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# Factors that Promote Engagement in a Youth Violence Prevention Program

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Factors that Promote Engagement in a Youth Violence Prevention Program

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Abstract

Youth in Hartford, CT are exposed to violence in their community at a disproportionately higher rate than youth residing in suburban and rural communities throughout the state. Within Connecticut, Hartford has a rating of five on the crime scale (100 meaning the safest) compared to West Hartford, which is rated as 32, and Wethersfield, rated 54. Numerous school- and community-based programs have been established to confront this epidemic; however, less is known about the specific components of these programs that maximize youth attendance and engagement. Youth violence prevention programs are most successful when participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences and vocalizing their emotions, so it is important to understand the dynamics of the program that might help youth to feel more or less comfortable participating in the program. My study sought to understand the factors that affect youth participation in a Hartford-based youth violence prevention program. Specifically, I conducted a focus group with seven Peacebuilder facilitators in Hartford, Connecticut, in the spring of 2016 in order to understand their perspectives about which topics were most engaging to youth and which modes of delivering the intervention seemed to be most effective. My findings suggest that factors such as mentor credibility and flexibility in implementing the curriculum are among the key factors that contribute to the success of engaging youth in this program.

Factors that Promote Engagement in a Youth Violence Prevention Program

According to national statistics, an estimated 199,000 youth murders occurred globally in 2000 as a result of violence (World Health Organization, 2002). Moreover, there is a higher rate of youth killed in the United States from homicides than cancer, heart disease, birth defects, flu, pneumonia, and other life threatening illnesses combined (Bushman, Calvert, Downey, Dredze, Gottfredson, Jablonski, Masten, Morrill, Neill, Newman, Romer & Webster, 2016; David-Ferdon & Simon, 2014).  Hartford, Connecticut alone was named the twenty-fourth most dangerous city in America in 2012 with 18 murders, 22 forcible rapes, and 511 robberies per 100,000 (FBI, 2012). In an attempt to curb this epidemic, youth violence prevention programs have been put in place across the country, in schools and communities. However, not all programs are implemented as intended, and numerous studies have shown that quality of implementation can affect a program's ability to achieve desired outcomes (Kloos, Hill, Thomas, Wandersman, Elias & Dalton, 2012). Moreover, research investigating the levels of fidelity in one domain of prevention, drug abuse prevention, has shown that under real world circumstances, there was a noticeable lack of program fidelity, which refers to the level in which the program was delivered as intended (Dusenbury, Falco, Lakem, Brannigan & Bosworth, 2003).  Despite receiving training, teachers who carry out prevention programming often do not implement programs with complete fidelity. Programs may start off with a high level of fidelity regarding implementation, but may digress in dosage on account of the teachers' thoughts of how successful or unsuccessful the implementation has been thus far (Dusenbury et al., 2003). Consequently, over time, the curriculum of the prevention is cut back gradually due to facilitators' inability to adapt to the program regimen and structure (Kloos et al., 2012). This often leads to failure of implementation and failure of the overall program.

In light of the compelling research showing the importance of sound implementation in ensuring prevention program success, in the current study, I will examine factors that may affect the implementation of a life skills curriculum as part of a youth violence prevention program in Hartford, Connecticut. Specifically, by gathering opinions of both facilitators and youth participants in the program, I will attempt to identify common themes in the facilitators' and participants' responses regarding factors that affect the implementation of the curriculum; specifically, the levels of participation and engagement of the youth participants.

**Theory of Youth Violence**

*Social Learning Theory.* Social learning theory states that human behavior is determined by three different influences: cognitive, environmental, and behavioral (Kloos et al., 2012). Being a model with such broad boundaries, it has been applied to explain a wide range of behaviors, including the causes of youth violence (Kloos et al., 2012). Hahn, Fuqua-Whitley, Wethington, Lowy, Crosby, Fullilove, Johnson, Liberman, Moscicki, Price, Snyder, Tuma, Cory, Stone, Mukhopadhaya, Chattopadhyay and Dahlberg (2007) describe many of the environmental and behavioral risk factors observed more frequently to occur in youth violence. Low socioeconomic status, lack of parental supervision and discipline, as well as negative peer influences are among those identified by Hahn (2007).

Using the Akers' variant of social learning theory, researcher L. Thomas Winfree Jr. and his colleagues (1994) set out to further understand how certain behaviors and attitudes lead to more or less gang involvement. The Akers' variant of social learning theory relies heavily on the belief that behavior is learned through reinforcements and punishments (Winfree, Bächström & Mays, 1994). If an action is reinforced, the individual will likely engage in that behavior again. Winfree et al. (1994) looked at three different social learning measures in regards to youth gang

involvement, namely: differential associations, differential reinforcements, and differential definitions. First, "differential associations" is defined as deviant behavior that is learned through the interaction with others (Church, Wharton & Taylor, 2009). Specifically, peer influence was seen as the most common indicator of differential associations.  Participants of the study were asked how many of their best friends were gang members, as a means of measuring differential associations. The second part of differential associations was how the youth perceived their significant others, and/or parents. According to the Akers' model, a youth's significant other and parents have the ability to shape a youth's behavior (Winfree et al., 1994). Significant others and parents set the environments and models that youth enact, meaning youth mimic the action and behaviors that they see their significant others and parents engaging in. Youth take into account the actions of those they look up to and mimic the viewed behaviors because they see a superior figure doing the same. If youth see a behavior being reinforced in the environment by someone whom they know and trust, that behavior will likely be acquired and repeated by the youth who witnessed it.

The second dimension of social learning is "differential reinforcements" which can be defined as the reactions that stem from a certain behavior or action carried out by other person, that either prompts an individual to repeat that behavior or stop it (Winfree et al., 1994). Reinforcement is either positive or negative and can be social or nonsocial. Social reinforcements are actions that surround us each day. These can range from a smile, to acceptance from peers, or attention from others. Nonsocial reinforcements refer to the positive of negative emotions of an individual during, or after engaging in a certain activity. For example, if an individual engages in a fist fight and finds it rewarding, he/she will be more likely to engage in that activity again.

