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Abstract

PYD programs are often conceptualized and led by adults with little youth input. The purpose of this study was to provide youth with a voice and better understand their own definitions of success, obstacles they face in achieving success, and how others can help them be successful. Interviews were conducted with 24 youth from 3 different contexts (swim club, church group, and reform home) in Trinidad & Tobago. The results indicated that youth have a varied understanding of success. Further, many youths' definitions mirror those prescribed in PYD work. Youth saw a variety of obstacles in their way to success, and even though some similarities existed, several obstacles were context dependent. Finally, it was noted that one of the primary ways in which others can help youth in their quest for success was to provide support and assistance. Support, both informal and formal, points to the significant role non-parental adults serve in the lives of youth. Implications for youth programs and future research are discussed.

Statistics show increased numbers of youth dropping out of school and participating in gangs and violence (Egley & Arjunan, 2012; Rumberger, 2001), causing rising concerns about youth development and youth outcomes (Larson, 2006; Mahoney, J. L., Larson, & Eccles, 2005). Although many developing countries share similar youth delinquency and underperformance struggles (Cunningham, McGinnis, Verdu, Tesliuc, & Verner, 2008), youth development studies have primarily focused on the United States (Coakley, 2011). The potentially high number of negative consequences faced by youth, especially those in high-risk contexts, have fueled a quest to identify the best approach to helping youth avoid negative outcomes (Cross et al., 2001; Hellison, 2003). Recommendations for youth success rarely, however, consider youth definitions of success (Weiss, & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2009). This study sought to identify how youth, in three unique contexts, on the Caribbean island of Trinidad and Tobago, define success, perceive its challenges and develop mitigating strategies.

Youth Development Interventions

Interventions targeting youth outcomes have, generally, been influenced by two main philosophies: 1) deficit-reduction, and 2) strength/asset-based approaches. In the deficit model, interventions target "problem-behavior" reduction, focusing on problem-fixing rather than youth development. The Midnight Basketball program administrators, for example, aim to keep kids off the street through providing alternative activity (Hartmann & Depro, 2006). Ineffective results in deficit-reduction programs have triggered a recent upsurge in strength-based intervention approaches, where activities are geared towards assisting youth to achieve their full potential and aiding them in achieving future success (Larson, Eccles and Gootman, 2004). These programs focus on developing the assets youth need for future success (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005). Researchers in this field focus on assisting youth to build their assets, rather than trying to "fix" youth problem behaviors.

One paradigm that has adopted an asset-based approach to youth programming and interventions is Positive Youth Development (PYD). PYD influence focuses on several aspects of the youth environment in order to maximize benefit. Two prominent viewpoints exist in the PYD-oriented youth programming culture. One, popularized by Benson and colleagues (Benson, Mannes, Pittman, Ferber, 2004), contends that young people benefit by possessing assets that are necessary for youth to realize their potential and achieve optimal development. Consequently, the primary tasks of a

program are to help youth further develop assets gained from past experiences, while simultaneously developing new ones. A second viewpoint in the youth programming culture seeks to ensure that the context in which youth participate elicits benefits. The main tasks of such programs are to identify environmental characteristics critical to aiding youth development and ensure they are present in the program to maximize youth development. Hellison and colleagues (Hellison, 2003; and Martinek & Hellison, 1997) have identified the critical characteristics of social contexts needed for youth development. These include a safe environment, positive adult influences and a challenging and supportive climate.

Limitations of Youth Development Strategies

One shared aspect of the two PYD perspectives is their goal to empower youth in their own development and not treat them as passive recipients of information or skills (Lerner, Phelps, Forman, & Bowers, 2009). Treating youth as active participants in their development makes PYD more inclusive than other development perspectives. Past PYD work has typically adopted a positivist approach where qualities and skills that youth need to succeed were identified by program leaders without consultation with the former about their perceived needs (for complete summary see Weiss & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2009). Coakley (2011) contends that PYD program developers often assume there are skills, values and characteristics that youth *should* develop in order to become successful. These values are forced on program participants without any consideration as to what might be best suited within their social context. Many policy makers and program organizers are not sufficiently connected or involved in the contexts from which the youth they assist come and lack the perspective which the said youth have. Programs and goals can only be properly aligned when an appreciation of what qualifies as success is understood. (Spaaj, 2009).

