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CULTIVATING ABOLITIONIST PRAXIS THROUGH HEALING-CENTERED ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL JUSTICE YOUTH ARTS PROGRAMS

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of

Antioch University

In partial fulfillment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

by

Laurel Sarah Butler

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December 2023

CULTIVATING ABOLITIONIST PRAXIS THROUGH HEALING-CENTERED ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL JUSTICE YOUTH ARTS PROGRAMS

This dissertation, by Laurel Sarah Butler, has
been approved by the committee members signed below
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in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

CULTIVATING ABOLITIONIST PRAXIS THROUGH HEALING-CENTERED ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL JUSTICE YOUTH ARTS PROGRAMS

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Antioch University

Yellow Springs, OH

This is a critical-phenomenological qualitative research study in which young people who participated in Social Justice Youth Arts (SJYA) programs during their teenage years engaged in a series of semi-structured arts-based interviews focused on recollecting their lived experiences in those programs and the years since. These interviews investigate the ways in which the principles of Healing-Centered Engagement (Ginwright, 2018) were present within these young people's experiences of those programs, as well as the extent to which those experiences may have encouraged or cultivated a lived praxis of the principles of the contemporary abolitionist movement (Kaba, 2021a; Kaepernick, 2021). This study describes how these young people's engagement with SJYA programming encouraged their process of identity formation as artists and activists, and how the durability and evolution of those self-identifications manifested in their broader social and behavioral context over time. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA (https://aura.antioch.edu) and OhioLINK ETD Center (https://etd.ohiolink.edu).

Keywords: qualitative research, narrative inquiry, arts-based research, critical phenomenology, youth, youth arts, youth arts programs, social justice, healing centered engagement, abolition, creative youth development, social justice youth arts

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To Marissa and Jova: working alongside you both has absolutely set the standard for me in terms of aligning mission and practice, and bringing an ethic of deep care to all of the relationships that weave together to create an authentic program experience for young people. To my beloved interviewees, Ché, Silvana, Natalie, Julia, Diana, and John: no words of gratitude can express what an honor it has been to collaborate with you and create space for your words and insights to be amplified and shared with the world. Incredible humans come out of social justice youth arts programs and y'all are the proof. Thank you. And to Ewen: so much discourse about the invisible labor of mothering and of doctoral scholarship, but this is where it becomes impossible to do justice to the labor of supporting a mother who is also a doctoral student—the meals cooked while I studied, the father-son outings while I wrote, the drafts read, the feedback given (so tenderly and thoughtfully!), the tech support, the elevator speeches heard over and over, the long sessions of listening to my doubts and fears and frustrations and tears, not to mention the 17 years of walking alongside me as I stumbled through the learnings that form the underpinnings of this entire thought project. Thank you for *everything*.

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Dedication

For Leo

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW

Abolition is about presence, not absence. It's about building life-affirming institutions.
—Dr. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Geographies of Racial Capitalism*

Originality and Importance

"This program changed my life" is a refrain that every youth arts organization hopes to hear from its alumni—and oftentimes does. For adolescents, engaging in collaborative, community-based creative practice can provide an opportunity found less frequently in the spheres of home and school. This allows adolescents to "detypify" (Halverson, 2010), experimenting with a range of new identities and finding a space in which they can grow into a version of themselves that defines their individuality and character moving forward. What are the mechanisms by which this self-proclaimed transformation takes place? How does that transformation impact the broader spheres of a young person's life, rippling out from the individual level into the relational and the systemic? Oftentimes, when researchers trace the impact of such a pivotal experience in a young person's lived trajectory, the indicators of transformation are quantified from within the dominant frameworks of American capitalism: whether a young person went to college, for example, or whether they were gainfully employed, perhaps even in the arts. However, what if we used an entirely opposite metric to assess the transformational impact of youth arts programs? For example, an anticapitalist framework rooted in the principles of the contemporary abolitionist movement, which emphasizes mutual aid, community care, transformative justice, creative future visioning, and a long-game strategy for social change.

For my doctoral dissertation in educational and professional practice with a specialization in social justice leadership at Antioch University, I conducted an interview-based study with

young people who participated in Social Justice Youth Arts (SJYA) programs during their teenage years. The interviews focused on the youths' recollections of their own lived experiences within those programs and in the years since. Through these interviews, I investigated how the principles of Healing-Centered Engagement (HCE; Ginwright, 2018), may have been present within these young people's experiences of those programs. I also explored the extent to which those experiences may have encouraged or cultivated a lived praxis of the contemporary abolitionist movement (Kaba, 2021b; Kaepernick, 2021). In this study, I endeavored to describe how these young people's engagement with SJYA programming encouraged their identity formation as artists and activists. I also sought to understand how the durability and evolution of those self-identifications manifested in the youths' broader social and behavioral context over time. My scholarly objective in this study was to demonstrate how—by incorporating HCE into the theory of practice undergirding young people's experiences—SJYA programs could catalyze and support behaviors aligned with a social justice ethos. I specifically looked at abolition as one core area in which "the coalescence of social justice endeavors [are] broadly assembled" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 28).

In her essay, *Abolish the World as we Know it: Notes for a Praxis of Phenomenology Beyond Critique*, Lisa Guenther (2022) asserts that "the world as we know it is structured by colonialism, capitalism, anti-Black racism, heteropatriarchy, carceral logics, and other forms of systemic violence" (p. 28). It is my opinion that abolition is both a vision of social justice and a transformational strategy, comprehensive and ambitious enough to apprehend the enormity of this intersectional matrix of sociopolitical oppressions that faces us. Abolitionists propose a radical overhaul that might catalyze revolutionary ways of restructuring and healing the world (Kaba, 2021b; Kaepernick, 2021). I believe that cultivating abolitionist behaviors and

worldviews will help move society towards antiracist, anticapitalist, and liberatory ways of living and meaning-making, at least in our micro-communities if not on a broader political scale. I have great hope that youth arts programs could themselves be iterations of these micro-communities. These programs could act as small-scale incubators of abolitionist thought and behavior; spaces for young people to practice the types of structural analysis and transformative relationality that form the core of the movement. If the power and potential of youth arts programs were explicitly activated to espouse and promulgate an abolitionist ethos, I believe great change would be possible. This transformation could be in individual lives as well as outwardly rippling spheres of broader community and sociopolitical engagement. This research project endeavors to trace the roots and seedlings of that transformational process.

In this study, I was concerned with the nuanced lived experiences of young people who have participated in SJYA programs. I sought to understand the ways in which these young people's understanding of themselves and their role in their community and the world at large might have shifted because of their time in these spaces. The SJYA case study sites that I researched represent a spectrum of pedagogical orientations to social justice teaching, ranging from a more service-learning-centered design to an explicitly abolitionist curriculum. The 2012–2013 Young Artists at Work (YAAW) program activated participants' social justice praxis through community engagement and arts-activism, without a specific focus on abolitionist themes. The 2013–2014 YAAW program focused intentionally and specifically on abolishing the Prison-Industrial Complex (PIC) as the inspiration for artmaking. My second case study site, the 2019–2022 CoLab program at 4C LAB, focused on social justice themes without being explicitly abolitionist, but while still engaging with themes of incarceration, criminalization, racialized violence, and police brutality, among others. While neither case study program was explicitly

designed with the principles of Healing-Centered Engagement in place, I applied that interpretive lens after-the-fact, using retroactive analysis to discern the degree to which the programs' ethoses may have prefigured HCE as a specific mode of social justice praxis.

It is important to note that this study uses the broadest context of abolition to comprise not only the eradication of policing and prisons, but also the large-scale transformation of capitalist society. Harney and Moten (2013) summarize this impulse:

> What is, so to speak, the object of abolition? Not so much the abolition of prisons but the abolition of a society that could have prisons, that could have slavery, that could have the wage, and therefore not abolition as the elimination of anything but abolition as the founding of a new society. (p. 114)

To this end, throughout the interview process I paid specific attention to the participants' self-identification as artists—creative agents who spend their time and capacity envisioning things that do not yet exist and bringing them into fruition. I also considered participants' self-identification as activists—critical social beings who bring a lens of equity analysis and justice-mindedness to their efforts to transform the world around them. By centering young people's narrative recollections about their own developmental trajectory, I explicitly conferred expertise to them and their lived experiences. I did so in opposition to the endemic discursive trend of adultism (Fox, 2020; Hare, 2019) that pervades the field of adolescent and youth studies (Wright, 2020) and to avoid perpetuating the inequitable sharing of power and leadership in youth programs.

Positionality as Researcher

My approach to this study includes a commitment to the praxis of autoethnographic self-reflection (Hughes & Pennington, 2018), foregrounding my positionality as a researcher, an SJYA practitioner with over 20 years of experience in the field, and a self-identified abolitionist. It is important to clearly identify my intersectional identity categories as a White, able-bodied,

American, middle-class, educated, queer, and adult woman. I identify my positionality in order to situate myself vis-a-vis research participants of diverse positionalities; I intend to be explicit about the relational dynamics and structural privilege differentials therein. My identity as a White educator and researcher should be noted as particularly significant within this study, as it could represent a limitation to my relationship with research participants' lived experiences, particularly because all of these research participants self-identify within a non-White racial demographic. Throughout this study, I endeavored to hold myself accountable to the core antiracist practice of cultural humility (Keiffer-Lewis, 2022). I did this by maintaining ongoing self-reflexive memos; maintaining active dialogue with my scholarly community, doctoral cohort peers, and dissertation committee; and implementing tools that I have acquired from my work with antiracist training programs such as Practice Progress (practiceprogress.org) and White People for Black Lives (https://www.awarela.org/White-people-4-black-lives). I used these frameworks and touchpoints to steer my research practice away from race-based pitfalls and blind spots.

My relationship history with the participants themselves is also important. At both case study sites, I have occupied a range of roles including but not limited to educator, facilitator, mentor, and professional supervisor. While those relationship categories are no longer applicable, they do carry particular relational power dynamics, and should thus be considered as an important—even influential—factor in the qualitative inquiry process. From 2011 to 2014, I served as the Youth Arts Manager at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, where I designed and implemented the Young Artists at Work (YAAW) program. This included the hiring and supervision of all youth artists, as well as serving as lead teaching artist and mentor for their year-long residency. While the program no longer exists, the years I spent working in that

capacity were deeply formative for both me and many of the youth participants. For example, when I toured San Francisco a few years ago, several former YAAW students came to my show and lifted their sleeves to reveal the program's logo tattooed on their shoulders. Staying connected to these young people throughout the decade is a testament to the significance of the experience and the quality of the relationship, and readers of this study should take those preexisting connections into account. I situate my relationship to these young people within Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Heart* (1997) and bell hooks' *Love as the Practice of Freedom* (1994), which is to say within a very profound and powerful ethic of love.