Lastly is "differential definitions". This describes how an individual considers behaviors as either good or bad through the interactions with others around them (Winfree et al., 1994). Youth are more likely to adapt behaviors that are more favorable by their peers and those they trust. If deviant behavior is favored by gang members, youth who are exposed to it are likely to adapt to those deviant behaviors as well (Winfree et al., 1994).  Findings for this were based off a study done by Winfree and colleagues (1994). A group of 9th grade males and females at a public school in a southwestern state were asked to what extent they approve or disapprove of certain gang related activities (Winfree et al., 1994). Researchers scored each participants' reaction as disapproving, neither approving nor disapproving, or approving, towards the following statements: (1) having friends in gangs, (2) being in a gang yourself, (3) taking part in illegal gang activities such as fights, and (4) doing whatever the gang leaders tell you to do (Winfree et al., 1994). The more frequent a participant answered "approving", the higher the score. The higher the score, the more positively the participant viewed gang-related activity. The results from this questionnaire showed an overall high level of pro-gang attitude, meaning a significant amount of participants responded more "approving" of certain gang-related activities, than "disapproving" (Winfree et al., 1994).

Ultimately, the results of the latter study and others done during the experiment determined that 9th-grade students who were involved in gang membership were able to be identified and understood through the above said variables of Akers' variant of social learning theory. This study allows us to theoretically understand gang involvement and violence. It also raises the concern regarding the challenges of preventing youth violence given the multiple influences in its development. If these challenges are identified, it may allow researchers to target the main sources of youth violence. If these sources can be identified, it may allow

researchers to conduct interventions that are tailored towards the specific needs of a population. But this also raises the concern regarding program implementation. If there are multiple sources of influence that have an impact on youth violence, then those sources must be targeted by the program in order for implementation to be successful. Because there are different influences on youth violence, it is crucial that researchers know the specific sources, as well as the population they are working with, that need to be targeted within each different violence prevention program. If they are not, program fidelity may be compromised.

**Implementation Challenges**

The literature has outlined some common themes researchers and practitioners face when implementing a new prevention program. Even the most successful prevention programs experienced hurdles and obstacles during their implementation process. In a study that looked at the results of four-hundred eighty-three studies, included in five meta-analyses of prevention programs ranging from drug prevention to youth violence prevention, it was shown that sound implementation of a program was the most important variable that affected program outcomes (Durlak & DuPre, 2008).  Implementation can be defined as "what a program consists of when it is delivered in a particular setting" (Durlak & DuPre, 2008, p. 329). When implementing an intervention program, leaders must be aware of the external factors that can affect the implementation process, such as cultural diversity, and geographical make-up, and how these variables affect relationships and participation among the participants and facilitators of the program.

These "implementation challenges" are extensive in number, but some are more common than others when reviewing the literature on youth violence prevention programs. Similarly, in a study comparing fifty-nine intervention programs, seventy-six percent showed a significant

positive relationship between the level of program implementation and half of all program outcomes (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). This finding emphasizes the importance of implementation in any intervention. It is important we identify the challenges that are faced during the implementation process so that we can determine ways to diminish or lessen them.

One of the prominent obstacles seen in much of the literature on violence prevention is the varying levels of fidelity. In a study by Orpinas, Kelder, Frankowski, Murray, Zhang and Mcalister (2000), fidelity varied among schools and teachers, which led to a nonsignificant difference between the schools that were to implement either the intervention or control curriculum. There are many layers that contribute to the fidelity of a program. Therefore, each program has to be implemented differently in order to succeed. This can be clearly seen in Leff, Thomas, Vaughn, Thomas, MacEvoy, Freedman, Abdul-Kabir, Woodlock, Guerra, Bradshaw, Woodburn, Myers & Fein's (2010) PARTNERS youth violence prevention program. The collaboration between the teachers, community members, and participants of the program engaged everyone affected by the intervention. Everyone's opinions were heard, and considered, which allowed for the program to adopt to the individual needs of the community. Therefore, the program was implemented with high levels of fidelity because many of the potential obstacles (participant and community "buy-in", positive relationships, etc.) were all carefully considered during the beginning processes of the intervention.

**Factors that Affect Program Implementation**

**Sufficient dosage.** Research has shown that sufficient dosage can have several consequential effects on program implementation and can impact a youth's ability to receive the appointed amount of intervention needed for it to be successful. Sufficient dosage is defined as the amount of intervention participants need to be exposed to in order to receive the desired

effects of the program (Nation, Crusto, Wandersman, Kumpfer, Seybolt, Morrissey-Kane & Davino, 2003). It can be measured in hours of contact, length and frequency of sessions, and duration of the intervention program (Nation et al., 2003). Although there is a lack of empirical research covering science-based prevention programs regarding the effects of sufficient dosage on youth violence prevention programs, the amount of time an individual is exposed to an intervention can have a large impact on his/her future behavior. Therefore, the assessment of dosage should be a component of any program evaluation.

Knowing the number of sessions a participant attends, however, still may not be sufficient. If youth are not fully engaged in a prevention program, they may not retain the information that is being presented. This can make it difficult to measure the effects of sufficient dosage. A youth's engagement and attention towards a program is not the only principle that can alter results. If a program does not fully adapt an intervention, that is, if the program does not carry out the appointed sessions or dosage that is needed to have a successful intervention, results may be jeopardized (Nation et al., 2003). Based on this assumption, it may be difficult for researchers to determine if a youth's reaction to an intervention was based on (1) their level of disengagement with the program or, (2) their inability to get a sufficient number of program sessions.

One example that illustrates the importance of dose and adaptability is a study by Orpinas. Alongside her colleagues, Orpinas implemented a multi-component violence prevention program in which eight middle schools were chosen (2000). All schools consisted of sixth, seventh, and eighth graders and were a part of a large, urban school district in Texas (Orpinas et al., 2000). Two-thirds of the participants were Hispanic. Drop out rates in the eight schools were relatively high, ranging from thirty-five to eighty percent (Orpinas et al., 2000). The eight

schools were divided into matched pairs, with one of each pair was assigned to the control

intervention and the other to the experimental intervention. Four were selected to implement the

multi-component prevention program and four conducted the state appointed violence prevention

program, which acted as the control condition. The multi-component intervention was based on

four components: modification of the school environment, a violence-prevention curriculum,

peer leadership, and parent education (Orpinas et al., 2000).

Results showed that two of the four schools in the experimental group fully accepted and

implemented the program suggested by Orpinas and her colleagues (2000), while the other two

schools adopted the intervention when it was convenient for teachers and administrators. For

example, the intervention content would be taught between classes when there was spare time or

cut short due to original curriculum plans. These schools were categorized as "low

implementation". In the experimental schools with low implementation, fewer teachers were

trained in the lessons that were to be taught to the students compared to the amount of teachers

trained in the highly implemented schools (Orpinas et al., 2000). Similarly, this was seen in the

control schools, with two schools adopting the state-appointed intervention fully, and two

implementing it when it was convenient. School administrators from the two control schools that

did not implement the intervention believed teachers were teaching their own intervention plans

so as to fit more comfortably into their schedule and not interrupt their everyday lesson plans

(Orpinas et al., 2000).

