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YOUTH VOICE AND THE PROMISE AND PERIL OF AFFIRMATIVE
GOVERNMENTALITY: AN ANALYSIS OF NEW YORK CITY'S BOROUGH STUDENT
ADVISORY COUNCILS

by

HILLARY DONNELL

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York.

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in
Political Science in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree
of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

YOUTH VOICE AND THE PROMISE AND PERIL OF AFFIRMATIVE GOVERNMENTALITY: AN ANALYSIS OF NEW YORK CITY'S BOROUGH STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCILS

by Hillary Donnell

Advisor: John Mollenkopf

This study addresses civil society and the state's shifting approach towards the incorporation of youth in governmental decision-making since the 1990s, and the recent ascendance of youth voice councils as a method of civic engagement. It uses the New York City Youth Leadership Council Initiative and the Borough Student Advisory Councils as case studies. Relying on the author's ethnographic participant observation and youth-voice frameworks, the paper provides an analysis of the individual, organizational and systems level effects of the New York Department of Education's BSAC program. Further, the paper discusses affirmative governmentality as a lens through which to critically examine the use of youth councils and youth voice initiatives. The NYC case suggests that, even as youth voice expands in municipal government, it does so in narrow, scripted ways-- forwarding a model of affirmative governmentality in the process. The analysis raises questions about the opportunities and limits of youth councils as strategies for meaningful youth politicization.

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Introduction

In the mid-1990s as participation lagged at the polls, a new notion of *citizenship* emerged in the civic engagement literature that broadened popular understandings of the duties and engagements of the citizen (Skocpol and Fiorina, 1999; Putnam, 2000; Dalton, 2007). The evolving concept of the citizen and its political role came to incorporate people below voting-age in new and sometimes contradictory ways. Since the mid 1990's various cities, municipalities, non-profit and educational institutions have begun to formally acknowledge the political inclusion of youth as emblematic of modern democratic practice (Bessant, 2004). At each of these sites an increasingly popular mechanism for the political inclusion of youth is the youth council. Youth councils and the notion of "youth voice" have become buzzwords in modern education, nonprofit and public sector spaces. Despite the emergence of useful frameworks by which to analyze the implementation of youth voice, there remains a lack of consensus on how it should be deployed and to what end. The Borough Student Advisory Councils (BSACs), a part of the New York City Youth Leadership Council Initiative, are one instance in which a liberal Mayoral administration has provided significant infrastructural and financial support to create a platform for youth voice in city agencies. For this reason it serves as an interesting case to study the particular ways in which municipally sanctioned youth councils script the political role of young people in a city agency. This study formulates a critical analysis of the BSAC program as a youth voice initiative on the individual, organization and systems level based on the author's participant observation. For analytic purposes, the study also draws on tenets of positive youth development and Hart's Ladder of Participation. Further, the study interrogates the manifest and latent motives in the policy narrative surrounding youth voice initiatives and examines some contradictions present in efforts to establish a political role for youth via positive youth

development. A final consideration is made regarding how even as youth voice expands into various governing bodies driven by notions of civic engagement as a method of youth development, the mechanisms for its expansion are heavily determined by societally constructed notions of youth as risky subjects. The study determines that the in New York City's case, even as youth voice expands to municipal government agencies, it does so in rather narrow, scripted ways-- forwarding a model of affirmative governmentality in the process. This raises questions about the opportunities and limits of youth councils as strategies for meaningful youth politicization.

Methods

This study will draw on experience from my 10 months of work with the BSACs as a trainer at Coro's Youth Leadership Academy, which prepared a cohort of young people with skills necessary to facilitate BSAC meetings of 30 or more youth. My methods consisted of participation in and participant observation of a wide variety of BSAC and related organizational activities, including a two week intensive training of BSAC Youth Partner Facilitators at Coro NY Leadership. I facilitated daily youth meetings, prepped youth for meetings with adult stakeholders, and planned skill-building workshops. I attended BSAC meetings as well as NYC Service hosted professional development for youth-council adult partners. I made school visits to young people in the program, joined them at community forums and participated in various social team building activities such as movie nights, and dinners with the youth. I also conducted a number of semi-structured interviews with adult partners involved in BSAC programming. During my time in the field for this research I was simultaneously engaged in research for social critique as well as politicized action.

This study seeks to situate the BSAC initiative in the wider context of a shifting societal approach towards youth and adolescence and offer an overall assessment of the program. In its use of “youth” as a category of analysis this study strives to move beyond a treatment of youth as generalized homogeneous group with commensurable needs, interests and motives. It is impossible and counter to the ethic of this study to attempt to cull a definition of youth that would encompass the experiences of all young people. Rather the research done here seeks to treat youth as a situated category and acknowledges young people as active social actors with their own variety of lived experiences, complex identities and conceptualizations of the world. Given the purposes of this study and its focus on youth voice initiatives targeting high school students in the US, people aged roughly 15-20 will serve as an adequate age limitation on the expansive and fluctuating notion of youth. The terms “teens”, “youth”, “young people” and “adolescents” will be used interchangeably.

Contextualizing the Emergence of Youth Voice Initiatives

The public context for the emergence of youth voice initiatives is one marked by at least two dominant discourses that merit further consideration. Firstly a discourse emerging from political science literature regarding the decline of American participation and the resulting reorientation of notions of citizenship. Secondly a discourse emerging from criminology regarding the deviance, criminality and ungovernability of youth of color. Each will be considered here as an individual current of discourse that arose independently and later coalesced creating a landscape suitable for youth voice programs to take root.

The proliferation of youth voice initiatives was preceded by significant anxiety about the declining rates of participation in the polity. Nearly two decades ago civic engagement expert

Robert Putnam (2000) joined others lamented a waning civic voluntarism amongst US citizens. Voluntarism had long been acknowledged by political and sociological observers as one of the defining features of the American democratic landscape. This line of thought can be traced to de Tocqueville's ethnographic observations from the 1800s in which he identified Americans as especially fond of participating in public life. According to Tocqueville, American's affinity for social association did not end at the local tavern, but translated itself into hearty taste for political activity (Tocqueville, 2000). In his lament Putnam cited declines in party participation, waning campaign activity and plummeting voter turnout as "merely the most visible symptom(s) of a broader disengagement from community life" (Putnam, 2000). Putnam's observations align broadly with a body of political science research citing declining youth political participation which tends to characterize young people as apathetic and disengaged actors in the political process. Walter Damon's claim in his 2001 book *To Not Fade Away: Restoring Civil Identity Among the Young* highlighted the degree to which scholars characterized the contemporary situation as quite dire and requiring immediate intervention. Damon cited a lack of inspiring leadership in government as the culprit which had engendered cynicism, apathy and disengagement amongst young people across the US to a degree unfelt in all preceding generations.

By 2008 Putnam spoke to a renewed hope among observers when he wrote in the *Boston Globe* that the presidential election of that year "had sparked into white hot flame a pile of youthful kindling that had been stacked and ready to flare for more than six years" (Putnam, 2008). He called the election year the "coming out party of the new Greatest Generation". As it turned out, Putnam's excitement was unfounded as the fervor of the 2008 election cycle panned out to be little more than a passing episode. After President Barack Obama's election in '08,

participation returned to former lows. Fast forward to 2018 when pundits and researchers alike predicted a renewed fervor in electoral politics amongst young people. Bernie Sanders' energizing presidential campaign in 2016 and Donald Trump's subsequent election were predicted to result in a surge in youth turnout for the 2018 midterms. Though the turnout was indeed higher than recent midterms, in most localities it fell well short of historic (McGoldrick, 2018). While these public discourses regarding disengagement focus on formalized political channels and processes, the concern is not limited to the US. Indeed a cross-national body of research catalogues young people's declining engagement with comparable political systems in Britain, Canada and Australia (Pirie and Worcester, 2000; Damon, 2001; Delli Carpini, 2000; Torney-Purta and Amadeo 2003; FLASCO, 2013; Hart and Youniss, 2017).