I bring an ethic of love to my position within the second case study organization, 4C LAB, as well. I first met Marissa Herrera, Executive Director of 4C LAB, when Marissa and I were both employed by separate youth arts programs; our pedagogical approaches did not align with these programs ideologically. Through ongoing dialogue and colleagueship, Marissa and I began to identify shortcomings in the local youth arts ecology, particularly regarding antiracist discourse. In response, we codeveloped a multiracial professional development practice and we have been providing consulting services together under the auspices of 4C LAB since 2020. I also worked for Marissa and 4C LAB as a contracted Program Development Specialist, meaning that—as with the YAAWs—I built relationships with the youth participants through the processes of hiring, training, educating, facilitating, and mentoring. Thus, I brought my friendship and existing ideological alignment with Marissa and 4C LAB into this research process. I also had a financial and professional relationship history with the organization.

My longtime self-identification as an abolitionist is also important to this study. I began teaching in jails and detention centers as an undergraduate student in 2004, which began my process of radicalization around critical literacy of the Prison-Industrial Complex (PIC). In 2007,

I saw a presentation by Critical Resistance, the abolitionist organization founded by Angela Davis; shortly thereafter, I read her foundational text: *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (Davis, 2003). This catalyzed my lifelong devotion to teaching and organizing against the carceral state. I believe fiercely in the potential of abolitionism as both an organizing tool and a vision of a transformed society. This belief has manifested in many modes of engagement. I have taught in jails, detention centers, and diversion programs for 15 years; I have presented at numerous conferences on issues of prison abolition and transformative justice; I have designed and taught undergraduate courses with collaborative, creative partnerships between incarcerated and non-incarcerated students; I have served on university faculty committees focusing specifically on issues of carceral justice; I have developed and led grant funded re-entry programs for formerly incarcerated community members; I have participated in community organizing efforts to pass ballot measures to divert funding away from incarceration and towards increased community resources. In recent years, however, I have perceived that the community of contemporary abolitionist organizers that I look to for leadership have begun articulating abolitionist theory in a new, more expansive way. Specifically, they have moved from centering the PIC as the object of abolishment to the structure of capitalism itself. I bring this lens of analysis to this research project, based on my impulse to theorize the broadest possible social transformations necessary to render the PIC actually obsolete, and bring a new world into being.

Problem of Practice

This research project was born in part of a personal sense of disillusionment, compounded over the 20-odd years of professional social justice youth arts programming experience that I brought to the beginning of my doctoral program in summer 2020 (see Appendix A). Throughout that time, I witnessed the genuinely life-changing impact that these

programs had on hundreds of young people. I also witnessed an acute discrepancy between the professed missions of many organizations in charge of running these programs and their actual values underpinning the programs' design and implementation. I saw programs trumpet their own devotion to the depth and quality of the youths' experiences, while behind-the-scenes those programs were only concerned with the breadth of impact on the sheer numbers of youth served. I witnessed harmful tokenization, as young people were thrust into the limelight of leadership roles without the proper pedagogical scaffolding, sometimes with devastating developmental consequences. I experienced outright lies in funder reports, institutional neglect of real deficits in program infrastructure, and—perhaps most troubling—programs broadcasting the language of social justice to mask a program ethos that was anything but.

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd in summer 2020 and the resulting racial justice uprising, diverse organizations across the country were called on to account for the presence or absence of social justice practices in their day-to-day operations. The field of social justice youth arts was no exception. I experienced a sort of relief when multiple organizations I had worked with were now tasked with identifying the shortcomings, oversights, and harms they had been enacting for years without reprisal or accountability. Even my first doctoral program received this type of scrutiny, particularly as the words "social justice" comprised part of their very nomenclature. Within myself, as a scholar-practitioner, I felt the coalescing of a renewed commitment to my own value system. I would no longer be available to work with or for any organizations whose practices do not align with their values.

However, in order to maintain this personal policy, I needed to be able to differentiate between the artifice and pretense of organizations whose behind-the-scenes operations did not reflect their professed values and organizations who "walked their talk" at the most

micro-relational levels of program implementation, espousing the same values to both the young people and the largest funders and board members. In my bones, my heart, and my intuitive body knowledge, I felt very clear that the two case study programs researched in this dissertation—the YBCA YAAW program and the 4C LAB CoLab program—had been the programs that I had known most intimately to be representative of the latter. I walked away from these programs with conviction that their theory and practice were actually in alignment. The transformative vision of change articulated by theorists of social justice youth arts programs were genuinely and authentically embodied and enacted in these pedagogical spaces, without the duplicity or falsehood I had witnessed in other program administration and implementation. I wanted to understand what set these programs apart. This impulse was the catalyst for my scholarly research and led me to the bodies of knowledge that would form the underpinnings of this dissertation's theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that undergirds my research is comprised of three mutually informative but distinct intellectual impulses: Healing-Centered Engagement (Ginwright, 2018), Social Justice Youth Arts (a term that originates in this study but comprises an amalgam of numerous theories regarding positive, creative, and critical youth development programming), and the principles of contemporary abolition (Kaba, 2021b). In Chapter II, I explicate these frameworks in detail, identify the overlaps therein, and begin to weave connective tissue between each theory to create the discursive container that will hold this research project and its findings.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Healing Centered Engagement

Healing Centered Engagement (HCE; Ginwright, 2018) is a theory of practice for youth program design and implementation. HCE incorporates systemic analysis and activist engagement both *alongside* and as a critical component *of* individual healing and Positive Youth Development (Damon, 2004; Shek et al., 2019). In his 2018 open-access article, "The Future of Healing: Shifting from Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement," Dr. Shawn Ginwright proposed HCE as a new popular framework for youth development.[1] In the article, Ginwright (2018) offers the following four key elements of HCE:

> Healing centered engagement is explicitly political, rather than clinical ... Healing centered engagement is culturally grounded and views healing as the restoration of identity ... Healing centered engagement is asset driven and focuses on the well-being we want, rather than symptoms we want to suppress ... Healing centered engagement supports adult providers with their own healing. (paras. 13–16)

By emphasizing the political as opposed to the clinical, Ginwright proposes an evolutionary turn in the critical discourse around youth programming, acknowledging the central role of systemic oppression in creating and perpetuating traumatic conditions. HCE specifically addresses the tendency of Trauma-Informed Practice, or TIP, to flatten the complexity of young people's experiences (Pyscher & Crampton, 2020) and proposes expanding the conversation around youth and trauma to look more broadly at the circumstantial, the communal, the relational, and the political factors that impact their lives. Pivoting away from the individualizing and deficit-based problematics of TIP, in which the essential pedagogical inquiry is often framed in terms of *what*

---

[1] Notably, by publishing this article on Medium, Ginwright intervened directly in the issue of accessibility regarding theoretical models for youth programming. Rather than publishing another scholarly article, the framework was made available for any practitioner or curious internet reader. It was particularly for readers who may already have been exposed to the jargon of dominant trends in contemporary youth development discourse, such as Trauma-Informed Practice or Social-Emotional Learning.

happened to you? (Bath, 2008), HCE moves towards an asset-driven approach by asking *what's right with you?* HCE also encourages youths to critically consider the impacts of systems of oppression on social-emotional wellness. Rather than pathologizing traumatic stress as an individual deficit, HCE reframes the narrative of youth struggle as an empowering process of *conscientizaçao* (Freire, 1970), purposeful community engagement (Chavez-Diaz & Lee, 2015), and transformative agency (Niehoff 2020; Wright, 2020).

HCE also expands upon the paradigm of TIP by explicitly identifying and naming the need for adult providers to heal. Adult social and emotional wellness has been proven to support positive student outcomes in traditional classrooms (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Further, research on "trauma exposure" (Van Dernoot Lipsky & Burk, 2009) shows that secondary exposure to traumatic stress carries a significant impact on individual wellbeing. Given the overwhelming presence of traumatic stress in youth spaces (Field, 2016; Harden et. al., 2015), considering healing practice is indispensable to supporting professional development for youth workers in all capacities (Wilson & Richardson, 2020).

Since publishing his landmark Medium article in 2018, Ginwright founded Flourish Agenda, a non-profit institution dedicated to training organizations and individuals in the principles of HCE. Flourish Agenda (n.d.) defines HCE as "a non-clinical, strengths-based approach that advances a holistic view of healing and re-centers culture and identity as a central feature in personal well-being for young people, their families, and those who work with them" (para. 10). Flourish Agenda codified the HCE model into a framework of five operational principles, referred to with the acronym CARMA (A. Alexander, 2021; Flourish Agenda, n.d.):

1. Culture: the values and norms that connect us to a shared identity.

2. Agency: the individual and collective power to act, create, and change personal conditions and external systems.
3. Relationships: the capacity to create, sustain, and grow healthy connections with others.
4. Meaning: the profound discovery of who we are, why we are, and what purpose we were born to serve.
5. Aspiration: the capacity to imagine, set, and accomplish goals for personal and collective livelihoods and advancement. The exploration of possibilities for our lives and the process of accomplishing goals for personal and collective livelihood.[2]

Currently, HCE is far more represented in the literature on youth organizing than youth arts, particularly in case studies. For example, Wilson and Richardson (2020) focused on two programs: The Transitional Education Through Affective Methodologies (T.E.A.M.) program for urban community college professionals, and the Girls of Grace Youth Center. These programs exemplify how Ginwright's principles of HCE can be built into program design and implementation. Conversely, Chavez-Diaz and Lee (2015) focused on organizations working with youth to advocate for law and policy developments in California, proposing the language of "healing justice" (p. 4) as a paradigm that connects social justice work to spiritual healing. Chavez-Diaz and Lee (2015) define HCE as an evolution of both radical healing and transformative organizing frameworks, encouraging practitioners to move beyond trauma and engage in social change work. Similarly, Wilson and Richardson (2020) defined HCE as an

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[2] These principles were brought to bear on the development and design of this study's interview protocol (see Appendix B).

expansion of TIP, which includes a broader systemic analysis that positions healing practices as a political response to oppressive conditions.

In 2021, the Los Angeles County Arts Education Collective commissioned a review of academic literature and interviews with research-practitioners and youth. This was an effort to cultivate "deeper, more comprehensive understanding" of Healing-Centered Engagement (Perera Rojas & Trinidad, 2021, p. 4), and move the theory further towards codification. The result was a 20-page zine published to the LA County Department of Arts & Culture website, began by describing the way in which HCE:

> Includes many overlapping disciplines and theories, including: creative youth development, deep social justice roots, transformational social emotional learning, culturally relevant pedagogy, cultural humility, decolonized and liberatory pedagogy, positive psychology, ethnic studies, and trauma-informed care. (Perera Rojas & Trinidad, 2021, p. 4)

The zine then culminated with a list of questions for moving forward, including fundamental questions about how to define healing and HCE in the arts, acknowledging that the impulse to codify the intersection of HCE and arts education is still very much in progress. However, this zine does serve a useful function in articulating the hybridity of HCE as a framework, and centralizing the various theoretical tendrils that comprise the current field of practice.