Youth Development in the Caribbean

There is a need to examine delinquent and other at-risk behaviors in cultures external to the United States (Coakley, 2011). One region where investigation may be particularly beneficial is Latin America and the Caribbean. Cunningham et al. (2008) described a situation in which youth in the region face expansive challenges including unsafe sexual practices, teenage pregnancies and extremely high rates of crime and violence that usually result in high murder rates. Errol Miller (1991) in his work, *Men at Risk*, examined the declining role and success of male youth in the Caribbean, especially in the field of academic achievement.

Trinidad and Tobago is one Caribbean territory where the incidence of crime and murder has grown exponentially. The country ranks in the top ten of the world in terms of murder rate per capita and has a growing incidence of HIV/AIDS, alcoholism and other types of delinquent behavior (World Health Organization, 2014; Overseas Security Advisory Council, 2015). In response to these challenges, the Trinidad and Tobago government is now partnering with many social and sporting groups worldwide to bring PYD initiatives to the country. Programs such as LifeSport, a program that teaches life skills through sport participation, is one such example.

Although intervention programs are aimed at developing youth in positive manners, the perspective of youth in the said territory is yet to be investigated. Consequently, youth in the program are being largely ignored in the planning and implementation of such projects. The primary purpose of the study was to understand how youth define success. That understanding would give voice to the youth stakeholders targeted by the PYD intervention programs. Secondary purposes of the study included gaining a better understanding of the challenges youth face in achieving success and how others can aid youth in their pursuit of success. That type of information would assist PYD programs to better meet the needs of youth. Context critically impacts experiences. As such, the study involved youth from three unique contexts in Trinidad & Tobago. Each context contained elements of (informal) positive youth development programs. Specifically, each context was youth focused and sought to develop youth assets in varying ways. No formal hypotheses were posited due to the exploratory and descriptive nature of this study.

Method

Design

In-depth interviews were conducted with 24 youth in 3 varying contexts in order to capture youth perspectives on success, the obstacles to success, and how others can help youth achieve success. Context has been shown to shape the way people view and interpret their world. Thus, the researchers selected youth from three distinct social groups

in Trinidad and Tobago, namely, a swim club, a church youth group, and a reform home (juvenile detention center). Additionally, because context is a critical component in youth's lives, a brief description of each of the three contexts is provided.

Contexts

Swim Club. One context used was a swim club, founded in 2009, which caters to swimmers from youth to young adults. There is an annual membership and monthly training fees which may make the club inaccessible to some. Swimmers participate in either the competitive or non-competitive level of the club. Said levels determine the frequency and length of training sessions. The club competes against other national clubs and many of its swimmers qualify to represent the country at regional and international tournaments. Although not necessarily a PYD program, the club is highly structured and emphasizes club values that include honesty and humility, ardency, respect, and team spirit.

Youth Group. The second context used was a church youth group that has existed for 20 years and which consists of twenty members between the ages of twelve and nineteen. The youth group was directed by one female administrator with oversight provided by the church pastor. The youth group's key goals included having an active and positive youth ministry that would impact the community, encouraging members of the youth group to understand and develop their spiritual gifts, and encouraging the members of the youth group to develop into mature and spiritually passionate members of the Body of Christ through interactive discussions and Bible sessions.

Reform Home. The final context used was a reform home, established in the mid 1940's by a Catholic convent. Today, the convent is still responsible for the home's administration. Girls are 'sentenced' to the home by a judge. This results in the general perception, by the girls who reside there, that the home is akin to a prison. Infractions such as truancy, drug use and running away from home are the most common reasons for girls being placed in the home. Girls are assigned to a block with a "mother" who is responsible for their welfare. A Nun oversees administration of the "home" with support from social workers and ancillary staff. Girls are provided with schooling and counseling at the home and participation in extra-curricular activities, like sports, is encouraged. Girls who demonstrate greater levels of maturity are allowed to attend public schools and are escorted to and from these schools daily. Said public schools are usually affiliated with the Catholic Church.

