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What does Social Agency have to do with it? Positive Pathways to Adulthood for Groups of Opportunity Youth and College Students in Rhode Island

Perri S. Leviss

WHAT DOES SOCIAL AGENCY HAVE TO DO WITH IT? POSITIVE PATHWAYS TO
ADULTHOOD FOR GROUPS OF OPPORTUNITY YOUTH AND COLLEGE
STUDENTS IN RHODE ISLAND

A Dissertation Presented

by

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ABSTRACT

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ADULTHOOD FOR GROUPS OF OPPORTUNITY YOUTH AND COLLEGE
STUDENTS IN RHODE ISLAND

August 2020

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Opportunity youth are emerging adults 16–24 years old, neither in a career nor
attending college. In 2018, there were 13,600 opportunity youth in Rhode Island, many are
low-income, young people of color historically excluded from educational and career
pathways. The study introduces an alternate lens grounded in the capability approach to
human development and provides new terminology for thinking about the positive trajectory
to adulthood for marginalized young people. The research offers an asset-based construct to
view social agency [and the dimensions of hope, empowerment, voice, choice, and
comm(unity)] as a foundational capability. The mixed methods study measures strength of
social agency and level of social agency facilitators (intermediaries required to actualize
social agency).

Conducted in 2017 and 2018 through a web-based survey, focus groups, and a community-engaged research group, the study compares opportunity youth members of Year Up Rhode Island (a national career preparedness and educational program) and students at Rhode Island College. Based on quantitative and qualitative data, the two groups share many similarities in social agency, but require different enabling conditions in order to activate their agency. Adjusting for sociodemographic characteristics, the multivariate regression illustrates that there are no significant differences in strength of social agency. Data from the survey and focus groups confirmed that both samples had similar levels of social agency facilitators; however, the college students had access to different activities, opportunities, and personal connections including community mentors and work experiences. When asked to identify the most important social agency facilitators, focus group participants most frequently cited social and emotional attributes. Higher levels of social agency facilitators were significantly correlated with stronger social agency ($p<.001$).

Race and ethnicity and mother's education did not significantly account for variation in social agency or social agency facilitators, although older emerging adults had stronger (but not significant) social agency and female emerging adults had significantly higher levels of social agency facilitators. Finally, the preliminary data support the need for improved understanding of marginalized young people's capabilities (including social agency), and targeted public policies that promote alternative pathways for all emerging adults to lead healthy lives.

Keywords: capabilities, social agency, social agency facilitators, emerging adulthood, opportunity youth, pathways to adulthood

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

During the second year of my doctoral program, early on in the first semester,
our professor asked each of us to draw a map of our own life's journey with
landmarks along the way. He said that it could look however we wanted, meaning we
could include words, pictures, or any other ways of illustrating where we have been
and where we are going. As I started to draw a path (I am horrible at drawing), I
found myself noting people as landmarks—not accomplishments, jobs, places, or
things. This exercise has stuck with me for the last five years; in fact, I often use this
same lesson with my own students at the end of each semester. What I learned from
this exercise is that there have been a number of people who have facilitated my own
pathway (which has been less than linear): my family who helped me positively reach
adulthood (my mom, my dad, and my brother), one of my close friends at age 12 who
was bused from Boston each day to attend my local public school, my eighth-grade
social studies teacher at Curtis Junior High School, my then-boyfriend and now
husband, my big boss at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, AIDS
Office (who later died during the epidemic), my political science professor (and
mentor) at the University of Maryland's School of Public Policy, and my colleagues
and friends at the NYC Office of Management and Budget and the NYC Department
of Health, early on in my public service career. Somehow this list is probably not that
surprising since it is filled with family, friends, teachers, and work supervisors.

However, the types of people in my drawing changed after 2004 when we
moved to Rhode Island and, since that time, every facilitator of my pathway has been

a young person, beginning with my own young adult daughters whom I learn something new from every single day and who make me a better person. My most recent social agency facilitators begin with Semente, Jeleny, Jarissa, Leslie, Dayo, Alex, Yinka, Tyler, Jennifer, Rosa, Julian, Drazy, Sam, and Chase, while I continue to be blessed by others including Susan, Rodney, Paul, Sarah, and Jean, bookmarked by Erika, Chantrea, Jerry, Richard, and Viset. All of these emerging adults are trying to make their way in this very complicated world, trying to financially support themselves and their families, trying to keep themselves physically and mentally healthy, trying to honor their families, trying to educate themselves, and trying hard to have a better future. It is for these young people that I dedicate this body of work. I hope that there are ways in which this dissertation (both the data and the research methodology) become useful to young people, especially emerging adults of color and low-income emerging adults in Rhode Island.

There are many people who specifically facilitated this dissertation study, without whom this would not have been possible. When beginning my dissertation process, I had no idea how much I would rely on people at my two data collection sites. George Nippo at Year Up Rhode Island had never met me before this study, but he believed in my work (and in me) from the very beginning and continues to be a sounding board and friend to me through this process. He did not need to coordinate another project because he spends every day caring for the lives of hundreds of emerging adults, but he took time to care about my work and the young people involved in the research. I want to give a special shout out to all the YURI staff who

willingly allowed me to observe their teaching and coaching sessions and to show up at the last minute just to hang out and get some of the positive vibes that permeate from their offices on Fountain Street. Valerie Endress is a long-time friend and colleague who teaches emerging adults at Rhode Island College, creates programs and systems to support their growth and development, and empowers young people to believe that with education and learning they can have different pathways to adulthood than they may have thought possible. Valerie was especially generous to help me develop the data collection strategies and to spread the word about my research to faculty and students at Rhode Island College.

My dissertation committee is an unlikely composition of experts—an economist, two philosophers, and a clinical psychologist. Each has facilitated my dissertation in critical ways and at different times throughout the long process. Dr. Randy Albelda agreed to oversee my research when I was lost and provided a strong and stable lamppost to me throughout my doctoral studies. Dr. Christopher Zurn is a stalwart believer in his students—he always looked for the bright spots in my work and connected them to larger concepts. Dr. Ester Shapiro saved my life many times over the past few years by helping me to conceptualize and execute this dissertation. She gave me more of herself (and her deep experience in research and teaching) than I ever could have asked from anyone. And Dr. Peter Levine has been a part of my journey since I went to UMaryland's School of Public Policy and first began understanding how deep thinkers have a role in applied public policy making. His work (both content and process) is one of my primary reference points. And Dr.

Philip Brenner is not an official member of my dissertation committee but was a critical part of my education at UMass Boston, and he was my sounding board for methodological questions about my survey and the data it produced. Finally, Rachel Schneider and Samantha Rosenthal saved me from myself with my quantitative data analysis. A warning to the wise: Stata® is much harder when you have not worked with it for several years and then decide to conduct a mixed methods dissertation study.

There have been several other important people who have contributed to this work either because they served as young adult researchers in the study, they participated in the Data Advisory Group at Year Up Rhode Island, they served as teachers and adult allies at Year Up RI or Rhode Island College, they completed the survey, and/or they showed up for a focus group. Specifically, I want to deeply thank Susan Anderson, Rodney Derogene, and Paul Itturalde for working with me as young adult researchers and for being so patient with me as I figured out how to make this academic project work. I also want to thank Year Up RI alumni Jerry Fleurima, Julissa Garcia, Oluwayemi Kayode (Junior), Marlenys Mora, and Steven Walsh who volunteered their time and ideas to the project and served as the Data Advisory Group. And many thanks to Michael Tartaglia, Genesis Pacheco Batista, and Stephanie Dominguez (also Year Up RI alumni) who were the first people to test the web-based survey.

My friends at the University of Massachusetts Boston in the Department of Public Policy have facilitated my work from the sidelines—crying with me,

complaining with me, telling me I was not crazy, being imposters with me, and even at times being paralyzed with me. Conducting a doctoral study is a very lonely process, but Hsin-Ching, Ana, Priyanka, Tanya, and Allyson were life rafts when I was drowning. To my women friends (you know who you are) who have continued to ask and listen to my progress and celebrate with me on the varied milestones along the way, thank you, thank you. And to my beautiful family, Jonathan, Becca, and Emmy who all endured this entire adventure with me, thank you for always believing that I could do this. I love you more than anything. The thing about social agency facilitators is that we do not always know whose path we are facilitating or how many people or experiences we really *need* to facilitate our own trajectory, but I would argue that *will, desire, or grit* alone does not get any of us to where we want to be. Those of us with privilege have a specific responsibility to serve as the facilitators of others' futures.

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INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

"To alter the trajectory of his or her life, a young person needs perseverance, the ability to delay gratification, the optimism to envision a better future, and the willingness to work toward it. But these personal characteristics, while necessary, are simply not sufficient. Disconnection is not a spontaneously occurring phenomenon; it is an outcome years in the making." (Lewis & Burd-Sharps, 2015*, pg. ii*)

1.1 Introduction

I have the privilege of being a caring adult in the lives of young people —both to my own daughters and to my friends. Many of these friendships were formed with emerging adults when they were in high school because they participated in youth advocacy organizations in Providence, Rhode Island (RI). Others I met when they were older, sometimes due to happenstance, like chatting in front of a flyer for a UMass Boston event, while others I was assigned as a community mentor in a structured youth program or as an institutional mentor when serving as their college teacher and advisor.

After spending time with many amazing young people, I was still unable to understand why some emerging adults were on the more traditional pathway to adulthood through college readiness and persistence (which people often deem as the more successful trajectory to adulthood) and other young people were on alternative pathways, even when the emerging adults had similar backgrounds including sociodemographic characteristics. Based on my experience working with marginalized young people in Rhode Island (including low-income young people

and young people of color), there are a few common pathways that emerging adults take: many attend the Community College of Rhode Island (some stay through their associate's degree and some do not), some attend Rhode Island College (RIC) located in Providence, while a smaller number go to the University of Rhode Island which is further away, an even smaller number go out of state to attend college, some do not even begin college and others drop out before they finish, and finally some end up in comprehensive career preparedness programs like Year Up RI (YURI) . When I began this study, there were some non-college workforce development options for emerging adults, but they were more limited than they are today given the state's recent career and college readiness initiative (known as PrepareRI).

This study was born out of my desire to better understand (a) why some young people were on a more traditional college readiness and persistence pathway when others were not and (b) how to map the complicated landscape of youth development programs and services offered by government and youth organizations in our state. In the pages that follow, I will begin to explain in greater detail some of the phrases and terms that are important to the story, including emerging adulthood, opportunity youth (OY), capabilities, social agency, social agency facilitators, and positive or successful trajectory to adulthood, and then describe how they fit together into a conceptual framework that tests how emerging adults on the different pathways are able to have hope for the future, to be empowered, to have voice, and to be agents of change for themselves and for others.

1.2 Concepts of Emerging Adulthood and Relationship to Study

I am defining emerging adults as young people between the ages of 18 and 25 years old[1]. During emerging adulthood, young people are confronted with a number of individual and social transitions and decisions that have long-term implications, including choices about jobs, education, and family life, while at the same time exploring their own identities. This definition comes out of the scholarly literature that discusses the transition from childhood to adulthood. The Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs (2013) splits the time period from adolescence to emerging adulthood into three stages: early adolescence (under 14 years old), middle adolescence (15–17 years old), and late adolescence and early adulthood (18–25 years old). Arnett (1998) first defines emerging adulthood as "a period of development bridging adolescence and young adulthood, during which young people are no longer adolescents but have not yet attained full adult status" (p. 312). While Arnett (1998) formally presents the age span of emerging adulthood as 18–25 years old, he also states that the upper age boundary is flexible and may be extended to age 29.[2] In later work, Arnett (2004) argues the period of emerging adulthood has five key characteristics—it is an age of instability, identity exploration, self-focus, feeling in-between, and possibilities. Arnett and Schwab (2012) attribute the rise of emerging adulthood to the social and economic conditions of the last few decades with changes in manufacturing leading to an information-based economy, more young people pursuing higher education, later ages of marriage and parenthood, and the sexual revolution.

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[1]In this paper, young people and emerging adults will be used interchangeably, although there is a body of literature that specifically defines emerging adulthood as a distinct developmental category (Arnett, 2012, 2015).

[2] For the purposes of this dissertation study, emerging adults will be categorized as those between 18 and 25 years old, although several federal databases at the US Bureau of the Census and other government agencies use 18–24 or 16–24 years old.

According to the most recent General Social Survey module about young adulthood (2012), Americans age 18 and over report that the highest-ranking milestones to becoming an adult are educational and economic accomplishments. Finishing school ranks the highest with over 60% of people indicating that it is extremely important in becoming an adult. At the same time, over half of Americans indicate that marrying and having children are not very important to becoming an adult (Vespa, 2017). In the first national survey specifically about the lives of emerging adults (18–29 years old), Arnett and Schwab (2012–2015) collect national data from emerging adults themselves and the parents of emerging adults to document their ideas about and feelings towards reaching adulthood. In the first survey (2012), participants are asked whether or not they feel they have reached adulthood, what would constitute reaching adulthood, and how education and work, and love, sex, and marriage relate to reaching adulthood. Surprisingly, the survey results indicate that emerging adults struggle, sometimes for a very long time, to reach adulthood and they are simultaneously very optimistic about the future. I found similar responses of honest struggle and hope in my study of emerging adults and opportunity youth in Rhode Island.

Opportunity youth (sometimes also referred to as *out-of-school youth*, *at-risk youth*, or *disconnected youth*) are young people 16–24 years old who are not currently in college and are not in a career. These young people may have jobs in food or customer service or in care work, but opportunity youth do not have avenues for career development that will lift them out of poverty. The recent name change from disconnected youth to opportunity youth is an intentional recognition that this group of young people should be viewed through a positive lens celebrating their opportunity for involvement in work and social life that contributes to the larger

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community. Unfortunately, many OY are often without some of the important individual and institutional support structures (referred to as anchor institutions) that connect young people to society.

The costs of disconnection are high, both for the young people and for the general population. OY are oftentimes cut off from the people, institutions, and experiences that would otherwise help them to develop the knowledge, skills, maturity, and sense of purpose required to live rewarding lives as adults. High-risk groups for disconnection include young adults of color, unmarried teen moms, youth in the juvenile system, youth in the foster care system, and high school dropouts (Weisstein & Traub, 2010). Many OY lack a high school diploma or GED, they are nearly twice as likely to live in poverty, and most live in central cities or in rural areas. Girls and young women who are disconnected are more than four times as likely to have a child as their connected counterparts during this time period (Lewis, 2020). The consequences of disconnection are large both for the young people themselves and for the community—loss of lifetime earnings, insufficient supply of skilled workers, loss of tax revenue, increased social investments in unemployment and welfare payments, increased costs to the justice systems, and the weakening of democracy due to the increased division between educational haves and have nots. OY are less likely to form stable families, vote, or volunteer, and they are more likely to need public assistance (Weisstein & Traub, 2010).

According to the US Census Bureau, there were over 30.6 million emerging adults (18–24 years old) in the United States in 2017. From 2000 to 2017, the population grew by 3.3 million, but the majority of the increase occurred in the decade between 2000 and 2010. Additionally, there have been significant changes in the population based on race during this

same time period with white opportunity youth 18- to 24-year-olds decreasing from 62% to 54%

while Black young people increased from 13.8% to 14.4%; Hispanic or Latinx increased from

18% to 22%; Asians increased from 4% to 6%; and two or more races rose from 1% to 3%

(National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020). One of the many reasons that the

emerging adult population serves such an important role in the United States is because of its

strength in numbers and the potential impact that these young people have on educational,

economic, and social structures. In 2019, the Pew Research Center defined Millennials as those

who were age 23 to 38 in 2019 (born between 1981 and 1996). Emerging adults are right on the

cusp of Millennials and Generation Zers, but the group represents a large cohort. In fact, just last

year, Millennials surpassed Baby Boomers in population (72.1 million) and are now the largest

generation in the United States (Fry, 2020).

At the same time, emerging adults are also particularly vulnerable to health risks,

unemployment, violence, and poverty. In the first quarter of 2020, the national unemployment

rate for 20- to 24-year-olds was 7.6% in the US—6.4% for whites, 13.4% for Blacks, 7% for

Asians, and 8.3% for Latinx young people. And these unemployment differences were also

found in 16- to 19-year-olds with a total rate of 12.7%, and the rate for whites was 11%, Black or

African Americans was 22.8%, and Hispanic or Latino was 14.8% in the first quarter of 2020

(U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). About 21% of the US population

(over 5.6 million) between the ages of 18 and 24 were in poverty[3] in 2018 (Economic News

Release, 2019). According to a 2019 Urban Institute analysis of the 2014 Survey of Income and

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[3] In 2018, the poverty threshold for a family of two adults and two children was $25,465. Poverty status is not
determined for people living in military barracks, institutional quarters, or for unrelated individuals under age
15 such as foster children.

Program Participation, Black, Hispanic or Latinx, and Asian youth (16–24 years old) were all employed at much lower rates than white youth. These early differences in employment status have implications for long-term work and earnings. Young people who live in low-income households[4] are less likely to have a job than those with higher-income families across all racial groups, and these are the people who derive the greatest benefit from early employment. The largest gap in youth employment between income levels above and below 200% of the Federal Policy Level is for youth of color, especially Latinx youth, with 59.1% of youth employed in households earning above 200% of the poverty line and only 40.8% of youth employed in households earning below 200% of the poverty line (Spievack, Natalie, 2019). These data suggest that some of the most financially vulnerable EA lack critical institutional resources and opportunities based on lack of employment.

For the study, I am defining two different *positive pathways to adulthood:* a college readiness and persistence pathway, when an emerging adult is persisting in a four-year college, and a career preparedness pathway, when emerging adults are enrolled in a job preparation and skills program. In some cases, the young people who end up on the career preparedness pathway were unsuccessful on the more traditional college pathway. Education and employment are the two strategies that are commonly cited as contributing most to a young person's successful trajectory to adulthood. Education influences adults' ability to find and maintain work. The national unemployment rate in 2019 for ages 25 to 34 was 4.1%—it was 9.6% for those who did not complete high school, and 1.9% for those who had a bachelor's degree or higher. This

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[4] Low-income is defined as earning less than 200% of the federal poverty level.

unemployment disparity is consistent in all age categories across the US population (U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2019).

When study participants were asked if they have reached adulthood, 68% answered "in some ways yes, and in some ways no," and over 31% answered "yes." The majority of emerging adults in the study still consider themselves not yet a full adult. In Arnett's 2012 study, participants identified the markers that were considered most important and "accepting responsibility for yourself" was the highest ranked marker (36%), closely followed by "becoming financially independent" (30%), which is often achieved by attending postsecondary education. The marker least frequently chosen as most important (by only 4% of survey participants) was "getting married." In Table 1 are the data from Arnett's 2012 study (the last time it was completed) compared to the results from my study, which indicates again that there is a consistent move away from the more traditional adulthood markers of getting married towards more markers that demonstrate independence and identity formation (accepting responsibility for yourself and becoming financially independent).

Table 1

Markers for Adulthood: Comparison of Study Results and Arnett's National Survey

Arnett's Markers of Adulthood	Arnett's 2012 Results (in %)	2017-2018 Study Participants - Pooled Sample (in %)
Accepting Responsibility for Yourself	36%	38%
Becoming Financially Independent	30%	23%
Finishing Education	16%	15%
Making Independent Decisions	14%	13%

Getting Married	4%	12%

Recognizing the widespread economic and social consequences of disconnection, over the past decade there has been additional research about and programming for young people with lower employment and educational attainment. In addition to trying to explain differences based on age, gender, race & ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (SES), my study begins to unpack some of the other factors that may contribute to a young person's trajectory to adulthood and which path they end up on by measuring an individual's *strength of social agency*. Defined as an emerging adult's vision for the future and ability to advocate for themselves and others, the study measures the social agency of emerging adults in Rhode Island to see if college students who are considered to have a more traditionally successful trajectory to adulthood have stronger social agency than a group of opportunity youth who are on the career preparedness pathway. Social agency may be a primary explanatory variable in why some young people end up either being on one pathway or the other. Beyond the acquisition of a college education or job skills training, social agency can play an important role in emerging adults' lives because social agency enables a person to have hope, to be empowered, to have voice, and be able to act upon the changes they want to make.

In the study, I assume that social agency is not inherent nor a capacity that someone is born with, but instead is a basic attribute that is shaped by sociodemographic characteristics (including age, gender, race & ethnicity, and SES), social conditions (including poverty, quality of housing, homelessness, educational attainment and quality, unemployment, neighborhood, and family history), and additional experiences, opportunities, and people that facilitate social

agency. Social agency facilitators can look very different depending on where one lives, the high school one attends, or other factors, but in all cases, the facilitators promote an emerging adult's ability to have hope, empowerment, voice, and choice. Some of the more common social agency facilitators that are discussed in the positive youth development (PYD) and emerging adulthood literatures are mentoring, leadership programs with other youth, political engagement, and community service and volunteering. The study uses both quantitative and qualitative measures to help identify the other experiences, opportunities, and people that may have facilitated the social agency of study participants.

In Chapter 2, I briefly detail the history of agency and social agency and the different variations of agency that are now used. For this study, I am distinguishing between agency or personal agency and social agency. I am measuring an emerging adult's ability to have hope for the future and empowerment to make change that benefits the larger community, not simply for their own betterment. This distinction helps provide a focus on the sociodemographic characteristics and the social conditions of OY and hopefully diverts attention away from the individual responsibility or fault that is sometimes placed on emerging adults which perpetuates a deficit model of thinking about this group. The primary question this research addresses is whether the strength of social agency and the levels and types of social agency facilitators of emerging adults on the college readiness and persistence pathway differs from those young people who are attending a career preparedness program (programs specifically designed for opportunity youth) such as Year Up RI.

1.3 Opportunity Youth Nationally and Locally

Rhode Island has a high rate of child poverty, higher than other New England states, but what sets Rhode Island apart is the high concentration of poverty in the cities of Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket, which are known as the *core cities*. The percentage of children living in poverty averaged 34.5% from 2014–2018 in the core cities compared to 18.2% across the rest of Rhode Island. Students in Rhode Island's core cities are less likely to graduate from high school than the rest of the state (75% compared to 84% in 2019) and only 53% of high school graduates immediately enroll in college compared to 67% statewide in 2019 (Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, 2020). Lower high school completion rates and high poverty rates are particularly problematic for young urban Latinx in Rhode Island. Latinx youth are concentrated in Central Falls, Pawtucket, and Providence, with many coming from families in poverty (Weisstein & Traub, 2010).

According to the most recent Measure of America[5] report, *A Decade Undone: Youth Disconnection in the Age of Coronavirus*, there are approximately 4.35 million opportunity youth (one in nine young people) in the United States (Lewis, 2020). Since 2010, the national rate has been falling from a post-recession high of 14.7% to its current rate of 11.2% (based on 2018 data), although the rate of decrease is slowing as shown in Table 2 and with the onset of the pandemic, these rates have increased. According to Measure of America, there are approximately 13,600 opportunity youth 16–24 years old (or 9.6% of youth) in Rhode Island, which is down from the estimated high of 18,386 (or 12.4%) OY in the state in 2015 (Lewis & Burd-Sharps,

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[5] Measure of America is a program of the Social Science Research Council and is a national organization that collects state and local data about youth disconnection.

2015; and Lewis, 2020). In 2015, Rhode Island ranked #20 (on a listing of 1–50 when a ranking of 1 is the lowest disconnection rate), with both Connecticut and Massachusetts having lower rates and lower rankings. Rhode Island has made improvements in their rankings and was most recently ranked fifteenth lowest of all the states' disconnection rates. Rhode Island has a higher percentage of OY than its bordering neighbor Massachusetts (7.3% disconnected youth and ranked 4th lowest state) and has significantly higher pockets of disconnection in the counties of Providence (10.9%) and Bristol (9.3%), as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 2

Trends in RI's Opportunity Youth, 2015–2018

	2015 Disconnected Youth (%, ages 16–24)	2015 Disconnected Youth (#, ages 16–24)	2015 State Rank	2018 Disconnected Youth (%, ages 16–24)	2018 Disconnected Youth (#, ages 16–24)	2018 State Rank
Nat'l	13.8	5,527,000		11.2	4,353,300	
RI	12.4	18,386	20	9.6	13,600	15
MA	9.8	84,834	9	7.3	62,500	4
CT	10.6	46,335	12	9.7	42,800	18

Note. Adapted from *Youth Disconnection in the Age of Coronavirus.* New York: Measure of America, Social Science Research Council, 2020. Adapted from *Zeroing In on Place and Race: Youth Disconnection in America's Cities.* New York: Social Science Research Council, 2015.

Table 3

Youth Disconnection by County in RI, 2018

	Rank of County Disconnection (among RI's 5 counties)	County Disconnection Rate (% ages 16–24)
Providence County, RI	1	10.9
Kent County, RI	3	8.3
Newport County, RI	*	*
Bristol County, RI	2	9.4
Washington County, RI	4	5.4

Note. * Population too small for reliable estimates. Adapted from *Measure of America. Making the Connection: Transportation and Youth Disconnection*. New York: Measure of America, Social Science Research Council, 2019.

Measure of America research demonstrates that in highly segregated metropolitan areas, Black youth oftentimes have higher-than-average rates of disconnection, whereas white youth have the opposite experience. At the national level, the 2018 youth disconnection rates for Blacks (17.4%), Native Americans (23.4%), and Latinos (12.8%) are markedly higher than rates for Asian Americans (6.2%) or whites (9.2%). Table 4 compares disconnection data by race to areas surrounding Providence, and while Providence-Warwick is ranked 42th highest out of the 98 metropolitan areas, Providence-Warwick also has one of the higher national disconnection rates for Latinos (14.6%), but is in the lowest quartile for whites at 7.7% (Lewis, 2020). Additionally, the Providence-Warwick metropolitan area has higher overall disconnection rates compared to several neighboring areas.

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Table 4

Youth Disconnection in America's Most Populous Metropolitan Areas by Race, 2018

	Disconnected Youth (% ages 16–24)	Disconnected Youth (# ages 16–24)	Disconnected Black Youth (% ages 16–24)	Disconnected Latino Youth (% ages 16–24)	Disconnected White Youth (% ages 16–24)
Nat'l/US	11.2	4,353,300	17.4	12.8	9.2
Providence-Warwick, RI-MA (Rank 42)	9.4	19,400	*	14.6	7.7
Worcester, MA-CT (Rank 14)	8.1	9,600	*	*	8.1
Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH (Rank 4)	6.6	40,800	10.8	11.6	5.4

Note. A * indicates that either the population size of youth ages 16 to 24 in that group and metro area is too small, or the survey response rate is too low for reliable youth disconnection estimates. For Native Americans, the national disconnection rate is 23.4% and the numbers for individual metro areas are too small for reliable estimates. For Asian Americans, only four metro areas have a sufficient population of youth ages 16 to 24 for disconnection estimates and the national Asian American rate is 6.2%. Adapted from *A Decade Undone: Youth Disconnection in the Age of Coronavirus*. New York: Measure of America, Social Science Research Council, 2020.

Over the past few decades there have been a number of state and local Rhode Island organizations as well as national programs trying to address inequities in the trajectory to adulthood by providing resources to emerging adults including the development of programs

specifically for OY. Figuring out why some young people with similar sociodemographic characteristics, sometimes even educated in the same school system, end up on different paths—some persisting in a 4-year college and others enrolled in a career preparedness program is at the core of the study's research questions. The study measures the social agency of two groups of emerging adults (opportunity youth and college students) to see if college students had significantly higher social agency than OY which may help to explain the differing pathways to adulthood.

As the research in this area suggests, there is no single factor that determines one's pathway to adulthood—it is many opportunities, experiences, skills, and people layered together that may provide the necessary foundations for taking risks, and perhaps even moving in a direction different than others around you or different from what others expect. This study defines the factors that may contribute to an emerging adult's trajectory to adulthood as a combination of sociodemographic characteristics, social conditions, and social agency facilitators. Perhaps surprisingly, my research suggests that career preparedness programs are providing OY with important enabling environments to activate their social agency which leads to future employment pathways that might not be possible in a traditional college-only environment.

1.4 The Study and Research Questions

Specifically, the study will address the following research questions:

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: SOCIAL AGENCY

    A. Do Rhode Island's college students report stronger social agency than opportunity youth enrolled in a career preparedness program?

B. Do differences in age, gender, race & ethnicity, SES, and social agency facilitators help to explain the strength of social agency for emerging adults in Rhode Island?

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: SOCIAL AGENCY FACILITATORS

A. Do college students report different levels and types of social agency facilitators than opportunity youth enrolled in a career preparedness program in Rhode Island?

B. What are the most commonly reported factors or activities that facilitate social agency for emerging adults in Rhode Island?

C. Is there a relationship between strength of social agency and level of social agency facilitators for emerging adults in Rhode Island, and does the level of social agency facilitators help explain the strength of social agency (controlling for age, gender, race & ethnicity, and SES)?

In the dissertation research, data about the different dimensions of social agency were collected both through a web-based survey and through face-to-face focus groups in order to measure if college students have different strengths of social agency and different levels and types of social agency facilitators than opportunity youth members in a career preparedness program. There is an underlying presumption that Americans enrolled and persisting in college may have stronger social agency than opportunity youth. However, given the context of economic, racial, and social constraints faced by opportunity youth, perhaps career-oriented programs serve as important and necessary pathways (enabling conditions) for opportunity youth to activate and use their social agency. Customarily, it is believed that those Americans who are

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in college are on a more successful pathway to adulthood than others and I am testing to see if differences in social agency and social agency facilitators help explain which pathway emerging adults pursue.

Based on the similarities and differences in the study populations, I expected college students to have stronger social agency (Research Question 1) than opportunity youth because they had persisted at a higher education institution. I also expected college students to have higher levels of social agency facilitators (Research Question 2) than OY because as full-time college students they had greater access to extracurricular and community activities and stronger support systems which allowed them to successfully persist in college, and by being on a college campus they would be more likely to take advantage of these facilitators of social agency. Finally, I expected that the study would demonstrate how differences in strength of social agency and level of social agency facilitators could in part be explained by a combination of age, gender, race & ethnicity, and SES.

1.5 Summary

Today I sit at my dining room table, my makeshift office during the COVID-19 pandemic, while I listen to my daughters on Zoom conference calls with their professors and co-workers. In this moment, I understand more clearly why the issue of opportunity youth is a community issue that we should all care about. During emerging adulthood, young people are establishing the imprints of their lives and without having social, cultural, and intellectual grounding points from institutions of education or employment, opportunity youth are at a disadvantage. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I am witnessing firsthand why these two institutions serve as critical points of security and autonomy for my own daughters as they move

through a very insecure world. Education and work set their schedules for the day and provide their social outlets of friends, mentors, and community, even in a period when all of life's activities are happening online or at a 6-foot distance. This is what makes emerging adulthood even more important during the spring and summer of 2020 when so many young adult lives have been disrupted by changes in family structures, changes in education and work, and changes in level of independence. I am keenly aware of the privilege that my daughters carry with them throughout their difficult life transitions: they come from a two-parent working family where both parents earned higher education degrees in the United States and understand the college and financial aid systems; my daughters are white and speak English as their first language; they attended high-quality K-12 schools and colleges; they have a network of people that provide support, mentorship, and points of reference; and they have financial flexibility which allows them to take risks knowing that when (not if) they fall or fail, they have people to help pay their rent, or their credit card bills, or in some circumstances, they can even return to live in their childhood rooms. And even with this intensity of support and strong social agency, many of these emerging adults still struggle (including my own children), both before and, even more so, after the arrival of COVID-19.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
"Is agency inherent to social action, or is it a differential property that some—whether through structural advantage or individual attributes—possess more than others?" (Hitlin and Elder, 2007, p. 173)

2.1 Introduction

There are several theories that help to explain why some emerging adults are able to do things, and be things, that make them more likely to have a successful transition to adulthood than others. The study tests whether those on a more traditional college readiness and persistence pathway have stronger social agency than those on a career preparedness path. Drawing from the works of scholars in psychology, political science, and sociology, I conceptualize social agency as having four interrelated dimensions during the period of emerging adulthood (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

The Dimensions of Social Agency in Emerging Adulthood

Note. The dimensions of social agency are based on the existing scholarship and new findings from this research study.

Hope and future orientation are emerging adults' optimistic ways of thinking about their futures. Empowerment, efficacy, and control are young peoples' beliefs that they are able to make decisions that can influence their life courses. Voice and engagement are emerging adults' ideas that they have things to say and that they have a right to say them; that their ideas matter and that engaging with others around their ideas may contribute to change. Finally, choice and advocacy are young persons' beliefs that they have the competence to make choices and then act in order to advocate on behalf of themselves, on behalf of others, and on behalf of their communities. The working definition of social agency and other important terminology used in this study can be found in Appendix A.

This research is built on the premise that a positive trajectory towards adulthood requires a set of capabilities defined as underlying foundational components or enabling conditions (Sen, 1989, 1993, 1999) and one of these capabilities is social agency. Social agency is a multidimensional and subjective construct that has been defined and measured in various ways without clear and consistent agreement among scholars. In fact, most of the current literature discusses the concept of agency, not social agency. At times, scholars have agreed on the general description of agency, but differed on whether or not the different components are inputs to or outputs from agency. In general, there is a basic understanding among psychologists and sociologists that agency is related to a number of core concepts including well-being, hope, empowerment, influence, voice, control, purpose, self-direction, participation, action, effectiveness or efficacy, and community engagement.

Additionally, the study measures common social agency facilitators or what some other scholars have referred to as opportunity structures or enabling conditions (Duggins, 2011; Watts & Flanagan, 2007) that may serve to promote both the development and use of social agency for emerging adults. These facilitators are drawn directly from the literature. Social agency facilitators are intermediaries because I argue that, without them, one is not able to actualize social agency. Additionally, the study tests whether there is a difference in the types of and levels of social agency facilitators that emerging adults access depending on whether they are on the college readiness and persistence pathway or the career preparedness pathway. There are three bodies of literature that I use for the study's conceptual framework; positive youth development, critical race theory (CRT), and the capability approach.

Grounded in the psychological tradition, the PYD literature focuses on providing support and opportunities that will help young people achieve their own personal goals and transition to adulthood in a productive, healthy manner. The literature focuses on personal actions and responsibilities over one's environment. The study uses this literature because PYD is an individual-focused way of thinking about a young person's paths to adulthood and the choices they make, instead of addressing the institutional factors that may create and substantiate inequalities. Alternatively, CRT presents the institutional inequalities that may lead to structural advantages and disadvantages in the trajectory to adulthood. I use CRT to understand how systems of economic status, gender, and racial disparities may affect the development of social agency and the possible choices available to a young person. The study uses both literatures: one approaches the problem individually, which is useful, but there is also an important structural element from CRT. To these two literatures, I am adding the capability approach as a

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fundamental theory driving the study which can also provide new ways to bridge the PYD and CRT scholarships.

2.2 Positive Youth Development

PYD scholarship rose in prominence during the 1990s, emphasizing family, neighborhood, and community ties as a method for young people to gain access to opportunities and social experiences that are critical to the trajectory towards adulthood. PYD minimizes critical political action in favor of contribution and community belonging. Elements of PYD include family support, caring adults, positive peer groups, a strong sense of self and self-esteem, and involvement at school and in the community. The PYD literature is important to understanding the personal and individual choices that have led some emerging adults to be on a more traditional pathway to adulthood and persisting in college while others are not. The study uses the PYD literature to measure the impact of individual (and groups of) youth development strategies (including mentoring, civic engagement, and community service) and describe how participation in youth programs and other opportunities and experiences may relate to one's degree of social agency and one's pathway towards adulthood.

In providing a detailed history of mentoring programs, Rhodes and DuBois (2008) report that in 2008, over three million young people were engaged in formal one-on-one mentoring with adults. The Federal government spends millions of dollars for mentoring programs each year (p. 254). Dubois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, and Valentine (2011) report a meta-analysis of 73 evaluations of mentoring programs, in an estimated 5,000 programs across the United States (p. 57). While the quantifiable value of mentoring programs remains unclear, it continues to be a common PYD strategy.

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PYD views young people as embodying assets needing to be developed as demonstrated in Lerner, Theokas, and Jelicic's (2005) study of young people enrolled in 4-H programs where they constructed the concept of the "Five Cs of PYD." These Five Cs include Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring/Compassion to be developed through youth programs that in turn facilitate a positive pathway to adulthood. The Five Cs have continued to be an important way that PYD programs evaluate their impact. In a survey of high school students in an ethnically diverse city in Illinois, Hansen et al. (2003) reported that students experienced higher rates of learning (translated into identity development, emotional learning, teamwork skills, and community relationships) from participating in youth peer activities (service, faith-based, community, sports, vocational) than from either academic activities or activities with their friends.

2.3 Critical Race Theory

CRT was developed in the 1980s out of legal scholarship and is now used in many other disciplines including education, sociology, and women's studies (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). Critical Race Theory considers personal attributes or actions within a larger structural context. CRT argues that race is a socially constructed concept and racial inequalities are supported by existing economic, political, and social institutions. Racism therefore can reduce social agency by limiting one's hope and belief in the future, one's engagement in that future, and one's ability to advocate for oneself in order to improve the future. At the same time, race consciousness can increase social agency by improving one's belief about a better future and enhancing a person's empowerment to make positive change. The study used CRT to assess how emerging adults' strength of social agency may differ based on race & ethnicity (as well as

age, gender, and SES) and to consider how the same sociodemographic variables may explain differences in the types and levels of social agency facilitators. The study investigates whether emerging adults have different social agency facilitators available to them due to racial segregation, gender roles, lack of material resources, different family structures and parenting patterns, as well as other factors.

2.4 The Capability Approach

While leveraging the literature of PYD and CRT, the study uses the capability approach as the primary theoretical lens to address the question of why some emerging adults in Rhode Island end up on the college readiness and persistence pathway and others do not. The capability approach meets and translates the other two bodies of literature by considering both the individual as well as the structural factors that may influence emerging adults' degree of social agency and the level of social agency facilitators. Amartya Sen (1999, 2009) and Martha Nussbaum (2000) popularized the capability approach and demonstrated how it can be used to think about several important economic and social conditions. The capability approach is a normative theory that is used in a wide range of fields, but historically it has been most commonly applied to human development and international economic development. In a March 2010 lecture at the University of Chicago Law School, Nussbaum discusses how all people are worthy of meaningful lives with human dignity. The development field has historically charted growth by economics, but Nussbaum suggests that growth could alternatively be measured in terms of capabilities. The capability approach offers a unique way to look at creating an "…enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, and creative lives" (Nussbaum, 2010). While the framework has not yet been explored specifically for the subpopulation of

emerging adults, it is widely used to understand other marginalized groups. Capabilities are foundational capacities of people and are required in order to do things and be things which Sen refers to as "functionings." Sen argues that capabilities are not choices but must be present for opportunity and freedom to be possible and he endorses a society that maximizes the capabilities of all its citizens. A capability therefore provides the opportunity for emerging adults to make decisions about how they would like to lead one type of life or another.

The capability approach is flexible and dynamic because it supports a common platform of opportunities while it also recognizes individual freedom and diversity. People have choices in what they want to do with their capabilities. The approach also acknowledges the intensity of resources required for capability development. Sen (1999) says that a good society maximizes the capabilities of people, not necessarily the outcomes that result when people act on those capabilities (i.e., functionings). Both Sen and Nussbaum reject the idea that everyone has equal and free choice of capabilities in society due to structural barriers (such as age, gender, race & ethnicity, and SES) that may inhibit one's ability to have fully developed capabilities. For Sen and Nussbaum though, this is the basic obligation of society—to ensure the foundational capabilities of all citizens–regardless of a country's economic development or a person's social conditions or sociodemographic characteristics.

Martha Nussbaum's list of ten human capabilities (2000) to be supported by all democracies at some threshold level serves as a starting point to evaluate social agency as a capability. Her list includes life, bodily health, bodily integrity, senses, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, other species, play, and control over one's environment (adapted from Nussbaum, 2011, pp. 33-34). To this list of capabilities, I propose adding an

eleventh, social agency. Social agency is distinct from either "practical reason" or "control over one's environment" (two other capabilities included on the list) because it requires intentional action for a social purpose. Viewing social agency as a capability (that everyone should possess) and not either as a biological or personal characteristic that a person is born with nor as a skill or competency that one simply attains through hard work, provides a different lens on the trajectory to adulthood. Since Nussbaum developed her original list of human capabilities, few scholars have suggested changes to the list and there is limited discourse about the relationship between sociodemographic characteristics including age, gender, race & ethnicity, SES, and social agency. This study tests some of the theoretical ideas suggested by Nussbaum, by measuring how sociodemographic factors individually and together may help to explain the strength of social agency for both college students and OY.

Sen (2009) makes reference to capabilities as power and endorses a society where everyone has access to a set of capabilities. At the same time, he explains if a person chooses not to act upon his or her capabilities, there is no injustice. Capabilities can be constrained or enhanced by laws, customs, and structural barriers due to unequal power relations. My study uses the capability approach as the primary conceptual framework to consider social agency as a capability—one especially important for young people in their pathways towards adulthood. This concept is inclusive because it incorporates individual, social, institutional, and life-course factors when measuring the likelihood that emerging adults will achieve a positive trajectory and healthy well-being and (a) accept responsibility for themselves, (b) make independent decisions, and (c) secure financial independence—the markers of adulthood that Arnett's study and this study confirmed were the most frequently cited among EA.

2.5 The Literature of Social Agency

In the multiyear research project highlighted in the annual *Clark University Polls of Emerging Adults* (2012, 2015) introduced in Section 1.2, Arnett did not specifically measure the concept of social agency, but he finds that many young people are hopeful that their lives will work out well, and hope is both a dimension of social agency in this study and one cited by several other scholars (Evans, 2007; Arnett, 2012, 2015; Bryant & Ellard, 2015). In the *2012 Clark Poll Report*, 89% of respondents agree that "I am confident that eventually I will get what I want out of life;" 83% agree that "At this time of my life, it still seems like anything is possible;" and 77% agree that "I believe that overall my life will be better than my parents' lives have been" (p. 18). Arnett also finds that despite difficult circumstances, emerging adults from low SES are as optimistic or even more optimistic than those from higher SES.

While there are few peer-reviewed articles about social agency, there has been a recent increase of online news pieces and blog posts about agency in education-related outlets where education reformers have adopted agency as one of the key outputs of student-centered learning. Student agency, or learner agency, has been deemed essential in the creation of educational environments that empower young people to be active participants in their own education and in the larger community. In her December 9, 2015 blog post in *Edutopia*, Holland calls 2016 the year of student agency and describes agency as "the ability to act independently within a given environment and assume an amount of control and empowerment" (para. 1). In his 2015 end-of-year blog post on "10 Tips for Developing Student Agency," Vander Ark describes student agency as "the capacity and propensity to take purposeful initiative—the opposite of helplessness" (para. 1). He suggests that young people with student agency actively go out and

seek meaning and act with purpose in order to achieve goals for themselves or for others. Some scholars and practitioners have directly connected student choice (or sometimes referred to as school choice) to student voice and agency. Sturgis (2015) states that agency is about students owning their education, which requires a growth mindset, skills to manage their learning, and transparent structures. In an October 16th blog post, Rikard (2015), then a third-year student at Davidson College in North Carolina, refers to agency as a capacity that one never stops developing and as a collaborative process. He says that agency requires individualization, relationship, and equality. "Encouraging agency is more than just doing what you want—it's recognizing your responsibility to take action in a world that needs makers and creators" (para. 10). It is this concept of social agency, as an interactive relationship, that makes it distinct from many other skills and competencies that young people may attain. Instead, social agency requires nurturance and growth and therefore has the potential to be more transformational. It is this broader and deeper discussion of social agency that guided the development of the dissertation research questions in order to obtain a greater understanding of how differing strengths of social agency may relate to the divergent pathways that emerging adults take in the transition to adulthood.