No statistically significant results were found between the control and experimental

intervention programs due to the inability to implement the programs in the way they were

intended. One explanation for this refers to the fidelity of intervention implementation.  In two of

the four schools that adopted the intervention, teachers, staff, and students were well trained, and

students participated in programs that promoted peace and mediation (Orpinas et al., 2000). In the other two schools, the level of implementation of the intervention was much less than the other two previously mentioned, possibly due to the inability to adapt to an intervention of this size.  This lack of consistency among the both intervention groups may have led researchers to conclude a lack of significant difference between the control state-appointed intervention and the experimental intervention.

**Participant "buy-in".** Another factor thought to affect program success is the extent to which those involved in the appointed population agree with the intervention being introduced into their community and their willingness to support it. "Buy-in" refers to the level in which community members, whether it be a community-based prevention program, or teachers and administrators, if it is a school-based prevention program, are accepting and on board with implementing a certain program or intervention. The schools in which the prevention programs were not fully adopted in the aforementioned Orpinas et al. study may have been caused by the lack of preparedness or agreement with the intervention that was put forth (2000). The level of buy-in and commitment for implementation can affect the success of the program. Without a strong commitment from the figures who are implementing these programs, exposure to the intervention will vary among the participants that are exposed to it and sufficient dosage may be compromised. Research published by the U.S. Department of Justice suggests having a strong leader is one of the key factors associated with participant buy-in. Specifically, these individuals take charge of planning the implementation, hold meetings with all members of the program, and inform all parties regarding implementation strategies, all the while working to gain support from all levels of the target population (Mihalic, Irwin, Elliott, Fagan & Hansen, 2001). Nonetheless, we might still expect some variation with respect to program leadership; some individuals may

take their role as a program leader much more seriously than the leader at another prevention program. For example, one leader may train their staff until they are up to a certain standard, while another leader may allow their staff to train themselves. This is similar with the participants. Some participants at one program may be fully invested in the intervention, while some are not, which could result in a less successful implementation. In summary, participant buy-in may be traced back directly to the skill of the program's leader in getting various parties associated with the prevention program interested and invested in its implementation.

One program abroad illustrates the importance of participant buy-in and leadership in effective program implementation. Following the suicides of three young boys as a result of bullying in Norway in 1983, the Norwegian Ministry of Education established an anti-bullying campaign to tackle the issue of bullying in schools (Kloos et al., 2012). What emerged from it was the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. Because the prevalence of bullying varied from school to school, surveys were administered to identify the prevalence of bullying in each school. Conferences were held with parents, teachers, and school officials to determine how to use the given responses to implement a program. Common with many school-based prevention programs, there was flexibility in how the program was implemented; specifically, there were core components of the program, but also aspects of the program that could be adapted to meet local needs.

The first round of findings from the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program found differing levels of bullying declension, some evaluations stating as much as a fifty percent decrease in bullying, while others showed a twenty-three to thirty-eight percent decrease (Kloos et al., 2012). Evaluation of schools implementing the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program looked at the rates of observed bullying, rates of bullying being reported, and to what extent the school

implemented the core components of the program (Kloos et al., 2012). Researchers found that

after a four-year period, only a select few schools from the population involved fully

implemented the program with high levels of fidelity, which led to a direct impact on the

outcome of the program. The presence of strong leaders and staff was the main factor that

promised fidelity (Kloos et al., 2012). Schools that were not able to fully adapt and implement

the program were described as having numerous changes in staff and key personnel, leading to

varying levels of program adoption.

It is crucial that commitment and strong support for a program and how it is going to be

implemented is fostered early in the process of implementation (Mihalic et al., 2001).

Conversation and engagement among leaders of the program can flourish from this initial step,

so if a key leader has to dismiss themselves from the program, there are other well-trained and

committed applicants.

**Sociocultural relevance and shared decision-making.** According to Nation and

colleagues (2003), sociocultural relevance can be defined as a program's adaptation to a

community's cultural norms and the participants who are involved. Nation et al. (2003) also note

that programs should take into account the thoughts and ideas of the target population when

planning and implementing intervention programs. This is not achieved by simply adapting or

using the language of the target community. Rather, intervention programs must benefit each

individual participant by targeting their specific needs, which may include adapting to factors

such as ethnicity, race, socioeconomic class, age, and generational differences. It is important

that researchers know when working with community organizations or partners, that the

community organization or partners are equal partners in the process of implementing a violence

prevention program. There should be open discussion and exchange of ideas on the side of both

the researcher(s) and the community partner. That is, sole responsibility in implementing an intervention should not be placed on one party, but should be a joint effort.

Leff and colleagues (2010) provided an empirical example of the importance of both sociocultural relevance and shared decision-making. Specifically, they used community-based participatory research to develop the PARTNERS youth violence prevention program. The goal was to develop an after-school violence prevention program in Philadelphia that would provide an alternative to problematic behaviors, such as physical youth violence, gang involvement, etc., which is more likely to occur when youth are unsupervised after school. In addition to conducting literature reviews, Leff and his colleagues (2010) held focus groups that included members of the community, parents, community leaders, and local service providers in order to determine the needs of the community, as well as the challenges they were currently facing. Pilot testing was also conducted with the youth before a permanent program was put in place. Two groups of youth who were involved with the after-school football program were observed by two PARTNERS facilitators and one community staff facilitator for the purpose of better understanding the program participants (Leff et al., 2010). Surveys assessing how the youth liked the sessions were conducted and collected from thirty African American boys, ages nine to fifteen, after the intervention (Leff et al., 2010). The surveys revealed that the activities performed to improve and teach skills were seen as most engaging and helpful to the youth (Leff et al., 2010).

The final product that was implemented by Leff and his colleagues (2010) was largely based off the input of members in the community and the participants in the program. The focus groups that were held with community members helped researchers to understand the strengths and weaknesses the community faced in regards to youth violence. Researchers sought to

understand what community members felt was needed in their neighborhood to promote a safe

neighborhood (Leff et al., 2010). The importance of community involvement in prevention

programs is crucial to make certain it is addressing the needs of the participants, not solely what

the investigators want to research. It also allows for a continued relationship between researcher

and community members that is based on the foundation of trust.