Participants

For the current study, a sample of twenty-four (24) youth participated. Eight youth were chosen from each of the three contexts. Thus, eight children each from a swim club (five boys and three girls), a church youth group (three boys and five girls), and a reform home (zero boys and eight girls) participated. Youth in the study ranged in age from fourteen (14) to eighteen (18) ($M = 15.83$, $SD = 1.25$) with school enrollment from 7th grade to their 1st year of university. To ensure anonymity of each participant, alternative names were assigned.

Procedure

Following approval from the University Institutional Review Board, the first author made contact with the administrator of each group (coach, youth group leader, and house mother) and explained the aim of the project and participation requirements. With support from the administrators of each context, potential participants were informed of the study aims and parental permission slips were provided. If the youth returned the signed parental or guardian permission slips, plus a signed assent form, by the scheduled day of interviews, they participated in the study. The first author conducted all of the interviews with each interview lasting between seventeen (17) and thirty-four (34) minutes.

The interview guide was pilot tested with two youth for ease of interpretation and any questions that were difficult to answer were modified or eliminated. In the first portion of the interview, the researcher collected demographic information. Information collected included gender, age, school, grade/form, career aspiration, mother's and father's occupation, siblings, and current living arrangement. The interview guide contained a number of questions concerning how youth define success, strategies to achieving success, and challenges to success.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed with assistance regarding interpretation of words and accents from the first author, a native of Trinidad and Tobago. Three independent researchers then conducted open coding (Glaser & Strauss, 2009); a process by which *meaning units* were identified and then independently grouped into themes. The coding was triangulated to ensure agreement between the three coders in both the *meaning unit* identification and assignment of the said units to higher order themes. Items where disagreements arose were discussed by the researchers until consensus was achieved. The researchers utilized an interpretivist approach to gain a better understating of the ways success is defined by youth and how those definitions may differ from the current literature. In light of this approach, *in vivo* coding was the primary method of coding used. Additionally, during coding, researchers tried to ensure that the ‘true’ meaning being conveyed by youth was being communicated.

Results

Youth’s responses regarding their definition of success, obstacles to success and how others can help them achieve success are outlined in the following sections. Categories are separated into themes and subthemes. Each section gives a brief overview of the construct. Where relevant, quotes from participants are included and the context from which the participant comes is identified in parenthesis.

Youth’s Definition of Success

Success, as defined by youth, is multidimensional; eleven indicators including reaching one’s goals, working hard, obtaining an education, demonstrating skill, overcoming obstacles, believing in one’s self or believing in what you do, experiencing positive affect or being happy, achieving through dishonest work, making others proud, acquiring fame, and having money were identified. Each theme will be briefly explained in this section.

Reaching One’s Goals. Youth viewed success as setting and attaining one’s goals. Many youth, regardless of context, indicated that meeting important milestones was an indicator of success. Matthew (swim club) stated that “If you have your aspirations, achieving them, that’s being successful.” Task completion was viewed as success and non-completion as a lack thereof.

Working Hard. Youth from all contexts indicated that achieving the goal itself was not as important as the effort put in to meet one’s goal. Selah (swim club) stated that even if someone did not accomplish their goal they “were still successful because they kept trying.” Only one youth in the sample perceived that hard work was not sufficient to achieving success. However, even with this realization, she indicated that hard work was still beneficial in attempting to achieve one’s goals.

Obtaining an Education. All three groups cited obtaining an education as one aspect that indicated that youth were successful. However, youth views about education differed. Some youth believed education allowed youth to achieve future goals, while others believed doing well in school was success in and of itself.

Demonstrating Skill. Youth believed that success included possessing and demonstrating some type of ability. Sherry (church group) believed that success was “having the ability to know something to its fullest.” She further believed that some youth may be able to achieve success in one context while others may be able to achieve success in another, very different, context.

Overcoming Obstacles. Many youth believed that overcoming obstacles was another success indicator. Selah (swim club) saw success as making the best of bad situations and continuing to persevere when things go poorly. She stated, “you will be disappointed sometimes, but as long as you get back up onto your feet and achieve your goal, then you are considered successful (sic).”

Believing in Self/What You Do. Success was also conceptualized by believing in one’s self and believing that youth had the skills necessary to achieve their goals. Matthew (swim club) stated that “if you want to do something, and you set your mind to do it, then I guess you are being successful. That is my definition of being successful.”

