants and with coordinators and other adults; (2) the types of strategies and approaches used to teach and direct activities; and (3) the procedures and outcomes of these activities. I did not record verbatim the exchanges between the research populations, but rather captured important quotes and rich details. Journal entries were transcribed electronically to facilitate data analysis while constructing an insightful analytical space, a methodological dialectic whereby preliminary analysis could influence shifts in the research process. The participant observation protocol and my journal notes were not shared with the research population.

Interviews. I conducted interviews during Phases Two and Three of the research, after I had built a rapport with the research population and become familiar with the program's rhythms. The interviews with youth participants and adult staff were conducted face-to-face at THE POINT from April 2010 to August 2010; interviews with non-staff occurred via telephone in October 2010. My interviews with the youth participants and the coordinators were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

> ***Youth Participants***. To schedule interviews with youth participants, I would make an announcement at the beginning of the program day and pass around a sign-up sheet. I created an interview schedule and shared it with the coordinators. I scheduled the interviews before or after program activities so as to not interrupt program activities. The participants I interviewed in April and May

spoke positively about the experience, which encouraged their peers to sign-up. On average, my interviews with youth took 25 minutes to complete.

Adult Staff and Adult Non-Staff. I interviewed the two coordinators in mid-August 2010 when they had fewer program related responsibilities. My interviews with the coordinators took over 90 minutes to complete. I conducted two interviews with non-staff adults over the telephone in October 2010. The interviews, which took 75 minutes to complete, were not recorded.

Youth Journals. I collected one journal entry from 12 ACTION participants in May 2010, at the end of the second phase of research, but it was not an independent free-write entry as described previously. Rather, it was a short essay the coordinators had asked participants to write about the current state of Hunts Point in support of THE POINT's annual Fish Parade.[78] THE POINT, along with other local groups, has originally organized the first parade in 2003 to raise public awareness of the proposed relocation of the Fulton Fish market from lower Manhattan to the Hunts Point Food Distribution Center. However, once the organizer realized the relocation was inevitable, the parade was re-envisioned as a celebration of Hunts Point and its residents. Since the study participants had not yet submitted any journals entries, I asked them to submit their essay assignment instead as the topic was germane to the protocol's objectives and they agreed.

Focus Groups. The program's full schedule and the participant's limited availability at the end of the school year necessitated an adjustment in order to accommodate discussions with youth. I collapsed the four focus groups, described previously, into one single meeting, which I held in June 2010 during the final phase of the research. During

the first two phases of the research, I observed participants initiate and sustain rich dialogue, even within a short timeframe and thus felt the focus group could be successful in a condensed format. The focus group captured the youth participants' perceptions of the research's key themes. The coordinators were not present during the focus group, which took over one hour to complete. (See Figure 14 below)

Figure 14: Focus Group with ACTION; photographs courtesy of Julie Poncelet.

I brought healthy snacks, large sticky note pads, markers, and colored dots to the focus group. To save time, I had pre-written the key themes on the large sheets of paper, which, once on site, I posted along the front of the loft. I initiated the focus group using the prompts from the protocol and requested that participants be responsible for a majority of the note taking. As we discussed each theme individually, youth wrote down or drew out their ideas, thoughts, and experiences. Toward the end of the focus group, I handed participants small sheets with different colored dots and asked them to identify the themes and definitions they felt positively about (green dots), felt negatively about (red dot) and wanted to change, specifically by taking action against (orange dot).

I was unable to initiate a collaborative review of my research findings with the

youth participants, due to time constraints and the loss of nearly half of the participants, who had graduated from high school and were preparing to attend college in the fall.

Reflections on Data Collection in an Open-Ended Research Setting

Conducting open-ended research is best described as happening "in the doorway" (Thorp 2006). As the journey twists and turns, the researcher negotiates multiple roles, simultaneously being and doing as a critical scholar, an advocate researcher, and an enthusiastic participant. Each research persona is imbued with unique power dynamics, performances, and know-how that bridges with the knowledge and meanings emergent in the spaces co-created and shared with research participants. The hybridization of knowledge helps amplify all the taken-for-granted bites of life. Rituals between the researcher and the researched becomes a praxis of dialogue, reflection, and action. Tilling soil in a small garden plot along the Bronx River, weeding, and planting seedlings were not research activities or rituals I had anticipated performing when I left Seattle for my fieldwork in New York City. Although these moments constituted the core of the research, the serendipity of these activities highlights the challenges of planning and carry-out open-ended, shared research.

As is expected with research such as mine, scheduling data collection activities was challenging, thus necessitating adjustments to the proposed administration of protocols in order to accommodate the program's full schedule.[79] For example, I did not conduct interviews during the first phase of the research as was planned, for I was fearful that the premature imposition of the activity, would compromise my rapport with participants. I also believed that a familiar connection would result in better, richer data. This tactic was effective, as evidenced during my interviews with youth participants. Specifically, question 12 in the youth participant interview protocol asks, "*What strengths and skills do you bring to the program?*" Some youth found it challenging to reflect on their strengths and positive contributions, responding shyly that they didn't know. Had I not become familiar with each participant, I would not have been able to

provide examples of the capacities I had observed, which ultimately prompted the participant to reflect happily on her or his growth and contribute independent thoughts.

I planned initially to ask youth participants to contribute free-write journals during the second phase of the research. However, after several months of observing the program, it became apparent many youth were not fond of writing assignments, which reminded them too much of school, an off-putting association in any youth program. Requests from the coordinators were often met with disgruntled pleas for another type of assignment; anything but writing! For example, when the coordinators requested essays on THE POINT's annual Fish Parade, most youth were unenthusiastic, while a few were outwardly defiant, asking to leave the program early to go home. Coordinators were honest about their objectives in requesting written assignments, such that they wanted the youth to improve their writing skills. Nevertheless, I was anxious that my request for free-write journal would be met with equal distain, negatively impacting my relationship with the participants. Consequently, I decided to use the Fish Parade essays as a suitable substitute.

The most challenging activity to schedule was the focus groups. I had not anticipated the program's spring and summer calendar would be so charged with activities; the participants' academic calendars were equally demanding. I suspected that neither the participants nor the coordinators would welcome having to accommodate over four hours of focus groups. Instead, I held one condensed focus group during which we reviewed the four research themes. I had also intended to review the research's summary findings collaboratively with the youth, assuming that all the participants would be available throughout the late summer months, but this assumption proved false. The coordinators and I even tried to assemble the youth the following summer, in 2011, when former participants might presumably be returning to Hunts Point, but the task proved too challenging to orchestrate. Ultimately, I was unable to achieve my goal of convening the final focus group to review analyzed data. These challenges represent the realities of conducting research that is lived and shared.

Data Analysis

The range of qualitative methods I implemented yielded numerous possibilities to explore a transformative youth program in the South Bronx. It yielded data that can be categorized broadly as either accounts derived from one-time, structured inquiries (i.e., interviews, journals, and focus groups) or accounts resulting from on-going and unscripted inquiries (i.e., participant observations).

The research process was iterative as I transcribed and reviewed data briefly throughout the three phases of the design. I began a comprehensive analysis of the data in October 2010. My primary method for analysis was thematic coding based on both theory-driven constructs and data-driven themes (Carspecken1996, Lofland & Lofland 1984, Madison 2005, Patton 1990). With regards to the analysis of the observation data, copies of the digital record were made for each of the themes. For my first review, I used the constructs outlined in the matrix as the coding guide. As these observations were driven by theory and developed prior to my engagement with ACTION, some of the language and scenarios described did not represent accurately the nature of the program or the interactions among members of the research population. Consequently, I reviewed the data a second time to identify and code any themes that emerged from the data but were not reflected in the matrix. I concluded the analysis of the observation data by generating basic frequencies and mapping them along a spectrum from high to low.

I employed the same coding technique to process the remaining data from interviews, focus group, and youth journals. As with the participant observation data, both theory- and data-driven themes were identified and used to generate basic frequencies.

Conclusion

I selected a research site defined by extremes. I witnessed the enactment of social justice led by youth who were at the forefront of struggles to transform Hunts Point, an environmentally, socially, and economically marginalized neighborhood. I watched low-income, urban ethnic youth and their adult allies foster (and at times support the youth in fostering) inclusive democracies within a small grassroots community-based organization and also within an isolated community in the country's largest metropolitan area.

The research methodologies used to carryout my dissertation research were centered around regular participant observation in the daily setting of young people's lived experiences. I aimed to design an open-ended, shared approach that would be responsive to the emergent and iterative nature of social change work and the "political process of decolonization" whereby youth participants were engaged in critical social analysis to uncover the underlying causes of the structural challenges they faced daily. My selection of research procedures was driven by participatory research methods that included working directly with youth as co-researchers. A strong conceptual framework, coupled with well-devised protocols facilitated the collection and analysis of data on the mechanisms and strategies employed by community-based youth program to yield transformative outcomes. The opportunity to follow and, at times, to support the ACTION program provided me with critical insight into the youth perspective on the socio-spatial conditions that compel youth to organize and take action and how, in the context of this struggle, youth perceive themselves as change agents.

Chapter Four Endnotes

[51] I am drawing from knowledge across the social sciences and specifically from socially critical research paradigms which include, but are not limited to the following disciplines: feminist theory, social theory, Afro-centrism, constructivism.

[52] *Urban Youth Programs in America: A Study of Youth, Community, and Social Justice Conducted for the Ford Foundation* (Sutton et al. 2006), is a 2.5-year investigation of justice-oriented, community based youth programs. The study revealed the important role of transformative youth programs – programs that involve youth in understanding and redressing unjust conditions – to personal and local development opportunities, emphasizing the significance of having youth engaged in local decision-making.

[53] These six measures were mapped along a continuum ranging from prevention = 1, which carries a low youth development score, to transformation=5, which carries the highest transformative youth development score. Programs assessed with high scores along the six measures demonstrate the operationalization of, or at the very least a willingness to implement, a transformative philosophy – that is, a belief in collaborative (personal and community-based) development, an essential characteristic necessary to complement the objectives of the proposed research.

[54] I consulted Dr. Sharon E. Sutton, FAIA and Dr. Susan Saegert.

[55] THE POINT had the highest transformative score of the all programs identified in New York City. Please refer to endnotes 1 and 2 for additional information. Do you know what its position was relative to all 88 programs.

[56] Prior to my initial meeting with THE POINT in January 2010, I kept in contact with the organization while finalizing my dissertation proposal and my proposal to the Human Subjects Department at the University of Washington. During this time, my communication with the program was limited to e-mail exchanges and phone calls to provide the program with updates about the status of my proposal, details about my research, and to solicit basic program information from THE POINT. I submitted my application to the University of Washington's Human Subject Division in October 2009 and it was approved in December 2009.

[57] By late February early March, it became clear to me that the participants and the coordinators were working on an extensive list of campaigns and projects, many of which grew organically and morphed into new, sometime smaller projects. It was not feasible (or practical) to suggest a new project in addition to the program existing work.

[58] During the 2009 – 2010 program year, participants of the ACTION program were paid a stipend of $120 every two weeks (which translates into an hourly rate of $7.50) for a maximum of 8 hours a week, plus any addition of weekend hours spent participating in special events.

[59] During the time I observed the ACTION program, THE POINT identified four core "key ingredients" or core content areas and outcomes: advocacy, academic support, media training, and youth development. According to THE POINT's ACTION brochure from October 28, 2009, these four core areas and associated outcomes were described as follows: For *advocacy*, ACTION participants were to "learn the fundamentals of environmental justice, study current

issues in the South Bronx, work to inform others in the community about these issues as well as work towards a solution." As for *academic support,* the academic progress of ACTION participants, "[was] monitored closely and tutoring [was] provided. Through collaboration with THE POINT's education staff and other organizations all [ACTION participants received] SAT Preparation and help with college application process. A minimum 75% average in grades is required." As for *media training*, ACTION participants, "take part in a media and technology course, where they are instructed in computer literacy, web design, computer programming and blogging." As for *youth development*, ACTION participants, "will become leaders by gaining experience and assistance in public speaking, job training, resume writing, and communication skills and effectiveness."

[60] The Purpose of Happening Habitat, "is to examine North Brother Island and other environmental aspects of the South Bronx community. We hope to promote the restoration of North Brother Island, raise awareness about the natural environment, and help build an overall appreciation and respect for nature. Our blog is updated weekly and is comprised of both visual and written material that is meant to support environmental stewardship. We hope that you find our blog useful and gain a new perspective on your relationship with nature." http://www.happeninghabitat.typepad.com last retrieved April 1 2012.

[61] The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene sponsored the Health Equity Project (HEP) in partnership with Hunter College of The City University of New York (CUNY). According to the project write-up, the New York Department of Health and Mental Hygiene created District Public Health Offices (DPHOs) in North and Central Brooklyn, the South Bronx, and East and Central Harlem to situate programs in neighborhoods of high public health need. The DPHOs seek to involve community residents in examining health disparities and developing solutions to health issues affecting their communities.

In 2008, the DPHOs in partnership with Hunter College created the HEP to develop a model of community engagement targeting adolescents ages 12-18 within high-need neighborhoods. HEP incorporates a structured dialogue process with youth and youth-serving agencies to raise awareness about the underlying causes of poor health in lower-income neighborhoods, looking particularly at obesity, diabetes, and other forms of cardiovascular disease; sexual and reproductive health; youth violence; and environmental health.

HEP worked with three afterschool programs in North/Central Brooklyn and the South Bronx to examine obesity and diabetes rates and conduct a community food assessment to see whether food access played a role in the local obesity epidemic. Based on their findings, students are currently working with HEP to develop an action project around improving School Food in neighborhood schools.

[62] The Bronx River Alliance, "serves as a coordinated voice for the river and works in harmonious partnership to protect, improve and restore the Bronx River corridor so that it can be a healthy ecological, recreational, educational and economic resource for the communities through which the river flows. The Alliance works in close partnership with the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation to achieve these goals." http://bronxriver.org/?pg=content&p=aboutus last retrieve April 1, 2012.

[63] The Go Green Campaign provided participants and residents with a general overview of what it means and what it looks like to go green (i.e., to be environmentally friendly and environmentally aware). Participants gave residents examples of how they could become green

at home by recycling, composting, and gardening. They also provided a general overview of various greening campaigns and projects currently underway in Hunts Points. Such projects included:

The green roof at THE POINT – "The NYS Office of the Attorney General and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation have officially awarded THE POINT support for its green roof! With this assistance, THE POINT plans to install an extensive green roof and smaller intensive green roof that will serve as an outdoor classroom at its main facility at 940 Garrison Avenue" (THE POINT ND); last retrieved May 29, 2012.

Increasing the amount of green space in Hunts Point – "In 2006, THE POINT completed the remediation process at this location of a former fur factory at 1399 Lafayette Avenue and officially named it the Hunts Point Riverside Campus for Arts and the Environment. The goal of the site is to enhance the community's access to the Bronx River while creating new opportunities for the arts beyond the reach of THE POINT's door. This same year, the Hunts Point community celebrated the opening of Barretto Point Park and the Hunts Point Riverside Park, a triumph for neighborhood residents and organizations like THE POINT who had been advocating for increased green space for over a decade" (THE POINT, ND); last retrieved May 29, 2012.

[64] The goal of the Urban Farming Project was to educate participants and Hunts Point residents about healthy food options through small scale urban agriculture. The project is an ongoing attempt to address the lack of access to healthy and affordable fresh produce in Hunts Point.

[65] New School Oyster Midden class and project. Last retrieve on April 1, 2012 from http://www.calamara.com/newschoolmidden.html

[66] For additional information, please refer to Hudson River Foundation. (Fall 2010). *Oyster Restoration Feasibility Study*. Last retrieved April, 2012 from, http://www.hudsonriver.org/download/ORRP_Fall2010Summary.pdf.

[67] As the dissertation research design is not experimental or semi-experimental in nature, research subjects were not recruited from a broader population of potential subjects; therefore it does not have equitable subject representation in terms of age, gender or ethnic and racial minority populations.

[68] I collected 19 signed parent/guardian consent forms from all the youth participants and I also sought and was granted youth assent from all participants. I asked each youth participant I interviewed if he or she would assent to participating in my research; all members of ACTION who were interviewed verbally assented to participate in my dissertation study.

[69] The departure of two members of ACTION was not related to my dissertation research. These youth participants left the program for personal reasons.

[70] I provided the coordinators with a contact letter and consent form in January 2010. Although THE POINT staff would occasionally attend or participate in ACTION activities, their involvement was limited and I did not interact with these staff members. Consequently, they were not involved in my dissertation research.

[71] I reached out to two members of the community whom I met in March 2010 during the town hall meeting. However, after numerous attempts, I was not successful at securing a signed consent form from these individuals and therefore was not able to include them in the research. I distributed three additional consent forms to adult non-staff members who provided assistance to the ACTION program. These individuals represented local or national organizations such as the Audubon Society, Hunter College of The City University of New York, and the Bronx River Alliance. Although all three individuals consented to participate in the study, I was not able to secure an interview with one of the individuals.

[72] The brainstorming list included the following ideas and suggested topics: HIV/STD's, urban farming, global education (general/broader knowledge), drugs in school, unemployment, bullying, counseling and mentoring, garbage and litter problem, teen pregnancy, money management and banking, after-school programs, go green outreach and education, gender empowerment, child abuse and domestic violence, technology literacy, fitness and health.

[73] The goal of the urban farm was for ACTION members to learn how to grow fruits and vegetables, to learn about healthy food options, and potentially develop a plan to start their own farmers market. ACTION participants wanted to develop their own small urban farm in a plot outside THE POINT's front doors and at a small satellite site or 'campus' in Hunts Point Riverside Park, which is located less than half a mile away from center. THE POINT's Riverside Campus for Art and the Environment, as it is formerly known, will become the first stop along the South Bronx Green Way Project (as described in Chapter Three).

[74] Companion planting is the planting of different crops in proximity and based on the idea of mutual benefit in terms of nutrients, pest control, and the provision of healthy habitat for animals. Please refer to Seeds of Change from: http://www.seedsofchange.com/enewsletter/issue_55/companion_planting.aspx last retrieved on May 23 2012.

[75] The community food assessment protocols were approved by the City University of New York's Hunter College approved IRB department.

[76] A large filling cabinet in the ACTION loft houses professional reports, pamphlets, and documentaries on various topics. They were also encouraged to use and were given access to computers to conduct research online. Participants were supplied with large poster boards and materials to create a poster presentation for their campaigns.

[77] I removed these personal identifiers and replaced them with a code in order to protect the confidentiality of the respondent's answers.

[78] Prior to the first annual Fish Parade in Hunts Point, THE POINT had been very active in spearheading an outreach program and protesting the growth of the Hunts Point Food Distribution Center. Their efforts centered around the environmental and public health concerns regarding the expansion of a large commercial/light industrial enterprise and its corollaries (e.g. increase in truck traffic). Loosely modeled after the Mermaid Parade in Coney Island, the parade welcomes the participation of community groups, organizations and individuals. Key to the Fish Parade is an emphasis on incorporating some of the quality-of-life issues in Hunts Point into the pageantry of Parade. Winding for a mile through the streets of Hunts Point, and culminating at Barretto Point Park, the procession features new and vibrant work by emerging

artists, community groups and schools throughout the Bronx and beyond." (THE POINT.org, ND).

[79] Though I made minor changes in the implementation and time frame of the focus groups and journals respectively, I used the language from the approved protocols and thus did not need to return to the Human Subjects Division for a modification of my original application.

CHAPTER FIVE – Findings on a Transformative Youth Program: Exploring the Social and Spatial Dynamics of *Place* in Catalyzing Youth Organizing and Activist Identities

"I dreaded the first day of school. Hated it!" It was September and my work colleague and I were in a taxi traveling to Washington Heights in northern Manhattan to visit an after-school program. The start of the school year meant a new round of evaluations for education programs. He drew his hands to his face as if to bite his nails. "I was so nervous. I mean, what would I say when the teacher asked about our summer vacation? Vacation! I was the poor black kid in a rich white school. I spent my summers cleaning houses with my mother. Everyone else went to Disneyland, or spent the summer at the beach or went to Europe. I went to Queens."

For many South Bronx youth, and other teens like them, *the neighborhood* is their entire world. Youth like those who participated in ACTION depended on the resources available in their immediate neighborhoods. Unjust social policies, environmentally toxic lands, limited open spaces, and isolated local economies can impede their access to diverse life opportunities. Additionally, these social and environmental toxins can constrain positive development and alter a young person's normative calculus. But these conditions also represent, as the context of development, the possible grounds for their civic education; the place for youth-led struggle against processes of exclusion and inequity. Therefore, I explore the youth perspective on the social and spatial conditions that define Hunts Point in order to better understand the perceived developmental context and to identify what motivates ACTION youth to take action. Using this reconstructed landscape as the lenses for analysis, I seek to understand how these youth perceived themselves as change agents.

As noted in Chapter One, I divided the presentation of my research findings into two chapters. The focus of Chapter Five is on youth outcomes and summarizes their perceptions of

both neighborhood-level social and spatial conditions and their activism within that setting. Chapter Six centers on program-level outcomes and summarizes the operationalization of critical civic praxis, emphasizing key strategies. The purpose of the current chapter is to answer two driving research questions:

1. What socio-spatial conditions experienced by ACTION participants shape their organizing and activism within the organization and their community.

2. Within the context of living with and seeking to change unjust social and environmental conditions intentionally, how do youth envision and understand their activism? Specifically, what perspective do ACTION participants have of themselves as agents for social change within their neighborhood?

To answer these questions, I reviewed the youth perspective on Hunts Point and sought deeper insight into how youth perceive their identities as change agents within this conceptualized landscape. I pieced together a conceptual map of Hunts Point by pulling descriptions from my interviews with participants, their Fish Parade essays[80] and my field observations.[81] The map allowed me to ground my analysis of the diversely sourced data to gain a better understanding of how youth define their roles as change agents and activists in place.

Youth Re-Constructed Hunts Point – A Neighborhood Defined by Social Bonds and Toxic Spatial Conditions

ACTION participants were well aware of the stereotypes that had defined Hunts Point and other South Bronx neighborhoods for decades. Popular accounts of the area such as prostitution, drugs, and violence were prevalent in the participants' stories.

> *[A challenge I face as a young person in Hunts Point] is the stereotypical stuff. "Oh, you're from Hunts Point? You'll never get a job!" or "Oh, you're from Hunts Point, you*

> *ain't getting out of there." Meaning you're always going to be staying there, selling drugs, being a pimp, or whatever you have to do to get by.* – M04_18[82]

However, youth were strategic in their treatment of negative attributes as they pieced together less acknowledged perceptions of the neighborhood. Although they recognized the presence of social and environmental toxins, they did not privilege these qualities as definitive. During my time with ACTION, as I watched, listened, and read, I sensed youth were frustrated with, but equally protective of, their neighborhood. Hunts Point was a neighborhood exemplifying social and environmental injustice, but it was also their home.

> *I've heard about what Hunts Point was – a low run down crowd of unsafe streets and unimportant people full of crime. I'm constantly questioned about what in the world … would make me want to even visit Hunts Point, and even though I heard them, I never really answered, but there is a time and place for everything right?…To me Hunts Point is a world of experience and everytime I come here I experience and every time I come here I am consumed by everlasting fascination and possibilities…As I walk through Hunts Point I see people interacting, different generations bonding, communities changing. I hear children playing, teens joking, and I can taste change and hope alive in the air.* – F07_16[83]

> *Hunts Point is not what it use to be. It still has it's flaws here and there…but there has definitely been improvements. Prostitution, gang violence, drugs, lazy people, stupid kids, and burning buildings. This is what Hunts Point use to be known for. This is what I use to think of Hunts Point. That is, until I came here…Before I couldn't care less about what people around me said about Hunts Point but, know I protect, like a lionist protecting her young.* – F06_17[84]

> *I remember before I ever came to Hunt's Point they would tell me Hunt's Point is nasty and all about sex and drugs. But now that I am in hear I don't ever wanna leave Hunt's Point…I am Hunt's Point.* – F09_17[85]

During my interviews with ACTION participants, I asked youth to describe *their* neighborhood but did not reference Hunts Point specifically. Consequently, I learned that nearly half of the participants (6 female participants and 1 male participant) lived outside of Hunts Point. Most lived in adjoining neighborhoods and one participants had moved out of the borough recently. The participant's geographic distribution was interesting and made their involvement in the program and the neighborhood more compelling. The catchment area for school-based after-school programs typically draws on the surrounding neighborhood, whereas community-

based programs can have a broader reach, especially in low-resourced communities like the South Bronx. Being a participant in the ACTION program represented a significant commitment. Youth traveled between home, school, and the program site at least three times a week and participated in a minimum of eight hours of programming. It is important to recall that there are no high schools in Hunts Point and thus, participants attended schools throughout the Bronx or traveled into Manhattan.

Of the seven participants who lived outside of Hunts Point, four identified the neighborhood as their *home* neighborhood, having developed a deep sense of place that was characterized as familiar and optimistic.