Other researchers interested in declining youth participation in particular have shifted the frame slightly. These accounts look beyond voting, elections and campaign participation when considering the scope of political action. Russell Dalton (2009) details the ways in which young people, and Millennials in particular, are developing new repertoires for action in civic life that diverge from formalized political processes. What Dalton calls the traditional repertoires for activity in political processes include campaign contributions, voting, party membership, and various means by which individuals seek contact with elected officials. According to Dalton, younger generations are more likely to have attended a demonstration (distinct from an electoral rally) than all prior generations including those from Gen X, the Sixties, Eighties, BabyBoomers and PreWar generations. Millennials are also more likely to have participated in a boycott of a product and are more likely to have signed a cause-oriented petition than prior generations (Dalton, 2009). Increasingly, youth are engaging in various forms of online participation. Dalton identifies online campaign support, online petition sharing and signing, online sharing of

information about a boycott, rally, political issue/debate, and the like as forms of participation gaining relevance in the contemporary United States and especially amongst youth. Dalton offers the suggestion that perhaps participation amongst citizens, and youth in particular, is not declining but shifting in ways that are not obvious to analyses limited to the traditional formalized channels. Dalton's findings focus on the political behavior of Millennials. But Gen Z sometimes called iGen, the rising generation of political actors born after 1997, is already proving to behave rather differently in the civic sphere even than its adjacent generation. The breakneck pace of technological change and in particular smartphone communication has shrunk the space-time that separates one generation from the next, resulting in daily experiences and lives that differ dramatically from the generations before them (Twenge, 2017). This situation all but ensures that Gen Z's priorities, interests and ways of engaging politically will certainly differ from those of its predecessors.

Further, increasing privatization and deregulation of industry and business in the age of neoliberalism have outsourced and decentralized government decision-making to a range of agencies and networks. Such decentralization makes government less accountable to a singular voting base. By extension, it becomes less obvious to the citizen on what exactly their vote has an effect (Norris, 2003). As such, citizen participation enacted through formalized or traditional structures may be perceived as getting less traction than an action carried out on an individual immediate basis, especially to a generation of citizen-consumers that has been accustomed to the immediacy of smartphone technology. Cause-oriented repertoires reflect a desire to engage a particular cause that resonates with the individual, rather than understand, enhance or support the government (Bennett, 2007). Bennet (2012) has called this form of engagement with cause-oriented repertoires "personalized politics" as distinct from Dalton's characterization of the duty-

oriented politics of prior generations. This shift is echoed by studies done by marketing agencies seeking to understand Gen Z's consumption patterns. Data and marketing company McCann Worldwide conducted a survey of 33,000 individuals called The Truth About Youth, seeking to better understand the consumption patterns of Gen Z and found that 87% of respondents feel that brands now have a role to play in advancing social equity and justice (McCann, 2016). The way the youngest generation conceptualizes and engages the political sphere is vastly different than generations prior. In some ways it is perhaps less threatening to established government, as youth leverage their consumerism in service of political outcomes. The new repertoires that Dalton identified, are perhaps more contentious. Youth are engaging in large collective and cause oriented political actions, a few contemporary examples being the National School Walkouts in 2018 in response to the Parkland shooting and Ferguson demonstrations in response Mike Brown's shooting led by Black Lives Matter. Public anxiety about the unsanctioned, non-traditional channels of engagement that youth are creating in may well play into the policy narrative necessitating mechanisms by which institutions can norm youth to sanctioned modes of engagement with the polity.

In addition to the decline discourse, another social phenomenon which dominated the public consciousness may have played a role in preparing the stage for youth voice. The late 1980s saw a dramatic increase in violent crimes amongst adolescents which captured the public imagination. The crime spike and the associated populations were disturbingly exemplified in the notion of the adolescent "superpredator", developed by Ivy League researchers and peddled by the media. A political scientist at Princeton at the time, John DiIulio, coined the term for a career criminal who was quite young, had little regard for human life, and had a full adulthood of predatory criminality ahead if they failed to be incarcerated early on (DiIulio, 1992). Based on

DiIulio's prior writings, the "superpredator" he had in mind was a black adolescent, likely male. The galvanizing potential of this image was significant and the resulting criminal justice system response which incarcerated hundreds of thousands of adolescents, many without parole, had long lasting destructive effects on the American political and sociological landscape (Vera, 2017). The crime spike saw an eventual decline after from the mid 90's into the 2000s, but the image of the "violent youth of color" remained lodged in the public imagination. An Urban Institute Report on *The Rise and Fall of American Youth Violence* from 2002 illuminates nonprofit institutional attitudes towards this phenomenon. It highlights a significant drop in adolescent violent crime (measured in terms of the number of yearly arrests of people under 24) after 1994 in stark contrast to the crime spikes of the mid 1980s and early 1990s. The report highlights the falsehood of the superpredator myth: "Whatever forces combined to produce the drop in violent crime after 1994 appear to have had their strongest effect on young people, the very demographic group that some experts believed would overwhelm American society by the end of the 1990s with alarmingly high levels of violence. The juvenile "super-predators" did not appear as predicted" (Urban Institute, 2002). The report suggests that perhaps a key focus of inquiry should be whether a special combination of social forces set off each wave of youth violence. In a section entitled *New Strategies for Crime Control* the report considers that "a research program to detect "tipping points" in these conditions and attitudes may help anticipate and avoid the next sudden increase in youth violence." The Program on Youth Justice at the Urban Institute which authored this report was created with a two-fold mission to "help policy-makers and community leaders test more effective, research based strategies for combating youth crime and promoting positive youth development" (Urban Institute, 2002) . Recognizing the need to turn away from deficit based models that treat the category of youth as inherently

deviant, the Urban Institute emphasizes “positive youth development” instead. Even so this report betrays the nonprofit institutional-governmental attitude towards adolescents, and in particular marginalized youth, as volatile subjects in need of subtle monitoring and careful governance. Research done in the field of developmental psychology confirms the suspicions of government and criminologists of young people as volatile subjects. Indeed the brains of adolescents and young adults continue to mature; in particular, those portions of the brain related to consequential thinking and delayed, reasoned decision-making are still developing. As a result, young people are developmentally more likely to exhibit impulsive, risky, and peer-influenced decision-making (Chein et al. 2011). The Urban Institute report and others like it from the early 2000s are especially illustrative of the way that the perceived need to control and manage youth is intimately related to the proliferation and advancement of a positive youth development agenda. Such approaches which seek to head off the presupposed potential criminality or unruliness of adolescents with engagement strategy have become increasingly commonplace in public policy.