Albert Bandura (2008) argues that people purposely act on their environment, as opposed to simply reacting, and this involves "a socially embedded interplay between the exercise of personal agency and environmental influences" (p. 167).

To be an agent is to influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances. In this view, personal influence is part of the causal structure. People are self-organizing, proactive, self-regulating, and self-reflecting. They are not simply onlookers of their

behavior. They are contributors to their life circumstances, not just products of them. (p.

164)

Bandura goes on to say that,

people who develop their competencies, self-regulatory skills, and enabling beliefs in

their efficacy can generate a wider array of options that expand their freedom of action,

and are more successful in realizing desired futures, than those with less agentic

resources. (p. 165)

Bandura defined four properties of human agency: intentionality (action plans and strategies for

realizing them); forethought (bringing anticipated outcomes to bear on current activities that

promote purposeful behavior); self-reactiveness (ability and motivation to construct appropriate

courses of action and appropriately execute them); and self-reflectiveness (ability to reflect on

one's own soundness of thought and action). These properties are different from the proposed

social agency dimensions shown in Figure 1 because they are more individually focused, internal

characteristics.

Hitlin and Elder (2007) discuss how the discipline of sociology has not sufficiently

studied agency while grappling with the obscureness of the agency definition and how this has

led to misunderstandings. Hitlin and Elder call for a new framework to examine agency

development based on the prior work of Emirbayer and Mische (1998). Hitlin and Elder

importantly ask the same question that was raised by the focus group participants in my study:

"Is agency inherent to social action or is it a differential property that some—whether through

structural advantage or individual attributes—possess more than others?" (p. 173). Hitlin and

Elder's life-course analysis helps support the unique role of social agency development during

emerging adulthood, in part due to the transitory nature of the time period and its strong association with identity formation.

In a qualitative study of disenfranchised young people in Australia, Bryant and Ellard (2015) present the concept of hope as an operationalized form of social agency. Through interviews with young people who had experienced homelessness, incarceration, and addiction, the authors find that even when the young people could not necessarily envision a new future for themselves, or make different choices about their future, there was consistent hope for something better and the capacity to imagine alternative possibilities (p. 496). It is this definition of hope as social agency that is perhaps even more important for marginalized populations including opportunity youth, whose ideas for the future may be more limited by their required attention to more basic life struggles.

Teen Voice 2009 and then an expanded Teen Voice 2010 are developmental studies sponsored by the Best Buy Children's Foundation (and prepared by the Search Institute), which influenced the construct of my research as well as the proposed data collection methodology. Instead of focusing on social agency, Scales, Roehlkepartian, and Benson (2009, 2010) measure how the combination of a young person's sparks (deepest passions and interests); voice (confidence, skills, and opportunities to influence things that matter to them); and relationships with adults and peers, affect their measures of success. In the research, a representative sample of 1,860 15-year-olds from around the country were surveyed and the study found that young people who scored high on one or more of the three strengths (sparks, voice, relationships) had improved outcomes (higher GPAs, stronger leadership skills, and greater interest in

volunteering) and young people who scored high on two of the measures had even higher outcome scores than those who only scored high on one of the measures.

The Teen Voice study considers age, race and ethnicity, SES, and gender, and concluded that for the most part, there were few differences in scores based on these sociodemographic factors except for those young people with parent(s) having a college or higher education, who were more likely (3% vs. 10%) to score high on all three strengths. The Teen Voice studies conclude that young people from lower income levels had a reduced number of developmental relationships and opportunities (Scales et al., 2009, p. 31). In general, females had stronger relationships than males and Latinx young people were less likely to have high relationship scores compared to both white and Black young people. Finally, young people whose parents had more years of education had a stronger sense of their own voices (Scales et al., 2010, pp. 4, 5, 12, 53). Teen Voice 2009 and Teen Voice 2010 are two of only a handful of studies that consider differences in young adult outcomes based on sociodemographic characteristics, which is important to my research.

One of the largest and most rigorous life-course studies identifying and measuring the importance of agency in young people is University of Chicago's Consortium on Chicago School Research's *Foundations for Young Adult Success—A Developmental Framework* (Nagaoka, Farrington, Ehrlick, and Heath, 2015), which compiles decades of literature from many disciplines and introduces an integrated way of viewing the promotion of positive well-being for emerging adults that addresses both individual and structural considerations. The framework begins with the premise that children learn through both people (parents, teachers, after-school professionals, and other adults) and developmental experiences that combine action and

reflection, and this learning happens in a variety of settings including the home, school, and organized activities. Through these experiences, young people build four foundational components or qualities (self-regulation, knowledge, mindsets, and values) and with these components, young people are able to attain three key ingredients for young adult success which the authors identify as (a) agency (making active choices about one's life path), (b) competencies (adapting to the demands of different contexts), and (c) integrated identity (incorporating different aspects of oneself to have a clear sense of identity). Nagaoka et al. (2015) define a young adult's likelihood of success from both an individual and societal perspective that is more externally focused. The concept of success is not only about meeting one's goals, but "success is also about contributing to a larger good, having a meaningful place within a community, and working towards a positive change in the world" (p. 15). I use a similar version of this definition of success when characterizing social agency and the positive pathways to adulthood in my conceptual framework.

The University of Chicago report is an important contribution to my study because it highlights the developmental and life-course approach in the paths to adulthood and underscores the importance of social agency in relationship to these pathways. The University of Chicago research team specifically acknowledges that low-income young people and young people of color face additional barriers and complexities on their pathways to adulthood, including fewer consistent and positive developmental experiences and relationships (p. 4). Nagaoka et al. (2015) state that there is a natural process of child and youth development, but the developmental experiences that impact young adults' likely success vary by race and SES. My study uses a sample of Rhode Island emerging adults in part to test the hypothesis that the Foundations for

Young Adult Success project identified but did not address. Growing up in marginalized communities adds to the complexity of developing into a healthy young adult with positive well-being. While having social agency equips young people to make choices and take action, their ability to successfully pursue a desired path also depends on social relationships, financial resources, and countless other external factors that are inequitably distributed. Further, the task of integrating one's identity is more complicated for marginalized emerging adults than it is for children that grow up within the social and behavioral norms of the dominant white, middle-upper class culture (Nagaoka, 2015, p. 7).

The literature points to the importance of social agency as a factor in the positive trajectory to adulthood, but the relationships between social agency and the different pathways (including the college readiness and persistence pathway and the career preparedness pathway) have not yet been tested. Perhaps OY have more social agency than middle-or upper-class emerging adults, especially around decision making, unstructured play, and taking care of other family members, but the social agency capability is not fully enabled on the college pathway which supports the need for more viable ways for young people to transition to a successful adulthood. Alternatively, OY and other marginalized groups of young people might not be afforded the social agency facilitators necessary to activate their social agency and perhaps it's not only that different pathways are necessary, but that different support systems and learnings are required for OY to enter and persist on the college readiness and persistence pathway.

The research study measures how age, gender, race & ethnicity, and SES (using social class as a marker) may help to explain differences in social agency and social agency facilitators. In Lareau's (2011) second edition of *Unequal Childhoods*, she returns to follow-up with families

that she interviewed years prior and finds that the class-based differences have in part

contributed to young adults' trajectory to adulthood. Middle-class children for the most part

entered professional jobs and graduate school (and are in the top third of the income distribution)

and poor and working-class children were mostly employed in service and trade jobs and were

experiencing significant financial constraints. Lareau's research relates these differences in

outcomes for emerging adults to the ways in which middle-class parents deeply engaged in a

process of *concerted cultivation* by directly and indirectly facilitating organized activities and

experiences (e.g., sports teams, musical instrument lessons, religious school) that give their

children a sense of "entitlement...where middle-class children learn to question adults and

address them as relative equals" (Lareau, 2011, p. 2). Alternatively, Lareau describes working-

class and poor families who do not consider concerted cultivation as a critical part of raising their

children. In these cases, working-class and poor children have more control over their out-of-

school time activities and more freedom in their unstructured play and social decision-making

which may even lead to stronger social agency. However, current institutions of American

society (including education and employment) reward emerging adults for having developed

cognitive and social skills that are learned as part of concerted cultivation.

> When working-class and poor children confronted institutions, however, they generally
>
> were unable to make rules work in their favor nor did they obtain capital for adulthood.
>
> Because of these patterns of legitimization, children raised according to the logic of
>
> concerted cultivation can gain advantages, in the form of an emerging sense of
>
> entitlement, while children raised according to the logic of natural growth tend to develop
>
> an emerging sense of constraint. (p. 7)

This may in part explain why OY and other marginalized emerging adults may not be as successful in the traditional college pathway, but may thrive in other educational or career preparedness programs where they can exercise the benefits that come from their natural growth environment or they can be in a specialized program and receive the training and support services (and advantages) that come as a routine part of a middle-class upbringing.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

The time period of emerging adulthood is critical in establishing individual temporal patterns for future decision making. Hogan and Astone (1986) suggest that "the transition to adulthood influences the adult life course because it represents a critical juncture in personal life histories and connects social origins with subsequent adult attainments and life satisfaction" (p. 125). There is ongoing discussion within the fields of developmental and community psychology and sociology about how best to view the choices that young people make during emerging adulthood—as individual and personal, structural, or some combination of the three. Hogan and Astone suggest a population-level analysis (the social and institutional factors shaping the lives of young people), as opposed to an individual level analysis about the trajectory to adulthood. As discussed in greater detail in this chapter, this study uses the capability approach to frame how sociodemographic characteristics, social conditions, and more choice-driven opportunities and experiences (social agency facilitators) are related to the strength of social agency for emerging adults in Rhode Island.

The study explores the relationships between structural inequalities (in part based on the sociodemographic characteristics of age, gender, race & ethnicity, and SES); emerging adults' strength of social agency; the opportunities, experiences, and people that facilitate social agency;

and the pathways to a positive trajectory to adulthood. This study stretches the limitations of the capability approach in order to consider a subpopulation of people in the United States. While the research proposes that social agency is one of the foundational capabilities required for emerging adults to likely succeed in their transition to adulthood, not all young people have the same degree of social agency, or an equal level of social agency facilitators that help to facilitate social agency functioning.

There are many structural factors related to one's ability to enroll and persist in college or in a career preparedness program in addition to age, gender, race & ethnicity, and SES that are not measured in this study—for example, the health (and mental health) of the emerging adult and their family members, financial aid eligibility, the neighborhood that a young person was brought up in, a young adult's housing status, the middle and high schools they attended, and many others. I am using the phrase social conditions to capture these important circumstances that are known ways in which inequalities impact the trajectory of people's lives, but these social conditions are not measured in the study.

Figure 2

Conceptual Framework for Study
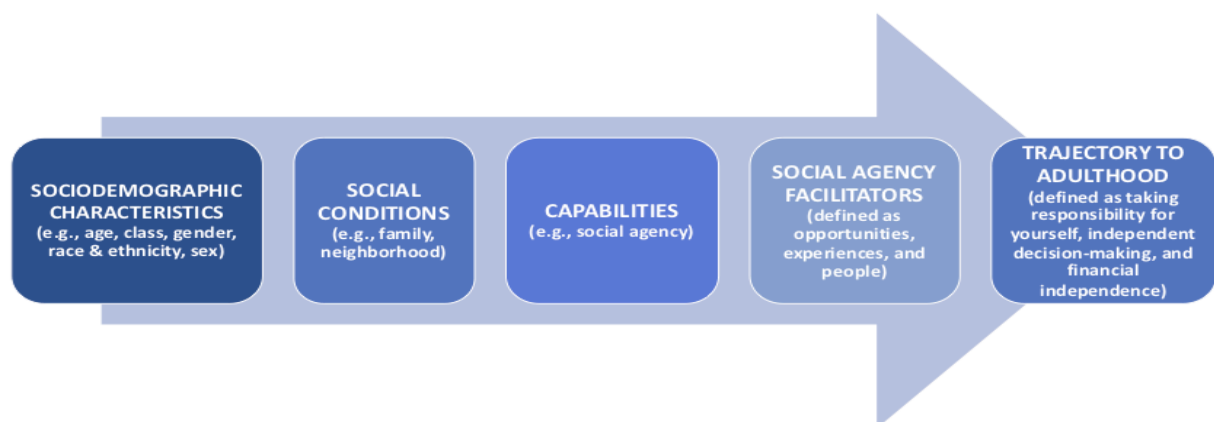
Note. Conceptual framework illustrating the proposed relationship between sociodemographic characteristics, social conditions, the capability of social agency, and social agency facilitators which contributes to the pathways to adulthood for young people.

2.6.1 Social Agency

Different from other studies, the conceptual framework considers social agency as primary, or as a capability that no one can do without, and one that is especially important during the volatile period of emerging adulthood. Emerging adults need both social agency, which is influenced by sociodemographic characteristics and social conditions; and the opportunities, experiences, and people that facilitate social agency in order to actualize the capability. Oftentimes, it is unclear why some emerging adults are on different pathways to adulthood given similar sociodemographic characteristics and social conditions; perhaps equalizing social agency facilitators can activate the functioning of social agency even for marginalized populations including OY. Levine writes in 2014:

> Capabilities recognize individual freedom and diversity while also acknowledging the human need for tangible support. If you have the capability of imagination, you are not obliged to use it in any particular way or at all. But you will not develop that capability just by being left alone: you need education, access to public art and nature, leisure time, and other supports that cost money. (March 28, para. 7)

The study's focus on social agency as opposed to personal agency is intended to capture how emerging adults view their actions and pathways in relationship to others—family, community members, friends, and colleagues. Social agency requires intentionality and forethought to derive a course of action and adjust that course as needed to reflect one's identity, competencies, knowledge and skills, mindsets, and values (Nagaoka et al., 2015, p. 2). The

reason that I am measuring social agency and not personal agency, or student agency is because social agency helps connect the emerging adult with the larger world and this is mutually beneficial to the young person and to our collective well-being. For the purposes of this study, social agency is defined as the ability to (a) have hope and envision a future, (b) believe you have the power to influence that future, (c) actively engage in defining what that future looks like through using one's voice, and (d) make choices, follow through, and advocate both for oneself and for others, rather than solely being the product of one's circumstances (see Figure 1).

2.6.2 Social Agency Facilitators

Social agency facilitators are the experiences, opportunities, and personal connections emerging adults experience that may influence their strength of social agency -- it enables their social agency. There are a number of sociodemographic characteristics and social conditions that foster inequalities in one's life trajectory including age, mother's education, gender, race & ethnicity, neighborhood, education, and family circumstances. This research introduces the idea that there are additionally a set of opportunities, experiences, and people that are more choice-driven where emerging adults participate in activities (e.g., religious groups, sports, leadership, mentorship), in part based on their own desires or the wishes of their friends and family members. One piece of the conceptual model (in Figure 2) that is tested in the study is that social agency facilitators are not equally distributed within samples or across samples of emerging adults because they can be based on a combination of luck (e.g., someone comes to school to recruit for a youth debate league) and intentional planning (e.g., a young adult's parents require him or her to be in the Big Brothers Big Sisters program). This study argues that these social

agency facilitators really do matter, and when combined with sociodemographic characteristics and social conditions, they influence one's strength of social agency.

2.6.3 Positive Trajectory to Adulthood

There could be a number of markers used for the positive trajectory to adulthood including leaving home, finishing postsecondary education, entering marriage, entering parenthood, and even owning a home. For this study, a young person's ability to either enroll and persist in (a) college (at RIC) or (b) in a career preparedness program (at YURI) serves as the primary marker for a positive trajectory to adulthood and the research compares strength of social agency and levels of social agency facilitators of those EA on these two pathways. There are a few assertions underlying the conceptual framework, the research questions, and the hypotheses. I am assuming that a positive trajectory to adulthood on either of the two pathways will likely lead the emerging adults to (a) accept responsibility for themselves, (b) make independent decisions, and (c) secure financial independence. The more traditionally or generally accepted idea is that young people who are in college are pursuing a more successful path than those who are not in college. I am expanding this idea by claiming career preparedness as an alternative positive pathway and then testing to see if differences in social agency and social agency facilitators help to explain which path emerging adults pursue.

While this is not a perfect match because other markers could be used as proxies for a positive transition to adulthood, it is widely documented that adults with higher levels of education have higher annual earnings in the US, and therefore are able to secure financial independence. And similarly, those emerging adults enrolled in a career preparedness program (using YURI as an example) also demonstrate improved financial independence although this

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pathway is more untraditional. For example, the 2017 median usual weekly earnings for adults

nationally aged 25 and over with a master's degree was $1,836 with an unemployment rate of

1.5%; the median usual weekly earnings for adults aged 25 and those with a bachelor's degree

was $1,401 with an unemployment rate of 2.2%; the median usual weekly income for someone

with some college (without either an associate's or bachelor's degree) was $836 with a 3.4%

unemployment rate; and the median usual weekly earnings for adults aged 25 and over with a

high school diploma and no college was $774 with an unemployment rate of 4.0% (Torpey,

2018). Along the other pathway, Fein and Hamadyk (2018) report in a randomized control trial

of Year Up alumni nationally that average quarterly earnings for Year Up participants were

$1,895 higher for the treatment group ($5,454) than for the control group ($3,559)—a 53%

impact, and while the largeness of the impacts diminish, the earnings differentials remain at

about 40% over the following year (Executive Summary, p. i). Therefore, the conceptual

framework posits that both pathways can lead to a positive trajectory to adulthood.

The study measures several related concepts about social agency facilitators—both what

the overall level of social agency facilitators were for the two samples of emerging adults and

what individual types of social agency facilitators may be more or less prevalent in the two

groups of emerging adults. The reasons for asking these questions are multipronged: first, if there

are statistically significant differences between the levels and types of social agency facilitators

in the two samples, one might look to figure out why these differences exist and what impact

they may have on the trajectory to adulthood. Second, it is important to understand what types of

social agency facilitators emerging adults have greatest access to and which they themselves

believe are most important in their own social agency development.

2.6.4 Relationships Between Concepts

Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual framework used to guide the research. The model begins with the concept that social agency is a foundational capability important for emerging adults to have a positive trajectory to adulthood. The model then incorporates how there are sociodemographic characteristics including age, gender, race & ethnicity, SES, and social conditions that shape the capabilities of emerging adults, plus a set of social agency facilitators that together help emerging adults to be and do the things necessary to be responsible for themselves, to make independent decisions, and to be financially independent (Arnett, 1998, 2000, 2004, 2015).

My conceptual framework uses a number of ideas from other scholars including Watts and Flanagan (2007) who present a theory of sociopolitical development (with an emphasis on systems change and social justice), where *sense of agency* and *opportunity structures* are moderators of societal involvement (e.g., community service, civic engagement, or sociopolitical activism). In their work, opportunity structures like social agency facilitators take into account the resources available to shape and permit action. "An emerging adult's potential for societal involvement is strongly influenced by the availability of meaningful and desirable opportunities for action in their community" (p. 786).

2.7 Summary

Emerging adulthood is a complicated time period when young people confront changes in family structure, work, relationships, and their own selves. The trajectory to a positive adulthood has more traditionally included a college pathway, but this has left out an important portion of the nation's young people. The study is designed to test if there are differences in the capability

of social agency between the samples of emerging adults on the two different pathways. The two groups of young people were specifically chosen because there are some core similarities in sociodemographic characteristics and perhaps even in the social conditions of the populations, but the samples are pursuing different paths. The research design also tests the range and intensity of social agency facilitators that emerging adults experience. Career preparedness programs such as Year Up Rhode Island help to provide alternative pathways for young people, recognizing that enabling opportunity youth to modify direction may, in part, require changes in levels of, or types of, social agency facilitators in order for them to achieve positive outcomes.

CHAPTER 3

STUDY DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

"What people can positively achieve is influenced by economic opportunities, political liberties, social powers, and the enabling condition of good health, basic education, and the encouragement and cultivation of initiatives. The institutional arrangements for these opportunities are also influenced by the exercise of people's freedoms, through the liberty to participate in social choice and in the making of public decisions that impel the progress of those opportunities" (Sen, 1999, p. 5).

3.1 Introduction

Gathering useful data from emerging adults is not easy; their schedules are jammed, they are continually solicited to participate in surveys (especially when on a college campus), and they live in a world filled with social media, multitasking, and disinformation. I found through this study that emerging adults who have some connection to the research topic or to the survey process (through a professor or supervisor they trust), are very willing and even excited to participate in a study about their pathways to adulthood in order to ensure that their stories are accurately told.

This study includes traditional mixed methods research with surveys and focus groups as well as community-engaged research tools involving young people in the development and interpretation of focus group data. Some of these methods were anticipated as part of the original study design and others were developed through the data collection process. I hope that the study is a learning vehicle based both on the content of information that was derived from the data sources, as well as the ways in which the data were collected. Finally, the dissertation

demonstrates the importance of having young people involved in all stages of research for many reasons, including the fact that they have a unique understanding of the barriers faced on their pathways to adulthood and they may directly benefit from being an integral part of the research process (and perhaps involvement in community-engaged research even serves as a social agency facilitator).

3.2 Target and Study Populations

There have been many studies of different youth populations in the United States, but fewer about emerging adults and opportunity youth. While the Measure of America program (a national program by the Social Science Research Council) has been collecting data on changes in the opportunity youth population across the country over the past decade, there is limited research nationally examining the assets and/or capabilities of opportunity youth and what is needed for this group of young people to successfully traverse life transitions—to college, to jobs, and to healthy independence.

This study compares and contrasts two target populations of emerging adults in Rhode Island: Population 1–opportunity youth and Population 2—college students at public higher education institutions. Population 1 is the group of emerging adults that are not currently connected to education or careers but are enrolled in a career preparedness program (Year Up RI). These young people are commonly viewed as being less successful for not taking a college path, and Population 2 includes emerging adults who are often seen as being on a more traditional pathway to adulthood typically associated with college acceptance and persistence. Within these two target populations which share some core similarities based on

sociodemographic characteristics, I defined a set of specifications to narrow the eligible study population. Study participants must:

1. Be between the ages of 18 and 25 years old,

2. Have received a diploma from a Rhode Island high school or attended a GED program in Rhode Island, and

3. Be attending college on a full-time basis and have enough credits to be considered a second-year college student or older (applies only to Target Population 2).

3.2.1 Target Population 1 (Opportunity Youth in Career Preparedness Program) and Study Population 1 (Year Up Rhode Island)

Based on data collected by DataSpark[6], Rhode Island's opportunity youth[7] who were 24 years old between 2010 and 2017 have a history of being disenfranchised. At an October 2018 semi-annual meeting of Rhode Island educators and program staff, the state provided data on Rhode Island's OY broken down by smaller groupings. OY in Rhode Island are comprised of high school graduates who have attended some college, but without any degree; high school graduates without any postsecondary education; and high school dropouts. Of those who did not attend any college, the group is disproportionately male, and many were on free or reduced lunch (a marker for SES). The majority of opportunity youth reside in a small number of communities that coincide with areas of concentrated poverty. The most recent county-level data from 2015

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[6] DataSpark maintains one of the largest data warehouses in Rhode Island and operates data tools that help people understand and use information.
[7] The data uses a definition of opportunity youth as those 24 years old during 2010-2017 who went through the RI K-12 education system and are either now unemployed or underemployed and making less than the poverty limit.

(in Table 4) illustrates that the parts of Rhode Island with the highest disconnection rate (12.4%) are in Providence County (the largest county in the state), which includes the cities of Central Falls, Cranston, East Providence, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket with the towns of Burrillville, Cumberland, Foster, Gloucester, Johnston, Lincoln, North Providence, North Smithfield, Scituate, and Smithfield. Some of the same cities—Providence, Central Falls, Pawtucket, and Woonsocket—are also among the areas with the highest poverty and lowest educational attainment compared to the rest of the state.[8]

Figure 3

Counties in the State of Rhode Island

Note. Counties in the State of Rhode Island also highlight the location of Providence County, which has the highest disconnection rate in the state.

Retrieved from https://www.worldatlas.com/na/us/ri/c-providence-county-rhode-island.html

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[8] See Appendix B.

In this study, I wanted to compare two representative samples of emerging adults of similar sociodemographic backgrounds (based on age, gender, race & ethnicity, and SES) with the primary difference being that one sample does not have a relationship to higher education and one is persisting in a 4-year college. In many important ways I achieved this research design goal. However, finding the ideal study population of OY that was disconnected was difficult. Instead, I found a program specifically designed for and exclusively servicing OY that could serve as a study population (and the data collection site for Sample 1). Year Up is a national, nonprofit youth development program that was founded in 2000 by Gerald Chertavian and had its first site in Boston, Massachusetts. The program trains low-income young adults for entry-level jobs in several sectors including corporations, government organizations, and nonprofits. YURI opened in 2005 and was the first Year Up site outside of Boston. As of January 2020, the national Year Up program has now expanded to 18 cities or areas across the country with some states having more than one program location. The 11-month model promotes "high supports, high expectations" and provides a rigorous combination of academic and skills-based training classes (referred to as the Learning and Development [L&D] phase) which are eligible for college credit, and then a six-month off-site supervised internship.

> These are smart young people who have graduated from high school, but they live outside the economic mainstream. So, they are either working multiple minimum wage jobs and still living in that low-income space, or they don't have access to higher education because they can't afford (it), or they continue to need to support their families while they're in school and that's not doable. (Hummel, 2018, p. F4)

YURI has three career training content areas for students: information technology, business operations, and health care. Throughout the training process, the emerging adults are supported by an adult team of in-house instructors, coaches, and community mentors who provide multiple points of contact as the young adults navigate (and balance) life and family, while also trying to learn a wide range of new and oftentimes demanding skills. During the L&D phase, members obtain expertise in PowerPoint and Excel, public speaking, personal finance, computer programming, and customer service, and they are exposed to the historical context surrounding economic, educational, and racial inequalities. This provides important information to the emerging adults about how and why structures and systems contribute to their own career and education disruption. During the internship phase, students are placed in supportive apprenticeships where they work full-time for half the year at one of more than 30 partner organizations across the state and, at the same time, members spend one morning a week at YURI where they focus on career preparedness. Year Up has a structure to support the job search process and placement in career-oriented employment after completion of the Year Up program, which often lifts young people above the hourly wage they had been earning in the service-oriented jobs held prior to enrollment in Year Up. Year Up is built on a cohort, family model where members are broken down into learning communities and there are a number of social gatherings and structured support systems throughout the program, including *Friday feedback sessions* where members give and receive feedback with their colleagues and coaches. Finally, members are paid weekly stipends during the time they are in the Year Up program.

An important difference between other OY in Rhode Island and those emerging adults that are part of the YURI program is that anyone who is a YURI member has endured a long and

rigorous application and interview process in order to be selected for this program. They also had to first know that the program existed. For every YURI member, there are between six to eight other young people who were not accepted but showed initial interest in the program. Over 95% of the past 12 graduating classes at YURI were employed or in college full-time within four months of their Year Up graduations and the average salary of a YURI graduate is $18 per hour. Many of the YURI graduates are actually hired by the organizations where they completed their internships. Over the course of the past 15 years, approximately 1,300 young adults have graduated from YURI.

3.2.2 Target Population 2 (College Students at Public Higher Education Institutions) and Study Population 2 (Rhode Island College)

There are three public colleges and universities in the small state of Rhode Island: the University of Rhode Island (URI), RIC, and the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI). I chose to target emerging adults enrolled in public higher education institutions for this study because these colleges are the more likely places for OY to pursue higher education, if they pursue it at all. Additionally, public colleges and universities have the highest concentration of students who are educated in Rhode Island's PK-12 school system and this was one of the screening criteria for participation in the study, given the importance of education as a factor in a young person's trajectory to adulthood (see Section 3.2 for eligibility criteria).

Of the three public colleges in the state, I chose to collect my sample from RIC. RIC is physically located in Providence (within Providence County which, as noted earlier, has the highest youth disconnection rate in the state). Rhode Island College is a place where students commonly graduate to after completing their associate degrees at CCRI and is a four-year

college. RIC is an example of Target Population 2 because, given the 2017–2018 graduation rate of 20% in four years, 46% in six years, and a 75% retention rate, a large number of RIC's non-first-year students are likely to complete their undergraduate degree and are on a positive pathway to adulthood.

Established in 1854 as the Rhode Island State Normal School, its original goal was to provide teacher preparation to young people from Rhode Island. After almost 100 years of growth and expansion, it moved to its current location and was renamed Rhode Island College, although educational training remains an important part of its curricular offerings. According to the RIC Fact Book, in the 2018–2019 academic year, the college had a total enrollment of 6,688 undergraduate students and 1,083 graduate students for a total student population of 7,771. RIC's enrollment has been steadily dropping (a 16.1% decrease in total enrollment from 2009–2010 to 2018–2019), similar to the population decline of Rhode Island's opportunity youth. RIC attracts young adults regionally and is unofficially known as the college of opportunity for immigrant students. A large percentage of RIC students do not live on campus and, according to the RIC website, slightly more than 50% of its incoming freshman class each year are first generation college students. There are many low-income students at RIC and in the academic year 2018–2019, about 72% of RIC students were financial aid recipients.

While students at CCRI also share similarities with OY in Rhode Island, CCRI awards primarily associate degrees or certificates, which are not considered final degrees and therefore may not represent a population of emerging adults on a positive trajectory to adulthood. Alternatively, the population of students who go to URI do not as closely resemble the sociodemographic characteristics of OY in Rhode Island and according to URI, the University

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has a larger percentage of its undergraduate students (46.1%) who are from out of state and did not graduate from a Rhode Island high school (or a GED program) and therefore would not be eligible for the study (University of Rhode Island [URI], n.d.).

3.3 Study Tasks, Sampling Strategies, and Description of Samples

3.3.1 Sample 1—Purposive Sample at YURI

Sample 1 is a purposive, nonrandom sample of YURI members. At any point in time, YURI has multiple cohorts[9] of emerging adults who are involved in the program. For this research study, emerging adults who were beginning the YURI program in September 2017 (known as Class 26), served as Sample 1 because this group had just begun the program when they participated in the web-based survey and therefore they most likely would not have experienced changes in social agency or social agency facilitators due to their YURI learning experience. In this way, Sample 1 closely mirrors the target population of opportunity youth.

Study recruitment at YURI began in October 2017 and YURI members were directly recruited to participate in the web-based survey by instructors who provided oral and written information about the study (and the weblink) during class time and YURI members received an email with similar information. Informed consent was received electronically at the very beginning of the web-based survey.[10] The study recruitment of YURI members yielded 63 eligible participants out of 80 total members of Class 26 (a 78.8% response rate). The high response rate for the web-based survey was in part due to the small size of the target population

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[9] Each cohort in YURI has a class number. During the study timeframe, Classes 24, 25, 26, and 27 were all actively engaged in the YURI program, but Class 26 served as the sample for the web-based survey.

[10] Respondents were asked if they agreed to serve as participants in the research study and then separately if they agreed to be entered into a lottery to receive the gift cards, which required them to include their email addresses for this purpose only.

and the tight-knit community of emerging adults who participate in the YURI program. Most of the YURI sample participants completed the web-based survey on-site at YURI. Each member of Class 26 that completed the survey received a $5 gift card to Dunkin' Donuts. Those members of other classes that participated in the survey (Class 24 and Class 25) were entered into a lottery to win one of four $100 Amazon gift cards that were distributed electronically. Survey participants had the option of indicating their interest in focus group participation within the survey itself.

3.3.2 Sample 2—Convenience Sample at Rhode Island College

Due to constraints at RIC, the final study recruitment led to a nonrandomized voluntary and convenience sample. By working with the Provost at the time and a long-time faculty member, I was able to obtain permission to recruit students through multiple methods during January through March 2018 including: email communications with undergraduate faculty; (b) a full-page ad in the campus newspaper (the *Anchor*); and (c) in-person campus recruitment at the Student Union. In the final sample, approximately 50% of the surveys came from direct recruitment at the RIC Student Union Lobby, no survey participants were a product of advertising in the on-campus newspaper, and the other 50% came from 15 faculty members across many diverse academic and student services departments (Modern Languages, Education, Sociology, Communication, History, Music, Gender and Women's Studies, History and Africana Studies, Nursing/Health Services, Economics, Psychology, and Learning for Life) who agreed to send emails and post the survey links for their students. The direct recruitment through tabling at the Student Union generally yielded as diverse a sample as the other recruitment strategies.

Using all three of the recruitment methods yielded a total of 103 (see Figure 5) eligible participants for the web-based survey (less than 5% of the eligible RIC student population)

which was fewer than originally envisioned. There were 42 surveys completed by RIC students that were unusable because the students did not meet the eligibility criteria despite explicit written and verbal instructions. Following a similar process as the YURI sample, RIC survey participants were entered into a lottery to win one of seven $100 Amazon gift cards that were distributed to students electronically and students indicated interest in the focus groups within the survey.

To be eligible for participation in the study, both participant groups had to meet similar eligibility criteria discussed in Section 3.2. The study only includes those young adults who persist through the first year of college and are registered as college sophomores or older. According to national and local data, of all students who started four-year public colleges in the fall of 2016, 71.2% returned to the same institution in fall of 2017, and students at Rhode Island College have a similar retention rate. While there is retention drop-off between sophomore and junior years and between junior and senior years, the first year is considered a riskier time for many higher education institutions. The reason for not including part-time college students in the study is because measurements of social agency and social agency facilitators may look different for those who enroll in college on a part-time basis. Part-time students are usually on campus for more limited hours as opposed to full-time students (even if they do not live on campus), which may impact the ability to be involved in on-campus activities and have personal connections with RIC faculty, staff, and students that are measured in this study as social agency facilitators.

Figure 4

Target Populations, Study Populations, and Samples
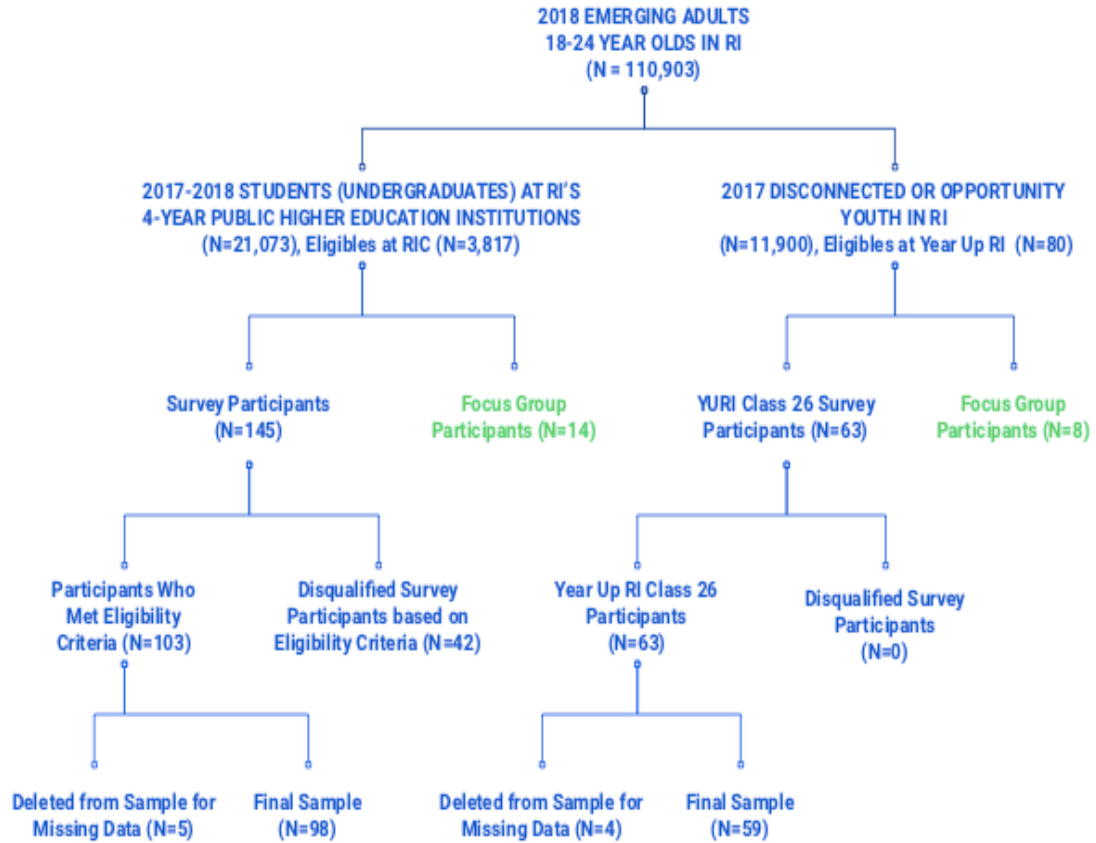
Note. Schematic of the populations and samples in the dissertation study. Data for the total population of emerging adults in RI is from "Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Selected Age Groups by Sex for the United States, States, Counties and Puerto Rico Commonwealth and Municipios: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2018," US Census Bureau, Population Division, June 2019. Data about the Rhode Island College target population and study population come from the "Rhode Island College Fact Book Highlights/Quick Facts, 2018–19."

Figure 4 illustrates how the study included a final total of 59 participants from YURI, which serve as Sample 1, and 98 participants from RIC, which serve as Sample 2. Differences

between these final sample numbers and eligibles were due to missing data. More information

about the RIC study population, eligibles, and the sample can be found in Appendix C. The data

collection was coordinated through senior staff at both YURI and RIC who provided entry into

their respective organizations. All survey participants were compensated for their willingness to

share their knowledge and experience for scholarly research and the study was designed to have

low barriers to entry, such as the short length of the survey, multiple ways which students could

access the web-based survey, and convenient times and locations for the face-to-face focus

groups.

3.3.3 Focus Group Participants

The emerging adults who participated in the focus groups were voluntarily recruited

directly from the survey samples as discussed earlier in the chapter. I sent emails to those survey

participants who noted interest in the focus groups and participants used doodle polls to sign up

for the most convenient dates and times. Reminder emails were sent to all registered participants

the day before the focus groups to encourage participation. When the emerging adults arrived for

the focus groups, they completed a sign-in sheet which also includes the email addresses where

the incentive gift cards were sent.

There were limited demographic data collected about the focus group participants. There

were a total of 22 emerging adults who participated in the four focus groups: eight from YURI

and 14 from RIC. Based on observations, there were a total of 11 males and 11 females: six

males and two females from YURI, and five males and nine females from RIC. Although the

focus groups were small in size, data from the focus groups were analyzed separately by sample

as well as collectively as a unit because there were some differences in the topics addressed during the focus group sessions based on the groups' individual conversations.

Two focus groups for YURI students were held in mid-December 2017 after work hours. There were a total of five people in the first focus group and three people in the second focus group. The two RIC focus groups were held on the main campus at the end of March 2018. In addition to the focus group participants, there were two or three young adult researchers who served as co-facilitators during the group sessions. More information about the role of the young adult researchers can be found in Section 3.4.1. All of the focus groups were recorded and transcribed. Food and drinks were provided to all participants and they also received $25 Amazon gift cards for the 90 minutes of their time.

3.4 Study Methods and Research Design

The study was initially approved by the University of Massachusetts Boston Institutional Review Board (IRB) in August of 2017 and then approved for continuance in August of 2018 and 2019. In the study, there were three modes (web-based survey, focus groups, Data Advisory Group) where data were collected from human subjects and in all these cases, the young people were notified in writing about their human subjects protections and all participants signed informed consent documents. All study participants were 18 years of age and older and therefore were able to sign their own informed consents without the signature of another adult. Sometimes the informed consent documents were signed electronically in the case of the web-based survey and sometimes participants signed a hard copy.

All of the methods employed in the study and the data collection instruments themselves were developed to solicit information about the testable research questions (detailed in Chapter

1) about strength of social agency, level of social agency facilitators, and the relationship with sociodemographic factors. The web-based survey helps to answer all the research questions and specifically uses bivariate analysis and multivariate regression analysis to test the determinants of social agency with a particular eye on social agency facilitators. The majority of the focus group prompts concentrate on Research Question 2 and are intended to elicit more narrative and explanatory stories about emerging adults' pathways to adulthood, what facilitated those pathways, and what barriers may prevent young adults from getting to the places where they want to go. The Data Advisory Group primarily addresses Research Question 2 as well.

The data collection, data analysis, and dissertation writing for the study occurred over a two-and-a-half-year period as indicated in Figure 5. The first two phases between March 2017 and January 2018 involved a number of required set-up tasks, including submitting the UMass Boston IRB application and study protocol, identifying partnerships for data collection, and raising funds to pay for participant incentives and transcription services. YURI has not been the subject of many research studies and it did not have any operating standards for having members participate in a research study; therefore, I developed a memorandum of understanding, articulating what both parties would give to the study and what both parties would receive from their involvement. The second data collection site was at Rhode Island College and after gaining permission from the administration, having the RIC IRB review the study, completing required paperwork, and finding a faculty sponsor, I was granted permission to begin data collection.[11]

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[11] At the beginning of the dissertation study, the study population (Population 1) was known as "Year Up Providence," but mid-way through the study, the organization's name was changed to "Year Up RI" to more accurately reflect that some members were from other cities and towns outside of Providence, RI. In this document, both names may be used depending on the time period being reported.

Figure 5

Major Study Tasks and Timelines
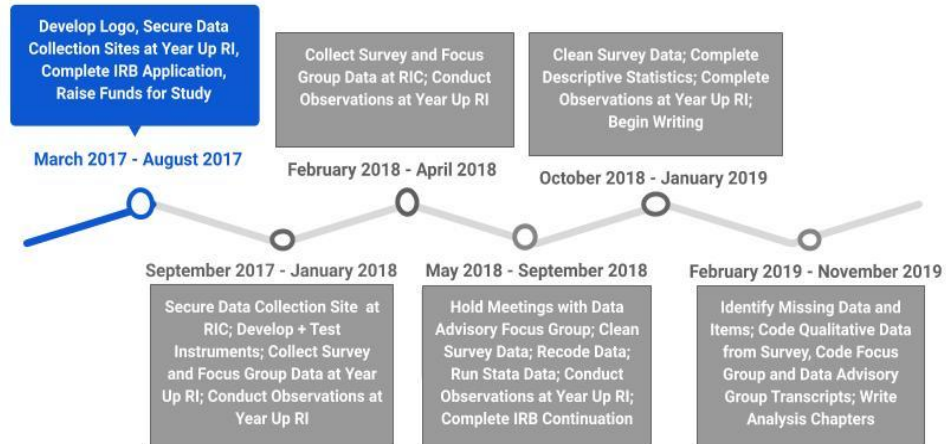
Note. Major study tasks and timelines illustrate the steps involved in the research process and the approximate time required to complete these tasks.

Figure 6

Design of Mixed Methods Research Study
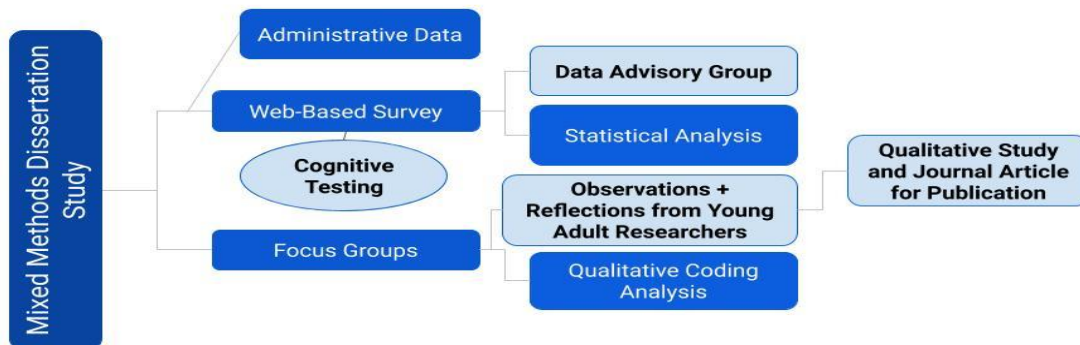
Note. Illustration of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods in the research design. Light colored shapes indicate activities where young adults participated in the study's data collection and analysis.