Similarly, research has shown that shared decision-making among researchers,

community members, administrators, and participants leads to better implementation and

increased sustainability (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). Allowing community members and participants

to be involved in the implementation and planning process gives them a sense of control over the

process. In the study by Leff and colleagues (2010), input from the community allowed them to

feel like they had control of what the intervention program was going to focus around. In any

community where youth violence is an issue, inhabitants likely can provide the most direct

insight into the challenges and strengths of that neighborhood. The relationship between

researcher and community can play a large role in the effectiveness of implementing an

intervention program. If community members believe their voices are being heard and are being

taken into account during the planning stages of the intervention, it is more likely that they will

engage and adopt the program.  If previously skeptical of the intervention or outsider researchers

coming into a community, members and participants are able to feel like they have control over

what happens in the process. If community members are supportive of the program, it will

ultimately increase the level of participation and acceptance within the community, which is an

important principle in order for a prevention program to be effective (Durlak & DuPre, 2008).

**Positive relationships.** Defined as "exposure to adults and peers in a way that creates

positive development and outcomes of a program", positive relationships are another key factor

in effective youth violence prevention programs (Nation et al., 2003, p. 452). Mentors and adults who establish positive relationships with youth in prevention programs create a sense of trust and belonging within the program. If youth are familiar and comfortable with the adult, they are more likely to engage in the program and internalize the content in the curriculum. Similarly, positive relationships among program participants also are critical for the intervention to be effective.

A study by Downey, Lebolt, Rincón and Freitas (1998) illustrated how the individual difference variable of rejection sensitivity might affect a youth's ability to participate constructively in a group. Specifically, children who were determined as being "high in angry expectations of rejection" were tested against children "low in angry expectations of rejection" to investigate the difference levels of distress after the child was rejected by a peer or friend (p.1082). Participants of the study ($n$=76) were selected from a public elementary school (fifth graders) and junior high school (sixth and seventh graders). The schools in the study were located in an economically disadvantaged inner-city neighborhood. Sixty-two percent of the participants were Hispanic, twenty-eight percent were African American, and the remaining identified as Asian or European American (Downey et al., 1998). Participants high in rejection expectation and those low in rejection participation were randomly assigned to the experimental or control groups. There were no significant differences in age, gender, race or rejection expectations between the experimental and control groups.

All participants completed a self-report distress measure pre- and post-experimental manipulation. For both groups of participants (experimental and control), the participant was brought into a room by an examiner to be interviewed. After the participant had been in the room for a few minutes, the examiner told him/her that the interview would benefit from having one of

the his/her friends in the room with him/her. The examiner then followed by asking the

participant to choose a classmate he/she wanted in the room with them for the duration of the

interview. At this time, an assistant entered the room and was asked by the examiner to find the

chosen friend and bring him/her to the interview room. When the assistant left the room, the pre-

experimental manipulation distress measure was completed by the youth participant. When the

assistant returned without the participant's chosen friend, those in the experimental group were

told by the assistant that the friend did not want to come to the interview, while those in the

control group were told by the assistant that the teacher said their friend could not come to the

interview at the moment. After the assistant delivered the news to the participant, he/she left the

room and a second distress measure was completed by the participant. Results from this study

found that, as expected, children who were high in rejection expectations showed the highest

levels of distress when they were exposed to the experimental condition. Children low in

rejection expectations who were exposed to the same condition resembled findings of those in

the control group.

  These findings suggest it is important to note that rejection sensitivity can affect

participants of an intervention program in many ways.  Social rejection in youth, as seen in the

study by Downey and colleagues, can have a prominent effect on aggression and violence levels

later in life. Lier, Vitaro, and Eisner (2007) explain the possible outcomes when children are

placed in an environment with others that inflict aggressive behaviors. The role this plays in the

classroom can have an immense impact on intervention outcomes. Youth who are rejected or

victimized by peers more often internalize behavioral problems early on, which could cause

violent behaviors later in life (Lier et al., 2007). Youth who internalize behaviors, or who are

disengaged, tend to withdraw from uncomfortable situations rather than voice their opinion

(McKee, Colletti, Rakow, Jones & Forehand, 2008). This puts youth at risk later in life for

developing symptoms related to depression and other disorders (McKee et al., 2008).  Youth

who are put in a classroom with peers that enact negative or nervous behaviors, such as

comments towards peers that inflict a sense of discomfort or threat, may play a role in the youth's

levels of engagement. If youth are not comfortable in the same room with one another due to

varying reasons, youth will likely not speak out during the program in fear of negative

consequences from the individual he/she fears. The relationships among the participants in the

program have the ability to steer the program's level of success.

Relationships among participants in the program are not the only factors affecting

successful program outcomes and implementation. A positive relationship between participants

and facilitators, as well as facilitator to facilitator relationships, are just as important for a

prevention program to promote positive growth. The presence of a program leader, or

"champion" has been shown to have positive effects on program implementation, but only if the

leader is well respected and looked upon favorably by their colleagues (Durlak & DuPre, 2008).

This positive relationship promotes and encourages innovation within the program (Durlak &

DuPre, 2008). If there is a deficit in the relationship between facilitators, program

implementation may be negatively affected and high fidelity may be jeopardized due to tensions

stemming with the administration. This can lead to a gap in communication between facilitators

and participants, which is a crucial aspect of a positive relationship.

Anda (2001) provided a detailed description of project "R.E.S.C.U.E." (Reaching Each

Student's Capacity Utilizing Education), a mentoring program that was implemented at an at-risk

high school in a low income urban city where there was a high level of violent crime. Youth who

participated in the program were high school students; nine identified as African American, eight

as Latino, and one as biethnic (African American and Latino) (Anda, 2001). The mentors in the

program were firefighters in the city where the school was located. The two firefighters who

conducted both pre and post intervention interviews identified themselves as a Latino male and

an African American female, both in their early forties (Anda, 2001). The two firefighters and all

mentees were asked the same open-ended questions in a pre-intervention interview and after in a

post-intervention interview. Aside from forming a relationship and a friendship, when asked why

they became involved in the mentor program, mentees drew attention to having a role model that

has gone through the same things as them. When asked the latter question, one youth stated:

> "Look up to them, because anything that they've done in the past when they
> were a kid, they've been there done that. They'll tell me, 'Don't do that, because
> I've been there before, and you shouldn't go that route.'"(Anda, 2001, p. 101).