Social Justice Youth Arts

Social Justice Youth Arts (SJYA) is an umbrella term developed for the purposes of this dissertation to comprise a composite of disparate theories in the overlapping fields of Positive/Creative/Social Justice Youth Development and activist arts-based program design. At the outset of this study, my impulse was to bundle these disparate theories under the nomenclature of Creative Youth Development (CYD). This impulse was in part because I had been working as a consultant with several organizations for whom CYD was serving as the

dominant framework. CYD has gained widespread prominence over the past decade, particularly in philanthropy. Thus, it seemed strategic to situate my research within an already well-resourced space. However, in conversation with my dissertation committee member Dr. Susie Lundy, I was encouraged to parse apart my identity as a consultant and my identity as researcher. As a consultant, situating my research on social justice youth arts programs in a well-resourced space as CYD seemed like a strategic decision for the future development of those programs. However, as a researcher, it became clear that CYD represented only one facet of a much broader landscape of theoretical and practical approaches to this field. In this section, I describe the history and context of CYD as a predominant—even paradigmatic—framework for social justice youth arts programs. Then, I expand outward to discuss other approaches to this work that might offer even more robust or precise alignment with the values, pedagogy, character, and ethos of the two case study sites involved in my research.

Creative Youth Development

Creative Youth Development (CYD) combines arts education with the principles of Positive Youth Development (Damon, 2004; Shek et al., 2019). CYD in the design and implementation of out-of-school-time programs allows for using creative practice to engage young people in community-centered experiences. The term CYD represents an entire professional field. The Creative Youth Development National Partnership works as a centralized hub to coordinate organizations across the U.S. and internationally in sectors ranging from youth employment to juvenile justice. Dedicated fundraising, research, and professional development streams promote the positive impact of artmaking and community engagement on youths' ability to thrive. Denise Montgomery (2017) located the origins of CYD practice in a range of educational impulses including: the settlement house movement, Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the*

Oppressed (1970), John Dewey's *Experience and Education* (1938), and President Obama's Committee for the Arts and the Humanities Coming Up Taller: Arts and Humanities for Children and Youth At Risk program. Montgomery identified the March 2014 National Summit on Creative Youth Development as both a catalytic and coalescing moment in the field. In 2019, Americans for the Arts commissioned the *Creative Youth Development Toolkit*, which sought to advance the field of CYD by collecting effective practices and resources on key topics in youth development and arts learning. Montgomery contributed her article "Landscape analysis: Trends in CYD programs" to the *Creative Youth Development Toolkit.*

In addition to extolling the strengths and virtues of CYD, Montgomery (2019) also bemoans the fact that "CYD publications based on direct research with youth remain scant in the field" (p. 3). Thus concern was echoed by Ashley Hare, Deputy Director of Equity and Human Development of the National Guild for Community Arts Education. Hare (2019) contributed a Landscape Analysis to the Toolkit called "Working with Youth." In her writing, Hare interrogated the unequal distribution of agency within youth arts programs, and proposed several dynamics that might benefit from a rebalancing of power. For example, ameliorating the adultism, racism, and other structural hierarchies that currently inhibit CYD's movement towards its espoused goal of providing "opportunities for young people to create a more just and equitable society" (Hare, 2019, p. 1). Hare extoled the importance of youth-driven leadership within CYD program models as an antidote to the dominant paradigm of adultism she observed in the field. Hare concluded with an incisive critique of the available CYD literature and the lack of authorial diversity, specifically racial diversity, therein. Dr. Bettina Love (2019) contributed to the compendium entitled "Working in Social Justice." Love noted the racialized dimensions of the origins of the field. They acknowledged that youth development practice had gone through

over a century of theoretical and ideological paradigm shifts; from the moralizing panic around "at-risk" youth of the 1980s to the more progressive assets-based youth development approach of the 1990s. Despite its relative newness as a field, CYD has clearly emerged as a dominant framework in arts education, with a dynamic and ongoing discourse around perceptions and constructions of youth and power inside an evolving sociopolitical context.

In the aftermath of George Floyd's murder in May of 2020, numerous organizations overhauled their mission and vision statements and other values indicators to externally represent an alignment with the larger impulse towards social justice. The Creative Youth Development National Partnership website was no exception. Between May 2020 and December 2021, the Partnership's website underwent a total redesign to center a new set of core principles: racial equity, social justice, youth voice, and collective action. Before this redesign, codified frameworks explicitly for activist or social justice arts pedagogies had been far less present in the public-facing literature on the theoretical underpinnings of CYD programs than frameworks informed by adolescent psychology (e.g., TIP; Bath, 2008). TIP certainly had much to offer to the design of CYD programs and the professional development of youth arts practitioners. It has also recently become subject to critique, specifically regarding the deemphasis of political, social, and structural analysis in favor of a more individualizing philosophy of youth and trauma (Pyscher & Crampton, 2020; Wilson & Richardson, 2020; Wright, 2020). Thus, as the field of CYD moves towards using more social justice-minded language (and hopefully praxis), it becomes necessary to interrogate these foundational theories in favor of a more critical, even political, evolution of the work. Furthermore, while the new core values on the CYD website are certainly admirable, it still lacks a codified framework for youth arts programming that incorporates an explicitly political or activist lens.

As mentioned, one of the key assumptions in this study was that incorporating key elements of Healing-Centered Engagement into the CYD theory of practice might help align the field with its updated core values. If the Creative Youth Development National Partnership intended to embody the social justice principles of its new theory of practice, HCE could offer a useful roadmap for implementation. Simultaneously, scholar-practitioners could strategically leverage the robust foundation of CYD to shift the field away from deficit models and towards the assets-based practices of HCE. These HCE practices support the individual, cultural, *and* political dimensions of healing through youth arts programming. As my research deepened, however, I began to see that the existing limitations of CYD might render it a poor fit for my particular study. Thus, I considered whether I ought to expand my frame of reference to comprise other theories of youth programming in social justice as well as the arts.

Social Justice in Youth Programs

Dr. Shawn Ginwright, the theorist and scholar behind HCE, has also contributed to developing many program models that incorporate elements of social justice and healing into nontraditional learning spaces. In 2002, Ginwright and Cammarota proposed a new paradigm in youth development practice: Social Justice Youth Development, or SJYD (A. Alexander, 2021). SJYD explicitly encourages a critical consciousness of systemic and historical oppression alongside the development of youth self-identity and social agency. They praised the Positive Youth Development impulse to move away from deficit constructions of youth and towards more assets-based assessments. The authors proposed moving the paradigm even further by "shift[ing] the unit of analysis from individual behavior toward social and community forces and their impact on youth" (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002, p. 85). In 2008, Akom, Cammarota, and Ginwright proposed "Youthtopias" as a model of pedagogical space that combines Critical Race

Theory (CRT), Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), and media literacy to create the conditions for resistance, resiliency, community empowerment, and social change). The authors focused on two case studies: Akom's work with Youth as Public Intellectuals (YPI) and Cammarota's work with the Social Justice Education Project (SJEP). They used these case studies to articulate the Youthtopia model, which was proposed as an antidotal approach to cultural deficit models by activating youth's existing social/cultural capital and experiential knowledge. Doing so allowed the youths to generate media that support social critiques and visions of justice and possibility.

There are also many program models designed with trauma-informed principles. These models often come with the tacit assumption that those principles can support the healing and resiliency of youth who have been exposed to traumatic conditions. These models include Youth Empowerment Programs (YEP; Bulanda & Byro-Johnson, 2016; Harden et al., 2015), expressive arts therapy in the classroom (Field, 2016), and autobiographical dramaturgy (Halverson, 2010). However, the trauma-informed paradigm is often incomplete insofar as it deemphasizes the structural analysis of systemic oppression as a determining factor in youth's exposure to trauma. For Ginwright and Cammarota (2002) theories that disregard this analytical component are problematic "because they assume that youth themselves should be changed, rather than the oppressive environments in which they live […] conceptualizing youth as if they were somehow separate from their environments" (p. 85). Similarly, Goessling (2020) observed that "research on complex trauma exposes the ongoing adverse effects of colonial and racial violence on racialized individuals and communities" (p. 15). The author added that much of the discourse on trauma-informed youth development "reflects a pathologizing lens situating the locus of responsibility on the individual, where they alone are responsible for their reactions and

responses" (Goessling, 2020, p. 15). As an alternative, Goessling (2020) referenced Ginwright and Cammarota's statement that "social justice youth development critically examines how sociopolitical factors influence urban youths' daily lives and development" (p. 15).

Goessling (2020) proposed a "politicized trauma-informed approach" (p. 27) to theorize the role of structural oppression within healing centered social justice arts spaces, which they termed "youthspaces." For Goessling, the notion of youthspaces is a framework for programs that use art and creative research practice to uplift the knowledge of youth; particularly urban youth, who experience oppression as a form of trauma. Like Ginwright, Goessling problematized the limitations of TIP, broadening her analytical framework for youth development from the individually pathological to the systemic and/or historical. Doing so illuminated the transformative potential of engaging with young people through social justice arts praxis and YPAR. Goessling's contribution to the literature is especially important insofar as they enumerates the difficult truths of implementing community-based programs with youth. Goessling (2020) underscored the particular challenges of including both critical consciousness and artistic skill development in youthspace design by emphasizing the necessity of relationships and restorative practices.

Activist Arts in Youth Programs

Marit Dewhurst (2014) proposed the framework of "activist art pedagogy" using the language of critical pedagogy to highlight "three key activities that characterize the process of making activist art: connecting, questioning, and translating" (p. 10). For Dewhurst, *connecting* was the process of forging relationships between young people's lived experiences and interests and the broader scope of social justice consciousness. *Questioning* indicated a facilitated experience of interrogating the social justice issue as well as the artistic medium to more closely

and deeply align the two. *Translating* meant utilizing symbols, metaphors, artistic thinking skills, and techniques to communicate not only the symptoms of injustice, but an actual vision of structural change via the artmaking practice (Dewhurst, 2014). Like Hare (2019), Dewhurst (2014) emphasized analyzing power when evaluating social justice art programs, as well as understanding that young people must lead the decision-making process in order for the pedagogy to be authentic.

Dana Wright's (2020)[3] proposal of "critical arts pedagogy" aimed to apply both systemic analysis and transformative agency to the production of knowledge and activist art. One of Wright's most salient contributions to the discourse was her emphasis on critical youth studies. Wright (2020) problematized dominant narratives of "how societies construct and frame youth as a social category" (p. 33) with particular resistance to discourses of deficiency, individualism, pathology, and other narratives that mask the inequities and structural relations impacting youth and families. For Wright, centering and valuing youth knowledge, particularly in the artmaking process, was a tool for inquiry into injustice. Doing so supported the youths' analysis, which helped reveal the mutability of systems, support their visions of a future, and promote the visibility and validity of their knowledge production. Artmaking can be an analytical tool to examine young artmakers' everyday experiences in a process of inquiry that reveals new ways of thinking about normalized encounters, intersectional identities, and shared experiences. Wright's

[3] Like many of the theorists in this conversation, Wright centers the practice of Youth Participatory Action Research, or YPAR, as a fundamental component of the model. It is important to note that for many CYD practitioners, designing and implementing a full-fledged YPAR project is beyond the scope of feasibility. This may be an area that calls for future resourcing and partnerships between practitioners and academics. It could be an area in which a more realistic analysis of resourcing and feasibility can help inform the models and frameworks that undergird the work in more practical, everyday terms.

(2020) case study program deepened young people's critical engagement with the world, their past and present circumstances, and possibilities for the present and future (p. 43).