The study was funded through crowdsourcing on a social media platform called experiment.com to pay for several small administrative costs including space rental, food, and transcription services. The bulk of the $3,350 raised specifically covered the costs of incentives paid to emerging adult study participants. The general strategy of the study was to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from reliable sources in order to triangulate the data illustrated in Figure 6. The primary data sources for the study are the web-based survey and the focus groups with YURI administrative data used for background and context. Interpretation of the data occurred through statistical analysis, qualitative coding and thematic analysis, and review by members of YURI in a Data Advisory Group (see further explanation in Section 3.4.1). Additionally, the study included young adult researchers who were trained in qualitative research methods as part of the study and then were employed as co-facilitators and notetakers during the focus groups. Below is a more detailed description of the data sources and data analysis methods employed in the study.

3.4.1 Community-Engaged Research

In Figure 6, the darker blue spaces are traditional research design methods and the light blue shapes are places where community-engaged research methods were used in the study. Five members from YURI volunteered for an interpretative focus group (named the Data Advisory Group) that was facilitated and moderated by me during the spring of 2018. The Data Advisory Group members were chosen by YURI staff and included three males and two females who, by observation alone, appeared to be different races, although these data were not collected as part

of the process. The interpretative focus group was used to review the web-based survey data from YURI and offer data interpretations from the standpoint of those who had taken the survey. Dodson, Piatelli, and Schmalzbauer (2007) state that this type of participatory research is important to understanding the actual experiences of the research participants by giving people that are similar to the participants the role (and voice) as experts, which can serve as tools for empowerment. The Data Advisory Group met three times during the months of April–June 2018 and included in Appendix D are the meeting materials which provide an outline of the topics that were discussed, as well as the general guidance for the way in which the group meetings were conducted. The Group served as an important part of the study's vetting and analysis process.

In order to analyze the data generated from the Data Advisory Group, I reviewed the transcripts from the three meetings to identify common themes through open coding. Then, using thematic analysis, ideas were organized into four broad categories:

- Content issues related to the study's three research questions,
- Policy recommendations,
- Reflections of Data Advisory Group process, and
- Proposed changes in survey methodology.

Subthemes were developed, the transcripts were hand-coded, and supporting narrative quotations from the participants were anonymously attributed to each of the themes and subthemes.

The study also included a group of three young adult researchers who were paid to help design and test the focus group questions and co-facilitate the focus groups. The involvement of the young adult researchers was an intentional strategy to accomplish four distinct goals: 1) to encourage authenticity in data collection so the instruments and the process had a greater

likelihood to elicit genuine responses; 2) to make the study participants feel valued and seen; 3) to provide growth and development opportunities to the target population of the study itself by involving emerging adults as partners in the work; and 4) to help keep the research real and to ground the outputs of the research in spaces where it may be helpful to the emerging adults themselves.

3.4.2 Primary Research Instruments and Research Process

During the same time period in which data was being collected at YURI, I spent time on-site observing at YURI. I was fortunate to watch while YURI members discussed current issues of structural racism and educational inequities; to speak with new YURI members about their goals and fears during their orientation sessions; to see current YURI members chat, laugh, and complain about the difficulty of their Excel classes; and to listen to YURI graduation speeches that brought me to tears. I took notes during all the observations over the course of the year (from September 2017 to September 2018) and frequently drafted reflections immediately after the observations. I wrote a number of analytical memos that pieced together the complicated stories that I was observing. These observations were conducted as background to the data collection methods in order to better understand the YURI program and the population of young people served. This provided essential context since I was unfamiliar with YURI before the dissertation study. These types of observations were not conducted with Rhode Island College since in the past, I have spent considerable time with RIC students and faculty on campus, and also have more knowledge about the lives of public college students from my teaching and advising at UMass Boston.

3.4.2.1 Administrative Data

For a broader understanding of the study populations, I used publicly available administrative data about both YURI members and Rhode Island College students and about both of the organizations themselves. YURI provided additional administrative data about the members of Class 26 (Sample 1) that is not publicly available. The administrative data was not specifically used to address any of the study's research questions, but instead was used as background to compare Sample 1 to other groups of YURI members and to OY.

3.4.2.2 The Web-Based Survey

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected through a web-based survey developed using Qualtrics and accessible via a smartphone as well as a computer or tablet. There were seven major sections or blocks of the web-based survey that coincide with the research questions and the variables of interest:

1. Consent and screening criteria

2. Demographics and background information

3. Cultural, racial, and ethnic identity

4. Views of adulthood

5. Social agency

6. Social agency facilitators and opportunity structures

7. Concluding remarks

The survey used a mix of validated scales and questions created specifically for the study when existing scales were not available.[12] The average participant took 13.5 minutes to complete the survey online. The survey was reviewed externally by senior administrators at both YURI and RIC and their edits and suggestions were included in the final version of the survey instrument. Additionally, three diverse emerging adults (who were current members or alumni of YURI) completed cognitive testing of the survey instrument in September 2017 when, in addition to taking the survey, they also submitted a 17-question Google form about their survey experiences, and then participated in a phone interview with me to provide oral feedback. The cognitive testing included questions about the length of the survey, the mode of taking the survey, and the format and substantive content of the survey questions. The data collected through the cognitive testing process led to small, but important, changes in the survey. The three young adults were paid $30 each for approximately 1.5 hours of their time.

Data collection occurred in two different time periods based on the sample. Sample 1 completed the survey in October 2017 and Sample 2 completed the survey between February 2018 and April 2018. Qualtrics data from the survey were exported as a .csv file and then uploaded into Stata® 12.1 where the descriptive statistics, bivariate analysis, multivariate regression analysis, and graphing was completed. The small number of open-ended survey questions were hand-coded and analyzed thematically using Excel.

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[12] Many of the scholars who had developed the validated scales were contacted to ensure proper data interpretation and scoring. Data from this dissertation research will be submitted to all the original scale developers so that this study can help contribute to the ongoing validation of the scales with different participant populations.

3.4.2.3 Focus Groups

Qualitative data were collected through the four focus groups, two with each sample.[13] The focus group prompts and process were developed in consultation with YURI and RIC, as well as other outside scholars. The focus groups were each 90 minutes in length. In order to create a positive environment for sharing information, each focus group began with brief introductions, an icebreaker, and establishing ground rules. There were a total of seven focus group prompts that directly and indirectly related to the research questions (see Table 5). In three out of the four focus groups, the prompts were the same. Some questions were revised after the first focus group to increase understanding for the participants. For a few of the focus group prompts, the participants received preliminary survey data which helped to inform the discussion. After the completion of the focus group questions, participants were asked to complete a brief handwritten evaluation form.

Table 5

Crosswalk Between Focus Group Prompts and Study Research Questions

	Focus Group Prompts	Research Question
1.	What do you consider are markers for a successful pathway to adulthood for yourself & how do you think we can best measure this?	NON-RESEARCH QUESTION
2.	What do you think when you hear the words "hope," "power," "voice," and "choice?" Are there other characteristics that you think are essential to a successful transition to adulthood?	RQ 1
3.	What were the most important people, experiences, and opportunities that helped you to stay on a positive pathway to adulthood in your own life?	RQ 2B + 2C

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[13] Focus group materials can be found in Appendix E.

4.	How do you think that Rhode Island College has contributed to your transition to adulthood? (ONLY IN FOCUS GROUPS 3 + 4)	RQ 2B + 2C
5.	What barriers have you encountered to achieving a positive transition to adulthood? How have you overcome or not overcome these barriers?	RQ 2
6.	What differences do you think that race & ethnicity, mother's education, and gender make on a person's ability to successfully transition to adulthood?	RQ 1 + 2
7.	If you were able to make changes in laws and funding, what action steps do you think should be taken to help all young adults (regardless of race, mother's education, and gender) have a successful transition to adulthood in Rhode Island?	NON-RESEARCH QUESTION

Using the qualitative data analysis model by Miles and Huberman (1994), the research study involved a constant comparison process of data collection, data condensation, data display, and data verification. The focus group transcripts were analyzed using grounded theory and then using thematic analysis to create inductive codes that aligned with the research questions based on open coding (Rossman & Rallis, p. 268). Working definitions (see Appendix F) were created for each of the themes and subcodes that would be revised several times based on the re-reading of the qualitative data (Maxwell, pp. 106-107). Finally, using this common set of themes and subcodes, I hand-coded the four focus group transcripts. The coding analysis was first completed individually by each of the four focus groups, then by sample, and then finally across the four groups to promote inter- and intra-group comparisons and within-sample and across-sample analysis.

3.5 Measurements of Key Variables

The web-based survey included eight scaled questions and many of the scales included subscales. Of these eight scales, four were used to construct and measure social agency, and two

were used to measure the social agency facilitators. The sociodemographic variables for age, gender, race & ethnicity, and SES were also captured in the survey and are part of the hypothesis testing, also serving as variables in the regression model. A full description of all the model variables in the web-based survey is included in Appendix G, along with a list of the modified scales, new subscales, and recoded variables.

3.5.1 Social Agency Variables

Social agency is the ability for a person to believe in and envision a future and to be empowered to advocate for oneself and others to work towards that future. Multiple scales were used to measure social agency because there is not a single scale that consistently measures the concept across disciplines, in part because social agency is theorized differently, and in part because it is a relatively new concept. Additionally, social agency has many different dimensions that are cited in the literature. Therefore, using multiple scales increases validity and allows the capture of subtle nuances between the scales and the possible differences based on dimension. Moreover, these specific scales were chosen because they are publicly available, the information about scaling and scoring is accessible, the scales are validated and easy to incorporate into a web-based format, and several scales were tested with similar comparison groups in terms of age and other sociodemographic indicators.

Figure 7

The Four Dimensions of Social Agency and Corresponding Study Measures

01	HOPE/FUTURE ORIENTATION	• WELL-BEING Measured by Adult Mental Health Continuum - Short Form (MHC-SF)
02	EMPOWERMENT/EFFICACY/CONTROL	• MASTERY AND CONTROL Measured by Pearlin Mastery Index (PMI)
03	VOICE/ENGAGEMENT	• INTRAPERSONAL EMPOWERMENT Measured by Socio-Political Control Scale for Youth (SPCS-Y)
04	CHOICE/ADVOCACY	• SENSE OF AGENCY, COMPETENCE FOR CIVIC ACTION, AND POLITICAL VOICE Measured by Community Leadership Scale (CLS)

Note. Illustration of the four dimensions of the variable social agency and the scales used to measure the concept in the study.

In Figure *7,* the four scales measuring social agency in the web-based survey coincide with the four different dimensions of social agency based on how the concept has been theorized in the existing literature as discussed in Section 2.1: Dimension 1–Hope/future orientation; Dimension 2–Empowerment/efficacy/control; Dimension 3–Voice/engagement; and Dimension 4–Choice/advocacy. The first two dimensions of social agency are grounded in the field of psychology and there are a number of studies using the Adult Mental Health Continuum Scale (MHC-SF)™ to measure hope and well-being, and an equal number of published studies using the Pearlin Mastery Scale (PMS) to measure efficacy and control, especially with children and young adults. The last two dimensions of social agency, which are more generally based in the fields of political science and sociology, are less well-theorized and studied and also are the concepts that most closely align with the definition of social agency included in this study. The Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth (SPCS-Y) has been used primarily with a younger

population to measure both voice and engagement (Dimension 3). Choice and advocacy (Dimension 4) are measured using the Community Leadership Scale (CLS) and is the primary measure of social agency and is used as the dependent variable in the study's regression analysis. In this case, the other three measures of social agency are used as reliability tests. Below is a more detailed description of the four social agency scales.

Adult Mental Health Continuum Short Form–Developed by Keyes (2009, 2018), the MHC-SF™ is used to measure the first dimension of social agency—hope and future orientation. This 14-item scale of well-being asks the young person how he or she has been feeling over the past month and how often he or she has felt positively about his or her life and about the world around her or him using a 6-point (0–5) Likert scale (never = 0, once or twice = 1, about once a week = 2, about 2–3 times a week = 3, almost every day = 4, every day = 5). The scores for each item are summed for a possible range of 0–70. The scale is created from responses to question 6.1 in the web-based survey found in Appendix H.

The Pearlin Mastery Scale–This scale is used to measure the second dimension of social agency—empowerment, efficacy, and control. The 7-item scale asks the young person his or her level of disagreement or agreement using a 4-point Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4), with statements about his or her ability to make decisions regarding his or her life and how much control he or she seemingly has over these decisions (Pearlin, 1978). The scores for each item are summed for a possible range of 7–28. The scale is created from responses to question 7.1 in the web-based survey found in Appendix H.

The Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth–This scale is used to measure Dimension 3 of social agency—voice and engagement. Building from the work of Marc Zimmerman and James

Zahniser (1991), this 17-item scale developed by N. Andrew Peterson et al. (2011) asks the young person their level of disagreement or agreement (using a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree) with statements that characterize how they engage with others, their leadership style, and how they believe that others respond to their voice and opinion. The scores for each item are summed for a possible range of 17–85. There are two subscales [Leadership Competence (LC) and Policy Control (PC)] and based on these subscale scores, participants are placed in one of four profile groups. The scale is created from responses to question 8.1 in the web-based survey found in Appendix H.

Community Leadership Scale–This scale is used to measure Dimension 4 of social agency—choice and advocacy. This 10-item scale asks the young person to imagine a problem (or a perceived injustice) in the community that they care about and wants to do something about (e.g., youth not having access to high-quality education, or lead in the drinking water), and then respondents must decide how well they are equipped to address this problem through creating plans, going to meetings, writing letters, contacting people in power, etc. Respondents answer using a 5-point Likert scale with 1 meaning "I definitely can't" and 5 meaning "I definitely can." The scores for each item are summed for a possible range of 10–50. The scale is created from responses to question 8.2 in the web-based survey found in Appendix H.

The CLS was based on an unpublished technical research report which was a modified version of the published CLS by the same authors (Watts & Guessous, 2006). The CLS was tested for reliability and validity by the scale authors and had a Cronbach's alpha of .91, meaning that the scale had excellent reliability. Based on research for his master's thesis, Shaun Duggins (2011) also demonstrated how the CLS, which was used to measure "competence for civic

action," could also reliably measure "sense of agency" (Flanagan, Syversten, & Stout, 2007).

Working with a similar population of young adults as those who participate in this dissertation study, Duggins found that the CLS was a more accurate and expansive depiction of a young person's agency. Duggins wrote,

> In a situation where a youth believes he or she has the capabilities to accomplish certain
> goals, like taking on a leadership role (which is a situation many youth of color find
> themselves in), it can be very useful to have a scale that directs attention to both the
> behavioral and psychological aspects of agency. (p. 24)

I decided to use the CLS as the primary scale to measure social agency because it was the only scale that asked young people to state the level of engagement that they would initiate to promote change. The scale is centered around a young person's active engagement.

3.5.2 Social Agency Facilitators Variables

Figure 8

Measures of Social Agency Facilitators

01	SOCIAL AGENCY FACILITATORS (Intensity)	• Measured by Youth Inventory of Involvement (YII) scale • Validated scale
02a	SOCIAL AGENCY FACILITATORS (Total #s, Types)	• Measured by Social Agency Facilitator (SAF) scale
02b	SOCIAL AGENCY FACILITATORS (Mentorship #s, Types)	• Measured by Social Agency Facilitator (SAF) subscales of MENTOR (all 4 types of mentors), MENTOR2 (3 types of mentors), and MENTOR3 (at least 1 type of mentor)

Note. Listing of the validated and unvalidated scales and subscales used to measure social agency facilitators in the study.

Social agency facilitators help emerging adults to be and do the things necessary for a positive trajectory to adulthood. To assess the impact of social agency facilitators on social agency, the web-based survey included some social agency facilitators that are measured using the validated Youth Inventory of Involvement (YII) scale (Pancer, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Alisat, 2007). The YII scale was used as the primary way to test for differences in the level of social agency facilitators since it is a validated scale. I developed a new Social Agency Facilitator scale (SAF) which was intended to supplement the YII scale (see Figure 8). The SAF scale was based on PYD literature that identifies connections between a young adult's positive trajectory to adulthood and an established set of facilitated activities including mentorship and participation in different school and community-based experiences. Additionally, an open-ended question in the survey and the focus groups provided alternative spaces to capture what emerging adults believe helped to promote their own paths to a successful adulthood.

Youth Inventory of Involvement Scale–This 28-item validated scale includes a list of activities and asks respondents to indicate how often they did each activity on a 5-point Likert scale from 0–4 with 0 = you never did this over the past year, and 4 = you did this a lot over the past year. The YII scale has four different subscales: political activities (pa), community/neighborhood activities (ca), responding activities (ra), and helping activities (ha). The scores for each item are summed for a possible range of 0–104. The subscales are measured on a scale from 0–4. I added an additional two items at the very end of this survey question based on requests from YURI and RIC that were excluded from the total scale score so that the data could be comparable with other

samples that used the scale. The scale is created from responses to question 9.1 in the web-based survey found in Appendix H.

Due to an oversight on my part, four of the scale's items did not make it into the survey that all the participants completed. However, it still holds true that a higher total YII score indicates a higher level of social agency facilitators so that comparisons can be made between the study's two samples. Two of the subscales have missing items (*ra and ha*), which could affect the validity. For the other two subscales (*pa and ca*), none of the four missing items are included in the calculations of subscale means and therefore it has stronger internal validity; however, *responding activities* and *helping activities* each have missing items.

Social Agency Facilitator Scale–This 10-item scale was developed specifically for this research study of emerging adults, asking the respondents which social agency facilitators they have experienced personally over the past year; survey participants can check as many boxes as they choose. The items included in the scale were based on scholarly literature that supports how each of these experiences, opportunities, and personal connections improves an emerging adult's social agency. The list includes peer and adult mentor relationships, youth programming, paid work experience or internships/apprenticeships, intense passions or skills/hobbies, volunteer service in the community, participation in cultural and/or religious organizations, and participation in political parties or organizations. Respondents were also given the opportunity to list their own ideas about experiences and personal connections they had over the past year which they believe were helpful to their development of social agency as part of an open-ended question in the web-based survey.

3.5.3 Control Variables–Sociodemographic Characteristics

I included various controls for sociodemographic variables that are informed by prior discussions in the literature about differences in the trajectory to adulthood. While sociodemographic characteristics are important in helping to think about a young person's trajectory to adulthood, they are by no means the only differences that contribute to a young person's story; it is influenced by a number of other social and environmental conditions including, but not limited to, one's family composition, geographic location, neighborhood, education, and health care, none of which are currently measured in the study.

The survey asked participants to provide information about themselves including their age, mother's education, gender, sex at birth, race & ethnicity, immigration and veteran status, hours worked, and volunteer hours. Using *t* tests and ANOVAs, I first tested age, gender, mother's education (as a proxy for SES), race & ethnicity, and sex to measure the strength of the correlation and in part due to the small sample size where gender and sex were so similar, I decided to use the four sociodemographic variables that appear to matter. Below is a more detailed description of each of the four control variables and the basic description of the data that were collected as part of the web-based survey.

Age: The survey question about age asks respondents to indicate how old they are with separate categorical choices from 18 to 25 years old. The variable was recoded to create three categories: 18–19 years old, 20–22 years old, and 23–25 years old because this categorization seems to reflect real differences in life experiences and social and cognitive development.

Mother's Education: The study uses mother's education to serve as a measure of social class or SES. In their seminal article, Entwisle and Astone (1994) provide guidelines for measuring race

& ethnicity and SES for youth. Building off the work of Coleman (1988), the authors suggest

that SES consists of three different types of capital: financial capital, human capital, and social

capital, and there are distinct variables for these different types of capital. For this study, I was

primarily concerned with measuring the human capital that emerging adults obtained from their

homes and therefore I used mother's education level as a proxy measure for SES as Entwisle and

Astone recommended, in part because the survey question is rarely skipped by survey

respondents and it is highly correlated to the father's education. In this web-based survey,

respondents were asked the highest level of education that their mothers had completed. There

were four categories of coded responses: high school degree or less, some college, college

degree, and do not know.

Gender[14]: The question used to describe gender asked, "What sex were you assigned at birth?"

This categorical variable was recoded to be a 0,1 variable with male = 0 and female = 1.

Race & Ethnicity: The web-based survey included a question about race & ethnicity which listed

ten possible self-identifying categories and one open-ended response option, and were recoded

and collapsed into five new items which included: African American and/or African Black;

Asian American and/or Asian Other Culture; Latina/o and/or Hispanic; White/Non-Hispanic

and/or European; and Multiracial and Other.

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[14] The variable for gender and the variable for sex were both included separately in the web-based survey
because I was originally planning to use the gender variable. However, the distribution of male and female in
both response sets were exactly the same except the gender variable had three people (one from YURI and two
from RIC) who responded, "Nonbinary or Gender Fluid" or "Choose Not to Answer." The variable sex (and not
gender) was included in the final study model due to the similarities of the two variables and the small sample
size.

3.6 Empirical Strategy

The study uses the variables in Section 3.5 to measure social agency and social agency facilitators for the two groups of emerging adults in Rhode Island; to better understand the possible relationship between social agency and social agency facilitators; and to illustrate how sociodemographic variables may explain changes in social agency and/or social agency facilitators. I computed descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, ranges for continuous variables and frequencies for all categorical variables) to describe the key study variables and to then to measure if they differ or are correlated using bivariate analysis. Finally, I used regression analysis to see if social agency, once adjusted for individual characteristics, is statistically associated with social agency facilitators.

3.6.1 Bivariate Testing

Using a combination of chi-square tests, t tests and ANOVAs, I analyzed the two samples of emerging adults and compared mean differences in social agency and social agency facilitators using a number of validated scales to help answer Research Questions 1 and 2. The analysis identified similarities and differences between the two samples of emerging adults. The bivariate relationships between social agency and social agency facilitators were also examined using correlation.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1A: Do Rhode Island's college students have stronger social agency than OY enrolled in a career or college preparedness program?

H_o: μ(YURI) = μ(RIC)

There is no statistically significant difference in mean scores of social agency between RIC students (college students) and YURI members (opportunity youth).

H$_a$: μ(RIC) > μ(YURI) (1-tailed)

The mean scores of social agency for RIC students are higher than YURI members.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS 2A AND 2B: Do college students report different levels and types of

social agency facilitators than OY enrolled in a career preparedness program in RI ? What are the

most commonly reported factors or activities that facilitate social agency for emerging adults in

RI?

H$_o$: μ(RIC) = μ(YURI)

There is no statistically significant difference in mean scores of social agency facilitators

between RIC students (college students) and YURI members (opportunity youth).

H$_a$: μ(RIC) > μ(YURI)

The mean scores of social agency facilitators for RIC are higher than YURI.

3.6.2 Linear and Multivariate Regression Analysis

I conducted a correlation analysis to measure the relationship between the dependent

variable social agency (using the CLS) and the independent variable social agency facilitators

(using the YII scale) in order to better understand how changes in the level of social agency

facilitators (including political activities, community/neighborhood activities, helping activities,

and responding activities) effect changes in the strength of social agency. I hypothesized that

there would be a strong and positive relationship between the two variables, meaning that as

one's level of social agency facilitators increased, so would one's strength of social agency.

The model provides insight into the relationship between strength of social agency and

level of social agency facilitators. An ordinary least squares regression enables an analysis of the

independent relationship of the dependent variable social agency (using the Community

Leadership Scale) and the independent variable social agency facilitators (using the Youth Inventory of Involvement scale) while controlling for age, gender, mother's education, race & ethnicity, and sex. All the control variables are categorical variables, and sex is a binary indicator. The model was run first with all the independent and control variables in the study; secondly, the model was run including the other sample as a dummy variable (a binary variable of YURI or RIC). Additionally, I regressed the outcome variable social agency using the three other scales for social agency (MHC-SF™, PMS, and SPCS-Y) as a validity check which can be found in Appendix I.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1B AND 2C: Do differences in age, gender, mother's education, race & ethnicity, and level of social agency facilitators help to explain the strength of social agency for emerging adults in Rhode Island? Is there a relationship between measures of social agency and level of social agency facilitators for emerging adults in Rhode Island, and does the level of social agency facilitators help explain the strength of social agency (controlling for age, mother's education, race & ethnicity, and sex)?

Social Agency = β_0 + $\beta_1$age + $\beta_2$mother's education + $\beta_3$race+ethnicity + $\beta_4$sex + β_5Social Agency Facilitators + β_6Program + ε_1

3.6.3 Descriptive Statistics of Survey Samples

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for Select Sociodemographic Characteristics of Web-Based Survey

Participants by Sample

	YURI (Sample 1)		RIC (Sample 2)		
Variable	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**χ2**
AGE					1.8+
18-19	10	16.9%	17	17.5%	
20-22	31	52.5%	58	59.8%	
23-25	18	30.5%	22	22.7%	
TOTAL	**59**	**100.0%**	**97**	**100.0%**	
MOTHER'S EDUCATION					15.1**
High school or less	20	33.9%	36	36.7%	
Some college	31	52.5%	26	26.5%	
College	6	10.2%	33	33.7%	
Do not know	2	3.4%	3	3.1%	
TOTAL	**59**	**100.0%**	**98**	**100.0%**	
RACE AND ETHNICITY					56.6***
African American + African Black	12	20.3%	7	7.1%	
Asian American + Asian Other Culture	4	6.8%	3	3.1%	
Latina/o and/or Hispanic	37	62.7%	19	19.4%	
White/Non-Hispanic + European	2	3.4%	57	58.2%	
Multiracial and Other	4	6.8%	12	12.2%	
TOTAL	**59**	**100.0%**	**98**	**100.0%**	
SEX					8.0*
Male	28	49.1%	31	31.6%	
Female	29	50.9%	67	68.4%	
TOTAL	**57**	**100.0%**	**98**	**100.0%**	

Note. The chi-square statistic notes differences in the YURI and RIC samples. YURI = Year Up Rhode

Island. RIC = Rhode Island College. +p<.10. *p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001.

The two survey samples in this study include 59 members of Year Up Rhode Island (Sample 1) and 98 Rhode Island College students who participated in the web-based survey (Sample 2). Almost all survey participants completed the sociodemographic survey questions which were located at the beginning of the survey. Select characteristics of the samples for YURI members and RIC students are included in Table 6 including the age, mother's educational level, race and ethnicity, and sex of the two samples. Pearson's chi-square tests for independence were used to examine if the distributions of the sociodemographic variables are significantly different. The distribution of mother's educational level for Year Up RI members was significantly different from those of RIC, with Year Up RI participants having a larger share of mothers who only completed some college and did not graduate from college, compared to RIC students. RIC students were significantly more likely to identify as female as compared to YURI members. There were significant racial and ethnic differences in the two samples; in YURI (Sample 1), 20.3% identified as African American and African Black, 62.7% identified as Latina/o and/or Hispanic, and 3.4% identified as White, compared to 7.1%, 19.4%, and 58.2% of the RIC sample (Sample 2), respectively.

3.6.4 Testing for Skewness and Kurtosis

Before conducting any hypothesis testing, each of the variables measuring social agency and social agency facilitators were tested for skewness and kurtosis for the pooled sample and then separately for the YURI sample and the RIC sample to help assess whether the two samples and the pooled total for the dependent and independent variables were normally distributed. This then allows for more confidence when comparing the means. For the most part, the social agency variables were normally distributed for the pooled sample. However, the YURI sample is less

normally distributed than the RIC sample, where in some cases, there are larger numbers of survey participants that have higher scores than anticipated. The probability of kurtosis is close to normal for all four of the social agency variables. The primary validated scale being used to measure social agency is the CLS which is moderately skewed for all samples. The MHC-SF™ scale is only moderately skewed with the YURI sample, and both the pooled total and the RIC sample are symmetrical. The PMS is moderately skewed for the pooled total and for RIC but is symmetrical for YURI. The SPCS-Y is moderately skewed for all samples.

Each of the two scales measuring social agency facilitators were also tested for skewness and kurtosis. For the YII scale (the primary validated scale used to measure social agency facilitators), the total pooled sample as well as the YURI and RIC samples are relatively normally distributed. The SAF variable is not normally distributed for either the pooled sample or the individual samples of YURI members and RIC students, and is considered moderately skewed.

3.7 General Measurement Issues

3.7.1 Missing Data

All scales were converted to indices. Missing data were a small issue in both samples. There were a total of nine observations (four from YURI and five from RIC) that were removed from the samples because these respondents did not answer any of the eight scaled variables. There were an additional five observations (three from YURI and two from RIC) that completed at least one of the scaled variables, but were missing responses to some of the other key variables of interest; these cases were kept in the samples and were listwise deleted from Stata® based on the questions that were missing. Finally, there were 12 cases (eight from YURI and four from

RIC) that failed to complete the last one or two scaled questions on the survey. These cases were also kept in the samples and were listwise deleted from Stata®.

There were five scaled questions of the eight that had item nonresponse, and, in most cases, imputation was used except in question 6.1 where the MHC-SF™ listed other instructions for missing data (Keyes, 2014). There were one or two cases where there were a larger number of missing items in the scale and participants' data were only kept in the sample for the question when they answered at least 75% of the items. The only scale where this was not the case was question 7.1 where the PMS instructions were specific that if one item is missing, the scale score is coded as missing. There was no pattern to the nonresponse in any of the scaled variables.

3.7.2 Reliability and Validity

The primary study instruments (the web-based survey and the focus group prompts) have strong reliability. Cognitive testing was completed on both instruments and changes were made based on this testing. The web-based survey was taken by two study samples using several data entry modalities which strengthened the reliability of the instrument. Additionally, when the web-based survey was designed in Qualtrics[xm], special attention was paid to the length of the survey and the accessibility of the survey concepts which also increased reliability. Finally, the focus group prompts were used with four different groups of emerging adults on four separate days over a six-month period.

Using engaged research methodologies strengthened the internal validity of the study by having emerging adults involved in the study design, data collection, and the data analysis, ensuring that the ideas of emerging adults were integrated into all aspects of the research study. Additionally, the study's Data Advisory Group served as a form of respondent validation and

member checks. Using these strategies, I hoped to design and implement a research study that had public value, and whose products and processes would add value to OY and other emerging adults in our small state. In her most recent book *Just Research in Contentious Times* (2018), Fine argues in favor of "critical public science undertaken with and by communities and movements as a strategy for building critical consciousness, archiving local knowledge, and forging surprising solidarities" (p. xiii). By using engaged research, I hoped to distribute new information about OY to young people themselves and to provide opportunities for young people to engage with the data and the process in the hopes that this would bring learning and perhaps spaces to activate their social agency.

Specific strategies that enhance internal validity of the study are the young adult researchers participating in the focus group process, the inclusion of many validated scales in the survey, and the use of different but related sources to collect data about the research questions. This allowed for the triangulation of findings from multiple sources and reduced systematic error and bias. However, the study is weaker on external validity primarily because of the small sample size of the RIC study participants compared to the size of the RIC population.

There is stronger external validity with the YURI sample for several important reasons. Firstly, there was a high response rate to the web-based survey for members of Class 26 who participated in the study (78.8%) and while the 80 members of Class 26 only represents about 5% (80 out of approximately 1,300 of the total number of emerging adults that have ever completed the YURI program), Class 26 has strong similarities (based on sociodemographic variables) to the other three classes of emerging adults (Class 27, Class 28, and Class 29) that were participating in the YURI program during the past two years (see Appendix J). If the YURI

sample is generally similar to the larger population of YURI members, then the study may be generalizable to future members and classes of YURI.

3.8 Summary

Even with all these planned preparations to enhance reliability, validity, and credibility, I have a history and a set of experiences that may affect the study findings both due to the effects of the researcher on the study and the effects of the study on the researcher (Miles, Huberman, & Suldana, pp. 296-297). I am a white, middle-aged woman of privilege who has been working with OY and college students over the past ten years and has lived a life very different from many of the young people who participated in the study. While the research design tries to address this by gaining access and legitimacy through the coordinators at each of the sample sites, creating a Data Advisory Group, and hiring young adult researchers who more closely reflected the study participants, I am still considered an "outsider" so that participants may not have felt completely comfortable being honest in their survey or focus group responses.

The research study includes routine contact with coordinators at the data collection sites throughout the research design, data collection, and data analysis process. I reviewed the study findings with the coordinators at the data collection sites to provide opportunities for input about whether or not the study findings made sense or were a misinterpretation of the data; in other words, whether there could be "alternative explanations or interpretation" of the results. This was done to limit threats to validity (Maxwell, p. 123). As part of the search for alternative or rival explanations and outliers, these preliminary findings were formally shared with senior members of the YURI staff through a February 2020 presentation. Additionally, the study's young adult researchers were asked to review the findings, identify whether or not they are surprised by the

findings, and provide alternative explanations, if applicable. The majority of RIC faculty who

participated in the survey data collection indicated that they were interested in receiving updates

about the study and will be given an opportunity to review and comment on the findings (Miles,

Huberman, and Saldana, pp. 12-14).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

"Reflecting on the four words that you highlight–hope, power, voice and choice–and thinking about when I've had the most strength of social agency, it brings me back to times when I have done less for myself and more for others, like really self-less experiences. I remember the survey and I know that I checked off each of the last three that actually were scored the least. When I volunteered and participated in religious organizations and participated in political party organizations, I feel like in those moments, even though I wasn't advocating for myself, I was advocating for something larger than myself and I was supporting people that maybe didn't usually have that support. When I was giving someone something else or giving someone else time, it's that very moment that I felt that I had hope for myself to do better and I felt I had the power and I had a voice and I could see a vision because I could see them in my shoes and I can see myself in another pair of shoes." (12/12/17, YURI Focus Group)

4.1 Introduction

The results of the mixed methods study include analyses of quantitative and qualitative data from the web-based survey, qualitative data from the focus groups, and qualitative data from the Data Advisory Group. In the chapter that follows, the results are presented, analyzed, and then reported within each of the research questions and categorized by type of data source. All three data sources were used to coalesce intricate stories of social agency and what contributes to a young person's ability to envision a future, to feel empowered, to take action, and to promote change for themselves and others. The qualitative information from the focus groups and the Data Advisory Group provides important context and texture about the pathways to adulthood for two groups of emerging adults in Rhode Island whose voices are not always heard.

4.2 Results and Data Analysis of Social Agency and Relationships with Other Variables

Research Question 1 asks how the strength of social agency can differ between opportunity youth in a career preparedness program and students enrolled in a public higher education institution. If social agency is a capability and core to a young person's ability to have a successful trajectory to adulthood, some may suggest that opportunity youth have weaker social agency because this set of emerging adults may not have the sets of resources to make positive change. I originally hypothesized that college students would have stronger social agency than opportunity youth and that social agency was one of the primary factors contributing to marginalized young people not having the same positive pathways to adulthood as those persisting in college. This fits into the deficit-based lens that has been established for the subgroups of young people that comprise the 13,600 opportunity youth in Rhode Island in 2018 (the latest available data). One narrative states that opportunity youth and its subpopulations (including incarcerated youth, youth who did not finish high school, youth who did not enroll in college, youth who were in the foster care system, youth who were English language learners, and youth with learning disabilities) do not have as strong social agency as those who are enrolled and persisting in college, because they may not have as strong a will (or grit) to achieve. What if this presupposition is not true and opportunity youth have the same or stronger social agency as those who are persisting in college?

4.2.1 Bivariate Analysis of Social Agency

One way to test the differences between emerging adults from RIC and YURI is to perform a two-independent sample *t* test for the variables measuring social agency. Looking across all four continuous social agency scales, emerging adults in YURI have higher average

scores than those in Rhode Island College and using both the Pearlin Mastery Scale and the

Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth, the difference in the mean scores are statistically

significant (p<.05; see Table 7).

Table 7

Summary of Social Agency Variable Means by Sample, YURI and RIC

	Pooled Sample Mean	YURI Sample Mean	RIC Sample Mean	*t* test
DIMENSION 1 - HOPE AND FUTURE ORIENTATION: Adult Mental Health Continuum - Short Form - Total Scale (range 14-70; N=154)	**46.22** (12.09)	**47.59** (12.48)	**45.39** (11.83)	**p=.27**
DIMENSION 2 - EFFICACY, EMPOWERMENT, & CONTROL: Pearlin Mastery Index - Total Scale (range 13-28; N=146)	**21.49** (3.45)	**22.40** (3.99)	**21.02** (3.06)	**p=.02***
DIMENSION 3 - VOICE AND ENGAGEMENT: Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth - Total Scale (range 30-85; N=148)	**64.32** (9.94)	**66.87** (10.43)	**62.89** (9.40)	**p=.02***
Leadership Competence Subscale (range 2.3-5.0; N=148)	3.84 (0.65)	3.93 (0.71)	3.78 (0.61)	p=.19
Policy Control Subscale (range 1.3-5.0; N=148)	3.75 (0.68)	3.95 (0.63)	3.64 (0.68)	p=.007**
DIMENSION 4 - CHOICE AND ADVOCACY: Community Leadership Scale - Total Scale (range 16-50; N=145)	**37.32** (6.93)	**38.27** (6.56)	**36.80** (7.10)	**p=.22**

Note. Standard deviations are listed in (). The *t* test statistic notes differences in the means of YURI and

the RIC samples. *p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001

Using the Adult Mental Health Continuum Short Form, there was no statistically significant difference in social agency between YURI members and RIC students at the .05 level [$t(154) = -1.0997$, p = .27]. Scoring for the MHC-SF™ scale can be used to categorize people as flourishing, languishing, or moderately mentally healthy; however, given the study's small sample size, the total continuous scale score was used instead of the subscales and therefore survey respondents were not categorized in this manner (Keyes, 2009, 2014). An e-mail correspondence with scale developer Dr. Corey Keyes from Emory University, who regularly uses the short form scale as a predictor for health outcomes, indicates that while using a data set of US college students (n = 14,000), the mean of the continuous scale is 47.4 with Languishing = 18.5, Moderately Mentally Healthy = 39.2, and Flourishing = 56.4 (C. Keyes, personal communication, February 12, 2019). One could interpret that both study samples of emerging adults (YURI and RIC), with total scores that average 47.6 and 45.4 respectively are consistent with national averages for college students and both samples fall between moderately mentally healthy and flourishing. This suggests that on average YURI youth have similar strength of social agency as those who are successfully persisting at one of Rhode Island's public higher education institutions and comparable to other college students nationally.

The total score from the Pearlin Mastery Scale indicates that on average, YURI members have significantly higher average scores compared to Rhode Island College students at the .05 level [$t(146) = -2.3235$, p = .02]. Mastery has been shown to provide a protective buffer for individuals' mental and physical health and well-being when facing persistent life stresses, such as economic and occupational hardships. YURI members demonstrate a greater "extent to which one regards one's life-chances as being under one's own control in contrast to being fatalistically

ruled" (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978, p. 5). High scores on the PMS are indicative of superior mastery and scores less than 20 indicate low mastery. The mean scores of both samples of emerging adults (see Table 7) are in the middle of superior mastery and low mastery and the YURI Median = 23 while the RIC Median = 21 (Pearlin, Lieberman, et al., 1981).

The Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth is a measure of empowerment and people's beliefs about their skills and capabilities (in social and political systems) to organize groups of people and influence policy decisions within a community. The SPCS-Y has been tested with different communities and youth programs; studies have generally concluded that sociopolitical control is important to positive youth development (Peterson, Lowe et al., p. 287). The scale has been used to measure youth participation, activism, and civic engagement. Maton (2008) described empowerment as "a group-based, participatory development process through which marginalized or oppressed individuals or groups gain greater control over their lives and environment, acquire valued resources and rights, reach important life goals, and reduce social marginalization" (p. 5). A two-independent sample t test indicates that on average, emerging adults at YURI have significantly higher scores using the total SPCS-Y scale than those at RIC and this difference is significant at the .05 level [$t(148) = -2.37$, p = .02]. In general, higher numbers on the continuous scale mean higher levels of sociopolitical control and empowerment.

Zimmerman and Zahniser (1991) were the first to emphasize the importance of differentiating between skills (leadership competence) and participatory expectations (policy control) within the measure of sociopolitical control, specifically in measuring empowerment. In more recent studies with youth in the Northeast, Peterson et al. (2011) conclude that measuring the two dimensions "may be especially important in efforts to increase our understanding of

social change activities, citizen participation in community organizations, and how individual differences in sociopolitical control might explain different outcomes of empowerment-based prevention initiatives" (p. 601). Emphasizing the bidimensional nature of the measure's construct, I too calculated the subscales of LC and PC using Peterson's methodology which then placed the participants in one of the four profile groups described below. YURI members on average have higher scores on both the LC and PC subscales, and the difference is significant for Policy Control at the .05 level. There was no statistical difference in scores between the two samples on the LC subscale. The SPCS-Y uses the two subscales to create four profile groups:

- High Leadership Competence and Policy Control (*hlcpc*)

- High Leadership Competence (*hlc*)

- High Policy Control (*hpc*)

- Low Leadership Competence and Policy Control (*llcpc*)

In this dissertation study, the way that emerging adults are categorized into these profile groups differs between YURI and RIC. YURI had a total of 41.2% (21 out of 53) of participants with scores that fit into one of the four profile groups and RIC had 30.1% (23 out of 95). The only significant difference in the four profile groups among the two samples is the participants who are categorized as *hlcpc*. This is the group of emerging adults that had both high participatory competence and high psychological empowerment (Zimmerman and Zahniser, 1991), demonstrated by scores in the top quartile on both the LC and PC subscales. Those who fall into this *hlcpc* profile group can also be characterized as *activists* or *initiators of actions* because in addition to being leaders, they also believe that they can influence policy decisions. YURI had 14 participants (23.7% of the sample) and RIC had only ten participants (10.2% of the

sample) that were designated as activists based on their subscale scores. A chi-squared test for independence indicates that the YURI sample has a significantly higher percentage of participants who are categorized as activists than the sample at RIC [$X^2 = (1, n = 157) = 5.2$, p = .023].

The final measure for social agency used in the study is the 10-item Community Leadership Scale that measures both the behavioral and psychological aspects of social agency. On average, emerging adults in YURI have a higher score (38.3) than RIC students (36.8) using the total continuous scale where higher scores indicate a greater sense of agency. The difference, however, is not statistically significant at the .05 level.

4.2.2 Relationship Between Social Agency and Social Agency Facilitators

Within Research Question 2, I hypothesized that there was a positive relationship between the strength of social agency and the level of social agency facilitators. To test for this, I performed a correlation analysis based on calculations in Stata® between the validated social agency CLS total (a continuous variable) and validated social agency facilitators YII scale (a continuous variable). There is a moderately positive correlation in the pooled sample, a weak positive correlation among the RIC sample, and a moderately positive correlation (although stronger than the pooled sample) in the YURI sample. The very low *p* values of the correlation for all three samples indicate that the probability of this occurring by chance is very small and that one can be confident in the relationship between the two variables.

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Table 8

Pearson Correlations of Social Agency and Social Agency Facilitators

	Pooled Sample	YURI	RIC
Pearson Correlation	.4283***	.5781***	.3218**
Significance	.0000	.0000	.0017
N	142	49	93

*p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001

      I also explored the data visually using a scatter plot of the two variables. Based on Figure 9, there is a positive and significant upward sloping relationship between the two continuous variables suggesting that as social agency facilitators increase, social agency increases. The scatter plot also confirms that the relationship is linear. The next question was whether or not the relationship would still be significant after adjusting for age, mother's education, race & ethnicity, and sex in the multivariate analysis.