Having a mentor who has gone through some of the same hardships can allow for a stronger

relationship and a quicker development of trust. When asked how they benefited from the

program at the post-intervention interview, youth had similar responses regarding their change in

behavior. Several youths replied that they learned how to communicate and stay out of trouble,

as well as how to respect others and resolve conflict with words rather than violence (Anda,

2001). Aside from the Captain of the fire department, two of the mentors were interviewed pre

and post-intervention regarding their goals as mentors and their time involved in the program.

Similar to what youth said they wanted to get out of the program, one mentor stated:

> "Many kids are growing up with one parent or another person who has come
> in to be a parent that they don't like. If I can bring that to the table as an exper-
> ience I had growing up…if I can bring some of my basic knowledge of all the
> terrible things they have on them today, I can explain to a kid how you can
> utilize that to be a strength for you to be the best that you can be instead of a
> negative thing." (Anda, 2001, p. 106).

The importance of knowing what youth in an at-risk neighborhood are going through is a critical

component of the facilitator-participant relationship. Youth will be more likely to take advice

and engage with the mentor if they understand what the youth is going through. This was seen in the case study of one of the mentees, Gina. She grew up being a part of a violent male street gang, and was frequently getting in physical and verbal altercations with individuals even if she sensed the slightest threat or attitude (Anda, 2001). She was paired with a female firefighter who was also seen as "tough" (Anda, 2001, p.110). The female was able to gain Gina's respect early on in their relationship which allowed Gina to open up to her mentor. Kara (pseudonym) not only served as Gina's mentor, but a sister, mother, and friend. Through this relationship, Gina transformed from a gang member to a high school graduate with a job and bright future ahead of her. The relationship between Gina and Kara was a key factor in Gina's ability to transform out of the gang and learn to communicate effectively with others rather with her hands. Relationships between facilitators and participants can have a key role in determining whether a participant engages in the intervention.

**Current Study**

Although there are several published evaluations of mostly school-based violence prevention programs, there is a lack of systematic evaluation of youth violence prevention programs, specifically ones that are community based. Literature suggests a growth in the number of youth violence prevention programs; however, it is notable that most of the programs take place in school-based environments. Further, most studies have focused on outcomes associated with violence prevention, as opposed to an examination of the programs' processes. For example, few studies have looked at the levels of engagement in a youth violence prevention program and specific aspects of the program, such as the program curriculum, manner of engaging/teaching youth, and facilitator-participant relationships, that might be promoting or impeding engagement. Accordingly, in the present study, I utilized a focus group methodology to

investigate factors that affect engagement among youth who are enrolled in a community based

violence prevention program. I hypothesized that certain characteristics, such as the content

being discussed, group composition, and teaching methods used by the facilitators would

promote such engagement among youth enrolled in a youth violence prevention program.

However, because there is a lack of prior research in this area, I did not make specific predictions

about which factors would promote more/less engagement within this program; that is, I

maintained an exploratory stance with respect to my research question.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants consisted of seven mentors employed with a youth violence prevention

program in Hartford, Connecticut. Two were female. The average age for females was 26.5 years

old ($SD = 2.12$), with the minimum age being 25 years old and the maximum age being 28 years

old. The average age for males was 41.4 years old ($SD = 5.03$) with the minimum age being 33

years old and the maximum age being 46 years old. The average age for all participants

combined was 37.14 years old. The females have been involved with the youth violence

prevention program for an average of 3.75 years, with the minimum involvement of 3.5 years

and the maximum involvement of 4 years. The males have been involved with the youth violence

prevention program for an average of 4.3 years, with the minimum involvement being 2.5 years

and the maximum involvement being 8 years. On average, the seven participants have been

involved with the youth violence prevention program for 4.14 years. One female identified

herself as "Hispanic/Latina", and the other female participant identified herself as

"Black/African American". Three males identified themselves as "Hispanic/Latino", one male

identified himself as "Black/African American", and one male identified himself as both "Hispanic/Latino" and "Black/African American".

**Program Under Study**

The program under study is a community-based youth violence prevention program located in Hartford, Connecticut. The program was started in 2007 under the Hartford Office for Youth Services to help decrease the rate of youth violence. The facilitators of this program have spent their lives in Hartford walking in the same shoes as the youth they are helping. They are on call 24/7 and work within the community to neutralize violent situations as well as teach life skills groups at one of the program's offices. The program's life skills sessions consist of co-ed, all female, and all male groups. Topics addressed in the life skills groups are ones that are frequent in the everyday lives of the youth in the program. They range from how to act on social media, to their legal rights, as well as the importance of respect among peers and friends. The facilitators have gone through extensive training, including a thirty-two-week Youth Development Practitioners Academy.

Ninety-eight percent of the program's participants are of color and are between the ages of thirteen and twenty-one years old. More than half the participants reside in four targeted neighborhoods where facilitators in the program are a constant presence.

**Materials & Procedure**

After a staff meeting was held, staff members were told that they could stay to participate in an experiment or leave if they did not wish to participate. Participants were given a brief description regarding the goal and purpose of the current study. Instruction regarding what the information was being used for and who was going to have access to it was clearly stated. After obtaining informed consent from each participant (Appendix A), they were each given a $10 gift

card to Dunkin Donuts as well as a short demographics questionnaire (Appendix B). Each participant was given a copy of the informed consent sheet to keep for their own reference. After consenting, but before the focus group, participants filled out a short demographics questionnaire regarding their age, gender, time they have been involved with the youth violence prevention program, and race/ethnicity. When all questionnaires were collected, participants were asked if they were okay with the focus group being audio-recorded. It was not until all seven participants gave permission to be recorded that the audio-recorder was turned on.

The focus group began when I asked the first question on the interview guide being asked. The guide was followed as closely as possibly but participants were not stopped or cut off if they spoke of topics that were not specifically what the question implied. I asked a follow-up question to clarify what the participant was describing if the responses were not clear. After it was felt that all questions were answered, participants were asked if there was anything else they might want to add to the conversation that had not been asked.

The focus group was held in a large common area at one of the program's offices in downtown Hartford, CT. Participants sat on either chairs, couches, or the ground in a circular formation. There was no order in which participants spoke. All questions and topics were open to all participants of the study. All study procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board at Trinity College in Hartford, CT.

I created an interview guide for the current study. Appropriate language was used so that the focus group discussion would be clear and straightforward, as well as culturally competent. I asked in the focus group that predominantly revolved around the mentors' time with the youth violence prevention program. I asked follow-up prompts if needed but they were not always used

due to time constraints or continuous discussion among the participants. The questions were as

followed (also see Appendix C):

1. What topics, would you describe, are covered during group sessions?
   *Follow up prompts (if needed):*
   - Do you think the youth are responsive to these topics? That is, do you think they are positively influenced/take to heart what is being discussed?
   - To which topics are youth most/least responsive to? Why do you think?