> *I don't consider Tremont my true neighborhood. I sleep in Tremont, but…I live in Hunts Point.* – M01_16[86]

> *I'm not from Hunts Point. They say that "home is where the heart is" and if that's true then it shouldn't matter that I don't live here…No, I don't live here, but I work here, play here, I play here and I love being here.* – F07_16[87]

Throughout the stories, gender appeared to mediate the participants' overall perceptions of Hunts Point and the South Bronx. For example, female ACTION participants were more likely to describe Hunts Point in positive terms, saying it was "comfortable" and "fun" or had "potential." Whereas, male participants described Hunts Point in a more negative light, saying it was "bad" or "shady." Additionally, female youth who lived outside of Hunts Point did not describe their home neighborhoods favorably. Instead, they said it was, "dead," "not peaceful," and "people [were] ignorant." These other South Bronx neighborhoods were characterized as lacking community resources and as being overrun by crime, drugs, and violence, descriptions similar to popular accounts of Hunts Point. Interestingly, these portrayals were formed in comparisons to Hunts Point, which youth regarded as a better place to live. The lack of programs such as ACTION and of organizations like THE POINT in their home neighborhoods were central to their assessments and positive association with Hunts Point.

I would say [my neighborhood is] actually a little bit more dangerous, because people out here [in Hunts Point] care. People out there [in my neighborhood] just don't care … Like a couple of my friends died. One hung himself and another jumped off the roof. Nobody heard about it. Just don't hear about stuff like that. I feel that, people really don't care. Like when you give up, you give up! And I think that is the most difference [between my neighborhood and Hunts Point]. In my area, where I live, nobody cares, so it's easier to give-up. In Hunts Point, where so many people care, even though you [as someone living in Hunts Point] have worse burdens, people that care really make a difference. That's when it makes it bearable, a place you want to go versus a place you have to go to. – F07_16[88]

Hunts Point is doing more than my neighborhood is. My neighborhood doesn't do anything. There are no types of activists or groups. – F02_16[89]

A complex and dynamic image of Hunts Point emerged from the participant's stories. Figure 15 below represents a conceptual map of Hunts Point and other South Bronx neighborhoods based on the social and spatial conditions identified by the youth. The conceptualization defies and acknowledges simultaneously the stereotypes of poor, urban neighborhoods. Youth did not define these neighborhoods as physical demarcations on a map, but rather in terms of the social bonds fostered in the struggle against spatial inequities.

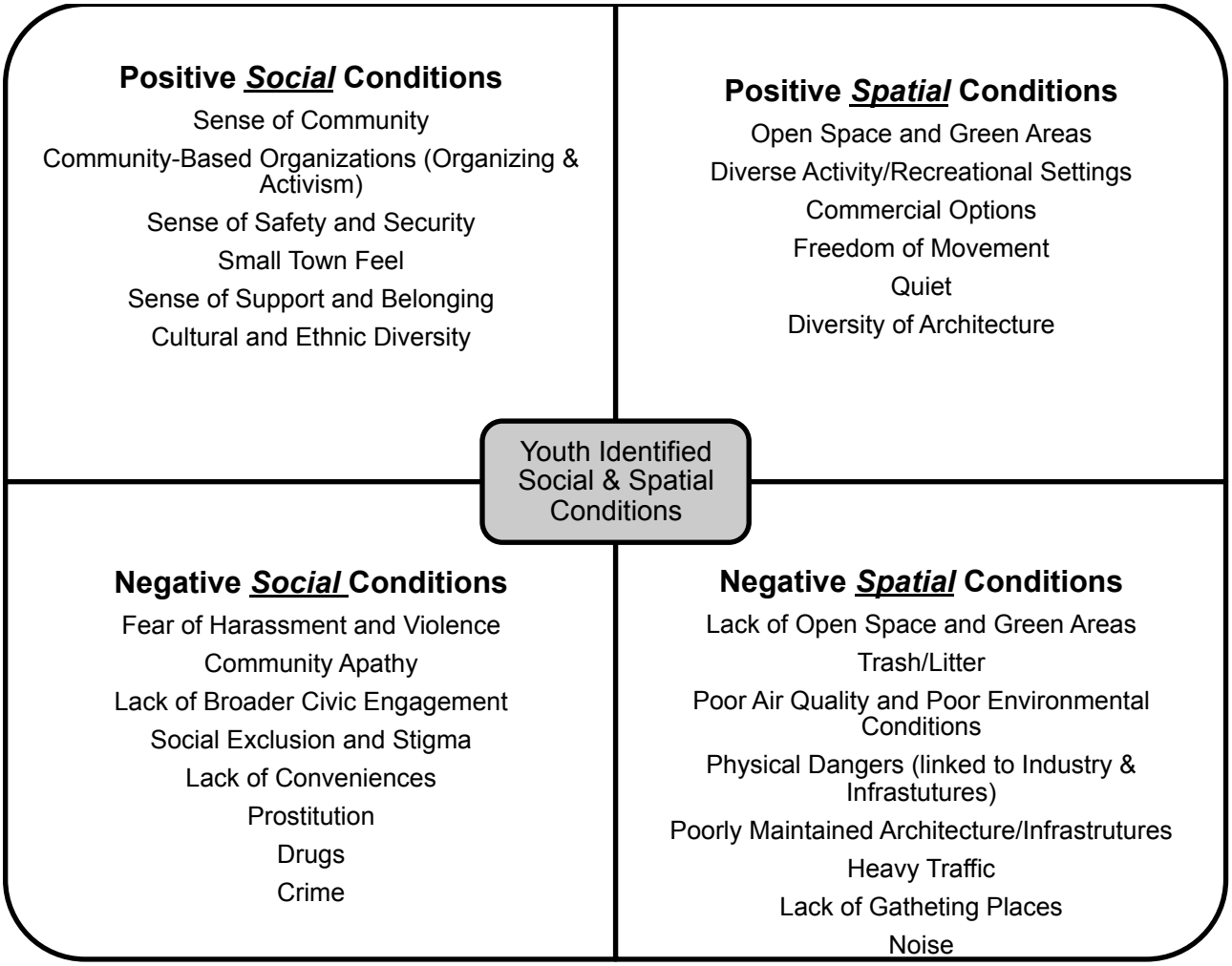

Figure 15: Youth Identified Conceptual Map of Hunts Point

In the subsequent sections, I review the social and the spatial conditions identified by youth as most salient and emphasize the contextual realities they described as being either positive or negative.

Youth Identified Social Conditions in Hunts Point and Other South Bronx Neighborhoods

ACTION participants identified a strong sense of community and supportive social bonds as the social attributes they liked most about Hunts Point. They described “a positive atmosphere," “a sense of family," and “more [of] a sense of togetherness." They said “I know

everyone" and “people are more caring in Hunts Point than where I live." Female participants felt safe and comfortable being in Hunts Point and male participants enjoyed the neighborhood’s cultural and ethnic diversity and the ease of mobility. All youth participants perceived programs like ACTION and community-based grassroots organizations as fostering supportive networks within Hunts Point and as catalyzing youth organizing and activism.

> *I like the Hunts Point area because I see people trying to make a difference in it, like ACTION and that has really motivated me to bring about change*. – M06-18[90]

> *Yeah, thanks to THE POINT [I’ve made] connections; it’s like my second family. Feel it’s a part of me*. – F01_18[91]

Youth participants drew strength from the social capital in Hunts Points. I borrow from Virginia Morrow’s work on social care with children and youth to define social capital, “as a community-level attribute [that] consists of the existence of social and community networks; civic engagement; local identify and a sense of belonging and solidarity with other community members; and norms of trust and reciprocal help and support” (Morrow 2004, p. 211). According to youth, what sets Hunts Points apart from other South Bronx neighborhoods are the social networks that are cultivated, which in turn help build a collective sense of efficacy to redress social and environmental injustices.

Prostitution was prominent in the youth’s reflection of the social conditions they disliked about Hunts Point. For one female participant, the neighborhood’s affiliation with prostitution in combination with the overwhelming presence of heavy truck traffic left her visibly angry:

> *I don’t like the truckers. Like when you’re walking back from the pool, they’re disgusting, they’re disgusting! They say stuff, like especially if you’re female; like not everybody in Hunts Point is a prostitute*. – F07_16[92]

In addition, male participants found objectionable the neighborhood’s bad reputation and the considerable presence of drugs and violence. Female youth were concerned with the

perceived apathy of adult community members, the lack of public transit options, and the limited opportunities to connect with people due to limited safe places to hang out.[93]

The presence of "guys hanging-out" on street corners or outside the entrance of buildings was a source of significant anxiety for many youth.

> *I don't like the people who stand on the corners, hanging out. We have too many junkies strung out on drugs and not too many people standing out there trying to make a difference. Like we still have these bozos standing there on the corner acting like they're making money selling weed and all that when like, they're giving Hunts Point a bad name. Like, Hunts Point is more than that*. – M06_18[94]

> *For young kids in my neighborhood [in the South Bronx], there is no place to hang out. Hanging out on the streets is a bad thing because I just see these people hanging-out and I feel that they have nothing to do but hang out in the street and that can lead to negative aspects of your life*. – F05_16[95]

People hanging out signaled the selling of drugs or foretold of a fight about to breakout. They symbolized the potential for danger and the perceived apathy of adult residents. These two social attributes resonated deeply with youth, some of whom shared their personal struggles, and that of their peers, to avoid entanglement with gangs and other risky involvements. The perceived apathy of adult community members was a recurring theme in the youth's stories on Hunts Point.

Many of ACTION's participants were drawn initially to the program by the opportunity to earn money, either for themselves or to help support their families. For these youth, ACTION was a job and one they took very seriously. Like many of their peers in the South Bronx, ACTION teens shouldered considerable responsibilities, from contributing to the household finance to caring for younger siblings. Youth understood these responsibilities to be adult obligations.

> *I look way older than I am…I don't want to get old. A lot of teenagers my age can't wait to get older. I'm not. Trying to enjoy [being young] because being, looking more mature than I actually am has made adults give me more responsibility than I, than a child is usually given. I now realize how much crap adults have to go through and how, and I guess the bullshit they have to act. It's not fun being responsible. It's fun being stupid, it*

> *really is and at my age, it's the only time you can do that. [But being an activist means being responsible? I asked]. That is a type of responsibility I do want*. – M03_16[96]

They drew frequently on comparisons with adults, which they divided roughly into two categories: adult allies and apathetic or "ignorant" adults. Adult allies featured prominently in the youth's activism values, which are discussed subsequently, and contributed to their social capital. In contrast, apathetic adults (frequently referred to by youth as ignorant adults) were perceived as, "chilling outside and not doing anything. They're always on the corner and never doing anything. Just sitting down in chairs, just talking" (M04_18[97]). Youth struggled at times to understand why they, young people, were more active than the adults in the neighborhood to try and bring about change.

> *I put the blame on people in my community. I think that if people don't try to make a change that than there will be nothing. Can't always rely on people coming in to save us and people who do make it don't want to come back and help… There are moments, [during] certain events that I am thinking, there are so many people doing nothing right now who could be here. [Like] the previous food summit or food export…there were not enough people there I thought it was a great opportunity to learn to make a difference. I learned about Green jobs and lots of people in my community could use a job. It affects them directly because these are the people who need changes in the community. If they participated, they would want to make a change. I don't think people realize how much they are being ripped off. And when you know, you change!* – F10_17[98]

> *Not enough people trying to bring about changes; not enough people being concerned if their children are receiving a good quality education or develop themselves in an orderly manner. That is why a lot of people grow up ignorant because not a lot of people living around them lead them on the right way, on the right path. Or that they have a good life and do what they are suppose to do and stay on the right track. If we had more people out there that cared, things would be a whole lot different*. – M06_18[99]

Youth-Identified Spatial Conditions in Hunts Point and Other South Bronx Neighborhoods

Parks and trees – albeit limited in the South Bronx, which has one of the lowest resident-to-park ratios in the city, - access to recreational resources like THE POINT and the neighborhood pool, and commercial areas, such as Southern Boulevard are the spatial

conditions that resonated positively with ACTION participants. The neighborhood's brick buildings and diverse housing styles were also valued for their architectural qualities. The opportunity to experience diverse environments, *green* or naturalized spaces in particular, were valuable for ACTION participants (as described in greater detail in Chapter Six). Youth described visiting the bird sanctuary on North Brother Island, the nurturing experience of growing their own fruits and vegetables, and being inspired by the neighborhood's access to two riverfronts, although restricted. The opportunity to interact with what they perceived as more naturalized environments were instrumental to fostering deeper connections with their existing built environment in Hunts Point and motivating their decision to take action.

Nonetheless, the rundown appearance of the neighborhood and its physical infrastructure, the sour, caustic smell emitted by the sludge sewage treatment plants, and the general lack of greenery throughout Hunts Point were the conditions that youth disliked the most.

The descriptions of spatial attributes supplied by female participants were more detailed than those shared by the male youth. For example, female participants were more likely to reflect on Hunts Point's being less densely developed than Manhattan, which lent to its small town feel. Or that the area's transportation infrastructure facilitated the heavy truck traffic generated by the food distribution center, which in turn fostered an unsafe environment for women. Male youth were more likely to make reference to overall environmental burdens such as the poor air quality.

The industrial land uses so ubiquitous in Hunts Point and prevalent in the youth-led campaigns were somewhat lacking from their interview narratives. Instead of making explicit reference to specific environmental aggressors, youth were more likely to describe their corollary activities and the environmental and health consequences yielded by these industries.

> *And that smell from NYOFCO, it's disgusting. It makes you want to stay in the house, you don't want to be around that. And there are so many food places around Hunts*

> *Point, you don't want [your food] to be around that. It's not a good association with food.* – M06_18[100]

> *Most of the parks in this area are located in the middle of industrial zones. And when it gets windy, it gets really, really bad. I had to start wearing goggles. I skateboard there, which means that a couple of times…there is debris hitting my face. I have to turn away because it's not good*. – M03_16[101]

This by no means suggests that the ACTION campaigns were not meaningful to youth participants or relevant to their daily lives. I observed youth speak passionately about these topics and elect to continue pursuing these issues. Instead, it suggests that ACTION engaged youth in the critical analysis of various issues in order to design doable interventions more so than participating in social criticism, which would have involved a deeper understanding of the issues root causes. Thus, the specifics of who caused what appeared not to be as significant as the conditions they produced and the experiences they triggered.

Summary of Social and Spatial Conditions Identified by Youth Participants

"It's not for everyone," she said, "if you recognize that it's bad and you know, you just deal with it, even if you don't accept it." (F03_17) She was describing for me, her Hunts Point. What she was highlighting corresponds with other findings on how low-income, urban ethnic youth adjust their normative calculus (Halpern 2005) or how they envision opportunities in the social and spatial toxin-rich context of their development. ACTION participants acknowledged that living in Hunts Point was not without its challenges. Nonetheless, they believed it was a good place to grow-up, citing numerous positive social attributes. Female youth were more likely to highlight the neighborhood's positive attributes, while male participants reflected on the challenges they faced daily as character building. In contrast, participants did not rate other South Bronx neighborhood as favorably as Hunts Point and identified the lack of community-based organizations like THE POINT or programs like ACTION, and the activism they engendered, as a significant drawback.

The comparison to other neighborhoods in the South Bronx was informative in light of the research limitations, such as working with a single site. In effect, these comparisons helped me establish a baseline. For youth such as those participating in ACTION, community-based, grassroots organizations appear to provide a safe, alternative place to socialize and to participate in youth-led initiatives, which other research suggests can be instrumental to fostering positive, supportive social bonds and promoting a collective sense of efficacy. Differentiated social interactions in what is stereotyped as standard in poor, urban ethnic neighborhoods demonstrated the role of social capital in mediating the full impact of toxic social and spatial conditions on young people's everyday experiences. These conditions both impeded access and inspired change. Thus, the youth-identified social conditions and comparisons helped explain these young people's relationship with marginalizing environments in a low-income, urban ethnic community.

In the following section, I explore the youth perspective on social justice and social change, which is grounded in participant's everyday experiences in the South Bronx.

The Social Justice and Activism Values of Youth Participants

> June 7 2010.[102] My afternoon with ACTION is coming to an end. There is one last item on the agenda – Alex's informal focus group. (Alex is a PhD student from Cornell University doing research on sense of place with youth programs participants throughout the South Bronx.) Alex plans to hold a brief focus group with the ACTION participants and has invited me to sit in on the discussion. He mentions his plan to use a digital voice recorder to collect young people's responses and that he paid participants $5 for their participation on the focus group.
>
> All the ACTION participants are sitting around in a circle. Alex begins to explain the goal of the brief and informal focus group. I'm sitting just outside the circle so I can take notes while not interfering with Alex's work. Adam and Sharon have left the loft to give the group some privacy.
>
> Alex begins: "What are meaningful places for you in the Bronx?"
>
> The youth participants respond all at once, "THE POINT, the streets, Barretta Street Park, schools, the subway.

> Alex tries again. This time, he hands the digital voice recorder over to one participant and asks that it be passed around the circle so everyone has an opportunity to contribute without being interrupted.
>
> He continues: “What does the Bronx mean to you?” Youth participants continue to share their perspective. Alex asks that they focus their ideas on environmental aspect.
>
> M03_16 takes the recorder and speaks briefly before passing it to another youth: “Gentrification scares me. It’s scary."
>
> F01_18 shakes her head as if to disagree. “The asthma rates, the negative image of the Bronx environmentally. I don’t think that Hunts Point will ever be gentrified. It will keep its cultural value.”
>
> I raise my eyes from my journal to watch Alex’s reaction and that of M03_16.
>
> M03_16 jumps in. “So the only way we can live in our cultural values is to live in crap? That’s wrong!” He gets up from his chair to stand. “Hardship is moving us forward to have more greenery and parks, but still have our cultural value. It [cultural values] pushes us forward. Hardship pushes you more than positive reinforcement.”

Witness above, youth engaging in a “political process of decolonization”; the development of individual and collective critical consciousness as fostered in a safe, open space for critical dialogue, in which youth “[can] learn to see clearly…and gather that rage [against oppression] and use it towards constructive social change” (bell hooks 1995, p. 18 from Cahill 2004, p. 276) – not an outcome associated with many traditional youth programs. ACTION participants’ understanding of social justice is rooted in their daily experiences as urban, ethnic youth living in one of the poorest congressional districts in the United States.

ACTION youth participants defined social justice in terms of equal rights for all, as seeking equity and as doing the right thing to redress a wrong. In the previous section, I highlighted instances of youth framing their exploration of place by drawing on concepts of social justice discourse, from recognizing inequitable experiences in Hunts Point compared to other, more stable neighborhoods to participating in community-based efforts aimed at redressing specific discriminatory or hazardous conditions. Concepts of collectivity or collaboration were dominant in the youth’s descriptions, such that social change could be attained when collective awareness was reached and a sense of efficacy was fostered.

I don't want to say something so cliché as "to right a wrong," it's just that the system that we have been put in forces us, if you cannot afford…I mean if your mom is struggling while you were in school, you'd have to drop out of high school to go get a job and your child would be in the same situation because you didn't go to high school and you don't have a good job and you don't have a way to support yourself as well so your child may do the same thing. Minority scholarships are a way to break out of that but I think that in terms of social justice it's a way to help balance it out because I feel that everybody is born equal, maybe born equal but none of us are born in equal situation. A child from the Bronx and someone from some rural/suburb area are never going, may have the exact same job, but the child from the Bronx will have to do a lot to get it. – M03_16[103]

Social justice means letting people know that they have the right to speak up and participate in certain things and so that they can get things done, and spread knowledge so that people know that if they do dedicate their time to certain, in something that they can achieve…A lot of people from what I can see, a lot of people don't know that they have the power to change something, but they do and it's because of, because of how people are let down in Hunts Point or anywhere in general, how people are treated here, they feel they have no power in speech…I believe I'm more aware of social justice [because of the program] but this is something that I already had in myself before because of other programs, but I am more [aware] of it now, of actual situations, and what is going on. I am more aware of that than the actual meaning of social justice – M01_16 [104]

*Justice in general is honoring the rights of different people without having to sacrifice one in order to please the othe*r. F03_17[105]

My discussions with youth on social justice revealed a great deal about their values on activism and in particular, if and how they distinguished between *activism* and *youth activism*. Collectively, youth identified activism as being a physical manifestation against an injustice at large or a specific threat. They perceived it as performance undertaken by adults. In contrast, participants conceptualized youth activism as the collective response by youth to place-based issues and as supported by adult allies and community-based youth programs.

I was always interested in [activism] but I was never so committed because there wasn't a group to be committed to. If anything, my activism was going to a protest here and there, but it would just be something as a physical representation. – F01_18[106]

Youth activism is teenagers who can organize themselves, see a problem and can solve it. That doesn't happen often, which is why we need [programs like ACTION and adult allies] to us organize. – M01_18[107]

Male participants talk about activism as mobilizing against injustice. They spoke in terms of, “standing up for what you believe in." “fighting for issues." and “the power to change something with a group of people when something is not fair." Interestingly, female participants were more likely to describe activism as something adults did. F03_17, was most succinct regarding this point: “[it’s about] older people being anal about the stuff they want." As with their assessment of social and spatial conditions, youth described their sense of being change agents in contrast to adults. Some participants argued that change agents by their very nature were youth; ACTION participants associated adults with the status quo, as stuck in their way, while they associated youth more explicitly with change.

Youth described adults as too “stuck in their ways” or having fewer opportunities to mobilize. Recalling the perceived apathy by adult residents, perhaps participants were suggesting that youth are less entangled by informal mechanisms of social and political control than adults. Taking a stand can jeopardize mortgages, careers, benefits, and retirement plans. Whereas low-income, urban ethnic youth may adjust their normative calculus according to the shifting context of their development, readily shaped by numerous social toxins. They may perceive themselves as more agile and therefore able to try-on different identities and personas and tackle varying degrees of responsibilities. Within such a paradigm, youth would be less restricted and have more opportunities to engage in broader social change dialogue.

> *Youth as a foundation for social change, directing social change. Youth are a common theme in every community. We understand the social and environmental problems more because we see it, because we play in the streets, we know what’s going on. I guess that’s how we’re agents too, we have that first-hand experience. We see the problems that happen everyday in the community and it’s not really decreasing, so if anything, it should inspire youth, especially me, to do something about it. To at least figure out ways to decrease the problems and if we can’t completely get rid of them, how we can work around them. Recently I was reading about the Civil Rights Movement and there were these groups of students who were the foundation of the Civil Rights Movement. And it was really stable and functional and they were able to create change…because it was something we are raised into as well, you know. We are raised into these environmental problems and we realize we don’t want these problems to continue and I guess…For example, my mom she’s an immigrant, she came to this country and if anything, started to realize the problems that are in the South Bronx. But I was born into it; I’ve been seen*

> *it from a young age and I guess that's why for me, it's why I started as a youth activis*t. – F01_18[108]

> *Social change is youth because we want to adopt change. We're not stuck to one way like adults.…Trying on different identities, therefore better able to accept change*. – F06_17[109]

Participants described youth activism as youth finding their voices and taking leadership roles to collaborate with peers and adults to redress community-based problems. In essence, youth activism was germane this to transformative youth program. Youth working, fighting alongside adults or "[inspiring] adults to work along side youth" was central to the participants' activism values and their perceptions of how to nurture young people's activist identities. Participants felt adult allies could best support the development of their skills and capacities without "being looked down upon" for their lack of expert knowledge or know-how.

Participants believed youth should be engaged in community-based advocacy work at an early age in order to catalyze broader social change and to empower youth to embody being a change agent throughout their lives. They reflected on the importance of youth recruiting peers to participate in community-based projects to ensure youth interests, experiences, and needs which drove theor efforts (as is explored in greater details in Chapter Six). Participants expressed some degree of awe at what their generation could accomplish and wondered at the potential for greater impact if more young people were afforded the opportunities to cultivate a greater awareness of their surroundings, which, as was the case for the participants, could compel them to take action.

> *Youth activists are especially important because we are the future. If you're fighting for social justice by the time you're 14, all you can do, is get bigger by the time you're 25. If you start late, you finish late; your time is short. But if you dedicate years and years to activism, I feel you can make a change in your lifetime, at least see the change you fought for*. – F07_16[110]

> *We're so street smart! We know more about our community. Starting at such a young age and we also see that change and growth in [ourselves] each year, so the more you get older, so by the time you're in your mid 20's, we'll definitely be experts in environmental change*. – F01_18[111]

> *If you go through your life without caring about anything, once you become an adult, unless something very dramatic happens, you're not going to be very happy. If you are educated about the world around you, about how things work and why you should care, and how it affects everyone around you, at a young age, you're a lot more likely to make a large difference*. – M03_16[112]

Again, youth participants were overwhelmed when speaking about the significance of organizations like THE POINT and programs like ACTION to catalyze and sustain their activism. Youth believed firmly that the lack of community-based youth programs in the South Bronx and beyond was a deterrent to youth participation in community-based social change work. ACTION participants, especially those living outside of Hunts Point, recognized that their lack of self-initiated engagement in their home neighborhoods was related to the lack of organized opportunities and safe alternative spaces.

> *Youth activism is teenagers who can organize themselves, see a problem and can solve it. That doesn't happen often, which is why we need [programs like ACTION] to help us organize*. –F10_17[113]

> *I don't get involved in my neighborhood, where I live. There is nothing, nothing to get involved in. There are no community centers, no gardens; we don't have anything. The only thing we have in my neighborhood is a lot of drugs and violence*. – F09_17[114]

> *Through programs like ACTION, there will be people from my community, saving my community…I think we will be the future community organizers, opening POINTS all over the community instead of having other come; we will fix our problems. We will make a change, because people will listen to people who they can relate to more than other people; outsiders* – F10_17[115]

But awareness, and acting upon it, was a double-edged sword. Some youth were discouraged that their collective responses to marginalization went unrecognized by adults or that adults seemed overly surprised with their accomplishments. Other participants were frustrated that developing greater critical awareness made it difficult for them to fit in with their peers.