Experiencing Positive Affect/Being Happy. If youth were happy in the jobs they earned, the people they were around, and the goals they were achieving, they considered themselves to be successful. Sherry (church group) viewed success in much the same way as her father, and stated “He [daddy] might say success is when you are happy in doing something.”

Achieving Through Dishonest Work. Many youth made the point that success could be achieved through both honest and dishonest work. Daryl (church group) believed that, depending on an individual’s personal goals, doing dishonest work could indicate they were successful and said, “Well, selling weed is not a good thing to do, but if you want to sell and get to sell, then you’re successful.” A few of the participants indicated that even though success was possible through both means, honest work was more likely to experience beneficial outcomes than dishonest work.

Making Others Proud. Making others proud was one indication that an individual was successful to some youth in the study. Terrell (swim club) said, “That’s my success...just making my parents proud.” Interestingly, making parents proud was a common reason for success for those athletes in the swim club. David (church group) also noted that making others proud of their actions as an indication of success for the individual.

Acquiring Fame. There was a divergence of opinion among youth as to whether fame was an indication of success. David (youth group) indicated that “fame and that sort of thing” was an indication of success for youth. However, others like Danielle (group home) indicated that being famous was not an indication of youth success. She said, “Fame is not success to me.....If you’re poor and you’re on television for killing, you’re not really successful. You’re just wasting your time.”

Having Money. Another theme central across all contexts was that money played some role in how youth viewed success. For some, money was a critical aspect in indicating that youth were successful. Ariel (church group) illustrated this point by saying, “In order to be successful, you will have money come and it will flow.” Other youth believed money was instead a resource that may or may not lead to success depending on one’s choices. Natori (group home) stated that, “Some people have money and ... they go and buy drugs and all of those things and some people will take money seriously and try and do something and get some classes done. It’s what you do with the money.”

Obstacles to Success

Youth were also asked about possible obstacles to achieving success in their own lives. Youth were able to name seventeen (17) unique obstacles that can exist on their path to success. Obstacles could be grouped into four major themes. The four major themes youth perceived as obstacles were “That’s life – outside of one’s control”, lack of support (which is made up of two subthemes (a) an absence of support and (b)negative support), personal factors, and a lack of skills. Each theme will be briefly overviewed in this section.

That’s Life – Outside of One’s Control. Youth felt that many of the obstacles to success were largely outside of their control and just a function of life circumstances. Several of them cited a lack of money and lack of opportunities as hindrances to the pursuit of success. Terrell (swim club) said that “In the Caribbean, you can’t go any further (at age 18) unless you go away to better the swimming aspect of your life. You can’t do anything in the country because we don’t have the facilities and to go away you need money.” Other youth indicated that injuries, sickness, or death in the family may be an obstacle to achieving their own goals. Leanza (Youth home) said, “When a family member gets sick, you don’t really study about your life ahead, you are just more focused on them,” indicating that if an illness or death happens in your family, personal resources must be redistributed away from some resources that may help an individual meet their own goals. Similarly, Nico (swim club) indicated that pain can be an obstacle as well. He said “You have physical obstacles too because that same pain barrier. Sometimes it’s a lot to push through. Sometimes you feel like stopping.” Finally, some participants indicated that sometimes life is just not set up for them to succeed. Shannon (swim club) indicated this aspect when she said “Some things, like, everything doesn’t go the way you planned. Sometimes some things may not work out the way you want them to.”

Lack of Support. Youth identified that another obstacle to success was a lack of support from others. This could take two forms; an absence of support or individuals who were negative influences. A general lack of support took several different forms. Sarah (youth home) indicated that some people will promise to help and then when you need it, they do not do as they have promised. Terrell (swim club) indicated nobody pushing him when he said, “My parents never really pushed me into school work...they thought somebody will mature on their own so they never molded me into a person.”

The most common form of negative influence was that of peer pressure and was experienced by youth in all three contexts. Danielle (youth home) indicated that friends actively discouraged her from doing well at school and said, "My friends before were like 'girl, you actually going to school? You're a nerd.'" Similarly, some youth cited that others were consistently trying to bring them down and negatively impact them. Elizabeth (group home) said that "People will tell you that you will not make it. People will tell you things to bring you down and sometimes you will feel like if they tell you that, you will feel like you are just no good, just no good at nothing....and you just give up."