The youth program at the center of Wright's YPAR case study culminated in a Theater of the Oppressed (Boal, 1979) performance about police harassment. The performance proposed a diversion of funds away from community policing and towards the creation of more tangible resources for youth. This is just one example of how centering the intersection of youth empowerment, critical justice work, and cultural organizing has become more popular throughout the youth development field in recent years. On the east coast, programs such as Performing Statistics (performingstatistics.org) utilize arts-based abolitionist pedagogies to engage creatively with themes of policing, criminalization, and imprisonment. On the west coast, organizations like the Youth Justice Coalition (youthjusticela.org) activate youth power for the movement to end incarceration both within the local political apparatus and at the grassroots level. One area of future research that may follow this dissertation study could certainly be a comparative survey of the various program models that exist at the intersection of youth arts and PIC abolition.

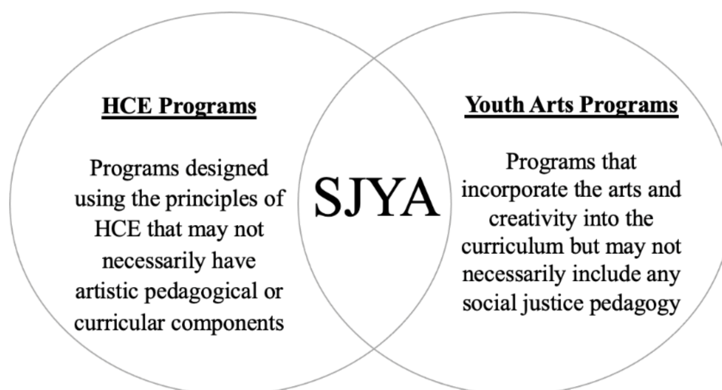
SJYA as Conceptual Framework

In the landscape analysis "Trends in CYD Programs," Denise Montgomery (2019) remarked upon the preponderance of models and frameworks within the space of youth arts and social justice. Montgomery (2019) wrote that "CYD practitioners and stakeholders, including youth, should convene to collaborate in merging the various frameworks of CYD program practice for greater clarity for practitioners" (p. 7). As evidenced in this chapter, numerous scholar-practitioners have worked to parse the specific characteristics of each pedagogical paradigm, contributing to the possible fragmentation of the field. I have chosen the terminology

of Social Justice Youth Arts (SJYA) to serve as the conceptual framework for the practical dimension of this research study. For the purposes of this dissertation, an SJYA program is a youth arts program that explicitly incorporates aspects of social justice education. This could occur didactically through direct instruction about activist history and praxis. It could also be pedagogical through the centering of young people's lived experiences of systemic and structural oppressions, or both. Even more simply or succinctly, SJYA describes a youth arts program designed with HCE principles (see Figure 1). A key assumption of this study was that designing youth arts programs with the principles of HCE supports integrating adolescents' natural developmental inclinations towards creativity and critical-analytical thought (Shek et al., 2019) with their needs for positive relationships, community engagement, and a sense of agency (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Hare, 2019; Wright, 2020). However, I chose to use the language of Social Justice Youth Arts as opposed to Healing-Centered Youth Arts to avoid confusion for those unfamiliar with the HCE paradigm. Otherwise, those unfamiliar with the paradigm might jump to logical conclusions that conflate the language of "healing" with discourses around trauma, injury recovery, wellness, or therapeutics.

Figure 1

Social Justice Youth Arts Programs Defined



It bears noting that the three frameworks identified within this section that are perhaps the closest corollaries to the SJYA framework—Youthspaces, Activist Art Pedagogy, and Critical Arts Pedagogy. All of these concepts were developed by White (or White-passing) female academics. The framework of Healing-Centered Engagement was developed by Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) scholars in collaboration with BIPOC youth. As a White, female academic, I feel strongly that the HCE framework offers an opportunity to center the experiences and voices of those most impacted by systemic oppression. This is critical as we design practices, strategies, and program models for the field that are intended to transform those structures in support of youth-led creative visions of a more liberated future. Using SJYA as the conceptual framework posits the notion that "students may become empowered to engage in some sort of praxis, engaged enough to name the obstacles in the way of their shared becoming" (Greene, 1988, p. 133). SJYA can more clearly "perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform" (Freire, 1970, pp. 33–34). This praxis of transformation is also at the heart of the contemporary abolitionist movement.

The Contemporary Abolitionist Movement

The language of abolition immediately evokes the historical crusade to end the enslavement of African people in the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries. The breadth and magnitude of that crusade is beyond the scope of this literature review. However, as Angela Davis (2021) notes:

> While most anti-slavery abolitionists simply wanted to get rid of slavery, there were those who did recognize early on that slavery could not be comprehensively eradicated simply by disestablishing the institution itself, leaving intact the economic, political, and cultural conditions within which slavery flourished. They understood that abolition would require a thorough reorganization of US society—economically, politically, and socially—in order to guarantee the incorporation of formerly enslaved Black people into a new democratic order. That process never occurred, and we are facing issues of systemic and structural racism today that should have been addressed more than one hundred years ago. (p. 22)

Numerous movement leaders have worked to identify and critically resist the ways that structural and systemic racism—and enslavement as enshrined by the 13th constitutional amendment—have persisted in the years since the Emancipation Proclamation. W. E. B. Du Bois' notion of abolition democracy was a mode of empowering formerly enslaved people during reconstruction (Spivak, 2020). Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* (2010) identified the ways that the war on drugs facilitated shapeshifted the American caste system and led to the modern day epidemic of mass incarceration. These analyses contributed to developing the more recent movement that has characterized the past 25 years of abolitionist organizing by centering the Prison-Industrial Complex (PIC) as the object of eradication and transformation.

In 1997, Davis founded Critical Resistance, an organization devoted to the abolition of the PIC. Critical Resistance (2020) defines the PIC as:

> The overlapping interests of government and industry that use surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as solutions to economic, social and political problems. […] PIC abolition is a political vision with the goal of eliminating imprisonment, policing, and surveillance and creating lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment. (paras. 1 & 3)

Movement leader, Mariame Kaba (2021b), articulated abolition's three essential components as "a political vision, a structural analysis of oppression, and a practical organizing strategy" (p. 2). The slogan of Critical Resistance—*Dismantle, Change, Build*—also summarizes the contemporary abolitionist movement's tripartite character. For the purposes of this literature review, I will expand upon these three impulses that characterize what I have termed the

contemporary abolitionist movement. This movement expands beyond just the eradication of prisons, per se, to encompass a vision of societal transformation in its broadest possible context. To invoke Angela Davis (2021) again:

> Abolitionist approaches ask us to enlarge our field of vision so that rather than focusing myopically on the problematic institution and asking what needs to be changed about that institution, we raise radical questions about the organization of the larger society. (p. 21)

Structural Analysis of Oppression (Dismantle)

As with Healing-Centered Engagement, one of the fundamental precepts of abolitionist praxis is the development of a critical analysis of structural and systemic oppression within a historical continuum. In the context of abolition, this requires an understanding that "the American carceral, legal, and electoral systems are rooted in racism, patriarchy, and capitalism. These systems must be abolished in order to build a new system of justice that ensures that the basic needs of all people are met" (Lumumba, 2021, p. 227). Critical and necessary analyses of the devastating social and economic harm wrought by the PIC are numerous (M. Alexander, 2010; Davis, 2003, 2005; Education for Liberation Network & Critical Resistance Editorial Collective, 2021; Gilmore, 2007; Kaba, 2021b; Kaepernick 2021). A full summation of these damages is beyond the scope of this literature review. However, I seek to theorize the more contemporary impulse to widen the locus of abolitionism from simply the dismantlement of prisons to encompass the dismantling of capitalist society itself. Thus, it is necessary to comprehend the ways in which "our histories have been asymmetrically shaped by the violence of carceral power," (Kaepernick, 2021, p. 14) and specifically, how "the carceral state is central to the machinery of racial capitalism" (Kaepernick, 2021, p. 29).

The theoretical impulse towards the abolition of capitalism it not merely a recent evolutionary outgrowth of prison abolition. In 1969, Herbert Marcuse proposed "a revolution which subordinates the development of productive forces and higher standards of living to the

requirements of creating solidarity for the human species, for abolishing poverty" (p. 8). For Marcuse (1969):

> The attainment of conditions in which man could shape his own life, was that of no longer subordinating his life to the requirements of profitable production, to an apparatus controlled by forces beyond his control. And the attainment of such conditions meant the abolition of capitalism. (p. 16)

Angela Davis, to whom many attribute the birth of the modern-day abolitionist movement, was a student and friend of Marcuse. In their essay collection, *Abolition Democracy*, Davis (2005) cites Marcuse's influence on her thinking:

> I have learned a great deal from Herbert Marcuse about the relationship between philosophy and ideology critique. I draw particular inspiration from his work *Counterrevolution and Revolt* that attempts to directly theorize political developments of the late 1960s. But at the same time the framework is philosophical. *How do we imagine a better world and raise the questions that permit us to see beyond the given?* [emphasis added] (p. 23)

I believe that this fundamental capacity to imagine a better world, while critically interrogating the one that currently exists, lies at the heart of both Healing-Centered Creative Youth Development practice *and* contemporary abolitionism. Using critical systemic analysis and artistic practice to problematize, or "defamiliarize" (Shklovsky, 1917), the oppressive characteristics of social reality helps to reveal their constructed nature, and opens the possibility for alternative and revolutionary visioning. For Davis (2021), "abolitionist strategies are especially critical because they teach us that our visions of the future can radically depart from what exists in the present" (pp. 22–23).

Political Vision (Change)

The abolitionist capacity for radical visioning is not specific to this contemporary moment. For incarcerated movement leader Mumia Abu-Jamal, it has been an essential throughline throughout abolition's chronological evolution: "abolitionists (of enslavement) were truly remarkable people who saw beyond the present into a time not yet born … Prison

abolitionists are today's freedom dreamers who seek to expand the experience of liberty for all" (Abu-Jamal, 2021, pp. 197–198). For Dan Berger and David Stein (2021) the movement for prison abolition requires a simultaneous engagement with both the extant and the possible:

> [Abolition] is both a defensive posture and a visionary one … Abolitionists have long operated at this intersection of opposing what is and fighting for what could be … Police and prisons uphold the world that is. Abolition fights for the world that should be. Abolition unites struggles across time and space. (pp. 232–236)

Radically imaginative future visioning is the aspect of the contemporary abolitionist movement that most requires the development of individual and collective creative capacities. For formerly incarcerated organizer, Marlon Peterson (2021), "[abolition] is about mainstreaming and resourcing the imagination of working-class and poor Black, Brown, Indigenous and White people to create community options that value our happiness" (p. 213). Of course, it is essential that this creative aspect of future social visioning be rooted in a liberatory community ethos. Activist and thought leader Mariame Kaba (2021a) articulates PIC abolition as "a positive project that focuses, in part, on building a society where it is possible to address harm without relying on structural forms of oppression or the violent systems that increase it" (pp. 239–240). Marcuse (1969) also prefigured the positive, perhaps even quasi-utopian, qualities of the abolitionist project in his affirmation:

> Of the right to build a society in which the abolition of poverty and toil terminates in a universe where the sensuous, the playful, the calm, and the beautiful become forms of existence and thereby the Form of the society itself. (p. 23)