As optimistic as youth were of their accomplishments in Hunts Point, at times I sensed some participants were exasperated by the attention or the surprise it garnered. They wondered

why the engagement of youth, low-income urban ethnic youth in particular, in community-based efforts would be so surprising. Youth were concerned about these issues, which affected their lives and youth wanted an opportunity to contribute to their solutions. Just as participants received the label youth at risk poorly, so was any perceived exaggerated fascination with their efforts as change agents.

> *You have a great power to change something when you're young because people aren't use to seeing younger people doing certain things like [campaigns] about food justice. They are not use to seeing that. So that means that its, you know, a real problem when you have youth standing up against it.* M01_16[116]

> *What [change agent] means to me is a fancy way to say youth activists, but it's just what youth do. The youth that do care, they are achieved, idolized by older people. I guess. The older people seem to like when you do stuff, like they, they are like, "Wow, I would never have thought of kids like this, doing this," this kind of stuff. It's idolized. If you do care, it makes a very dramatic change because now its not just old people saying, "Oh, I want this." Now it's really an issue when you have kids that take time out of their childhood to focus on topics like this, whatever problem it is*. – M06_18[117]

> *I'm considered an "at risk" youth. When I first heard that, I was like at risk of what? If I do anything that is considered normal in a suburban community, it's considered remarkable if we do it here. It's great, but I feel it shouldn't be remarkable, it should be normal here too*. – F08_17[118]

Youth were anxious about their dealings with peer pressure; be it to dress or look a certain way or to act or *r*eact according to youth cultural norms in social situations. The ACTION program helped promote the development of young people's critical awareness (as described in Chapter Six) and with this knowledge and associated works came an uneasy struggle to fit in. It was subtle, but it became challenging for some participants to relate to their peers.

> *People don't have drive or ambitions, goals. They leave high school, get pregnant. They are so different. It's so difficult to connect with people*. – F04_17[119]

> *I'm different from people who live here. I also think differently and people can take that as a threat, as something they don't like or understand and will ridicule the way I think, while other people will learn from the way I think or think it's interesting*. – F03_17[120]

Conclusions

In this chapter, I set out to answer two of the dissertation's driving questions: the youth perspective on the socio-spatial conditions that shape their struggles and their perceptions of themselves as change agents.

My research demonstrates that ACTION participants described their neighborhoods in terms of socio-spatial characteristics, in particular the social bonds fostered within the context of spatial inequities. In addition, the socio-spatial dynamics of Hunts Point were never obscured from the participants' view or engagements, but was a formative program component. Community-based organizations like THE POINT and programs like ACTION were perceived as key catalyzers of youth organizing and activism and functioned as a counter force to indifference and violence. ACTION participants expressed their role as activists in relation to their socio-spatial experiences of place and differentiated youth activism as a collective and intergenerational response to place-based inequities. They differentiated the role of adults and youth as change agents, placing responsibility for progress on resolving inequities in the natural domain and critical practices of young people. Their drive for progress was equally balanced by asserting their need for guidance from programs like ACTION and adult allies.

Decades before THE POINT and programs like ACTION existed, Hunts Point residents adopted a "Don't Move, Improve" motto to sustain their grassroots efforts to rehabilitate neighborhoods, thereby changing the "chemistry of urban politics" permanently in the South Bronx – a legacy my study population upholds (quoting Charles J. Orlebeke 1997, Gonzales 2004 p. 130). The opportunity to leave their mark in a positive and constructive manner and to transform, to make place justly and an equitable fashion motivated youth to be activists and organizers.

In the following chapter, I present my findings on the ACTION program's engagement of an intentional critical pedagogy, critical civic praxis, to catalyze and sustain youth organizing and youth activism in the South Bronx.

Chapter Five Endnotes

[80] THE POINT, along with other CBOs organized the first annual Fish Parade in 2003 to raise public awareness about the relocation of the Fulton Fish market from lower Manhattan to the Hunts Point Food Distribution Center. Prior to the first annual Fish Parade in Hunts Point, THE POINT had been very active in spearheading an outreach program and protesting the growth of the Hunts Point Food Distribution Center. Their efforts centered around the environmental and public health concerns regarding the expansion of a large commercial/light industrial enterprise and its corollaries (e.g. increase in truck traffic). Soon, the CBOs realized that the fish market's move to Hunts Point was inevitable and thus the Fish Parade was re-envisioned as a celebration of the neighborhood's assets – its residents. Loosely modeled after the Mermaid Parade in Coney Island, the parade welcomes the participation of community groups, organizations and individuals. Key to the Fish Parade is an emphasis on incorporating some of the quality-of-life issues in Hunts Point into the pageantry of Parade. Winding for a mile through the streets of Hunts Point, and culminating at Barretto Point Park, the procession features new and vibrant work by emerging artists, community groups and schools throughout the Bronx and beyond." (THE POINT n.d.).

In May 2010, Adam and Sharon asked each member of ACTION to submit an essay in support of the annual Fish Parade. The brief essay was to focus on "the state of Hunts Point" from their perspective. There was a $25 to $75 prize award to the winner of the Fish Parade essay. As the brief assignment was inline with the propose journal protocol that was submitted as part of my dissertation research proposal to the University of Washington's Human Subject Department, I asked if I could get copies of the essays for the research.

[81] Refer to ACTION Youth Participant Interview Protocol, Questions 7, 8, and 9.

[82] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant M04_18 on May 17, 2010.

[83] The text was taken directly from the participant's Fish Parade essay; no errors or corrections were made in order to retain the authenticity of the text and voice of the youth contributor.

[84] The text was taken directly from the participant's Fish Parade essay; no errors or corrections were made in order to retain the authenticity of the text and voice of the youth contributor.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant M01_16 on May 17, 2010.

[87] The text was taken directly from the participant's Fish Parade essay; no errors or corrections were made in order to retain the authenticity of the text and voice of the youth contributor.

[88] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant F07_16.

[89] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant F02_16.

[90] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant M06_18 on July 22, 2010.

[91] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant F01_18 on May 5 2010.

[92] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant F07_16.

[93] The comment made about the lack of transportation options is interesting as Hunts Point is relatively well connected by subways and buses to Manhattan and other neighborhoods in the South Bronx. What is lacking is good transportation *within* the neighborhood. Not all areas within Hunts Points are well connected by public transit. Some bus lines are seasonal (operating only during the summer months) and some have been slated to cease operating by the Metro Transit Authority (MTA). This is particularly challenging for younger residents especially as new public resources such as parks and pools are being built in the southern portion of the neighborhood which is not well serviced by public transit or where services is offered only seasonal (such as Bus 6, which operates to Barretto Park Pool). Improvements are being made through New York City's Department of Economic Development as part of its Hunts Point Visioning program to increased capital facilities, especially green infrastructure, along the riverfront and throughout the neighborhoods heavy industrial zone. Please refer to Chapter Three for a summary, as well as New York City's Department of Economic Development for specific capital improvement plans.

[94] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant M06_18 on July 22, 2010.

[95] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant F05_16 on May 26, 2010.

[96] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant M03_16 on May 17, 2010.

[97] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant M04_18 on May 17, 2010.

[98] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant M010_17 on May 3, 2010.

[99] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant M06_18 on July 22, 2010.

[100] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant M06_18 on July 22, 2010.

[101] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant M03_16 on May 17, 2010.

[102] Poncelet, J. (2010). Personal Correspondence. Field Notes.

[103] Poncelet, J. (2010). Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth participant M03_16 on May 17, 2010.

[104] Poncelet, J. (2010). Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth participant M01_16 on July 22, 2010.

[105] Poncelet, J. (2010). Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth participant F03_17 on April 28, 2010.

[106] Poncelet, J. (2010). Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth participant F01_18 on May 5, 2010.

[107] Poncelet, J. (2010). Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth participant F01_18 on May 5, 2010.

[108] Poncelet, J. (2010). Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth participant F01_18 on May 5, 2010.

[109] Poncelet, J. (2010). Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth participant F06_17 on May 19, 2010.

[110] Poncelet, J. (2010). Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth participant F07_16.

[111] Poncelet, J. (2010). Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth participant F01_18 on May 5, 2010.

[112] Poncelet, J. (2010). Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth participant M03_16 on May 17, 2010.

[113] Poncelet, J. (2010). Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth participant F10_17 on May 3, 2010.

[114] Poncelet, J. (2010). Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth participant F09_17 on May 26, 2010.

[115] Poncelet, J. (2010). Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth participant F10_17 on May 3, 2010.

[116] Poncelet, J. (2010). Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth participant M01_16 on July 22, 2010.

[117] Poncelet, J. (2010). Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth participant M06_18 on July 22, 2010.

[118] Poncelet, J. (2010). Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth participant F08_17 on May 5, 2010.

[119] Poncelet, J. (2010). Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth participant F04_17

[120] Poncelet, J. (2010). Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth participant F03_17 on April 28, 2010.

CHAPTER SIX – Findings on a Transformative Youth Program: Exploring the Programmatic Mechanisms and Strategies Catalyzing Youth Organizing and Youth Activism

> *[I see] glimpses of the problems around me and the different social standings of why these problems happen, especially in my area and instead of saying, you know, I'm use to it, I can say, you know, I'm going to say something…Maybe we [ACTION] can do something. Maybe I can do something. You know?* – F03_17[121]

> *[I'm] always being educated. I realize that a lot of the things I'm learning I can take out with me to my friends and talk about in school. A lot of information we are not typically learning in school. [It's] very detailed…we're not learning this in school*. – F01_18[122]

I argue that community-based grassroots organizations are strategically positioned to recognize and support youth in exploring the structural constraints and contextual realities of their everyday lives. Informal institutions grounded in a neighborhood's civic sub-culture can be key sources of knowledge and empowerment for social groups that have been excluded historically from recognition and participation in democratic processes (Ginwright 2010, Sanchez-Jankowski 2002). Many of these organizations operate in poor, urban America and undertake neighborhood-level organizing to redress spatial inequalities. In essence, these social institutions function as "incubators of innovation" able to "experiment and implement new strategies" (Ginwright 2010, p. 89), including alternative approaches to youth development that go beyond promoting positive individual-level developmental outcomes as the ultimate goal.

Community-based youth programs encompass diverse approaches from youth-centered community development programs to more transformative approaches that emphasize youth-led struggles against social and environmental injustice. Transformative youth programs implement strategies rooted in community organizing. As such, the programs typically operationalize hands-on, intentional learning opportunities in civic and democratic education

intended to transform socio-spatial inequities (Hosang 2004b, Listen, Inc. 2003, Warren et al. 2008). Community-based youth programs can be meaningful to young people living in neighborhoods struggling with disparities as they can foster opportunities for youth to develop a positive sense of self, sustain civic responsibilities, and build capacities to address complex social issues. In addition, these programs can support youth (and their communities) to develop collective identities as innovators and change agents so they can take informed actions in response to marginalizing conditions. Consequently, longer-term outcomes such as sustaining issue-based advocacy and civic participation into adulthood can be achieved (Stoneman 2002).

In this dissertation, I posited that an intentional place-based critical pedagogy – critical civic praxis – can yield individual- and community-level transformative outcomes. This can be attained through the engagement of youth to: (1) develop critical awareness or critical consciousness that community-based problems are issues rooted in broader socio-structural forces; (2) produce and exchange local knowledge based on everyday experiences, which are legitimate and proximal contributions to addressing spatial inequities; and (3) foster youth agency and the development of civic, activists identities as social agents capable of transforming the world around them. Thus, the potentially harmful context of their development becomes the grounds for their civic education and, through struggle, the place for the mutual transformation of youth and their communities.

The goal of the current chapter is to present my findings on the ACTION program's engagement of a critical civic praxis framework, including the organizational processes and strategies that catalyze youth organizing and activism. First, I summarize the practices that fostered on overall program culture, characterized as a *critical pedagogy of social analysis, hands-on learning, and youth governance*. Second, I focus my analysis on the three dimensions of critical civic praxis in order to identity the mechanisms capable of fostering transformative outcomes. In particular, I present how the program's coordinators and its participants engaged

in (1) critical consciousness raising, (2) knowledge production and exchange, and (3) agency and identity development.

Findings on the ACTION Program – Transformative Processes and Strategies

In the following section, I present my findings on the ACTION program's operationalization of a critical civic praxis framework. The purpose of the analysis is to understand the mechanisms used by a community-based youth program to support individual and community level change. The section is divided into two parts: (1) the documentation of the strategies used in ACTION in order to support the premise that its overall program culture constitutes a critical pedagogy and (2) the documentation of the operationalization of the three dimensions of critical civic praxis, as described by coordinators, and the resulting participant-level outcomes.

I summarize the program's overall culture in Table 5 and describe key strategies and practices used to create an open, shared, and hands-on transformative youth program. I employed the observation protocol matrix reviewed in Chapter Four to map-out the strategies from high usage (employed on a daily basis) to low usage (used on a weekly to monthly basis).

The ACTION program's operationalization of critical civic praxis is summarized in Table 6. These strategies helped galvanize youth to work collectively in order to organize and take action against community-based social justice issues. Again, I employed the observation protocol matrix to map-out outcomes from high occurrence (occurred on a daily basis) to low occurrence (occurred on a weekly to monthly basis).

TABLE 5: ACTION's Overall Program Culture

High Usage (Frequency - daily)	Medium Usage (Frequency - weekly)	Low Usage (Frequency - weekly to occasional)
Communicate goals, purposes, and expectations about activities in support of campaigns and projects, special events, and presentations. Encourage active learning through research, activities and hands-on experiences for both youth and adult: - Community-organizing strategies informed program process - Adults work along side youth in partnership; collaborative endeavors. - Development of various skills with a focus on civic and organizing/activism capacity building Provide real world and local examples to frame activities, discussions, or to address questions: - Encourage youth to research problems they have identified in the community - Encourage the use and familiarity with technical language commonly used in discourse on community organizing, environmental justice, and food justice Direct youth to make reference to personal experiences (as knowledge) and information they have researched for campaigns and projects when speaking about Hunts Point and ACTION projects Focus on collective identity building and attitudes; supported by using positive behavior management and reinforcement techniques to foster a positive knowledge sharing environment: - Build strong, supportive bond/relationship between youth and adults - Reinforce public skills development - Encourage everyone to participate	Focus on collective identity building and attitudes; supported by using positive behavior management and reinforcement techniques to foster a positive knowledge sharing environment: - Review youth's work in a positive, yet constructive manner; peer to peer feedback - Adults give youth specific directions or cue to start tasks or to remain on task - Adults and (at times) youth enforce time management Encourage youth to share ideas, opinions, and concerns about the content and plans for activities and projects: - Group decision making and goal setting - Group debriefing and reflection of activities, events, outcomes Adults assist youth without taking control: - Regular program tasks/mundane tasks	Coordinator management roles and responsibilities are clear and consistent: - Coordination between the 2 coordinators and with those adults providing technical support to the ACTION program - Management of project timelines Encourage youth to share ideas, opinions, and concerns about the content and plans for activities and projects: - Individual reflection of self, reflection on individual transformation, including skills development. Identity development, future aspirations, participation/recognition in community Communicate goals, purposes, and expectations about activities in support of campaigns and projects, special events, and presentations: - Education and academic achievement goals Adults assist youth without taking control: - Completing technical tasks and learning technical skills (assisting youth without taking control)

Findings on ACTION's Overall Program Culture

Table 5 reveals three key findings on ACTION's overall program culture or critical pedagogy, which is geared to promote, support, and sustain youth organizing and youth activism in the South Bronx: the program (1) was intentionally action-oriented in that participants collaborated with adult allies to develop and carry-out community-based projects conceived to address social and environmental justice problems in Hunts Point; (2) was explicit in its development of individual and collective civic efficacy to organize against inequities; and (3) incorporated a balanced youth-driven and adult-driven decision-making process, which helped foster strong, supportive relationships between youth and adults.

Adult-youth interactions in the program were grounded in notions of youth participation in which interactions can range from youth providing little to no input into the program's activities and direction to adults providing limited structure and assistance as youth lead the program. In youth-driven programs, young people have greater authority over input and decision-making, while adults have greater control over daily activities in adult-driven approaches (Larson, Walker & Pearce 2005).[123] I observed a balance between youth-driven and adult-driven approaches in the ACTION program. Authority and responsibility would flow between the participants and the coordinators depending on the nature of a task. For example, ACTION participants led the process to select new members as well as efforts to identify campaigns, while the coordinators organized capacity-building opportunities and managed the participant's stipends.

ACTION program coordinators built strong relationships with the participants by assuming complex and diverse roles; as parent, teacher, mentor, friend, and confidante. One of the coordinators would call the participants, "mi amours" or my loves, an endearing reference to the loving and supportive bonds that defined the program's overall culture. Youth development scholars suggest that such youth-adult relationships as I observed in ACTION are central to creating safe environment where youth feel they belong and where positive interactions with adults can enhance a young person's social competency skills and increase their self-esteem (Borden et al. 2001, Haddad et al. 2011, Walker 2011). Such close, trusting relationships can foster young people's positive identification with an activist role (Strobel 2007).

An explicit program culture is what O'Donoghue (2006) refers to as an "intentionality" to support youth in developing a sense of civic efficacy as change agents in their communities. This can be achieved when programs emphasize building a young person's capacity beyond developing twenty-first century skills to include critical social analysis and organizing capabilities in support of direct action taking. Mapped out, the ACTION program's pedagogy is similar to the intentional learning environments of effective youth programs described in *Urban Sanctuaries* (McLaughlin et al. 1994). Specifically, the strategies employed by ACTION coordinators and

THE POINT staff were directed by youth interests, talents, and capacities ("youth-centered"); were driven by issues relevant to youth in order to built their capacity to tackle these challenges ("knowledge-centered"); and were responsive to youth feedback ("assessment-centered"). In addition, ACTION was also explicitly *community-centered,* driven by the socio-spatial context of Hunts Point and thus reinforcing the importance of place-based initiatives to catalyzing transformative outcomes such as youth organizing and youth activism.

ACTION is an action-driven program. Although the program did not have an established curriculum, I observed the systematic use of community-based, hands-on strategies and projects as the core of the program's critical pedagogy. The program was also linked to THE POINT's community development efforts; the lead coordinator served as the organization's Director of Community Development, thus organizing and activism strategies implemented by THE POINT influenced programming.[124]

In following section, I review ACTION's overall strategies along a spectrum from high to low frequency of implementation.

High Usage Strategies. Most frequently employed (on a daily basis) was an intentionally action-oriented pedagogy in which participants collaborated with adult allies to develop and carry out community-based projects. This pedagogy was supported by communication of shared goals, responsibilities, and expectations regarding activities, projects, and hands-on learning, providing real world, local opportunities to explore socio-structural forces in Hunts Point and learn how to redress them.

The coordinators would frequently start the program by sharing overall goals for the day and collaborating with youth participants to develop a list of tasks to be accomplished. They worked together to clarify expectations, responsibilities, and timelines for campaigns and projects, thus ensuring that everyone understood his/her role and their contribution to a collective effort. The overall group expectation was to

progress toward bringing about change in Hunts Point and to ensure that youth gained new perspectives and skills from the experience. As with much grassroots advocacy work, goals and tasks are not always achieved or completed on time and such was the case with ACTION, although work on projects did progress.

Youth's hands-on learning was facilitated by joint opportunities led by youth and adults and which were targeted to specific community-based social change projects in Hunts Point in addition to exposure to diverse experiences beyond the neighborhood. For example, ACTION youth maintained two small urban farm plots and gardened to increase their knowledge of healthy foods and improve the community's access to locally-sourced foods; they interviewed residents on the street to learn about their food habits and needs as part of a community food assessment used to investigate health inequities in Hunts Point; and they attended weekend presentations at various events across the city to share and exchange knowledge on a range of topics. In addition, coordinators organized practical, workshop-style sessions to build participants' capacity and skills to complete project and campaign tasks. The sessions were led by THE POINT staff, including the program's coordinators, and by professionals from outside organizations such as the National Audubon Society and Hunter College. Participants learned how to identify socio-structural forces and collect, analyze and synthesize data in addition to learning about farming techniques and water recycling systems, which they then implemented at THE POINT.

Coordinators and youth collaborated to foster a safe environment for exploring new perspectives and sharing personal experiences. Participants were encouraged to raise questions and introduce topics of interest from learning about food deserts and how to running a farmers market to learning about LGBQ rights and how to avoid reproducing/representing gender-based stereotypes. Creating a sense of belonging and openness was a key mechanism to helping youth recognize the impacts of broader

societal forces on Hunts Point and its residents. In support of these efforts, coordinators made use of a wide range of resources, such as: showing documentary films, taking youth on excursions (including group visits to colleges outside the city) and attending special events, and providing youth with technical reports pertinent to projects. Ideas for new projects were frequently inspired by such occasions.

Medium Usage Strategies. Less frequently employed (on a weekly basis) were positive behavior management strategies that explicitly developed the individual and collective civic efficacy of youth to organize against inequities. These strategies reinforced team-building and collective identity development, resulting in an open and shared environment where youth felt free to share ideas, opinions, and concerns.

Coordinators attempted to model, although not always successfully, the collaborative behavior they wanted youth to emulate. For example, coordinators would provide constructive feedback on participant's contributions by identifying areas in need of additional work and highlighting the work's strengths. They would invite youth to provide feedback to their peers and encouraged participants to take part in group discussions and decision making. Although the program maintained a balance between youth-driven and adult-driven decision making, coordinators used non-aggressive tactics to communicate their dislike of certain behaviors. For example, during group discussions, excitement would invariably ensue and youth would begin speaking over one another. In order to quell the jumble of voices, coordinators would call out "one mic" or engage in the silent treatment; they stopped speaking or listening and stared directly above the youth participants' heads. On several occasions, one or more of the participants would eventually remark that the coordinators were no longer listening and that everyone needed to be quiet. Coordinators never took center stage and were fairly

successful at not taking away from youth their control, authority, and responsibility to contribute to key decision making and open dialogue.

Low Usage Strategies and Program Shortcomings. Least frequently employed (on a weekly or occasional basis) were strategies incorporating a balanced youth-driven and adult-driven decision-making process. Shifting leadership roles between the two coordinators and limited opportunities for youth to engage in individual reflection created tensions in ACTION and were some of the program's shortcomings. Although supportive and reciprocal youth-adult relationships were a cornerstone of the ACTION program, the balance between being a friend and being an "accountable adult" (McLaughlin et.al 1994) was unclear or even compromised at times. Youth struggled to navigate the subtle nuances of these multiple, shifting roles. Their feelings could be visibly hurt, although this was not a frequent occurrence.

The roles of the two coordinators were vaguely defined and shifted frequently. This was most apparent when contributors from outside THE POINT were present, either leading a workshop or working directly with youth on specific projects. For example, there were times when coordinators would transfer leadership responsibility over the group and the activities onto the non-staff adults who were collaborating on projects. This non-staff adult was left to lead the session and handle behavioral and work performance issues without assistance from the coordinators. The transfer of authority without the necessary support compromised the collaborators' ability to develop relationships with the youth participants and, at times, with their ability to complete important work. I learned several months into my fieldwork that the senior coordinator would be resigning his position at the end of the year leaving the other coordinator to assume leadership of the program the following fall. Although the

coordinators had a plan to transition roles, this was never clarified with the youth participants and non-staff adults. The lack of communication caused tensions for both the coordinators and the participants.

ACTION had an established culture of collective reflection, especially following specific activities and events. The ensuing formative discussions emphasized what had been successful, what had not worked, and what remained to be done. Unfortunately, the practice of observing individual reflection was less common. Methods such as journaling, debriefings, and group discussions were strategies the program could have drawn on to inspire individual-level reflection (Ginwright 2002). According to Ginwright (2002) reflection is a key component to youth organizing, yielding three major youth development outcomes: (1) fostering a sense of commitment; (2) building a young person's identity, fostering a sense of hope and agency; (3) and bringing about healing from harmful social and personal experiences by creating emotional and spiritual wellness.

Self-reflection can be an opportunity for youth participants to think critically about their individual journeys, contributions, strengths, and challenges in addition to the group's collective accomplishments. It calls for the exploration of changing perceptions and identities resulting from one's experiences and actions. Through the coordinators performed a mid-year check-in to review participant's performance in the program and in school (to ensure that participants were maintaining a specified grade point average), my interviews with the youth suggested that they were not unaccustomed to engaging in self-reflection. For example, some participants found it challenging to think critically about their strengths and the contributions they had made to the program and the community. In some instances, I had to highlight the strengths and contributions I had observed as a means of engaging the individual in some critical reflection as participants and as change agents in Hunts Point. In considering the responsibilities the youth bear

personally and professionally at ACTION, they may have benefited from deeper, more personal reflection and goal setting.

I also did not observe a consistent reinforcement of certain basic organizational and interpersonal skills during my fieldwork with the ACTION program, even though building the capacity for the competent (and confident) application of basic twenty-first century skills and other civic and organizing capacities is key to sustaining community organizing and activism work. For example, I observed very little note taking by youth during presentations or data collection activities or in preparation for projects. All youth participants were given a binder at the start of the program, but these were used rarely. On the occasion that the binders were pulled out, it was at the explicit and repeated insistence of coordinators and would frequently result in delays.

Atypical of the program culture, I did observe on a few occasions coordinators and non-staff adults would assume control over tasks when time was limited or the activity's objectives were not well articulated from the onset. The adults would deem it easier and faster to complete the work, especially if it required the use of software such as spreadsheets and chart generators. During these moments, youth sat around watching or reading off information to adults. They appeared disappointed, frustrated, and were far less engaged in the process as they lacked ownership and authority.