2. How actively engaged are youth in group discussions?
   *Follow up prompts (if needed):*
   - Do you think there are other forms of communication within group sessions that could promote more engagement?
   - How does group environment impact youth participation?

3. What are some of the barriers you face being a mentor at this program?
   *Follow up prompts (if needed):*
   - To what extent do these barriers affect the youth?
   - How do these barriers affect the ability to do your job effectively? That is, are the barriers related to youth engagement/participation?

4. What else would you like to tell me about your experience that I haven't asked about?

**Data Analysis**

  **Qualitative analysis.** Thematic Analysis (TA) is a method used to identify themes and

key ideas within a qualitative data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach was used to

analyze the perceptions of facilitators in a youth violence prevention program. An inductive

approach was taken with the current study since the themes pulled out were embedded in the data

(Braun & Clarke, 2006). Because data collection took place within a focus group, there were pre-

existing themes regarding youth engagement embedded in the questions.

  Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps for thematic analysis, the focus group data

was broken down into appropriate themes. In the first step, the focus group was transcribed and,

due to the specificity of the research question, one distinct theme was developed: youth

engagement. Subthemes were identified as outgrowths of this larger topic. I reviewed the

transcription of the interview and coded the appropriate topics that were relevant to the theme of youth engagement.

## Results

**Thematic Categories and Subthemes**

  **Youth Engagement.** Using Braun & Clarke's (2006) method of thematic analysis, I was able to pull four main subthemes from the data collected. The questions of the focus group centered around specific questions tailored around the theme of youth engagement in a violence prevention program, therefore I saw it fitting that the entire data set was coded and sorted into appropriate subthemes under this larger theme. The following four themes capture the main factors that affect youth engagement in a youth violence prevention program, from the perspective of the facilitators.

  *Culturally relevant curriculum.* One prominent subtheme that emerged from the larger "youth engagement" theme was the importance of a culturally relevant curriculum, as a means of promoting youth participation. This subtheme refers to the day-to-day relevance of topics discussed for youth attending the program. Facilitators allow youth to bring up situations that have recently occurred in the youth's life that they would like to process. The facilitator first allows the youth to speak about what happened and the emotions they felt during the situation. This permits the youth to vent about the subject before the facilitator uses the example to back up the appointed curriculum. Allowing youth to express their emotions regarding a sensitive subject, before facilitator intervention, provides a positive outlet for expression in lieu of physical or verbal violence.  Facilitators mentioned that certain topics had the ability to provoke strong opinions or feelings. Relatedly, facilitators observed that youth are more likely to engage in discussion if a facilitator allows them to go through the venting process before explicitly

addressing the curriculum content. For example, one facilitator stated the following while

conducting a group session on respect:

"In our culture, if someone spits on you, that is the ultimate disrespect."

The facilitator commented on how the youth were very engaged in the session because many of

them have experienced getting spit on. Focusing on this sensitive and relevant issue for the youth

allowed many emotions and opinions to arise, promoting productive discussion and debate in the

group.

*Mentor/Mentee relationship.* The second subtheme under the larger theme of youth

engagement was "mentor/mentee relationship", which refers to the importance of the

mentor/mentee relationship in promoting youth engagement in the program more broadly.

Mentee/mentor relationships were perceived as strong because of the respect the mentees have

for the mentors. As one facilitator put it:

"When topics arise that are sensitive to youth, the facilitators are able to intervene in the
situation and neutralize it because of the respect gained from the youth."

The relationship between mentee and mentor was seen as beneficial to not only the mentee, but

the mentor as well. One facilitator spoke of how he was formerly incarcerated. He stated that

there are times he feels like falling back into old habits but added:

"Sometimes these kids help me more than I help them when I feel like I'm falling back into things."

Other facilitators agreed with this statement. Some spoke of the daily motivation the youth give

them. As one facilitator put it:

"We live amongst them. We live in a community. Even if we aren't working they'll see us on a
Sunday. And they relate to us more because we are amongst them."

*Implicit curriculum.* The idea of implicit curriculum was a topic that surfaced multiple

times among facilitators. This subtheme refers to the technique of getting a lesson across to

youth without them directly recognizing that they are learning it. When asked what topics youth

are most responsive to, facilitators perceived youth engaged in topics that were masked as

regular activities such as basketball. As one facilitator put it regarding one technique used by his

fellow coworker:

> "You know, they do sports, but he has a curriculum. He's teaching but they can't really tell that they're being taught something."

Facilitators perceived youth as more engaged when they believed they were physically

participating in recreational sports or activities when really, there was a hidden lesson being

taught. One facilitator described the game of basketball as a way to learn the ins and outs of

life's "hustle". Through the game of basketball, youth learn that they need to stay on top of the

things in their life. If they slow down for even a moment, opportunity can pass by them in a

matter of seconds. They learn the values of being a part of a team and supporting others. One

facilitator drew attention to a youth who was never picked to be on either basketball teams

because he wasn't a good shooter. Through this situation, he taught the youth that not everyone

in life can be good at every aspect of the game, and that it takes a team to make success. This

hidden curriculum led to the youth being picked first for each game.  As one facilitator put it:

> "It doesn't matter what the topics are. They will be receptive if the topics are being communicated in an exciting way."

*Gender.* This topic was the fourth subtheme to emerge under the larger theme of youth

engagement. Gender refers to the varying levels of engagement and discussion as a result of

groups being co-ed or a single gender, and the varying levels of engagement based on age and

maturity levels among male and females. There are three groups held by the youth violence

prevention program in the current study: co-ed life skills groups, all female groups, and all male

groups. Facilitators believed that neither males nor females were more/less engaged.  Further, a

majority of the facilitators agreed that there were no apparent differences in the effectiveness of

the groups (all male groups, all female groups, and co-ed). However, same-sex groups lent

themselves to different content and different methods of engaging youth. Some topics are more

easily discussed in the presence of the same gender. As one female facilitator put it:

> "When girls are separated from guys you get to talk more about the feminine stuff, you know like being a woman, how to carry yourself as a lady and how to respect yourself."

Facilitators also remarked on a difference in the way in which each group is run. For example,

facilitators perceived all male groups as tending to fool around more before getting to the

curriculum, whereas all female groups were viewed as having the ability to become more serious

about the proposed topic compared to males. One facilitator mentioned less disruptions among

the all-male life skills sessions when they are given the time at the beginning of the group to talk

to other youth and staff.