Practical Organizing Strategy (Build)

Despite the appeal of utopian dreaming, the abolitionist project is a specific one. It focuses the future visioning process on "the particular and urgent need to get rid of systems of policing, surveillance, and prisons, and to build alternatives that make us truly safe" (Education for Liberation Network & Critical Resistance Editorial Collective, 2021, pp. 8–9). This visioning

allows for “dreaming the world anew to replace carceral repression with compassionate practices and structures that meet basic social and economic needs, so that we might flourish individually and collectively in an ecologically protected planet” (Abu-Jamal, 2021, pp. 200–201). The specificity of these alternative practices and structures vary from theorist to theorist, as evidenced by the following direct quotes:

- Close analyses of (abolitionist) proposals make good sense. They want to build a society in which social problems are solved not by police and prison guards but by medical and mental health specialists, social workers, domestic violence experts, educators, and community-based organizers and problem solvers charged with addressing crises in the communities where they live. (Abu-Jamal, 2021, p. 198)
- An abolitionist project is one that addresses the systemic and immediate needs of communities, particularly the most marginalized, not only by demanding the end to carceral institutions that are violent but to create structures that are built upon mutual aid, transformative justice, community accountability, and collective liberation. (Wun, 2021, pp. 208–209)
- Abolition is and always has been a slate of affirmative demands for the world we need. The struggles to defund police and decarcerate prisons are wholly intertwined with other efforts to transform society. Medicare for all, a job guarantee, and a home guarantee are battles for a humane and ecologically just budget. (Berger & Stein, 2021, p. 235)
- PIC abolition is a vision of a restructured society in a world where we have everything we need: food, shelter, education, health, art, beauty, clean water, and

> more. Things that are foundational to our personal and community safety. (Kaba, 2021b, p. 2)

In their 2012 essay *Decolonization is not a Metaphor*, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang refuse the implication that it is the work of theorists or movement leader to answer questions regarding the conditions that will follow a revolutionary social justice event:

> Reconciliation is concerned with questions of *what will decolonization look like? What will happen after abolition? What will be the consequences of decolonization for the settler?* Incommensurability acknowledges that these questions need not, and perhaps cannot, be answered … We want to say, first, that decolonization is not obliged to answer those questions—decolonization is not accountable to settlers, or settler futurity. Decolonization is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity. (p. 35)

In contrast, abolitionists are actively engaged in the practice of articulating and projecting specific visions of a more just future. Answering the question "*What will happen after abolition?*" is both an active creative practice and an organizing strategy. However, as Robin D. G. Kelley (2021) reminds us, "abolition is not an event but a process" (p. 192). It is more important to embody and live the values of the future we want to see than it is to answer a priori questions about that world. Critical Resistance (2020) calls us to that task:

> An abolitionist vision means that we must build models today that can represent how we want to live in the future. It means developing practical strategies for taking small steps that move us toward making our dreams real and that lead us all to believe that things really could be different. It means living this vision in our daily lives. (p. 6)

This concept of abolition as an everyday behavior is a guiding principle for this study. For Marlon Peterson "'abolition' is an action word. It is a daily practice, just like meditation, yoga, and veganism" (p. 211). Similarly, for Andrea Ritchie (2021), "the tools for abolition are in our hands, and we can practice them every day, in every interaction, institution, and imagining we engage in" (pp. 222–223). These articulations helped inform the design of the study with the

objective of identifying everyday abolitionist praxis in the lived experiences of the interview participants.

Identifying and analyzing the everyday abolitionist behaviors enacted and embodied by this study's interview participants led me to theorize the role of the individual as a core unit of the abolitionist project. It also helped with understanding how participants' experiences of membership in a creative community helped foment those behaviors in relational terms. As Kaba (2021a) describes it,

> Trying to transform society, we must remember that we ourselves will also need to transform … being intentionally in relation to one another, a part of a collective, helps to not only imagine new worlds but also to imagine ourselves differently. (pp. 240–241)

In this study, I intended to look closely at the ways in which SJYA programs have supported the process of young people imagining themselves differently at a pivotal and formative inflection point in their developmental trajectory. I also sought to understand the ways in which that process had impacted young people's lives since.

Summary of Literature Review

The field of Creative Youth Development (CYD), which emerged out of the longer history of Youth Development programming, crossed a watershed moment in 2020 when its stakeholders were moved to more overtly respond to demands for racial justice and equity. This response invited CYD organizations to evolve their theory of practice beyond a trauma-informed approach to comprise a more socio-politically aware, assets-based, community-driven pedagogy. Healing-Centered Engagement (HCE) offers one model that might support this practical turn by bringing core principles of social justice youth development into a contemporary context. There are a number of existing models in the field that blend social justice principles and practices with youth arts pedagogy. For the purposes of this study, I have used the term Social Justice Youth

Arts (SJYA) to describe programs where the principles of HCE are integrated into the design of youth arts programs—CYD or otherwise. Without HCE, a youth arts program could easily become simply "arts for art's sake." Without the arts, an HCE program is not obligated to include creative components and could just as easily be a youth organizing or development program. This literature review helped me to posit that when HCE is integrated into youth arts programs, the fundamental characteristics of the contemporary abolitionist movement—critically dismantling oppressive systems and imaginatively envisioning transformative social change—have the potential to be operationalized as liberatory educational praxis. Both HCE and abolition share a theoretical understanding that personal, interpersonal, and systemic transformation are interconnected and mutually informative processes. Flourish Agenda (n.d.) articulates this process as a sort-of ripple effect:

> Most policies lack effectiveness because change must first happen at three levels: Individual, Interpersonal, and Institutional … If you first focus on the Individual perspective through the lens of healing, it will change how people interact. This will then impact how policies are created at an institutional level. (para. 6)

This concept is made even more succinct through adrienne maree brown's social change model of the fractal in emergent social change, and the notion that "what we practice at a small scale can reverberate to the largest scale" (brown, 2017, p. 52). I propose that these reverberations travel not only in terms of scale—from the micro- to the meso- and macro-levels of relationships— but also in terms of time. Catalytic seedling moments of *conscientizaçao* (Freire, 1970) resonate and expand over time to impact broader spheres of engagement and behavior. In Chapter III, I outline the methodological framework I used to trace this longitudinal phenomenon through a hybrid of narrative and arts-based research processes.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

In this study, I employed semi-structured interviews with young people who participated in social justice youth arts (SJYA) programs during their teenage years. These interviews investigated how the principles of Healing-Centered Engagement (Ginwright, 2018) were present within these young people's experiences of those programs. I also explored the extent to which those experiences may have encouraged or cultivated a lived praxis of the principles of the contemporary abolitionist movement (Kaba, 2021b; Kaepernick, 2021). What follows is a description of the methodological approaches of this research design. I also describe the theoretical underpinnings that informed those design choices to best support the objectives of this study and address the following two-part research question:

1. What elements of Healing-Centered Engagement are present in young people's memories of their experiences in SJYA programs?
2. How have those aspects of that experience informed their relationship to the principles and practice of the contemporary abolitionist movement in the years since, over the course of their development from adolescence into young adulthood?

Methodological Considerations and Study Design

This dissertation project draws primarily from the qualitative tradition of narrative inquiry, and secondarily from the field of Arts-Based Research (ABR). Because I was interested in studying the recollections of young adults who participated in SJYA programs during their teenage years, the narrative (re)construction of memory served as the principal data source. As a researcher, I intended to "simultaneously embrace narrative as a method for research and narrative as the phenomenon of study" (Clandinin, 2007, p. 7). I did this by engaging former

SJYA program participants in the act of remembering and meaning-making through reflective autobiographical and autoethnographic storytelling. In conceptualizing the methodological approach to this storytelling process, I considered the philosophical intersection of narrative inquiry and ABR to inform my understanding of memory as a principal data source. This helped to ground the study's recollection-based approach as a creative, agentic practice.

In his chapter on Narrative Inquiry (from *The Handbook of Arts-Based Research*; Leavy 2017a), Mark Freeman (2017) elucidates the "distinction between life as *lived* and life as *told,* from the vantage point of the present, looking backward" in that "the process of looking backward could at times lead to truths that couldn't be had in the moment" (Leavy, 2017a, p. 127). In this study, I was concerned with how young people's engagement with SJYA programming encouraged their identity formation process *at the time*. I was further interested in how the durability and evolution of those self-identifications manifested in the participants' broader social context *in the years since*. The theory of retrospective meaning-making was particularly useful for this approach. For Freeman (1993), "the process of recollection is one of *finding new meanings,* new patterns and metaphors for articulating the shape of one's life. (p. 32). The interview participants engaged in a creative narrative practice to recollect their experiences in a creative arts program. I believe this resulted in a depth of reflection and insight that enriches the data as well as the research process and participant experience.

To help inspire and propel the narrative recollection process, and to situate the research process within the creative arts frame, I incorporated some methodological practices and strategies from ABR in the data collection phase. Specifically, in each interview, the participants and I engaged visually with a digital artifact of some piece of art created by the participant during their time in the SJYA program (see Appendix B). Then we participated together in a

discursive interviewing practice—informed by Betensky's (1977) phenomenological approach to art expression—to activate the artifact as a catalyst for narrative remembering. Betensky's (1977) work comes from the psychotherapeutic field—specifically art therapy—so, she articulates her approach for the roles of therapist and client, as follows:

> The first step is phenomenological perceiving when client and therapist silently gaze at the art expression … The second step is phenomenological discussion ... The phenomenological discussion leads into the third step. It is the client's phenomenological accounting to the art therapist of his, the client's, subjective experience of the creative art work process as it evolved. (pp. 174–175)

I believe that conducting an analogous process within the researcher-participant relationship in place of the therapist-client relationship inspired a depth of access to embodied and nonverbal memories. Such access deepened and enriched the narrative as well as the participant experience. Together, the participants and I experienced their art, and then engaged in a two-part open-ended inquiry about the experience:

1. How do you feel after looking at the artwork you created during that time?
2. What memories come up for you? Images? Sensations in the body? (see Appendix B)

These questions were designed to awaken emotional, psychological, and somatic recollections of the particular time period via the sense memories of the artmaking process. My choice to orient these questions around feelings rather than more cerebral analyses was largely inspired by Blumenfeld-Jones (2016). The author articulated the role of "muscle remembering" in phenomenological ABR as "remembering lodged in the muscles. This memory is a memory of the complete moment" (p. 330). For Blumenfeld-Jones (2016), both muscle remembering and "*retrospection* that involves standing away or outside of what I am doing as I recall my intentions as an artist" (p. 331) are key components of the phenomenological practice of ABR.

Similarly, for Leavy (2017a), “this approach (ABR) has the potential to bring forth data that would not emerge with written or verbal communication alone” (p. 20). Engaging with art to catalyze the interview process was also inspired by the video-mediated interview method (Takeuchi & Bryan, 2019). In this method, an individual is shown a video clip from which the interview departs. The video functions as a shared piece of data that both researcher and participant engage with, reflect on, and respond to verbally throughout the interaction.