Figure 9

Scatter Plot of Relationship Between Social Agency (CLS) and Social Agency Facilitator (YII) Scale Scores and Best Fit Line (Pooled Total)
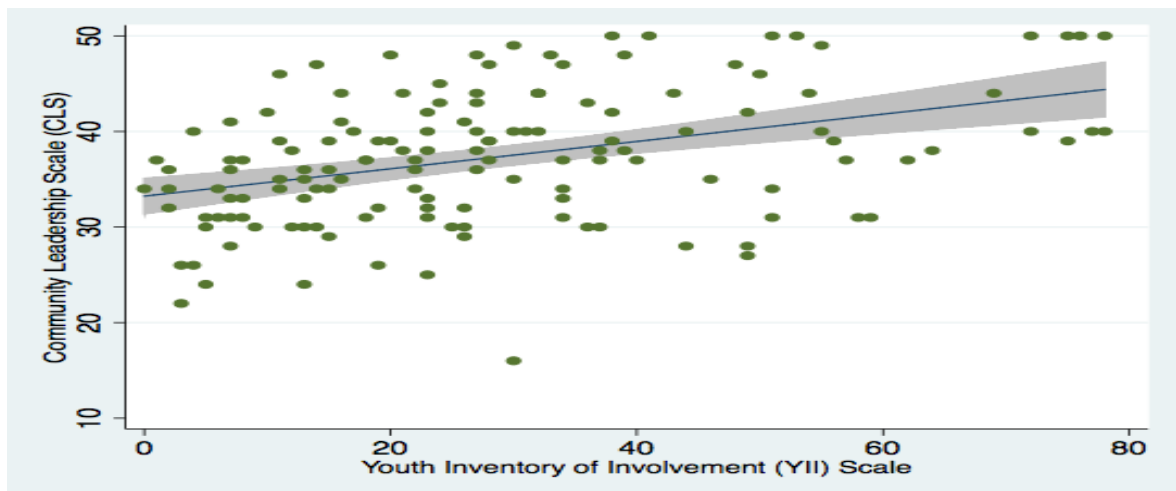
4.2.3 Multivariate Analysis of Sociodemographic Factors and the Relationship to Social Agency

In order to measure the impact of all four sociodemographic variables (age, mother's education, race & ethnicity, and sex) and social agency facilitators in relationship to social agency, I completed a multivariate regression analysis for the pooled sample. The multivariate regression (Model 1 in Table 9) examines how strength of social agency using the total of the CLS can be explained by all the sociodemographic categorical independent variables and the level of social agency facilitators (continuous variable using the YII scale) in one model for the pooled sample including YURI as one of the independent variables. Table 9 reports the regression results using unstandardized coefficients for all categorical measures. This modeling produces a $R^2 = .2032$ with the *totalyii* category as the only independent variable with significance. That is controlling for age, mother's education, race & ethnicity, sex, and program, there is a significant (p<.001) and positive (0.1315) relationship between the level of social agency facilitators and the strength of social agency. No other individual independent variables are significant in the model. The total model accounts for 20.3% of the variation in strength of social agency that is explained by the independent variables.

Table 9

Estimating the Relationship of Sociodemographic Variables, Social Agency Facilitators, and

Social Agency Outcomes (Unstandardized Coefficients and Standardized Errors Reported)

Model 1 Variables (using Community Leadership Scale as the Dependent Variable)	**Total Pooled Sample (w/ YURI)**
Age (missing category age 18-19 years old)	
20-22 years old	1.7414
	(1.4890)
23-25 years old	3.1905+
	(1.7031)
Mother's Education (missing category high school or less)	
Some college	0.6532
	(1.3356)
College	0.2479
	(1.5094)
Do not know	-3.0230
	(3.5136)
Race & Ethnicity (missing category African-American + African Black)	
Asian American & Asian Other Culture	-0.1724
	(3.3591)
Latina/o and/or Hispanic	1.1840
	(1.8374)
White/Non-Hispanic & European	1.2684
	(2.0118)
Multiracial	0.9868
	(2.3925)
Sex (female)	.9701
	(1.1876)
Social Agency Facilitators (using YII)	0.1315***
	(0.0299)
YURI	.23340
	(1.4865)
R^2	.2032
Observations	139

The most important finding from Model 1 is that there is no significant difference in social agency between emerging adults from YURI and RIC once I adjusted for sociodemographic characteristics and social agency facilitators. This is a very important and key finding from the study. Although the mean scores show some statistical differences, once I control for individual characteristics, there are none. For the pooled sample of emerging adults in Rhode Island, mother's education, race & ethnicity, and sex do not seem to matter in terms of the strength of social agency as measured by the CLS. Significant at the .10 level, the signs and p value (.06) of the 23-25 age variable in Table 9 suggest that older emerging adults in the pooled sample may have stronger social agency compared to 18-19 years old. The signs in the regression analysis also suggest that those young people with mother's who have higher levels of education (some college or college graduate) may have stronger social agency compared to those who either are high school graduates or did not complete high school. Using the same CLS for social agency, I also ran the model separately for YURI and RIC and I found many similar outputs including signs and significance. The model is generally a better fit for YURI than RIC and the independent variables together explain 47.8% of YURI's variance in social agency compared to 18.3% for RIC.

While I suggest that the CLS is the scale that most closely reflects the definition of social agency used in this study (and is the best model fit compared to the other social agency variables), there are many similarities in findings across the other social agency variables. The variable for social agency facilitators is consistently positively associated with social agency and

is significant for three of the four social agency variables (excluding the PMS). It appears from the data that stronger social agency is obtained as one gets older and age is significant in all sample groups (pooled, YURI, and RIC) using several variables for social agency. Finally, one difference in the regression outputs from the CLS scale versus the other three scales, is that the signs on the sex variable are negative and significant in the case of the MHC-SF™ scale at $p<.05$.

4.2.4 Qualitative Analysis of Social Agency

Social agency and questions about differences in social agency between the samples of emerging adults at YURI and RIC were also addressed through the (a) focus groups and (b) Data Advisory Group. In addition to the more traditional focus groups with YURI and RIC, YURI members in the Data Advisory Group helped validate whether the differences in strength of social agency between emerging adults at YURI and those at RIC were plausible based on their own lived experiences. In general, the participants in the Data Advisory Group were not surprised when looking at the survey data that members of YURI have the same or stronger social agency than those at RIC, but they were very pleased with this finding (6/27/18 Data Advisory Group meeting).

In order to analyze the focus group data, I developed preliminary key themes based on multiple readings of the transcripts, drafted definitions of the themes, hand-coded the transcripts, and then transcript quotes were categorized and counted based on themes and subthemes. The data were analyzed across all four focus groups and within each of the samples in order to measure how frequently the themes and subthemes were addressed. Subthemes were counted and ranked based both on frequency of occurrences within each of the focus groups, and the numbers

of focus groups in which a certain theme appeared. Subthemes that occurred in all four focus groups, or three of the four focus groups, meant that both samples of emerging adults raised the subtheme for discussion.

Turning to the analysis of the focus groups, the following illustrates participants' understanding of social agency and each of its dimensions. As the following quote indicates participants were not familiar with the term social agency.

> The word social or the phrase social agency makes me uncomfortable. Because my brain keeps going back just to the word agency and what that traditionally means in my mind and it feels like grinding gears to think of it in a different context. And then adding social to it. So, I have to force myself to think of like a synonym for social agency. So I think of social agent and being my own agent of my socialness or something like that. Like I'm trying to force myself to think of it in a different way that feels more comfortable. So being my own agent of my own socialness, like what would I do if I was… I don't know. Now I'm thinking about superheroes and stuff. (12/12/17 YURI Focus Group)

There were other varied reactions to the words "social agency" in the focus groups with YURI members and RIC students. One member of YURI asked if I "believed that social agency is something you achieve or something you maintain." During the focus group session, I responded by saying I did not know, but this question is something that I have continued to think about in the writing of this paper. Another focus group participant characterized social agency as the active function of being able to make "good, essential decisions in your life…(which is) essential to becoming an adult" (12/13/17 YURI Focus Group).

Another focus group participant likened social agency to believing in one's own success or internal drive or push.

I mean, I think it's that belief that you can succeed in what you're trying to do, the kind of drive to finish whatever you started and further your life. Kind of make a better… I don't want to say a better existence for yourself, but I guess that's the best way to put it. I think that's incredibly important. Like if you don't have that drive to try and do something, whether it be a job, whether it be school, whether it just be moving out of your parents' house, you kind of fall into a rut and you just kind of get stuck there (3/28/18 RIC Focus Group).

<u>Hope/Vision as Most Important Dimension of Social Agency</u>

In the focus groups, participants were asked to comment on the dimensions of social agency using the prompt, "What do you think of when you hear the words 'hope, power, voice, and choice'?" Of the four dimensions of social agency, hope/vision (vision was a new term suggested by focus group participants), was the theme that elicited the most discussion in all of the four focus groups based on open coding, axial coding, and thematic analysis. Both groups of emerging adults spoke about hope in similar terms based on their own personal stories of being in spaces when they or others they knew did not have hope and what a difference it makes in their lives.

When I was originally in high school and everything, I didn't really have much hope or kind of excitement for my future. I was not in the best family situation there. But I kind of realized that my best avenue was to try and go to college and become better than I was given and better than it seemed like my family was pushing me to be. And I came out

here and I have felt much better about my future. Like I'm happy with what I'm doing.

I'm excited to kind of continue on and see where it takes me. As a tech theater guy, it's

my hope that I can create something that people enjoy. Like that's what kind of pushes

me to continue. So for me personally, it was incredibly important to try and further

myself than I had in my current situation. (3/28/18 RIC Focus Group)

The focus group participants from both samples likened hope to motivation which in

some cases was the reason they applied to or persisted at RIC or YURI. One emerging adult from

RIC likened hope to "...the fire that lights your passions. And so if you're not passionate about

something, then it's not gonna want to give you hope to succeed and it's not gonna drive you or

push you over the edge to complete everything you want to do" (4/6/18 RIC Focus Group).

YURI members also described many connections between hope and being able to move forward

and believing that one can be successful. One focus group participant likened hope to having a

direction and knowing what that direction is. Participants generally characterized hope as a

mindset.

While vision was not originally conceived as part of the first dimension of social agency

based on the literature, several focus group participants from YURI addressed the importance of

being able to see themselves in a different space—not simply wanting things to be different and

having the idea that things could be different, but also being able to picture it for themselves and

having a clear direction. Finally, hope also was a concept that all of the emerging adults from

both samples (but especially those in YURI) seemed to most easily understand because

"everyone believes that there is something more" (12/12/17 YURI Focus Group).

Definitely. I would also include direction. I think that you need a sense of direction

because you can't get to your endpoint if you don't know where to start. You know, you

can't follow the steps if you don't know where to begin. I'd say direction definitely.

(12/13/17 YURI Focus Group)

The Work of Growing Empowerment

Focus group participants from both samples (three of the four focus groups) also

discussed the issues of empowerment/efficacy/control (Dimension 2). Focus group participants

in YURI and RIC discussed how the word *power* raised negative connotations and how they

would prefer the word *empower*.

Empower is something that you strive for. You strive to be empowered. You gain

empowerment. But when you hear power, yes, that…is there but it's like power inflicted

upon you by a higher force and that doesn't have to be monetary, governmental or

oppressive in a certain form or person. (4/6/18 RIC Focus Group)

Participants talked about the lack of empowerment they felt growing up and how empowerment

was not something that you have or don't have, but something that is on a spectrum and requires

constant work and maintenance, similar to the way participants characterized hope. An emerging

adult from YURI said, "But lots of times, I don't think people or even teachers take the time to

understand how the idea [empowerment] is actually tangible and how can you get to it."

(12/12/17 YURI Focus Group)

Differences in Participants' Connections to Choice Versus Voice

There were some marked differences between the two samples' views about the final

dimensions of social agency, Dimension 3 (voice/engagement) and Dimension 4 (choice). Some

focus group participants from YURI connected Dimension 1 (hope/vision) with Dimension 4 (choice/advocacy), as opposed to either Dimension 2 (empowerment/efficacy/control) or 3 (voice/engagement). This narrative introduces the idea that one needs hope and vision in order to have choice, especially when growing up in communities where emerging adults are more limited in their choices either by what others have told them, by what others around them are doing, and by structural limitations.

> Yeah, absolutely. I agree with him. I think hope and choice are definitely I would say more influential, I guess, in a way versus power and voice. I look at my father, for example. All he had was hope and choice. That's all he had. He had no power. You know, he came from Mexico. He didn't have a voice. He didn't have anyone, you know, really to advocate for himself. So, I think that those two, as long as you have hope and you make those correct decisions, you know, I think you can definitely go far. (12/13/17 YURI Focus Group)

Participants also highlight the importance of having choice (freedom) over decisions and over their future, which some participants historically had not believed was possible. One member of YURI highlighted how he had seen so many people make bad choices and emphasized the importance of believing he had a choice of going down a right or wrong path while students at RIC had less to say about choice and instead were drawn to issues of voice.

> Because just in my community, I've seen like a lot of negativity and like bad choices being made and people just like getting stuck in that cycle. So, it's like being around that all the time, you have like a choice whether you want to follow that or whether you want to like go against the grain. And so you need hope to think like wow, I don't need to be

like these people and that you have like the ability to choose whether or not you want to be like them or not or change and make the change that they need to see. (12/13/17 YURI Focus Group)

Comm(unity) as Fifth Dimension of Social Agency

Several participants in one of the RIC focus groups suggested a new dimension of social agency. These students raised the concept of *comm(unity)* as something required for a young person to have a positive trajectory to adulthood. The college students described community as being a part of something and feeling like they belong. The focus group participants specifically discussed the word *unity* within the larger word community because they felt that it was the unity which was the unique part of social agency and what is required for a successful transition to adulthood. "So like community, not like... I'm not saying you should have to, you don't have to go out and help the community but like being able to be a part of the community. I'm sorry, guys. I think I figured the word out. You said student union. So unity. That's the word. It's the end of community" (3/28/18 RIC Focus Group). While only one of the four focus groups specifically suggested adding the concept of comm(unity) to the dimensions of social agency, there was a strong consensus of the importance of community in other focus groups. Issues of community were raised throughout all four focus groups and were described as both facilitators and barriers to social agency. There were some questions about the boundaries of a community and whether or not one's community is based on the neighborhood where one currently resides, the school, college, or program one attends, or one's family home.

I was gonna say I can understand that. Like you said, it's being a part of something. It's definitely a good kind of thing to be on your pathway. It goes back to relationships that

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we mentioned earlier. Kind of feeling like you belong. You're not an outcast. You're a

part of something that's larger than yourself, whether it be like even something as simple

as like oh these are the other people in my major or like these are the people with the

same interests as me or it could be like this is my neighborhood. It's that idea of

interacting with people who share some commonality (3/28/18 RIC Focus Group).

The focus groups illustrate many similarities in how emerging adults from both samples

generally view social agency. At the same time, it is clear that the groups have some nuanced

differences in the most important aspects of social agency which may be a product of the current

position of each group. Emerging adults at YURI had recently made choices to enter into the

career preparedness program which represents a significant life change requiring hope and

vision, but also the belief that they have real choices in their trajectory to adulthood. Perhaps RIC

students' emphasis on voice is because they already have experienced choice after spending time

in a college community and voice is a natural extension of choice.

4.2.5 Qualitative Analysis of Sociodemographic Factors and the Relationship to Social Agency

Discussion about the relationship between sociodemographic variables and social agency

was illustrated through the focus groups and the Data Advisory Group. In the focus groups,

participants were asked a question specifically related to sociodemographic factors and their

relationship to a successful transition to adulthood. Focus group participants were asked, "What

differences do you think that race & ethnicity, class, and gender make on a person's ability to

successfully transition to adulthood?" Given how emerging adults seem to focus on their own

identities, these questions engendered a surprisingly small amount of discussion, especially at

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RIC. A few members of a RIC focus group connected issues of sociodemographic characteristics to issues of identity and the white male culture that dominates a college campus.

> I was gonna say for me, like an important thing about transitioning into adulthood is like self-actualization. And so characteristics like race & ethnicity, class, gender or like sexual orientation, when you don't identify with like male, white, straight, those act as barriers towards your self-actualization, which becomes a barrier to you becoming an adult, so to speak (3/28/18 RIC Focus Group).

The Positive Relationship Between Age and Social Agency

The five or six YURI members who served on the Data Advisory Group were generally surprised that there are so many members of YURI who are straight out of high school although on reflection the participants thought that going through the YURI program at an earlier age would help facilitate social agency. The group members expected that those who are older, and female would have more social agency and while the survey data in part supports similar findings, the group discussion below illustrates how the emerging adults contextualize age and social agency based on their own experiences.

> Yes. I feel like people who are older have a lot more… I'm not gonna say a lot more drive because I feel like we all have drive. But it's like if they didn't get in this year, they wouldn't get in at all so I feel like they're taking the program a lot more seriously than anybody else is.

> Because I feel like they have less time to get their lives together so they're like hurrying up at the last minute type thing. I feel like that's why there's more guys there. I feel like, you know, women mature faster so they try to get on the right path faster.

No, no. Not like trying to say anything against you guys. But I thought that's usually how

it is. Women mature faster so they try to get their lives faster where the guys like wait to

the last minute and they're like oh I heard about this program, I can do it two years from

now and they're like trying to get it together.

But if you were to like talk to all of us, I feel like you wouldn't be able to tell the

difference in ages because the program has helped all of us mature."

Yeah, at least at this point. But in the beginning…

In the beginning, you could definitely be able to tell who was 18 and who was 25.

Definitely.

But now I feel like if you were to have a conversation with all of us, you couldn't

pinpoint our ages just because the programs help us mature so much.

(5/9/18 Data Advisory Group Meeting)

The Impact of Mother's Education on the Educational Choices of Emerging Adults at YURI

The participants in the Data Advisory Group had strong reactions to the relationships

between social class and possible differences in social agency. The participants feel it makes

sense that they have struggled with their own education because their mothers also struggled.

No, I feel like a lot of people have the same. Like their mom went to CCRI for a couple

semesters or something like that.

I feel like it kind of explains like why we're motivated to do something.

Yeah. Like you can see here. Like there's only like six people who say their mom

actually finished college or something. So I think it shows why we all want to be here.

Like we want to get more out of that.

Yeah, the majority of our moms finished high school and some college.

But didn't finish college.

(4/25/18 Data Analysis Group Meeting)

During the same meeting, the Data Advisory Group participants discussed how it also explains why they are motivated to do something different.

Most of the people in college, their mother finished college.

Jesus.

I think it makes sense because if you went to college, you want your children to go to college.

I feel like so many people start it and they never finish.

And never finish.

And that's why it's always like so high.

But it's crazy how only 25% of the moms at RIC started and then 52% of moms at Year Up started but the percentage of the people that actually completed it is so low. So it's like those starting, the Year Up is higher. But then like finishing, RIC is way up there.

(6/27/18 Data Analysis Group Meeting)

4.3 Results and Data Analysis of Social Agency Facilitators and Relationships with Other Variables

Research Question 2 asks how the level and types of social agency facilitators differs between emerging adults at YURI and RIC. Social agency facilitators are the opportunities, experiences, and personal connections that emerging adults are engaged in which promote hope

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and vision, empowerment, voice, choice, and community. There is a wide range of social agency facilitators, from participating in a political group, to community volunteering, to being in an organized sports program, to having peer mentors. I originally hypothesized that college students would have higher levels and different types of social agency facilitators than opportunity youth due in part to the fact that students on a college campus are involved in a college community offering more opportunities for engagement.

4.3.1 Bivariate Analysis of Social Agency Facilitators

In order to test the hypothesis that RIC students have higher levels of social agency facilitators than YURI members, a two-independent samples *t* test was conducted using the validated Youth Inventory of Involvement scale which illustrates that on average YURI members had significantly higher average scores of social agency facilitators than RIC students. This difference was statistically significant at the .05 level [(*t*(140) = -2.09, p = .038]. The YII scale was designed to assess how strongly young people believe they have an obligation to others, particularly for underserved populations, by measuring involvement in many types of activities including *political activities*, *neighborhood activities*, *helping activities*, and *responding activities* (Pancer et al., 2007). Table 10 illustrates the total YII scale and subscales as well as the Social Agency Facilitator scale and subscales that were developed to supplement the validated YII scale.

Table 10

Summary of Social Agency Facilitator Variables Means by Sample, YURI and RIC

	Pooled Sample Mean	YURI Sample Mean	RIC Sample Mean	*t* test
Youth Inventory of Involvement - Total Scale (range 0-78; N=142)	**29.13** (20.40)	**33.27** (24.87)	**26.15** (16.95)	**p=.038***
YII Subscales *Political activities* (range 0-3; N=144)	*0.63* (0.77)	*0.80* (0.98)	*0.54* (0.62)	p=.057
Community/neighborhood activities (range 0-3.7; N=143)	*0.96* (0.85)	*1.19* (1.01)	*0.83* (0.73)	p=.016*
Helping activities (range 0-3.5; N=143)	*1.44* (0.89)	*1.57* (0.93)	*1.37* (0.87)	p=.22
Responding activities (range 0-4; N= 143)	*1.79* (0.97)	*1.92* (0.99)	*1.720* (0.95)	p=.23
Participation in a YURI or RIC public forum (ex. panel, workshop) (range 0-4; N=141)	*0.81* (1.21)	*1.08* (1.29)	*0.66* (1.15)	p=.05
Attendance at a YURI or RIC sponsored networking event (range 0-4; N=142)	*1.02* (1.22)	*1.18* (1.30)	*0.94* (1.18)	p=.25
Social Agency Facilitator - Total Scale (range 1-10; N=140)	**5.58** (2.03)	**5.44** (2.07)	**5.65** (2.01)	**p=.55**

Note. Standard deviations are listed in (). The *t* test statistic notes differences in the means of YURI and

the RIC samples. *p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001

In addition to measuring differences in the total level of social agency facilitators, both

scales provide insight about the specific types of opportunities, experiences, and personal

connections that the emerging adults reportedly were involved in over the past year. Those activities that both samples of emerging adults report they experience most frequently using the YII scale (in descending order) are (a) responding activities, (b) helping activities, (c) community/neighborhood activities, and (d) political activities. On average, the data indicates that emerging adults in YURI more frequently engage in all four different types of activities compared to emerging adults at RIC; however, the only subscale difference that is statistically significant is community/neighborhood activities (e.g., participated in a church-connected group; participated in an ethnic club or organization; attended a demonstration; or helped people who were new to the country), and overall the emerging adults only participated in these activities once or twice a year. Political activities (e.g., participated in a political party, club, or organization; helped prepare and make verbal presentations to organizations, agencies, conferences, or politicians; or ran for a position in student government) is the category that both samples reported engaging in the least frequently over the past year (either never or less than once or twice a year). For both samples, the highest mean scores were for the responding activities subscale, also defined as passive involvements, which include items such as extending help (including money, food, clothing, rides, etc.) to friends or classmates in need; signing a petition; or giving money to a cause, and these responding activities were done a "few times over the past year."

Immediately following the YII scale, there was the addition of two items based on requests from YURI and RIC. The two activities were (a) Participated on a panel or public forum and (b) Attended a networking event. While the mean score for YURI members was higher than RIC students on both of these items (see Table 10), neither difference was statistically

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significant. The frequency that emerging adults reported participating in a public forum or a networking event was similar to the four YII activity clusters and, at most, both samples reported that on average they engage in public forums and networking activities once or twice a year.

The second scale measuring level of social agency facilitators was created for the study to improve data validation through triangulation, but also because the YII scale was missing some opportunities, experiences and personal connections that, based on literature, are known to contribute positively to youth development and the trajectory to adulthood. On average, the samples of YURI and RIC had means of 5.44 and 5.65 (see Table 11) on the ten-item Social Agency Facilitator scale, meaning that of the ten items listed, on average emerging adults experienced over one-half of these social agency facilitators during the past year. There is no statistically significant difference between the means based on a two-independent sample t test [$t(138) = .59$, p = .55]. Comparisons can also be made using basic frequencies to see how often the pooled total and the two different samples answer affirmatively to having experienced each of the individual social agency facilitators SAF1–SAF10 (see Table 11, which provides information about the similarities and differences in the types of social agency facilitators most frequently reported by the two samples of emerging adults).

Table 11

Frequency of Social Agency Facilitators Experienced Within the Past Year

List of Social Agency Facilitators	% Total n=157	Rank	% RIC n=98	Rank	% YURI n=59	Rank	χ^2
1. Positive relationship with RIC or YURI faculty/staff	72.6%	3	73.5%	3	71.2%	1	.10
2. Positive relationship with adult outside RIC or YURI	73.3%	2	81.6%	1	59.3%	4	9.36**
3. Positive relationship with RIC or YURI colleagues and classmates	70.7%	4	70.4%	4	71.2%	1	.01
4. Positive relationship with friends and peers outside of RIC or YU	74.5%	1	81.6%	1	62.7%	3	6.94**
5. Participated in organized program with other young adults	41.4%	7	41.8%	7	40.7%	6	.89
6. Paid work experience or internship/apprenticeship	53.5%	6	64.3%	5	35.6%	7	12.19***
7. Intense passion, skill, or hobby	54.1%	5	56.1%	6	50.9%	5	.41
8. Volunteered with community service organization	28.7%	8	28.6%	8	28.8%	8	.00
9. Participated in cultural or religious organization	19.1%	9	20.4%	9	17.0%	9	.29
10. Participated in a political party or organization	8.9%	10	12.2%	10	3.4%	10	3.55

Note. The χ^2 statistic notes differences in the means of YURI and the RIC samples.

*p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001

The first four items on the table present different types of mentors. While there are some

differences in the mentor types between YURI members and RIC students, the majority (over

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70%) of all respondents in both YURI and RIC report that they have experiences with mentorship over the past year and these items are the most frequently cited social agency facilitators of the ten items in the survey question. In addition to mentorship, the social agency facilitators most frequently experienced by both samples of emerging adults over the past year were:

- An intense passion, skill, or hobby (54.1%)

- Paid work experience or internship/apprenticeship (53.5%)

- Participation in organized programs with other young adults (41.4%)

The social agency facilitators least frequently cited by the pooled sample of emerging adults as well as those from YURI and RIC individually are items 8–10 where only 0–30% of all survey participants indicated they had either *volunteered with a community service organization, participated in a cultural or a religious organization,* or *participated in a political party or organization*. Low levels of political participation were also confirmed on the YII scale.

While for the most part there are many similarities in how emerging adults from the YURI sample and the RIC sample reported the types of opportunities, experiences, and personal connections they engaged in over the past year, there are a few social agency facilitators in which the difference in the distribution of the sample scores are statistically significant based on χ^2 testing. Firstly, fewer emerging adults from YURI (35.6%) reported *having a paid work experience,* or *an internship/apprenticeship* (SAF6), over the past year compared to 64.3% of emerging adult respondents from RIC. Additionally, the same survey question asked participants about different types of mentors they have personally experienced over the past year and whether they have *a positive, consistent, and meaningful relationship* with adults and peers, both within

YURI or RIC and outside these organizations. These four items on the SAF scale were intended to measure different types of mentor relationships in the lives of the emerging adults during the past year. When looking at the four mentor items separately, emerging adults in YURI report significantly fewer *positive, consistent, and meaningful relationships with an adult outside RIC or YURI* (item 2 in Table 11) and significantly fewer *positive, consistent, and meaningful relationships with friends and peers outside of RIC or YURI* (item 4). At the same time, the two samples of emerging adults had similar percentages of *positive, consistent, and meaningful relationships with adult mentors* (item 1) *and peer mentors* (item 3) within YURI and RIC, although YURI emerging adults had only been in the program for a few weeks. The frequencies of adult and peer relationships for both YURI members and RIC students within their respective organizations (YURI and RIC) are similar and the departure is only apparent with those mentor relationships in the community.

Three mentorship subscales were calculated in order to develop a composite of the level of mentors in the lives of these emerging adults (see Table 12). In all three scales the differences between the two groups were not statistically significant using the chi-square test. The majority in both groups of emerging adults have both adult and peer mentors in their lives (*mentor2*), but the differences lie in where these mentors reside.

Table 12

SAF Mentorship Subscale Definitions and Scores

SAF Subscale	Definition	Pooled Total	YURI %	RIC %	χ^2
mentor	If answered positively to all four mentor relationship items, meaning that the respondent reported having both adult and peer mentors at RIC or YURI as well as outside these organizations.	50.3%	45.8%	53.1%	0.78
mentor2	If answered positively to at least three of the four types of positive mentors.	70.1%	62.7%	74.5%	2.43
mentor3	If answered positively to at least one of the four types of positive mentors.	86.6%	81.4%	89.8%	2.26

Note. The χ^2 statistic notes differences in the means of YURI and RIC samples. None of the three scales are significant at p = .05.

RIC students had this additional question included in their survey: "Do you have an adult ally at RIC?" and almost 70% of RIC survey participants answered affirmatively that they have a person at RIC who helps guide and support them (this could be an advisor, a counselor, or a faculty or staff member). The survey also gave a blank space if respondents chose to include any other additional information and several RIC students provided the name of the person at RIC who serves as an ally to them.

4.3.2 Multivariate Analysis of Sociodemographic Factors and the Relationships to Social Agency Facilitators

This multivariate regression model (Model 2) examines whether age, mother's education, race & ethnicity, and/or sex are related and help explain the level of social agency facilitators using the total score of the YII Scale as a continuous dependent variable. A key variable of

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interest is whether or not there are differences between YURI and RIC. The regression results in Table 13 (using unstandardized coefficients) indicate that controlling for the other measures, sex is statistically significant at the .05 confidence level ($p = .014$). Statistical analysis reveals that the level of social agency facilitators is related to sex. Holding age, mother's education, and race & ethnicity constant, on average females score more than eight points higher on the YII social agency facilitator score than male participants, and this finding is unlikely to have occurred by chance. The four sociodemographic independent variables do not explain a significant portion of the variance in the level of social agency facilitators, which means there must be other variables that are contributing to changes in the level of social agency facilitators. The total model accounts for 13.7% of the variation in the level of social agency facilitators that is explained by the independent variables. Similar to the case with Model 1, when Model 2 is run for YURI only, the sociodemographic variables explain a larger percentage (25.97%) of the variance in social agency facilitators and in the RIC model the sex variable is also significant as was the case with the pooled sample.

Table 13

Estimating the Relationship of Sociodemographic Variables and Social Agency Facilitator

Outcomes (Unstandardized Coefficients and Standardized Errors Reported)

Model 2 Variables (using Youth Inventory of Involvement Scale as the Dependent Variable)	Total Pooled Sample (w/ YURI)
Age (missing category age 18-19 years old)	
20-22 years old	2.0521 (4.4172)
23-25 years old	4.3299 (5.0421)
Mother's Education (missing category high school or less)	
Some college	-2.9658 (3.9566)
College	-3.7185 (4.4694)
Do not know	-21.9296* (10.2489)
Race & Ethnicity (missing category African-American + African Black)	
Asian American & Asian Other Culture	-3.2411 (9.9692)
Latina/o and/or Hispanic	-9.0668 (5.3956)
White/Non-Hispanic & European	-11.1478 (5.8905)
Multiracial	-11.6473 (7.0277)
Sex (female)	8.6122* (3.4423)
YURI	4.8493 (4.3925)
R^2	.1374
Observations	139

Note. All variables are unstandardized. Standard errors are in parentheses.

*p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001

Most importantly, the regression analysis shows that there is no statically significant difference in level of social agency facilitator scores between YURI and RIC. The signs suggest that those who are assumed to be less educated and Black demonstrate higher levels of social agency facilitators (although not significant) which needs further investigation. For reliability testing, I ran Model 2 using the alternate variable measuring social agency facilitators (SAF) which is included in Appendix K. The regression analysis using SAF accounts for a lower percentage of the variance for the pooled sample (R^2=.0626) but has similar signs for age and sex.

4.3.3 Qualitative Analysis of Social Agency Facilitators

Information about the types and levels of social agency facilitators were also addressed through a number of qualitative data collection tools including (a) open-ended questions in the web-based survey, (b) focus groups, and (c) the Data Advisory Group. Below are findings from these qualitative data sources.

After survey respondents completed the two scales about social agency facilitators in the web-based survey, they were asked to "Please describe the other opportunities or experiences that you had over the past year (in addition to the list above) which you believe helped you to have hope, to be empowered, to advocate for yourself and others, and to make positive choices for your future." A total of 32 participants responded to the open-ended question in the web-based survey and there was generally a low response rate from YURI members on this question (six YURI members and 26 RIC students), and there were a total of 42 unduplicated responses (six from YURI and 36 from RIC), as some survey participants provided multiple answers to the survey question. Given the small data set and the variability in responses (especially for YURI),

the thematic analysis examines trends for the pooled sample, understanding that this data was composed of many more RIC students than YURI members. The responses were aggregated into seven codes (see Table 14).[15] [16]

Table 14

Additional Social Agency Facilitators from Open-Ended Survey Question by Frequency of Responses

Code	# responses (pooled sample)	% responses (pooled sample)
Giving back or advocating on others' behalf	15	35.7%
Connection to people and groups	14	33.3%
Friends and family support	4	9.5%
Accomplishment	3	7.1%
Travel or study abroad	3	7.1%
Health and wellness	2	4.8%
Other	1	2.4%

Of the seven codes, *Giving back or advocating on others' behalf* and *Connection to people and groups (and new activities)* each comprised over 30% of the responses. I discuss these findings more in depth below.

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[15] Coding definitions and data analysis can be found in Appendix F.

[16] There were two additional codes for *work* and *mentorship* in the narrative data set. These are themes that are already measured in the SAF scale; therefore, these two codes and the data were removed from the final qualitative data set.

<u>Contributing to Others and Advocating on Other People's Behalf</u>

Approximately 35.7% of the responses to the open-ended survey question mentioned the issue of *giving back or advocating for others* by donating, raising money, or engaging in the community (and culture) in places where their involvement makes a difference. Emerging adults mentioned a wide range of giving back examples, including "I am able to have the opportunity to volunteer at an underprivileged high school and help out in the classrooms" and "helped make downtown (Providence) a better, cleaner, and safer place."

<u>Connecting (to People and to Groups)</u>

Fourteen responses (or 33.3%) referred to the emerging adults' involvement with new people or new groups in a wide variety of activities. Respondents saw this as separate and apart from *participating in organized programs with other young adults (including sports),* which was also an option in the SAF scale (question 9.2 in the web-based survey found in Appendix H). The common theme here was not about the specific activity, but about how young people were engaged in different groups and felt involved, whether that was with a dance group, a political organization, a church, taking a new class, or just simply "trying new things." Some examples of responses from RIC students about connecting to other people and groups include "joining a LGBTQ+ group therapy to increase my self-confidence and consolidate my sense of self," and a few RIC students mentioned being involved in an organized group that related to their cultural or ethnic backgrounds, saying, "I am a member of a sorority on campus. Being a member of a social sorority, I have strongly encouraged others to join ethnic sororities and fraternities on campus." Some responses used the word *new* when discussing these experiences. Several participants referenced more general opportunities that come with being engaged such as

"positive interactions with fellow community members." One YURI member reported, "just being able to network with new people and work on applying myself after not being in school for so long," and another RIC student said, "going to school and trying new things."

New Social Agency Facilitators Cited by Focus Groups

There were several focus group prompts that also elicited the emerging adults' understanding about social agency facilitators and social agency barriers. The focus group participants were asked to respond to the following two questions: "What were the most important people, experiences, and opportunities that helped you to stay on a positive pathway to adulthood in your own life; and what barriers have you encountered to achieving a positive transition to adulthood and how have you overcome or not overcome these barriers?" An additional prompt about social agency facilitators was included in the two focus groups with Rhode Island College students which specifically asked how RIC has contributed to their transitions to adulthood.

The focus group participants identified a wide range of social agency facilitators, 17 in total (included in Appendix L), but only six were categorized as high frequency codes because they were discussed in two or more of the four focus groups across both samples. A number of the social agency facilitators captured in the thematic analysis of the focus group transcripts are not captured on the YII scale used to measure social agency facilitators in the study. The most common themes included (a) *Happiness*, (b) *Perseverance/Determination*, (c) *Social + Emotional Skills*, (d) *Caring Adult/Ally*, (e) *Civic and Community Activism*, and (f) *Identity*.

<u>Most Frequently Mentioned Social Agency Facilitators from Focus Groups Are Happiness, and</u>

<u>Perseverance and Determination</u>

The social agency facilitator subcodes that are most frequently raised by focus group participants (in three of the four focus groups) and then discussed by both samples of emerging adults from YURI and RIC are *Happiness* and *Perseverance and Determination*. These two social agency facilitators were two of the few themes that were raised by three of the four focus groups (including both samples of emerging adults). *Happiness* was characterized as something that emerging adults want to think about as core to the pathway to adulthood and important to accomplishing goals. "I was thinking of saying happiness in a way. Some people, you know, they have this, this and that, but they don't feel happy while they're doing it. Who knows. I don't know if that could affect adulthood in a way" (12/12/17 YURI Focus Group).

Perseverance and Determination were generally defined as having the will to struggle through tough times and hardship. One young person also connected the theme of perseverance and determination to failure and being willing to work through difficult times. The idea of perseverance and determination was considered a mindset that an emerging adult could have, almost as if it were an intentional choice. There are a few other themes of social agency facilitators that were raised by both samples of focus group participants (at least two of the four focus groups), including *Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Skills*, *Life Skills, Caring Adult*, and *Civic and Community Activism.* SEL Skills and Perseverance and Determination were frequently raised together when the emerging adults talked about having skills in conflict management, being able to communicate needs to others, and having self-awareness and humility which then led into discussions of self-discipline and learning how to struggle through

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hard times. "Because without struggle, you won't know what difficulty is, to have hope. And I think struggle is necessary for you to value the things that you get through a lot of hardship. And then through struggle, you obtain perseverance" (4/6/18 RIC Focus Group).

Three of the four focus groups raised the need for *Improved Life Skills Training*. Along with the more common strategies for enhanced work preparedness, programs, and training, emerging adults at both RIC and YURI clearly stated that they want and need to know more everyday "adulting" skills, including how to enroll in health insurance, how to pay monthly bills, how to pay their taxes, and how to manage their work, school, and free time.

> Along the same lines of that, it's also…even at a younger age, pushing things that people need to know as adults, like even if it's just in high school. Like I don't know about anyone else here. But one of the few things that was drilled into my head from like freshman to senior year, mitochondria is the powerhouse of cells, this is American history, this is that. But like I was never taught anything else. I was never taught how to do taxes. (3/28/18 RIC Focus Group)

Importance of a Caring Adult (not necessarily a mentor)

The social agency facilitator *Caring Adult* was raised by both samples of young people through the focus groups. When describing a caring adult, many times the word *mentor* was used, but more often the word *caring* was the important concept that the focus group participants expressed more than what that peer or adult was actually doing for them. Emerging adults in the focus groups also mentioned the importance of having people that believe in you, have high expectations of what you are capable of, and sometimes are willing to challenge you. While this concept was only discussed in one of the two focus groups from YURI and one from RIC, it has

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the most conversational buzz around it of all the focus group subcodes and there were many quotes directly related to the concept. Good examples of the desire for caring adults was expressed by both samples of emerging adults who said

> You know they say not all, teachers are not really all good? Like they don't care about you? I did find one teacher that really cared about like my success. She was my Physics teacher, AP Physics teacher. She really cared. Like when I wouldn't come to school or when I wouldn't be in her class or when I wasn't doing her homework, like she would always be on top of me. Like why aren't doing this, why aren't you do this? Like stay after school, I'll help you, like if that's what you really need. And she was just always giving advice. So like everything she said, like I started to realize that she really cared for me and like it stuck with me because that was the first time I was like wow, like I actually like this teacher, she really cares for me and it's not like she's just grading me like on my performance. Like she actually cared for me as an individual. (12/13/17 YURI Focus Group

> I like have a real relationship with her like beside a teacher-student one, we like make jokes in class and I do go see her outside of like class hours. If I see her on campus, like I'll stop and say hi. She has been like a motivator to me. Like I've gone to her office like stressed out and being like I don't think I'm doing this right, I don't know what I'm doing, blah, blah, blah, X, Y and Z and she has told me like no, you're not stupid, you are smart, like you should strive, you are doing well in school, like X, Y and Z. So I really do agree. Like before I had any real relationships with any faculty member, I had no desire to be in any classes because I was like I just felt like a number, I just felt like a statistic. I

didn't feel like my professors cared if I went or didn't go. So it really is a big motivator to have a faculty member care for you and like know that it's not like a BS relationship. It's a real, honest to God, like they want to see you succeed. (4/6/18 RIC Focus Group)

Personal and Cultural Identity as Barriers to Social Agency for Focus Group Participants

The three separate codes for *Professional Skills*, *Community*, and *Identity* were all themes that were described as both social agency facilitators and social agency barriers. Identity was the code most frequently discussed among focus groups in both samples. Some focus group participants discussed the concept of identity in relation to cultural identity, but others more generally discussed the importance of knowing who you are and how you relate to others and to the world. In many cases, the emerging adults mention identity as a barrier to their successful paths to adulthood because they are either first generation immigrants, or they primarily speak a language other than English, which makes them feel different. Several RIC students specifically raised issues of being a first generation student and how the issue of identity is a large barrier to their successful transition to adulthood, as opposed to it being primarily an issue of race, social class, or sex.

So as far as like personal barriers, for me, though, it's kind of… I'm actually like first gen so my barrier is mostly like an identity crisis which is I'm still uncertain where I kind of stand as like I'm kind of torn by these kind of two different kind of social customs, traditions growing up, being Asian-American and yet torn by like American like expectations versus… So I have a lot of my family like hopes and dreams riding on my success here, which is kind of… And they have a very narrow view of success that I had to adhere to, which was stressful before I came to realize that I had to break from that and

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that made me a bit miserable. So it's just mostly a balance act for me that I'm still trying

to work through. (3/28/18 RIC Focus Group)

Civic Engagement, Community Service and Activism Directly Connected to Developing Social
Agency

Both groups raised civic engagement and community activism although there was more

discussion in the RIC focus groups. It appears RIC students are more familiar with the traditional

view of civic engagement as community service and the focus group participants expected more

survey participants to report involvement in the community.

I'm actually surprised that volunteering isn't a little bit more like, up there. I'm thinking

just about my own personal experience. I volunteered during the summer to teach middle

school students and I think that was probably one of the most rewarding experiences for

me. (3/28/18 RIC Focus Group)

YURI members also discussed community service and helping others as crucial to their

own social agency development, because the giving process facilitated hope, empowerment, and

voice—and allowed them to envision themselves in someone else's position. This description

was different from the way in which RIC students characterized contributing to others.

Data Advisory Group Expects Lower Levels of Community Service and Volunteerism in Their
Communities for YURI Members

The Data Advisory Group members expected they as a group would have lower levels of

volunteer service and civic engagement due to a number of constraints including lack of access

to these arrangements. One participant in the Data Advisory Group even says that they would not

even know where to volunteer and the primary reason they know of any opportunities is because

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of YURI. The Data Advisory Group participants also raised the idea that RIC students have more flexibility in their schedules to volunteer. However, the most surprising (and even distressing) explanation was that members of YURI did not want to go back into their own neighborhoods to help, but that they would rather escape.

Well where you gonna go? If I were to say volunteer right now, where do I go to volunteer? It's just not there.

I feel like it's kind of hard to find volunteer things or community groups like that. Like here we find it because like they give it. They'll email us and tell us. But if not, I would never know about all these volunteer things. It's not like they really advertise them anywhere for us to know.

(5/9/18 Data Analysis Group Meeting)

I feel like it could be that RIC has more time on their hands to volunteer. I mean, we're here Monday through Friday all the way until 3:00 and then if we do have a part time job, we're there after 3:00 and then we're there on the weekend. At RIC, your schedule is not like the same every day. Some days you'll have classes and they're like even if you do, you can at like 10:00 in the morning. I feel like they just have more free time than we do.