Summary of Findings on ACTION's Overall Program Culture

The analysis of ACTION's overall strategies revealed an action-oriented program that fostered a responsive and rich intentional leaning environment but was somewhat less effective in having a balance of youth/adult decision making. Programs that draw on both youth-driven and adult-driven approaches are not directed primarily by youth developmental outcomes, but comprise community-based change as a goal instead (Larson et al. 2005). ACTION emphasized the empowerment of youth as key decision-makers within the program and co-leaders in social

change projects in Hunts Point. While traditional youth programs cater mainly to the transformation of the individual, ACTION's intentional learning environment emphasized the collective development of youth as change agents.

Findings on the ACTION Program – Operationalizing the Three Dimensions of Critical Civic Praxis

In the following section, I present my findings on ACTION's operationalization of the three dimensions of the critical civic praxis: critical consciousness development, local knowledge production and exchange, and youth agency and civic activism identity development. Once again, I employed the observation protocol matrix reviewed in Chapter Four to map-out the outcomes of ACTION's critical civic praxis from high occurrence (employed on a daily basis) to low occurrence (used on a weekly to monthly basis).

TABLE 6: Operationalizing the ACTION Program's Critical Civic Praxis – Construct Outcomes

Effectiveness	Summary of Critical Civic Praxis	Critical Consciousness	Local Knowledge Production & Exchange	Youth Agency
High Occurrence (daily)	Communicate goals, purposes, and expectations about activities in support of campaigns and projects, special events and presentations. Encourage active learning through practice and activities, hands-on experiences for both youth and adult. Provide real world and local examples to frame activities, social analysis, or answer questions. Direct youth to make reference to personal experiences (as knowledge) and information they have researched for campaigns and projects when speaking about Hunts Point and ACTION projects. Use positive behavior management and reinforcement techniques to foster a positive knowledge-sharing environment and develop strong youth-adult and peer bonds.	**ACTION Coordinators *Promote Constructs By…***		
		Engage Youth in Critical Analysis Engage Youth in Hands-On Change Engage Youth as Program Leaders	Engage Youth in Critical Analysis Engage Youth as Community Researchers Engage Youth in Reflection (Personal Story Telling)	Engage Youth as Program Leaders Engage Youth as Civic Role Models
		Action Participants *Engage Constructs By…*		
		Youth Participate in Open Dialogue Youth Engage in Critical Analysis Youth Engage in Hands-On Change	Youth Engage in Reflection (Personal Story Telling) Youth Engage as Community Researchers	Youth Engage as Program Leaders Youth Engage as Community Researchers Youth Engage as Civic Role Models Youth Engage in Hands-On Action
Medium Occurrence (weekly)	Use positive behavior management and reinforcement techniques to foster a positive knowledge sharing environment and develop strong youth-adult and peer bonds Encourage youth to share ideas, opinions, and concerns about the	**ACTION Coordinators *Promote Constructs By…***		
		Engage Youth in Social Analysis (Root Causes, History Of Societal Forces)		Encourage Youth to Transform Place(s)
		Action Participants *Engage Constructs By…*		

TABLE 6: Operationalizing the ACTION Program's Critical Civic Praxis – Construct Outcomes				
Effectiveness	**Summary of Critical Civic Praxis**	**Critical Consciousness**	**Local Knowledge Production & Exchange**	**Youth Agency**
	content and plans for activities and projects Assist youth without taking control	Youth Engage in Social Analysis (Root Causes, History Of Societal Forces) Youth Construct Alternative (Hopeful) Futures	Youth Engage in Social Analysis Youth Engage as Community Researchers (Data Collection) Youth Engage as Representatives Of ACTION/THE POINT/Hunts Point Youth Identify Spaces for Positive Self-Expression (THE POINT/ACTION)	Youth Attempt to Transform Place(s) Youth Engage in Reflection (Responsibilities) Youth Engage as Community Researchers (Project Planning) Youth Led Activities
Low Occurrence (weekly to infrequently)	Apply program coordinator management roles and responsibilities clear and consistent manner Encourage youth to share ideas, opinions, and concerns about the content and plans for activities and projects Communicate goals, purposes and expectations about educational outcomes. Use positive behavior management and reinforcement techniques to foster a positive knowledge sharing environment and develop strong youth-adult and peer bonds	**ACTION Coordinators *Promote Constructs By…***		
		Reinforce Civic/Organizational Skills Engage Youth to Construct Alternative (Hopeful) Futures	Engage Youth in Reflection (Responsibilities Outside ACTION)	Engage Creative Youth Participatory Strategies and Techniques
		Action Participants *Engage Constructs By…*		
		Youth Initiate Projects Youth Engage in Reflection (Stereotypes and Self-Blame) Youth in Social Analysis (Outside Of Existing Campaigns and Projects) Engage Youth to Construct Alternative (Hopeful) Futures	Youth Identify Spaces For Positive Self-Expression (Outside of THE POINT/ACTION) Youth Engage in Social Analysis (Identify Places to be Transformed Outside Of Existing Campaigns And Projects)	

Findings on Raising Critical Consciousness

The literature suggests that critical consciousness of youth who participate in community-based youth programs can be heightened using an iterative process of reflection on pressing community problems and their root causes, and of informed, collaborative action taking to redress these challenges. It also suggests that youth's sense of self-efficacy as situated decision makers and as social actors able to effectuate change can be strengthened as they become aware of the systemic processes of exclusion and inequity that exist in their communities (and beyond).

The findings reported in the previous section, in particular the program's balanced youth-driven and adult-driven approaches were associated with raising youth participant's critical

consciousness, which coordinators helped strengthen by: (1) engaging youth in critical social analysis of the socio-spatial conditions in Hunts Point that exemplify the processes of exclusion and inequity youth and residents face daily; (2) engaging youth in collaborative, intergenerational hands-on action-taking intended to redress inequities in Hunts Point; and (3) positioning youth as program leaders who share decision-making responsibilities in the programs, and as change agents struggling for a just and thriving neighborhood.

ACTION Coordinators Elevate Critical Consciousness. Advocates of critical civic praxis agree that person's critical awareness or critical consciousness can be raised when both *reflective* and *reflexive* processes are engaged. With regards to reflective processes, youth were encouraged by the coordinators and other adult allies to recognize challenges and barriers experienced in Hunts Point as issues rooted in systematic processes of exclusion and inequity. Coordinators' *engagement of youth participants in critical social analysis* went beyond group discussions of social, environmental, and economic difficulties encountered in Hunts Point and New York City overall. Youth were also exposed to new opportunities that enabled them to link dialogue with tangible, lived experiences. This powerful strategy reinforced collective dialogue on, for example, health disparities and toxic environmental conditions with actual experiences such as collecting data on residents' access to healthy foods and working to restore bird habitats on North Brother Island. The opportunity to talk about, witness, and act upon such disparities made real to youth the impacts of injustice, both on an individual and a collective level. It reinforced the complex and dynamic roles they assume as social agents acting within reciprocal social, political, and economic domains and shared ecosystems. It impressed upon them further the power and the capacity of youth to sustain social change work. The combination of group conversations and hands-on learning frequently led to newly discovered interests and ideas for projects.

The operationalization of a core dimension of critical civic praxis – the engagement of critical consciousness – meant that ACTION was grounded in an everyday lived domain; it could respond to current needs and opportunities in Hunts Point while incorporating and inspiring youth interests.

> *Kids are really resilient especially at the high school age. They don't like this stuff but they can forget about it. As they become aware of [these problems], it become more of an issue for them. But at first, it didn't seem like an issue.*
>
> *[Take] North Brother Island and the Bird sanctuary [as an example]. They didn't really care or get it at first, but the process of going through the program, they began to understand the importance of the project on North Brother Island [and the importance of birds to ecosystems and how pollution generated locally impacts the birds] and how critical it was.*
>
> *[Again], the fact that all the trucks are coming [into their neighborhood] but that they are not getting any fresh food…now that they know, [this issue has] become a springboard to being engaged, and to learn about urban farming. So [their urban farming project] started with the birds!*. AOM_02

The empowerment of *youth as leaders* within the program furthered critical consciousness raising by means of reflexive processes. The process of reflecting on one's actions and decisions and understanding their impacts on others can be seen in the recruitment of new youth members by returning ACTION participants each October. Coordinators worked along side youth for the selection of new participants to ensure that a balanced cadre of youth would be welcomed to the program. Coordinators provided suggestions during the review process to encourage the inclusion of diverse personalities, abilities (both strengths and challenges), and interests.[125] Participants could not simply elect their friends. The decision to accept a new member had to be justified as beneficial to the individual elected (e.g., what will that person gain from participating in the program?), to the entire ACTION group (e.g., what skills, perspectives, and dynamic does that person bring to the program), and to the community at large because of the projects sustained by participants (e.g., this is not just an after-school program, but critical work).

MacNeil and McClean (2006) wrote of community-based youth programs as, "creating conditions that support learners in making discoveries themselves, then putting those discoveries to use" (p. 99). This not only nurtures critical awareness, but youth leadership in direct, critical ways. Thus youth are conceived as holding positions of governance within the program and within Hunts Point. ACTION's engagement of the participants in social analysis and as program leaders created conditions for youth to learn, reflect, and *engage in hands-on change* in the community.

Yes absolutely [ACTION members were involved in the governance of the program; they] had a lot to say into the program. [The program was] very democratic. [Youth participants] were integral in the interview process of getting new recruits. Lots of kids applied for the ACTION. ACTION members interviewed who would come to be in the program. So this created a community for the kids – they make a decision. My piece of the program was a little nuts because we had to think on our feet since the original plan had challenges. Some activities we did that were successful and some not so, so instead of me just taking a step back to think about things had the kids participate in this decision making. OAM_02[126]

[ACTION members were active] in making decisions on what projects they are doing. [coordinators OAF_01 and OAM_01] did well to involve [ACTION members] in the decision and that was unique to ACTION Program, based on the 15 programs I worked with [for HEP]. The teens [of the ACTION program] were more mature and vested in the process. I think that the structure was very clear, giving responsibility, that I have not seen elsewhere. [OAF_01 and OAM_01] would ask for feedback and communication, that was going on – OAF_02[127]

ACTION Participants Engage Critical Consciousness Raising. During each day of the ACTION program, coordinators engaged *youth in hands-on learning and action-taking* in Hunts Point. Youth participants prepared knowledge-sharing campaigns on: being environmentally savvy and greening the South Bronx, protecting and restoring bird habitats on North Brother Island and of smaller ecosystems throughout Hunts Point, advocating against the relocation of a third correctional facility in Hunts Point, and empowering females. Participants started a small urban farming projects and carried out a community food assessment as their two primary participatory action projects.

Participants worked along side their adult allies – the program's coordinators and other non-staff adults – to develop a research plan, to collect and analyze data, and report their major findings to diverse audiences at a number of events. ACTION's projects were designed to transform Hunts Point intentionally by introducing a locally produced food source managed by young residents and based on the health and foods needs of the residents in general. To bring about change intentionally in Hunts Point, ACTION participants appropriated spaces and conferred meaning upon these environments. They were in effect engaging in critical placemaking a place-based praxis involving the enactment of revolutionary hope and radical imaginations, along with critical reflection on collective struggles for inclusionary democracies.

Prompted to reflect on issues of social and environmental injustice in Hunts Point, *participants engaged in open dialogue*. They drew from their personal experiences living in the South Bronx and by making comparison to other neighborhoods in New York City. It was during these moments, when the conversation focused on place that youth were most adamant to recognize and label Hunts Point as a neighborhood exemplifying inequity. They saw their neighborhood as systematically different from others and they began to understand why more fully.

> *Air is free, but we don't all breath the same air. Even though it's free, we don't all pay the same price*. Female ACTION Participant[128]
>
> *It's different from other places that are not EJ [environmental justice] communities. The burdens that Hunts Point deals with, other communities don't. We're the ones who have to live with it*. – M05_15[129]

ACTION was a sincere, critical, and free space for dialogue where participants could voice their opinions openly and willingly. Sexuality and gender, race and ethnicity, economic status and financial struggles, violence, drugs, and family dysfunction were shared as plainly as discussions on food deserts, the growing rate of diabetes in Hunts

Point, and the South Bronx Greenway. At times, youth challenged one another to appreciate alternative perspectives, which could on occasion draw laughter, but were never rejected outright or ridiculed. A positive, collaborative environment was key to creating a safe space for open dialogue and was cultivated by a lively debate in which personal attacks or lack of responsibilities for one's own speech was not tolerated. In effect, coordinators and youth co-created a dynamic for intellectual risk-taking, one that was not explicitly controlled or manipulated, but emergent and iterative in nature.

Participants spoke to both peers and adults with confidence and, at times, with a little too much self-assurance. I sensed many of the youth were accustomed to speaking frankly and negotiating their positions with others.[130] This could lead to intense conversations at times about responsibilities and roles within ACTION. Such conversations were critical in light of the limited opportunities for individual reflection. I was concerned the first time I observed such an animated exchange in ACTION, anxious that the group's union had been challenged. What I had witnessed was not discord, but a release of emotion, a collective reflection on the struggles and stress of being a young person and a youth activist in a socially and environmentally marginalized neighborhood. ACTION participants, like their peers in the South Bronx, shouldered considerable responsibilities at home, ranging from contributing their ACTION stipends to the household finances to undertaking home repairs and caring for family members.

ACTION *participants were critical* of what they perceived to be society's failure, the education system in particular, to share, teach, and engage students more openly about what they were learning in ACTION. The program became a principle source of knowledge and learning about pressing social and environmental issues for many participants. Youth were often visibly struck by what they learned while conducting research for their campaigns and projects or when participating in related activities. A few youth referenced parents or family or, in one case, a teacher as immediate

resources for knowledge exchange on topics dealt with in ACTION. This reinforces the importance of ACTION to this marginalized population.

> *[We're] learning what school is not teaching. Talking about topics other places wouldn't allow you to talk about because of the sensitivity of the subjec*t. – F03_17[131]
>
> *I didn't know what a food desert was until I came here; I just thought that Hunts Point was a crappy neighborhood. – M04_18*[132]
>
> *We learn lots of stuff, new things, everyday; so much opportunity that is presented in this program*. – M05_15[133]
>
> *I am learning things that I wouldn't learn at, by myself, if I did the research on my own*. – M01-16[134]

Summary on Critical Consciousness Raising. Imagination were ignited and possible futures for the South Bronx were sketched out from the second floor loft at THE POINT. The ACTION program coordinators and youth participants co-created a rich, positive, and collaborative environment in which youth felt empowered. They voiced openly their ideas, values, and interests and engaged in active learning and hands-on experiences. Youth identified and worked to recognize certain socio-spatial conditions in Hunts Point both as impediments to their own and the community's development and as opportunities for change.

The process of developing critical consciousness, especially for marginalized youth, can be strenuous, and that was the case at ACTION. Coordinators had to remind youth, on occasion, to "be teenagers, please." All the youth were committed to their work with ACTION, but some extended their contributions to social change in Hunts Point beyond their participation in the program. These youth could at times feel overwhelmed by the pressures of dealing with adult situations and were frustrated with peers whom they perceived as not being equally committed. Coordinators were instrumental in

fostering a supportive and balanced program culture where youth could be teens and at the same time, transformers of their world.

Findings on Local Knowledge Production and Exchange

> *[ACTION is] the source of information for the community…we should keep [the information we share] relevant to us and what we do* – F01_18[135]

According to justice-oriented youth scholars, community-based youth programs that promote youth as community researchers draw on their unique spatial experiences as sources of knowledge regarding impediments and place-based remedies (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster 2003, Sutton & Kemp 2006). Young people's contributions to the exchange and production of local knowledge reaffirms a tradition of grassroots activism in the South Bronx to challenge dominant stereotypes characterizing Hunts Points as a post-apocalyptic wasteland. The projects and campaigns carried out by ACTION provided THE POINT's community development agenda with youth-led input, which worked to legitimize young people's contributions to social change efforts in Hunts Point.

ACTION program coordinators supported youth in local knowledge production and exchange by encouraging, directing, initiating, and/or identifying opportunities and processes for youth to: (1) conduct research on the socio-spatial conditions most salient to them and (2) participate in numerous knowledge-sharing forums so that they could engage in formative discussions and share the findings from projects and campaigns with other organizations, peers, organizing/activism allies, and diverse government and private institutions.

ACTION Coordinators Elevate Local Knowledge Production and Exchange. Strategies fostering open dialogue and critical social analysis of Hunts Point aided in the development of critical consciousness raising. By emphasizing community-based issues most salient to ACTION participants, coordinators *engaged youth in critical analysis and*

personal story telling as a means producing local knowledge. Youth talked about their daily experiences - as students in the largest public school system in the United States, as riders of one of the world's largest public transit systems and as residents of one of the poorest congressional districts in the nation. Youth participants' story telling further contextualized their everyday lives for me as an outside observer.

Coordinators engaged youth as *community researchers* co-leading efforts and participating in knowledge sharing events. Throughout my fieldwork with the ACTION program, I observed countless afternoons spent collecting, processing, discussing, critiquing, and disseminating various forms of knowledge, some based on personal experiences, others on project-based data collection processes and technical sources.

Youth participated in various knowledge-sharing events such as THE POINT's annual town hall meeting, public meetings held by Community Board Two as a representative of THE POINT and Hunts Point,[136] a Metro Transit Authority (MTA) meeting to provide testimony regarding a proposed cut to local bus service,[137] and numerous conferences such as the South Bronx Food and Film Expo, the Bronx Food Summit, the New York City Wildflower Week, and the Fish Parade.[138] These events were opportunities for ACTION youth to engage with residents, other concerned citizens (including youth) with shared interests, and community-organizing groups to discuss a variety of social justice issues, exchange ideas and experiences, and collaborate in innovating solutions. In turn, ACTION members would return to Hunts Point with additional technical and factual support to incorporate into their local organizing and activism work.

ACTION Participants Engage Local Knowledge Production and Exchange. Youth initiated *collective reflection and personal story telling* on a variety of topics ranging from upcoming special events to spaces in Hunts Point they liked. For example, members

would share the dates and locations for upcoming community events, highlighting those that catered to youth or provided opportunities for skills or job training. ACTION members shared their thoughts on subjects such as: skateboarding in Hunts Point and the desire to design and build a skate park; the lack of open spaces for recreation and its effect on public health; and their family's limited access to fresh, nutritious foods despite living nearby world's largest food distribution center.

As detailed in Chapter Five, participants were very much aware of the stereotypes that defined Hunts Point – prostitution, drugs, and violence. Violence – at school, on the bus, or in the neighborhood – was a dominant theme in participants' daily story telling, in contrast to narratives captured during my interviews. These stories were most prevalent amongst female ACTION participants.

> *February 22, 2010.[139] [coordinator] is writing down participants verbal contributions for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant. F03_17 is talking about why she was late for ACTION today. It was because she had cut a male student at school after he choked her. She described how she cut the male student with her nails and that he bled.*
>
> *April 26, 2010.[140] We haven't had a check-in in a while. F11_99 begins by declaring that she has arranged a fight for June 4th and that it will take place at a club where a party will be held. Apparently, someone from school has been talking about her and her brother, so F11_99 decided to fight this other person at the party.*
>
> > *"People are coming to the party just to see the fight, "she exclaims proudly.*

This sparks a broader discussion on people being jumped or being violent with one another at school and in the neighborhood. Youth participants discuss fights on the school bus, during school hours, and off school property. Although these occurrences may appear to be ordinary for some of the ACTION youth, it is clearly not the case for some youth who are sitting, mouths open in shocked horror. Other youth are shaking their heads in disbelief and/or disapproval.

> May 3, 2010.[141] F03_17 says that a friend of hers was shot at a talent show this weekend…Her friend had surgery to remove the bullet but his heart stopped while he was on the operating table. He survived.
>
> May 26, 2010.[142] F07_16's brother was arrested on Friday night in Harlem for resisting arrest. He was caught carrying a gun. He is still in high school, but is now in a juvenile holding facility.
>
> Instantly, another youth participant interjects. She observed at fight at school involving another ACTION participant. The incident involved F02_16 and another student. Someone threw the contents of a beverage cup at the other, but I am not certain of the details as F01_16 is speaking in a fast, nearly gleeful, animated voice.

Youth participants engaged in local knowledge production and exchange as *community researchers*. They worked along side adults to co-design action plans in support of their projects and campaigns, they were active in collecting data and information, and consequently learned and adopted technical language and factual information (e.g., specific data). For example, ACTION members spoke frequently about public health issues and would reinforce their arguments by making reference to specific figures regarding the rate of childhood asthma and the growing rate of obesity in Hunts Point.

Youth participants assumed the roles of community researchers when they worked with adults to carry out their action projects in Hunts Point. For example, in April 2010, ACTION began data collection efforts for the HEP project. In preparation, the data collection protocols (designed by the HEP coordinator) were reviewed collaboratively and a map of Hunts Point identifying the locations of bodegas, grocery stores, and restaurants was reviewed. Some of the youth participants voiced concerns that the geographic boundaries defining Hunts Point would not correspond with residents' perceptions of their neighborhood, highlighting the importance of local knowledge. In addition, they worried that the number of grocery stores within the designated boundaries was insufficient to produce sufficient the data required for the food inventory. The group decided to expand the boundaries of the study area to include the subway

station located on west side of the Bruckner Boulevard, which increased the number of food businesses in the area and broadened the participants' interview territory, although not significantly.

ACTION participants also reviewed the data collection protocols designed by the HEP coordinator with a critical eye. Youth performed a run through of the interview using the protocol, after which they noted that its length could be problematic for a simple street interview. Would it have the potential to scare respondents away before the interview began, they wondered? Participants edited the protocols as well. In a unique moment, I watched as a young female participant gathered the IRB approve protocols to modify them. She did so with ease, striking lines through words and correcting errors. The HEP leader was startled by the direct manner in which F03_17 began to edit the interview protocol. It was remarkable to observe the transformation of ACTION participants as they interpreted the roles of community researchers and programs leaders. Their direct participation in community-based action projects catalyzed a deep sense of responsibility and empowerment.

> *ACTION kids really absorbed what they were learning. Even if we [began] working with a higher [level of] knowledge about the issues, [youth] learned just as much. The fact that ACTION adult leaders give them responsibility makes them more attentive*. OAF_02[143]

During the course of my interviews and my field observations, I learned that some of the ACTION participants were discouraged when professionals from outside the neighborhood were brought in by city agencies or other organizations to provide technical assistance for specific community-wide efforts, for example the Hunts Point Vision Plan. The source of their frustration was two-fold: first was the perception that professional knowledge was privileged over local knowledge and second was the complex interplay between the perceived apathy of adult community members and the "white savior" discourse. Youth were not bothered directly by those with the desire to

support projects or who were tasked with assisting residents. But rather they were bothered that knowledge was sought from outside the neighborhood as opposed to within and that interactions were not structured as a collaboration with residents, including the ACTION program youth. Youth believed their daily experiences in Hunts Point gave them a unique perspective, which in turn was a key source of local know-how to complement the knowledge of adult professionals.

> *The work that we are doing is important too…We who are part of the community know it so much better than an outside source. They know the statistics, but they don't know how it feels*. – Female ACTION Participant, Age 16.

Additionally, youth participants were angry at the perceived apathy of adult community members, as previously discussed in Chapter Five. The sentiment resonated most with youth who attended a number of community meetings throughout the program year (outside of those sponsored by THE POINT). For example, one youth reflected that the previous year's Bronx Food Expo was deemed successful as it managed to attract people from outside the neighborhood; "white people, I mean." But not all youth agreed with his assessment, in particular whether the presence of outsiders, or whites, indicated an event's success or whether it indicated a broadened reach. And what of the people from Hunts Point? Why were they not participating? During one of my interviews, a female ACTION participant reflected on the presence of outsiders as saviors. Although she bore no resentment towards these professionals, she lamented the missing residents from Hunts Point, producers of key local knowledge. Some youth grasped the systemic implications of stymied civic engagement by a marginalized group, but struggled to identify remedial strategies.

> *It's great when I go to a meeting and I see the faces of people who are not from my community. I like that they are concerned, but I wish there were more people who looked like me, who cared enough to do it, not just people from the outside saving us. They've been saving us for a long time and I think it's about time we did it on our own*. – Female ACTION Participant, Age 17.

Summary of Findings on Local Knowledge Production and Exchange. The ACTION program was an important source and an incubator of local knowledge production and exchange. Coordinators and other adults encouraged youth to engage in local knowledge production by drawing on personal experiences and by identifying topics most salient to them. Youth-sourced knowledge was legitimized as valuable to community-based projects and development. The impetus to produce and exchange local knowledge empowered youth to adopt (and adapt) the roles of community researcher and local storytellers.

Findings on the Development of Youth Civic Agency

Ginwright (2002) noted that youth who struggle for social change build relationships, develop a sense of life purpose, and become more meaningful contributors in their community. To that end, the ACTION program was structured to support purposeful and informed action taking by youth. Coordinators engaged youth participants as decision makers, leaders, and collaborators who (1) assisted in setting program goals and determining program activities and (2) participated in, initiated, and/or lead informed action-taking to redress social and environmental justice issues in Hunts Point. In response, youth participants worked collectively and adopted a variety of community organizing and resistance strategies; they learned to make a critical analysis of issues in Hunts Point; they carried out information-seeking initiatives such as doing research and collecting data; and they took action at THE POINT and throughout the South Bronx with projects such as habitat rehabilitation, urban farming, and a community food assessment.