In 2017 The Presidential Budget proposed by Donald Trump suggested enormous cuts to youth programs and services, eliminating \$1.2 billion previously allocated to community centers providing after school and summer programming to young people (OMB, 2017). This cut targeted the 21st Century Learning Centers which provides academic enrichment opportunities during non-school hours for students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools. The Trump budget cited lack of “strong evidence of meeting its objectives, such as improving student achievement ” (OMB, 2017). Congress rejected these cuts, but Trump’s proposal, set against the landscape of proliferation of non-profit and city-funded youth leadership and engagement programs highlights near irrelevance of federal funding for these sorts of programs. Despite

federal disinterest, an infrastructure of support for youth engagement initiatives has been building over the past few decades especially in larger cities and urban areas enabled by a combination of city, independent foundation and nonprofit support. In response to increasing demand from their city membership in the late 2000's, the National League of Cities (NLC) began providing trainings and support to city and municipal officials with regard to youth engagement strategy (personal correspondence with Laura Furr, 2019). Today the NLC provides downloadable toolkits on its website on topics such as: authentic youth engagement, how to host a youth summit, starting a youth council, participatory budgeting 101 and lowering the voting age in municipal elections (National League of Cities, 2019). In 2009 the National League of Cities identified five “established trends” among municipalities: forming a youth council, appointing youth to municipal boards and commissions, hosting a youth summit, conducting community assessments and promoting youth service. The same report also identified four “innovations” in youth engagement: using social media to engage youth, drawing up a bill of rights for children and youth, developing get out the vote campaigns for youth and putting youth in charge of developing community centers and skate parks (NLC, 2009). Highlighting the salience of youth civic engagement in good city governance the NLC’s website reads, “One of the basics of ensuring your city is meeting the needs of its young people is to actively and authentically engage your local youth in the process.” As evidenced by the NLC’s emphatic promotion, the council framework has become a celebrated site of democratic practice for the next generations of voters and participants in the polity (Martin et al, 2007).

NYC Service's Youth Leadership Council Initiative and BSACs

Under the leadership of Mayor de Blasio, New York City in particular has made enormous efforts in the past few years to amplify the capacity of its agencies to incorporate some degree of youth voice in the form of youth councils. In its 2014-2015 strategic plan, NYC Service proposed a goal of expanding the size, outreach, and training of leadership programs within the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). The plan proposed that all city agencies including the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), Department of Health & Mental Hygiene, Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Police Department (NYPD), Department of Education (DOE) as well as community based organizations such as The Door and libraries across the city develop and maintain a youth council. The ultimate goal was to engage 30,000 teens serving as NYC Youth Leaders in some council capacity by 2017. This ambitious plan would engage a total of 10% of NYC teens in a council capacity in the first three years. Three leadership development organizations Coro New York Leadership Center, generationOn, and New York Cares were contracted as partners to train young people (and initially adults) in the critical competencies necessary to work in partnership with adults (Coro, 2014). In 2014 NYC Service created a constellation of City Agency Youth Leadership Councils, local government Youth Leadership Councils, Public schools and Community Based Organization with The Mayor's Youth Leadership Council serving as the centerpiece for each of these council initiatives (Figure 1). The NYC Service website provides information about the various councils and the issues that they address and allows young people to sign up to participate on a council directly by completing and submitting an four page online application.

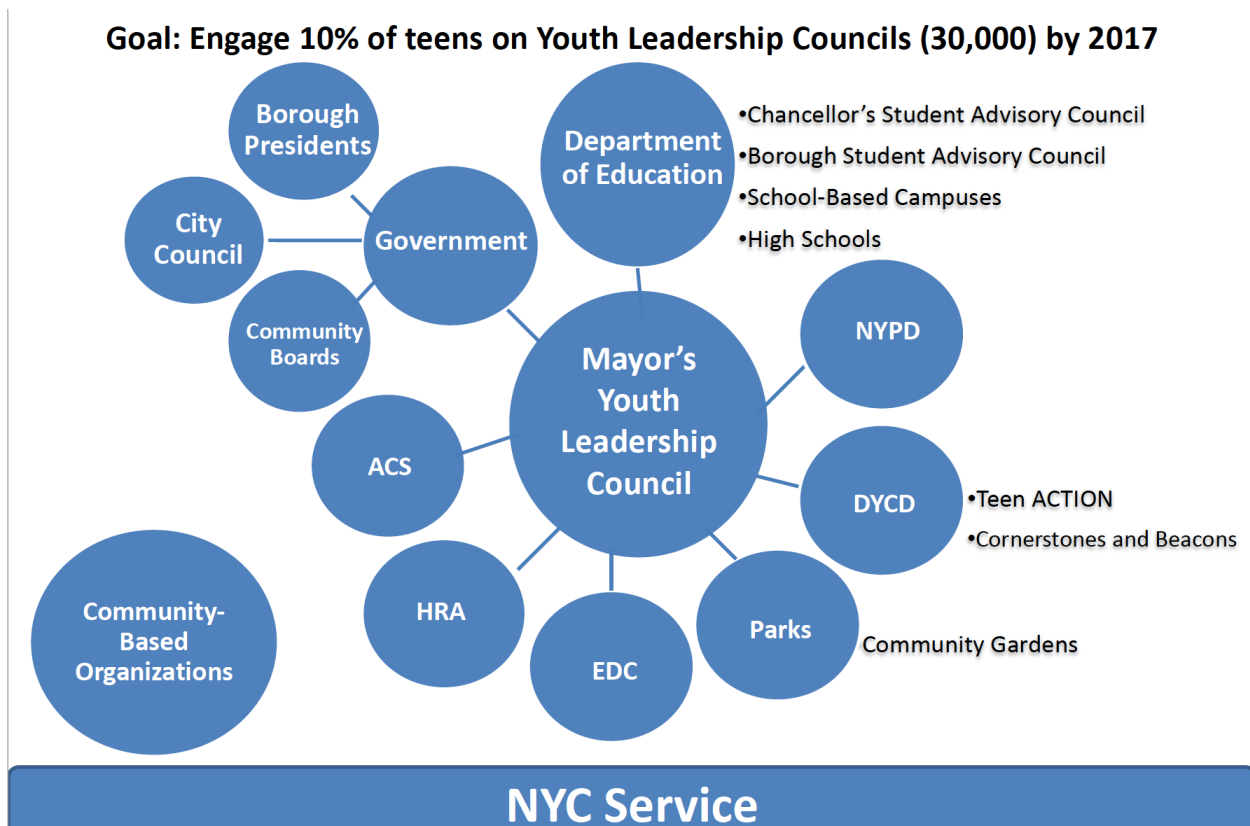


Figure 1 (NYC Service, 2014)

In addition to the series of new councils initiated by NYC Service, there was also a pre-existing infrastructure of Borough Student Advisory Councils (BSACs) managed by the Department of Education. As a part of the Initiative, BSACs would receive support in the form of dedicated adult staff and additional training for both adult staff and Youth Partner Facilitators (YPFs). The BSACs draw the bulk of their membership from student government associations, ideally from each high school in the borough to sit as BSAC representatives. From the BSACs select students are sent to the Chancellor's Student Advisory Council (CSAC). The intention is that through this tiered system student concerns filter their way up from the school level, to the borough level and finally to the office of the Chancellor (see Figure 2).

In observance of the stated need for meaningful youth engagement the NYC DOE contracted Coro New York Leadership to train four youth from each of the seven BSACs to

serve as Youth Partner Facilitator (YPFs). The YPFs would serve in partnership with the adults tasked with co-facilitating BSAC meetings. Coro and generationOn were also engaged in training adult in facilitation and positive youth development practices to equip them as effective adult partners. The adult partners for the BSACs are DOE staff based in the Borough Field Support Centers, often holding the title of Field Support Coordinator or Climate Manager in addition to their roles as BSAC adult-partners.