Personal Factors. Youth identified personal characteristics that they saw as obstacles to success in their lives. The aspect that youth cited most frequently was a lack of motivation to complete the tasks that needed to be done to be successful. Nico (swim club) said, "Having to motivate yourself over and over can get tiring after a while and sometimes you just feel demotivated on the whole." Farisha (group home) indicated that sometimes she felt as if the next step was too difficult to reach and therefore staying motivated was difficult. She said, "You feel like you can't do it, like something is too hard." Related to a lack of motivation, some youth viewed not putting in the time, either by choice or circumstances, and the wrong mindset as obstacles to being successful.

You can't help yourself from doing certain things and that can actually stop you from being who you want to be at times." Finally, some youth cited a lack of efficacy in their own abilities as a hindrance toward success. Dave (church) indicated that he was intimidated by others and it influenced his own path. when he said, "I went to school with some stars in cricket who play for the Trinidad....When I train with them, their level is real high compared to mine, so I was kinda discouraged."

Lack of Skills. The final subtheme within obstacles to success was youth's perceived lack of skills. Youth specifically indicated that poor time management was an obstacle with this problem especially relevant for those youth in the swim club. Mikey (swim club) spoke of misguided priorities and said, "I watch too much TV, not come to training or I am on social media ... it takes my concentration that I really want. I put all the energy on something else that isn't necessary when I could have been focusing on something else like a race or long-term or short-term goals." Other youth indicated that having poor self-presentation skills was an obstacle to success. Danielle (youth home) talked about having a poor reputation harming her future aspirations as well as not knowing how to interact with others with the proper tone or volume.

How Others Can Help Youth Achieve Success

To better understand how youth perceived others, they were asked how others could contribute to making them successful. While youth identified a number of ways in which others could help them, these different ideas grouped together into three main higher order themes. In the minds of youth others could help them by providing psychosocial support, instrumental support or tough love.

Psychosocial Support. Youth highlighted that they needed to be emotionally and psychologically supported by others on their path to success. They saw others playing a critical role by motivating them and encouraging them as they worked toward their goals. Terrell (swim group) said, "They'll like keep saying that they are proud and it's the best word that could help you to overcome anything. Saying that you know you really make me proud in this. You make me proud. That word proud is probably the best word to overcome any situation that you have."

In the minds of youth, others sometimes fostered a sense of determination and perseverance. Cristal (group home) in response to who might help her responded, "I believe Farah (roommate at home). Because most of the time when I am down and ting [sic], she tells me that life must go on. She encourages me in school and when I am going wrong, she is always there. Always there to help me." Matthew (swim group) expressed similar ideas about one of his peers, "(Friend in club)...Well he's my really good friend....I guess when you have a friend, he knows what you're going through, and knows the difficulties, what's easy and not so easy, and you have somebody there to talk to, it helps you a lot. I guess that's how he helped me. "

Similarly, youth viewed others praying for them as a mechanism through which they might demonstrate their support and encouragement. Sarah (group home) said, "I just say mummy, pray for me so you know I get into the coastguard and I come out next year."

Instrumental Support. Youth also identified others providing support in tangible and instrumental ways. For many of the youth this manifested itself in the fulfillment of some of their basic needs. Shannon (swim club) expressed such support when she said, “My mom would be one of my role models in me trying to achieve everything because well, she supports me the most in swimming and... like for dance, when I wanted to do dance she help me join, she carried me classes and stuff. For my schoolwork she makes sure I do all my schoolwork, she make sure I get good grades. Swimming she makes sure I come, make sure I have my equipment and everything.”

One of the main types of support others provided was advice to youth to aid in achieving their goals. Danielle (group home) said, “My mother used to tell me, whatever I do to other people it will come back at me but not in the same way, it will be a different way. My mother always told me, the world is a circle, so one thing doesn’t go here and run off the edge, it comes back, in different ways. So if I’m being a bully now, later down in life, it might not be me getting bullied, it might be my sister or my children.”