## Discussion

As outlined previously, there are certain factors within a youth violence prevention

program that promote youth engagement and participation. Four main topic areas were identified

from the data in the current study. Findings from the focus group held with facilitators of a

community-based youth violence prevention program underscored numerous factors that can

affect youth engagement in the group sessions of the program. In some cases, the subthemes

identified from the focus group were consistent with what has been reported in the literature; in

other cases, the subthemes were more novel.

Using thematic analysis, I identified four key subthemes from the larger theme of youth

engagement in the violence prevention program. The first was that the curriculum was culturally

relevant. This is consistent with Nation et al.'s (2003) findings regarding sociocultural relevant

prevention programs. Nation and colleagues emphasize the importance of knowing your target

audience and tailoring the curriculum to fit the needs and environment of the ones who are

receiving the intervention (2003). My findings also are congruent with Leff et al.'s 2010 study

on sociocultural relevance and shared decision-making. The final product of the intervention

program in the Leff et al. study was largely based off the opinions and ideas of the youth and

community members of the area where the program was going to be carried out (2010). The

program targeted what the youth saw as the key obstacles that stood in the way of staying out of

violent engagements and promote a safe neighborhood environment.  Facilitators described

youth as being more engaged in topics and activities that they were interested in.

The second subtheme identified in my research was that the relationships between

mentees and their mentor were built off trust and respect for one another, and positively

impacted the youth participants in the program. This is consistent with the research done by

Anda on project "R.E.S.C.U.E.", a mentoring program that was implemented at an at-risk high

school in a low-income urban city that was known for a high level of criminal activity (2001).

Students who had mentors in project "R.E.S.C.U.E." that had gone through similar hardships

developed stronger relationships, and a quicker development of trust. My findings are also

consistent with Nation et al.'s, findings regarding positive relationships among mentors and

youth participants (2003). A facilitator's ability to establish a positive relationship with his/her

mentee allows for the mentee to feel a sense of belonging within the program and to possibly be

more receptive to the information shared by the facilitator.

Facilitators believed that youth had generally higher levels of engagement when

curriculum was being taught without the youth's knowledge, for example, through the game of

basketball, or a casual discussion with a facilitator about a situation that occurred earlier in the

day. This theme is referred to as implicit curriculum. My research regarding was consistent with

research by Kellam, Mackenzie, Brown, Poduska, Wang, Petras, and Wilcox (2011), in which

children were engaged in implicit curriculum which may have played a role in a decreased level

of violence and aggression later in life. The Good Behavior Game is a universal method used in classrooms for behavioral management. It was tested in forty-one randomly selected first- and second-grade classrooms in Baltimore, Maryland in 1985 and students who participated in the game were then followed up with at ages nineteen to twenty-one (Kellam et al., 2011). Researchers found that students who had participated in the Good Behavior Game showed significantly lower rates of activities such as smoking, aggression, incarnation for violent crimes, and thoughts of suicide, compared to those students in the schools chosen who did not engage in the intervention.

The final subtheme I identified within the larger theme of youth engagement was gender. This referred to the varying levels of engagement between female and male youth in the program. Facilitators of the prevention program did not identify specific differences in engagement levels among the all-female life skills sessions and the all-male life skills sessions, as well as the co-ed sessions. The only factor differentiating the genders was the female youths' ability to calm down and focus on the curriculum faster than the all-male groups.

It should be noted that engagement levels may have been affected because of social rejection, according to research by Lier and colleagues (2007). Youth who are rejected and victimized by other youth are ore likely to internalize their problems which could lead to aggressive behaviors in the near to long future. Although not explicitly identified by facilitators, group dynamics may have played a role in the levels of engagement among the youth participants. However, because this theme was not fully explored the extent to which it might have had an influence in this setting is unknown.

**Limitations**

My research had several limitations. Originally, I had planned to conduct one-on-one interviews with both youth participants of the program, as well as the facilitators, because I wished to assess and compare the perspectives of both groups. Due to scheduling conflicts, and obstacles that arose with consent, it was determined that only facilitators could feasibly participate in the study and, instead of interviews, a focus group with all facilitators willing to be in the study, was conducted. One-on-one interviews may have allowed for more detailed answers and a broader range of perspectives on a certain topic. Looking at only facilitators' perspectives served as another limitation. If youth perspectives had been included, it may have offered similar or differing opinions in relation to facilitators' views on engagement within the program.  Since facilitators have already been through what the youth have, and turned their life around, it would be interesting to contrast their opinions regarding the program to those of youth who are currently developing their lives. It should also be noted that the format of a focus group may have served as a limitation because it was not uncommon for the discussion to steer off topic. Once this occurred, it became difficult at times to shift the discussion back to the original topic. This may have caused some of the questions to not be answered in full compared to others. For example, when the question "How actively engaged are youth in group discussions?" was asked, facilitators spoke briefly about their opinions on the topic. I then asked the follow up question "How does group environment impact youth participation?". To this, facilitators had a conversation regarding gender differences and how the different groups within the program functioned differently. If time had permitted, I would have liked to also discuss other environmental impacts that may affect youth engagement, such as peer relationships within the groups, or factors such as rejection sensitivity, which was likely more characteristic of some youth than others.

**Future Research**

Given that this study was relatively limited in scope and only reflected the views of the facilitators, there are multiple opportunities for continued research on this topic. Youth participants in the violence prevention program are either court-mandated or enroll in the program voluntarily. It may be beneficial to further study the differences in engagement between youth who are court-mandated into the program and those who voluntarily enroll. This may provide perspectives that help to explain varying levels of engagement among individuals in the program. In doing so, researchers could look at background histories of youth who are both court-mandated and voluntarily enrolled to see if there are any common trends or themes that occur among either population. It would be interesting to look at past criminal activity of both court-mandated youth and youth who are voluntarily enrolled, as well as the likelihood of committing certain crimes. This may allow researchers to measure aggression, indicating if one population or the other has a higher level of current or potential aggression. This information could be used to target youth who are at an increased risk of violence, and allow mentors to give them the guidance they need.

Similarly, it would be interesting to look specifically at all-female groups and all-male groups. This could be done by sitting in on and observing both of these groups in depth. This may provide more information into the effects of gender on engagement and allow for researchers to determine the similar and different variables among each gender group that both encourage and dissuade youth engagement. Research on this topic may uncover the reasons behind why it takes longer for all male groups to settle down and begin curriculum.