ACTION Coordinators Elevate Youth Civic Agency. ACTION participants were not merely recipients of an after-school program service; they were its administrators. As has been previously noted, coordinators *engaged participants as program co-leaders*

from the start to ensure youth interests, as well as community needs, were met; their engagement influenced ACTION's rhythms and its overall culture. As co-leaders, youth selected new program participants and were responsible for helping coordinators manage the program. For example, youth and adults collaborated on daily and/or weekly program goal-setting, thereby laying out the groundwork for project procedures and expectations. Participants' civic agency and their activist identities were developed because youth were promoted and given responsibility as co-owners of ACTION and organizers in Hunts Point.

> *I noticed that a couple of kids that were leaders [took on] leadership roles. They didn't need that much explanation; they lead by being active…. [They] were really getting into it.*
>
> *ACTION kids were actually getting engaged in the administration of the program. Some of the kids were really good at research, writing, and branding ACTION. They would come in and give advice about how to talk about the program*. – OAM_02[144]

ACTION youth participants were also engaged as *civic role models*. They represented THE POINT and Hunts Point residents at hearing, participated in marches or rallies, attended, and spoke at special events.

ACTION Participants Engage Youth Civic Agency. ACTION participants adopted roles as *leaders, civic role models, and community researchers* within THE POINT, as well as throughout the community. For example, approximately once a month, participants were responsible developing and leading a lesson with Fun Friday participants, THE POINT's after-school program for elementary and middle school-aged children.[145] ACTION members were given an opportunity to work directly with children from Hunts Point as both program leaders, and, equally, as community role models advocating for and demonstrating how young people can engage social change work. To

prepare for Fun Friday, youth were instructed to select a topic for their lesson plan and to develop activities and an informal post-test assessment to ensure the children had learned something from the experience. Although THE POINT staff provided ACTION participants with guidance and ideas, the lessons were almost entirely youth-led.

In February and April 2010, ACTION members wanted to introduce Fun Friday participants to a number of the campaigns and projects they had been working on, including Go Green, Happening Habitat, the Sheridan Expressway, and planting vegetables in an urban environment. ACTION participants had decided that the overarching goal for their Fun Friday lesson plans was environmental stewardship. Youth had to design their lesson plans according to the age or grade of the children participating in their assigned groups, thus having to reflect on how to make information and data accessible to a range of ages. The Fun Friday-ACTION partnership helped develop relationships and possibly new mentorship bonds between young children and older teens. During my interviews, several youth spoke of being inspired to join the program because of their previous interactions with former ACTION participants, similar to the experiences with the children from Fun Friday. They identified their predecessors as role models.

> *I always looked up to the ACTION teens at THE POINT when I was little. Like any kid really…I always wanted to join*. – F01_18[146]

> *I was part of THE POINT's after-school program [and saw] ACTION participants. [They] were always there, at THE POINT. [ACTION youth] were always in the loft; they were older…all the kids seemed excited to transition to ACTION*. – F04_17[147]

Youth were affected by their experiences with Hunts Point's built environment. Their experiences motivated their desire and their capacity to take action against unjust socio-spatial conditions. Without making specific use of the word "placemaking," youth

were compelled by their specific place-based interactions and engaged in intentional transformation of the environments around them. For example, many participants spoke of their experiences working with bird habitat restoration at North Brother Island as transformative. Their direct engagement with the island's ecosystem, the birds and the land, had catalyzed within them, both individually and collectively, a deep sense of connection with the place. Their experience motivated them to take *hands-on action* to protect and change other places for the better.[148]

Summary of Findings on Youth Civic Agency.

> *Because I like helping out my community. I see something wrong and I want to get it fixed* – F05_16[149]
>
> *If I have an idea, I don't want to keep it to myself, that I can share my ideas and not be afraid to try new things*. M06_18[150]
>
> *Because I get to change other people's lives and show them different ways of living and yeah, it has changed my life*. – F09_17[151]

Youth participants openly discussed their personal responsibility to foster social change in Hunts Point. The ACTION program helped cultivate the critical consciousness of youth participants and made them aware of the processes of exclusion and inequity borne of and perpetuated by unjust social-spatial conditions in the South Bronx. The intentional program culture promoted youth as leaders with legitimate and valuable insights, which further empowered participants and built their capacities to further engage with their community as change agents. And thus I witnessed the power of ACTION participants' civic agency - in the urban farm they planted and weeded, in the community food assessment they compiled, in the interviews they conducted with residents to gain insight on health disparities and access to nutritious healthful foods, in the Fun Friday activities they shepherded with young children, in the protests and rallies they joined, and in the testimonies they delivered against transit service cuts and environmental

aggressors in their neighborhood. ACTION helped build young people's capacities and skill sets to co-lead their program and through collaborative decision-making be youth organizers and activists in Hunts Point.

Summary of Findings on Operationalizing the ACTION Program's Critical Civic Praxis

> *I see all the seniors of ACTION are going to college and I have never thought of that. I always thought halleluiah if I finish high school. I feel like ACTION could really push me to actual pursue a career*. – M04_18

"Developing greater awareness of problems in my neighborhood," "speaking up," "establishing relationships and networks," and "being a stronger person" are the individual outcomes youth hoped to achieve form their participation in the ACTION program. These youth sought transformation for themselves and for their communities. My investigation of critical civic praxis centered on cultivating critical consciousness, producing and exchanging local knowledge, and youth agency. The engagement of youth in critical analysis, in hands-on community-based transformative projects, as community researchers and program leaders were key strategies employed by coordinators to catalyze youth-led organizing and activism. However, coordinators were less effective in engaging ACTION participants in individual reflection about their responsibilities beyond the program or stereotypes that lead to self-blaming nor were certain organizational skills reinforced.

Conclusions

ACTION engages participants in identifying social and environmental justice issues in Hunts Point with the goal of creating and implementing youth-led solutions. Although the program did not follow a structured curriculum, the coordinators reinforced, with support from the participants, an intentional program culture geared to build youth's organizing and activism capacities through hands-on learning opportunities in their community. The lack of a structured

curriculum did not hinder the growth of the program or the cultivation of youth as change agents in Hunts Point. A transformative youth program without a structured curriculum is analogous to a scaffold; sufficient enough in structure to support the growth and development of the youth participants, the adult coordinators, and the program from year to year while being flexible enough to adapt to the emergent nature of community-based organizing and activism work.

THE POINT's community organizing work influenced ACTION's strategies, therefore it was not surprising to find that the program's strength was in critical analysis and the implementation of doable interventions in contrast to deeper, social criticism. While the program had shortcomings, its strengths evidenced themselves very frequently while the challenges evidenced themselves infrequently - validation of the transformative measure.

Chapter Six Endnotes

[121] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant F03_17 on April 28, 2010.

[122] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant F01_18 on May 5, 2010.

[123] Please refer to Larson, Walker, and Pearce (2005) for a more comprehensive review of the differences, benefits, and limitations of youth-driven and adult-driven programs.

[124] A ground-up organizing and mobilization of residents/volunteers to address community-based problems is characteristic of community organizing strategies. Whereas movement building strategies are defined by their ability to mobilize significant numbers of people (not necessarily from the same community) to take action in order to redress and transform social and environmental injustices. Individual are united by the engagement of shared strategies, in support of shared values and goals.

[125] Please refer to Chapter Four for additional information regarding the selection of new members for the ACTION program.

[126] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with Other Adult Participant OAM_02 on October 22, 2010.

[127] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with Other Adult Participant OAF_02 on October 29, 2010.

[128] Quote from field notes from ACTION program on February 8, 2010. Female ACTION participant's name was not recorded.

[129] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant M05_15 on July 22, 2010.

[130] I do not mean that youth were talking back or engaging in backtalk, (although there were occasions when I witnessed such behavior directed at peers or coordinators), but rather participants appeared to be familiar with speaking out. During my time with ACTION, I did not ask youth participants directly about their personal or home situations, although youth would share with me certain personal details. Based on these conversations, as well as open group discussions, it appeared that most participants had significant family obligations ranging from contributing their ACTION stipend to the household economics to undertaking repairs in their homes to carrying for siblings and other family members. In many ways, these youth had adult responsibilities, a likely context in which to develop communication (and negotiation) skills.

[131] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant F03_17 on April 28, 2010.

[132] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant M04_18 on May 17, 2010.

[133] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant M05_15 on July 22, 2010.

[134] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant M01_16 on July 22, 2010.

[135] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Field Notes; February 3, 2010.

[136] Community Board Two is made-up of three South Bronx neighborhoods –Hunts Point, Longwood, and Morrisiana. The Community Boards are local representative bodies that are tasked with implementing procedures to improve the delivery of services to residents (New York City – Mayor's Community Affairs Unit 2011). For additional information, please refer to Know your Community Board 2011, a document published annually by the Mayor's Community Affairs Unit of the City of New York. http://www.nyc.gov/html/cau/downloads/pdf/know_your_community_board.pdf last retrieved on September 28, 2011.

[137] On March 5, 2010 an ACTION Member attending the public hearings for the Metro Transit Authority (MTA) proposed service cuts. She provided testimony about the impact cutting the BX6 shuttle bus and the BX5 bus (both of which are local Bronx – hence BX – bus services), and the elimination of the free student metro cards would have on youth and families in Hunts Point. ACTION coordinators and ACTION youth participants wrote the testimony.

[138] The list of events and conferences attended by ACTION Members is not limited to those noted in this dissertation. ACTION member attended events prior to my observation work and during my observation work, such as attending at the Youth Summit Meeting (February 10, 2010), giving a presentation (by five ACTION senior members) to the organization STRIVE (February 12, 2010), attending the Bronx Park Speak-up (February 28, 2010) and the Youth Food Expo (June 13, 2010)

[139] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Field Notes.

[140] Ibid.

[141] Ibid.

[142] Ibid.

[143] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with Other Adult Participant OAF_02 on October 29, 2010.

[144] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with Other Adult Participant OAM_02 on October 22, 2010.

[145] As described in Chapter Three, Fun Friday is an after-school program for elementary and middle school aged children. The ACTION program partnered with the after-school program's coordinators to develop curriculum and lessons, which they then carried out.

[146] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant F01_18 on May 5, 2010.

[147] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant F04_17 on July 21, 2010.

[148] ADD NOTE about Big Brother Island – take from Chapter Three.

[149] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant F05_16 on May 26, 2010.

[150] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant M06_18 on July 22, 2010.

[151] Poncelet, J. (2010) Personal Correspondence – Interview with ACTION Youth Participant F09_17 on May 26, 2010.

CHAPTER SEVEN - Discussion and Conclusions

> Place-based pedagogies are needed so that the education of citizens might have some direct bearing on the well-being of the social and ecological places people actually inhabit.
> - David A. Gruenewald, *The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place*

Young people in America need social institutions that engage them as active, knowledgeable, and legitimate change agents in their neighborhoods. Youth characterized as at-risk or disconnected by some practitioners, scholars, and members of society are targeted by interventions aimed to remedy what they conceive as being exclusively youth-centered problems: poor academic performance; engagement in risky, anti-social behavior; poor twenty-first century job readiness skills; under or unemployment; and poor physical and mental health. While some approaches to youth development may acknowledge the socio-spatial context in which youth and their so-called problems develop as socially toxic and born of social inequality, less frequently is place recognized as a potential objective of intervention in itself. Youth grow up in neighborhoods, not in after-school programs and at the intersection of youth development and place are opportunities for their mutual transformation.

Along the spectrum of youth programs, the evolution of community-based initiatives is conceptualized to upend traditional, solely youth-focused approaches to positive development. The strength of localized approaches is that youth can lead, with the support of adults, initiatives aimed at redressing marginalizing conditions in their neighborhoods. In turn, the hands-on experiences of organizing and taking action, when guided by principles of social justice, can transform neighborhoods and youth equally. My research on a transformative youth program contributes to the small, but growing scholarship on the programmatic and organizational strategies that catalyze youth organizing and activism. In addition, it strengthens under-

theorized and undervalued notions of the socio-spatial conditions that motivate youth to engage in collective struggle for social justice.

My dissertation research set out to explore a transformative youth program active in New York's City's South Bronx. I began with a program that had scored high, in a previous study, on helping youth understand and transform themselves and their community. The purpose of my work was to investigate a critical civic praxis framework as employed by the ACTION program to understand the strategies and mechanisms of a placed-based critical pedagogy to catalyze youth organizing and activism. In particular, the aim of the research was threefold. First, I set out to explore how a community-based youth program driven by principles of social justice helped: (1) develop youth participants' critical awareness, (2) strengthen the capacities of youth by increasing their opportunities to contribute to local knowledge production and exchange, and (3) foster participants' civic agency and identity as change agents in their communities. Second, I wanted to identify the social and spatial conditions experienced by youth participants that were most salient to their struggles in Hunts Point and, finally, to understand the youth perspective on being change agents within their neighborhoods.

For my dissertation, I designed a research program grounded in participatory and interdisciplinary methods and intended for my work to be open-ended and flexible to emergent experiences. I conducted nine months of fieldwork, observing and participating in the ACTION program, completing fifteen interviews with youth program participants and four interviews with adult research participants. I learned that youth participants defined their neighborhoods in terms of both positive and negative socio-spatial experiences, the social bonds fostered in the collective struggle against spatial inequities, being particularly relevant to their having a sense of place in this neighborhood. In addition, participants perceived the role of youth activists as intergenerational, collective responses to the social and environment injustices they faced daily. Both youth and adult participants regarded THE POINT and the ACTION program as key catalyzers of young people's organizing and activism efforts. My participant observation work

revealed a program culture defined by hands-on community-based initiatives, driven by a balance of youth and adult decision making, that developed collective and, to a lesser extent, individual opportunities to heighten critical awareness, produce and exchange local knowledge, and develop a civic efficacy.

In this concluding chapter, I synthesize my major findings to answer the study's three research questions and then discuss their theoretical implications in relation to the existing literature on transformative youth programs. With regards to my discussion of critical civic praxis in particular, I propose a revised conceptual framework that makes explicit the importance of a particular place to critical pedagogy, a construct that was not at the forefront of Ginwright's and Cammarota's (2007) initial conceptualization. I conclude the chapter with suggestions for additional research.

Discussion and Implications of a Transformative Youth Program

The ACTION [program] has shaped who I am
– F10_17

What follows is a synthesized discussion of my study's findings and a review of their implications stated in relation to the literature. The discussion is divided according to my three research questions, which are (in revised order):

1. What socio-spatial conditions experienced by ACTION participants shape their organizing and activism within the organization and their community?

2. What is the role of a critical civic praxis framework in supporting change in youth? In particular, how does a transformative program like ACTION utilize critical consciousness, the production and exchange of local knowledge, and action-taking by youth?

3. Within the context of living with and seeking to change unjust social and environmental conditions intentionally, how do youth envision and understand their activism? Specifically, what perspective do ACTION participants have of themselves as agents for social change within the neighborhood?

A discussion of each of these questions follows.

Question One: Socio-Spatial Conditions That Shape Youth Organizing and Activist Identities

The relationship ACTION participants had with Hunts Point wavered between an optimism nurturing a deep sense of place and a brooding anger against the toxic conditions, the disengagement of adults in responding to those conditions, and the frustration with the slow pace of change. Hunts Point was many things to these young people: it was their home, it was where they come to play and work, it was a part of their family's history, and it was where they struggled daily living in a prime example of poor, urban America. But their struggles were not always centered on conflict. Youth engaged in civic activism and placemaking equally to amplify what they loved and cherished about Hunts Point.

The spectrum of youth programs (Figure 1) conceptualized in Chapter Two illustrates that normative approaches to development attempt to fix young people by stamping out social pathologies so that youth may be problem-free and well equipped to thrive in adulthood. Absent from traditional developmental practice is place. And yet the recognition of place, as either toxic or thriving, and young people's need for alternative spaces as outlets for collective and self-directed exploration are exactly what youth seek, especially those most marginalized by social and environmental inequity. These youth want the places that are home, as seen through their eyes, to be front and center.

The ACTION program demonstrated how a justice-oriented community youth program used place-based activism and organizing as a counter-force to a toxic environment, substituting collective struggle for passivity, self-destruction, and violence. In addition, ACTION as an alternative space within one of the country's poorest congressional districts was not protected, hidden, or kept apart from the social and environmental injustices that have largely defined Hunts Point. Combining the good with the bad, it is where young people grow-up and equally where they develop layered civic identities. The neighborhood's positive and negative socio-spatial conditions were formative of the program's critical civic praxis. Youth engaged in a critical analysis of various issues, discussed risqué topics, voiced their opinions, and challenged, at times confronting, one another. Thus, Hunts Point was a key participant in ACTION. Together, youth traversed its dangerous quarters to garden; they hosted and attended community meetings, and played in its parks and canoed along its rivers. These strategies make transformative programs different from traditional ones that may find such activities too litigious or make them available for one-time, special occasions. Transformative program strategies support youth in humanizing their neighborhood by building alternative landscapes and helping them confer meaning on the environments they appropriate. The opportunity to leave their mark, to transform, to make place, and to adapt space – to create a legacy - in a positive, constructive manner, motivated youth to be activists and organizers.

My findings on the social and spatial conditions of neighborhoods most salient to youth reinforce many of the conclusions made by Chawla's (2002) reprisal of Kevin Lynch's original investigation, *Growing Up in Cities,* a UNESCO project pioneered in the 1970s. *Growing Up in an Urbanizing World* sought to, "learn from children themselves how they evaluate the places where they live and how they would like to live, and then use this dialogue to bring children and adults together in participatory programs to improve the urban environment" (Chawla 2002, p. 19). As with the young people who participated in Chawla's study of youth programs in eight countries around the world, ACTION youth conceptualized their neighborhoods according to the

supportive sense of community and strong social bonds forged by their collective struggles against spatial inequities.

The children who participated in Chawla's work identified neighborhood conditions similar to the ones summarized in Figure 15 (Chapter Five). Social conditions that resonated in both our works with young people emphasize the importance of social integration, traditions of community self-help, and the sense of secured tenure, whereas trash, heavy traffic, and the lack of gathering places were prominent factors identified as exclusionary. Green areas, a variety of active settings, and freedom of movement were perceived as positive spatial conditions; the fear of harassment and crime and social exclusion and stigma were the spatial conditions identified by both groups of youth participants as alienating.

Existing literature from environmental psychology underscores the importance youth place on having access to safe, clean open spaces and places of activity. What is particularly attractive to youth is that these spaces retain their adaptive values, such that they are not overly prescriptive or planned (Chawla 2002, Kaplan & Kaplan 2002, Katz 2004). Youth seek to retain some autonomy over their environment and their spatial experiences. In essence, they seek to produce representational spaces, a social "space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols" (Lefebvre 1974, p. 39). This enacted production of space is in contrast to the subordination of space tied to adult authority or other social engineers' conceptualized socio-spatial order that is, the imposition of accepted, agreed upon technocratic representations of social control, such as how one must be and act in particular spaces. Young people's preference to retain some autonomy over their environment suggests a preference for urban mobility, "which [implies that they seek] opportunities to explore and to bring the city within reach." (Kaplan & Kaplan 2002, p. 232).

> *People like places where they can understand what is going on, can explore safely, and feel comfortable…favoring opportunities for exploration is adaptive…favoring settings that are understandable, therefore has considerable adaptive value* (Kaplan & Kaplan 2002, p.228).

Transformative programs such as ACTION, by their very nature, are geared to meet young people's need for collective, alternative, and adaptive spaces amidst socially and environmentally toxic conditions. Youth who live in Hunts Point, as with other low-income neighborhoods across urban American, share common experiences of marginalizing conditions, which are linked inextricably to the layered processes of development (Ginwright & Cammarota 2006). The opportunity to unite youth in collective struggle is key to the common good efforts that support the making and nurturing of inclusive democracies (Flanagan & Van Horn 2003). Thus, youth like those at ACTION who collectively take action to redress marginalizing socio-spatial conditions are confronting what has become the status quo of their community lives by creating the conditions in which to live and thrive (Chawla 2002, Ginwright & Cammarota 2006). And they are understanding fully and deeply the role of collective efficacy in making change happen (O'Donoghue & Strobel 2007).

Question Two: The Role of a Critical Civic Praxis Framework

The strength of a critical civic praxis framework is in its adaptive nature, that is to be simultaneous and reiterative. The renewal of campaigns from one year to the next and the setting of goals throughout a project's life cycle were incremental approaches that made short-term change or "wins" more tangible to ACTION participants. This helped keep youth engaged throughout the program year and deepened their sense of ownership and leadership within the program (Lewis-Charp, et al. 2006). In defense of praxis, Freire (1968) emphasized that reflection and action are not dichotomous operations, but rather are simultaneous and critical. True reflection aimed at exposing unjust social and environmental conditions leads to action, and the action taken becomes a new point of reflection from which to continue the transformative process of critical analysis and social criticism.

At the heart of this transformative program is an intentional place-based critical pedagogy that engaged ACTION youth as leaders and change agents in the building of critical

consciousness, the production and exchange of local knowledge, and the cultivation of civic efficacy. ACTION's programmatic strategies and organizational mechanisms were grounded in THE POINT's community organizing work; trouble-shooting and problem solving were the community development organization's primary undertakings. Thus, while some transformative programs harness the power of youth toward social criticism, which involves examining the structural causes underlying issues embedded in historical processes of exclusion and inequity, ACTION's strength was in hands-on critical analysis that led to action-taking - to doing.[152] ACTION provided youth with the language and skills necessary to identify issues in Hunts Point (e.g., targeting the lack of the food security in the neighborhood and at school) and to uncover facts (e.g., conducting a community food assessment and doing research on the food distribution center) in order to develop doable interventions (e.g., youth designing and creating two small urban farm plots).

It is not surprising that youth engaged in (and were encouraged to partake in) collective reflection, more so than individual reflection, given THE POINT's goal-setting and problem solving community development and advocacy work. Group work was the primary way youth related to each other and to adults – a characteristic that made program activities distinctly different from individualistic, competitive school (and school-like) activities. However the need for individual reflection is key to nurturing life-long civic identities (Ginwright 2002, Lewis-Charp, Cao-Yu, & Soukammeuth 2006) and should be an integral component of transformative programming. Collective efforts did inspire youth to challenge their own thinking on a variety of topics (e.g., reflecting on what they were not being taught at school), but these considerations, beliefs, and even biases were not systematically re-integrated into or adequately elicited through the program's approach. Individual goal-setting like that found in certain, more traditional positive youth development programs is key to personal transformation.

Place played a key role in my study: operating within a neighborhood that exemplified social and environmental injustice, ACTION focused its activities on this compelling socio-

spatial context, shining a light on its inequities to engage the imagination and critical consciousness of youth; simply put, place offered a stage for youth to practice civic activism. As the critical lens of a potentially radical shift in approaches to youth development and instructional theory, place served as a critical pedagogy. Research on place-based education stipulates place-specific approaches, ones that emerge from a particular lived experience (Gruenewald 2003). Traditional youth program curriculums are placeless and generalized to facilitate service delivery, formative assessments, and impact evaluations. Typically, these curriculums are delivered regardless of participants' particular lived experience. Although programs can target particular populations such as youth living in poverty-concentrated neighborhoods, the individual histories of these neighborhoods are different as are residents' situationality. Thus, within the context of a critical pedagogy of place, the mechanisms and strategies that define a transformative youth program must be grounded in the particular attributes of place and in youth's efforts to re-create that place.

With regards to participation, it was remarkable to observe the transformation of ACTION participants as they interpreted the roles of community researchers and leaders. The direct participation of these young people in community-based action projects catalyzed a deep sense of responsibility and empowerment. For instance, I recall a unique moment when I watched as a young female participant gathered IRB-approved protocols pertaining to the HEP project to correct them – a young woman who disliked writing but dared to edit the writing of a university researcher. In that moment, she was no longer simply a participant in a youth program but managed to reposition herself within the program's dynamic and HEP's broader research landscape as an expert and a producer. The ACTION participants drew on their knowledge of the research context – their neighborhood – and its population to collectively reflect on what was feasible and what was necessary to address the project's research questions. The level at which youth were integrated into HEP's planning and implementation was critical to evaluating the quality of their participation, considered successful only when

youth have an effect on the process, influence decisions or projects outcomes, and bring about tangible change (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster 2003).

The dialogical and critical principles central to participatory and collaborative research are a direct challenge to conventional, extractive social science initiatives that typically do not emphasize collaboration with research participants (Hemment 2007). Researchers and community organizers who undertake collaborative research activities strive to produce a collective knowledge to inform action-taking by means of exposing unjust social and environmental condition, thereby signaling the engagement of a political act that shifts the center of power toward residents (Cahill 2004, 2007, Fraser et al. 2004, Hart 1997, Kirshner & O'Donoghue 2001, Nieuwenhuys 2004, Thorp 2006). As was the case with ACTION, the collaborative exploration of injustices should focus ideally on the research participants' social and spatial experiences as opposed to pre-constructed identities of place. The inclusion of ACTION youth as participant-researchers connected the communities of traditional research with those of youth and community organizing to foster richer opportunities for critical discourse on marginality in society, environments, and culture that resulted in tangible place-based knowledge; in the case of HEP, a community food assessment that would inform which produce was to be harvested in ACTION's urban farm.