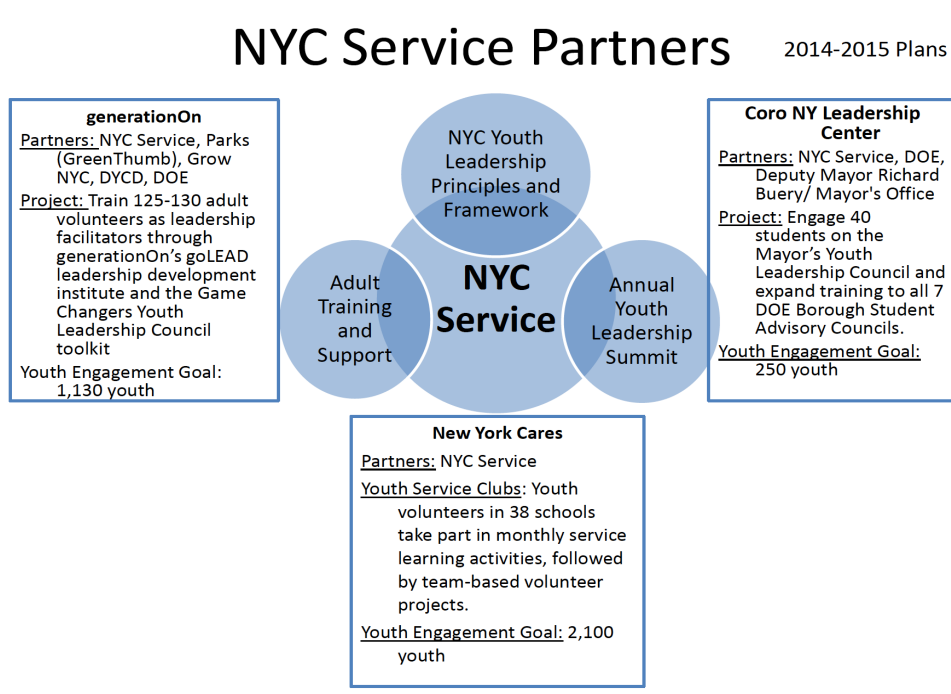


Figure 2 (NYC Service, 2014)

In part the councils were intended as service opportunities for groups of young people (NYC Service, 2014). Maintaining that service also provides leadership development, social network expansion and skill building opportunities, the NYC Service website lists a series of “member benefits” to potential council participants which include (NYC Service, 2019):

- Gain insight into potential college and career opportunities
- Understand how NYC works and gain real world experience

- Get community service hours
- Develop personal and professional skills
- Learn about events and other opportunities in NYC
- Meet fellow youth interested in leadership
- Receive a certificate of achievement signed by Mayor Bill de Blasio

The NYC Youth Leadership Council Initiative framework also provides a set of outcomes that go beyond the benefits that might be derived from a service opportunity. The overarching outcomes of this initiative as outlined by NYC Service (2014) are as follows:

- 1) Civic Engagement of Youth, Youth knowledge of NYC, and Youth voice on Critical policy, practice and service areas; strengthening our local democracy
- 2) Individual skills in strategic planning, research, critical thinking, problem solving, communications, project management and teamwork
- 3) Academic results/ college and career readiness
- 4) Capacity to set personal goals and development plans with caring adults
- 5) Improved city results in focus areas of Youth Leadership Councils

The programmatic outcomes of the Councils initiative which includes the 7 Borough Student Advisory Councils are emblematic of the tenets of positive youth development which emphasize engagement, developmental relationship building, service and preparedness for college and career. The rhetorical thrust of the councils initiative also emphasizes to a great degree the impact on the community and the “change” in policy and practice that is possible as a result of a youths involvement. Language from the NYC Service website reveals this emphasis.

“NYC Youth Leadership Councils (YLCs) provide opportunities for you to share ideas to create community solutions. YLCs also give you the tools to put them into action with your friends and adults to support you. Team up with teens from

your neighborhood or school and meet new people who share similar interests, while making “it” happen. What exactly is your “it”? The change you wish to see!”

The apparent policy narrative provides interesting content for analysis using the frameworks which have been developed to evaluate varying degrees of youth voice implementation.

Frameworks for Categorizing Degrees of Youth Voice

Following the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 a number of useful frameworks were developed which helped systematically conceive of how youth voice might be leveraged in political or power relationships. Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989) states that children and youth should be offered opportunities to weigh in on decisions that directly concern them. It was Article 12 which stirred up controversy in the United States and formed a baseline for the qualitative categorization of youth voice initiatives. Roger Hart developed what can be considered the modern launching point for this discussion, a framework he calls the Ladder of Youth Participation. Hart’s ladder built upon earlier critiques of tokenism in urban planning spaces (Arnstein, 1969). Hart notes 3 rungs of the ladder which constitute “non-participation” and 4 which are “degrees of participation”. Manipulation, decoration and tokenism constitute non-participation, while “assigned but informed”, “consulted and informed”, “adult-initiated, shared decisions with children”, “child-initiated and directed”, “child initiated, shared decisions with adults” are identified as degrees of increasing participation, respectively (Hart, 1992). Hart argues that governmental processes seldom take seriously the capacity for young people to contribute in meaningful ways in matters affecting their own lives and well-being. A cursory scan of youth participation initiatives in the US in schools, corporate and municipal institutions conducted by the Forum for Youth Investment shows that the most

common practice is to involve youth at the consultant level (Martin et al, 2007). The consultancy repertoire aligns with neoliberal concepts of the state which treat citizens as consumers or consultants who can offer insight on how better to deliver the “product” offered by the state, but which fall short of conferring decision-making power to the subject. In the case of youth voice, the products in question are the services offered to youth by government, which can include education, healthcare, policing, transportation and others. In these modalities of youth participation, is not unusual for government agencies or programs to use surveys to solicit youth’s point of view on a particular issue or problem that relates to them, or to gather feedback on how service delivery can be improved. However, this formulation offers little by way of genuine participation unless youth are involved in the development of the questions of interest and formulating the questionnaire and subsequently involved in the process of incorporating the findings into institutional policy or practice. In this latter case the degree of participation might be categorized by Hart as “adult initiated, shared decisions with children”. Frameworks for levels of youth development are helpful in evaluating the extent to what degree youth voice initiatives can be said to *involve* young people.

This heuristic has often been interpreted in a normative sense by those operating within a rights framework to encourage those engaging in partnership with youth to strive for the higher rungs on the ladder. Less prescriptive and more fluid approaches have also been developed to acknowledge that the range of possible contexts and experiences in which youth can be considered participants. Situational approaches recognize the significance of everyday informal participation of youth in everyday life that are often ignored by more formal organizations and public policy. While policy tends to focus on power and control over project management situational approaches allow a more textured picture of a young person’s participation experience

(Chawla, 2001; Sinclair, 2004; Francis & Lorenzo, 2002). The International Association for Public Participation (2005) elaborated Hart's ladder from a situational approach. IAPP's framework reduced Hart's ladder 9 rung ladder to 5 variations of participatory relationships - informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and empowering. The IAPP map acknowledges that on each ladder rung there may be underlying intentions for the various modes of participation deployed by an organization, group or policy and offers example techniques to consider dependent on the intention (see Figure 3). The IAPP framework is useful in that it recognizes the varying potential intent of the institution seeking to engage in participatory practice. This framework acknowledges the extent to which intent inevitably shapes the sort of participation that is rolled out programmatically. However, it does not account for the mismatch that occurs at instances when institutional intent does not match impact, or when policy narrative does not align with programmatic outcome. Hart's ladder and the IAPP framework will be used in tandem to discuss BSAC initiative in detail in the following sections.

Levels of public participation and empowerment.