Youth also felt that in addition to giving them advice, others could provide opportunities or “open doors” for them to be successful. Sarah (group home) said, “My sister’s boyfriend... he works at the coastguard and he always telling me that no matter what, when I come out next year, cause he is a kind of ‘big boy’ in the coast guard, he will take me in, no matter what.”

Additionally, youth identified that others assisted them in being successful by providing an example of the behavior they wanted to model. Shannon (swim group) said that it helps when “you have someone to look up to. Someone that’s there to show you, like if you push forward and try to achieve your goals where you can be, where you can be someday and never give up.” Natori (group home) also noted taking strength from a model when she said, “I realized that he was believing in himself and knew he could do certain things.”

Tough Love. Youth also felt that others could aid in their success by showing them tough love, defined as challenging youth or holding them accountable. Sarah (group home) said, “I always thank my mother for putting me before the court, because if I was at home, I would never be in COSTAAT (local college) I would never have a full time certificate for nursing, I would never be in the cadet force, I would not be doing any of these things, so I thank her for putting me here so that I can build myself and I actually do something good.”

Discussion

This study sought to understand how youth define success, to better understand the challenges faced in achieving success and to understand how others can aid youth in their pursuit of success in three unique contexts in Trinidad & Tobago. Across all the interviews, three general ideas stood out as critical to better understanding the youth perspective about success. Firstly, definitions of success among youth were diverse. Secondly, several said definitions aligned with definitions of success within the PYD literature. Thirdly, “significant others” were perceived by youth to be critical in their quest for success.

Definitions of Success

Eleven unique definitions for success were cited by youth across the three contexts. Interestingly, each of the eleven themes was cited by members of at least two groups; indicating that even though youth have a high number of definitions of success, these definitions are largely consistent across youth in different domains. This high number of definitions points to the diverse ways in which youth conceptualize and understand success. The lack of a single definition could be attributed to the uncertainty that youth have about what is ‘true’ success, but it could also reflect the transient nature of success itself. Such variation exists even among adults in their definitions of success (Pellegrin & Coates, 1957).

Alternatively, varied definitions of success could simply reflect youth’s more nuanced understanding of success, given their contexts and a developmental stage limited in experiences and socialization. Notwithstanding this variety, programs focused on assisting youth should be cautious not to adopt too rigid or static a definition of success and should avoid applying a single definition to all participants as youth who do not hold the program goals as consistent with their definition of “success” will be less engaged in the process and the activities advocated.

PYD practitioners should make concerted efforts to engage youth, cognizant of their unique contexts and potential pathways to navigate their world successfully (Wang & Burris, 1997). Youth therefore should be given “voice” in youth development programs. To engage a higher number of youth, PYD initiatives should conduct needs assessments before developing content and strategies to improve youth outcomes (Shek, Ma, & Tang, 2011). This will assure youth satisfaction with the content, design, and intended outcomes of program interventions.

Congruence with PYD Literature

Despite the diversity in the definitions of success, some were mentioned more often or seemed more central to youth views of success across all three contexts. Six of the eleven definitions of success initially identified by youth were used by youth in all three contexts. Of these, “Reaching one’s goals”, “Working hard” and “Obtaining an education” all seem consistent with the PYD construct of thriving (Lerner, von Eye, Lerner, & Lewin-Bizan, 2009). Lerner et al. (2009) described thriving as, “the growth of attributes that mark a flourishing, healthy young person...competence, confidence, character, connection and caring p. 568”. This congruence in the youth view and the PYD literature suggests that youth in this study described success in ways that mirror the 5C model (Lerner et al., 2009).

Interestingly, youth across all contexts identified, “Overcoming obstacles” as a central definition of success. Overcoming obstacles, as a form of success, is similar to the PYD construct of “Resilience” which views the individual’s ability to flourish in the face of adversity as a core attribute of success (Lerner, 2006). Martinek and Hellison (1997) defined resilience as an ability to “recover” or “bounce back” from a series of obstacles or failures, outlining that it is critical to for youth success and might be influenced by youth’s social and psychological makeup of youth. Considering the many risks that youth face on their pathway to success (Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995), it is heartening that PYD conceptions of youth success and the assets that lead to them appear to have some validity for work with this population and youth in general.