Question Three: The Youth Perspective on Being Change Agents

ACTION participants were familiar with the labels: at-risk, disconnected, and incompetent. But as one female participant asked, "At risk from what?" Low-income youth of color are bombarded with negative stereotypes and conditioned to believe they are useless (Halpern 2005, Stoneman 2002). ACTION youth demonstrated their resistance to stereotyping, both by society and from well-intentioned adults or researchers. In particular, they spoke of their frustration at the low expectations adults had of them, such as when adults were surprised at their accomplishments or that something good could come from such a bad place. ACTION

youth spoke of hope for themselves and their South Bronx neighborhoods fueled by the positive social bonds they had fostered there over the years and the sense of purpose and accomplishment achieved from their activism and organizing work.

However, ACTION participants engaged in stereotyping of their own. At times, they made generalizing statements about South Bronx residents as being ignorant and referenced professionals from outside the area as outside or white saviors. In very rudimentary fashion, ACTION coordinators introduced participants to technical concepts, including stakeholder mapping and power analysis (although these technical terms were not used) to help youth navigate that which is too frequently framed as an adversarial landscape of civic activism and organizing. ACTION youth became more aware of the diverse stakeholders and their roles; they were involved in social and environmental justice work but struggled nonetheless with the implications of outside actors "coming in" to help them - a subtle affirmation of a self-determination ethos. The tension raises questions as to whether ACTION's intention was to prepare youth to work either alongside or as adversaries of the saviors. Problem-solving transformative programs with an inclination for social analysis over social critique may aim to prepare youth to work in the larger world as critically minded colleagues of outside saviors as opposed to antagonists primarily.

The relationship nurtured between ACTION youth participants and adults, both program coordinators and non-staff adults, and the program's critical civic praxis, in particular the application of multiple strategies and mechanisms to bring about change (i.e., campaigns, action projects, demonstrations and participation in public meetings) underpinned young people's identities as change agents. ACTIONs emphasis on place, intergenerational collaboration, youth-adult shared leadership roles, an intentional program culture aimed at building a collective sense of civic efficacy, and hands-on social analysis further suggests that transformative youth programs can focus on non-oppositional struggle and cooperation (Lewis-Charp et al., 2006). Social institutions like THE POINT and programs like ACTION foster the

love, the revolutionary hope, and the radical imaginations youth and all people need to support positive social change. The collective, personal experiences supported by ACTION are likely to be a great influence in these young people's trajectory in social justice/change efforts (Appollon 2012). Thus transformative youth programs are key to fostering inclusive democracies from the local level up as evidenced by the reliance of globally, social resistance movements on youth-led social and political action (Noguera & Cannella 2006).

Re-Conceptualizing of Critical Civic Praxis

An important outcome of my research is the re-conceptualization of critical civic praxis to define more explicitly the program context, including youth participation within that context, and the program outcomes. Ginwright and Cammarota's (2007) initial conceptualization of the critical civic praxis framework lacked two key components instrumental to the program's critical pedagogy: an explicit engagement with place and youth participation in understanding and re-creating that place, both enabled by the context of community-based transformative youth programs. These programs are grounded in young people's socio-spatial experiences of their neighborhood; as my study of ACTION demonstrated, place helped catalyze young people's collective struggle. Place – both Hunts Point and THE POINT - offered a stage for building social bonds, making plans, and then bringing about some visible change, albeit limited to two small urban farm plots. Therefore, the socio-spatial context in which a community-based program operates, along with young people's perceptions of their role as change agents are instrumental to critical civic praxis and must be explicit in its conceptualization.

In addition, community-based youth programs, with their roots in grassroots organizing and civic activism, value youth participation, such that participants play a central role in programmatic decision-making (Checkoway & Richard-Schuster 2003, Hart 1997, MacNeil & McClean 2006). Thus, being explicit about youth participation in the program and in

placemaking is essential if youth are to enact their deepest hopes and fears about their roles in society.

The original critical civic praxis framework as illustrated in Figure 2 (Chapter Two) did not consider pedagogic outcomes, specifically the transformation of place and self and the perception young people have of themselves as activists. As discussed in a previous section, my research explored how ACTION participants conceived of their roles as change agents within Hunts Point, but I did not study the transformation of place and self beyond the creation of the two small urban farming plots by program participants. Nonetheless, a critical civic praxis framework must be intentional about fostering both individual- and community-level change; these are important distinctions pedagogically and in terms of outcomes compared to traditional approaches to youth development such as positive youth development programs (Ginwright & James 2002, Jennings et al. 2006, Kemp 2011, Otis 2006. Sutton et al. 2006). For these reasons, I have re-conceptualized critical civic praxis; please refer to Figure 16

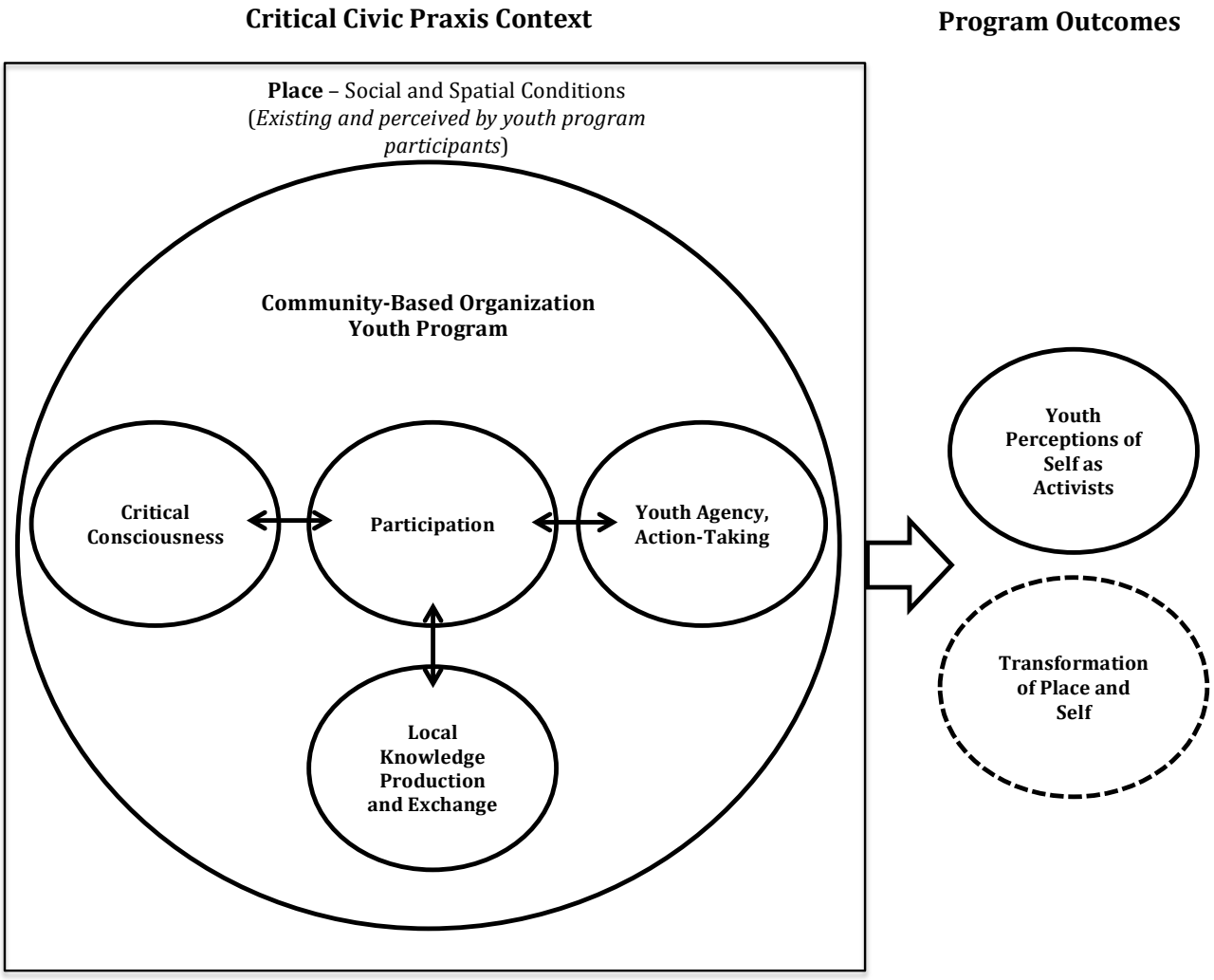

Figure 166: Re-Conceptualization of Critical Civic Praxis

Lessons Learned

With my dissertation study, I set out to contribute to scholarly discourse and practitioner efforts by: (1) identifying what compels young people to undertake civic activism, in particular those youth not traditionally involved in civic engagement and (2) showcasing the importance of a transformative program to those youth, their adult allies, and their communities. My study joins the growing pool of research that challenges misconceptions of youth, urban youth of color in

particular, as incapable of and lacking interest in engaging civic and democratic efforts to redress toxic socio-spatial conditions (O'Donoghue & Strobel 2007). Some lessons learned are:

- The foregrounding of place is critical to operationalizing a transformative philosophy in community-based youth programs. The strength of an intentional, place-based critical pedagogy, such as critical civic praxis, is its simultaneous and reiterative nature to develop young people's critical awareness about the place in which they live, learn, and play; to provide them with opportunities for exchanging and producing local knowledge, about this place; and to foster their civic identities as change agents through hands-on place-based action taking. Grounded in the everyday socio-spatial conditions of participation, this study suggests that, critical civic praxis can bring together youth and their adult allies to collaborate on redressing unjust realities in order to bring about visible change in themselves.
- Community-based organizations have the great potential to be catalyzers of youth activism and organizing. Groups that focus primarily on community development and advocacy work can set the stage for a transformative approach that engages youth in hands-on, critical analysis. However, undertaking some form of social criticism is key to youth understanding the root causes of systematic injustice in their neighborhoods and in line with greater individual reflection, both key to nurturing life-long civic identities. This study suggests that the interplay between deep collective and individual reflection can help reduce stereotyping by youth, born of frustration and cynicism, which can limit their leadership opportunities in the community and beyond.
- Most youth want to feel loved, protected, and relevant in their communities and by society at large. Community based youth programs can work to counter the prevailing assault being leveled at youth of color, maligned by negative stereotyping. This research demonstrates the urgent need for alternative, safe spaces in marginalized communities

where low-income, urban ethnic youth can develop a collective sense of efficacy and build the skills and confidence in their capacities as change agents. Transformative programs can engage youth in understanding and redefining their civic roles as community researchers, leaders, and allies in the struggle for collective good. This study suggests that programs such as ACTION, which go beyond the normative positive youth development rhetoric, can enact approaches that maximize youth participation in decision-making processes within programs, and beyond, addressing issues most salient to them.

- The research proposes that community-based youth programs, particularly those approaches that emphasize a social justice/change ethos, can emphasize collaborative models. These programs have the capacity to nurture collective efficacy, build on existing knowledge bases, and strengthen intergenerational relationships in contrast to stressing an oppositional model, such as one that centers around the often conflictual landscape of community organizing and activism. In addition, a collective approach could help promote a positive perception of youth organizing and activism as a purposeful challenge to processes of exclusion and inequity as opposed to being disregarded as simply disorderly and violent behavior.
- The research also suggests that gender may be a mediating factor in young people's overall perceptions of their neighborhoods. Whereas female youth participants were more likely to speak positively of their neighborhoods, making reference to the spatial or environmental factors they preferred, male participants were more likely to speak less favorably of the South Bronx, citing social conditions they disliked. Positive social factors, a positive sense of community in particular, were prevalent in all young people's perceptions their neighborhoods.

Next Steps

Limited empirical research exists on transformative programs, on the specific mechanisms or pathways that lead to activism and organizing outcomes in youth and on the broader, structural outcomes of these mechanisms. Although my study contributes in part to this area of research, it is limited to a single program case study in New York City. Possible next steps would be to investigate the re-conceptualized critical civic praxis framework (Figure 16), first to research the transformative outcomes of critical civic praxis, namely the transformation of place and self, which was not the focus of this research, and second to study the framework and its outcomes within a broader range of community-based programs in New York City or, even further afield, in diverse socio-spatial contexts from throughout the United States.

Future studies could begin by investigating the outcomes of the critical civic praxis framework. Specifically, this work could look into the impacts such programs have on the lives of youth participants and on the communities in which they operate. How would the transformation of place and self be conceived? And what are the links between these two outcomes and a place-based critical pedagogy? In effect, this could help test critical civic praxis further to identify any missing constructs not adequately represented by the re- conceptualized framework.

Additional research on the revised conceptual framework of critical civic praxis could be framed according to the three pre-existing dimensions (1) the production and exchange of *local knowledge*, including youth-led solutions, (2) the development of *critical consciousness or awareness* about local problems, and (3) the fostering of *youth agency* and of youth activist identities) and the newly reflected dimensions of place, in particular how youth define their neighborhoods in terms of socio-spatial conditions, as well as youth participation in the program, their role as decision makers and leaders within the program, and the projects they undertake. Socio-spatial dimensions identified in Chawla's (2002) work and supported by my research

(refer to Figure 15 – Youth Identified Conceptual Map of Hunts Point) would provide a solid basis for further collaboration and corroboration across studies and geographical areas. Youth participation in the programs could be assessed using frameworks such as Hart's (1979) "Ladder of Participation" in combination with the principles of social justice youth development as outlined by Ginwright and James (2002).

Greater attention could be focused on the relationship, if any, between a transformative program's approach or curriculum and the type community-based organization and its overall mission. In short, are certain types of organizations more likely to foster programs that promote or privilege social analysis over social criticism, how, and do their outcomes differ? A gender- and sexuality-driven analysis could offer an alternative lens through which to explore possible differentiated experiences, and therefore outcomes, in transformative programs. My study did indicate some preliminary gender-based differences in how youth participants responded to research questions.

Financing research on transformative programs could be a challenge as the funding landscape supporting youth development and educational initiatives, including research and evaluation, has suffered tremendously following the 2008 economic crisis. Federal and state governments have reduced funding to education and after-school programs, pushing cities to reallocate monies away from community-based initiatives into school-based programming in order to subsidize the growing cuts to education. Foundations are focusing increasingly on accountability to their investors rather than their grantees and make recipient organizations, many of which lack the necessary capacities and resources, responsible to measure hard-to-collect, hard-to-define, and potentially unconnected or irrelevant indicators of success for their programs. Programs serving those communities with the greatest needs, such as neighborhoods with high rates of poverty and low-performing schools and low-income

communities of color, have been hardest hit by the shrinking budgets (Afterschool Alliance 2012).

Conclusion

The needs of the estimated 350,000 disconnected youth in New York's metropolitan area and their communities would benefit from a community-based social justice developmental approach. Marginalized youth do not suffer exclusively from youth-centered problems or predicaments of their own making (although as agents in their own right, they do bear responsibilities). The struggles they face are deeply rooted in processes of exclusion and inequity where the nuances of social and environmental racism are played out in their everyday environments: home, school, parks, and neighborhood streets. In order for inclusive democracies to thrive, youth must be active in creating, advocating, and activating social justice works. Transformative programs call for critical pedagogy of place and not one that is sanitized or hidden away from the dangerous realities of ghettoized neighborhoods. In addition, a radical epistemological shift must take place as paramount, challenging traditional notions of young people's socio-economic and political roles as passive in society. Transformative youth programs can be key catalyzers of change in a community or a city's long-term strategy for peace and equity.

Chapter Seven Endnotes

[152] Participants were engaged in some social critique, but the goal of the program, as stated in Chapter Four (page 93) was, “young people who work to identify social and environmental justice issues facing the Hunts Point section of the South Bronx with the goal of creating and implementing on-going youth-led solutions”.

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APPENDIX ONE - Hunts Point Geography and Demographics

Appendix Map 1 Hunts Point, Bronx New York City

Table Appendix 1: Hunts Point, Bronx County, and New York City Demographic Data 2010 Census Data

	Hunts Point, NY		Bronx County, NY		New York City, NY	
TOTAL POPULATION						
Total Population	12,281		1,385,108		8,175,133	
SEX						
Male	6,300	51%	649,633	47%	3,882,544	47.5%
Female	5,981	49%	735,475	53%	4,292,589	52.5%
AGE						
Under 5 Years	1,054	9%	103,144	7%	517,724	6%
5 to 9 Years	1,000	8%	98,664	7%	473,159	5%
10 to 14 Years	981	8%	99,159	7%	468,154	6%
15 to 17 Years	649	5%	115,662	8%	535,833	6%
18 to 24 Years	486	4%	112,897	8%	642,585	8%
25 to 34 Years	1,265	10%	105,710	7%	730,190	9%
35 to 44 Years	2,027	17%	97,824	7%	662,255	8%
45 to 54 Years	1,736	14%	91,016	6%	587,407	7%
55 to 64 Years	1,476	12%	96,073	6%	567,280	7%
65 to 74 Years	483	4%	97,569	7%	565,692	7%
75 to 84 Years	374	3%	88,029	6%	541,684	7%
85 Years and over	449	4%	72,545	5%	475,535	56%
Median Age by Sex						
Median Age:	***29***		***33***		***36***	
Male Population	26.7		30.6		34	
Female Population	30		34.9		37	
RACE						
Total Population	***12,281***		***1,385,108***		***8,175,133***	
One Race:			**1,311,865**	**95%**	**7,849,232**	**96%**
White Alone	2,832	23%	386,497	28%	3,597,341	44%
Black or African American Alone	4,231	34%	505,200	37%	2,088,510	22%
American Indian and Alaska Native Alone	197	2%	18,260	1%	57,512	0.7%
Asian Alone	128	1%	49,609	4%	1,038,388	13%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Alone	11	0%	1,288	0.1%	5,147	0.1%
Some Other Race Alone	4,040	33%	351,011	25%	1,062,334	13%
Two or More races	842	7%	73,243	5%	325,901	4%
Hispanic or Latino by Race						

Table Appendix 1: Hunts Point, Bronx County, and New York City Demographic Data 2010 Census Data

	Hunts Point, NY		Bronx County, NY		New York City, NY	
Hispanic or Latino (of any race):	***8,684***	***71%***	***741,413***	***54%***	***2,336,076***	***29%***
Mexican	879	7%	71,194	5%	319,263	4%
Puerto Rican	4,000	33%	298,921	22%	723,621	9%
Cuban	113	1%	8,785	1%	40,840	0.5
Other Hispanic or Latino	3,692	30%	362,513	26%	1,252,352	15%
Not Hispanic or Latino	3,597	29%	643,695	47%	5,839,057	71%
HOUSEHOLD BY HOUSEHOLD TYPE						
Total Households	**3,633**		***483,449***		**3,109,784**	
Family Households:	***2,650***	***73%***	***322,604***	***67%***	***1,850,221***	***60%***
(1) Married-couple Family (Husband-Wife)	*939*	*35%*	136,853	42%	*1,097,870*	*35%*
With Own Children Under 18 Years	534	57%	67,516	49%	492,967	45%
(2) Other Family	*1,711*	*65%*	*185,751*	*58%*	*752,351*	*40%*
Male Householder, no wife present	307	18%	35,382	19%	170,606	23%
Female Householder, no husband present	1,404	82%	150,369	81%	581,745	77%
With Own Children Under 18 Years	897	64%	85,567	57%	278,903	48%
Nonfamily Households:	***983***	***27%***	***160,845***	***33%***	***1,259,563***	***40%***
(1) Householders living alone	*782*	*80%*	*136,482*	*85%*	*995,755*	*79%*
(2) Householders not living alone	*201*	*20%*	*24,363*	*15%*	*263,808*	*21%*
HOUSING UNITS						
Total Housing units	***3,985***		***511,896***		***3,371,062***	

Table Appendix 1: Hunts Point, Bronx County, and New York City Demographic Data 2010 Census Data

	Hunts Point, NY		Bronx County, NY		New York City, NY	
OCCUPANCY STATUS						
Housing units:	***3,985***		***511,896***		***3,371,062***	
Occupied	3,633	91%	483,449	94%	3,109,784	92%
Vacant	352	9%	28,447	6%	261,278	8%
TENURE						
Occupied Housing Units:	***3,633***		***483,449***		***3,109,784***	
Owner Occupied	292	8%	93,101	19%	962,892	31%
Renter Occupied	3,633	91%	390,348	81%	2,146,892	69%

APPENDIX TWO - The Point and ACTION Program Details

Table Appendix 2: The Point's Programs

Program Category	Program Type	Programming Options
Youth Development	After-School Program	*Academic Assistance* *Literacy* *Arts-in-Education* *Environmental Education* *Leadership* *Social Skill Building*
	Summer Youth Program	*Summer Day Adventure* *Camp Quinnahung* *Summer Youth Leadership* *ACTION Summer Internship*
	Teen Program	*College Prep* *Regents Tutoring* *Dance* *Hip Hop & Therapy Production* *Music* *Photography* *Poetry & Spoken Word* *Skate Park Design* *Social Circus* *Fine Art Professional Development Workshops* *ACTION* *WOMEN – where our minds empower need* *Teen Internship*
	Teen Leadership	*ACTION*
	Youth Art Program	*After-School Arts Residency Program* *Drama* *Music* *Photography* *Social Circus* *Visual Arts*

Arts and Culture	Theater	Latin Jazz Series Mambo to Hip Hop Young Audience Series Hunts Point Summer Festival & Fish Parade Artists in Residence
	Visual Arts	Public Arts Projects
	Broadcasting	Broadcasting
	Photography	ICP
	Music	Live Concerts Music Education
	Dance	Live Performances Resident Dance Companies Dance Education
	Circus	Social Circus No Beef Thursday

List of ACTION Projects and Campaigns for 2009-2010

1. **Projects: Collaborative Projects and Participatory Action Research Projects (PAR)**
   a. The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene sponsored the Health Equity Project (HEP) – a PAR project - in partnership with Hunter College of The City University of New York (CUNY). According to the project write-up, the New York Department of Health and Mental Hygiene created District Public Health Offices (DPHOs) in North and Central Brooklyn, the South Bronx, and East and Central Harlem to situate programs in neighborhoods of high public health need. The DPHOs seek to involve community residents in examining health disparities and developing solutions to health issues affecting their communities.

      In 2008, the DPHOs in partnership with Hunter College created the HEP to develop a model of community engagement targeting adolescents ages 12-18 within high-need neighborhoods. HEP incorporates a structured dialogue process with youth and youth-serving agencies to raise awareness about the underlying causes of poor health in lower-income neighborhoods, looking particularly at Obesity, diabetes, and

other forms of cardiovascular disease; Sexual and reproductive health; Youth violence; and Environmental health.

HEP worked with three afterschool programs in North/Central Brooklyn and the South Bronx to examine obesity and diabetes rates and conduct a community food assessment to see whether food access played a role in the local obesity epidemic. Based on their findings, students are currently working with HEP to develop an action project around improving School Food in neighborhood schools.

b. Urban Farming Initiative: The goal of the urban farm was for ACTION members to learn how to grow fruits and vegetables, to learn about healthy food options, and potentially develop a plan to start their own farmers market. ACTION participants wanted to develop their own small urban farm in a plot outside The Point's main front doors and at a small satellite site or 'campus' in Hunts Point Riverside Park, less than half a mile away from center. The Point's Riverside Campus for Art and the Environment, as it is formerly known, will become the first stop along the South Bronx Green Way Project.

2. Campaigns

a. The Go Green Campaign provided participants and residents with a general overview of what it means and what it looks like to go green (i.e., to be environmentally friendly and environmentally aware). Participants gave residents examples of how they could become green at home by recycling, composting, and gardening. They also provided a general overview of various greening campaigns and projects currently underway in Hunts Points. Such projects included:

   i. **The green roof at The Point** – "The NYS Office of the Attorney General and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation have officially awarded THE POINT support for its green roof! With this assistance, THE POINT plans to install an extensive green roof and smaller intensive green roof that will serve as an outdoor classroom at its main facility at 940 Garrison Avenue" (The Point ND); last retrieved May 29, 2012.

   ii. **Increasing the amount of green space in Hunts Point** – "In 2006, THE POINT completed the remediation process at this location of a former fur factory at 1399 Lafayette Avenue and officially named it the Hunts Point Riverside Campus for Arts and the Environment. The goal of the site is to enhance the community's access to the Bronx River while creating new opportunities for the arts beyond the reach of THE POINT's door. This same year, the Hunts Point community celebrated the opening of Barretto Point Park and the Hunts Point Riverside Park, a triumph for residents and organizations like THE POINT who had been advocating for increased green space for over a decade" (The Point, ND); last retrieved May 29, 2012.

b. Happening Habitat The Purpose of Happening Habitat is to examine North Brother Island and other environmental aspects of the South Bronx community. We hope to promote the restoration of North Brother Island, raise awareness about the natural environment, and help build an overall appreciation and respect for nature.

In support of this campaigns, ACTION participants, with the assistance of the NY Audubon Society, maintained a blog: http://www.happeninghabitat.typepad.com/

c. Sheridan Expressway - The Sheridan Expressway is short freeway connecting the Bruckner Expressway and the Cross Bronx Expressway. Extensions of the Sheridan were planned but never implemented and thus the expressway is regarded as a little used or necessary piece of infrastructure in Hunts Point. Extensively studied by all levels of governments, several plans are currently being considered, including the conversion of the Sheridan a recreational space. The broad scope of the study sought to address community concerns over land use, waterfront access, transportation and economic development, and take advantage of emerging opportunities for new housing and retail. The proposals developed, attempts to strike a balance between an increasingly vibrant residential area and the need to maintain efficient routes for traffic traveling to Hunts Point, the economic and employment core of the area. For additional information, please refer to http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/sheridan_hunt/index.shtml

d. Anti-Jail Complex - In 2006, the New York City Department of Corrections proposed a new $375 million, 2,000 bed-facility as a possible reuse of the defunct Oak Point Energy site. The Oak Point Energy Site was formerly the Oak Point garbage dump, which was abandoned in 1990 amidst crippling debt ($60 Million) and suspected ties to illegal activities (specifically, linked to the Gambino crime family). In 2004, there was plan to develop a large energy plant on the site, significant enough to provide the city with one tenth of its energy needs (Urbina 2004, August 16). The site is one of the largest privately owned pieces of underdeveloped commercial land in the city. Although the energy plant was never developed, the NYC Economic Development Corporation was in negotiation with the site's owner to purchase the land to develop a $375 million jail facility (Hu 2004, April 26).