Source: International Association for Public Participation (2005). Copyright IAP2, all rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
<i>Public participation goal</i> To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
<i>Promise to the public</i> We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible	We will implement what you decide
<i>Example techniques to consider</i> Fact sheets Web sites Open houses	Public comment Focus groups Surveys Public meetings	Workshops Deliberative polling	Citizen advisory committees Consensus-building Participatory decision-making	Citizens' juries Ballots Delegated decisions

Figure 3 (IAPP, 2005)

BSACs: Individual-Level Analysis

Youth voice initiatives that enable teenagers to participate in institutional processes which acknowledge the capability of young people to make positive contributions to society have been shown to offer a broad range of developmental benefits. As a result of participation in these kinds of youth voice initiatives research has shown gains in sense of control of one's environment as well as enhanced self-esteem, empowerment, and self-efficacy (Checkoway, 2011; Blanchet-Cohen, Manolson, & Shaw, 2014; Matthews, 2001; Zeldin, Camino, & Calvert, 2007). Further, Wray-Lake and Syversten (2011) have suggested that another beneficial outcome is the development of an ethic of social responsibility. The work undertaken by youth in BSACs require the development of a number of skills which can contribute to sense of efficacy in the civic realm. Youniss and Yates (1997) note that self-efficacy is a particularly crucial element of positive youth engagement given that a sense of responsibility to one's community alone will not

translate into action if it is not paired with a sense of agency. Given the persistent gap in political participation based on wealth and race (Verba et al, 2003) and contemporary evidence that that gap is growing among youth (Syversten et al, 2011) youth councils offer teachers, community leaders and afterschool program managers an opportunity to subvert this dynamic by recruiting participants from marginalized identity and low income groups. The New York City Department of Education's BSACs draw their membership from public schools serving mostly youth of color, many of whom are first generation Americans and 72% of whom receive free and or reduced price lunch (Council of Children and Families, 2019). For the most part, the BSACs are comprised of young people who are low-income and can be considered marginalized from an institutional or systemic perspective in terms of either their legal status, race-ethnicity, religious background, or neighborhood of residence.

Youth voice initiatives can also serve as *contact zones* for adults and young people. Developmental relationships between adolescents and adults that occur outside of the family and authority relationships are a cornerstone of positive youth development (Hamilton et al, 2016). Torre (2006) defines a contact zone as a space where humans interact across power differentials, moving beyond the binary distinction of oppressor/oppressed to relations somewhere in between. Settings such as BSACs which have been intentionally arranged to create conditions where youth and adults work in partnership are good sites for the emergence of developmental relationships (Zeldin, 2012). Developmental relationship building in the context of a youth-adult partnership can be qualitatively different than that of a pre-ordained mentoring relationship. The youth-adult partnership is built on the premise of mutuality; the adult stands to gain as well as the child. Whereas in mentorship the mentee is expected to be the receptacle for the wisdom of the mentor in ideal BSAC relationships adults also enter the partnership with the expectation that they will

learn, grow and change as a result. In evaluating the effects of having exercised a leadership role as Youth Partner Facilitators in their respective BSACs the participants discussed the growth they experienced with regard to working with adults. Generally the teens reported feeling more at ease than ever before in their interactions with adults in decision-making roles. One student reported learning how to talk to adults while staying calm, while another reported that he learned how to be more confident when talking to adults. Other participants named particular adults who had played important roles in their individual lives by offering the student the opportunity to gain confidence in their abilities by inviting them to present at a Chancellor's town hall or leading a workshop on college access. These self reports show how BSACs serve as contact zones where youth can break down the notion that adult authority figures are intimidating and judgemental, coming to see them as potential partners in the larger project of reforming school environments to better meet student needs. Similarly, within the BSAC structure adults have the opportunity to interrogate their own inhabitation of power. A persistent theme that emerged in BSAC meetings was one of collaboration, both the youth and adults seeing the BSAC space as one for "working together" on "shared goals". This theme highlights the reality that most spaces where youth come into contact with adults are characterized by starkly uneven power-interrelations and goals that appear to be at cross-purposes. The BSAC space, with its expectations for collaboration and partnership have the potential to disturb the extant power imbalances between young people and adults. This concept is further explored in the following section.

The unique opportunities afforded by the Borough Student Advisory Councils for high school students to meet with individuals who hold decision-making power have the potential to increase participants' sense of self-efficacy, and political efficacy in particular. One student who cited Bronx born Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez as her role model expressed that

meeting with DOE stakeholders helped her envision herself dealing with the difficult choices that come with a policymaking role. This student was under no illusions about the nascent nature of youth-voice in the DOE and of the system which limited her access as a student of color to influence a Borough Superintendent or other adult DOE officials. However, her interaction with her BSAC afforded her a better understanding of the structure of the system of governance and the various levels at which decision-making power is distributed. Other students shared the realization that most problems they witness at their school are actually the result of systems wide policy and practice, and that school administrators are often merely the ones carrying out policy instead of shaping it. The BSACs offer an opportunity for youth to participate in experiential learning, meeting with adults and deliberating about issues that present themselves as unique to their schools, but which they come to realize are the results of systemic and represent wider inequalities that extend beyond their individual experience. Individual students who self-identified as activists reported feeling that BSACs were a place to skillbuild, and practice facilitation and connect with other youth but that the work which they wanted to prioritize took place elsewhere. These findings echo Taft and Gordon's (2013) research on youth activists serving on youth councils in Australia. It is worth noting, however, that not every young person who participates in the BSACs will be the beneficiary of this kind of positive development. NYC Service's initial goal to involve 30,000 youth in some council capacity over the course of 4 years was undoubtedly ambitious, and the attempt to scale engagement to such impressive levels came at the cost of genuine and impactful engagement across the board on the individual level. Many youth cycling through the BSACs did not receive the range of benefits proposed, due in some significant part to the scale of the project. Serving such a large number of youth in such a short time precluded careful attention on a managerial level to the quality of

programming offered on the ground on each council. Reasons for the failure of adult partners to fully engage youth in a transformative capacity on the individual level may include lack of capacity in terms of available time commitment, lack of capacity because of lack of adequate positive youth development facilitation training, or lack of genuine interest in the role of adult-partner facilitator. All of these are imminently necessary to create conditions for implementation of BSACs which result in individual youth development. Further details will be discussed in the following section.

BSACs: Organization-Level Analysis

Since more institutional focus has been directed at the BSACs since they fell under the Youth Council Initiative in 2014, there has been more attention paid to the quality of youth engagement occurring within the BSACs. In prior years, youth involved were asked to spend the year developing proposals on issues of concern to them which they then presented to DOE staff at the end of the year. According to youth feedback, the resulting proposals did little more than fall on interested but ultimately deaf ears of DOE staffers who were unsure of what next steps to take. In terms of the IAPP framework this former means of engagement could be understood as falling under the “Informing” category. On an organizational level, the visible result of BSACs were to give youth the opportunity to inform policymakers of how they saw the problem, and inform them of potential solutions devised by young people. In recent years, this has become less common across all BSACs as more emphasis has been placed on developing projects which are rolled in real-time out as the year progresses. Since 2014 opportunities for staff training in positive youth development and youth-adult partnership have increased, as has the emphasis on publicity and recruitment of students to sit on the councils, and increased attention to outcomes