(6/27/18 Data Analysis Group Meeting)

So let's say it isn't because of the time, the time frame. I feel like me personally, my ultimate goal at one point was to get outside of Providence and just like never go back there again. And you know what? I never had like gang experiences or fighting or a time where I felt unsafe in my neighborhood. I've always felt safe. I've been living in the

same house for a really long time. And now that I'm more grown, I understand like this is my home. Like even if I do leave this place, like I love it. But at the time that I did feel like I wanted to leave, I didn't want to help. Like I didn't want to help the south side of Providence. I didn't want to volunteer or go to like help people from underprivileged schools and stuff like that. That's not something I was interested in doing and it's crazy because that's part of like me or whatever. Like I was in those underprivileged schools. Because I was in them, it made me like oh there's nothing I can do to like help them. I don't know if I'm making sense. So that's something that I also feel like a lot of young adults my age do. It's like we all try to get away from the hood but we never try to help the hood become a better place. I say the hood because it's like… It's not really a hood. (6/27/18 Data Analysis Group Meeting)

Unique Social Agency Facilitators for RIC Students

The Data Advisory Group was created to provide a safe space where members of YURI would be able to react to the web-based survey data and to assist in the interpretation of the data from the perspective of survey participants themselves. The five members of the Data Advisory Group noted differences in both the content and in the number of comments about social agency facilitators from YURI students compared to RIC students based on the responses from the open-ended survey question. The Data Advisory Group mentioned that RIC students have more and different social agency facilitators than they do, in part because YURI members have not been exposed to the same opportunities as emerging adults in a college environment. The conversation below is illustrative of how the emerging adults at YURI were thinking about their own social agency facilitators in comparison to those of RIC students.

And it's very different, the things that we put.

Like we put just basic stuff. Like some of the males owned a seasonal business and stuff. It's like completely different things.

I feel like all the things that people said at RIC is because they've had the opportunity to do it.

Because if I had the opportunity, I would have owned a seasonal business. I would've went to a bunch of different places to travel.

But then some of them, it could be like because people made them do it, not because they wanted to do it themselves. So like the one where they said my volunteer work has been done because of a college course that required it, I feel like if the college course didn't require it, would he have still volunteered.

Yeah, so I feel like RIC is gonna have a lot more to say because they're in college basically. That's basically it. Ours is very simple. It's very simple but these are very key points that we have here on our side. But they have all this extra stuff.

It's like not necessary.

Not that it's not necessary, but they had the opportunity.

Yeah, it's helping them to grow at the same time, but we didn't have the opportunities that they had. (6/27/18 Data Advisory Group Meeting)

The Data Advisory Group members are looking at what RIC members included as social agency facilitators from the web-based survey (e.g., starting my own business, traveling abroad, volunteering) and at first they are saying that these opportunities are extra or not necessary and that social agency facilitators of YURI members are more basic or simple and that perhaps the

RIC students are just doing these things because someone made them do it or it was part of their schoolwork (e.g., their volunteer service). However, something happens at the end of the conversation that changes the group's thinking when the Data Advisory Group members bring the conversation back to the fact that the RIC students had different opportunities and that is not necessarily a positive thing for young people in YURI. One young person comments that having these various opportunities is "helping [RIC students] to grow at the same time."

Different things that are helping us, different things that are helping them.

I think even them writing it shows that it helped them. Like if they answered this question with these things, then it means that it helped empower them. So it shows that like they have a lot more things that help motivate them and we don't have as many. We only have like a few and yet we're a lot more motivated than they are.

I think it's because the things that motivate us are very important things.

So even if we don't have a lot…

How did that help you? What did traveling around the country do for you? What did meeting your fiancé and moving home do for you?

Just for you to be heard?

Does that say that? Oh, that's a good one.

Okay, but then I did hot yoga. Like how did that help you?

It touches people like mentally.

I've never done yoga in my life. I would love to.

(6/27/18 Data Analysis Group Meeting)

Both of these conversations illustrate the complications associated with the topic of social agency facilitators—on one hand, the YURI members of the Data Advisory Group are proud that they as a group are motivated by fewer facilitators and ones that they deem to be more important. Alternatively, the YURI members recognize that these other opportunities have helped to empower RIC students and may even be experiences that they would like to have for themselves, like hot yoga.

4.3.4 Qualitative Analysis of Sociodemographic Factors and the Relationship to Social Agency Facilitators

Emerging adults in the YURI focus groups had more to say that RIC students about how age, mother's education, race & ethnicity, and sex relate to their opportunities, experiences and personal connections. Specifically, YURI members felt that they had a different set of social agency facilitators because of their race and income levels.

> But I would say that race, ethnicity and class all tie into like your community because usually you don't see like – I don't want to sound racist – but like white people struggling. Like in the projects around those neighborhoods, you would never like usually… It's usually or predominantly like Black, Hispanic, Asian and those are people that I can relate to. Even if I don't know, just solely by like skin color, like what we've been going through as a community. So just seeing that like how when you see on TV, like commercial or just like rich people in general, they're usually not of color and you can see like everybody that usually is related to you. (12/13/17 YURI Focus Group)

I feel like race is the first one that would pop into everyone's head because it's just so in your face and obvious. But I think that a really close second or maybe the first one would be class. I mean, in your example, I think that if you are of a certain race but you are part of a certain bracket and you have a certain type of income and you have options of certain types of education, then you can learn to articulate yourself in a certain way and you have options of participating in certain groups and you have options. You have more options when you're higher up in the brackets. I think that obviously there's gonna be differences based on race but the higher you go, the more options there are. (12/12/17 YURI Focus Group)

Members of the Data Advisory Group were the only group to raise the discussion of gender based differences in social agency facilitators because they cited that girls were more apt to develop and maintain relationships.

I feel like girls, they tend to be friends quicker than guys do. Like I feel like it's probably easier for the guys to talk to staff rather than try to talk to one of the other guys here and say what they were thinking or something. Like they're not as open to just talking to girls or talking to other guys. With girls, I feel like they just…

Yeah, we're not very open.

Yeah, I'm thinking like…

Yeah, guys are not as open to just go up to another guy and like tell him what he's thinking or what he's going through.

Yeah, I wouldn't do that.

Yeah. Girls are way more like open. They'll just see another girl and feel like they have a

connection or something and just tell them their whole life.

I'm thinking like I don't do that.

Because I do that all the time.

I'm like wait I hang out with a lot of women and I'm like okay, that makes sense.

(5/9/18 Data Advisory Group)

4.3.5 Qualitative Discussions about Sociodemographic Characteristics, Social Conditions, and
Pathways to Adulthood

Community and Neighborhoods Not Reflecting A Positive Pathway to Adulthood

YURI members and RIC students discussed two similar problems, but from different

perspectives. YURI members indicated they do not see enough people with similar racial and

ethnic backgrounds that can serve as community success stories. Alternately, RIC students

discussed the problems associated with having professors and senior administrators of the

college not reflect the diverse student body. Members at YURI had more to say specifically

about social class and race and the relationship to others in their communities. YURI members

also discussed how hard it is to grow up in low-income communities, in part because those

around them (who do look similar to them) are not providing the modeling or community that

they want in order to have a more positive pathway to adulthood.

You don't see those people that are successful. And so seeing that everyday sort of just

drags your morale down. It makes you believe that you're not gonna be able to succeed,

that you're gonna stay in that same situation. So that definitely is like, extremely

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discouraging because I know at one point that's sort of what, how I felt. (12/13/17 YURI Focus Group)

Yeah, absolutely. I would just throw that in there, too. I would say community in a way sort of holds you back, too. I seen a lot of negative things, you know, growing up and it was easy to take that route. I did take that route, you know, being naïve, a young 12-year-old kid growing up in the city. You don't know any better. Unfortunately, my parents were both working. You would get home, no one's home. In the morning you would wake up and no one's home. They wouldn't come home until late. It's easy to take the wrong path, super easy. You sort of have to go through, sort of have to play with fire and burn your hand to just kind of realize that that's not the right way to go. (12/13/17 YURI Focus Group)

RIC students discuss how the faculty and administration do not reflect the composition of the student body and how this impacts their college and campus experiences, which can be characterized as a barrier to social agency. YURI members echoed these comments about the need to see and know people succeeding who look like you and perhaps even come from your neighborhood.

I think seeing other people, especially those who look like you. Like for me, I see other minority groups or other people who look like me in positions where they use that voice in a positive way. I think that's one of the reasons why I feel empowered and I feel like I can do that, what they're doing. I think that's important because a lot of times, you know, we'll see people who don't look anything like us. Like XX said, like professors a lot of times we'll see are like white or more often than not men. So to see other people in

positions where we want to be is incredibly empowering and important for us to see. (3/28/18 RIC Focus Group)

It's crazy. But then you see administrators. Like I feel like administrators, professors, cisgendered white males, you know, and it's not proportional to the campus and the people who go here. I think that, you know, obviously that comes becomes of privilege, because of the opportunities they were given that weren't offered to a lot of us. (3/28/18 RIC Focus Group)

One of the YURI members calls attention to what it feels like when emerging adults can see themselves in people who are their leaders.

But seeing successful people like myself, that definitely helps a lot. So for example, you know, it's the Jorge Elorza, hearing his story and the things he had to go through. You know, the fact that he went to Harvard and he became a lawyer, the fact that he was able to succeed despite these barriers, I guess. It definitely made me, you know, realize that I can do this as well, despite my class or race. (12/13/17 YURI Focus Group)

4.4 Summary

The quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrate that emerging adults at Year Up RI have the same strength of social agency and the same level of social agency facilitators even when adjusted for individual characteristics including age, mother's education, race & ethnicity, and sex. Additionally, there is a significant and moderately strong relationship between social agency facilitators and social agency. The regression analysis suggests that stronger social agency is related to older emerging adults and females have higher levels of social agency

facilitators than males which was also echoed by participants in the Data Advisory Group.

Finally, the face-to-face focus groups provide a number of new ideas (and explanations) about

the definitions of social agency, other facilitators of social agency that were not measured in the

web-based survey, and possible ways in which sociodemographic variables are related both to

the strength of social agency and the level of social agency facilitators. The question then is how

these findings fit into the study's conceptual framework and what this may mean for the

pathways to adulthood for emerging adults in Rhode Island.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

"I mean, I think it's that belief that you can succeed in what you're trying to do, the kind of drive to finish whatever you started and further your life. Kind of make a better…I don't want to say a better existence for yourself, but I guess that's the best way to put it. I think that's incredibly important. Like if you don't have that drive to try and do something, whether it be a job, whether it be school, whether it just be moving out of your parents' house, you kind of fall into a rut and you just kind of get stuck there." (3/28/18 RIC Focus Group)

5.1 Overview of Study Aims and Methods

The research study was intended to explore and measure the concepts of social agency and the variables that may contribute to social agency, including social agency facilitators and sociodemographic characteristics. Agency and social agency are relatively new terms and part of the study was to understand what these concepts mean to emerging adults in their everyday lives. Based on the study findings, perhaps the strength of social agency is not necessarily the result of privilege, but that actualizing social agency requires control over what one has and does not have. Contributors to social agency come in many forms and this study tries to identify differences in social agency for two groups of emerging adults based on sociodemographic factors (age, mother's education, race & ethnicity, and sex), as well as those social agency facilitators that many youth development programs have been providing for many decades. The study includes the measurement of different social agency facilitators separately and together (using a combination of validated and newly developed scales) to better understand how young

people view the people, places, and experiences that impact their trajectory to a successful adulthood.

In the past decade there has been increased attention on this group of marginalized young people including opportunity youth, as many programs coordinated and sponsored by state governments and state and national nonprofits have been created to help opportunity youth achieve improved employment and educational outcomes. Continuing to highlight this population of young people is one important contribution of this research. The study led to several preliminary findings, many of which were unexpected. Some of these findings are about the definition of social agency and what expectations we can have for emerging adults to have or maintain strong social agency. Other findings are about the things we know that typically facilitate social agency, like mentorship and work experience, for example. The results also illuminate a set of social agency facilitators that I never thought of before and are not as commonly discussed in current scholarship (e.g., happiness, belonging). These findings and what they may mean for emerging adults in Rhode Island are connected to the original set of research questions. Chapter 6 then uses the same set of findings to consider implications for state public policy.

5.2 Summary of Findings About Social Agency

The study tested whether students at RIC had stronger social agency than opportunity youth in YURI and asked the emerging adults to think about the definitions of social agency and how this relates to their own trajectories. At the core of the discussion about social agency is a question raised by one focus group participant from YURI about whether social agency is intrinsic—something that you achieve and once you have it, there is nothing more to do—or, is it

something that requires ongoing maintenance? For example, is social agency an active function of being able to make "good, essential decisions in your life…(which is) essential to becoming an adult?" (12/13/17 YURI Focus Group) Or is it believing in your own success or your internal drive or push? This question relates to the larger idea of social agency as a capability and whether you are born with certain capabilities, or that some capabilities including social agency can be learned, and what is required to maintain strong social agency.

5.2.1 No Statistically Significant Difference in Social Agency

Using the CLS scale, I found that the strength of social agency for YURI members was higher than RIC students, but not statistically significant adjusting for individual sociodemographic characteristics. YURI members are found to have greater policy control and as a group, YURI has significantly more of its sample who are activists according to the SPCS subscale. This finding surprised me, but may not surprise my committee members who, during my dissertation defense, asked what I would do if I had a null finding. It also did not surprise the emerging adults who volunteered as part of the Data Advisory Group and reviewed the preliminary data. In focus group discussions with emerging adults from YURI, the young people spoke about how the social agency dimensions of empowerment and voice were in fact linked, and that hope (Dimension 1) and choice (Dimension 4) are also connected. The young adults from YURI were more focused on hope, vision, and choice, and the young adults from RIC were more interested in empowerment and voice. Focus group members from YURI discussed that they had never before felt they had choices about their futures, and they had seen many others make bad decisions. An unanswered question is about the relative strength of these four dimensions and whether or not Dimensions 1 (hope and vision) and 4 (choice) are in fact more

important in the trajectory to adulthood than the other two dimensions (empowerment and voice).

How is it possible for YURI members, who are neither employed in a career nor attending college, to have as strong social agency as RIC students using multiple scales? And if YURI members have the same strength of social agency as RIC students, why are more opportunity youth not on the college pathway? There are a few explanations worth exploring, including the possibility that there are other more important capabilities in one's transition to adulthood that help determine one's pathway other than social agency. Alternatively, even though YURI members have similar social agency, there may be other sociodemographic characteristics or social conditions that prevent them from being on a positive pathway to adulthood.

5.2.2 Sociodemographic Characteristics Do Not Explain Changes in Social Agency; Older Emerging Adults Have Stronger Social Agency

In conversations with the Data Advisory Group at YURI, members shared that they expected there would be a strong relationship between social agency and age. They thought the data would show both older members of YURI to have stronger social agency, and at the same time they believed one's social agency could be strengthened by participating in the YURI program at an earlier age. Data from the web-based survey confirmed some of these findings, because older emerging adults (23–25 years old) have stronger social agency than other age groups, but sex, mother's education, and race & ethnicity did not have a significant relationship to social agency although there were some consistent trends in signs. Stronger social agency associated with older age follows the literature about emerging adulthood, which helps to make

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the argument that emerging adulthood is different than youth and different than adolescence, but more importantly, that within the age cohort of emerging adulthood, there are differences in capabilities, including social agency.

Additionally, the Data Advisory Group spoke about how the results which illustrated differences in mother's education made sense to them because so few members of YURI had mothers who completed college, and the Data Advisory Group members believed this helped motivate them to "rise above" their mothers' educational pathways, and in part this was why they were in YURI. In the regression model, mother's education was not significantly related to strength of social agency, however since the sample size is small, a larger sample might shed more light on the relationship. In general, the sociodemographic variables do not explain a large portion of variance in the strength of social agency.

5.2.3 Emerging Adults Believe Comm(unity) is Important to Social Agency

Community and unifying relationships that promote belonging are raised in both the web-based survey and in the focus groups as *both* a possible additional dimension of social agency and as a facilitator of social agency. The idea of community and belonging can be connected both to the social agency facilitator of *having a caring person or mentor* and *civic and community engagement* (see Section 5.3.2), but the theme of community was not included separately in any of the social agency or social agency facilitator scales that were used in this study.

5.3 Summary of Findings about Social Agency Facilitators

Amartya Sen (1999) lists the following as influencers of people's abilities to positively achieve: economic opportunities, political liberties, social powers, the enabling condition of good

health and basic education, and the encouragement and cultivation of initiatives (p. 5). I am suggesting that perhaps social agency facilitators as theorized in this study are the encouragement and cultivation of initiatives. The term *social agency facilitators* is not found in the literature, but what is included in this category is certainly discussed by many in the fields of adolescent psychology and positive youth development. There are opportunities, experiences, and personal connections (some thoroughly tested and some not as well researched) that improve outcomes for young people. Marginalized young people may not have the same range or depth of opportunities within their families, neighborhoods, or educational environments, which is why in part college readiness and persistence and career preparedness programs have been developed to provide some of these experiences. Included in Appendix M is a partial listing of those social agency facilitators that were tested in the study and some of the literature around the efficacy of each facilitator.

My research study tested whether RIC students had higher levels of social agency facilitators than those emerging adults at YURI. Based on my original conceptual framework, I expected RIC students would exhibit higher levels of social agency facilitators and therefore higher degrees of social agency. However, this was not the case. Both the quantitative and qualitative data point to young people in YURI having higher levels of social agency facilitators and higher degree of social agency (although not significant). However, some of the types of social agency facilitators that are more prevalent with RIC students differ from those that are more common with YURI members.

5.3.1 YURI Members Have Similar Levels of Social Agency Facilitators to RIC Students

As surprising was the fact that YURI members had as strong social agency as RIC students, equally as shocking was that they had similar levels of social agency facilitators. I had hypothesized that being on a college campus would significantly increase the levels of opportunities, experiences, and personal connections available to emerging adults pursuing college versus those available to opportunity youth like those in YURI. There could be several explanations about this finding, including the possibility that members of YURI require significantly more social agency facilitators than RIC students in order to develop and maintain similar levels of social agency. Or, perhaps YURI members have higher levels of social agency facilitators, but they have different types of social agency facilitators that may make a significant difference in one's trajectory to adulthood, when compared to college students. Since the study did not assign any weight-based differentials to the social agency facilitators, there is no way of knowing the answers to these questions.

Volunteerism and Community Engagement Are Not Cited Frequently Across Emerging Adult Study Participants, but RIC Students May See This Differently

The data around volunteerism, community service, and civic engagement is unclear because in some survey measures it appears as an important social agency facilitator and in others it is not deemed as important which may be a matter or wording or understanding of the interconnected concepts. While the category of volunteering and community service was one of the least frequently cited social agency facilitators for both groups of emerging adults based on quantitative data in the SAF scale, in the open-ended survey question where emerging adults were asked about other opportunities or experiences they had in the past year which they believe

helped strengthen their social agency, one of the most common responses by the emerging adults (majority RIC students) was about *giving back or advocating on behalf of other people*, which study participants clearly felt was different than *volunteered with a community service organization* which appears in the SAF question (question 9.2) on the web-based survey. Perhaps this is because volunteering with a community service organization is not seen as the same thing as giving back and advocating on other people's behalf. Or, perhaps characterizing engagement as "volunteering or community service" is something that emerging adults in the study do not relate to or perhaps is only relatable to students connected to a college campus. However, being a food insecurity advocate, improving safety services in the city streets, or attending a march for women's or immigrants' rights are all activities that study participants report has helped promote a more positive trajectory to adulthood. Perhaps it is even based on the lack of institutional opportunities for civic participation for opportunity youth (Wray-Lake, Hart, 2010; Flanagan and Levine, 2010).

The Data Advisory Group participants introduced a different idea—that it is not simply because YURI members lack volunteer or community service opportunities, but that they are choosing not to engage in improving the places where they grew up because they want to "get away from the hood," and not "help out the south side of Providence." The YURI members describe how, upon reflection, this seems almost counterintuitive for them because they understand that these schools and neighborhoods made them the people who they are, but they also feel like "there's nothing I can do to, like, help them."

YURI members of the Data Advisory Group provided additional context about the issue of volunteerism and community service that is not reflected in the survey data. They discuss how

YURI members' lower rates of volunteerism were due to the lack of access to volunteer opportunities and an unwillingness to give back to their communities, in part because they were trying so hard to look forward that they were not thinking about improving the places where they had been. While this was not necessarily substantiated by this study's quantitative data, findings by other scholars including Flanagan and Levine (2010) support the views of the Data Advisory Group and find that emerging adults not in college and marginalized young adults lack the same opportunities for civic and community engagement because there is no organized home base for these activities that are easily accessible to the college students. Flanagan and Levine wrote, "colleges have become perhaps the central institution for civic incorporation of younger generations. But no comparable institution exists for young adults who do not attend college" (p. 159). This suggests that to some extent, the level of social agency facilitators (at least for some SAFs) may be about access and opportunity.

Researchers have found that volunteering is also associated with the acquisition of transferable job-readiness and professional skills and helps to create positive opportunities for long-term positive societal engagement (Opportunity Nation, 2014). Specifically, in an analysis completed by Opportunity Nation and Measure of America with the 25 largest US Metro areas, researchers found that teens and young adults ages 16–24 who volunteer across all races and socioeconomic levels are less likely to be classified as OY. A 2013 report by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), the federal agency which oversees national service programs, found that volunteering is associated with 27% higher odds of employment in people 16 years and older, and the association between volunteering and employment had the strongest effect on people without a high school diploma or equivalent (51% increase in odds). The study

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reports that volunteering may best help those people who have a more difficult time finding employment, especially during a recession (p. 1).

Volunteering is connected to other positive outcomes in addition to work, including increased self-esteem. In a 2015 study by Nicotera, Brewer, and Veeh, researchers found that engagement in civic activities during high school or the beginning of college may also serve to promote well-being (physical and emotional wellness) among college students. Based on life-cycle theory, establishing patterns of community service and civic engagement during the period of emerging adulthood also improves the likelihood that the same young people will be active members of their communities as they assume other adult responsibilities of families, jobs, marriage, and children.

5.3.2 Study Participants Report Core Set of Social Agency Facilitators for Both Samples

There were many opportunities, experiences, and personal connections that YURI members and RIC students commonly identified as important facilitators in their pathways to adulthood. The least common social agency facilitators (from the SAF scale) were political participation, cultural and religious participation, and volunteering or community service. Low levels of political participation among the study participants are also illustrated in the other quantitative scale (the Youth Inventory of Involvement) data, where emerging adults in the study reported only engaging in political activities less than once a year or twice over the past year.

About 40% of emerging adults in both samples indicated that they had participated in organized programs with other young adults and these rates were higher than the participation rates in a community service organization, cultural or religious organization, or a political party or organization. Led by the scholarship of Larson and colleagues (2005, 2006, 2010), there is a

body of research that connects youth programs and youth activism programs to agency and the positive pathway to adulthood. One of the most difficult issues is the large variety of organized programs—from arts to sports to public speaking. Larson, Hansen, and Moneta (2006) catalog the different types of organized youth programming, including extracurricular and community-based activities, and sample eleventh graders from 19 different U.S. high schools to explore the types of experiences that young adults have in these different activities. Findings from the research show that youth experience different outcomes based on the specific type of programs, with faith-based activities reporting higher rates of identity, emotional regulation, and interpersonal development, compared with sports and arts programs which were more closely associated with development of initiative (pp. 860-861).

Over 70% of emerging adults in both samples report having positive relationships with adults and positive relationships with peers in their respective institutions, meaning that YURI members have these positive relationships within YURI, and RIC students have them within RIC. Having a caring adult is also a concept raised in the focus groups. At the same time, emerging adults in YURI report significantly fewer "positive, consistent, and meaningful relationships with an adult outside of YURI," referred to as community adult mentor, and significantly fewer "positive, consistent, and meaningful relationships with your friends and peers outside of YURI," known as community peer mentor. YURI members completed the web-based survey in their second week of orientation at YURI, meaning that they had only been a part of the YURI program for a few weeks, but already had similar percentages as the RIC sample who reported these caring relationships within their institutions.

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The four mentorship categories illustrated in Figure 10 were developed for this research study based on the review of the mentorship literature that separated peer mentors from adult mentors and discussed the importance of having supportive relationships at the primary institutions where young people spend considerable time.

Figure 10

Types of Mentors
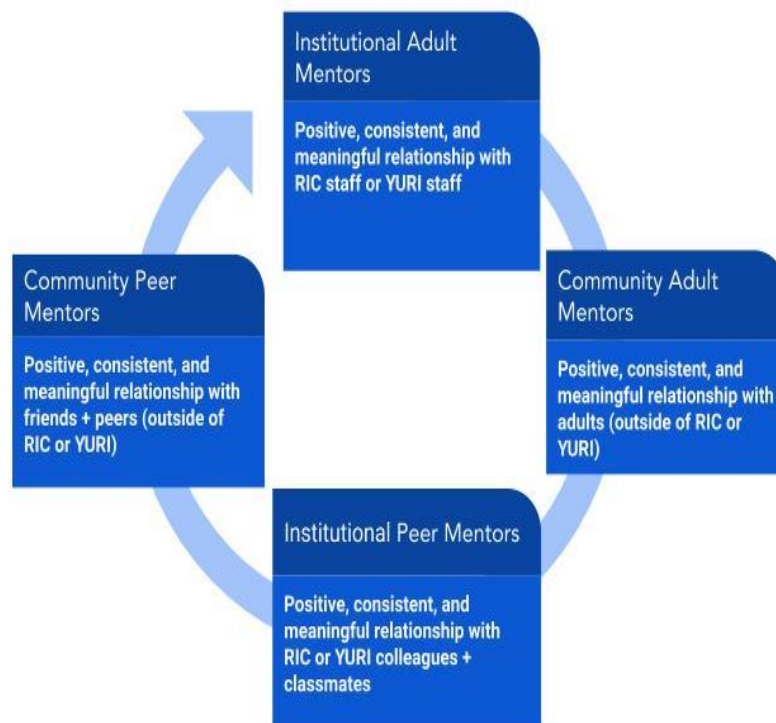
There is a varied and large body of literature which spans the past 20 years demonstrating the relationship between mentoring and positive outcomes for young people (including educational attainment, reduced risk behaviors, identity development, and socioemotional

competence). The literature coincides with the proliferation of mentoring programs, including Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, the largest and most well-known program of its kind. The types of mentoring within the body of scholarship have changed from formal mentoring and are moving to the newer concepts of peer mentoring, youth-initiated mentoring, community mentoring, and natural mentoring. Over this same time period, there have been several studies including some meta-analyses which identified that, while mentoring demonstrates positive developmental outcomes, the outcomes are modest and dependent on a number of variables including the strength of the mentoring relationship and the characteristics of the mentor and the mentee. Rhodes and DuBois (2006) recommend a greater attention to theory and research in the proliferation of mentoring programs nationally and remind scholars and practitioners about the importance of establishing high-quality mentoring relationships with close connections between caring adults and youth.

In a 2011 meta-analysis by DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, and Valentine, the authors reviewed 73 evaluations of mentoring programs from 1999–2010 and found that the common observed effects of the mentoring programs were modest and that there were a number of variables not accounted for, including demographic characteristics and risk profiles of the youth and the mentors themselves. The authors state that, surprisingly, the research on youth mentoring is still in early stages of development and that the field still lacks a strong, tested theoretical framework that clearly links specific mentoring strategies with participant outcomes (pp. 79-80). A recent body of work about mentorship considers the importance of natural mentors (caring nonparental adults who provide young people with continued support and guidance) in the positive development of youth, and the benefits associated with having mentors

in larger community settings where the young people interact regularly. However, all caring relationships are not the same and an emerging adult's openness to accepting caring adults and peers into their lives is also not uniform. In a 2009 study, Zand and colleagues found that young people with stronger family and school bonds were more likely to have higher quality relationships with mentors.

Most recently, Hagler (2018) discusses institutional mentors as vehicles for meeting the needs of underrepresented students, and I have adopted this term in order to differentiate between those caring adults and peers that reside in the primary place where emerging adults are connected (in this case either at YURI or at RIC), as opposed to those caring adults and peers that are in the community. In both cases, these mentors can be a combination of natural mentors and formal mentors. Hagler describes institutional mentors as having strong social and cultural capital and power. Marginalized and opportunity youth may rely on their institutional mentors more heavily than their colleagues who have family members able to more readily provide information about higher education, careers, and employment. However, my results diverge slightly from Hagler's prediction because both groups of emerging adults in the study report strong institutional mentor relationships. It is unclear why fewer YURI members would have community mentors given the similarity of the two samples. The lack of community mentors for YURI members may have long-term effects for their trajectory to adulthood especially when they are no longer part of the YURI program and lose their institutional mentor relationships.

New Ways of Categorizing Social Agency Facilitators as Individual and Personal Facilitators or Structural and Institutional Facilitators

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While conducting this study, I was able to identify the opportunities, experiences, and people that are important to emerging adults' successful transitions to adulthood. The web-based survey was specifically developed to capture these activities that were known to have a positive impact on emerging adults during this time period. The focus group discussions illustrate new ways of thinking about social agency facilitators. When looking at the opportunities, experiences, and personal connections the participants mentioned that have positively impacted their pathways, the responses fit into one of two categories: individual and personal facilitators or structural and institutional facilitators. Individual and personal facilitators are the characteristics related to the emerging adult himself, herself, or themselves as opposed to more systematic, structural, or institutional factors which are not as much in the control of the individual emerging adult. The two most frequently discussed social agency facilitators (happiness, and perseverance and determination) from the focus groups could be considered types of social and emotional learning (SEL) skills and would fall into the category of individual and personal facilitators.

Sometimes referred to as 21st century skills or soft skills, SEL are now part of the mainstream ideas of what young people require to ensure student success and a positive trajectory to adulthood. The Partnership for 21st Century Learning is composed of national industry and business leaders and educational associations, foundations, and think tanks. The Partnership developed a model of what was required to meet the challenges of a 21st Century global economy and workforce. While this was intended as a guide for educational institutions through high school, the framework has also been adopted by after-school programs, college access programs, and other initiatives to meet the needs of out-of-school youth.

Reviewing the full list of social agency facilitators captured through the focus groups and the web-based survey, I found that some of the social agency facilitators have deep and significant literatures about their relationship to the trajectory of young people, and some social agency facilitators including happiness and perseverance and determination have more limited scholarly research, which provides an opportunity to better understand what emerging adults themselves report are the most helpful opportunities, experiences, and people along their pathways to adulthood.

5.3.3 Differences in Types of Social Agency Facilitators Reported by Sample

The results from the web-based survey illustrate how emerging adults from YURI have the same levels of social agency facilitators than students at RIC, and at the same time, there are marked differences in the types of social agency facilitators each group of emerging adults has experienced over the past year. Finally, there were a small group of social agency facilitators that were only raised by RIC students.

Of all the types of activities captured on the YII scale in the web-based survey, the category of activities that was significantly different between the two samples was community/neighborhood activities, which includes those activities that are typically associated with being an active member of one's community. Participating in a church-connected group, participating in an ethnic club or organization, helping to organize neighborhood or community events, doing things to improve one's neighborhood, and helping people new to the country, are all activities that YURI members reported being more involved in over the past year compared to RIC students.

<u>Significantly Fewer YURI Members Reported Personally Experiencing a Paid Work Experience</u>

<u>or Internship/Apprenticeship Over the Past Year</u>

Based on results from the web-based survey, a larger percentage of young adults in the

RIC sample reported having *a paid work experience or internship/apprenticeship* compared to

the YURI sample. However, it is a double-barreled survey question[17] and someone could have a

paid work experience separate from an internship or apprenticeship, and this would only be

counted as a singular social agency facilitator. Better information could be helpful in determining

the importance of this social agency facilitator (work) and how opportunity youth may not have

the same access to work experiences prior to their enrollment in a career preparedness program.

While this finding may be meaningful in identifying a significant difference between the two

groups of emerging adults, it may not accurately reflect where this difference lies, which begs

the question if the difference is in work experience or in internships/apprenticeships?

The relationship between employment and the positive trajectory to adulthood is

chronicled over several decades of literature. An early article about work experience and

adolescence connects issues of mastery and control to employment and indicates that work

orientations in young adulthood may help predict adult work attainment (Finch, Mortimer,

Shanahan, Ryu, 1991). Then, about ten years later, the research of Johnson (2002) and

Zandvakilli (2002) identifies differences in earnings and work values of young people based on

race, gender, education, marital status, social origins, and early work experience. The increase in

scholarship about the importance of work for emerging adults follows the 2008 recession and the

issuance of the first report by the Measure of America project about the population of youth who

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[17] A double-barreled survey question is two questions combined into one.

were neither employed nor enrolled in school. Acknowledging changes in the labor market that have made the transition to adulthood more difficult, especially for marginalized young people, studies by Danziger and Ratner (2010) and Heinrich and Holzer (2011) examine strategies to improve education and employment for marginalized youth. An increase in the literature about career readiness and employment pathways for marginalized young people (including opportunity youth) began in earnest over the past five years, including scholarship about in summer employment, skills-based employment, internships, and the re-emergence of apprenticeships.

While some findings from my study are inconclusive, the results illustrate a possible difference between the educational and work-related activities for the two groups of emerging adults. It is unclear why this difference exists, given the fact that there were many similarities in social agency facilitators between the two samples (with the exception of adult and peer community mentors and work experience documented in the SAF scale analysis). Perhaps the difference is based on the high schools attended by the emerging adults or other social conditions, some of which may offer more structured opportunities for employment experience than others. One may have predicted a different result because, while the sample at YURI may not have been employed in a career pathway over the past 12 months prior to program entrance, many were working in service-related or factory jobs. There may also be the need for more information about how the survey participants defined work experience when it was combined with internships and apprenticeships, which led to underreporting by the young people at YURI. While understanding that the possible explanations are important for future research, the

difference between the two samples is still significant and may influence decisions about future availability of work related opportunities for young people.

RIC Students Discussed the Importance of Having Opportunities to *Interact with Different People and Places* (e.g., Travels Abroad) and Access to *Independent Space for Changing Themselves*

Interacting with different people and places (e.g., travels abroad) and access to *independent space for changing themselves* are social agency facilitators that were raised only by students at RIC and were not discussed by YURI members most likely because YURI members do not have access to do and be these things. And while this was not the most frequently cited social agency facilitator, the concepts were raised several times and the emerging adults connected these concepts to their independence. There is a related scholarship about the benefits of study abroad programs. In a 2013 literature review, Stone and Petrick found that the scholarship is primarily focused on study abroad programs that demonstrate outcomes including change of perspective, independence, self-confidence, intellectual growth, intercultural development, and dispelling of stereotypes (p. 736). However, as the authors acknowledge, the outcomes of general travel (both domestic and international) outside study abroad, is not well-documented and it could be an area for further research, especially for marginalized groups of young people.

The other social agency facilitator raised by RIC students was the space they have in which to explore (and test) their independence. While this is not a social agency facilitator that I measured in the web-based survey or in any focus group prompts, it is not surprising considering how emerging adults discuss the importance placed on independence and decision-making.

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Emerging adults also prioritize living on one's own and buying a house. One possible explanation about why YURI members did not discuss these two issues as facilitators of social agency is because they have never before experienced either of these social agency facilitators and therefore they do not know what they have never had. While some of the Year Up RI members in the focus groups and the Data Advisory Group recalled being a student at the Community College of Rhode Island, not one of the young people described it as a space for exploration and testing of independence.

5.3.4 Relationship Between an Emerging Adult's Strength of Social Agency and Level of Social Agency Facilitators

The quantitative analysis shows a positive relationship between strength of social agency and level of social agency facilitators across all samples using several measures of social agency. This illustrates that it may not be one single facilitator of social agency that transforms one's pathway to adulthood. Perhaps it is a combination of two or three important facilitators, or the culmination of 10–15 facilitators, but the larger question is, what combination leads to the greatest change in strength of social agency? It makes sense that someone who is more frequently engaging in political activities, responding activities, helping activities, and community or neighborhood activities would have stronger social agency. This positive finding underscores the relationship between the two theoretical concepts and strengthens the need for continued testing and measuring the concepts. Additionally, there were some differences in the strength of correlation in the two groups of emerging adults, and further study could investigate how the relationship may look different for other groups of emerging adults. Perhaps for opportunity youth, the strength of the relationship between social agency and social agency

facilitators is more intense or important than for other groups of young adults who have greater institutional advantages, such as educational opportunities and family circumstances that are not included in the YII scale. It is also possible that the weight (and importance) of the different types of social agency facilitators differ between the two samples. While YURI members have similar levels of social agency facilitators, perhaps it is comprised of individual social agency facilitators that are not as valued on the college readiness and persistence pathway and that the career preparedness pathway leverages these social agency facilitators more effectively that more likely leads to success for opportunity youth. Finally, while the data indicates a significant and relatively strong relationship between social agency and social agency facilitators, I do not know the direction of the relationship. Perhaps having strong social agency leads an emerging adult to seek out (or have access to) certain social agency facilitators.

5.3.5 Sociodemographic Variables Do Not Substantially Explain Changes in Social Agency Facilitators, but Females Have Higher Levels of Social Agency Facilitators

The sociodemographic variables explain a relatively small percentage of the variance in the level of social agency facilitators in the study which indicates that there are other variables that contribute to the variance. The research does provide quantitative data from the web-based survey that females have significantly higher levels of social agency facilitators. Additionally, the Data Advisory Group provides qualitative data about how women are more social and have an easier time creating relationships. This finding while not surprising, may be a fruitful area of future study in the emerging adulthood literature. Additionally, members of the focus groups and the Data Advisory Group discussed their beliefs that social class would have the strongest

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relationship to both social agency and social agency facilitators although this did not prove to be the case.

While the study measured age, mother's education, race & ethnicity, and sex, there are many other factors that can contribute to the level of opportunities, experiences, and personal connections that one has participated in over the past year. Additionally, the YII scale asks emerging adults to report on their relative levels of each activity over the past year, which may not account for prior differences in cumulative advantages leading up to the last 12 months. Finally, the YII scale itself is missing some items that may be important facilitators of social agency and it is worthwhile to revisit what is not included in the scale.

5.3.6 Community and Neighborhood Role Models with Similar Sociodemographic Attributes are Important Social Agency Facilitators

I found that age and sex were the only sociodemographic variables that had a statistically significant relationship to either social agency or to social agency facilitators using the scales that I chose to represent these theoretical concepts. I only measured sociodemographic characteristics of individuals and the relationship to both social agency and social agency facilitators. I did not measure these same characteristics of the larger community in which the young people reside. This might provide important insight into how social agency can be activated communally, not simply based on a person's individual social agency facilitators. In focus groups with RIC students, the participants mentioned the importance of having daily decision makers, including professors and administrators, with similar sociodemographic backgrounds. Participants discussed a related desire to have more people (both peers and adults) in their community who look like them to serve as reminders of the possibility of a positive trajectory to adulthood. The

idea of having community role models and institutional role models who share race, SES, or

other important factors is something that the young adults in the study value and could be

included as a separate social agency facilitator.

> "... But I definitely think that there's barriers in our community. But I would say class is
>
> definitely one of the more bigger ones for me. So for example, my parents weren't the
>
> richest so we lived in a more poorer community. But you know, he was able to work hard
>
> and eventually own a home. But I think it's definitely hard when you live in a lower, in a
>
> poor community to try to succeed because you're looking around yourself and you don't
>
> see those affluent people." (12/13/17 Year Up Rhode Island Focus Group)

5.4 Contributions of the Study

The study makes a number of theoretical and applied contributions to the fields of

positive youth development and youth policy. Agency as a concept has been theorized for

several decades and was more popularized beginning with Bandura (2006). Agency is now used

both casually and formally to explain certain concepts associated with empowerment and

efficacy. This is the first study of social agency as a public and community good and is the first

study to theorize specific dimensions (hope, empowerment, voice, choice, and community) of

social agency and connect them to measures and scales.

Young people's (and specifically opportunity youth's) trajectories to adulthood and the

importance of capabilities required for a productive, fulfilling, and independent life is part of a

larger body of work about capabilities and human development measured by the American

Human Development Index (from the Measure of America project of the Social Science

Research Council). Emerging adults at YURI do not necessarily have the same opportunities to

fully develop and/or activate their capabilities, including respect for others, political participation, physical safety, equality before the law, and voice and autonomy afforded to other emerging adults. To Sen's list of capabilities, I am proposing to add social agency, because without social agency, an emerging adult does not have the basic tools to live a long and healthy life, have access to knowledge, and attain a decent standard of living. Based on my findings, social agency may be a capability that is not predominantly shaped by access to resources as some other capabilities might be, but the functioning of this capability could be limited due to resource constraints.

The term social agency facilitator is used as a part of this study—not that the concepts are all new, but the terminology is. This study looks at social agency facilitators as a group in order to measure the overall impact of being involved and engaged. And while the scales chosen for the study did not perfectly match all the concepts I wanted to measure, they did begin to tell a story about how little we know about the relationships between these opportunities, experiences, and personal connections and the trajectory to adulthood, along with the possibility that not every opportunity or experience is created equal in promoting social agency. Most of the common social agency facilitators have independent literature that verifies their contributions but considering them together and the interplay between them is a new concept.

The study also contributes to a growing body of literature about the use of community-engaged research methods that improve the quality of the research and at the same time help to empower the participants in the research process. Through this study, young adults (both from the Data Advisory Group and the young adult researchers) were introduced to a new set of research skills, and the presence of the emerging adults in the data collection and analysis

process greatly improved the quality of the data collected. Additionally, the engaged research component of the study led to empowerment, personal growth, and strengthened relationships among the young adult researchers themselves and with me. Finally, it promoted greater understanding of opportunity youth and the issues involved in emerging adulthood on the part of the emerging adults who participated in the study. Some of these findings are part of a pending manuscript that was co-written with the young adult researchers through the dissertation study process. Much of the literature around community-engaged research focuses on the improvement of the research itself through enhanced data collection and higher quality data. Differently, the young adult researchers in this study emphasized the improved trust, communications, and relationships among the co-researchers, and between the co-researcher(s) and the community as major outcomes of the community-engaged research process.

Finally, the study brings greater attention to an important group of young people in the state of Rhode Island who reside in areas with concentrated poverty and low-performing educational systems. Some of these young people may have the same or greater hope, empowerment, and sociopolitical control than their counterparts who are persisting at RIC. Opportunity youth represent our state's potential -- to fill important jobs with skilled young people, to have a more informed and engaged electorate, and to strengthen young families and our communities. Another important contribution is that my data suggests that OY engaged in a career preparedness program with mentors attracts participants with as high levels of social agency as those persisting in college. This begins to deconstruct some of the deficit narrative that is commonly attributed to opportunity youth. There may be experiences in the lives of OY that require them to develop strong social agency such as taking responsibility early in life, caring for

their family members, helping financially contribute to their households, and having to take more initiative in how their time is spent that all facilitate their social agency, but may not be counted or as valued in more traditional college pathways. Demonstrating the potential of opportunity youth at YURI in comparison to those already in college will hopefully encourage policy makers to think about this group of people as a critical resource that can add economic and social value to our small state.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

The study took place in Rhode Island and the data cannot be generalized to other states in the United States. Rhode Island has a history, character, and infrastructure that makes it unique, even compared to other New England states. Each sample had some constraints and limitations. My sample for RIC was smaller than I had originally intended, and this led to a sample that was not representative of the larger population of college students who attend RIC. The findings for RIC are specific to the sample of students that participated in the study and they are neither generalizable to the RIC student population nor to college students in other public higher education institutions in Rhode Island.

There may be bias towards those students who participated in the study having stronger social agency or more social agency facilitators than those RIC students who did not volunteer for the study, because perhaps these participants are more interested in the research topic generally. And while RIC had a relatively large percentage of students of color (33%) in the fall of 2017 (the latest data publicly available), my study sample was predominantly composed of white students at RIC. Additionally, the small sample of RIC students and the disproportion of white students has implications on the types of analysis that could be conducted. RIC is the right

comparison group for this study because it is the more common four-year college choice for Rhode Island's emerging adults who share similarities to OY, but perhaps future studies would be completed in true collaboration with RIC and therefore would produce higher student response rates that would in turn generate a more representative sample.