   Outraged, residents in collaboration with grassroots CBOs formed a coalition, *Community in Unity*, in opposition to the jail proposal (Hirsch 2010, August 12; Williams 2008, March 5). In August 2010, after significant efforts by *Community in Unity*, the city abandoned its plan to construct a third prison facility in Hunts Point.

e. South Bronx Greenway - The South Bronx Greenway is one of the primary goals of the Hunts Point Vision Plan. The planned greenway is set to improve access to the waterfront, provide much-needed recreational opportunities, improve transportation safety, and enhance the network of bike and pedestrian paths on the South Bronx peninsula while providing opportunities for compatible economic development. For more information on the project and its current status, please refer http://www.nycedc.com/project/south-bronx-greenway

f. Female Empowerment (Group)

APPENDIX THREE - Research Protocols

In addition to the consent forms for youth and adult participants, I developed five research protocols for my study, these are as follows:

1. Consent Forms for each research population
2. Interview Protocols for each research population
3. A Participant Observation Protocol
4. An ACTION Program Youth Participant Journal Booklet Protocol
5. Key Themes Focus Group Protocols
6. A Collaborative Data Analysis Focus Group Protocol

1. **Consent Forms for each research population**

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

College of the Built Environments
PhD Program in the Built Environment
Seattle, WA 98195-5740

A Community-Based Organization in the South Bronx as a Catalysts for Activism: Observing the Dynamics of a Youth Initiated Participatory Research Project

Dear Parents/Guardians:

I am writing this letter to let you know about a research study I am conducting at THE POINT Community Development Corporation's ACTION program. This letter is being given to the parents/guardians of all youth currently enrolled in THE POINT Community Development Corporation's ACTION program.

My name is Julie Poncelet and I am a doctoral student at the University of Washington in the College of the Built Environments and am interested in understanding and documenting what motivates urban youth to engage in community-based activism and how these youth see and understand their actions in the Hunts Point neighborhood.

- All youth currently and previously enrolled in the ACTION program are eligible for the study.
- Prior to participation, a consent form and a photograph release form must be signed by the parent or legal guardian.
- These consent forms are attached to this letter and additional copies are available from me and ACTION program staff

As part of the study, the following will occur:

- Youth participants, THE POINT and ACTION staff, and members of the community will be interviewed
- Youth participants, THE POINT and ACTION staff, and members of the community will be photographed
- Youth participants will be observed during ACTION program activities
- Youth participants can submit journal entries regarding their experiences with the ACTION program
- Youth participants will take part in focus groups during regular ACTION program hours

Any questions about the study should be directed to me. My contact number is: 917.751.5570. I can also be reached by email at the following address: poncelet@u.washington.edu[1].

If you and your child are interested in participating in this study, please review and sign the attached consents form and return it to THE POINT Community Development Corporation's Adam Liebowitz, ACTION Program Director.

Sincerely,

Julie Poncelet, Candidate for PhD
University of Washington
College of the Built Environments

[1] Please note that the researcher cannot guarantee the confidentiality of information sent via e-mail.

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Parent/Guardian Consent Form for

A Community-Based Organization in the South Bronx as a Catalysts for Activism: Observing the Dynamics of a Youth Initiated Participatory Research Project

Principal Investigator(PI):	Julie Poncelet
Affiliation:	University of Washington, College of the Built Environments, PhD Program in the Built Environment
PI's Contact Information:	Telephone: 917.751.5570
	E-mail*: poncelet@u.washinton.edu

**Please note that we cannot ensure the confidentiality of information sent via e-mail*.

INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

I am asking for your permission to allow your son or daughter to take part in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether or not to allow your child to be in the study. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, the possible risks and benefits, and anything else about the research or anything in this form that is not clear. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to allow your child to take part in the study or not. This process is called 'informed consent.'

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

I want to know more about youth involvement with THE POINT Community Development Corporation's ACTION program. I want to better understand and document what motivates urban youth to take part in community-based projects and activism and how these youth see and understand their actions in the Hunts Point neighborhood. I want to observe and document ACTION program participants. I also want to interview ACTION participants, staff, and other members of the community, to conduct focus groups with program participants, to have youth participants help me review non-specific, non-personal research data, and have youth participants contribute journal entries about their program experiences.

PROCEDURES

I would like to interview your child once to learn about their experiences, feelings and activities associated with the ACTION program. The interview will take less than one hour to complete. I would

like to audiotape the interviews so that I have an accurate record of your child's responses. I will assign a codename or number to the interview and destroy the audio recording within six (6) months of the interview. I would like to observe ACTION program participants, including your child, during program hours and while participants are conducting program and research related activities.

I would like your child to write brief journal entries about their experiences with the ACTION program. Your child does not have to write a journal if he or she does not want to. If your child does want to contribute a journal entry, it will be anonymous – I will not be asking them to write down their name. The purpose of the journal is to better understand how the program is helping your child. The original journal entries and any copies will be destroyed once the research is complete, meaning when all the data has been analyzed and the research report has been approved.

I would like your child to participate in focus groups related to their activities with the ACTION program. The focus groups will be conducted at the POINT throughout the course of the program. The purpose of the focus groups is to better understand the youth perspective on community-based projects, community and social conditions found in Hunts Point, and their feedback on non-specific, non-personal summary-form data collected as part of the research.

I would like to photograph ACTION program participants, including your child, during regular ACTION program activities. The photographs will be used to document youth participants taking part in the ACTION Program and the activities they are involved in. I would like to use the photographs in academic public presentations, educational settings, and publication such as journals, magazines, newspapers and online multimedia publications.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

The nature and degree of risk of possible stress, discomfort, or invasion of privacy as a result of your child's participation in this research is minimal to none. Some people are a little uncomfortable when they are interviewed and audio-taped. Your child can stop the audio-taping or observation at any time. Some people feel that providing information for research is an invasion of privacy. I will not be asking your child to provide/disclose any sensitive information as the research activities are limited to your child's involvement with the ACTION program. It is possible for someone who knows your child may recognize their image from the photographs.

OTHER INFORMATION

Taking part in this study is voluntary. Your child can stop at any time. Information about your child is confidential. I will code study records. The link between the code and your child's name will be kept secret and in a secured location. Only I as the principal investigator will have access to that information. The link between the study records and your child's name will be kept for the duration of the study (meaning when all the data has been analyzed and the research report has been approved) and then it and all original materials (except photographs) will be destroyed. Your child's name will not be published in connection with information collected, including photographs. Your child will not receive any compensation for their involvement in the study or for the use the photographs.

Julie Poncelet

Signature of Principal Investigator Printed Name Date

PARTICIPANT'S STATEMENT

The study has been explained to me, and I voluntarily consent to participate. I have had an opportunity to ask questions. I understand that future questions I may have about the research will be answered by the researcher listed above. If I have questions about my rights as a subject, I may call the University of Washington Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

*I understand that if I am 18 years of age or older, I no longer require parental consent to participate in the study and will therefore sign this form myself.

Your Child's Name
(*if you are 18 years or older, write down your name)

Signature of Parent/Guardian Printed Name Date
(*if you are 18 years or older, please sign, print your name and write down the date)

Copies to: Investigator's file; Subject

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

College of the Built Environments
PhD Program in the Built Environment
Seattle, WA 98195-5740

A Community-Based Organization in the South Bronx as a Catalysts for Activism: Observing the Dynamics of a Youth Initiated Participatory Research Project

Dear THE POINT Staff and/or Member of Hunts Point Neighborhood:

I am writing this letter to let you know about a research study I am conducting at THE POINT Community Development Corporation's ACTION program. This letter is being given to staff members and members of the community affiliated with THE POINT Community Development Corporation's ACTION program. A member of THE POINT Community Development Corporation and/or a participant of the ACTION program recommend I reach out to you.

My name is Julie Poncelet and I am a doctoral student at the University of Washington in the College of the Built Environments and am interested in understanding and documenting what compels urban ethnic youth to engage in community-based activism and how these youth see and understand their actions in the Hunts Point neighborhood. As part of the study, the following will occur:

- Youth participants, THE POINT and ACTION staff, and members of the community will be interviewed
- Youth participants, THE POINT and ACTION staff, and members of the community will be photographed
- Youth participants and ACTION staff will be observed during ACTION program activities
- Youth participants will submit journal entries regarding their experiences with the ACTION program
- Youth participants will take part in focus groups during regular ACTION program hours

I would like to interview you for my research. Participation in the research is voluntary and confidential. Please review the attached consent form and photographic release form which will provide you with details regarding the study and the interview. Any questions about the study should be directed to me. My contact number is: 917.751.5570. I can also be reached by email at the following address: poncelet@u.washington.edu[2].
If you are interested in participating in this study, please review and sign the attached consent forms. Please make sure to include either a contact phone number or e-mail address so I may contact you to schedule the interview. Please return the form in the envelope provided (postage

[2] Please note that the researcher cannot guarantee the confidentiality of information sent via e-mail.

has been added for your convenience) or drop off the form in the sealed envelope to Adam Liebowitz, ACTION Program Director at THE POINT Community Development Corporation. I will bring a copy of your signed consent forms to the scheduled interview.

Sincerely,

Julie Poncelet, Candidate for PhD
University of Washington
College of the Built Environments

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

THE POINT Staff and/or Member of Hunts Point Neighborhood Form for

A Community-Based Organization in the South Bronx as a Catalysts for Activism: Observing the Dynamics of a Youth Initiated Participatory Research Project

Principal Investigator(PI):	Julie Poncelet
Affiliation:	University of Washington, College of the Built Environments, PhD Program in the Built Environment
PI's Contact Information:	Telephone: 917.751.5570
	E-mail*: poncelet@u.washinton.edu

**Please note that the researcher cannot ensure the confidentiality of information sent via e-mail*.

INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

I am asking for you to participate in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether or not to be in the study. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what I would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called 'informed consent.'

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

I want to know more about youth involvement with THE POINT Community Development Corporation's ACTION program to better understand and document what compels urban youth to engage in community-based activism and how these youth see and understand their actions in the Hunts Point neighborhood. I want to observe and document ACTION program participants. I also want to interview ACTION participants, staff, and other members of the community, to conduct focus groups with program participants, to have youth participants help me analyze non-specific, non-personal research data, and have youth participants contribute journal entries about their program experiences.

PROCEDURES

If you choose to take part in this case study, I would like to know about your involvement, experiences, and opinions about THE POINT Community Development Corporation's ACTION program and what you understand to be the role of ACTION participants in community-based activism to make positive changes in Hunts Point.

I would like to interview you about your involvement, experiences, and opinions about THE POINT Community Development Corporation's ACTION program. The interview will take less than one hour to complete. I would like to audiotape the interview so that I have an accurate record of your responses. I will transcribe the audio tape of your interview, then, I will assign a code to the transcript and destroy the audio recording within six (6) months of the interview. I would like to observe ACTION program participants and ACTION program staff ONLY. If you are an ACTION Program staff person, I would like to observe you during program hours and while participants are conducting program and research related activities.

I would like to photograph ACTION program participants during regular ACTION program activities. The photographs will be used to document youth participants taking part in the ACTION Program and the activities they are involved in. I would like to use the photographs in academic public presentations, educational settings, and publication such as journals, magazines, newspapers and online multimedia publications.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

The nature and degree of risk of possible stress, discomfort, or invasion of privacy as a result of your participation in this research is minimal to none. Some people are a little uncomfortable when they are audio-taped and interviewed. You can stop the audio-taping procedures at any time. Some people feel that providing information for research is an invasion of privacy. I will not be asking you to disclose any sensitive information as the nature of the research activities is limited to what your experiences and opinions regarding THE POINT Community Development Corporation's ACTION program.

OTHER INFORMATION

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You can stop at any time. Your information is confidential – all interviews will be coded. The link between the code and your name will be kept in a secured location, separate from the study information. Only I, as the principal investigator, will have access to that information. The link between the study records and your name will be kept until the research is complete (meaning when all the data has been analyzed and the research report has been approved), and then it and all original materials (except photographs) will be destroyed. Your name will not be published in connection with information collected, including photographs. You will not receive any compensation for your involvement in the study or for the use the photographs.

Julie Poncelet

Signature of Principal Investigator Printed Name
Date

PARTICIPANT'S STATEMENT

The study has been explained to me, and I voluntarily consent to participate. I have had an opportunity to ask questions. I understand that future questions I may have about the research will be answered by the researcher listed above. If I have questions about my rights as a subject, I may call the University of Washington Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Signature of participant Printed name

Date

Copies to: Investigator's file;
Subject.

2. Interview Protocols for each research population

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Youth Participant Interview Protocol for

A Community-Based Organization in the South Bronx as a Catalysts for Activism: Observing the Dynamics of a Youth Initiated Participatory Research Project

Principal Investigator: Julie Poncelet

University of Washington, College of the Built Environments,
PhD in the Built Environment Program

Telephone: 917.751.5570 E-mail*: poncelet@u.washington.edu

**Please note that we cannot ensure the confidentiality of information sent via e-mail*.

PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW
(To be read to interview participant)

The date is (today's date) and time (time interview begins).

My name is Julie Poncelet and I am a student from the University of Washington. I am asking you to take part in a research study because I want to know more about your involvement with THE POINT's ACTION program. I want to better understand and document what motivates you to take part in community-based activism and how you see and understand your actions in the Hunts Point neighborhood. Although your parents/guardians have given their permission for you to participate in this study, you can still decided not to do this. I would like to get your verbal permission that you would like to take part in the research study. If you don't want to be in this study, you don't have to participate. Remember, being in this study is up to you and no one will be upset if you don't want to participate or even if you change your mind later and want to stop.

If you decide to participate in the study, you will be interviewed and can participate in focus groups in the spring. I will also be attending the ACTION program on a regular basis to observe regular program activities and the community project you will be taking part in. You may also contribute

some journals to the study if you would like. There are no risks to participating in the research study and you can stop at any time.

Do you want to participate in the study?

The interview will be about your experiences, feelings, and activities in the program and in the Hunts Point neighborhood.

This interview will take less than one hour to complete. I will be audio-taping the interviews so that I have an accurate record of your responses. I will transcribe the audiotape of this interview and destroy the tape within 6 months of the interview. No one else will hear or read your interview responses; only I will have access to your interview recording and responses. Though I may take excerpts from your interview, I will never make reference to you by name.

Participation in this interview is voluntary. This means that if you cannot or do not want to respond to any of the following questions, you do not have to. If at any time during the interview you are uncomfortable, please let me know so we can stop the interview.

Do you have any questions or concerns about the interview?

Let us begin.

(*) indicates - Ford Foundation Report Questions
Questions marked with an asterisk (*) are pulled directly or in part from the report "*Urban Youth Programs in America: A Study of Youth, Community, and Social Justice Conducted for the Ford Foundation"* that was published by the University of Washington in 2006. THE POINT participated in the study. Please refer to Appendix B of the report for the complete interview protocol.

This page of the interview protocol will be removed and stored in a secure place in order to ensure the subject's personal information is confidential and protected.

Interviewee Demographic Data			
Name:			
DOB:		Age:	
Gender	○ Female		○ Male
Ethnicity/Race: *(according to interviewee)*			
DATA CODE:			

Interviewee DATA CODE:	

Program Involvement & Characteristics

1. How long have you been involved with THE POINT's ACTION program? Were you ever involved or are currently involved in other programs offered at THE POINT?

2. How did you hear about or find out about THE POINT's ACTION program?

3. Why did you decide to join/participate in the ACTION program?
    a. *For those youth participants who have been involved for more than one year – And why did you decide to continue participating in the ACTION program?*

4. Why is joining and being a part of the ACTION Program important to you?

5. *For Returning ACTION Participants* – What have you enjoyed most about the program in the past?
    a. And, if you could make changes and improvements to the program, what would they be and why?

Neighborhood Characteristics - Social and Community Conditions

6. Do you live in Hunts Point? If No, where do you live and how do you get to THE POINT?

7. Describe your neighborhood for me?

8. What are the physical and environmental things **you like** and that **you don't** like about your neighborhood and why? Explain/Describe.

9. What are the social things **you like** and **don't like** about your neighborhood and why? Explain/Describe.

10. Overall, do you think your neighborhood is a good place to grow-up? Explain. Would you change anything and why?

11. How well do you know people in your neighborhood? Do you feel you can speak with people in your neighborhood or ask them question or ask for help?

Youth Characteristics

12. What strengths and skills do you bring to the program? (Examples if needed – leadership, commitment to help my community, being creative, able to work collaboratively with peers and adults).

13. What do you hope to achieve from your participation in the program?

Social Justice and Activism Values

14. What does Social Justice mean to you and your participation in the ACTION program? *

If interviewees are unfamiliar or confused by the term, an alternative question is, What does Justice mean to you and your participation in the ACTION Program?

15. What does activism and youth activism mean to you and your participation in the ACTION program?

16. What are challenges you face as a young person in your neighborhood? Describe and Explain.

17. Can you describe why you think these challenges occur or what causes these challenges? Explain.

18. How would you address and solve these challenges and why? Explain.

19. How do you participate or get involved in your neighborhood? Why is this important to you?

20. What does the phrase “youth as agents of social change” mean to you? How are you encouraged to be an agent of social change in Hunts Point?

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Staff Interview Protocol for

A Community-Based Organization in the South Bronx as a Catalysts for Activism: Observing the Dynamics of a Youth Initiated Participatory Research Project

Principal Investigator: Julie Poncelet

University of Washington, College of the Built Environments,
PhD in the Built Environment Program

Telephone: 917.751.5570 E-mail*: poncelet@u.washington.edu

**Please note that we cannot ensure the confidentiality of information sent via e-mail*.

PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW
(To be read to interview participant)

The date is (today's date) and time (time interview begins).

I want to know more about your involvement with THE POINT Community Development Corporation and its ACTION program to better understand and document what compels urban ethnic youth to engage in community-based activism and how their actions in the Hunts Point neighborhood are seen and understood.

This interview will take less than one hour to complete. I will be audio-taping the interviews so that I have an accurate record of your responses. I will transcribe the audiotape of this interview and destroy the tape within 6 months of the interview. No one else will hear or read your interview responses; only I will have access to your interview recording and responses.

Participation in this interview is voluntary. This means that if you cannot or do not want to respond to any of the following questions, you do not have to. If at any time during the interview you are uncomfortable, please let me know so we can stop the interview.

Do you have any questions or concerns about the interview?

Let us begin.

(*) indicates - Ford Foundation Report Questions
Questions marked with an asterisk (*) are pulled directly or in part from the report "*Urban Youth Programs in America: A Study of Youth, Community, and Social Justice Conducted for the Ford Foundation"* that was published by the University of Washington in 2006. THE POINT participated in the study. Please refer to Appendix B of the Ford Foundation report for the complete interview protocol.

This page of the interview protocol will be removed and stored in a secure place in order to ensure the subject's personal information is confidential and protected.

Interviewee Demographic Data			
Name:			
DOB:		Age:	
Gender	○ Female		○ Male
Ethnicity/Race: *(according to interviewee)*			
DATA CODE:			

Interviewee DATA CODE:	

Program Involvement & Structure

1. What is the title of your current position at THE POINT and how long have you had this position?

2. How long have you been involved with THE POINT and/or the ACTION program? (Have you held any other positions or were you formerly a program participant?)

3. How would you describe your current position and its goals?

4. In your words, what is the mission of THE Point and the ACTION Program?

5. What are the main categories of youth activities offered at THE POINT and specifically, within the ACTION program? *

6. What are the primary reasons these activities are offered? Why are these activities important to the ACTION program and its participants?*

7. Why do youth in the Hunts Point neighborhood need a program like ACTION?*

8. What roles do parents/guardians and other members of the community play in the ACTION program and other THE POINT programs?

9. How are youth involved in the governance of the ACTION program and THE POINT?*

Neighborhood Characteristics - Social and Community Conditions

10. Do you live in Hunts Point? If No, where do you live and how do you get to THE POINT?

11. Describe the Hunts Point neighborhood for me?

12. What are the physical and environmental things **you like** and that **you don't like** about the Hunts Point neighborhood and why? Explain/Describe.

    a. Do youth participant ever mention to, share or discuss any of these physical and environmental elements with you during the course of an ACTION program activity or in conversation with you? If so, which ones and what do they say?

13. What are the social things **you like** and **don't like** about the Hunts Point neighborhood and why? Explain/Describe.

a. Do youth participant ever mention to, share or discuss any of these social elements with you during the course of an ACTION program activity or in conversation with you? If so, which ones and what do they say?

14. Overall, do you think the Hunts Point neighborhood is a good place to grow-up in terms of (a) safety, (b) social relationship/ social networks, (c) the physical infrastructure/ environmental conditions? Explain.
    a. Safety
    b. social relationship/ social networks
    c. the physical infrastructure/ environmental conditions

15. Do you or other ACTION Program staff and THE POINT Staff discuss the neighborhood's history with ACTION participants? If, yes, how do you go about doing this and why?

Youth Characteristics

16. Describe ACTION program participants? Who are they – in your opinion, are they different from other Hunts Point youth? Why are they in the ACTION program?

17. What strengths and skills do youth bring to the ACTION program? (Examples if needed – leadership, commitment to help community, being creative, able to work collaboratively with peers and adults).

18. What do youth hope to gain from their participation in the ACTION program?

19. What do you hope youth participants achieve from participation in the ACTION program?

Social Justice and Activism Values

20. What does Social Justice mean to THE POINT and, specifically, to the ACTION program? *

If interviewee is not familiar with the term social justice, an alternative series of question could be - what does justice mean to The Point?

21. What does activism and youth activism mean to THE POINT and, specifically, to the ACTION program?

22. What are challenges young people in the Hunts Point neighborhood face? Describe and Explain.

23. Do you know or understand why these challenges occur or what causes these challenges? Explain.
24. How does the ACTION program help youth participants understand, think about, address and solve these challenges and why? Describe activities and Explain.

25. How do ACTION program youth participants get involved in the Hunts Point neighborhood? Why is this important to the program goals and the mission of THE POINT?

26. What does the phrase “youth as agents of social change” mean to you? How does THE POINT and the ACTION program address youth as agents of social change in Hunts Point?

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Other Interview Protocol for

A Community-Based Organization in the South Bronx as a Catalysts for Activism: Observing the Dynamics of a Youth Initiated Participatory Research Project

Principal Investigator: Julie Poncelet

University of Washington, College of the Built Environments,
PhD in the Built Environment Program

Telephone: 917.751.5570 E-mail*: poncelet@u.washington.edu

**Please note that we cannot ensure the confidentiality of information sent via e-mail*.

PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW
(To be read to interview participant)

The date is (today's date) and time (time interview begins).

I want to know more about your involvement with THE POINT Community Development Corporation and its ACTION program to better understand and document what compels urban ethnic youth to engage in community-based activism and how their actions in the Hunts Point neighborhood are seen and understood.

This interview will take less than one hour to complete. I will be audio-taping the interviews so that I can have an accurate record of your responses. I will transcribe the audiotape of this interview and destroy the tape within 6 months of the interview. No one else will hear or read your interview responses; only I will have access to your interview recording and responses.

Participation in this interview is voluntary. This means that if you cannot or do not want to respond to any of the following questions, you do not have to. If at any time during the interview you are uncomfortable, please let me know so we can stop the interview.

Do you have any questions or concerns about the interview?

Let us begin.

(*) indicates - Ford Foundation Report Questions
Questions marked with an asterisk (*) are pulled directly or in part from the report "*Urban Youth Programs in America: A Study of Youth, Community, and Social Justice Conducted for the Ford Foundation"* that was published by the University of Washington in 2006. THE POINT participated in the study. Please refer to Appendix B of the report for the complete interview protocol.

This page of the interview protocol will be removed and stored in a secure place in order to ensure the subject's personal information is confidential and protected.

Interviewee Demographic Data			
Name:			
DOB:		Age:	
Gender	○ Female		○ Male
Ethnicity/Race: *(according to interviewee)*			
DATA CODE:			

Interviewee DATA CODE:	

Program Involvement & Structure

1. How did you come to know about THE POINT and the ACTION Program? Please describe your involvement (your role) with THE POINT and the ACTION Program?
2. How long have you been involved with THE POINT and/or the ACTION program?

3. In your words, what is the mission of THE Point and the ACTION Program?

4. Are you familiar with the programs and activities offered by THE POINT? What can you tell me about the ACTION program?

5. Why do youth in the Hunts Point neighborhood need a program like ACTION?*

6. Who else from the community should be involved with THE POINT and the ACTION Program? Why? Explain.

7. Do you know if and how youth are involved in the governance of the ACTION program and THE POINT?*

Neighborhood Characteristics - Social and Community Conditions

8. Do you live in Hunts Point? If No, where do you live and how do you get to THE POINT?

9. Describe the Hunts Point neighborhood for me?

10. What are the physical and environmental things **you like** and **don't like** about the Hunts Point neighborhood and why? Explain/Describe.
    a. Do youth participant ever mention to, share or discuss any of these physical and environmental elements with you during the course of an ACTION program activity or in conversation with you? If so, which ones and what do they say?