Alternate Pathways to Success

Youths’ definitions of success reflected knowledge that several pathways to success exist. While there was a preference by youth to achieve success by legitimate means, there was a simultaneous recognition that alternate (unethical) means existed. Youth considered the achievement of goals, whether via legitimate or illegitimate channels, to be success. Gray (2004) in writing about Jamaican society said that sometimes among the poor there is “the rejection of a bourgeois, civic morality, in favour of the cultivation of an identity of radical otherness...these strategies and renegade forms of opposition secure for the poor, the status and honour and respect that exploitative society has denied them (p.1-2)”. Gray’s writings suggested that in societies and contexts where persons feel oppressed, illegitimate means of acquiring honor or success may be valued. Such views may be prevalent in Trinidad and Tobago where youth may have less resources than their peers elsewhere in the world. One youth speaking about the difference between ‘true’ success and fame felt that what she had initially ascribed as success (things that made her popular and gave her notoriety) were not real success. However, she only realized the difference upon later reflection. In circumstances where context may seem particularly oppressive, achieving goals may hold greater value to youth than the process through which they were attained.

While PYD initiatives try to reduce the risky behaviors in which youth engage (Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995), such perceptions of right and wrong by youth indicate the acceptance that risky behaviors may be justified if such behaviors facilitate goal achievement. Achieving success via “alternate pathways” may be frowned upon by society, but youth may feel that in particular contexts they have no choice but to indulge in high risk-high reward behaviors. This realization points to a need for PYD programs to not only address youth in identifying and reflecting on the implication of the goals that they have for themselves, but also to assist them in developing strategies to achieve their goals, thereby avoiding risky behaviors. Programs aimed at empowering youth must go beyond simply encouraging them to articulate their goals and instead equip them with the skills and introduce them to the networks that will allow them to manifest said goals.

Obstacles to Success

While youth had eleven ways to define success, they identified seventeen obstacles to success, suggesting that becoming successful is not easy. Moreover, only five of the obstacles identified by youth were identified across all three contexts implying that while definitions of success are more universal, the impediments vary depending on the social context. “Not putting in time” and “Lack of money”, were challenges identified by youth in the swim context.

Several swim club members were unable to devote the time necessary to training due to other commitments or monetary constraints. In a country where there are limited pools and swimming is a “club” sport; there is a financial cost to participation. A “lack of money” therefore will be a challenge for these individuals. A “lack of support” and “life is not set up for you to succeed” were especially salient to the youth of the reform home. Many of these girls came from single- parent families and had challenging relationships with strains and challenges with their family members and loved ones before they were admitted to the home. It is understandable that many of the girls might attribute a lack of success to a lack of support or external challenges over which they had little control. Finally, “lack of opportunities” stood out for the youth in the Church group. Many of these youth came from a poor community in Central Trinidad where legitimate opportunities for success only exist if you are well- educated. Again the youth’s view of their context shaped their perceptions of the obstacles they identified more frequently.

Youth in all three contexts identified “lack of opportunities”, “lack of support”, “peer pressure”, “others bringing you down”, and “mindset” as common, universal challenges to success. Apart from “mindset”, which is personal, the other obstacles highlight the need that youth have to seek and receive help as they strive for success. There seems to be a need for “adult” involvement in the lives of youth (Benson, Leffert, & Scales, 2012; Larson, Eccles, & Gootman, 2004). Many of the youth were able to accurately identify the obstacles that were unique to their situation. This suggests that many youth are aware of the challenges they face in becoming successful and perhaps simply do not know how to surmount those challenges. Interventions may serve to educate youth about the ways in which they can treat with their obstacles.

Mentoring

The obstacles that youth identified consistently across all three contexts underscore the role adults in their lives serve in helping them gain success and overcome challenges. While not a research objective, researchers identified as a core finding, the critical role that “significant others” play in the success of youth. In many ways, youth in all three contexts described the role ‘others’ played in their lives as consistent with conceptualizations of mentoring. Mentoring can be thought of as a process by which someone who is generally more experienced assists in the development of someone who is less experienced (Gould & Mac Intosh, 2013). Much of the research on mentoring has focused on the functions that mentoring serves for mentors, mentees, and the institutions within which they interact (Chao, 1997; Kram, 1983). The research suggested that mentors can assist in tangible ways (instrumentally) or by boosting self-esteem and confidence (psychosocially) (Lockwood, Evans, & Eby, 2007). In both ways, mentoring can be seen as a critical lifeline to underserved youth in need by providing the tangible resources to get to school or to improve their grades or by simply offering the social support needed to move forward in life.