The other major limitation of the study is using YURI members to represent Rhode Island's OY population. Those members in YURI are a self-selected group of young people who already took several monumental steps to change their life circumstances because they identified the desire to make a change, found the appropriate program to enroll in order to facilitate that change (there are a few similar programs targeting OY), completed the application and interview process, and then actually showed up for the program. This requires initiative, planning, resources, and potentially social agency that may not be representative of the average OY living in Rhode Island. Originally, I had intended to directly recruit individual opportunity youth across the state but finding these emerging adults and verifying their identification as opportunity youth became too difficult of a process to manage with the potential for large unmitigated risks.

I selected two particular groups of emerging adults and these groups have very different ways that they entered into YURI or RIC. In fact, this selection bias may have been pre-selecting for stronger social agency and higher levels of social agency facilitators among the OY in YURI because it may be what got them into YURI in the first place. Another set of emerging adults that are similar to the YURI sample may not have the same strength of social agency or level of social agency facilitators. There may be other explanations including the possibility that the group that made it to YURI did so because they had more social agency facilitators before they entered. Similarly, RIC students may have access to social agency facilitators, but may not

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choose to access them (especially those without much social agency). It could also be the case that RIC students might be gliding on the social agency of their parents. As Lareau's (2011) follow-up to her original study demonstrates, middle class youth are expected to go to college and parents help get them there through concerted cultivation, so perhaps RIC students' level of social agency might be relatively low or perhaps they haven't been required to activate their social agency. Unfortunately, because this is a cross-sectional study, not a longitudinal study, and it involves young people who are enrolled in programs that require them to apply for access, most of these questions cannot be addressed at this time.

There are also questions of generalizability with the YURI data. One important question is about how typical the data for YURI's Class 26 are as a group, compared to other classes at YURI; the second is whether any class (or Class 26) of YURI is similar to the overall population of OY in Rhode Island; and finally, whether the YURI findings have implications for other Year Up programs across the country. Class 26 is generally representative of other YURI classes based on the sociodemographic factors of age, mother's education, race & ethnicity, and sex (see Appendix J). Therefore, one can generalize the study findings about YURI to other YURI classes (both past and future), but not to the general population of OY in Rhode Island. It is unclear how typical YURI members are compared to other OY in Rhode Island who may also be without a career and not currently enrolled in higher education. It is clear that those who are enrolled in YURI had to work hard to get there.

Looking across age, race & ethnicity, and sex, the survey participants from Class 26 at YURI are similar to the pooled total of YURI participants from Classes 27, 28, and 29, which are the three classes of emerging adults participating in the program immediately following those

who were in the study. In addition to the sociodemographic data from the web-based survey, YURI provided some administrative data about the YURI sample that is pertinent to the research questions. According to self-reported administrative data of the 80 members that comprise Year Up's Class 26, over 57% (46 of 80) attended some college prior to coming to YURI. This is consistent with other YURI classes (Classes 27, 28, and 29) whose members reported that over 55.9% had prior college experience. This data provides another point of reference that illustrates similarities between the two samples and the possible fluidity between the circumstances of the two study populations that led one group to be able to persist in college and one to be categorized as opportunity youth.

The big question the study raises is, how similar or different are YURI members from students at RIC? Based on the quantitative and qualitative data collected through multiple methods, it is clear that there are both similarities and differences between the two samples, but it appears that the groups of emerging adults are more similar than they are different. If this is confirmed by other future studies, this could have implications on public policy and programming specifically geared towards this population of young people.

The other major limitation of the study is the validated measures that were used and non-validated scales that were developed to measure concepts of social agency and social agency facilitators. Social agency is a relatively new theoretical concept and therefore there is no set of standard validated measures that have been used regularly by other scholars, and even fewer that have been used with similar populations of young people. Additionally, the ways in which this study describes social agency as a concept having different but interrelated dimensions (initially four, and now five) is new and therefore the scales have not been tested together in any prior

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studies. The primary scale that I used to measure social agency was a scale that had been validated in a graduate student study when compared to other similar validated scales of sociopolitical power; however, it has not been widely used in other scholarly research outside of the scale's developer, Dr. Roderick Watts. This means that there is not a body of results to compare the study's scores to, in other parts of the country or with other subpopulations.

Similar limitations exist with the social agency facilitator scales. Firstly, the term social agency facilitator is new to the field. There are other studies looking at individual opportunities or interventions (e.g., participation in sports, religious groups, mentor programs, and internships or apprenticeships) and their impact on marginalized young people. The YII scale was the only scale of its kind to include helping activities, responding activities, political activities, and community/neighborhood activities together. However, there were some social agency facilitators that were not included in the YII scale which is why I developed the SAF scale. There are limitations to the SAF scale—it was not psychometrically validated, and it did not measure the level of involvement that emerging adults had in each of the ten activities. The scale simply asks emerging adults how many of the items (social agency facilitators) they have personally experienced over the past year without considering how often they have been involved with the activities (like is captured on Pancer's YII scale). For instance, a participant can make dinner for a homeless shelter once over a year-long period and check off the box for volunteering with a community service organization, or one could tutor elementary school students twice a week over the year and the same box would be checked. Additionally, there is no comparison group for this scale, so while my findings illustrate significant differences between the YURI and RIC samples, it is not as meaningful because I do not know if this is typical for other groups of

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emerging adults. Finally, there are differences in the two samples of emerging adults that I did not measure, and these factors may help explain the difference in social agency and social agency facilitators. Differences based on town and city (zip code), neighborhood, and high school experiences are important to add to any future studies about emerging adults, especially with the economic and educational disparities that exist across towns, cities, and school districts in the state of Rhode Island.

The final gap in the study is about other social conditions and how one's family and community affect a young person's pathways to adulthood. I began to capture a little of this information by including a few validated scales about cultural, racial, and ethnic identity, but I did not probe enough into the importance of family in promoting social agency facilitators for the two groups of emerging adults. For instance, it would be helpful to know how many people in an emerging adult's family went to college or had a career-oriented job (including siblings). Throughout all the informal opportunities to collaborate with and interact with emerging adults at YURI and RIC during this research process, family dominated each and every discussion.

A related but separate concept is community and this idea is raised frequently by participants in the focus groups, but the study never specifically probes the concept of community—if people on one's street went to college, if some went to the local public high school or to the one exam school in Providence, and whether one's childhood friends are working in career-oriented jobs. This is not to say that there will not be some emerging adults who are outliers and will achieve successful pathways to adulthood without family and community systems of support, but for many young people, belonging to a family and community support system may be foundational.

5.6 Future Research

5.6.1 Social Agency

Future research about the definition and dimensions of social agency are important if social agency is one of the capabilities required for a successful pathway to adulthood. Additional scholarship about the dimensions of social agency, especially hope (and vision) and choice, and the connections between these dimensions, is needed. In terms of validated measurement, there are a number of established scales for measuring hope, but I am not clear if the concept of vision is truly represented in these scales. The emerging adults in the study were clear that hope and vision were the most important aspects of social agency and being able to picture one's future and seeing oneself in a different space is essential to achieving a positive pathway to adulthood. There were fewer options available for validated scales to measure choice. I used the Community Leadership Scale in this study because it was one of the few scales I could find which measured young people's active roles in decision making. However, additional validated scales are needed for future studies.

As the use of the word agency moved from the academic literature and the field of human and economic development to the day-to-day vernacular, it has become a catchall phrase for empowerment, efficacy, voice, and many other attributes, specifically for different populations of people (e.g., youth, students, people of color). While this study supports the concept of social agency and endorses additional studies documenting how social agency can be developed and maintained for the well-being of emerging adults and for the greater public good, work must first be done to clearly define the components or dimensions of agency so that there is a common understanding and language around this important concept. Once there is a baseline definition,

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set of terms, and operationalization of social agency, scholars can begin measuring both agency and social agency more broadly and with different populations.

While this study defines and measures four dimensions of social agency (hope, empowerment, voice, and choice) supported by scholarly literature and then adds comm(unity) from the research findings, these dimensions have not been endorsed by other scholars. Figure 11 is a diagram of the revised dimensions of social agency in emerging adulthood. In addition to defining social agency and developing measures for these concepts, the scales should be tested with other populations nationally. The study uses literature to develop theoretically grounded dimensions of social agency for emerging adults in Rhode Island, but the definitions of social agency may look different in rural Appalachia or in the Mississippi Delta. Future studies of social agency with larger samples should retest the relationships between sociodemographic variables and strength of social agency, specifically mother's education, which was close to being significant and age which I found to be statistically significant. In addition to the set of sociodemographic variables tested in this study, I suggest adding zip code and the name of the high school attended to see if these factors have a relationship to social agency.

Figure 11

New Dimensions of Social Agency in Emerging Adulthood

Note. Illustrates the proposed five dimensions of social agency (of which four were measured both quantitatively and qualitatively in the research study).

5.6.2 Social Agency Facilitators

The study begins to measure the strength of the relationship between an emerging adult's level of social agency facilitators and strength of social agency. As previously mentioned in Section 3.5.1, the survey included four different measures of social agency, and the Community Leadership Scale (Dimension 4—choice) was identified as the primary dependent variable and therefore, for the most part all bivariate and regression analysis was completed using the CLS as the dependent variable and then the other three variables for social agency were tested for reliability. The YII scale was one of only a handful of scales available to measure the activities and opportunities that emerging adults are engaged in that may facilitate agency, but the scale is

very long and unfortunately may encourage straightlining[18]. While the self-designed SAF scale is not validated, perhaps it is worth looking at alternative scales to calculate the level of one's opportunities, experiences, and personal connections in an easier and more comprehensive manner.

Based on data collected through the web-based survey, face-to-face focus groups, and the Data Advisory Group, the study captures the views of emerging adults about social agency and a range of social agency facilitators and connects it to the positive development of marginalized emerging adults and OY. Future research could test the relationship between any individual social agency facilitator or a specific group of social agency facilitators and one's overall strength of social agency, recognizing that most likely not every social agency facilitator contributes equally to one's social agency. Some are more important, or potent than others, and these differences may be accentuated for some populations. The range of and intensity of (level of) individual social agency facilitators matters for the development of social agency or vice versa, but we do not yet know how much. The bodies of research on community service and civic engagement, mentorship, and work experience are decades in the making, but it is still unclear about how strong each of these facilitators is, separately and together, and it is likewise unclear how strong the relationships are relative to other social agency facilitators. In this study all social agency facilitators are weighted equally in terms of their relationship to social agency. In other studies, there have not been any published groupings or weightings of social agency

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[18] Respondents choose one specific response to a survey item and then use that same answer all the way down the entire scale.

facilitators and therefore perhaps completing a factor analysis would enable this question to be addressed.

The focus group participants identified a wide range of social agency facilitators—17 in total (found in Appendix F)—which could be organized into two different groupings: individual and personal facilitators and structural and institutional facilitators. This is a new concept and perhaps worth some additional research because it appears that the majority of traditional facilitators of a more positive trajectory to adulthood fall into the category of structural and institutional facilitators, and this is where there has been more public programs and policy resources directed in Rhode Island (e.g., more job training, internship and apprenticeship programs, mentor programs, and academic skills training); however, when emerging adults are asked about what has facilitated their social agency and what they would need to promote a more successful transition to adulthood, it is the individual and personal facilitators that most focus group participants spoke of.

A few social agency facilitators require additional study because it is possible that there are important relationships between facilitators that are currently constructed as stand-alone strategies. Of all the social agency facilitators, *having a caring person (or mentor)* and *civic engagement and community service* have some of the most well-documented literature detailing how these opportunities and experiences improve the development of young people on their pathway to adulthood. However, results from the open-ended question on the web-based survey and the focus group transcripts link these two themes. Study participants discussed the concept of community, not as part of volunteerism and service, but as the desire to belong and be connected to other people. Focus group participants did not use the word mentor and instead

underscored the importance of having a caring and unifying relationship. Therefore, I suggest that there be additional research about the role of community and belonging as a separate social agency facilitator and to consider expanding the vision of mentors, not simply differentiating between different types of mentors, but perhaps collapsing them all into a more general category of caring relationships and measuring the impact on a young person's pathway to adulthood. Finally, in studies with young people, we continue using the words *volunteering* and *community service* and perhaps by using these words, we are missing out on the true story of young people's engagement in their communities. Future research could include asking emerging adults about giving back to their communities or advocating on behalf of other people.

When I developed the survey, I split the question about mentorship into four categories based on the literature that stressed the importance of peer relationships and community relationships. I could not find other mentorship studies that asked the questions in a similar way. Given the significant difference between mentorship in the anchor institutions as opposed to community mentors, I suggest that future research studies include questions to rigorously investigate whether or not this finding is replicated with other groups of opportunity youth. Perhaps it would also be helpful to ask questions specifically about the role of teachers as mentors. Teachers are mentioned in the focus groups and the surveys as instrumental in the caring and the development of community for emerging adults—both high school teachers and college professors. Future research can also document the breadth of the mentors by measuring the number of different caring adults that are present in the lives of emerging adults.

A more thorough analysis is necessary that crosswalks the YII scale and the individual scales that have been used to measure other well-documented social agency facilitators including

mentoring, civic engagement and community service, work experience, and having an intense passion or skill, which would allow people to better understand what is missing from the YII scale and what supplemental measures should be used in future data collection. It is possible that modifications could be made to the YII scale to also incorporate some of the SEL facilitators that were identified through the study's focus groups.

The significant difference in work experience including internships/apprenticeships requires further research. It would be important to understand why YURI members report having significantly less work experience, internships, and apprenticeships over the past year, and if this has a relationship to one's strength of social agency. Additionally, for each of the ten social agency facilitators in the study that were measured in the SAF scale, there was no measure of frequency and therefore we cannot know the depth of engagement for any facilitator, which makes a difference in understanding the importance of any individual facilitator and its relationship with social agency. Finally, it could be helpful to understand if this work experience, internship, or apprenticeship is sponsored by a local high school or another community group or how the emerging adults were connected to this opportunity.

Future research measuring the social agency facilitators of emerging adults, and opportunity youth in particular, could include measures of community and belonging and its impact on the successful pathways to adulthood for emerging adults. Defining what community means will be an important part of this exploration, because while there are measures for cultural and family identity including the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) (Roberts et al., 1999) and the Familismo Scale (Gil, Wagner, & Vega, 2000), I could not find other scales measuring community or belonging, separate and apart from identity. The unresolved issue with

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the MEIM and the Familismo Scale are that they connect community and belonging to ethnic identity and family, and in some cases, the community that emerging adults seek and value is with peers in a cohort model like YURI or at college, based on people who may be in one's class, or a club or group that may or may not have been organized around one's cultural or ethnic identity. The issue of identity as both a facilitator of and barrier to social agency also requires additional research. In this study, focus groups participants (both RIC and YURI), only discussed identity as a social agency barrier. However, it would be important to measure the developmental assets and protective factors that go along with a strong identity (including cultural and ethnic identity).

Data from the survey and focus groups confirm that social agency facilitators vary by sample of emerging adults, both in terms of the frequency of certain types of social agency facilitators as well as the different types of social agency facilitators. While RIC students discussed how travel and space were two opportunities and experiences that were important in the trajectory to adulthood, no one knows their importance for other groups of emerging adults. Additionally, in order to fully assess the importance of travel, it is helpful to elaborate on the types of travel, such as domestic versus international, and short episodic travel versus long-term travel, or whether the young person has ever spent time outside of her or his state of residence.

5.6.3 Changes to Research Methodology

Dissertations are student research projects with consultation from faculty members and members of the community. In the spirit of learning, I have developed a short list of recommended changes for future studies. This is not intended to be a comprehensive list. In some cases, the recommendations are followed by a supporting quote from study participants and

young adult researchers which illustrate the reasons behind the recommendation. Many of these recommendations come directly from missteps made by me in the dissertation study process. Others come directly from young people who were involved in the study and empowered to review data and think about what changes would lead to improved data collection and data quality.

Recommendations for Changes in the Survey Instrument

1. Include questions about siblings' and peers' educational and work history. (Data Advisory Group)

> "It's like let's say you have like older siblings and none of them went to college, you're gonna feel like oh I don't have to go either. It's just like a path. It's like the cycle continues." (4/25/18 Data Advisory Group Meeting)

2. Change the collection of data on mother's educational status to include information on certifications or other learning programs, not only on mother's college completion, perhaps even distinguishing between associate's and bachelor's degrees. (Data Advisory Group)

> "Not exactly high school. Not exactly like a school but more of just like a program or anything that they set endeavors to."
> "Yeah, like a certification." (4/25/18 Data Advisory Group Meeting)

3. Add questions to the web-based survey about residential status of RIC students—and if they live off campus, do they live with their family or friends?

4. Add questions about what, if any, college access program the emerging adult attended and if they specifically attended a youth advocacy program.

5. Include young adult participants in the study design, data collection, data analysis, and development of findings and recommendations to both improve the quality of the study and provide emerging adults structured opportunities for learning, affirmation, and empowerment. (Data Advisory Group and young adult researchers)

6. The pattern of not completing the last few scaled variables is something to consider in future surveys with young adults, because perhaps the dependent and independent variables should be better dispersed throughout the survey to ensure survey completion, as it is possible that survey participants simply tired of answering questions with so many items.

7. Include questions about travel, both domestic and international and if an emerging adult has traveled outside of their home state.

8. Include more specific questions about college enrollment because so many opportunity youth start college and don't finish; ask when they enrolled, the name of the college where they enrolled, and why they did not finish. (Data Advisory Group)

> "It's actually not even surprising. I feel like every time in a group, everybody would always mention how they went to CCRI."
> "Or enrolled."
> "Or they enrolled and they didn't like it and that's the reason why they're here. I feel like that's a lot with our class. Like that's our main thing." (4/25/18 Data Advisory Group Meeting)

5.6.4 New Research About Emerging Adulthood

Finally, based on the finding that older emerging adults have stronger social agency and female emerging adults have higher levels of social agency facilitators, future life-cycle research with emerging adults could continue addressing differences in age and gender in the trajectory to

adulthood. Perhaps some of the more traditional social agency facilitators that were measured using the web-based survey are more geared to females and there may be other social agency facilitators (even some of the ones that were captured in the focus group data) that are stronger facilitators of social agency for males. Or perhaps social agency scales are more relatable to older emerging adults and do not speak in the language of 18 or 19 year olds.

5.7 Summary

The study answers most of the research questions and also exposes many areas in need of future research and action around emerging adulthood and the pathways to adulthood which, for the most part, are topics with literature about college access and retention and skills-based employment programs. This study begins a larger discussion about other opportunities, experiences, and people that are important to a person's trajectory. Additionally, the study emphasizes the need to reframe the trajectory to adulthood from one that is solely personal to one that must address organizational relationships that impact the pathways and choices of emerging adults and opportunity youth as a group. The study offers new ways of thinking, but also a new language in which to discuss what capabilities (including social agency) are essential to a young person's well-being and what obligations the United States has to provide the social conditions and the social agency facilitators required for all young people to have adequate health, education, and income.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC POLICY

" I think it's mostly important also to kind of entice students to like act. I feel like there's a great deal of like apathy coming from I think especially from this generation. I don't know if it's whether because a great deal of, let me see… Oh God. Just I think something that can help motivate them to like go out to try to change stuff. But it just seems like there's that I think belief that you're fighting against overwhelming odds in a bigger system. So, there comes with the idea that one person's voice wouldn't really matter in the long term, which no, isn't the case. But I feel like there has to be an opportunity to sort of provide a platform, like an easier, accessible platform for students." (3/28/18 RIC Focus Group)

6.1 Introduction

In Chapters 4 and 5, I have presented data about differences in an emerging adult's social agency and social agency facilitators based on whether the young person is currently enrolled in RIC or is a member of YURI. I have strong evidence based on quantitative and qualitative data that there is no difference in strength of social agency and level of social agency facilitators between the two groups of young people. The survey data illustrate that YURI members have similar strength of social agency and level of social agency facilitators to college students persisting at RIC based on several validated scales. Additionally, there is no difference in the levels of social agency facilitators between the two groups and there is a common set of social agency facilitators. RIC students have some different types of social agency facilitators than YURI members including more community mentors and more work experiences, internships, and apprenticeships. This provides important insights about the trajectory to adulthood for these two groups of young people suggesting that, while these groups are different, they may be more similar than I initially hypothesized. Additionally, I found a significant relationship between

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social agency facilitators and social agency which supports the idea that the intensity and types of facilitators (experiences, opportunities and people) helps to explain differences in strength of social agency and therefore matter in a young person's trajectory to adulthood.

Ensuring a young person's positive pathway to adulthood has been a topic of research for over 50 years. There have been periods of time and historical national public policies that specifically addressed the need for a successful trajectory for young people, both because it was important for the population, but also because it was sound economic and social policy for our country. In this chapter, I provide the context for state public policy specifically directed at emerging adults and opportunity youth in our small state of Rhode Island, and then revisit the most important findings from the study to suggest some changes in state policy to promote more positive pathways for all our young people, but especially those who are marginalized.

6.2 Re-Operationalizing the Conceptual Framework with Study Findings

I originally hypothesized that social agency was not intrinsic, but a capability that can be enhanced and maintained depending on experiences, opportunities, and personal connections and that those emerging adults who had a higher level of social agency facilitators would have stronger social agency, which would lead to a more agentic pathway to adulthood, thus enabling them to persist at a four-year college like Rhode Island College. Likewise, those emerging adults who had lower levels of social agency facilitators would have a lower degree of social agency and therefore a less agentic pathway to adulthood, making them more likely to be opportunity youth or YURI members. This was naive.

Based on the findings of the study, I revised the conceptual framework to better reflect what I now know about the relationship between social agency, social agency facilitators, and the

pathways to adulthood. First, we know that strength of social agency is not necessarily positively associated with one's pathway, meaning that young adults can have higher degrees of social agency and end up enrolled in a career preparedness program. This is what I found when the YURI sample had as strong social agency than the emerging adults at RIC.

The study findings could be explained by the presence of other moderating or mediating variables in addition to social agency (not currently tested in this study) which have a relationship to the emerging adult's trajectory to adulthood, and help determine if someone is on the college readiness and persistence pathway (at RIC), or is not working and not in college and is on a career preparedness pathway (and maybe a member of YURI). Or perhaps while types of social agency facilitators may differ, strong social agency is fostered among marginalized young people, but the best outlet for using their social agency may not be a college readiness and persistence pathway. If the degree of social agency among YURI members is similar to that of other opportunity youth in Rhode Island who are on a career preparedness path then this suggests that social agency may not be the only issue in determining one's trajectory to adulthood, but perhaps the access to appropriate pathways is. Finally, it is important to note that not all opportunity youth are on a career preparedness pathway, and some may never have access to either path.

The research assessed the strength of social agency (lower or higher degree) with two different groups of EA in Rhode Island; how opportunities, experiences, and personal connections may help to facilitate social agency; the strength of the relationship between social agency and social agency facilitators; and how age, mother's education, race & ethnicity, and sex may help explain differences in degree of social agency and in levels of social agency

facilitators. The study suggests that there is a positive relationship between level of social agency facilitators and strength of social agency in both samples of emerging adults, so that the greater the number and the more intense the social agency facilitators, the higher degree of social agency or the reverse with a greater strength of social agency leading to a higher level of social agency facilitators. The parts of the model with negative findings were the sociodemographic factors of the emerging adults. I predicted that there would be a number of different relationships between gender, race & ethnicity, and SES (social class) so that differences in these factors explain the variances in social agency and in social agency facilitators. Specifically, I hypothesized that emerging adults who have mother's with lower educational attainment, those who identify racially and ethnically as nonwhite, and those who were male, would have lower levels of social agency facilitators and therefore lower social agency. However, this is not exactly what I found so it could be that either my ideas of what contributes to the components of social agency are incorrectly measured, or there are different contributors (including social conditions) that were not included in the study.

The study collected data about gender and sex and I originally hypothesized that emerging adults who identified as female would have stronger social agency and higher levels of social agency facilitators; this hypothesis was partially confirmed by the web-based survey results that demonstrated how girls have higher levels of social agency facilitators, but not stronger social agency. Initially I did not intend to look at differences in social agency and social agency facilitators based on age, but the emerging adults raised the issue in the focus groups and the Data Advisory Group, so I then analyzed the data to see if the age variable had any relationship to social agency or social agency facilitators, finding that in fact it does explain

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differences in social agency. Based on the study results, I am suggesting that social agency facilitators do contribute to social agency and what I found is that class and race & ethnicity, are not predictors of social agency or social agency facilitators (while age and sex are). Given the similarity in strength of social agency and level of social agency facilitators between the two groups of emerging adults, I am asking that policy makers, advocates, and nonprofits should not assume that OY are lacking hope, empowerment, voice, and choice (at least not the opportunity youth in the YURI program). Additionally, this challenges us to envision different pathways for opportunity youth to use their strong social agency and high levels of social agency facilitators.

6.3 Other Public Policy Issues Raised by Study Participants

The last question in each of the four focus groups asked participants, "If you were able to make changes in laws and funding, what systematic action steps do you think should be taken to increase the social agency of emerging adults in Rhode Island?" Emerging adults in all four focus groups were very engaged in this topic and responded similarly. Focus group participants from both samples most frequently discussed education quality, educational culture, and work preparedness programs and training, as the public policy areas they would like to see improved. Additional public policy changes that participants mentioned included police training, educational financing, comm(unity), health, out-of-school programming, and leadership. One participant spoke candidly about the relationship between education and social agency.

Definitely we need to re-work our education system. It has unfair advantages and disadvantages everywhere. Especially in Rhode Island it's very visible. If you live on the east side of Providence, you are getting a very different education than if you live on the south side of the same city. And that's not fair. It's reflected in test scores. It's reflected

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in the quality of the teachers, the quality of the textbooks and that's not fair. I think that we need to re-work the way our taxes our divided up. It's not… The amount that's being contributed to the military as opposed to our roads, our education again, just the things that should be the building blocks for our future are not being supported in the way that they should be. Those to me, I think they will have an impact on someone's social agency because if you know that you're getting a good education and you know that you're in a good place, then what's to stop you from thinking you can do anything? (12/12/17 YURI Focus Group)

6.4 The Public Policy Landscape for Emerging Adults and Opportunity Youth in Rhode Island

Following national trends in programming and funding, Rhode Island began more heavily investing in youth development and out-of-school programs in the early 2000s. A 2003 United Way report titled "Stepping Up! Out of School Time and Youth Development in Providence: A School-Community Analysis," called for a number of statewide changes including expanding out-of-school time programs, promoting the vision of young people as agents of their own development, developing a regular forum where young people are part of the decision making structure, supporting neighborhood-based strategies, identifying leadership roles with the Providence Public School Department to assist in the management of these programs, and improving the coordination of public and private resources. This report was part of a national and statewide recognition about the need for improved academic and other learning opportunities after school, especially in high poverty areas or in low-performing schools. Enhanced federal funding availability in the late 1990s and early 2000s (through 21st Century Community

Learning Centers) led to policy changes in Rhode Island which improved the availability of after-school programs through the creation of the Providence After School Alliance and coordination at the state level by the Rhode Island Afterschool Plus Alliance. Some of the activities and experiences that are defined and measured in this study as social agency facilitators still are offered through after-school programming at both the middle and high school levels across the state.

Beginning about a decade ago, the state of Rhode Island (through the Rhode Island Department of Education) in collaboration with community-based organizations began to enhance their efforts around college access and success and then more recently around student-centered learning and career pathways for young adults. The largest and most influential community-based organizations for children in the state is Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. Founded in the 1990s, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a nonprofit organization that helps to improve the health, well-being, and development of children and youth through information, public policy, and collaboration. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT commissioned a study of college access and success (especially for marginalized populations) in the Providence Public Schools. When asked how schools can better support the activities that promote a positive trajectory to adulthood, high school students who participated in the study emphasized the need for more individualized support from both guidance counselors and teachers (Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, 2012). During the same time period, the Rhode Island Office of Higher Education developed the College Access and Persistence Programs to help support low-income, underrepresented, or at-risk RI students (from urban communities) attending the state's three

public colleges and universities in coordination with community-based pre-college access programs. The three goals of these programs were to:

1. Ensure the successful transition to college through strategic partnerships with college access organizations,

2. Coordinate services within the higher education institutions to deliver comprehensive and student-centered services, and

3. Link program impact to student degree completion and high academic standing.

The program demonstrated improved course credit completion, higher first-year grade point averages that kept emerging adults in good academic standing, more program participants entering the STEM fields at higher rates, and higher persistence into the second year of college. Some of the takeaway recommendations were the need for "continued partnerships with college access and postsecondary support programs to successfully smooth students' transition to college and coordinate comprehensive services while in college enhances their chances of success." (RI DataHUB, n.d.).

In 2015, the Providence Children and Youth Cabinet, funded by the Lumina Foundation, issued their own report about what was happening in higher education institutions and community-based organizations across the state (*Minding the Gap: Increasing College Persistence in Rhode Island*). The report highlighted the structural disadvantages of some groups in Rhode Island including that of the Latinx population, where Rhode Island's college attainment rates were and still are significantly lower than that of the white and Black populations. The report also identifies the promising practices for college persistence and completion that could be implemented in the state including academic services, financial services, college and career

services, and social services, along with elements of systemic success (flexibility, student-centered practices, integrated services, targeted outreach, meaningful connections, strategic partnerships, and institutional commitment), in order to help support and empower students to persist through college graduation. The report made specific policy recommendations calling for the state colleges and universities to continually assess their programs, set targets around college access and success, and to develop or expand partnerships with community-based organizations. These reports along with the development of several youth-centered, community-based organizations around the same time (e.g., Youth in Action, Young Voices) brought greater attention to the transition period of emerging adulthood and to the state educational and employment systems that were available to assist young people.

In the past five years, state funding and policy priorities have pivoted from college access and success to a stronger emphasis on personalized learning or student-centered learning and the improvement of the state's career pathways, specifically for low-income and marginalized populations. In 2016, Rhode Island was awarded a New Skills for Youth grant from JPMorgan Chase and the Council of Chief State School Officers, and a new organization for college and career preparedness was created. PrepareRI is a strategic partnership between the Rhode Island government, leaders in private industry, the public education system, colleges and universities, and nonprofits across the state to help prepare all youth in Rhode Island with the skills they need for well-paying jobs. The program is coordinated by an interagency task force composed of the Rhode Island Governor's Office, the Rhode Island Department of Education, the Governor's Workforce Board, Rhode Island Commerce Corporation, and the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner. PrepareRI and the parties involved in the multipronged initiative are heavily

involved in creating alternative pathways to careers and college for young people who are at risk for dropping out of high school, for dropping out of college, and for not being on a career path. PrepareRI has been the driving force for many changes that benefit marginalized emerging adults, including opportunity youth. The original goals of the program were that, by 2020:

- All career pathway programs would be aligned to Rhode Island's high-demand career fields,

- All high school students will have access to work-based learning experience such as an internship in a relevant career field,

- All students, starting no later than middle school, will have career exploration opportunities and individualized learning plans based on their unique strengths and interests,

- Over half of high school students will graduate with college credit or an industry credential, and

- Over half of high school students will participate in career and technical education.

This set of work and education priorities was also fueled by economic challenges in a small state that never fully recovered from the 2008 recession. In an introduction to the 2018 report "Learning for Life and Work," issued by the Commission on Higher Education & Employability, a New England based panel chaired by Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo, the Governor noted that the region faces employment challenges, including a declining number of high school graduates and a large gap between the share of residents with higher education and the share of jobs requiring postsecondary education. The report includes recommendations

for colleges and employers to prioritize graduates' ability to get jobs including requiring at least one work-integrated learning experience before completion of high school.

Over the past four to five years, the growth of PrepareRI and the state's prioritization of career pathways and skills roadmaps can be seen at each of the state's three higher education institutions and across program funding with employers and community partnerships. There are two distinct arms of the PrepareRI program: career readiness and college readiness. The current and revised goals of PrepareRI include that 100% of high school students will graduate with a postsecondary credential by 2025, 100% of high schools will offer some form of work-based learning as part of the high school experience, and 100% of elementary and middle schools will offer career awareness and exploration programming.

Based on the history and current status of public policy around emerging adults and their trajectory to adulthood in Rhode Island, questions remain about possible gaps that exist based on the findings from this study. It is clear that some of the social agency facilitators are getting a significant amount of attention and that work- and career-related opportunities and skills (including summer employment, internships, and apprenticeships) are being more universally implemented in public schools across the state. And there has been progress in the college and career readiness for young people across the state. At the same time, there appear to be gaps in the PrepareRI initiative and state level public policy for emerging adults, especially opportunity youth.

Firstly, the recent efforts coordinated through PrepareRI do not include an emphasis on mentoring or having caring adults and peer relationships either in the secondary schools or in the colleges. Additionally, the state's public policy and funding priorities do not emphasize

individual and personal social agency facilitators including SEL skills. While there are some community-based organizations in the state that have continued SEL work with young adults, there is no dedicated initiative or stream of funding to support these opportunities in middle school, high school, or college. Additionally, there is also no mention of the need to create community and a sense of belonging through any of the PrepareRI programs, nor a plan of how this would be possible. There is a policy gap around civic engagement and community service which, while it has mixed outcomes in the literature in terms of effectiveness for college or career preparation, it does provide enhanced community and sense of belonging. Finally, the current structure and leadership of PrepareRI does not have a space or process for a dedicated youth voice (which could serve as a facilitator of social agency). There is no place for emerging adults to be involved in planning, data collection, or ongoing feedback from the career and college readiness programs, which runs counter to the literature about the importance of student-centered learning and positive youth development. The Providence Children and Youth Cabinet has a Youth Advisory structure which could be used as a model, but there does not appear to be any movement on this issue.

Perhaps the most significant missed public policy opportunity is the lack of discussion and programs specifically directed to opportunity youth. In 2018 documents from PrepareRI, there was a brief discussion about the specific needs of OY and the creation of unique pathways for these emerging adults. Additionally, PrepareRI also produced documentation explaining why this group of emerging adults looks different than other groups. However, in the past two years, there has not been any public planning for this group of young people. And so much attention is

being paid to career and college pathways for young people in Rhode Island, it seems strange that this important group is a forgotten part of the policy solution.

There are several important players working on the pathways to success for emerging adults in Rhode Island (and specifically marginalized young people), including the state government, secondary and higher education institutions, and community-based organizations. YURI and YouthBuild are organizations dedicated to improving the trajectory to adulthood, specifically for opportunity youth. There are many other community-based organizations that play an important role in the youth development space across the state who are not necessarily highlighted in the PrepareRI program. Different from College Visions or the College Crusade, which are primarily college access and success organizations, AS220, New Urban Arts, Providence Student Union, PRIDE, Prysm, Youth in Action, Young Voices, and others are community-based organizations which are engaged in the interpersonal development of young people and facilitating dimensions of social agency. These are the organizations that may require additional attention and funding if Rhode Island is truly interested in improving the social agency of our state's young people, in addition to offering more transactional career and college readiness skills. A full listing of those organizations involved in Rhode Island's college and career readiness programs are included in Appendix N.

6.5 Policy Considerations and Recommendations

Based on the study findings and the current state of public policy in Rhode Island, I have the following recommendations for changes in practice and policy in order to help ensure a more equitable trajectory to adulthood for all emerging adults across our state. In order to achieve this,

additional or different pathways and social agency facilitators are perhaps required for
marginalized emerging adults, including opportunity youth.

Recommendation 1—Differentiate College and Career Readiness Programs for Emerging Adults
Based on Gender and Age (and perhaps other sociodemographic variables)

Perhaps it is not surprising that emerging adults 23–25 years of age have stronger social agency
than younger emerging adults and that those who identify as female have higher levels of social
agency facilitators. This is an important recognition that not all emerging adults are the same and
therefore the set of career and college readiness programs could look different for distinct
populations, perhaps by both age and gender as well as other social conditions and
sociodemographic characteristics. Specifically, given the racial and economic composition of
Rhode Island, it could be very helpful to develop programs specifically for Latinx emerging
adults and emerging adults from those core cities with the higher disconnection rates.

Recommendation 2—Develop Youth Development and Career and College Readiness Programs
Specifically Designed for Groups of Marginalized Emerging Adults at Greatest Risk (e.g.,
Opportunity Youth)

The state of Rhode Island knows the characteristics of the thousands of emerging adults
who are not in college and not employed in a career—where they live and what public schools
they attend, and which groups of young people are more likely to end up being categorized as
opportunity youth (based on income, race, learning abilities, language spoken in school, etc.);
based on this study we also know that OY in YURI have as much or more hope, empowerment,
voice, and advocacy competencies as emerging adults who are persisting at one of our state's
higher education institutions. Therefore, I am suggesting that Rhode Island develop statewide

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policies and practices to support these young people both through existing programs including PrepareRI, but also during the years preceding middle school when we know that young people are at risk for being disconnected from education or careers. Additionally, the state should collaborate with the existing programs (including YURI, YouthBuild, CYCLE, and CityYear) who most closely work with opportunity youth to design more expansive programs based in part on the input of the young people themselves.

Recommendation 3—Expand State-Supported Programs to Provide Greater Access to Caring Adults and Peers in Educational Institutions and in the Community for Marginalized Emerging Adults

If over 70% of RIC students in the study have adult and peer mentors both at RIC and in the community, this means they have a continuity of support that extends to and from college (institution) through their homes and neighborhoods (community). The disparity for opportunity youth between the rates of institutional mentors at YURI and those in the community could mean that significantly fewer of these young people have positive relationships with adults and peers prior to their entrance into YURI. And once they graduate from YURI, they will lose some (if not all) the adult and peer institutional relationships they have at YURI and will have fewer of these relationships in their communities compared to students at RIC. Therefore, I am suggesting that the state of Rhode Island work with the existing mentor organizations including LEAD Mentoring RI, ACE Mentor Program, MENTOR RI, and others to develop a more intensive system of caring adults and peers that provide mentorship in both middle and high schools and in the community through the transition to college or early careers, especially in higher-need communities.

Recommendation 4—Expand National Service and Civic Engagement Programs for Emerging Adults and Opportunity Youth in Rhode Island and Promote Civic Engagement and Community Involvement in Existing Programs for Opportunity Youth.

Rhode Island, and specifically the City of Providence, has one of the most active national service programs in the country which began in 1994. Rhode Island ranks 6th among the states for per capita AmeriCorps participation and Providence ranks 2nd in the country among mid-sized cities. AmeriCorps is funded by the federal CNCS and administered in the state by Serve Rhode Island. AmeriCorps and VISTA programs provide important services to communities most in need around issues of education, the environment, and public safety. AmeriCorps programs train and provide skill-building to our state's young people from economically and academically disadvantaged backgrounds and provide loan deferment and educational awards that can be used for higher education or repaying federal student loans.

Historically, AmeriCorps members who serve in Rhode Island come from both in state and out of state, but a large percentage of young adults come from Rhode Island's core cities in which they also serve (Providence, Central Falls, Pawtucket, and Woonsocket). In a 2015 study of 1,250 AmeriCorps members who served over a ten-year period, many came from financially disadvantaged backgrounds, were considered academically at risk, and attended urban schools. The study also found that over 90% of the cohort had some higher education experience either before, after, or during their service experience and most stayed in state to attend college at one of the three public institutions, then remained in Rhode Island for work (RI DataHUB, n.d.).

In the open-ended question on the study's web-based survey, emerging adult participants reported that "connecting to people and groups" and "giving back or advocating on others'

behalf" are facilitators that promote social agency. While this study did not confirm any direct relationship between civic engagement, community service, and social agency, a longitudinal study of AmeriCorps national service members eight years after their service suggests that members felt more connected to their communities and were better able to identify and understand community problems. The findings also demonstrated positive relationships between involvement in public service and positive relationships with civic engagement and educational gains (Flanagan & Levine, pp. 172-173).

Therefore, I recommend expanding Rhode Island's existing AmeriCorps programs (including CityYear) to specifically recruit opportunity youth. Additionally, I suggest that PrepareRI incorporate national service as a pathway to success as part of their program offerings (in addition to their career and college readiness programs). Finally, YURI, YouthBuild, and other programs for opportunity youth should include more opportunities for civic engagement and community involvement because, while they cannot undo the cumulative disadvantage that opportunity youth and other marginalized youth populations face based on unequal opportunities during childhood, this could address changing patterns of civic engagement during the important years of emerging adulthood.

> Overall, the evidence supports providing alternative civic learning opportunities for young adults not in college. AmeriCorps, especially if modified to become more educative and more open to politics, would be an important step, but would by no means suffice to close the civic engagement gap to reverse declines since the 1970s. (Flanagan and Levine, p. 175)

Recommendation 5—Take Inventory of Existing Youth and Emerging Adult Organizations
Across Rhode Island and Identify Opportunities to Coordinate the Provision of Opportunities,
Experiences, and Personal Connections that Facilitate Social Agency for Emerging Adults and
Opportunity Youth in Rhode Island

In order to address the complicated needs of emerging adults transitioning to adulthood, there are many systems involved including education, employment, health care, and social services. Some of this coordination should take place in the Rhode Island state government, but nonprofit organizations also serve an important role in providing the opportunities and experiences that facilitate social agency. In a state of just over one million people, there are more than 30 independent community-based organizations that serve the varied needs of youth and emerging adults. While some of the programs are more focused on the arts, STEM, or education reform, perhaps there is a better way to organize the delivery of programs and services to emerging adults in our small state. Thinking about programs in terms of locality or by type of SAFs offered could promote sharing of information and resources among service providers.

Recommendation 6—Develop a Strategic Plan for Addressing Needs of Opportunity Youth and
Other Marginalized Emerging Adult Populations in Rhode Island in the Midst of COVID-19

In March 2020, the world changed for everyone. When COVID-19 came to the United States and began spreading through our population, schools closed, businesses shut down, people lost their jobs, many families lost loved ones, and low income communities of color were disproportionately impacted, especially opportunity youth. In Rhode Island, Governor Raimondo aggressively developed a series of policies to maintain the health and safety of all Rhode Islanders through executive stay-at-home orders and unemployment benefit expansions along

with assistance from the federal government. With colleges facing difficult decisions about what programs will be possible in 2020-2021, work in the areas of career and college readiness is uncertain. Rhode Island has an opportunity to join with other states to ensure that Congress specifically acts to support opportunity youth, youth of color, youth experiencing poverty, youth in foster care, and incarcerated youth in any relief package. The state and federal governments have a responsibility to develop COVID-19 initiatives that specifically address the unique needs and vulnerabilities of opportunity youth and other marginalized emerging adults to help ensure a positive trajectory to adulthood. This could include additional internships and apprenticeships, expansions of national service programs, provisions to ensure that all opportunity youth benefit from economic stimulus packages, and funding for enhanced behavioral health services for opportunity youth and other vulnerable emerging adults.

For opportunity youth, youth of color, and youth experiencing poverty, the time period since March 2020 has involved more than simply boredom from staying at home. Some emerging adults in Rhode Island were employed in the service sector in minimum wage jobs prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, which means that many have lost their jobs, some who were deemed essential are still working and risking their health and safety, and others enrolled in education or employment programs will have more limited opportunities.