As the interview transitioned from engagement with the arts-based catalyst into more specific recollections of participants’ lived experiences, I employed a semi-structured approach to the inquiry process. I based my line of questioning on my pre-written protocol, while also pivoting and shifting in the moment based on a posture of active listening. The protocol was composed based on Flourish Agenda’s (n.d.) five CARMA principles of HCE, as well as Critical Resistance’s threefold model of abolition. I employed a critical-phenomenological lens in the process of listening to—and making meaning from—the narratives that emerged within these interviews. Merleau-Ponty’s (1974) theory of intersubjectivity undergirded my understanding of each young person’s unique perspectival and retroactive interpretation of their experience. I located myself within critical-phenomenological discourse, rather than classical phenomenological thought as described by Moustakas (1994) because of this project’s firm grounding in critical socio-structural analysis. According to Guenther (2020):

> Critical phenomenology goes beyond classical phenomenology by reflecting on the quasi-transcendental social structures that make our experience of the world possible and meaningful, and also by engaging the material practice of “restructuring the world” in order to generate new and liberatory possibilities for meaningful experience and existence … (Structures) are both “out there” in the world, in the documented patterns and examples of hetero-patriarchal racist domination, and they are also intrinsic to subjectivity and intersubjectivity, shaping the way we perceive ourselves, others, and the world. (pp. 15–16)

Recently, Guenther has begun to propose that phenomenology might extend beyond criticism. They ask "what would it take for a praxis of phenomenology to become *abolitionist,* beyond and against the Kantian tradition of critique that phenomenology has inherited, albeit not without significant transformation?" (Guenther, 2022, p. 32). My intention throughout the interview process was to lean into this invitation from my position as researcher, noticing when and if a default inclination towards a critical posture might be bypassing or impeding more abolitionist takeaways. Fortunately, as I discuss in Chapter IV, my interviewees testimonies contained a high degree of hopefulness—a core quality of abolitionist thought—which ameliorated my fear that the conversations might get stuck in a mire of criticality.

Both HCE and abolitionist theory encourage developing a critical analysis of structural oppression. As such, one of the primary foci of this inquiry was the way in which the development of critical-analytical capacities interacted with the creative/artistic experiences of young people, both individually and collectively. Again, the intersection of ABR and Narrative Inquiry served as a useful frame for this research to address that interplay. According to Leavy (2017a), "ABR can be particularly useful in exploring, describing, or explaining (theorizing about) the connections between our individual lives and the larger contexts in which we live our lives" (p. 10). For Clandinin and Caine (2008), "in narrative inquiry it is imperative to address the question of how larger social, institutional, and cultural narratives inform our understanding and shape the researchers' and participants' stories by which they live" (p. 5). Throughout the interviews, our discourse navigated between these concentric spheres of experience, traversing the terrain between the experiential and the systemic, and back again.

This narrative process can also be characterized as "counter-storytelling," which is defined by Solórzano and Yosso (2002) as "a method of telling the stories of those people whose

experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society)" (p. 32). Through purposive sampling, my cohort of interview participants was comprised entirely of BIPOC youth. By specifically centering the recalled lived experiences of BIPOC youth, I aimed to contest the majoritarian stories associated with predominantly White institutions in the arts, education, and nonprofit sectors. I also challenged the adultism (Fox, 2020; Hare, 2019) and deficit-based constructions of youth (Wright, 2020) embedded in many youth service organizations by uplifting memories of adolescent experience as the primary locus of knowledge and expertise. ABR practices also supported this project's counter-storytelling approach. ABR is "able to get at multiple meanings, opening up multiplicity in meaning making instead of pushing authoritative claims. ABR can democratize meaning making and decentralize academic researchers as 'the experts'" (Leavy, 2017a, p. 10). The participants' expertise was centered not only in the data collection phase but also the interpretation and presentation phases. The written representation of both the narrative and the coded themes were member-checked, clarified, and validated in an intentional and collaborative process between myself as researcher and the study's participants (see Appendix C).

The final contribution to the composite of theoretical paradigms that informed the design of this research study is the practice of autoethnographic self-reflection (Hughes & Pennington, 2018). Throughout my data collection process, I conducted self-reflexive memos, engaged in reflective conversation with trusted colleagues and friends, and maintained a consistent degree of critical analysis of my own contribution to the interviews themselves. I implicated myself as a subjective participant in the research dynamic as opposed to an objective or dispassionate observer. The Autoethnographic Self-Reflection section of this document serves as a space to

center my own identity positionalities and individual experiences as the researcher within and throughout the larger context of the study itself.

Data Collection Procedures

In this study, I used semi-structured narrative interviews (Galletta, 2013) with an arts-based catalyst. These interviews captured data about young people's experiences as teenage participants in two distinct SJYA case study programs and in the years since. I explored students' recollections of the program design itself, the relative presence of the principles of HCE within their experience of the program, and the degree to which the program may have encouraged a lived praxis of abolitionist principles and behaviors. Four participants were selected via purposive sampling and two via snowball sampling. Data collection took place between November 2022 and March 2023. This data collection process consisted of semi-structured, open-ended interviews prompted by viewing and discussion of an arts-based catalyst, as well as a follow-up member-checking process (see Appendix D) and demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E). Additional secondary data sources included the participants' artwork, self-reflexive researcher memoranda, and websites and online media that describe the SJYA programs and their mission statements.

Case Study Sites

I sought to look closely at the experiences of young people in two distinct SJYA programs. To do so, I employed Merriam's (1998) approach to qualitative case studies as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit" (p. xiii). I applied an interpretive lens to the research in accordance with Stake's (1995) characteristics of qualitative case studies by "resting upon [my] intuition and see[ing] research basically as a researcher-subject interaction" (Yazan,

2015). This intuitive and interpretive approach was based on Parlett and Hamilton's (1972) notion of "progressive focusing," which builds upon the assumption that "the course of the study cannot be charted in advance" (as cited in Stake, 1995, p. 22). However, the boundedness of the phenomena being studied—namely, the experiences of young people in two specific SJYA programs—stayed firmly clear throughout the process, even as I made space for emergent/emic themes. Using this qualitative and constructivist case study model (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995), the two SJYA programs on which I focused my research were the Young Artists at Work (YAAW program, now defunct) at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA) in San Francisco, and CoLab, a program of 4C LAB in Los Angeles, California.

Case Study 1: The YBCA Young Artists at Work Program

Throughout the 2012–2013 academic year, the Young Artists at Work program at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA) was a paid, year-long art-as-activism residency for Bay Area teens. Staffed by one full-time manager, one part-time assistant, and several temporarily contracted artist-educators and interns, the program served between 25 and 30 youth. The YAAWs began their residency by spending an entire summer month at YBCA immersed in contemporary art and ideas. The teens learned from local and international artists, acquiring practical tools and models for art-making and social justice. Then, throughout the school year, the teens spent between 5 and 10 hours/week at YBCA developing and creating their own original community-based art projects. They learned about youth-driven pedagogy, critical dialogue around contemporary aesthetics and social justice, and collaboration with local organizations. By the end of the 2013 school year, the Young Artists at Work program had received local and national recognition, was invited to participate in national teens-in-museums

convenings and publications, and occupied a major seat at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts curatorial table (Butler, 2014).

The following year, 2013–2014, the program's assistant manager and I (serving in the capacity of program manager) decided to introduce prison abolition as the curricular theme for the year. We did so by engaging the YAAW program's multidisciplinary community-arts practice as a pedagogical framework "to examine the complex matrix of oppressions that collude to perpetuate mass incarceration in America, and theorize strategies for intervention, change, and liberation" (YCBA Young Artists at Work, n.d., para. 1). During the 2013 summer intensive, the participating youth engaged in social-justice workshops on the histories of race and capitalism. They unpacked privilege, queer and feminist theory, critical literacy of the judicial system, as well as strategic and technical trainings on mobilizing art as a vehicle for social change (including the 2013 fight to prevent a new San Francisco jail). Then, over the course of the 2013–2014 year, the YAAWs engaged in a collaborative artmaking practice, activating their research to create a public exhibition presented at YBCA in the Spring of 2014.

Case Study 2: The 4C LAB CoLab Program

CoLab is a youth performance ensemble and creative residency program run by 4C LAB, an arts organization based in Los Angeles, California. 4C LAB provides arts immersion programming led by professional teaching artists. The 4 C's are: create, communicate, and collaborate to build community. CoLAB strives to create "a safe space for young creative visionaries to share their stories through artistic expression" (4C Lab, n.d., para. 2). CoLab brings together youth (ages 15–23) from across Los Angeles for weekly, no-cost multidisciplinary workshops, guest artists, mentorships and ensemble-building, and working towards the creation of an original performance. With a pedagogy and curriculum rooted in the

power of personal narrative through multi-disciplinary artforms, participants engaged in story circles, personal narrative writing, exquisite corpse poetry, and dance warm-ups. Participants engaged in visual and multimedia art activities, resulting in a culmination performance of their collective work. Youth who participated in the CoLab creative residency were also given the opportunity to enter into the program's leadership development pipeline by training to become paid teaching artists.

Since 2020, I have worked for 4C LAB as a contracted Program Development Specialist, building relationships with the youth participants through the processes of hiring, training, educating, facilitating, and mentoring. In 2020 and 2021, I served as a cohost of the online culminating performances for CoLab, the SJYA branch of 4C LAB. As such, I met the youth participants via Zoom moments before their public presentations. The participants' energy was filled with pre-performance excitement and mutual admiration for one another's creativity. Then, as my work with the organization deepened, I began collaborating with them artistically and professionally by facilitating choreography and helping co-direct in-person performances. I designed and implemented the first-ever Teaching Artist training. Youth participants were onboarded as facilitators of the program's pedagogy, spending many days together studying theories of arts education and culturally responsive teaching.

Participant Selection

The interviewees were purposively selected based on established relationships that I have maintained with youth participants throughout my years of working with and for both case study programs. Since leaving San Francisco in 2014, I have stayed in touch with several students from the YBCA YAAW program through social media (primarily Instagram) and a variety of real-life

engagements and exchanges. For example, Ché[4] reached out to me for advice after a challenging medical episode, Silvana asked me to drive her to her immigration citizenship interview, and both Silvana and Ché came to a performance of mine while on tour in San Francisco and showed me their YAAW tattoos. We wish one another happy birthday and celebrate one another's accomplishments online. So, while there is no current formal or institutional relationship in place, these young people were selected as my interviewees because I have watched their lives follow a particular trajectory in the years since the program. I particularly wanted to know more about their art and activism. My third participant, Natalie, was then recruited via snowball sampling at Ché's recommendation and referral.

My relationships with the 4C LAB youth are newer, but nonetheless full of a preexisting dynamic of care and collaboration. Specifically, I became very close with the participants of the Teaching Artist training and reached out to those young people as potential interviewees. Both Julia and Diana responded enthusiastically. John was then recruited via snowball sampling at Diana's recommendation and referral; although I had not met John prior to the interview, I had seen him perform, which gave us a shared point of reference for the conversation. All participants are introduced in detail in the Participant Profiles section.