through evaluation and surveying of both staff and student participants. There has also been an effort to increase the visibility and the work of the BSACs within the DOE to alert other offices of the opportunity for adult staff to partner with BSAC students on various initiatives which relate to the work of the department, i.e. the Office of Sustainability partnering with BSACs to launch a DOE wide recycling awareness campaign which is rolled out over the course of the spring semester. It was clear that the increasing level of organizational awareness of the BSAC work at the DOE departmental level had been beneficial given that students whose BSAC had no connection to adult partners working in the offices which could address their concerns had trouble getting their projects off the ground and felt frustrated about where to turn for information and a sounding board for their proposals. The youth who had been returning participants in three out of the seven BSACs in particular felt that each of their councils had become more youth-led in the past two years as adult facilitators adjust to sharing ownership of the BSACs with the youth involved. Adults reported that seeing the same students return year after year encouraged them to delegate some tasks that were otherwise executed by adults to the students. Those adults seemed proud and to some degree relieved that their BSACs had become more youth-led, acknowledging that it gave them more time to focus on other areas of their jobs at the Field Support Office and offered the youth participants a deeper level of engagement and leadership. Conducting opening meeting ice-breakers, holding extra meetings to co-create the agenda, fielding student questions during meetings and breaking-out into working groups with adult DOE staff partners increased amounts of real-time problem solving and leadership available to participants. Students in other BSACs reported feeling disappointed that their monthly meetings were not more youth-led. Expecting a youth-voice initiative to be more student directed, many of them expressed an understanding that though their adult partner meant

well and was a nice person, he or she was not aware of what it meant to work in partnership with youth and perhaps lacked the skills necessary to do so. In these meetings youth did not co-create agendas or facilitate much beyond an initial ice-breaker. These same youth were sometimes unwilling to challenge the adult facilitator or request that they share power because they were concerned that it may mark them as problem students or greedy and may jeopardize their place in the program. In such instances youth may be frustrated by the lack of power-sharing but may be unwilling to forgo the nominal 'leadership opportunity' that sitting on the council provides. For these young people the possibility of equalizing power relations was not worth the risk of losing the a resume builder, or their good reputation in the eyes of an adult. Trust emerges as a salient theme in these findings, proving necessary for adults to feel secure delegating work to the youth, and in the youth feeling secure enough in a relationship with the adult to ask for meaningful work. These findings echo Taft and Gordon's (2013) research which highlights youth activists' skepticism about adult council partners who retain control while rhetorically applauding the idea of shared decision-making. A student in Taft and Gordon's study reported "Like they come in with the agenda and they ask you for input, knowing that they are already going to do what they're going to do" (2013). Although the dominant power imbalances may be troubled by the youth-adult partnership, evidence demonstrates that they are not entirely subverted or eliminated. In fact, the potential that relationships continue to operate hierarchically, leaving limited room for organizational change in an adult-led organization, appears most likely unless a basis for challenging and equalizing power-relationships is established early on in the program. In only 2 of 7 BSACs did youth appear to feel that power-sharing was operating equitably. Power-sharing in a way where youth can feel comfortable, safe and supported requesting and taking on decision-making roles on the council youth is possible, and should occur in a way that builds

trust across the youth-adult relationship. In BSACs where youth were offered opportunities to suggest DOE offices for potential partnership, direct meetings, co-create agendas and deliberate in real time about concerns raised during meetings students reported feeling a sense of growth and control in their leadership abilities and their faith that their BSAC could make some changes at their school level. Students expressed optimism about the change-making trajectory and potential of their BSAC to become even more youth-directed as time went on. Observations suggest that the role of the adult partner is of significant importance in setting the tone and offering opportunities early on for the kind of power-sharing relationships that will abide in the BSAC space.

To deploy Hart's Ladder of Participation, the BSACs stated programmatic purpose seems to advance the notion that BSACs will operate entirely on an adult initiated level, and involve youth mostly as "informed and consulted" participants to "improve city results" and provide "Youth voice on Critical policy, practice and service areas" (NYC Service, 2014). However, given that the interests, capacity and motivation of individual adults varied widely across BSACs the rollout of BSACs in terms of challenging dominant power relations has been non-uniform. There are instances which can be categorized as "adult-initiated, shared decisions with children" and others which are "youth initiated, shared-decisions with adults". For example, at one BSAC quite a few students coalesced around the idea that school lunch was a problem that needed addressing borough-wide, both with regard to the way that students were being treated by lunchroom staff and the quality of food they were being offered. A staffer from the DOE Office of School Food was invited to discuss and deliberate with students on potential options for intervention on these problems. The decision to create a survey was arrived at after a process which lasted a number of meetings. While students had other ideas of potential interventions to

improve food options including rooftop gardens and partnerships with local vendors, the responses provided by the adult-partner led to the decision to create a survey to gather more information on students' opinions regarding their available lunch options. Although students felt that they had sufficient information, they agreed that more target questions about particular student experiences would help them hone in on appropriate next steps, whatever those might be including rooftop gardens or local-vendor partnerships. The surveys created for students to assess the quality of school food and relations with service staff in their cafeterias were developed by the students, while an adult from the DOE Office of School Food was present to provide information and answer questions. In this case, the idea to address lunchroom problems was student initiated, but the decision of what to do about existing issues was shaped by the will and intentions of the adult partner. The final product, however, was developed by students. Using the IAPP framework this example suggests that this BSAC in particular was moving towards a collaborative environment, rather than an adult directed one where students' role is merely to better inform adults of the problem. However, consensus building is a non-linear and highly variable process which is difficult to categorize in any clear cut way. Granular observation of decision making processes in BSACs highlights the complex nature of youth adult-partnership and shared decision-making.

BSACs: Systemwide Analysis

In terms of city agency structure the BSAC initiative represents a move towards apparent institutionalization of a channel for some kind of youth presence in policy making. The question this poses at the systemic/structural level is: what *kind* of presence? Despite significant opportunities for individual development and the possibility for organizational change given the

right conditions, the BSAC model faces severe limitations with regard to its potential for systemwide change. Students from one BSAC shared their experiences with access to sports and recreation resources. The Chancellor's Student Advisory Council (CSAC) is a body which draws select members from BSACs to elevate and expose their concerns to a higher level of DOE leadership. While this model is structurally sound, the execution leaves much to be desired by BSAC members hoping to have a more powerful audience for the concerns they spent time on at the borough level. CSAC is reported by youth involved to be an almost entirely adult-directed space. BSAC participants from various boroughs lamented that CSAC "report backs" felt unrelated to the work that their BSAC was doing, and resulted in awkward exchanges with the students reporting CSAC business. A common refrain was that students felt unsure about the purpose of CSAC or its value, while others emphasized that it was supposed to be where BSAC concerns got a wider audience. Some students have voiced their visible frustration with the fact that Chancellor Carranza himself very rarely appears at a CSAC meeting. Student frustrations seem warranted given the rhetorical emphasis paid to youth adult partnership DOE wide and that the council bears the name of Carranza's title. Others students were more cynical about the level of engagement expected from the Chancellor, intimating that they never expected him to show up in the first place. Students shared that they saw the CSAC as more of an "informing" space where adults want to share the decisions that have already been made with the participants. The roll-out of CSAC raises questions about the intentions of this initiative and about why coming to CSAC and supporting youth voice doesn't fall higher on the priority list of a working in a liberal Mayoral administration. Turning attention to another structural body which has system-wide decision-making power, the Panel for Educational Policy (PEP) has 13 members 8 of whom are Mayor appointed and the rest of whom are appointed by borough presidents. In 2014 the Mayor