11. What are the social things **you like** and **don't like** about the Hunts Point neighborhood and why? Explain/Describe.
    a. Do youth participant ever mention to, share or discuss any of these social elements with you during the course of an ACTION program activity or in conversation with you? If so, which ones and what do they say?

12. Overall, do you think the Hunts Point neighborhood is a good place to grow-up in terms of (a) safety, (b) social relationship/ social networks, (c) the physical infrastructure/ environmental conditions? Explain.
    a. Safety
    b. social relationship/ social networks
    c. the physical infrastructure/ environmental conditions

13. Do you or other members of the community discuss the neighborhood's history with ACTION participants? If, yes, how do you go about doing this and why?

Youth Characteristics

14. How would you describe young people from the Hunts Point Neighborhood?

15. How would you describe ACTION program participants? Are they different from other Hunt Point neighborhood youth? Why do you thing they are in the ACTION program?

16. What strengths and skills do youth bring to the ACTION program? (Examples if needed – leadership, commitment to help community, being creative, able to work collaboratively with peers and adults).

17. What strengths and skills do youth bring to their involvement and engagement with the community?

18. If you know of a youth involved in the ACTION program, what do you hope they gain and achieve from their participation?

Social Justice and Activism Values

19. What does Social Justice mean to you and your involvement with THE POINT? *
20. *If interviewee is not familiar with the term social justice, an alternative series of question could be - what does justice mean to you and your involvement with The Point?*
21. What does activism and youth activism mean to you?

22. What are challenges young people in the Hunts Point neighborhood face? Describe and Explain.
23. Can you describe why you think these challenges occur or what causes these challenges? Explain.

21. How does the ACTION program help youth participants understand, think about, address and solve these challenges and why? Describe activities and Explain.

22. How do ACTION program youth participants get involved in the Hunts Point neighborhood? Why is this important to the program goals and the mission of THE POINT?

23. What does the phrase "youth as agents of social change" mean to you?

3. Observation Protocol

Table Appendix Two – Observation Protocol Themes and Constructs	
Themes	**Operationalized Constructs on a Continuum (Lo-Hi)**
Critical Consciousness[1]	• ***What are youth participants talking about:*** o Comparing and exploring social settings and community conditions o voicing opinions; listening to others and engaging others; cooperating, compromising, appreciating diverse viewpoints; confronting challenges o initiating discussion, activities, projects; making decisions & taking action • ***Are youth participants engaging in reflection and dialogue:*** o Identifying and addressing stereotypes and self-blame o Identifying social and community barriers o Proposing alternatives • ***How are staff/member of the community engaging youth participants***: o encouraging, directing, initiating, and/or identifying discussion about social settings and community conditions; stereotypes; community barriers o encouraging, directing, initiating, and/or identifying youth participants to listen and speak to and with one another o encouraging, directing, initiating, and/or identifying activities, projects o making decisions and taking action; proposing alternatives o providing or directing youth to seek information about particular events or history
Local Knowledge Production	• ***What are youth participants talking about and contributing to:*** o discussing, questioning, making mention of social settings and community conditions by identifying, and discussing experiences and preferences o identifying what is important to them, saying what they notice about and experience in their neighborhood o identifying or naming places where youth turn to for expression of self (positive and negative) o identifying or naming places; seeking to redesign, revise, and implement local initiatives and policies • ***How are staff/member of the community engaging youth participants***: o encouraging, directing, initiating, and/or identifying discussion about social settings and community conditions by exploring experiences and preferences; staff relaying personal experiences o encouraging, directing, initiating, and/or identifying places of importance and actions or alternatives for these places

Table Appendix Two – Observation Protocol Themes and Constructs	
Themes	**Operationalized Constructs on a Continuum (Lo-Hi)**
	o providing or directing youth to seek information about particular events or history
Critical Civic Praxis	• ***How are staff/members of the community interacting with youth participants:*** o Using positive behavior management techniques o Encouraging the participation of all; attentively listening to and/or observing youth o Encouraging youth to share their ideas, opinions and concerns about the content of the activity and social comparison and exploration of social settings and community conditions o Communicating goals, purpose and expectations about the content of the activity o Assisting youth without taking control • ***How are staff/member of the community engaging youth participants:*** o encouraging, directing, initiating, and/or identifying discussion about social settings and community conditions; stereotypes; community barriers o encouraging, directing, initiating, and/or identifying youth participants to listen and speak to and with one another o encouraging, directing, initiating, and/or identifying activities, projects o making decisions and taking action; proposing alternatives o providing or directing youth to seek information about particular events or history o recounting/relaying personal experiences o encouraging, directing, initiating, and/or identifying places of importance and actions or alternatives for these places o employing a particular program curriculum and series of activities and exercises o identifying and demonstrating types of community engagement & collaboration strategies; encouraging youth to contribute to these strategies o involving youth in goal setting
Youth Agency	• ***Are youth taking on leadership role(s) and what do they say about leadership role(s):*** o assuming, rejecting, discussion of personal responsibility for change o Identifying problems, opportunity, stakeholders, projects and activities; engaging in decision making o Employing community engagement strategies, working in collaboration with other youth participants, staff and members of the community • ***Are youth taking action:*** o Taking personal responsibility for change o Attempting to transform place o Demonstrating success through their interactions with youth participants and staff/members of the community, reflection and dialogue; community engagement & PAR • ***How are staff/member of the community engaging youth participants:***

Table Appendix Two – Observation Protocol Themes and Constructs	
Themes	**Operationalized Constructs on a Continuum (Lo-Hi)**
	o Encouraging and/or directing youth participation o Engaging and supporting youth as decision maker and leaders in activities and projects o Encouraging and supporting how youth participants can take personal responsibility for change o encouraging and supporting youth participants to attempt to transform place

Note - The cultivation of critical consciousness is a linear progression, but rather a cyclical journey of awareness, experience, empowerment, hope, agency and action. Guishard (2009) relates described the operationalization of critical consciousness as moments of “revolutionary love”, when the scope of injustices is perceived”, and “contestation/confrontation”.

4. ACTION Program Youth Participant Free Write Journal Booklet

Youth Participant Journal Booklets

Purpose
The purpose of the ACTION Program participant journals is to gain the youth perspective on how the program training and regular program activities, as the organizational processes supporting critical civic praxis, help youth develop individual critical consciousness and contribute to local knowledge production.

Sites of Data Collection
Participants can complete the journal booklets during regular program activities or outside of regular program activities.

Materials Needed
The material necessary for the voluntary completion of the youth participant journal booklets are the booklets themselves (see below) and a sealed box for the collection of the booklets.

Advance Preparation
Consent Forms: University of Washington Human Subjects Division-approved consent forms will be distributed to ACTION Program youth participants prior to the request for voluntary journal booklet contributions.

Procedures
For youth participants – The submission of a youth participant journal booklet is completely voluntary and anonymous. Youth participants are not required to complete a journal booklet and those wishing to do so will not be asked for their names. Youth participants will have access to blank journal booklet in the ACTION Program room and during my participant observation visits.

Participants will follow the instructions and journal prompts to complete the journal booklets. The questions included in the journal booklet focus on the youth participants' experiences during regular program activities. Completed journal entries can be submitted by depositing the booklets in a sealed box. The sealed box will be available to ACTION program participants when the PI is conducting participant observation work at The POINT during regular ACTION Program activities.

For PI – The PI is responsible for collecting and analyzing the completed journal booklets. Completed journal booklets will be collected using a sealed box. The sealed box will be an opaque plastic container with a hinged top and a slit cut-out of the top. The journal entries will be photocopied for coding purposes. The journal booklets will be coded based on the themes of critical consciousness, cultivating and contributing to local knowledge production, critical civic praxis and youth agency and any additional emergent concepts.

ACTION Youth Program Participant
Journal Booklet
2009-2010

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Journal Protocol for

A Community-Based Organization in the South Bronx as a Catalysts for Activism: Observing the Dynamics of a Youth Initiated Participatory Research Project

Principal Investigator: Julie Poncelet

University of Washington, College of the Built Environments,
PhD in the Built Environment Program

Telephone: 917.751.5570 E-mail*: poncelet@u.washington.edu

**Please note that we cannot ensure the confidentiality of information sent via e-mail.*

I want to know more about your experiences with the ACTION Program.

Only youth participants whose parents/guardians have consented to your participation in this study can submit a booklet

Your participation in the research is VOLUNTARY and ANONYMOUS!
You do not have to complete a journal booklet if you do not want to.

The principal investigator is the only person who will have access and read your journals; no one else will read your journals or have access to your journals.

INSTRUCTIONS

Please follow the directions on the following page.
If you would like to submit your journal entry, please deposit the journal booklet in the plastic box labeled "JOURNALS" which I will bring with me during my visits to the ACTION Program. Additional booklets are available, so please don't hesitate ask me or please help yourself to the copies available in the ACTION Program room.

CONSENT TO USE YOUR WORDS

I may want to include excerpts of your journal – that is, portions of what you have written – in my research report and in presentations of my research.

You MUST select one of the following two options.

- I do not want excerpts, that is portions of what I have written to be used by the Principal Investigator in her written reports and oral presentations about this research.
- I will allow excepts, that is portions of what I have written to be used by the Principal Investigator in her written reports and oral presentations about this research.

DIRECTIONS

Please tell me about your ideas, thoughs, and experiences concerning your participation with the ACTION Program. You can write about anything you believe is important about what the activities and projects, the actions your have taken to complete these activities or projects, things and skills you have learned during ACTION program activities. Please tell me why these activities, actions, skills and new things are important to you.

- You can use as much or as little space as you need. If you run out of space to write, simple continue on another piece of paper and staple it to this booklet.
- Please do not refer to another person by name in your writing.

5. Key Themes Focus Group Protocols

Focus Group Protocol

Purpose

The purpose of the ACTION Program focus group protocol is to collect data pertaining to youth activism, with a particular focus on the themes of cultivating critical consciousness, cultivating and contributing to local knowledge production, critical civic praxis, and youth agency. Each focus group will target concepts central to the research goals: (1) youth participation and collaborative participatory action research, (2) critical consciousness and the development of local knowledge, (3) action/activism and social change in Hunts Point and finally, pulling it all together, (4) youth participants as agents for social change. Key concepts are divided into four separate focus groups because, on their own, the concepts are broad, but critical to understanding how youth view their political ideas and actions as agents for social change. To tackle each as an independent query, as opposed to singular concept could provide incredibly rich narratives to support or challenge dominant perceptions (scholar & advocate views) of youth as agents for social change; we, as scholars and advocates of youth activism have privileged *our* construction of this meaning.

Data Collectors

Data - that is the comments generated during the focus groups- from the focus group will be collected by the Principal Investigator (PI) and the focus group participants. The data will be collected on large sheets of paper attached to the wall. The PI and the youth participants will write down notes on these large pieces of paper.

Sites of Data Collection

The Focus Groups will take place at the site of the ACTION program in THE POINT facilities during regular program activities.

Materials Needed

Large sheets of paper and colored markers, along with regular-seize blank sheets of paper and pencils, are necessary to complete the focus group activities. A digital camera may be used to record participants performing focus group activities. A photographic release form is included with this application to the University of Washington Human Subject Division, please refer to Appendix Nine. Small adhesive, colored dots will be used by the youth participants to identify which comments (written on the large pieces of paper) are most important to them.

Advance Preparation

Consent Forms: University of Washington Human Subjects Division-approved consent forms and photographic release forms will be distributed to ACTION Program youth participants prior to any observation work. Only ACTION Program youth participants who have signed and returned the consent forms and photographic release forms will be able to participate in the focus group.

Youth participants who do not consent to participate in the research will not be able to participate in the focus group. Alternative ACTION Program activities will be made available to these participants by ACTION staff.

Training for Participants – ACTION Program participants will have received training on how to conduct a focus group in the fall 2009. The PI has previous experience in participating in and facilitating focus groups. No additional training is required.

Procedures
For youth participants - The ACTION Program youth participants will be asked to provide insight and make comments regarding the questions posed during the individual focus groups. Participants may be asked to write their comments on the large pieces of paper and to generate a discussion about key words and concepts.

For PI – The PI will schedule the focus group with the ACTION Program staff and participants prior to arriving on site. The PI will ask the youth participants to help set-up the room for the focus group to ensure that the room is set-up to meet the needs to the participants. The PI will initiate the focus group by following/reading the focus group protocol detailed on the following pages.

After the focus group, the PI will remain on site to address any questions or concerns youth participants may have regarding the focus group. This time will also be used to write down thoughts and notes regarding the activities. The focus group notes (on the large pieces of paper) will be transcribed and coded; the location and number of dots will be calculated. Focus group notes and the PI's post-focus group notes will be transcribed so that a digital copy is available. All personal identifiers will be removed. The focus group notes can then be coded based on the themes of critical consciousness, cultivating and contributing to local knowledge production, critical civic praxis and youth agency and any additional emergent concepts.

Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group Date and Time	
Focus Group Location	
Focus Group Theme	
Summary of Focus Group Theme: (brief description)	

Total Participants	
Total # Girls	
Total # Boys	

Were photographs of this activity taken?			
	Yes		**No**

Total number of large comment sheets	
Transcribed on:	
Additional Notes or Comments:	

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Focus Group Protocol for

A Community-Based Organization in the South Bronx as a Catalysts for Activism: Observing the Dynamics of a Youth Initiated Participatory Research Project

Principal Investigator: Julie Poncelet

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PhD in the Built Environment Program

Telephone: 917.751.5570 E-mail*: poncelet@u.washington.edu

**Please note that we cannot ensure the confidentiality of information sent via e-mail*.

PURPOSE OF THE FOCUS GROUP
(To be read to focus group participants)

I want to know more about your involvement with THE POINT Community Development Corporation's ACTION program to better understand and document what motivates you to engage in community-based activism and how you see and understand your actions in the Hunts Point neighborhood. Participation in this focus group is voluntary. This means that if you cannot or do not want to respond to any of the following questions, you do not have to.

I will type out the notes we generate today during our focus group and will provide you with a copy of the write-up at our next focus group. I will not make reference to you by name in the write-up.

The focus group will be about your thoughts, ideas and experiences with:

_____

(*The PI will select one theme in chronological order – meaning, focus group one will be about item 1 on the list, while the fourth and final focus group will be about item 4.*)

1. youth participation and collaborative participatory action research,
2. critical consciousness and the development of local knowledge
3. action/activism and social change in Hunts Point
4. youth participants as agents for social change

The focus group will take about one to two hours to complete. I will initiate the focus group, but the responsibility of facilitating the group will be shared by all the participants, including myself.

Step One – Rules of Engagement/ The rules of the focus group

For the first focus group *only:*

We will begin the focus group by establishing some ground rules regarding our conduct and cooperation during the focus group. We want to ensure that everyone is comfortable expressing themselves and that no one feels hurt or embarrassed about contributing to the conversation.

What do you think should be included in the rules?

The PI will write down what the participants say. If no one speaks, the PI will make a few initial suggestions such as no one speaks while someone has the floor, no laughing at or making inappropriate (negative) remarks about a person's contribution to the discussion, no use of cell phones during the focus group.

Once there is a list, the PI will ask if participants agree with the list of rules and if they agree to follow the list of rules.

For *subsequent* focus groups:

The PI will bring out and attach the rules that were written down during the first focus group. These must always be present during the focus group as they are a collective agreement between participants of how to engage, contribute and behave during a focus group. New participants will be asked to review and agree to the list; additions can be made as long as they are agreed upon by the group.

Step Two – Introducing the theme of the focus group

The theme of today's focus group is:

(*The PI will select one theme in chronological order as before. The PI will distribute a blank sheet of paper and a pencil to all participants. The PI will affix the large sheets of paper to the wall for everyone to see and have access to. The PI will label each sheet with the key words highlighted below. This last task can be done when the participants are written down their ideas – refer below.)*

1. youth participation and collaborative participatory action research OR
2. critical consciousness and the development of local knowledge OR
3. action/activism and social change in Hunts Point OR
4. youth participants as agents for social change

What do the following words (PI refers to list below – words that are highlighted) mean or represent to you? What comes to mind? Take about 5 to 10 minutes to write down everything that comes to mind.

(The PI will ask participants to write down their answers on a piece of paper.)

1. youth participation and collaborative participatory action research – focus on these key words youth, youth participant, participation, action research OR
2. critical consciousness and the development of local knowledge – focus on these key words critical consciousness, knowledge, local knowledge OR
3. action/activism and social change in Hunts Point – focus on these key words action, activism, social change
4. youth participants as agents for social change – focus on these key words youth participant, agency and agents, social change

What did you come up with?

(The PI will ask participants to list off what they have written down on their sheet of paper. The PI or the youth participant will write these items on a large piece of paper affixed to the wall and labeled with the individual key words. If participants repeat items, the PI will make a note (a line) for each time the item is repeated.)

Step Three – Focus group theme in ACTION

Do these key words relate to your experiences with (see below)? If you think there is a relationship between these key words and your experiences describe how and why do you think that is?

- With the ACTION Program?
- With your ACTION program community project?
- In the Hunts Point Neighborhood?

In thinking about these experiences, can you identify obstacles and/or opportunities?

Would you like to see these things change? Why and Why not?

(The PI AND youth participants together will write as many of the participants' comments down on large pieces of paper affixed to the wall).

Step Four – Concluding focus group

I have some dots I'd like you to use to identify the comments, definitions and themes that were most important to you. You should have 5 green dots, 5 red dots, and 5 blue dots. You will

place the dots next to the comments/notes. The green dots are for comments, definitions and themes which you feel are positive and the red dots are for comments, definitions and themes which you feel are negative. By positive, I mean that these represent feelings and experiences which contribute to your experiences with (refer to the focus group's themes – see below) and by negative I mean that they represent feelings and experiences which hold you back (from our theme – see below). The blue dots are for things you want to change, things you want to take action against.

Any questions?

1. youth participation and collaborative participatory action research – focus on these key words youth, youth participant, participation, action research OR
2. critical consciousness and the development of local knowledge – focus on these key words critical consciousness, knowledge, local knowledge OR
3. action/activism and social change in Hunts Point – focus on these key words action, activism, social change
4. youth participants as agents for social change – focus on these key words youth participant, agency and agents, social change

(the PI will distribute the sheets of dots to each participant. When all the dots have been placed, the PI will quickly go over the top three for each dot color.)

Thank you for your participation today!

If you have any questions about the focus group please don't hesitate to let me know.

6.Collaborative Data Analysis Focus Group Protocol

Collaborative Data Analysis Focus Group Protocol

Purpose

The purpose of the collaborative data analysis focus group protocol is to involve youth in collaborative data analysis, to provide youth participants with an opportunity to review an aggregate analysis of the research and ensure that their perspectives are reflected in the data. Collaborative data analysis is an essential component of critical ethnographic practice that contributes to the continued evolution of the researcher's and research participant's critical consciousness and to the rigger of critical civic praxis.

Data Collectors

Data - that is the comments generated during the focus groups- will be collected by the principal investigator (PI) and the focus group participant. The data will be collected on large sheets of paper attached to the wall. The PI and the youth participants will write down notes on these large pieces of paper.

Sites of Data Collection

The Focus Groups will take place at the site of the ACTION program in THE POINT facilities during regular program activities.

Materials Needed

Large sheets of paper and colored markers, along with small adhesive, colored dots are necessary to carry out the focus group activities. Aggregate data will be printed on large sheets of paper to be affixed to a wall. Additional large sheets of paper will be provided for recording comments and notes. A digital camera may be used to record participants performing focus group activities. A photographic release form is included with this application to the University of Washington Human Subject Division, please refer to Appendix Nine.

Advance Preparation

Consent Forms: University of Washington Human Subjects Division-approved consent forms and photographic release forms will be distributed to ACTION Program youth participants prior to any focus group activities. Only ACTION Program youth participants who have signed and returned the consent forms and photographic release forms will be able to participate in the focus group.

Youth participants who do not consent to participate in the research will not be able to participate in the focus group. Alternative ACTION Program activities will be made available to these participants by ACTION staff.

Training for Participants – ACTION Program participants will have received training on how to conduct a focus group in the fall 2009. The PI has previous experience in participating in and facilitating focus groups. No additional training is required.

Procedures

For youth participants - The ACTION Program youth participants will be asked to review and make comments on the aggregate data provided by the PI. The aggregate data will be organized according the study's themes along with any themes that emerged during the research. Participants may be asked to write their comments on the large pieces of paper affixed to the wall and to generate a discussion about the aggregate data.

For PI – The PI will schedule the focus group with the ACTION Program staff and participants prior to arriving on site. The PI will ask the youth participants to help set-up the room for the focus group to ensure that the room is set-up to meet the needs to the participants. The PI will initiate the focus group by following/reading the focus group protocol detailed on the following pages.

After the focus group, the PI will remain on site to address any questions or concerns youth participants may have regarding the focus group. This time will also be used to write down thoughts and notes regarding the activities. The focus group notes (on the large pieces of paper) will be transcribed and coded; the location and number of dots will be calculated. Focus group notes and the PI's post-focus group notes will be transcribed so that a digital copy is available. All personal identifiers will be removed. The focus group notes can then be coded based on the themes of critical consciousness, cultivating and contributing to local knowledge production, critical civic praxis and youth agency and any additional emergent concepts.

Collaborative Data Analysis Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group Date and Time	
Focus Group Location	
Focus Group Theme	
Summary of Focus Group Theme: (brief description)	

Total Participants	#
Total # Girls	
Total # Boys	

Were photographs of this activity taken?			
	Yes		**No**

Total number of large comment sheets	

Transcribed on:

Additional Notes or Comments:

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Collaborative Data Analysis Focus Group Protocol for

A Community-Based Organization in the South Bronx as a Catalysts for Activism: Observing the Dynamics of a Youth Initiated Participatory Research Project

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**Please note that we cannot ensure the confidentiality of information sent via e-mail*.

PURPOSE OF THE FOCUS GROUP
(To be read to focus group participants)

For the past several months, I have been researching your involvement with THE POINT Community Development Corporation's ACTION program to better understand and document what motivates you to engage in community-based activism and how you see and understand your actions in the Hunts Point neighborhood. I have

performed a preliminary analysis on the data and have summarized the data for your review. I would like you to comment on the data I have summarized to get your perspective.

Participation in this focus group is voluntary. This means that if you cannot or do not want to respond to any of the following questions, you do not have to.

Though I will type out the notes we generate from today's focus group, I will not make reference to you by name.

The focus group is an opportunity to get your comments, review and feedback about the data that has been generated by my interviews with you, your journal booklets, my observations and the focus groups on the research's key themes. If you recall, the key themes are:

5. youth participation and collaborative participatory action research,
6. critical consciousness and the development of local knowledge
7. action/activism and social change in Hunts Point
8. youth participants as agents for social change

The focus group will take about two hours to complete. I will initiate the focus group, but the responsibility of facilitating the group will be shared by all the participants, including myself.

Step One – Rules of Engagement/ The rules of the focus group

The PI will bring out and attach the rules that were written down during the original series of focus groups. These must always be present during the focus group as they are a collective agreement between participants of how to engage, contribute and behave during a focus group. New participants will be asked to review and agree to the list; additions can be made as long as they are agreed upon by the group.

Step Two – Introducing the summarized data to the participants

The PI will distribute the aggregate data packets to each participant. These packets consist of the aggregate data as shown on the large print outs, but on regular size paper. The PI will refer to the large print outs labeled according to the key themes mentioned above and any additional emergent themes. The PI will read the summarized data to the focus group participants. The data being presented is aggregate data, therefore there will be no mention of personal identifiers such as names, gender or role and there will be no direct quotes pulled from interviews or participant journal booklets. All the data will be in aggregate, summary form.

Do you understand the information that I have just presented to you? Would you like me to clarify any of the data for you?

Starting with our first sheet of aggregate data, what are your first thoughts? Do you have any concerns about what you see?

Do you believe that this summary begins to represent your experiences, thoughts and ideas about the ACTION program and the activities you have undertaken?

The PI and the participants will write down comments and notes directly on the large data print outs and on additional large sheets as necessary; please use one color of marker. Once the group has finished talking about one sheet, they will proceed to the next sheet until all the sheets have been discussed and the notes/comments have been recorded on the larger pieces of paper affixed to the wall.

Review the comments we have just made regarding the summary data. Is there anything you would like to add, something you believe is missing and should be added or perhaps something that needs to be further clarified?

The PI and the participants will write down comments and notes directly on the large data print outs and on additional large sheets as necessary; please use a different color market to differentiate between the first analysis and the second analysis. Once the group has finished talking about one sheet, they will proceed to the next sheet until all the sheets have been discussed and the notes/comments have been recorded on the larger pieces of paper affixed to the wall.

What does this data mean to you now, today? How does it effect, if at all, how you see and understand your actions as:

1. an ACTION Program Participant
2. As a resident of the Hunts Point Neighborhood
3. As a young person
4. As an activist

The PI and the participants will write down comments and notes directly on large sheets of paper affixed to the wall, different from the ones used in the previous two analyses; please use a different color market to differentiate between the first two series of analysis/feedback .

Step Four – Concluding focus group

I have some dots I'd like you to use to identify what is most important to you about today's discussion. Unlike our previous sessions, you will only have 5 dots to place next to the items that are most important to you so please take your time.

(the PI will distribute the sheets of dots to each participant)

Thank you for your participation today!

If you have any questions about the focus group please don't hesitate to let me know.