In both environments—YBCA YAAW and 4C LAB CoLab—the structures in which relationships were forged were similar. I employed check-ins, icebreaker activities, and theater exercises. I also used circle dialogues, which are intimate group conversations, bordering on the therapeutic, that foreground aspects of selfhood and experience which might not be shared under other circumstances. It is this ethos of creativity, collectivity, and deep community that informed my approach to purposive sampling for this study. I wanted to conduct interviews with young

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[4] The interviewees were given the informed choice to select pseudonyms or use their actual names, and thus there is a mix of both represented in the group of six participants.

people with whom I had an established level of trust, of knowing one another in a holistic and multifaceted sense, and of having been through a set of experiences together that we can mutually reflect on. I emphasized the intersubjectivity of our experiences to make meaningful connections and co-create our narrative analysis. Furthermore, I purposefully selected youth whose stories I already had a baseline familiarity of. I was less concerned with *whether* Healing-Centered Social Justice Youth Arts programs encourage abolitionist praxis later in life, but rather *how* that process happens. Thus, I intentionally chose research participants who followed that particular trajectory in order to evince the mechanisms by which the process takes place.

Interviews

Each interviewee participated in one semi-structured interview (Galletta, 2013) conducted online via Zoom. I used the same protocol for all interviews, which I designed by synthesizing arts-based phenomenology, the CARMA principles of HCE, and the three-part framework of contemporary abolition (see Appendix B). The protocol was self-created using open-ended inquiry (Agee, 2009) and designed to last just over one hour. The interviews began with an arts-based catalyst: a work of art created by the participant during their time in the SJYA program. The interviewees and I viewed the arts-based catalyst together in order to inspire, stimulate, propel, and deepen the remembering process. The conversations began by situating the practice of remembering within the feeling body (i.e., “How do you feel after looking at the artwork you created during that time? What memories come up for you? Images? Sensations in the body?”). The interviews then proceeded with an approach based on Seidman’s (2006) four themes that guide phenomenological interviewing: (a) attempt to understand the experiences of participants and how they make meaning of those experiences, (b) attempt to capture

participants' experiences from their own subjective point of view, (c) focus on participants reconstructing and reflecting on their lived experiences, and (d) pay close attention to the meaning that participants make of their experiences in context (Seidman, 2006). The interviews were video and audio-recorded for transcription, and notes were gathered to help with the analysis.

Patton (2015) explained that the purpose of interviews is not to test hypotheses nor evaluate the facts. Rather, the focus is on the participants' lived experiences, thought processes, and stories. My interview questions were structured specifically around the core principles of the study's two theoretical frameworks—Healing-Centered Engagement and contemporary abolitionist praxis. Still, the conversations allowed for spacious tangential meandering, nostalgic remembrances, and collaborative analytic detours before returning to the intended structure. These unplanned lines of inquiry often arose from my own curiosities about the interviewees' experiences within their SJYA programs and in the years since, and made space for several consistent emergent or emic themes outlined in the following section.

Data Analysis Procedures

For this study, I used thematic data analysis to gain a thorough understanding of each participant's experience and the interrelationships between them. Transcripts were analyzed individually to ensure there were no discrepancies or inaccuracies between the AI transcription and what was spoken in the actual interview space. I also analyzed transcripts to rake through the data and identify evidence of emerging thematic throughlines between the narratives. At times, I also made small edits to participant quotations, removing superfluous colloquialisms to support the readability of the comments. Quotes from each interview were grouped according to a set of

themes comprised of both etic (a priori/predetermined) codes and emic (emergent/inductive) codes (see Table 1).

Table 1

Initial Thematic Codes

Etic	• Learning as paradigm busting • Impact on artistic/activist identity • Activist & abolitionist analysis • Peer relationships • Safe space
Emic	• Standard of reference for future relationships • Mentorship • Expansive definition of art • Family

While coding the data, I handwrote various memos to diagram emerging analytic and theoretical ideas, issues, and concepts. I then raked through the data again, this time looking for sub-themes that could potentially be cross-indexed across the initial categories. A durable sub-theme was defined by frequency, meaning that it had to be mentioned in at least three separate interviews. This process resulted in a list of two-dozen sub-themes (see Table 2) which included the original list of nine themes, as well as some coded words or phrases that appeared to transcend themes; for example, the term “intention” or “intentionality” appeared across six separate sub-themes. Through the process of evincing these sub-themes, a set of overarching categories emerged as a way to organize the sub-themes according to pertinent thematic throughlines. The questions that appear in Table 2 were not the questions asked in the interview process, but rather an ex-post-facto framework that arose from the analytical process and allowed me to group the sub-themes along unifying lines of inquiry.

Table 2

Secondary Sub-Themes

How was the space designed?	• Safe space • Space agreements • Circle • Story • Open bubble • Bus/geography • Artsy kids • Mentorship • Heaviness/gravitas & care • Non-extractive labor • Actual exercises • Expansive definition of art • Critical analysis
What ways of being did the program encourage?	• Openness • Being wrong/unlearning/cultural humility • "Where has this been & why isn't it elsewhere?" • Access • Intention • Accountability • Finding words/voice for amplification & speaking up • Doing a disservice if I don't speak up • Hope despite the odds • Mystification re: relationship depths & quality • Positionality awareness/self-reflexivity re: privilege
How do you live now?	• Mainstream conversation re: abolition/activism • Awareness of capitalism • Standards of reference re: relationships • Labor justice & equity • Self-identification, especially as an artist • Re-creating accessible spaces
Rites-of-passage as inflection points	• Family & home life • Protests & marches

Meta- or methodological reflections	• Art & remembering as time-travel/portal • Onion/concentric circles of impact • Researcher self-reflexivity

Over time I reorganized these codes and sub-codes, collapsing some according to their interrelationships and reconfiguring them into a chronological narrative arc: (a) Program Design, (b) Identity Transformations, (c) Habits of Mind (d) and Ways of Being. This sequence of four thematic categories represents the four stages of the SJYA pedagogical trajectory, which serves as a primary analytic lens throughout Chapter IV: Findings. Conceptualizing these four stages as the experiential continuum for SJYA participants allowed me to connect three of the four HCE core principles articulated by Ginwright (2018) to Critical Resistance's three core principles of abolition.

Validity and Reliability

Merriam's (1998) strategies to enhance internal validity—triangulation, member checks, participatory research, and disclosure of researcher bias—were intrinsic to the development and implementation of my analytic process. Triangulation is a procedure that utilizes multiple sources of information to develop converged themes or categories in a study (Patton, 2015); I used a triangulation method of analysis by ensuring that the inductive coding process searched for themes that occurred in at least three separate interviews by three distinct data sources (i.e., interviewees). My member-checking process took a recursive form, looping from my own inductive and intuitive assessment back to my participants. I focused on the construction of shared understanding to assess participant relationships to the themes and theories that I evinced from their data. I followed the advice of Clandinin and Caine (2008), who said "field texts are shaped into interim research texts, which are shared and negotiated with participants prior to

being composed into final research texts," and then "research texts are negotiated between researcher and participants" (pp. 4–5). This collaborative member-checking helped to ensure that my qualitative narrative was constructed in partnership with my participants. I endeavored to reflect as accurately as possible the recollection and meaning-making evinced from the interviews, and aspired to as much authenticity of representation as possible.

Participant Profiles

In this section, I introduce the interviewees via demographic characteristics and identity positionalities (see Table 3). I also describe their arts-based catalyst and their response to it. Additionally, I included a brief overview of one salient theme that arose from each individual interview as a way of distinguishing each participant for ease and clarity of readership.

Ché

The first person to participate in an interview for this study was Ché (they/them). Ché self-identifies as a second generation Chinese American. They were 27 years old at the time of the interview. Ché was 16 when they began participating in the YAAW program; they also served as a program intern for two years after their time as a participant. Ché recently finished a medical assisting program and now works as a medical assistant. They also make art, including a recent piece embroidering hair in the color of the trans flag as "an homage to the role hair plays to the construction of gender and my gender identity." They are still very close with other former YAAWs; modes of connection include a Discord Server where former YAAWs are in dialogue with one another, and a mini art collective formed with other YAAW alums to apply for grants and present at zine events.

As the art-based catalyst for their interview, Ché and I engaged with a series of photos depicting their process and final product. They created a three-dimensional sculptural piece

Table 3

Interview Participants

Name/ Pseudonym	Pronouns	Race (self-reported)	SYJA program	Age at start of program	Age at time of interview	Occupation(s)
Ché	They/Them	Chinese-American	YAAW	16	27	Medical assistant, artist, zine collective member
Julia	She/Her	Half-White Half-Mexican	CoLab	14	20	Teaching apprentice, college student, Employment Services and Events Assistant
Silvana	She/Her	Indigenous Quechua	YAAW	16	26	Writer, artist, social justice & activism scholar
Diana	She/Her	Black	CoLab	14	31	Program coordinator, educational science program instructor, modern dancer
Natalie	She/They	South East Asian: Illocano-Filipino-Hakka-Chinese	YAAW	17	27	Nonprofit Events and Community Space Manager, artist, pop-up vendor, mutual aid coordinator

Name/ Pseudonym	Pronouns	Race (self-reported)	SYJA program	Age at start of program	Age at time of interview	Occupation(s)
John	He/Him	Native Mexican American	CoLab	18	23	College student, community organizer, multi-media artist, poet

centered around a full-body plaster cast of themselves. For Ché, the piece was explicitly about expanding consciousness through political education:

> YAAW really opened my mind about wanting to receive knowledge and be educated. I think before that, I just didn't care about what I was learning in school … It was also a time, I think, on social media that they were discussing how some textbooks in America are printed to have a different version of history, and they refuse to acknowledge things like slavery, or internment camps and stuff like that, which are really important. And so, having all that at the same time inspired me to want to create basically this replica of me, a student, taking in media consumption … and so I did so much research, and I remember reading a People's History of like the United States, and like trying so hard to wrap my little young brain around it … I remember it being a really extensive project. But in the end it was just so fun to do.

The most salient theme in Ché's interview was the way in which the YAAW program set a standard of reference for the quality of relationships—personal and professional—that they would maintain in the years following the program. In particular, Ché mentioned the quality of accountability multiple times as a fundamental characteristic to be expected from others, and one that was exemplified by the ethos of the program itself:

> It's amazing, all of the incredible work that these YAAW alums do. And we were just saying it created a standard for us on people that we can meet in the future. How do we hold other people accountable as well? Who do we let into our lives? And how do we talk to people? And stuff like that. And not even just on a social justice perspective, also just in personal lives and boundaries and stuff like that.

Julia

The second person to participate in an interview for this study was Julia (she/her). Julia identifies as half-White half-Mexican. She was 14 when she began as a Creative Visionary with 4C LAB and she now works as a 4C LAB Teaching Apprentice. She was 20 years old at the time of this interview. Julia is a first generation college student, currently in her third year, majoring in Deaf Studies with a focus in Community Service. In addition to her job at 4C LAB, she also works on campus at the Career Center as an Employment Services and Event Student Assistant.