Considering the obstacles identified by youth across the three contexts and the support they felt others could provide, it seemed that many youth believe that “mentors” are a significant part of their lives on the pathway to legitimate success. The role that adults might play in the success of youth was identified by Dubois & Karcher (2008). Larson, Eccles, and Gootman (2004) have listed adults as a significant feature necessary in positive developmental contexts for youth. Youth mentoring literature (Dubois & Karcher, 2008) has long suggested that positive adults who develop meaningful relationships with youth can assist them in their development. Notably, this is one of the few times that youth have suggested the need for a mentor, not by name but by function. By signaling the need for “Instrumental Support”, “Psychosocial Support”, and “Tough Love”, which mentors provide, youths have identified a need for mentorship. It points to a clear path in the ways that youth believe they can be helped.

Limitations and Future Directions

One of the main limitations of this study was rooted in its methodology. While phenomenological research is useful for discovering the richness of an individual’s experience, it does not lend itself well for generalization to other populations. As such, one unanswered question remains: How widespread are these definitions of success? The insights offer a foundation for further study. Additionally, participants for the study were selected, conveniently, based on prior relationships that the researchers had with their respective institutions. Future work could focus on comparing groups of youth who are more contextually similar so that greater comparisons can be made. Finally, based on the results of the present study, future work should have a greater focus on the role that “significant others” have in youth’s achievement of success. Some emphasis can be placed on categorizing “significant others” and how their relationships with youth may impact the type of assistance given.

Conclusion

Youth in the sample from Trinidad and Tobago defined success in various ways; many of which align with existing positive youth development literature. Although many of the obstacles to success were consistent across the three contexts, several unique obstacles exist in each of the environments. This proves that, as youth development programming is instituted, a thorough understanding of youths' context-specific challenges is needed, if programs are to be successful. Finally, although not mentioned directly, youth from each context indicated that mentors and support from peers and adults was critical to aiding them in pursuing success. The study begins to provide a foundation for understanding how youth in Trinidad and Tobago define success, but further investigation is needed to maximize programs that aim to impact youths' short-term and long-term outcomes.

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Figure 1. Definitions of Success

Swim Club	Church Group	Youth Home
Reaching one's Goals	Reaching one's Goals	Reaching one's Goals
Working Hard	Working Hard	Working Hard
Obtaining an Education	Obtaining an Education	Obtaining an Education
	Demonstrating Skill	
Overcoming Obstacles	Overcoming Obstacles	Overcoming Obstacles
Believing in self/Believing in what you do		Believing in self/Believing in what you do
	Experiencing positive affect/Being Happy	Experiencing positive affect/Being Happy
Achieving through dishonest work	Achieving through dishonest work	Achieving through dishonest work
Making others proud	Making others proud	
	Acquiring Fame	Acquiring Fame
Having Money	Having Money	Having Money

Figure 2. Obstacles to success.

Higher Order Themes		Swim Club	Church Group	Youth Home
That's Life - Outside one's control		Lack of opportunities	Lack of opportunities	Lack of opportunities
		Lack of Money		
		Injuries/Sickness	Injuries/Sickness	
		Pain	Pain	
		Life is not set up for you to succeed		Life is not set up for you to succeed
Lacking Support	Absence of Support	Lack of Support	Lack of Support	Lack of Support
		Nobody Pushing		Nobody Pushing
	Negative Support	Peer Pressure	Peer Pressure	Peer Pressure
		Others Bringing you down	Others Bringing you down	Others Bringing you down
		Jealousy		Jealousy
Personal Factors		Demotivation		Demotivation
		Not putting in the time		
		Mindset	Mindset	Mindset
		Temper and Attitude		Temper and Attitude
		Low Self-efficacy	Low Self-efficacy	
Lack of Skills		Time Management	Time Management	
				Self-presentation