6.6 Viewing Emerging Adults and Opportunity Youth from an Asset-Based Lens

In this study I explore several new concepts about the pathways to adulthood for emerging adults in Rhode Island. The original model illustrated that an emerging adult's ability to have hope for the future, to be empowered, to have voice, and to make choices was related to the young person's persistence in college as a marker for a positive trajectory to adulthood. This

was not supported by the study findings in which opportunity youth who are enrolled in the YURI program were found to have similar social agency (and similar levels of social agency facilitators) than those at RIC. While this is only one small, nonrepresentative study, it provides additional information about the importance of a group of young people that American society oftentimes dismisses. The research study hopefully makes us all stop and think about the important period of emerging adulthood and what unique value young people can contribute to American social, economic, and cultural institutions. The study also emphasizes the similarities between young people in Rhode Island who are making their way through their bachelor's degrees at a state college and a group of young people who are not employed and not in college, which makes me question how we define a successful adulthood. And if these two groups are similar in many ways, what opportunities are lost if we cannot help these emerging adults to find alternative pathways that leverage their strong social agency and recognize their high levels of social agency facilitators? The outstanding question that the study cannot address is whether or not YURI members are such highflyers to begin with, and if this is why they have the same social agency and social agency facilitators as RIC students; in other words, are they outliers or are they representative of many more opportunity youth in Rhode Island? It is valuable to know that the web-based surveys were taken right at the beginning of the YURI experience, which means the findings are not evidence of the impact of the YURI program.

6.7 Summary

While this study provides many possible directions for future research and new constructs related to the trajectory to adulthood, the primary unanswered question is whether or not social agency is related (and how strongly it is related) to positive pathways to adulthood. The study

uses existing literature and measurement tools from developmental psychology, positive youth development, political philosophy, and sociology to reframe the issues around the trajectory to adulthood for young people in Rhode Island, with specific attention to opportunity youth. At the same time, the study introduces new methods and frameworks to measure the concepts of social agency and social agency facilitators which are important in emerging adults' pathways. By suggesting implementable public policy changes and life-course interventions to benefit emerging adults in the state of Rhode Island, the research hopefully impacts on-the-ground changes for programs and services that directly affect marginalized young adults in Rhode Island.

I began this study with a commitment to engaged research and ensuring that the voices and ideas of emerging adults would be represented in the research process and outcomes. I have fulfilled this obligation to myself. The other goal I had with the research was to find ways that the information from this study would be available and accessible to the young people who participated in the study, to the larger community of opportunity youth in Rhode Island, to the program directors who are responsible for overseeing and delivering youth programming, and to the policy makers who allocate funding and create laws and legislation to support and sustain young people. Imagine the power of telling opportunity youth that they have similar strengths as their peers who are on their way to graduate college. While the study is not conclusive, there are many learnings and pieces of the story that are useful to the constituents involved in the pathways to a positive adulthood for all Rhode Islanders.

I came to this work with a deep appreciation and admiration of all emerging adults (I have two young adult daughters myself), but especially those young people who do not have the

same access to all the possible pathways to adulthood. And even with a history of working with opportunity youth and college students, I am still surprised by the findings that emerging adults in YURI have similar strength of social agency as RIC students. Perhaps it is possible that, with changes in individual characteristics, social conditions, or social agency facilitators, emerging adults could have just as easily ended up on one pathway or another—either persisting in a 4-year state college, or in the orientation session of a year-long program designed especially for young people who have not been able to go to college, stay in college, or get jobs that would allow them to be financially secure. I see this as a two prong opportunity: finding new and more pathways to adulthood for opportunity youth that leverages their strong social agency and high levels of social agency facilitators (who in the past may not have succeeded on a traditional college track) and providing different and more supportive access (and retention) points for opportunity youth who do choose the college path. I hope my study underscores the potential of all young people in Rhode Island to lead healthy lives, to achieve a positive well-being, and to contribute positively to our state.

APPENDIX A

WORKING DEFINITIONS OF CONCEPTS

Capability Approach - The capability approach is a normative theory that is used in a wide-range of fields and was popularized by Amartya Sen (1999, 2009) and Martha Nussbaum (2000). The capability approach begins with the premise that individuals must have the freedom to achieve well-being based on their capabilities and this well-being is a matter of what people are able to do and be.

Capabilities - Capabilities are foundational capacities of people and are required in order to do things and be things. Capabilities are not choices but must be present for opportunity and freedom to be possible. A capability therefore provides the chance for a person to make decisions about how they would like to lead one type of life or another.

Comm(unity) - Being a part of something and feeling like you belong to a group, something larger than yourself. Interacting with people whom you share some commonality (3/28/18 RIC Focus Group).

Emerging Adulthood - A life course period of people ages 18 - 25 years old, between adolescent and young adulthood where the cohort has a number of personal and life transitions involving education, school, family, and relationships. Arnett (2004) suggests that the period of emerging adulthood has five key characteristics—it is an age of instability, identity exploration, self-focus, feeling in-between, and possibilities.

Marginalized Youth - Young people who due to their sociodemographic characteristics and/or social conditions have historically been left out of mainstream systems of power and support (including housing and healthcare) which therefore poses additional risks in (and limits to) their positive pathways to adulthood.

Opportunity Youth – Opportunity Youth (sometimes also referred to as *out-of-school youth*, *at-risk youth*, or *disconnected youth*) are young people 16-24 years old who are not currently in college and are not in a career (not connected to schooling or the labor market). Therefore, they are without some of the important individual and institutional support structures (referred to as anchor institutions) that connect young people to society.

Positive or Successful Pathways/Trajectory to Adulthood - When young adults (1) accept responsibility for themselves, (2) make independent decisions, and (3) secure financial independence. In the study, I have identified two pathways including:

1. College readiness and persistence (more traditional pathway to adulthood)
2. Career preparedness

Social Agency – Social agency is a basic attribute that is shaped by socio-demographic characteristics (including age, gender, race & ethnicity, and SES), social conditions (including poverty, quality of housing, homelessness, educational attainment and quality, unemployment, neighborhood, and family history), AND additional opportunities, experiences, and people that facilitate social agency (social agency facilitators). Social agency is the ability to make choices about and take an active role in one's life path in order to improve future conditions, rather than solely being the product of one's circumstances. Someone with strong social agency has hope for the future, is empowered, has voice, and is able to act upon the changes they want to make.

Social Agency Barriers - The opportunities, experiences, and people which may prohibit emerging adults from actualizing their social agency. In the focus groups, participants discussed identity as one barrier to social agency.

Social Agency Facilitators - Social agency facilitators are the activities, opportunities, and people that may influence the strength of social agency and promote hope and vision, empowerment, voice, choice, and community. These appear to be more choice-driven based on people's own desires or the will/wishes of others and their choices may facilitate differences in the pathways to adulthood. All social agency facilitators can be categorized as either:

1. Individual & Personal Facilitators
2. Structural & Institutional Facilitators

RHODE ISLAND CITY AND TOWN INCOME AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Rhode Island City & Town Educational Attainment from ACS 2017

City/Town	Population 25 Years & Older	Percent High School Grad. or Higher	Percent Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Rhode Island	**729,261**	**87.3%**	**33.0%**
Barrington	11,100	96.7%	67.7%
Bristol	14,863	86.8%	38.4%
Burrillville	11,999	88.5%	26.5%
Central Falls	11,153	59.2%	8.0%
Charlestown	5,855	93.1%	37.6%
Coventry	25,090	91.8%	26.4%
Cranston	57,637	88.7%	31.4%
Cumberland	24,990	89.9%	37.7%
East Greenwich	9,001	96.2%	62.7%
East Providence	35,055	82.8%	26.7%
Exeter	4,811	90.8%	42.4%
Foster	3,574	94.0%	32.2%
Glocester	7,161	94.9%	33.0%
Hopkinton	6,028	94.9%	31.1%
Jamestown	4,132	98.0%	66.1%
Johnston	22,060	88.5%	22.4%
Lincoln	14,995	91.3%	36.8%
Little Compton	2,751	97.4%	53.1%
Middletown	11,372	92.3%	41.4%
Narragansett	9,925	96.6%	58.2%
New Shoreham	711	96.8%	44.9%
Newport	17,196	93.3%	53.5%
North Kingstown	18,476	95.6%	51.5%
North Providence	24,574	90.0%	30.3%
North Smithfield	9,063	91.3%	32.3%
Pawtucket	49,038	80.3%	19.4%
Portsmouth	12,538	93.0%	47.5%
Providence	107,106	77.8%	30.1%
Richmond	5,252	94.1%	38.8%
Scituate	7,728	94.0%	36.2%
Smithfield	14,472	92.2%	35.5%
South Kingstown	17,849	94.7%	52.3%
Tiverton	12,278	92.2%	32.3%
Warren	8,080	88.2%	33.5%
Warwick	61,134	91.8%	32.6%
West Greenwich	4,227	96.3%	43.3%
West Warwick	20,737	87.2%	22.0%
Westerly	16,537	90.4%	32.4%
Woonsocket	28,713	79.0%	15.3%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

RI City & Town Income from
American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
2013-2017

City/Town	Median Household Income[1]	Median Family Income[1]	Per Capita Income[2]
Rhode Island	**$61,043**	**$79,043**	**$33,315**
Barrington	$117,408	$139,591	$59,392
Bristol	$65,890	$85,982	$33,102
Burrillville	$71,055	$81,792	$31,678
Central Falls	$30,794	$33,139	$14,842
Charlestown	$72,648	$87,483	$37,262
Coventry	$68,633	$92,185	$34,608
Cranston	$64,282	$82,271	$31,607
Cumberland	$81,713	$97,905	$41,513
East Greenwich	$108,828	$146,234	$58,284
East Providence	$54,707	$70,178	$30,665
Exeter	$79,044	$107,500	$39,683
Foster	$81,036	$91,853	$37,818
Glocester	$91,503	$101,422	$36,132
Hopkinton	$85,863	$92,575	$39,552
Jamestown	$105,201	$113,239	$59,510
Johnston	$60,574	$86,488	$33,113
Lincoln	$69,404	$88,384	$39,059
Little Compton	$69,620	$89,766	$48,055
Middletown	$65,799	$81,628	$36,658
Narragansett	$69,332	$117,369	$44,894
New Shoreham	$76,174	$80,625	$44,400
Newport	$65,365	$93,564	$41,742
North Kingstown	$87,311	$105,954	$43,928
North Providence	$53,792	$76,543	$33,085
North Smithfield	$79,167	$101,708	$39,538
Pawtucket	$44,909	$51,875	$23,884
Portsmouth	$91,626	$110,101	$49,386
Providence	$40,366	$47,990	$24,052
Richmond	$98,234	$102,018	$37,244
Scituate	$83,728	$105,590	$44,660
Smithfield	$81,010	$98,065	$36,534
South Kingstown	$80,407	$105,292	$35,782
Tiverton	$75,716	$85,605	$40,680
Warren	$55,689	$77,278	$35,725
Warwick	$71,191	$87,369	$37,461
West Greenwich	$103,110	$108,836	$39,609
West Warwick	$51,563	$72,216	$29,236
Westerly	$63,507	$82,180	$37,358
Woonsocket	$38,340	$47,608	$22,747

Source: US Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

1: Median Income in the Past 12 Months (2017 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars)
2: Per Capita Personal Income in the Past 12 Months (2017 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars)

APPENDIX C

RIC TARGET AND STUDY POPULATION CALCULATIONS

HEADCOUNT (including part-time and full-time students)	Number	% of Total
Undergraduate +	6,688	86.1%
Graduate+	1,083	13.9%
TOTAL+	**7,771**	
FULL-TIME STATUS		
First-time, full-time freshman (degree-seeking and non-degree seeking)+	1,291	25.3%
Full-time, non-freshman (degree-seeking and non-degree seeking)+	3,817	74.7%
TOTAL+	**5,108**	
RESIDENCY		
In-State^	6,640	85.4%
MTP/NEBHE^	940	12.1%
Out-of-State^	191	2.5%
TOTAL^	**7,771**	
In-State, Full-Time, Non-Freshman^^	3,262	

*In some cases, the sum of the 'Male' and 'Female' columns will not equal the 'Total' due to students who do not identify with these gender categories.

**Change in reporting categories in 2009 resulted in the classification of many students as"Unknown" race/ethnicity.

*** Fall 2017 Data retrieved from http://www.ric.edu/admissions/Pages/RIC-Facts.aspx on 12/20/19

+ Data retrieved from: RIC Common Data Set 2018-2019

^Data retrieved from Rhode Island College Fact Book Highlights/Quick Facts, 2018-19

^^Calculated using non first-time, full-time students total (3,817) and applying in-state residency percentage (85.4%)

APPENDIX D

DATA ADVISORY GROUP MATERIALS

Year Up Providence - BE HEARD! Data Advisory Group from Class 26 CLC
(draft for discussion)

Goals of Advisory Group:
   ★ To obtain structured feedback on the BE HEARD! survey and focus group data (and presentation of data) in order to ensure that the data is being interpreted correctly before distributed to other people.
   ★ To provide Year Up Providence members with an opportunity to review data, ask questions about the data, and learn some data analysis skills.
   ★ To think about and make recommendations about how young adults could use the data and what format may be best for this important audience.
   ★ OTHER from YUP?

Proposed Activities - 3 monthly meetings of 1 hour each:
   1. Meeting 1 in April 2018 - Discuss possible formats of data for different audiences and review what types of data will be available from surveys and focus groups.
   2. Meeting 2 in May 2018 - Review data and preliminary analysis of data and provide recommendations for changes.
   3. Meeting 3 in June 2018 - Review final data with recommended revisions. Review communications/social media plan for distributing data.

Logistics
   ➔ Meetings will take place on Wednesday mornings at Year Up Providence offices
   ➔ Food and drinks will be provided for meeting participants
   ➔ Proposed Dates: April 25, May 23, June 27
   ➔ Need to decide how many young adults should be invited to participate (ideally groups should not be more than 8 people)?
   ➔ Need to decide meeting times?

APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP MATERIALS

<u>ORIGINAL FOCUS GROUP PROMPTS FOR YURI - FG1:</u>

1. What do you think of when you hear the word "social agency?" What images come to mind?

2. What do you think of when you hear the word "hope?"

3. What do you think of when you hear the word "power?"

4. What do you think of when you hear the word "voice?"

5. What do you think of when you hear the word "choice?"

6. How do you think that agency relates to the successful pathway to adulthood?

7. Here are the results from the survey that you and your peers completed back in September 2017.
   a. Is there anything that surprises you about the strength of/levels of social agency for your group of colleagues at Year Up Providence and at Rhode Island College?
   b. Is there anything that surprises you about the types of social agency facilitators that you identified and the relative importance of each of these facilitators? Do you think that there are other facilitators that were not addressed through the survey?

8. If you brought a drawing, diagram, or photo, can you please hold up your picture and describe how this picture represents youth agency or your own agency?

9. If you were able to make changes in laws and funding, what systematic action steps do you think should be taken to increase the social agency of young adults in Rhode Island.

<u>REVISED FOCUS GROUP PROMPTS FOR YURI - FG2:</u>
1. What do you consider are markers for a successful pathway to adulthood for yourself and how do you think we can best measure this?

2. IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS FOR YOUNG ADULTS TO HAVE A SUCCESSFUL PATHWAY TO ADULTHOOD - WHAT IS REQUIRED?
   a. What do you think of when you hear the word "hope?"
   b. What do you think of when you hear the word "power?"
   c. What do you think of when you hear the word "voice?"
   d. What do you think of when you hear the word "choice?"

3. If you brought a drawing, diagram, or photo, can you please hold up your picture/go over to the picture and describe how this picture represents social agency in general or your own social agency?

4. What were the most important experiences and opportunities that helped you to stay on a positive pathway to adulthood in your own life?

5. How do you think the social agency of Year Up Providence members and alumni may be the same or different from young adults who are enrolled full-time in Rhode Island College (or different from other young adults who had more traditional success in their pathways to adulthood)?

6. Have you or others you know encountered barriers to your social agency? How have you overcome these?

7. What differences do you think that race/ethnicity, class, and gender have on someone's social agency?

8. If you were able to make changes in laws and funding, what systematic action steps do you think should be taken to increase the social agency of young adults in Rhode Island?

FOCUS GROUP PROMPTS FOR RIC - FG1 and FG2:

1. What do you consider are markers for a successful pathway to adulthood for yourself and how do you think we can best measure this?

2. IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS FOR YOUNG ADULTS TO HAVE A SUCCESSFUL PATHWAY TO ADULTHOOD - WHAT IS REQUIRED?
   a. What do you think of when you hear the word "hope?"
   b. What do you think of when you hear the word "power?"
   c. What do you think of when you hear the word "voice?"
   d. What do you think of when you hear the word "choice?"
   e. Are there other characteristics that you think are essential?

3. What were the most important people, experiences, and opportunities that helped you to stay on a positive pathway to adulthood in your own life?

4. How do you think that Rhode Island College has contributed to your transition to adulthood?

5. What barriers have you encountered to achieving a positive transition to adulthood? How have you overcome or not overcome these barriers?

6. What differences do you think that race/ethnicity, class, and gender make on a person's ability to successfully transition to adulthood?

7. If you were able to make changes in laws and funding, what action steps do you think should be taken to help all young adults (regardless of race, class, and gender) have a successful transition to adulthood in Rhode Island?

FOCUS GROUP CODING DEFINITIONS

THEME	Subcode	RQs	Operational Definition
THEME 1 - SOCIAL AGENCY DEFINITION		**RQ1**	The meaning of social agency and how different emerging adults think about the word and its relationship to their own paths to adulthood. Most young adults in the focus groups and the co-researchers never heard of the word agency or social agency before our discussions.
1a.	Voice		Speaking up for yourself.
1b.	Hope and Vision ↔		Believing you can succeed. The drive to finish what you started. Being able to picture that there is something ahead and having direction(s) of where you are going.
1c.	Power/ Empower		Feeling like you can make your own decisions.
1d.	Choice ↔		Having the ability to identify something you want to do and then to do it.
1e.	Comm(unity)*		Being a part of something. Feeling like you belong.
TOTAL SUBCODES	**5**		
THEME 2 - IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL AGENCY FACILITATORS - INDIVIDUAL & PERSONAL FACILITATORS		**RQ2**	The people, opportunities, or experiences emerging adults identify that helped them achieve more successful pathways to adulthood. These are internal attributes, related to the emerging adult him, herself, or themselves as opposed to structural or institutional factors.
2a.	Motivation		The personal reason(s) that emerging adults want to have a positive trajectory to adulthood. Sometimes family is the primary motivation. Some emerging adults want to achieve for their parents in order to acknowledge and give back for what they have sacrificed, and other emerging adults may also want a more successful path to adulthood in order to make changes for their own families.
2b.	Happiness		Being satisfied and joyful in your life.

2c.	Professional Skills (e.g., study skills) *		Note-taking, homework, public speaking, analytical, critical thinking and problem solving, preparedness, time management, and decision-making.
2d.	Social and Emotional Skills ↔		Conflict management and resolution, being able to communicate needs, asking for help, perseverance, determination, goal orientation, self-awareness, self-discipline, and humility.
2e.	Perseverance/Determination ↔		Having the will to struggle through tough times.
2f.	Identity*		Knowing who you are and where you came from in relationship to others.
2g. and 3k.	Knowledge of Structural and Historical Inequities		Understanding that you are part of a system of inequalities that impacted your pathway to adulthood. Knowledge of the opportunity divide, intergenerational poverty, violence, gender gaps, racism, segregation, structural racism, microaggressions, affirmative action etc.
TOTAL SUBCODES	**7 or 8**		
THEME 3 - IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL AGENCY FACILITATORS - STRUCTURAL + INSTITUTIONAL FACILITATORS		**RQ2**	The people, opportunities, or experiences emerging adults identify that helped them to get to the place they are today and the things that they believed to be essential in order to achieve more successful pathways to adulthood.
3a.	Comm(unity) and Belonging *		Having shared hopes and dreams. Having shared points and people of reference and feeling that you belong. Feeling that you are part of a larger group/cohort and that you have a place in this group.
3b.	Social Networks		Having social and professional colleagues and people that you know that you can look up to, that you can seek advice from, and which can assist you in your growth and development.
3c.	Caring Adult/Ally (including mentors)		Having someone to provide advice, guidance, and support. Having another person believe in you, challenge you, and have high expectations of what you are capable of doing and being. Sometimes this person is referred to as a mentor.

3d.	Civic and Community Engagement and Activism		Being engaged in more selfless activities to improve communities and doing things for others.
3e.	Out of School Group Programs and Activities		Having activities, clubs, or other ways that young adults come together as an organized group with shared interests (including religious groups).
3f.	Work		Having work-related experience including paid work, internships, apprenticeships, and other job training.
3g.	Access to Spaces		Having an active, creative, and engaging space where emerging adults are encouraged to think, to challenge each other in healthy discourse, and to feel safe to use their voice to express themselves and their views. College campuses are one example of this type of space.
3h.	Experiencing Different Places and People		Travelling and studying in other places (outside of the United States) in order to experience the expansiveness of the world. Learning about differences.
3i.	Social Services and Supports		Having access to social services and other support systems including people to help navigate housing, education, food, family planning etc.
3j.	Health *		Having access to a full range of medical care and mental health care services, and healthy food.
TOTAL SUBCODES	**9 or 10**		
THEME 4- DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS AND IMPACT ON SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD		RQ3A/ 3B	The inherent (uncontrollable) factors that a young person has which impacts their pathways to adulthood (not necessarily by choice), but due to life circumstances.
4a.	Race + Ethnicity		The race and ethnicity of the emerging adult.
4b.	SES + CLASS - Parents Education		The emerging adult's parents' formal experience with higher education.
4c.	Sex and Gender		The sex and gender of the emerging adult.
Total Subcodes	**3**		

THEME 5 - SOCIAL AGENCY BARRIERS			The internal and external impediments that emerging adults have which may derail or deter a positive pathway to adulthood.
5a.	Stigma about Young Adults		Negativity about the millennial generation not being able to do anything.
5b.	Identity *		Being the first generation of their family born in the U.S. or entering the U.S. during their elementary or secondary school years.
5c.	Community*		Lack of community that had similar race and culture to their own inhibited their development of social agency.
5d.	Professional Skills *		The lack of study skills and organizational/administrative skills required to successfully manage higher education, or a career tracked job.
5e.	Access		Making greater access to educational and employment opportunities.
TOTAL SUBCODES	**5**		
THEME 6 - VIEWS OF ADULTHOOD		NON-RQ	How the emerging adults view and define adulthood and what the emerging adults believe you need to accomplish in order to be an adult.
6a.	New Marker - Moving Out		Being financially stable enough to live on your own, pay your own bills, and not be reliant of family for providing the basic life necessities.
6b.	New Marker - Happiness		Being generally satisfied and happy with what you have in your life.
6c.	New Marker - Stability		Developing and maintaining relationships and social networks. Feeling both emotionally and physically stable.
6d.	New Marker - Goals & Accomplishments		Being able to establish goals and ground rules for yourself and then to accomplish them.
6e.	New Marker - Assume Challenges and Risks		Being able to take on new and more responsibilities that the emerging adults may not have experienced before that may require taking personal and/or financial risks.
6f.	New Marker - Owning Assets		Acquiring and owning something of monetary value. Having the access to capital in order to buy a tangible good like a car, a house, a piece of A/V equipment, or something else.

6g.	New Marker - Health		Being able to physically and emotionally care for yourself (e.g., to make healthy decisions about sex)..
6h.	New Marker - Being Self-Sufficient		Being able to care for yourself and care for others without being reliant on your parents or friends. Being able to make your own decisions about both small and big things (e.g., setting up appointments).
6i.	Remove Old Marker - Getting Married		Getting married is not a marker for adulthood.
TOTAL SUBCODES	**9**		
THEME 7 - PUBLIC POLICY CHANGES		NON-RQ	Suggested changes in public policy that would improve the chances of emerging adults to have a more successful transition to adulthood.
7a.	Police Training		Better training of policy force in how to interact with young adults.
7b.	Education - Quality		The quality of the educational teaching and textbooks. The quality of physical resources including school buildings.
7c.	Education - Culture		Changing the school culture so that emerging adults are encouraged to succeed instead of feeling isolated from their peer groups.
7d.	Education - Financing		Changes in financial costs for college so it reduces educational costs.
7e.	Education - Improved Life Skills Training		More life-skills training.
7f.	Education + Work Readiness Training		Having preparation and training in skills that are important in the workplace.
7g.	Comm(unity)		More involvement in the community including more community mentors.
7h.	Health		Greater access to health care services, specifically mental health services.
7i.	Out of School Programming		Having additional programs available to K-12 students that provide more opportunities for exploration.

7j.	Leadership		Opportunities to learn and experience leadership.
TOTAL SUBCODES	**10**		

KEY

* = Denotes those subthemes (Professional Skills, Comm(unity), and Identity) that were discussed as both <u>facilitators</u> of and <u>barriers</u> to social agency.

⇄ , ↔, ↦, and ⇔ = Denotes when there are sub themes that have a relationship with each other.

Highlights in <mark>orange</mark> = Denotes those subthemes that were discussed by emerging adults in the focus groups in multiple ways: as both <u>facilitators</u> of social agency and as a place of <u>change in public policy</u>. In the case of ***Health***, focus group participants raised this issue as a new marker for adulthood as well.

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY VARIABLES AND NEW/MODIFIED SCALES

VARIABLES	DEFINITIONS
Dependent Variables	
DIMENSION 1 - HOPE/FUTURE ORIENTATION - Adult Mental Health Continuum - Short Form (MHC-SF)	A validated 14 item scale measuring well-being defined as the frequency with which respondents experienced each symptom of positive mental health and outcomes of the positive trajectory to adulthood over the past month. Using a 6-point Likert scale with 1 = never and 6 = everyday, the sum of the total items has a range of 0 - 70. The scale has 3 continuous subscales/clusters: (1) hedonic, emotional well-being, (2) eudemonic, social well-being, and (3) eudemonic, psychological well-being. For this study, the total score (*mhcsf*) and subscale/cluster 2 social well-being (*smb*) were calculated. Using the total scale, participants can be coded as "languishing" (low levels of well-being), "flourishing" (high levels of well-being), or "moderately mentally healthy" (Keyes, 2009). (continuous, positive)
DIMENSION 2 - EFFICACY/ EMPOWERMENT/CONTROL - Pearlin Mastery Index (PMI)	A validated 7 item scale that measures an individual's level of mastery which is defined as "the extent to which one regards one's life chances as being under one's own control in contrast to being fatalistically ruled" (Pearlin, L.I. & Schooler, C., 1978) . *pms* is the total of all 7 items using a 4-point Likert scale with 1 = strongly disagree and 4 = strongly agree. Scores can range from 7 - 28 with higher scores indicating higher levels of mastery. (continuous, positive)
DIMENSION 3 - VOICE/ENGAGEMENT - Socio-Political Control Scale for Youth (SPCS-Y)	A validated 17 item scale that measures empowerment as "a group-based, participatory development process through which marginalized or oppressed individuals or groups gain greater control over their lives and environment, acquire valued resources and rights, reach important life goals and reduce social marginalization" (Maton, 2008, p. 5). *spcstotal* is the total score of all 17 items using a 5-point Likert scale with 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. For this study the *spcstotal* had a range of 17 - 85 with higher scores indicating higher levels of socio-political control. (continuous, positive)
	Means are also taken for 2 continuous subscales: leadership competence (*lc*) and policy control (*pc*). The scale also includes 4 profile groups: high leadership competence and policy control (*highlcpc*), high leadership competence (*highlc*), high policy control (*highpc*), and low leadership competence and low policy control (*lowlcpc*). Each of the profile groups are coded with 0 = No, does not meet criteria, and 1 = Meets criteria. *hlcpc* includes a response group with participatory competence and psychological empowerment demonstrated by high scores (top quartile) on both dimensions of leadership competence and policy control. *hlc* respondents score higher on *lc* (top quartile), but lower on *pc* (bottom quartile) and generally may have leadership skills, but not necessarily socio-political control because of the absence of the belief that they can influence policy decisions. Those in *hpc* may be activists, but not initiators of action and usually have higher scores on *pc* (top quartile), but lower scores on *lc* (bottom quartile). *llcpc* refers to the group of respondents with scores in the bottom quartile for both *lc* and *pc* and are referred to as alienated, unengaged or simply disinterested in community issues. (discrete)

DIMENSION 4 - CHOICE/ADVOCACY (*PRIMARY*) - Community Leadership Scale (CL)	A validated 10 item scale to assess sense of agency also used to measure "competence for civic action" and "political voice" (Watts & Guessous, 2006). CL measures both the behavioral and psychological aspects of agency. The scale asks the respondent a hypothetical question about a perceived injustice and asks how confident the respondent felt that they would be able to carry out actions to address the injustice using a 5-point Likert scale with 1 = I definitely can't and 5 = I definitely can. A total score of the 10 items is generated (*clst*) and higher scores indicate a greater "sense of agency" (Duggins, 2011). Total scores are between 10 - 50. (continuous, positive)
Independent Variables	
Social Agency Facilitators - Youth Inventory of involvement (YII) (*PRIMARY*)	The original validated 30 item scale was designed to assess the extent that young people feel that they have a responsibility to others in society, particularly those who are marginalized or oppressed by asking about their involvement in a broad array of activities using a 5-point Likert scale with 0 = you never did this over the past year and 4 = you did this a lot over the past year. For this study, the scale was modified so the total score only includes 26 items of the original 30 items. Two additional items were specifically developed for this study and are not included in the total score nor the subscales. The total score (*totalyii*) ranged from 0 - 104 (continuous, positive). Mean subscales scores were computed for each of the 4 clusters of activities (political activities (*pa*), community/ neighborhood activities (*ca*), responding activities (*ra*), and helping activities (*ha*), each yielding scores that ranged from 0 – 4. (continuous, positive) Respondents are categorized into profile groups with 0 = No, does not meet criteria, and 1 = Meets criteria and labelled as *Activists*, *Responders*, *Helpers*, and *Uninvolved* depending on the mean scores of the clusters. *Activists* were highest (in the top quartile) on all 4 subscales. They were very involved in political activities, community activities, helping others, and responding to requests for help. The *Helpers* were not generally very involved in political activities (in the lowest quartile), but we're close to the activists in terms of their involvement in helping others from their school and community (in the top 50%). The *Responders* were relatively high (in the top 50%) in terms of their passive helping, but they were uninvolved in other kinds of activities (in the lowest quartile). The *Uninvolved* were in the lowest quartile in all the clusters (Pancer et al., 2007, pp. 748 - 750). (discrete)
Social Agency Facilitators - Literature-Based List	A 10 item list of literature-based social agency facilitators (opportunities and experiences) that respondents are asked to indicate which they have personally experienced over the past year including having adult and peer mentors, participating in organized youth programs, having a paid work experience, participating in a cultural or religious organization, and others. Items are counted separately with total scores of social agency facilitators (*saf*) ranging from 0-10 with higher scores indicating more social agency facilitators (continuous). Levels of/range of mentorship was calculated separately with a new variable (*mentor*) indicating on a scale of 0 = no and 1 = yes if a respondent indicated that they had all 4 types of mentors. The new variable *mentor2* measures if a respondent answered positively to 3 of the 4 mentor items with 0 = no and 1 = yes. The new variable *mentor3* measures if a respondent answered positively to 1 of the 4 mentor items with 0 = no and 1 = yes. (discrete, positive)

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RIC Adult Ally (RIC Only)	Have an adult ally at RIC who helps guide and support you with 0 = no and 1 = yes. (discrete, positive)
Other Social Agency Facilitators (open-ended)	Other opportunities or experiences that respondents had over the past year which encouraged hope, empowerment, self-advocacy, and positive choices about the future. (open-ended, discrete, uncertain sign)
(1) Mediator + Confounders (continuous, predictor - on causal pathway, used with ANOVAs), (2) Moderator (interaction terms) and Covariates (might affect DV)	
Age (*agenew2*) (Moderator)	18 years through 25 years old divided into 3 age categories with 1 = 18-19 years old, 2 = 20-22 years old, and 3 = 23-25 years old. (discrete, positive)
Gender (*gendernew*) (Moderator)	0 = male, 1 = female, and 2 = non-binary and/or gender fluid. (discrete, positive)
Race and Ethnicity (*racenew*) (Moderator)	1 = African-American and African Black, 2 = Asian-American and Asian Other Culture, 3 = Latinx/Hispanic, 4 = White/Non-Hispanic, European, 5 = Multiracial, and 6 = Other. (discrete, uncertain sign)
SES/Mother's Education (*sesmothernew*)	Highest level of education that a mother completed with 1 = high school or less, 2 = some college, 3 = college, and 4 = do not know and missing data. (discrete, positive)
Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)	A validated 12 item scale which measures ethnic identification (a positive and committed sense of belonging to a group and typically accounts for the relation between cultural identities and psychological health). 4 general aspects of ethnic identity are assessed including positive ethnic attitudes and sense of belonging, ethnic identity of achievement, ethnic behaviors or practices, and other group orientation which allows the measures to be used across ethnic groups. Ethnic identity is considered a significant predictor of development, especially for minority children. Two subscales are calculated: Ethnic Identity Search (*eis*) and Affirmation, Belonging, and Commitment (*abc*). The mean of 2 individual subscales and the mean of total items in the scale (*mem*) are all calculated. Higher mean scores indicate higher levels of ethnic identity achievement. 4 point scale with 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. (continuous, positive)
Familismo1 (open-ended)	Open-ended responses to "Who makes up your family?" which can include people who live with you or not live with you.
Familismo2	A validated 7 item scale measuring Latino cultural value defined as the importance of strong family loyalty, closeness, and getting along with and contributing to the well-being of the nuclear family, extended family, and kinship networks. Familism has been described as a protective mechanism for negative environmental influences among Hispanic populations (Gil, Wagner, and Vega, 2000). Harker (2001) found Latino families share important familial

	and communal mechanisms that protect and strengthen psychological well-being of their children. The values and attitudes of familism have been reported in the literature as common among Latino cultures (Vega, 1990). These values include the propensity to reside in close proximity to the family, and the use of family networks as sources of emotional + social support. 4-point Likert-type scale for 7 items (1 = strongly disagree and 4 = strongly agree). Total scores on the familismo scale (*fam*) can range from 7-28 with higher scores indicating a greater tie to the value of familismo. (continuous, positive)
Views of Adulthood - Reach Adulthood	"Do you feel that you have reached adulthood?" with 1 = yes, 2 = in some ways yes, and in some ways no, and 3 = no. (discrete, negative)
Views of Adulthood - Adult Markers - new	Five items listing most important markers for becoming an adult. Using a 5-point Likert scale with 1 = most important and 5 = least important, respondents rank each marker in order of importance. (continuous, uncertain sign)
Views of Adulthood - Other Markers (open-ended)	Open-ended question for respondents to describe other markers/achievements associated with "becoming an adult." (open-ended, discrete, uncertain sign)

Stata Coding - New Scale Variables

Question 4.1: Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)
    mem - mean of all 12 items
    eis - Ethnic Identity Search subscale score (mean of 5 items)
    abc - Affirmation, Belonging and Commitment subscale score (mean of 7 items)

Question 4.3: Familisimo (FAM)
    fam - total score of 7 items

Question 6.1: Adult Mental Health Continuum - Short Form (MHC-SF)
    mhcsf - total score of all 14 items
    swb - social well-being cluster/subscale score (total of 5 items)

Question 7.1: Pearlin Mastery Scale (PMS)
    pms - total score of all 7 items (with the negatively phrased questions reverse-coded)

Question 8.1: Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth (SPCS-Y)
    spcsmeantotal - sum of mean lc and mean pc
    spcstotal - total score of 17 items
    lc - leadership competence subscale mean of 8 items
    pc - policy control subscale mean of 9 items
    4 Profile Groups:
        A. **highlcpc (HIGH LEADERSHIP COMPETENCE AND POLICY CONTROL) - Participatory Competence + Psychological Empowerment Group** - Respondents with high scores on both dimensions of leadership competence and policy control. *Coded as top 25% quartile on both subscale LC and subscale PC.*
        B. **highlc (HIGH LEADERSHIP COMPETENCE)** - Respondents have leadership skills, but not necessarily sociopolitical control because of the absence of the belief that one can influence policy decisions. Respondents have higher scores on LC, but lower scores on PC. C*oded as top 25% quartile on LC, but lower 25% quartile on subscale PC.*
        C. **highpc (HIGH POLICY CONTROL)** - Respondents may be activists, but not initiators of action. Respondents have higher scores on PC, but lower scores on LC. *Coded as top 25% quartile on PC, but lower 25% quartile on subscale LC.*
        D. **lowlcpc (LOW LEADERSHIP COMPETENCE AND LOW POLICY CONTROL) - Alienated, Unengaged, or Simply Disinterested in Community Issues** - Respondents with lower scores on both LC and PC. *Coded as lower 25% quartile on both subscales LC and PC.*

Question 8.2: Community Leadership Scale (CLS)
    clst - total score of 10 items
    clsmean - mean score of 10 items
    clsmedian - median score of 10 items

Question 9.1: Youth Inventory of Involvement Scale (YII)
> **Subscale 1 - pa -** political activities cluster/subscale mean of 8 items
> **Subscale 2 - ca -** community/neighborhood activities cluster/subscale mean of 7 items
> **Subscale 3 - ra -** responding activities cluster/subscale mean of 3 items
> **Subscale 4 - ha -** helping activities cluster/subscale mean of 8 items
> **totalyii -** total score of 26 items
> <u>**4 Profile Groups:**</u> HIGHEST = Top quartile; HIGH = Top 50%, LOWEST = Bottom quartile
>> A. **Activists** = HIGHEST on PA, CA, RA, and HA based on mean scores (meaning in the top quartile in all 4 areas)
>> B. **Helpers** = LOWEST on PA (meaning in the lowest quartile), HIGH on CA and HA (meaning in the **top 50%**), based on mean scores
>> C. **Responders** = HIGH on RA (meaning in the top 50%), LOWEST (meaning in the lowest quartile) on PA, CA, and HA based on mean scores
>> D. **Uninvolved** = LOWEST on PA, CA, RA, and HA (meaning in the lowest quartile) based on mean scores

Question 9.2: Social Agency Facilitators (SAF)
> **saf -** total score of 10 items
> **mentor** - If answered positively to all 4 items 1, 2, 3, and 4
> **mentor2** - If answered positively to at least three of the following items 1, 2, 3, 4
> **mentor3** - If answered positively to at least one of the following items 1, 2, 3, 4

WEB-BASED SURVEY

QA.1

Q1.1 DO YOU WANT TO SHARE A LITTLE ABOUT THE EXPERIENCES AND OPPORTUNITIES THAT HELPED YOU TO HAVE HOPE FOR THE FUTURE, TO BE EMPOWERED TO ADVOCATE FOR YOURSELF + OTHERS, AND TO MAKE CHOICES FOR A POSITIVE PATHWAY TO ADULTHOOD?
Hello! Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in the BE HEARD! hope, power, voice, and choice study. My name is Perri Leviss and I am a graduate student from UMass Boston, and I am interested in learning more about how young people learn to advocate for themselves and for their communities. My hope is that collecting this information will give voice to the important stories of young people in Rhode Island and may bring greater attention to what young adults need in order to achieve their goals.

I would like to ask for your consent to collect information through this web-based survey. During this project, I will share general information from the survey with you and *Rhode Island College*, but any information that is shared will be confidential and will not be associated with your name or other personal information.   Your identity will be protected in the study and I will not use your name in any report or in any writings. I may share group data that looks at experiences of *Rhode Island College* students based on gender, age, race, and other factors, but no one will know your individual identity.

Your participation in the survey is completely voluntary which means that you can stop at any time without being penalized or losing any benefits. You may also skip questions in the survey that are confusing and/or you do not want to answer, and you can just move on to the next question. Your participation in the survey will involve minimal risk to you. As a small thank

you gift you will be entered into a lottery for a total of seven $100 Amazon gift cards that will be distributed to Rhode Island College students who participate in the survey. I appreciate your participation in this survey and the study. You have the right to ask questions about the survey before signing this electronic form, while the survey is conducted, or anytime during the research.

If you have any questions, you may contact me at perri.leviss001@umb.edu or by cell at 401-527-0998; the faculty advisor for this study is Professor Randy Albelda who can be reached at randy.albelda@umb.edu. Questions or concerns about your rights as a participant may be directed to a representative of the Institutional Research Board (IRB) at the University of Massachusetts Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The Institutional Research Board may be reached at the following address: IRB, Quinn Administration Building 2-080, University of Massachusetts, Boston, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125-3393. You can also contact the Board by telephone or email at (617) 287-5374 or at human.subjects@umb.edu.

Q1.2 The nature and purpose of this research has been satisfactorily explained to me, and I agree to become a participant in the *BE HEARD*! study. I understand that research records must be made available to UMass Boston's IRB and federal regulatory agencies for compliance auditing purposes, should they be requested. By signing the form, I am indicating that I am at least 18 years of age or older.

○ Name (1) _____

○ Date (2) _____

Q1.3 Do you wish to be entered into the lottery for the chance of winning one of the seven $100 Amazon gift cards, please provide your email address below:

○ email (1) _____

Q1.4 Are you 18 years of age or older?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Are you 18 years of age or older? = No

Q1.5 Did you graduate from a high school in Rhode Island or complete a GED program in Rhode Island?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q1.6 Are you presently enrolled as an undergraduate student at Rhode Island College?

○ Yes (4)

○ No (5)

Q1.6 What year are you at Rhode Island College?

○ Freshman (1st year student) (1)

○ Sophomore (2nd year student) (2)

○ Junior (3rd year student) (3)

○ Senior (4th year student) (4)

○ 5th year student or more (5)

Q1.7 Are you enrolled at Rhode Island College on a part-time or on a full-time basis?

○ Part-time (1)

○ Full-time (2)

Q1.8 How did you hear about this BE HEARD! Survey?

○ Professor (1)

○ Class/program (2)

○ RIC student/alumni (3)

○ the anchor (5)

○ Social Media (FaceBook, Twitter etc.) (7)

○ Other (4) _____

Q2.1 How old are you?

○ 18 years old (1)

○ 19 years old (2)

○ 20 years old (3)

○ 21 years old (4)

○ 22 years old (5)

○ 23 years old (6)

○ 24 years old (7)

○ 25 years old (8)

Q2.2 What sex were you assigned at birth?

○ Male (1)

○ Female (2)

Q2.3 How do you describe yourself?

○ Male (1)

○ Female (2)

○ Non-binary or gender fluid (3)

○ Choose not to answer (4)

Q2.4 How do you identify racially and/or ethnically?

○ African-American/Black (1)

○ African Black, Other Culture/Ethnicity/Nationality (2)

○ Asian-American (3)

○ Asian, Other Culture/Ethnicity/Nationality (4)

○ Middle Eastern (5)

○ Latina/o and/or Hispanic (6)

○ Native American (7)

○ White/Non-Hispanic (8)

○ European (9)

○ Multiracial (10)

○ Other (11) _____

Q2.5 What is the highest level of education that your mother completed?

○ Less than high school (1)

○ High school (2)

○ Some college (3)

○ College (4)

○ Do not know (5)

Q2.6 Are you currently serving in the military?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q2.7 Are you a veteran or did you serve in the military through the National Guard?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q2.8 What type of high school degree did you earn?

○ Traditional/college preparatory (1)

○ Vocational (2)

○ GED (3)

○ Other, please specify (4) _____

Q2.9 What is your current major at Rhode Island College?

○ Undeclared (1)

○ Accounting (2)

○ Africana Studies (3)

○ Anthropology (4)

○ Art (5)

○ Art Education (6)

○ Art History (7)

○ Biology (8)

○ Chemical Dependency/Addiction Studies (11)

○ Chemistry (12)

○ Communication (13)

○ Community Health and Wellness (14)

○ Computer Information Systems (15)

○ Computer Science (16)

○ Dance Performance (18)

○ Early Childhood Education (17)

○ Economics (19)

○ Elementary Education (20)

○ English/Creative Writing (21)

○ Environmental Studies (22)

○ Film Studies (24)

○ Finance (25)

○ Gender and Women's Studies (28)

○ Geography (29)

○ Global Studies (30)

○ Health Care Administration (31)

○ Health Education (32)

○ Health Sciences (33)

○ History (34)

○ Justice Studies (36)

○ Liberal Studies (38)

○ Management (39)

○ Marketing (40)

○ Mathematics (41)

○ Medical Imaging (42)

○ Modern Languages (including Francophone Studies, French, Latin American Studies, Portuguese, Spanish) (43)

○ Music (44)

○ Nuclear Medicine Technology (45)

○ Nursing (46)

○ Philosophy (47)

○ Physical Education (48)

○ Physics (49)

○ Political Science (50)

○ Psychology (54)

○ Public Administration (55)

○ Secondary Education (57)

○ Social Work (58)

○ Sociology (59)

○ Special Education (61)

○ Technology Education (62)

○ Theatre (63)

○ World Languages Education (65)

○ Youth Development (66)

Q2.10 What is your country of birth?