proposed to add 2 seats to the panel reserved for youth, since then young people have been selected from BSAC and CSAC membership to sit in on the PEPs public town-hall style meetings. However, those youth seats are non-voting, and they don't appear on the DOE website's PEP member list or in public correspondences regarding decisions of the panel. In this regard it is clear that the seats are largely symbolic, and if anything meant to expose the youth to a high-level decision-making procedure. However, there is further evidence showing further institutionalization of youth voice in the Department. In late 2018 the Department of Education put out a call to hire for a new position entitled "Student Voice Manager". The responsibilities of this position included establishing and cultivating youth adult partnerships throughout the Department of Education, improving recruitment and awareness of BSACs in high-schools but also internally, and training BSAC adult facilitators. The creation of this position appeared to the youth and adults involved at the BSAC level as a win, since the Student Voice Manager would be the only staff person not dividing their time between youth-voice work and other unrelated job responsibilities. Additionally, a responsibility of this role is to meet regularly with youth-led organizations outside the Department. One can infer that cause-oriented, youth-led, NYC based organizations like Teens Take Charge, Integrate NYC4Me and Ya-Ya Youth Network are the kinds of organizations intended for these meetings. It appears likely that the student activists holding roles in both BSACs and the student-led organizations played a role in initiating the partnerships. The potential for these youth to bring extra-institutional perspectives on the roll-out of youth adult partnerships in BSAC is encouraging. These ties may encourage further critique of the areas where rhetoric diverges from practice in terms of the implementation of shared decision-making.

All in all roadblocks remain lodged at the systems level, hampering the potential for long term shifts that could institutionalize a place for genuine youth voice in DOE policy-making. There remains a lack of dedicated staff people whose sole responsibilities are the administration and facilitation of BSACs at each Borough Field Support Office. And the unresolved question of where (organizationally) “student voice” should reside within the Department of Education is betrays unwillingness of the institution to embrace it wholesale. The Student Voice Manager which is currently situated in the Office for Community Affairs which is housed under External Affairs under the Deputy Chancellor for Community Empowerment, Partnerships and Communications. This placement is representative of the way that the DOE intends to utilize the BSACs, as a means of community engagement, however this necessarily silos it apart and away from the various offices which could benefit from direct contact with youth-voice and from whom adults are often solicited to attend BSAC meetings to share information (DOE, 2019). Ideally youth-voice would have a place in each office which administers and deals directly with issues of concern to students such as the Office of School Safety and Youth Development, Office of Equity and Access, Office of School Food, Office of Sustainability, etc. It is not unforeseeable that such a shift may occur in the future as youth voice becomes further institutionalized.

Contradictions Complicating the Political Role of Young People

Over the past few decades society has grown to understand youth as a social group with its own social value and function, this is reflected by structural changes in the institutions of civil society. The predominating view of young people which has bearing on youth participation initiatives is the idea that youth are by their very nature, evolving linearly through a stage of development culminating in adulthood. The societally constructed notion of youth as

underdeveloped adults or as what Hava Gordon (2010) has called “citizens in the making”, is influential for how youth voice initiatives are implemented in the public sphere. Embedded within this concept are presuppositions about youth’s limited capacities for autonomous decision-making, deliberation and effective action. Maria Tsekoura (2016) rightly notes the dualistic nature of approaches to contemporary youth participation which are structured by a socially constructed notion of childhood and youth either as existing in a phase of *becoming*, on the one hand and of *being* on the other. Tsekoura notes that these socially constructed ideas overlap and often contradict one another.

Hannah Pitkin argues that the meaning of citizenship is discovered through active participation in social life. Pitkin posits that through contact with the wider polity an individual discovers that private concerns are implicated in wider public debates. Thus an individual can begin to consider private disturbances public as they are understood to be shared by a multitude. Pitkin argues that along with the realization of the individual’s situatedness within a wider public, comes the realization of one’s own capacity. From this realization flows potential for autonomous judgement, deliberation and effective action (Pitkin, 2004; Pitkin and Schumer, 1982).

Taking seriously Pitkin’s view helps illuminate the view that avenues for youth participation can serve as means by which youth discover themselves as part of the wider polity, embedded and implicated as individuals within wider social narratives, situations and structures. However, there are elements of Pitkin’s analysis that are in tension with how youth are viewed by mainstream society and the societally constructed notion of youth. Critical youth development literature has been diligent in documenting the ways in which young people are not generally viewed or understood by the public as active co-creators of their environment, but rather as

onlookers and followers (Best, 2013). Particularly illustrative of this widely held view is the oft used metaphor of children as “sponges” absorbing their surroundings rather than co-creating them. This view of youth as non-agential is problematic when it comes into conversation with literature on democratic participation for at least two reasons. Firstly, the youth as “becoming” narrative is often baked-into the implementation of youth voice integration initiatives because of its pervasiveness in mainstream society. Secondly, if youth are in fact primarily absorbers of their environment, as the sponge metaphor suggests, it is most likely the case that they will understand themselves as non-agential. Most spaces in which young people live, learn and work in the US offer limited avenues for their participation this societal view of youth as limited is reflected back to them. Schools and families offer many developmental benefits to young people, but they are inherently undemocratic institutions. In schools and families young people are routinely denied participation in decision-making which directly affects them. Given the pervasiveness of this socialization, the risk of their reproducing this reality even when offered space for engagement is significant. An observer should be circumspect in their expectations that youth participation will increase dramatically when offered opportunities given the strength of socialization processes that reflect occurring in institutions. Further discussion of this phenomenon will follow in the section on Individual Effects. A salient question to ask given this set of concerns is to what extent the adults and youth involved in youth voice initiatives may be simultaneously resisting and/or perpetuating notions of youth as underdeveloped citizens.

Affirmative Governmentality: A Youth Governance Apparatus

Youth-voice apparatuses such as the BSACs do not operate independently of the socio-political context in which they are embedded. Rather they are reflective of wider political shifts

in governance strategy which utilize community participation and engagement to varying ends. Given this it is worth tracing out an analysis of how the prevailing environment of neoliberal political technology shapes the potential of youth voice initiatives more generally.

The aforementioned body of scholarship chronicling the sharp decline in youth involvement relies heavily on two interwoven beliefs which merit further consideration. Firstly it relies on a narrowly circumscribed concept of the political. It has already been noted that the notion of what constitutes political behavior focuses strictly on involvement in a few formalized political institutional processes which include voting, campaigns, elections and their accoutrements. Secondly, the research is predicated on the liberal notion that to change law and policy will necessarily change citizen behavior. Here liberal is used in the Foucauldian sense, referring not to a theory or an ideology but rather to a “way of doing things” in the exercise of government (Foucault, 2008). The scholarship shines a bright light on certain repertoires for action and relies heavily on the belief that providing a legal degree of opportunity for youth actors to engage in these particular ways will necessarily result in engagement. Such a belief paves the way for construction of a narrative that reifies a presupposed belief. Tsekoura (2016) rightly observes that a youth’s choice to decline a particular form of political engagement when it is legally provided will appear to the observer as that youth’s apathy and lack of responsibility. Apathy, immaturity, lack of responsibility, lack of interest in the political system is precisely what general deficit based theories of youth and childhood presuppose about the nature of “citizens in development”. This is especially true when it comes to minority youth who are often the targets of youth voice initiatives, especially in larger urban contexts. It is worth asking why researchers, pundits and politicians alike are concerned about youth’s lack of engagement in formalized political processes. It may be the case that without training these youth will become

non-participating adults, resulting in a political establishment elected and supported by a small number of elites rather than a broad cross-section of the possible American populace. There is also the possibility that a deeply embedded anxiety regarding the potential ungovernability of youth who have not been socialized to engage productively with formalized political channels is creating concern about perceived non-participation. Emphasizing the degree to which youth have become disengaged in particular ways does create a particular rationale for the development of new mechanisms for governability and citizen management.