Future research regarding mentees' outlook on their mentor's cultural background would allow researchers some insight on the effects of mentor/mentee relationships on youth

engagement and participation within a youth violence prevention program. Youth would be asked via survey if they felt more or less comfortable having a mentor that was of the same or similar cultural background as what they identified themselves as. Having this information could lead to a heightened awareness of the importance of the mentor/mentee relationship, further providing youth with a sense of belonging in the program.

**Implications**

In the current study, four subthemes under the theme of "youth engagement" were identified as being factors that affect the youth engagement and participation in a youth violence prevention program. Implicit curriculum was seen as a valuable tool for engaging youth in life skills and lessons through a way where they are not aware of. Beyond sports, it may be beneficial to extend this implicit teaching to other areas of the youths' lives. For example, if youth are interested in certain career paths, it may be beneficial to take them to an office in that line of work. Meeting with employers in their field of interest may provide youth with the encouragement to pursue a certain career. Even if the youth is unaware of what they would like to pursue, attending a job fair or meeting personnel in different fields of study may be valuable.

Continued involvement of youth in curriculum development of life skills sessions is a crucial asset to the programs success. Emphasizing Nation et al.'s (2003) findings regarding shared decision making, if youth feel like their opinions and thoughts on the program implementation process are being heard, they will feel like they are a larger part of that network. Youth may all be more engaged in sessions if they are involved in the curriculum development since they are developing activities that are interesting to them.

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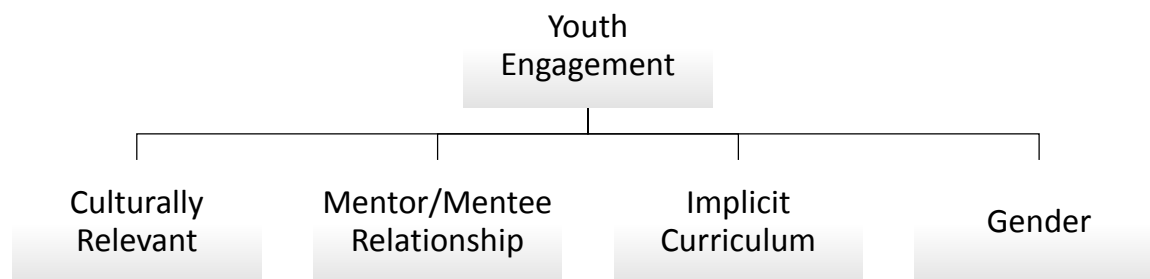
*Figure 1.* Subthemes capturing factors that affect youth engagement in a youth violence prevention program from the perspective of the facilitators

Appendix A

**Informed Consent Agreement for this Research Study**
**Please read this consent agreement carefully before you decide to participate in the study.**

**Purpose of the research study:** You are invited to be in a research project for a senior thesis at Trinity College to assess the factors that promote engagement in group sessions held at this program's headquarters.

**What you will do in the study:** The study will involve you being asked a series of questions regarding your time and work with this program, as well as opinions regarding your experiences with the program.

**Time required:** The study will require about 15-20 minutes of your time.

**Risks:** Some questions may evoke memories or thoughts that are uncomfortable for you. You are not required to answer the question if you find you do not want to for any reason. All questions are meant to be used for determining opinions of the program and are in no way formed to make you uncomfortable.

**Benefits:** There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research study.  The study may help us understand the varying levels of participation among youth in a violence prevention program. The study may lead us to recurring themes among participants.

**Confidentiality:** The focus group will be recorded. No names will be recorded and information, as well as recordings will be disposed of after the study is complete and the final product is submitted at the end of Trinity's spring semester 2016. Although information from your interview will be shared with this program and members of the Trinity community, your name will never be attached to this information. Because the study is done in a group setting, by signing this you are agreeing to not discuss any information regarding the study outside of the discussion.

**Right to withdraw from the study:** You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.  Meaning, your employment with this program would never be compromised. If you would like to withdraw at any point during the interview just indicate so. If for some reason you would like to withdraw your interview from the study after it is completed, you can feel free to contact me using the information below. The tape that is being used to record the interview will be destroyed should you decide to withdraw.

**Payment:** You will receive a gift card in the amount of $10 to Dunkin Donuts (if you are a Peacebuilder, McDonald's if you are a youth participant in the program) for participating in the study.

**If you have questions about the study, contact:**
Lyndsay Brattan, primary investigator
Email: Lyndsay.Brattan@trincoll.edu

Cell phone: (603) 205-6155

Laura Holt, faculty advisor
Email: Laura.Holt@trincoll.edu

**Agreement:**
I agree to participate in the research study described above.
**Signature:** _____ **Date:** _____
You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix B

# Demographics Questionnaire

How old are you?

What is your gender?

How long have you been involved with this program? (months or years)

Mark the appropriate item or items that best describe(s) your racial/ethnic background:

☐ Asian/Pacific Islander
☐ Black/African American
☐ Hispanic/Latino(a)
☐ Native American/Indian
☐ Caucasian/White
☐ Other (please describe): _____

Appendix C

**Pre-Focus Group Script:**

Hello, my name is Lyndsay Brattan and I would like to ask you a couple of questions regarding your involvement with this program, both past (if applicable) and present. This interview, along with these questions are entirely voluntary and your name will be kept confidential. I will provide a summary of the responses to Veronica and Iran but your name will never be attached to what you said. I will have you fill out a form saying you agree to participate in the study. A copy will be available for you to keep.
If you do not wish to participate in the study that is okay. You may stay in the room and observe or you can leave, whatever is most comfortable for you.

**Scripted Questions with follow up prompts:**

*(after assent form is given)*
- Are you willing to be interviewed? [If yes, continue.]
- May I record our conversation? I will not record your name. [If no, stop. If yes, turn on recorder and proceed with interview.]

5. What topics, would you describe, are covered during group sessions?
*Follow up prompts (if needed):*
- Do you think the youth are responsive to these topics? That is, do you think they are positively influenced/take to heart what is being discussed?
- To which topics are youth most/least responsive to? Why do you think?

6. How actively engaged are youth in group discussions?
*Follow up prompts (if needed):*
- Do you think there are other forms of communication within group sessions that could promote more engagement?
- How does group environment impact youth participation?

7. What are some of the barriers you face being a mentor at this program?
*Follow up prompts (if needed):*
- To what extent do these barriers affect the youth?
- How do these barriers affect the ability to do your job effectively? That is, are the barriers related to youth engagement/participation?

8. What else would you like to tell me about your experience that I haven't asked about?