○ United States (1)

○ Other (2)

Q2.11 If you were born outside the U.S., please list your country of birth.

_____

Q2.12 If you were born outside the U.S., please indicate the number of years that you have lived in the U.S.

○ 0 - 5 years (1)

○ 6 - 10 years (2)

○ 11 - 15 years (3)

○ 16 or more years (4)

Q2.13 What is your immigration/worker status?

○ US Citizen (1)

○ Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR) (green card holder) (2)

○ Other (non-LPR) lawful immigration status (ex. DACA) (3)

○ Undocumented/no lawful status (4)

○ Unknown (5)

Q2.14 Are you currently working in addition to being a college student? *Working means paid work whether it is informal and self-employed (babysitting, elder care) or formal jobs where you report to an employer (business, restaurant).*

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q2.15 On average, how many hours of outside work do you complete per week?

○ Less than 5 hours (1)

○ 5 to 10 hours (2)

○ 11 to 15 hours (3)

○ 16 to 20 hours (4)

○ 21 to 30 hours (5)

○ 31 to 40 hours (6)

○ More than 40 hours (7)

Q2.16 Are you currently volunteering your time outside your hours being a college student? ***Volunteering means unpaid work whether it is informal caring for a family member or giving***

your time to a school or community organization including a local church or a RIC student club.

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

- -

Q2.17 On average, how many hours of volunteer work do you complete per week?

○ Less than 5 hours (1)

○ 5 to 10 hours (2)

○ 11 to 15 hours (3)

○ 16 to 20 hours (4)

○ 21 to 30 hours (5)

○ 31 to 40 hours (6)

○ More than 40 hours (7)

End of Block: Background Information (BI)

Start of Block: Background Information2 (BI2)

Q3.1 What is your marital/partner status?

○ Married (1)

○ Living with partner (2)

○ Single (3)

○ Divorced (4)

○ Widowed (5)

○ Separated (6)

Q3.2 Do you have any children (or dependents that you are their primary caretaker)?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q3.3 Are you a single parent (either not married or married, but separated?)

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q4.1 *Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree.*

	1 = strongly disagree (1)	2 = disagree (2)	3 = agree (3)	4 = strongly agree (4)
I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs. (1)	○	○	○	○
I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group. (2)	○	○	○	○
I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me. (3)	○	○	○	○
I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership. (4)	○	○	○	○
I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to. (5)	○	○	○	○
I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group. (6)	○	○	○	○
I understand pretty well what my ethnic group means to me. (7)	○	○	○	○

In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group. (8)	○	○	○	○
I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group. (9)	○	○	○	○
I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs. (10)	○	○	○	○
I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group. (11)	○	○	○	○
I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background. (12)	○	○	○	○

Q4.2 Who makes up your family (this may include people who live in your house as well as people who DO NOT live with you, but whom you speak to regularly such as a parent, husband/wife, child, sibling, aunt/uncle, cousin)?

_____

Q4.3 Now, think about these family members above when you respond to the following questions listed below. *On a scale of 1 to 4 with 1 = strongly disagree and 4 = strongly agree, please mark how much you agree or disagree with each of the statements as it relates to your own family members.*

	1 = strongly disagree (1)	2 = disagree (2)	3 = agree (3)	4 = strongly agree (4)
Family members respect one another. (1)	○	○	○	○
We share similar values and beliefs as a family. (2)	○	○	○	○
Things work out well for us as a family. (3)	○	○	○	○
We really do trust and confide in each other. (4)	○	○	○	○
Family members feel loyal to the family. (5)	○	○	○	○
We are proud of our family. (6)	○	○	○	○
We can express our feelings with our family. (7)	○	○	○	○

End of Block: Measures of Cultural, Racial, + Ethnic Identity (CREI)

Start of Block: Views of Adulthood (VOA)

Q5.1 Do you feel you have reached adulthood?

○ Yes (1)

○ In some ways yes, in some ways no (2)

○ No (3)

Q5.2 What do you think is most important for becoming an adult? Please rank each of the following in order of importance from 1 to 5 with 1 = most important and 5 = least important.

_____ Accepting responsibility for yourself (1)
_____ Becoming financially independent (2)
_____ Finishing education (4)
_____ Making independent decisions (5)
_____ Getting married (6)

Q5.3 What other markers/achievements (in addition to those listed above) do you associate with "becoming an adult?"

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q6.1 *Please answer the following questions about how you have been feeling during the past month. Choose an answer that best represents how often you have experienced or felt the following during the past month. During the past month, how often did you feel...*

	never (1)	once or twice (2)	about once a week (3)	about 2 or 3 times a week (4)	almost every day (5)	every day (6)
happy (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○
interested in life (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○
satisfied with life (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○
that you had something important to contribute to society (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○
that you belonged to a community (like a social group or your neighborhood) (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○
that our society is a good place or is becoming a better place, for all people (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○
that people are basically good (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○

that the way our society works makes sense to you (8)	○	○	○	○	○	○
that you like most parts of your personality (9)	○	○	○	○	○	○
good at managing responsibilities of your daily life (10)	○	○	○	○	○	○
that you had warm and trusting relationships with others (11)	○	○	○	○	○	○
that you had experience that challenged you to grow and become a better person (12)	○	○	○	○	○	○
confident to think or express your own ideas and opinions (13)	○	○	○	○	○	○

| that your life had a sense of direction or meaning to it (14) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q7.1 *In the following questions, please rate how much you agree or disagree with the following sentences with 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree. These do not refer to any specific time frame. Please answer the following questions about indicating the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement, using the following scale .*

	1 = strongly disagree (1)	2 = disagree (2)	3 = agree (3)	4 = strongly agree (4)
There is really no way I can solve some of the problems I have. (1)	○	○	○	○
Sometimes I feel that I am being pushed around in life. (2)	○	○	○	○
I have little control over the things that happen to me. (3)	○	○	○	○
I can do just about anything I really set my mind to do. (4)	○	○	○	○
I often feel helpless in dealing with the problems of life. (5)	○	○	○	○
What happens to me in the future mostly depends on me. (6)	○	○	○	○
There is little I can do to change many of the important things in my life. (7)	○	○	○	○
I look to god for strength, support, and guidance. (8)	○	○	○	○

End of Block: Measures of Hope (MOH)

Start of Block: Measures of Social Agency (MOSA)

Q8.1 *Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement. 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree , 5 = strongly agree.*

	1 = strongly disagree (1)	2 = somewhat disagree (2)	3 = neither agree nor disagree (3)	4 = somewhat agree (4)	5 = strongly agree (5)
I am often a leader in groups. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I would prefer to be a leader rather than a follower. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I would rather have a leadership role when I'm involved in a group project. (3)	○	○	○	○	○
I can usually organize people to get things done. (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Other people usually follow my ideas. (5)	○	○	○	○	○
I find it very easy to talk in front of a group. (6)	○	○	○	○	○
I like to work on solving a problem myself rather than wait and see if someone else will deal with it. (7)	○	○	○	○	○

I like trying new things that are challenging to me. (8)	○	○	○	○	○
I enjoy participation because I want to have as much say in my community or school/progra m as possible. (9)	○	○	○	○	○
Young adults like me can really understand what's going on with my community or school/progra m. (10)	○	○	○	○	○
I feel like I have a pretty good understanding of the important issues which confront my community or school/progra m. (11)	○	○	○	○	○

Young adults like me have the ability to participate effectively in community or school activities and decision making. (12)	○	○	○	○	○
My opinion is important because it could someday make a difference in my community or school/program. (13)	○	○	○	○	○
There are plenty of ways for young adults like me to have a say in what our community or school/program does. (14)	○	○	○	○	○
It is important to me that I actively participate in local issues that impact young adults. (15)	○	○	○	○	○

| My community or school/program leaders would listen to me. (16) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Many local activities are important to participate in. (17) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

Q8.2 If you know about a problem in your community that you want to do something about it (for example, young people are not getting a quality education or there was lead discovered in your drinking water), how well do you think you would be able to do each of the following according to the following scale from 1 to 5, where "1" is I definitely can't and "5" is I definitely can.

	1 = I definitely can't (1)	2 = I probably can't (2)	3 = Maybe (3)	4 = I probably can (4)	5 = I definitely can (5)
Create a plan to address the problem. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Get other people to care about the problem. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Organize and run a meeting. (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Express your views in front of a group of your PEERS (meaning classmates and/or friends). (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Express your views in front of a group of PEOPLE. (5)	○	○	○	○	○
Identify people or groups who could help you with the problem. (6)	○	○	○	○	○
Write an opinion to a local or school newspaper. (7)	○	○	○	○	○
Contact someone you don't know to get them involved. (8)	○	○	○	○	○

Contact an authority figure about the problem - for example an elected official or the principal. (9)	○	○	○	○	○
Organize a protest or other event. (10)	○	○	○	○	○

End of Block: Measures of Social Agency (MOSA)

Start of Block: Measures of Social Agency Facilitators and Opportunity Structures (MOSAF)

Q9.1 *For each of these activities, please use the following scale to indicate whether, in the last year, 0 = you never did this, 1 = you did this once or twice, 2 = you did this a few times, 3 = you did this a fair bit, 4 = you did this a lot.*

	0 = you never did this over the past year (1)	1 = you did this once or twice over the past year (2)	2 = you did this a few times over the past year (3)	3 = you did this a fair bit over the past year (4)	4 = you did this a lot over the past year (5)
Visited or helped out people who were sick. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Took care of other families' children (on an unpaid basis). (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Participated in a church-connected group. (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Participated in or helped a charity organization. (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Participated in an ethnic club or organization. (5)	○	○	○	○	○
Participated in a political party, club or organization. (6)	○	○	○	○	○
Helped with a fund-raising project. (7)	○	○	○	○	○

Helped organize neighborhood or community events (including carnivals, potluck dinners, etc.). (8)	○	○	○	○	○
Helped prepare and make verbal and written presentations to organizations, agencies, conferences, or politicians. (9)	○	○	○	○	○
Did things to help improve your neighborhood (example - helped clean up local playground). (10)	○	○	○	○	○
Gave help (including money, food, clothing, rides, etc.) to friends or classmates who needed it. (11)	○	○	○	○	○

Served as a member of an organizing committee or board for a school club or organization. (12)	○	○	○	○	○
Wrote a letter to a school or community newspaper or publication. (13)	○	○	○	○	○
Signed a petition. (14)	○	○	○	○	○
Attended a demonstration. (15)	○	○	○	○	○
Collected signatures for a petition drive. (16)	○	○	○	○	○
Contacted a public official by phone or mail to tell him/her how you felt about a particular issue. (17)	○	○	○	○	○
Joined in a protest march, meeting or demonstration. (18)	○	○	○	○	○

Got information about community activities from a local community information center. (19)	○	○	○	○	○
Volunteered at a school event or function. (20)	○	○	○	○	○
Helped people who were new to your country. (21)	○	○	○	○	○
Gave money to a cause. (22)	○	○	○	○	○
Worked on a political campaign. (23)	○	○	○	○	○
Ran for a position in student government. (24)	○	○	○	○	○
Participated in a discussion about a social or political issue. (25)	○	○	○	○	○
Volunteered with a community service organization. (26)	○	○	○	○	○

Participated in a RIC public forum (ex. panel, workshop). (27)	○	○	○	○	○
Attended a RIC sponsored networking event. (28)	○	○	○	○	○

Q9.2 *Which of the following have you personally experienced over the past year? You can choose multiple answers.*

☐   a positive, consistent, and meaningful relationship with a RIC Faculty/Staff (1)

☐   a positive, consistent, and meaningful relationship with an adult (outside of RIC) (2)

☐   a positive, consistent, and meaningful relationship with your RIC colleagues and classmates (3)

☐   a positive, consistent, and meaningful relationship with your friends and peers (outside of RIC) (4)

☐   participated in organized programs with other young adults (including sports) (5)

☐   a paid work experience, or a internship/apprenticeship (6)

☐   an intense passion, skill, or hobby that you worked on (examples include art, music, sports, etc.) (7)

☐   volunteered with a community service organization (8)

☐   participated in a cultural or religious organization (9)

☐   participated in a political party or organization (10)

Q9.3 *Please describe other opportunities or experiences that you had over the past year (in addition to the list above) which you believe helped you to have hope, to be empowered, to advocate for yourself + others, and to make positive choices for your future?*

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q9.4 Do you have an adult ally at RIC who helps guide and support you (this could be your advisor, a counselor, and/or a faculty or staff member)?

○ Yes (6) _____

○ No (7) _____

Q10.A.1

Q10.1 Thank you for your participation in the *BE HEARD!* survey. I really appreciate you taking the time to complete the survey. Please answer the following questions about participating in focus groups and receiving information from the study. I am looking forward to sharing the survey data with you and *Rhode Island College*. Thanks again.

Best Wishes,
Perri Leviss

Q10.2 Are you interested in receiving updates about the *BE HEARD!* study?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q10.3 If yes, please enter your email address:

_____

Q10.4 Are you interested in being invited to join the *BE HEARD!* Facebook group where postings will include project updates, sharing of data, and an opportunity to ask questions about the study?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q10.5 If yes, please enter your email address:

_____

End of Block: Concluding Remarks and Thanks

Start of Block: Focus groups

Q11.1 Would you be interested in participating in a focus group on the RIC campus to discuss issues surrounding the hope, power, voice, and choice of young people in Rhode Island? The focus group will happen during March 2018 and will last for 90 minutes where participants will have a chance to review data from this survey and will also discuss their own experiences. Focus

group participants will receive a $25 Amazon gift card that will be distributed at the focus group session.

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q11.2 If yes, please enter your contact information below in order to sign up as "interested" in the focus group. This is not a final commitment and participation in the focus group is voluntary. A separate email will be sent to you confirming your participation in the focus group and providing you with logistical information. This contact information will be stored in a secure file separate from your answers to the survey.

first name (1) _____

○ last name (2) _____

○ email address (3) _____

End of Block: Focus groups

APPENDIX I

REGRESSIONS USING OTHER SOCIAL AGENCY VARIABLES FOR RELIABILITY
TESTING

POOLED TOTAL
. regress mhcsf age2 age3 sexnew rac2 rac3 rac4 rac5 ses2 ses3 ses4 YUP totalyii

```
     Source |    SS       df     MS            Number of obs =    139
------------+------------------------------      F( 12,  126) =   2.42
      Model | 3687.41041   12  307.284201        Prob > F     = 0.0075
   Residual | 16021.9961  126  127.158699        R-squared    = 0.1871
------------+------------------------------      Adj R-squared = 0.1097
      Total | 19709.4065  138  142.821786        Root MSE     = 11.276
```

```
--------------------------------------------------------------------------
      mhcsf |    Coef.   Std. Err.    t    P>|t|   [95% Conf. Interval]
------------+-------------------------------------------------------------
       age2 |  3.705724  2.621364   1.41  0.160  -1.481879   8.893327
       age3 |  6.501757  2.998293   2.17  0.032   .5682232   12.43529
     sexnew | -4.757499  2.090776  -2.28  0.025  -8.895084   -.619915
       rac2 | -9.607736  5.913531  -1.62  0.107  -21.31044   2.094967
       rac3 |  2.978938  3.234618   0.92  0.359  -3.422276   9.380153
       rac4 |  5.617155  3.541618   1.59  0.115  -1.391603   12.62591
       rac5 |  4.360962  4.211812   1.04  0.302   -3.97409   12.69601
       ses2 |  3.211557  2.351188   1.37  0.174  -1.441375   7.864489
       ses3 |   2.91705  2.657294   1.10  0.274  -2.341657   8.175757
       ses4 |  5.651587  6.185524   0.91  0.363  -6.589383   17.89256
        YUP |  1.979079  2.616969   0.76  0.451  -3.199826   7.157985
    totalyii |  .1793908  .0526146   3.41  0.001   .0752681   .2835135
      _cons |  34.28722  4.401445   7.79  0.000   25.57689   42.99755
--------------------------------------------------------------------------
```

. regress pms age2 age3 sexnew rac2 rac3 rac4 rac5 ses2 ses3 ses4 YUP totalyii

```
     Source |    SS       df     MS            Number of obs =    136
------------+------------------------------      F( 12,  123) =   1.14
      Model | 160.279279   12  13.3566066        Prob > F     = 0.3382
   Residual | 1447.25013  123  11.7662612        R-squared    = 0.0997
------------+------------------------------      Adj R-squared = 0.0119
      Total | 1607.52941  135  11.9076253        Root MSE     = 3.4302
```

```
--------------------------------------------------------------------------
        pms |    Coef.   Std. Err.    t    P>|t|   [95% Conf. Interval]
------------+-------------------------------------------------------------
       age2 |   .961293  .8005614   1.20  0.232  -.6233692   2.545955
       age3 |  1.470027  .9121987   1.61  0.110  -.3356147   3.275668
     sexnew | -.6501921  .6418349  -1.01  0.313  -1.920665   .6202808
       rac2 | -2.115825  1.831836  -1.16  0.250  -5.741832   1.510182
       rac3 |   .518382  1.039909   0.50  0.619  -1.540055   2.576819
       rac4 |  .8580537  1.109365   0.77  0.441  -1.337866   3.053973
```

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```
     rac5 |  -.6471022   1.309853   -0.49   0.622   -3.239876   1.945671
     ses2 |   .7308973   .7308383    1.00   0.319   -.7157524   2.177547
     ses3 |  -.0070394   .8167064   -0.01   0.993    -1.62366   1.609581
     ses4 |   1.828057   1.885347    0.97   0.334   -1.903872   5.559985
      YUP |   1.160708   .8118058    1.43   0.155   -.4462121   2.767628
  totalyii |  -.0080292   .0162249   -0.49   0.622   -.0401454    .024087
     _cons |   20.10723   1.395877   14.40   0.000    17.34418   22.87029
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------
```

. regress spcstotal age2 age3 sexnew rac2 rac3 rac4 rac5 ses2 ses3 ses4 YUP totalyii

```
      Source |      SS       df       MS              Number of obs =     139
-------------+------------------------------           F( 12,  126) =    2.51
       Model |  2546.99322    12  212.249435           Prob > F      =  0.0054
    Residual |  10648.6758   126  84.5133004           R-squared     =  0.1930
-------------+------------------------------           Adj R-squared =  0.1162
       Total |  13195.6691   138  95.6207903           Root MSE      =  9.1931
```

```
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------
   spcstotal |    Coef.   Std. Err.     t    P>|t|    [95% Conf. Interval]
-------------+---------------------------------------------------------------
        age2 |   2.619556   2.137061    1.23   0.223   -1.609625   6.848737
        age3 |   5.144024   2.444351    2.10   0.037    .3067254   9.981323
      sexnew |  -.6603005     1.7045   -0.39   0.699   -4.033456   2.712855
        rac2 |   1.313942   4.820991    0.27   0.786   -8.226658   10.85454
        rac3 |   5.709832   2.637015    2.17   0.032    .4912577   10.92841
        rac4 |   4.668503   2.887295    1.62   0.108   -1.045369   10.38238
        rac5 |   4.323414   3.433669    1.26   0.210   -2.471717   11.11854
        ses2 |   1.749295     1.9168    0.91   0.363   -2.043997   5.542586
        ses3 |    .063461   2.166353    0.03   0.977   -4.223687   4.350609
        ses4 |  -6.067549   5.042733   -1.20   0.231   -16.04697   3.911872
         YUP |   1.251102   2.133478    0.59   0.559   -2.970988   5.473192
    totalyii |   .1491272   .0428939    3.48   0.001    .0642414    .234013
       _cons |    52.0312   3.588267   14.50   0.000    44.93012   59.13227
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------
```

BY PROGRAM/SAMPLE
. regress mhcsf age2 age3 sexnew rac2 rac3 rac4 rac5 ses2 ses3 ses4 totalyii if program=="YUP"

```
      Source |      SS       df       MS              Number of obs =      47
-------------+------------------------------           F( 11,   35) =    2.87
       Model |  3165.54814    11  287.777103           Prob > F      =  0.0086
    Residual |  3509.41995    35  100.269141           R-squared     =  0.4742
-------------+------------------------------           Adj R-squared =  0.3090
       Total |  6674.96809    46  145.108002           Root MSE      =  10.013
```

```
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------
       mhcsf |    Coef.   Std. Err.     t    P>|t|    [95% Conf. Interval]
-------------+---------------------------------------------------------------
        age2 |  -2.876046   4.373831   -0.66   0.515    -11.7554   6.003303
        age3 |  -4.896097   5.137656   -0.95   0.347   -15.32609   5.533899
      sexnew |  -7.340588   3.235195   -2.27   0.030   -13.90838  -.7727928
        rac2 |  -14.45879   8.084843   -1.79   0.082    -30.8719   1.954312
        rac3 |   2.526389   4.002219    0.63   0.532   -5.598548   10.65133
```

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```
      rac4 |   23.06918   10.82809    2.13   0.040    1.086982   45.05138
      rac5 |  -2.224439   7.607478   -0.29   0.772   -17.66844   13.21956
      ses2 |   11.99784   3.490787    3.44   0.002    4.911168   19.08452
      ses3 |   15.62928   5.801414    2.69   0.011    3.851787   27.40678
      ses4 |   20.66702   13.26377    1.56   0.128   -6.259857    47.5939
   totalyii |    .197387   .0731598    2.70   0.011    .0488647   .3459094
      _cons |   38.10877   6.353334    6.00   0.000    25.21082   51.00672
------------------------------------------------------------------------------
. regress mhcsf age2 age3 sexnew rac2 rac3 rac4 rac5 ses2 ses3 ses4 totalyii if program=="RIC"

      Source |       SS       df       MS              Number of obs =      92
-------------+------------------------------           F( 11,   80) =    1.61
       Model |  2339.56176    11  212.687433           Prob > F      = 0.1129
    Residual |  10594.5578    80  132.431973           R-squared     = 0.1809
-------------+------------------------------           Adj R-squared = 0.0683
       Total |  12934.1196    91  142.133182           Root MSE      = 11.508

------------------------------------------------------------------------------
      mhcsf |    Coef.   Std. Err.     t    P>|t|    [95% Conf. Interval]
-------------+----------------------------------------------------------------
      age2 |   5.880703   3.303311    1.78   0.079   -.6930951    12.4545
      age3 |   10.56717    3.88628    2.72   0.008    2.833221   18.30111
    sexnew |  -2.411295    2.70944   -0.89   0.376   -7.803253   2.980664
      rac2 |  -7.445036    9.46581   -0.79   0.434    -26.2826   11.39253
      rac3 |   3.044711    5.12179    0.59   0.554   -7.147977    13.2374
      rac4 |   6.062781   4.685495    1.29   0.199    -3.26165   15.38721
      rac5 |   4.385932   5.618003    0.78   0.437   -6.794251   15.56611
      ses2 |  -.9472711   3.174164   -0.30   0.766   -7.264059   5.369516
      ses3 |   .4736548   3.091644    0.15   0.879   -5.678914   6.626223
      ses4 |   3.522509   7.333739    0.48   0.632    -11.0721   18.11711
   totalyii |   .1865509   .0765312    2.44   0.017    .034249   .3388529
      _cons |   31.99449    5.78473    5.53   0.000    20.48251   43.50647
------------------------------------------------------------------------------
. regress pms age2 age3 sexnew rac2 rac3 rac4 rac5 ses2 ses3 ses4 totalyii if program=="YUP"

      Source |       SS       df       MS              Number of obs =      44
-------------+------------------------------           F( 11,   32) =    0.91
       Model |  164.126535    11  14.9205941           Prob > F      = 0.5456
    Residual |  527.032556    32  16.4697674           R-squared     = 0.2375
-------------+------------------------------           Adj R-squared = -0.0247
       Total |  691.159091    43  16.0734672           Root MSE      = 4.0583

------------------------------------------------------------------------------
      pms |    Coef.   Std. Err.     t    P>|t|    [95% Conf. Interval]
-------------+----------------------------------------------------------------
      age2 |  -.3612245   1.813971   -0.20   0.843   -4.056163   3.333714
      age3 |  -1.860783   2.092419   -0.89   0.380   -6.122901   2.401336
    sexnew |  -.8491953   1.369793   -0.62   0.540   -3.639372   1.940981
      rac2 |  -5.540677   3.348607   -1.65   0.108   -12.36157   1.280214
      rac3 |  -.8968866   1.825661   -0.49   0.627   -4.615637   2.821864
      rac4 |   2.707117   4.619612    0.59   0.562   -6.702724   12.11696
      rac5 |  -4.355945   3.232702   -1.35   0.187   -10.94074   2.228853
      ses2 |   2.350777   1.562945    1.50   0.142   -.8328373    5.53439
```

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```
      ses3 |   3.009562   2.474523    1.22   0.233   -2.030876      8.05
      ses4 |   9.194049   5.473694    1.68   0.103    -1.9555    20.3436
    totalyii | -.0178485   .0318395   -0.56   0.579   -.0827034   .0470064
      _cons |    23.3502    3.00184    7.78   0.000    17.23565   29.46475
------------------------------------------------------------------------------
```

. regress pms age2 age3 sexnew rac2 rac3 rac4 rac5 ses2 ses3 ses4 totalyii if program=="RIC"

```
      Source |       SS       df       MS              Number of obs =      92
-------------+------------------------------           F( 11,    80) =    1.03
       Model |  108.553396    11  9.86849056           Prob > F      =  0.4323
    Residual |  769.913995    80  9.62392494           R-squared     =  0.1236
-------------+------------------------------           Adj R-squared =  0.0031
       Total |  878.467391    91  9.65348782           Root MSE      =  3.1022
```

```
------------------------------------------------------------------------------
         pms |    Coef.   Std. Err.     t    P>|t|    [95% Conf. Interval]
-------------+----------------------------------------------------------------
        age2 |    1.18174   .8904901    1.33   0.188   -.5903921   2.953872
        age3 |   2.451709   1.047644    2.34   0.022    .3668309   4.536587
      sexnew | -.1486578   .7303975   -0.20   0.839   -1.602195    1.30488
        rac2 |    .122555   2.551746    0.05   0.962   -4.955582   5.200691
        rac3 |   1.907555   1.380707    1.38   0.171   -.8401396   4.655249
        rac4 |   2.145828   1.263092    1.70   0.093   -.3678063   4.659462
        rac5 |   .6893391   1.514473    0.46   0.650   -2.324559   3.703237
        ses2 |   .1331158   .8556754    0.16   0.877   -1.569733   1.835964
        ses3 | -.4632829   .8334302   -0.56   0.580   -2.121862   1.195296
        ses4 |   .6559052   1.976993    0.33   0.741   -3.278437   4.590247
    totalyii | -.0036782   .0206309   -0.18   0.859    -.044735   .0373786
      _cons |   18.41348   1.559419   11.81   0.000    15.31014   21.51683
------------------------------------------------------------------------------
```
. regress spcstotal age2 age3 sexnew rac2 rac3 rac4 rac5 ses2 ses3 ses4 totalyii if program=="YUP"

```
      Source |       SS       df       MS              Number of obs =      47
-------------+------------------------------           F( 11,    35) =    2.00
       Model |  1803.98003    11  163.998184          Prob > F      =  0.0595
    Residual |  2874.95614    35  82.141604           R-squared     =  0.3856
-------------+------------------------------           Adj R-squared =  0.1924
       Total |  4678.93617    46  101.716004          Root MSE      =  9.0632
```

```
------------------------------------------------------------------------------
    spcstotal |    Coef.   Std. Err.     t    P>|t|    [95% Conf. Interval]
-------------+----------------------------------------------------------------
        age2 |   8.093606   3.958767    2.04   0.048    .0568813   16.13033
        age3 |   8.097862   4.650107    1.74   0.090   -1.342357   17.53808
      sexnew | -3.70503   2.928185   -1.27   0.214   -9.649561     2.2395
        rac2 | -10.41644   7.317615   -1.42   0.163   -25.27199    4.43911
        rac3 |   7.018031    3.62242    1.94   0.061    -.335873   14.37193
        rac4 |   11.01567   9.800539    1.12   0.269   -8.880486   30.91182
        rac5 |   .5058898    6.88555    0.07   0.942   -13.47252    14.4843
        ses2 |   4.900783   3.159521    1.55   0.130   -1.513386   11.31495
        ses3 | -.5329462   5.250876   -0.10   0.920   -11.19279    10.1269
        ses4 |    16.2196   12.00507    1.35   0.185   -8.151993    40.5912
```

```
    totalyii |  .1545727   .0662172    2.33   0.025    .0201447    .2890007
       _cons |  48.86239   5.750421    8.50   0.000    37.18842    60.53637
------------------------------------------------------------------------------
. regress spcstotal age2 age3 sexnew rac2 rac3 rac4 rac5 ses2 ses3 ses4 totalyii if program=="YUP"

      Source |       SS       df       MS              Number of obs =      47
-------------+------------------------------           F( 11,    35) =    2.00
       Model |  1803.98003    11  163.998184           Prob > F      =  0.0595
    Residual |  2874.95614    35  82.141604            R-squared     =  0.3856
-------------+------------------------------           Adj R-squared =  0.1924
       Total |  4678.93617    46  101.716004           Root MSE      =  9.0632


------------------------------------------------------------------------------
    spcstotal |    Coef.   Std. Err.     t    P>|t|    [95% Conf. Interval]
-------------+----------------------------------------------------------------
        age2 |  8.093606   3.958767    2.04   0.048    .0568813    16.13033
        age3 |  8.097862   4.650107    1.74   0.090   -1.342357    17.53808
      sexnew |  -3.70503   2.928185   -1.27   0.214   -9.649561      2.2395
        rac2 |  -10.41644  7.317615   -1.42   0.163   -25.27199     4.43911
        rac3 |  7.018031    3.62242    1.94   0.061    -.335873    14.37193
        rac4 |  11.01567   9.800539    1.12   0.269   -8.880486    30.91182
        rac5 |  .5058898    6.88555    0.07   0.942   -13.47252     14.4843
        ses2 |  4.900783   3.159521    1.55   0.130   -1.513386    11.31495
        ses3 |  -.5329462  5.250876   -0.10   0.920   -11.19279     10.1269
        ses4 |   16.2196   12.00507    1.35   0.185   -8.151993     40.5912
     totalyii |  .1545727   .0662172    2.33   0.025    .0201447    .2890007
       _cons |  48.86239   5.750421    8.50   0.000    37.18842    60.53637
------------------------------------------------------------------------------
. regress spcstotal age2 age3 sexnew rac2 rac3 rac4 rac5 ses2 ses3 ses4 totalyii if program=="RIC"

      Source |       SS       df       MS              Number of obs =      92
-------------+------------------------------           F( 11,    80) =    1.82
       Model |  1655.17914    11  150.470831           Prob > F      =  0.0639
    Residual |   6612.1252    80  82.651565            R-squared     =  0.2002
-------------+------------------------------           Adj R-squared =  0.0902
       Total |  8267.30435    91  90.8494983           Root MSE      =  9.0913


------------------------------------------------------------------------------
    spcstotal |    Coef.   Std. Err.     t    P>|t|    [95% Conf. Interval]
-------------+----------------------------------------------------------------
        age2 |  -.4739026  2.609628   -0.18   0.856   -5.667227    4.719422
        age3 |  3.116535   3.070176    1.02   0.313   -2.993309    9.226379
      sexnew |  .8522619   2.140468    0.40   0.692   -3.407405    5.111929
        rac2 |  7.666777   7.478024    1.03   0.308   -7.214966    22.54852
        rac3 |  4.350652   4.046233    1.08   0.286   -3.701609    12.40291
        rac4 |  5.075099   3.701558    1.37   0.174   -2.291236    12.44143
        rac5 |  6.347945   4.438243    1.43   0.157   -2.484441    15.18033
        ses2 |  .6817513   2.507601    0.27   0.786   -4.308534    5.672037
        ses3 |  -.4607756   2.44241   -0.19   0.851   -5.321327    4.399776
        ses4 |  -11.03567  5.793681   -1.90   0.060   -22.56547    .4941201
     totalyii |  .1493533   .0604599    2.47   0.016    .0290342    .2696724
       _cons |  53.55622   4.569958   11.72   0.000    44.46171    62.65072
------------------------------------------------------------------------------
```

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COMPARISON OF YEAR UP RI STUDY SAMPLE TO STUDY POPULATION BASED ON SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Variable	Study Population 1 (Year Up RI, using mean of pooled sample of Class 27, 28, 29)	Year Up RI Sample (Class 26)
N	*255*	*59*
AVERAGE AGE	21	21.2
CLASS/SES		
Percent Low Income*	71.8%	
Percent whose mother's highest levels of education was either some college, completed high school, or less than high school		63.3%
RACE		
Black of African American	10.6%	20.3%
Asian	14.9%	6.8%
Hispanic or Latino	61.2%	62.7%
White	6.3%	3.4%
Other/Unknown	3.2%	3.4%
Multiracial	3.9%	3.4%
SEX/GENDER		
Male	53.3%	49.1%
Female	46.7%	50.9%

Note. All data included in the column "Study Population 1" was provided by Year Up RI through their Salesforce data system and was collected as part of Year Up member intake.

* = Figure based on self-reported household income and household size.

APPENDIX K

REGRESSIONS USING OTHER SOCIAL AGENCY FACILITATOR VARIABLES FOR RELIABILITY TESTING

POOLED TOTAL

. regress saf age2 age3 sexnew rac2 rac3 rac4 rac5 ses2 ses3 ses4 YUP

Source	SS	df	MS		
Model	35.2730214	11	3.20663831		
Residual	528.566395	125	4.22853116		
Total	563.839416	136	4.14587806		

Number of obs = 137
F(11, 125) = 0.76
Prob > F = 0.6806
R-squared = 0.0626
Adj R-squared = -0.0199
Root MSE = 2.0563

saf	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P>|t|	[95% Conf. Interval]	
age2	.968025	.4779467	2.03	0.045	.0221092	1.913941
age3	.4408363	.5488104	0.80	0.423	-.6453275	1.527
sexnew	.1491901	.3774708	0.40	0.693	-.5978714	.8962515
rac2	.2570507	1.086665	0.24	0.813	-1.893594	2.407696
rac3	.0521003	.5994441	0.09	0.931	-1.134274	1.238475
rac4	.4409703	.6447044	0.68	0.495	-.8349797	1.71692
rac5	.7374395	.769563	0.96	0.340	-.7856213	2.2605
ses2	.2585793	.4314356	0.60	0.550	-.5952853	1.112444
ses3	.004667	.4874497	0.01	0.992	-.9600564	.9693905
ses4	-1.13964	1.109738	-1.03	0.306	-3.33595	1.056669
YUP	-.0394241	.4771353	-0.08	0.934	-.9837341	.9048859
_cons	4.474275	.7538601	5.94	0.000	2.982292	5.966257

BY PROGRAM/SAMPLE

. regress saf age2 age3 sexnew rac2 rac3 rac4 rac5 ses2 ses3 ses4 if program=="YUP"

Source	SS	df	MS		
Model	47.4224806	10	4.74224806		
Residual	147.534041	35	4.21525832		
Total	194.956522	45	4.33236715		

Number of obs = 46
F(10, 35) = 1.13
Prob > F = 0.3721
R-squared = 0.2432
Adj R-squared = 0.0270
Root MSE = 2.0531

saf	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P>|t|	[95% Conf. Interval]	
age2	.7889921	.8961904	0.88	0.385	-1.030371	2.608355
age3	-1.228449	1.072828	-1.15	0.260	-3.406406	.9495085
sexnew	-1.050986	.6615769	-1.59	0.121	-2.394059	.2920863
rac2	.4715112	1.677378	0.28	0.780	-2.933748	3.876771
rac3	.4268299	.8261462	0.52	0.609	-1.250336	2.103996
rac4	2.343492	2.227262	1.05	0.300	-2.17809	6.865074

```
    rac5 |  -.7006521   1.480588   -0.47   0.639   -3.706406    2.305102
    ses2 |   .9061941   .7061454    1.28   0.208    -.5273573   2.339746
    ses3 |   1.721741   1.206058    1.43   0.162    -.7266873   4.170169
    ses4 |   .8894215   2.657157    0.33   0.740    -4.504895   6.283738
   _cons |   4.867516   1.114921    4.37   0.000     2.604106   7.130926
```

. regress saf age2 age3 sexnew rac2 rac3 rac4 rac5 ses2 ses3 ses4 if program=="RIC"

```
    Source |       SS       df       MS              Number of obs =      91
-------------+------------------------------           F( 10,    80) =    1.07
     Model |  43.2234375    10  4.32234375           Prob > F      =  0.3966
  Residual |   323.80953    80  4.04761912           R-squared     =  0.1178
-------------+------------------------------           Adj R-squared =  0.0075
     Total |  367.032967    90  4.07814408           Root MSE      =  2.0119
```

```
      saf |    Coef.   Std. Err.     t    P>|t|    [95% Conf. Interval]
-------------+----------------------------------------------------------------
     age2 |   .9295944   .5773534    1.61   0.111    -.2193754    2.078564
     age3 |   .7572223   .6791332    1.11   0.268    -.5942959    2.10874
   sexnew |   .8302422   .4642157    1.79   0.077    -.0935765    1.754061
     rac2 |   .3466077   1.644573    0.21   0.834    -2.926196    3.619411
     rac3 |   .3042867   .8940147    0.34   0.734    -1.474859    2.083433
     rac4 |   .7535141   .8204197    0.92   0.361    -.8791732    2.386201
     rac5 |   1.261376   .9802005    1.29   0.202    -.6892853    3.212037
     ses2 |   .0835177   .5565533    0.15   0.881    -1.024059    1.191094
     ses3 |  -.2272919   .5456395   -0.42   0.678    -1.313149    .8585652
     ses4 |  -1.848117   1.256151   -1.47   0.145    -4.347936    .6517028
   _cons |   3.808677   .9830059    3.87   0.000     1.852433    5.764921
```

FOCUS GROUPS THEMES - HIGH FREQUENCY CODES

Subtheme	# of Focus Groups	# of Discussions	Relationship to Research Questions
Hope + Vision	4		Social Agency (RQ1)
Power/Empower	3		Social Agency (RQ1)
Happiness	3	3	Social Agency Facilitator (RQ2)
Perseverance/ Determination	3	3	Social Agency Facilitator (RQ2)
Civic + Community Engagement & Activism	2	3	Social Agency Facilitator (RQ2)
Social + Emotional Skills	2	2	Social Agency Facilitator (RQ2)
Caring Adult/Ally	2	2	Social Agency Facilitator (RQ2)
Identity	3	6	Social Agency Barrier (RQ2)
New Marker - Stability	2	2	Views on Adulthood (Non-RQ)
Education - Quality	4	4	Public Policy Changes (Non-RQ)
Education - Improved Life Skills Training	3	3	Public Policy Changes (Non-RQ)
Education - Culture	2	2	Public Policy Changes (Non-RQ)
Education + Work Readiness Programs & Training	2	3	Public Policy Changes (Non-RQ)

APPENDIX M

PRELIMINARY LIST OF SOCIAL AGENCY FACILITATORS AND LITERATURE-BASED
OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED WITH EACH FACILITATOR

Name of Social Agency Facilitator	Source(s)	Findings (outcome areas)- Contributions to Positive Pathways to Adulthood
Community/Belonging/Group Membership/Social connectedness	Literature, Focus Groups	• Personal growth, identity formation, increased sense of belonging, belief that life has larger purpose (Flanagan & Levine, 2010) • Force for political change, help stabilize democratic societies (Flanagan & Levine, p. 160) • Connection to community, understanding of problems in community, ability to lead community change (Flanagan & Levine, p. 172)
Volunteering/Community Service/Civic Involvement	Literature web-based survey, focus groups	• Improved family and school social capital increases civic involvement (Mahatmya, 2012) • Females are more civically involved (Mahatmya, 2012) • Significant differences in civic involvement by race (Mahatmya, 2012) • Youth who volunteer are considerably less likely to be disconnected from work and school • Volunteering and participating in a civic or service organization is a predictor of economic opportunity

		• Volunteering has an inverse relationship income inequality. Higher rates of volunteerism usually has lower income inequality • (Opportunity Nation, 2014) • Personal growth, identity formation, increased sense of belonging, belief that life has larger purpose (Flanagan & Levine, 2010) • Force for political change, help stabilize democratic societies (Flanagan & Levine, p. 160) • Connection to community, understanding of problems in community, ability to lead community change (Flanagan & Levine, p. 172) • Employment (CNCS, Volunteering as a Pathway…, 2013)
Caring Adult (including mentor)	Literature, web-based survey, focus groups	• Improved high school completion & college attendance, increased working hours, improved self-esteem and life satisfaction, reduced risky health behaviors (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005)
Caring Peer (including mentor)	Literature, web-based survey, focus groups	• School and employment outcomes (Hadley et al, 2010)
Extra-Curricular and Community-Based Organized Activities and Programs (e.g., youth leadership programs, sports and arts programs)	Literature	• Educational attainment, school attendance, school engagement, college attendance, employment, earnings, welfare dependence (Hadley et al.)

		• Identity, emotional regulation, interpersonal development (Larson & Hansen et al., 2006) • Some studies say that effects are greater for disadvantaged youth (Mahoney, 2000; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002)
Social-emotional skills emotion management, empathy, teamwork, initiative, responsibility and problem-solving	Literature	• (Smith, McGovern, Larson, Hillaker, & Peck, 2016)
Volunteering/Community Service/Civic Involvement(need new words)	Literature (Mahatmya, 2012) web-based survey, focus groups	• Improved family & school social capital increases civic involvement (Mahatmya, 2012) • Females are more civically involved (Mahatmya, 2012) • Significant differences in civic involvement by race (Mahatmya, 2012) • Youth who volunteer are less likely to be disconnected • Volunteering and participating in a civic or service organization is a predictor of economic opportunity • Volunteering has an inverse relationship income inequality. Higher rates of volunteerism usually has lower income inequality (Opportunity Nation, 2014) • Teamwork, positive relationships, and social capital (Larson, Hansen et al, 2006)

Work Experience, Internships, Apprenticeships		- Improved sense of control (Finch et al, 1991) - Violence reduction (Heller, 2014) - Improved skills

PARTIAL LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING SERVICES TO EMERGING ADULTS
AND OPPORTUNITY YOUTH IN RHODE ISLAND

YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS	
ACE Mentor Program	Providence Student Union
AS220	Providence Youth Works
Breakthrough Providence	Providence Children Youth Cabinet (PCYC)
CityYear	Rhode Island Campus Compact
College Visions	WaytogoRI
College Crusade	Upward Bound
Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island	Year Up RI
Educational Talent Search	YMCA
English for Action	Young Voices
Generation Citizen	YouthBuild
Institute for the Study and Practice of Non-Violence	Youth in Action
LEAD Mentoring Program	SELECT YOUTH CENTERS
MENTOR Rhode Island	Blackstone Valley Community Action Program
New Urban Arts	CCAP West Bay Youth Center
PRIDE	CCAP Pawtucket Youth Center
Providence Youth Works	Community Care Alliance - Woonsocket Youth Center
Project Open Door	East Bay Community Action Program
Providence Youth Student Movement (Prysm)	South County Community Action
Progreso Latino	Tri-Town Community Action Agency
Providence After School Alliance	Westbay Community Action

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