Liberalism, Foucault instructs us, is not concerned with institutional government as such, in terms of the strengthening and enlarging of the state apparatus. Rather liberalism as a *modus operandi* is always concerned with the risk of governing “too much” (Foucault, 2008). Liberal governmentality recognizes its own limitations when it comes the knowability of what makes good government intervention, and thus defaults to laissez-faire when possible. Generally liberalism puts faith in the principles embodied by *homo oeconomicus*, principles which direct individuals to act on their individual preferences without regard for the larger whole, thereby producing optimal outcomes. Foucault says “from the point of view of a theory of government, *homo oeconomicus* is the person who must be let alone.” Foucault quotes economist cum criminologist Gary Becker in his elaboration of this postulate saying that *homo oeconomicus* is “the person who accepts reality or who responds systematically to modifications in the variables of the environment...artificially introduced into the environment” (Foucault, 2008). Subjects in a liberal democracy take on the governmental imperative to self-regulate against social risks such as poverty, unemployment, criminal behavior and others which render them ungovernable. Youth subjects, though, who are by definition difficult subjects to govern given their unpredictability, irregular sexual habits and lack of economic productivity appear to the liberal

governance apparatus as the least likely social actors to take on the mantle of self-governance.

This paper has already discussed the prevailing notion of black and brown youth criminality held over from the 1990s and the resulting notion of youth as a social problem (Best, 2008). Media and popular opinion since the 90's has reinforced the narrative that black and marginalized youth are risky subjects. Research on images of adolescents in early 2000's news coverage shows that youth of color appeared in crime news 52 percent of the time while white youth did so 35 percent of the time. In contrast, white youth were more likely to appear in health and education stories than youth of color, 13% compared to 2% respectively (Center for Media and Public Affairs, 2000). Researchers also found a strong association between crime news including youth of color as offenders and viewer's public policy stances: "A mere five-second exposure to a mugshot of African American and Hispanic youth offenders (in a 15 minute newscast) raises levels of fear among viewers, increases support for 'get tough' crime policies, and promotes racial stereotyping" (Gilliam and Iyengar, 1998). Recent events demonstrate that the superpredator script has been revised but not forgotten. Its potency was recalled during Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign when Clinton was heavily criticised for invoking the superpredator narrative in her 1996 speech to a mostly white audience in New Hampshire. A Vera Institute report from 2017 highlights that the number of youth incarcerated has been cut in half, returned to pre-1990s levels and juvenile detention alternatives are on the rise, removing the death penalty and life without parole as potential punishments for minors (Larson and Carvente, 2017). However, civic engagement strategy embodied in governance apparatuses like youth councils can be linked to this social anxiety created by the crime spikes of the 1990s, the readily available data on decline in youth participation and the advancement of research on positive youth development demonstrating beneficial social outcomes.

Soo Anh Kwon (2013) develops the notion of affirmative governmentality to explain engagements of a institutionally supported activism of an organization called Asian/Pacific Islander Youth Promoting Advocacy and Leadership (AYPAL). She argues that the slew of apparently progressive moves towards incorporating youth organizing and otherwise contentious political participation into institutional decision-making structures are a means of exercising control via positive intervention. In her analysis, youth organizing is supported by structures through which dominant governing institutions can legitimize narratives and policy choices by obtaining youth assent. In this way municipal governments can, in concert with nonprofits supported by foundation money, sidestep exclusionary practices and overt coercion. Kwon characterizes the pervasive youth civic engagement initiatives as enclosures, limiting the way that society recapitulates theories of social change. The manner in which the rhetoric of youth civic engagement has been captured by dominant governance systems allows municipalities, cities and governments to appear to address an issue which has produced much public anxiety. As a regime of incorporation, youth voice initiatives rhetorically rely on the language of inclusion and engagement to draw young actors into contact with government and institutions to engage in the deliberative work of policy-making. However, this agenda may conceal the degree to which such projects intend to develop and “work on youth” more than it intends to “work on policy”. Advisory councils in this regard can be understood as what Barbara Cruikshank has called “technologies of citizenship”. Youth councils are the means by which contemporary governmental systems have chosen to produce members capable of acting politically, a pedagogical program which enables the production of the citizen to serve particular governmental ends, the first being the governability of the citizen himself (Cruikshank, 1999). Kwon notes that the will to empower and be empowered is exercised by enabling and

encouraging youth to participate in nonprofit programming meant to protect them from the risks of their environment but also, notably, to protect them from the threat of becoming “at risk” (Kwon, 2013).

Interestingly, John DiIulio, the aforementioned political scientist credited with the superpredator narrative has long since acknowledged the failure of his story to represent or predict the reality of youth criminal activity. However, in 2013 he joined the board of directors of an Aspen Institute funded initiative called the Franklin Project to impel 18-24 year olds into national service bodies with the intention of making national service a “common expectation for all young Americans” (Aspen Institute, 2013). It is notable that the same individual who advocated removing black youth from their communities by incarcerating them in large numbers in order to prevent the cumulative effects of negative socialization now sits on a major foundation board directing a youth engagement initiative. DiIulio also served as George W. Bush’s White House Director of Faith Based and Community Initiatives. Perhaps this can serve as an example of the dramatic shift in public understandings of youth subjectivities, and in particular marginalized youth subjectivities which has led to a convergence of conservative and liberal governance strategies which can best be characterized by employing a affirmative governmentality framework. The research done here demonstrates that while it may be tempting from a theoretical angle to view neoliberalism’s hegemony as all-encompassing, it proves not to be totalizing in the context in question. Both youth and adults involved in the BSAC roll-out showed themselves to be actively engaged in recognizing and exposing the contradictions embedded in its manifestations.

Conclusion

As social justice movements like #BlackLivesMatter and the National School Walkouts in response to the 2018 Parkland shooting engage thousands of youth in collective political action calling for social transformation, the neoliberal re-ordering of public life continues to alter contemporary channels for meaningful public participation. Youth voice programs such as the NYC Youth Council Initiative and the Borough Student Advisory Councils can be sites of positive youth development on the individual participant level and result in organizational change that disrupts power imbalances between adults and youth. Systems level shifts in policy making, though they appear to be a part of the rhetorical impetus behind youth voice initiatives are difficult to realize in practice. Systemic shifts may come as a result of future incorporation of meaningful youth engagement in institutional processes, however. One might also consider youth voice initiatives on the whole as constitutive of form of affirmative governmentality, by which the state norms participants to the functioning of governmental institutions by sanctioning individual contact through specified channels, and maximizing developmental opportunities for the individual young person whilst leaving systems level policy unchanged. While the BSACs can provide a meaningful leadership development opportunity for the individual youth participant, it is unclear whether the BSACs set up conditions for the co-creation of the educational public good via genuine shared policy-making and systemic change. The BSAC programmatic rollout leaves questions unanswered in terms of the disconnection between the policy rhetoric and its execution at a systemic level. Given the context for the emergence of youth voice initiatives which laments a decline in youth political participation and a current federal administration hostile to equitable youth development, it is not insignificant that New York City offers to its youth an opportunity to engage freely in governmental processes before

they are old enough to vote. However, the NYC case suggests that, even as youth voice expands in municipal government, it does so in narrow, scripted ways-- forwarding a model of affirmative governmentality in the process. The implementation of NYC's Youth Council Initiative at the BSAC level raises questions about the will to extend apparatuses of governance to young people without accompanying mechanisms that give material effect to the input of youth participants.

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