As the art-based catalyst for her interview, Julia read aloud a poem that she had written and performed, based on the "I Am" prompt format, as we looked together at the text on a shared Zoom screen. For Julia, the poem exemplified the 4C LAB practice of centering personal story as primary content to make the artmaking process more accessible:

> Reading it now it's really nice to see where I was at that time, and who. This is like an identity poem to me, you know? So I think it's interesting to see how I identified then, which I don't think is necessarily different. I just think it's nice to see. I think I see a lot of my moral values in there, too, which is a good refresher and good reminder of how much my community and what I'm surrounded by really shapes who I am … I feel like around poetry there's a stigma, like you have to sound super cool and hip and like it needs to sound good and it needs to be gasp worthy, you know? And I remember feeling really nervous about writing, because that wasn't what I was comfortable with. But I remember feeling comfortable doing it about things that I knew, because it was my story.

The most salient theme in Julia's interview was the integration of her artistic self, her activist voice, and her sense of identity writ large. Having self-identified as a competition dancer beginning at a very young age, Julia grew up with a primarily aesthetic definition of artistic success. Reframing that definition in terms of personal voice and intention has been a definitive characteristic of Julia's experience as a youth arts program participant:

> To me art before was such a separate practice of my life: you would go to dance class, and then you would come home, and it would be done, you know? And I feel like now that I go to 4C LAB, and when we have our sessions, I go there, and we have the past of what we talked about, or even just start again. And I go home, and those things never leave me, because they're either always on my mind, or at least there's such a big impact with what we talk about and what we do.

Silvana

The third person to participate in an interview for this study was Silvana (she/her). Silvana was 26 at the time of the interview. She participated in the YAAW program from ages 16 to 18, and briefly served as an intern afterwards. Silvana self-identifies as a Brown Indigenous Quechua woman. She and her sister are the first in their family to graduate with degrees and acquire U.S. citizenship. Currently, Silvana writes and works on a webcomic inspired by her Indigenous roots, with fantasy adventure and queer themes. She continues studying social justice and activism in her spare time.

As the art-based catalyst for her interview, Silvana and I watched a short animation called "Forgiveness, Acceptance, Love" that she created for the YAAW program's Abolitionist Visions exhibition in 2014. Silvana was struck by the durability and continued relevance of the themes explored in the piece, despite it being created almost a decade ago. She also remarked on the compassion and empathy that viewing the piece inspired her to feel towards her younger artist self:

> Even now, after a few years, I'm actually so stunned at how there's not a lot—I mean, I would definitely go over and change a few things, but not all of it, because the message and the core thing that I wanted to share is still present and visible within the animation. It just hits a lot at how, regardless of the years that have passed, how a lot of these topics are still so prevalent and relevant … It makes me feel inspired and more kind to myself about the fact that back then I am still a kid that's learning a lot about these very difficult and very hard social issues that are still, again, prevalent in today's society. And even currently, now, as the world is going on … and that actually does surprise me because I feel that us as artists, when we look at our old work, we definitely have that mentality in mind of like, "oh, I would change this" or like "that wasn't essentially what I wanted to do" or "I would do things differently." I'm surprised at myself of how I wouldn't do things differently, actually, because I guess it speaks to how much I had learned during that time, and how much is still relevant, again, and how much I wouldn't change because the work still speaks for itself.

The most salient theme in Silvana's interview was the unlearning of internalized narratives and the resultant deepening of her relationship to her own intersectional positionality. In particular, she could express her Indigenous and queer identities within the safe space and critical vocabulary of the YAAW program:

> I was figuring out my own sexuality and my own orientation as a young person, as a young Brown woman in a very much heterosexual household with parents who I knew wouldn't have been supportive of it. It was very dear to me, and still very healing to me that I was able to go to the program after school, and know that I was in a safe space, that I was among people who wouldn't look at me differently … going through the YAAW program, I realized that I was definitely in a tomboy and boyish phase where I was trying to move away from that, specifically when I cut my hair and everything. I was like, "Okay, I'm not going to be a girl anymore" you know? But living in the now without all of that, or like living in this liberation and freedom, it's like "No, I am comfortable in being a woman, and saying I'm a queer woman, I'm an Indigenous woman" and finding liberation and freedom in that.

Diana

The fourth person to participate in an interview was Diana (she/her). Diana was 31 at the time of the interview. She self-identifies as Black or Black American. At 14, she began working with Marissa, the Artistic Director of 4C LAB, when Marissa taught a performing arts class at Diana's high school. Diana is now the program coordinator for 4C LAB as well as an instructor

for an educational science program, a dancer with a modern dance company, and she holds a Master's degree in American Dance Studies.

As the art-based catalyst for their interview, Diana and I watched a dance performance that she choreographed for the 4C LAB youth ensemble in 2016. Diana described the feeling of watching the piece as a sort of nostalgia—a term that several of the other interview participants used as well—for a very specific time period:

> It wasn't a piece that I really got to share or keep exploring after it was set for that particular group of people. So it is very much a time capsule of a very specific set of things that were happening in Spring and Summer of 2016. And it's this really fun nostalgia as well, because there are people inside of that dance, alumni who have now kind of come back into the program as teaching artists, or we saw them at the Ford, and 2016 was the first year that I met them. So there's kind of a sweet nostalgia to be like "oh, my god! Look at you! Seven years ago, you were such a baby baby. I was such a baby baby."

The most salient theme in Diana's interview was the ethos of safety and interpersonal/ community care that she experienced as a fundamental quality of youth arts spaces:

> A lot of us were coming to school, not having slept at home that night, not having eaten, or in my case I was dealing with my parents having a really hard time in their relationship. So mine would be "I didn't sleep all night, it's been very loud all night, and now I'm in school and I would like to go to sleep." So there was an extra vulnerability and an incorporation of needing to talk about those things. We were already talking about them amongst each other, but we could talk about them in class within the context of these art building exercises.

Natalie

The fifth person to participate in an interview for this study was Natalie (she/they). Natalie was 17 when she participated in the YAAW program, and was 27 at the time of this interview. She self-identifies as an intraracial South East Asian person; a mix of Ilocano-Filipino-Hakka-Chinese cultures. Natalie is employed at an API-community focused nonprofit in Portland, OR, as an Events and Community Space Manager. As an artist, she sews,

upcycles crafts, and coordinates and vends at art market pop up events. She also participates in community-based mutual aid efforts in the form of raffles and resource distribution.

As the art-based catalyst for their interview, Natalie and I looked at a photograph of a book bag that they created during their time in the program. She up-cycled used chip bags collected from her fellow program participants who had bought them from the YAAW co-op snack bar. For Natalie, looking at the photograph alongside some photos of her and her peers in the program evoked an immediate sense of clarity:

> Just seeing those photos reminds me and brings me back to the activity. I very much remember that exercise—I feel like it's very clear. Whereas compared to if I see photos of me in high school—versus specifically YAAW—high school is kind of more mushed together, and I feel like YAAW memories are very distinctly separate: I can weed out or name these themes, or share how I was feeling, because I just so intensely remember it.

The most salient theme in Natalie's interview was a refusal to stay in spaces or relationships that did not exemplify the social justice values of accountability and integrity that she felt had been inculcated during her time in the YAAW program:

> I know that's something, again, that I've had to fight against systemically, from larger systems and also from peers who don't have this analysis or value set, or decide "okay, but I want to live comfortably. So I'm going to be taking a job that looks like this." And, you know, that's their choice. But I think just separating and knowing that I'm allowed to choose the spaces I exist in because of the values I have, and not compromising on that.

John

The sixth and final person to participate in an interview for this study was John (he/him). John was 18 at the time he joined 4C LAB, and was still participating in the program when he was interviewed for this study at age 23. John self-identifies as a Native Mexican American and first-generation college student. He is also an organizer with the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA) and regularly attends city council meetings in his hometown of East Los Angeles. John is an active poet and engaged in both music and film.

As the art-based catalyst for his interview, John and I watched a video of him performing a spoken word poem that he wrote during a recent 4C LAB residency. For John, watching his own performance inspired an uncanny sense of alignment and heightened meaning:

> I knew I was in the right place at the right time. That's just where I had to be, you know? Even watching it I get nervous. It literally feels like I'm right there. I can imagine just putting myself in that space … and I hope that as much as it matters to me correlates with how I represent it.

The most salient theme in John's interview was that the work ethic at 4C LAB inspired and motivated him to take his artistic practice seriously and self-identify as such:

> I think that it's built me in terms of it helping me to just be better, and wanting to improve myself, not just on an artistic performance level, but as an individual, as someone who works hard, someone who wants to to show what they can offer, you know, in life, rather than just being an artist going home and not doing anything after that, you know? It takes more than just showing up. You gotta do the behind the scenes footwork. And I've really valued that. And 4C LAB has showed me that: I've been taught that it's okay to respect yourself as an artist even though you're not getting paid for it.

Summary of Methods

In this chapter, I detailed the methodological considerations brought to bear on the design of this study, incorporating elements of qualitative narrative inquiry and arts-based methods with a critical phenomenological approach. By focusing on two SJYA case study sites, this research was primarily comprised of semi-structured interviews with six former program participants, and supplemented by self-reflexive memos, media artifacts, and original participant art (see Appendix B). Four participants were initially selected through purposive sampling and two were selected via subsequent snowball sampling referrals. I coded their interviews using an inductive thematic analysis, resulting in the findings detailed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

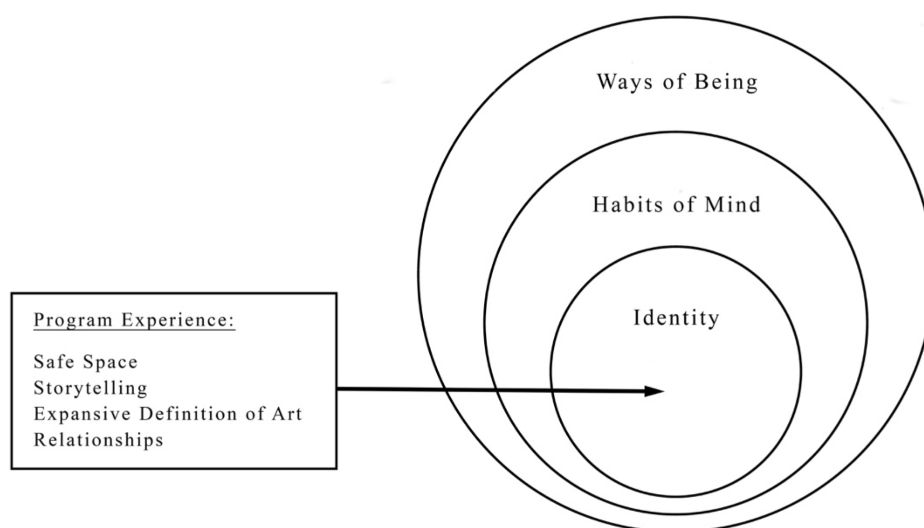
The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how the principles of Healing-Centered Engagement may have been present in young people's experiences of Social Justice Youth Arts programs, and to understand the extent to which those experiences may have encouraged or cultivated a lived praxis of contemporary abolitionism. This chapter includes a detailed description of the central themes derived from data collected from a series of semi-structured interviews with the study's six participants. After coding and analysis, I came to understand these young people's experiences as a chronological process, which I have outlined here as a logic model comprised of four consecutive stages.

The first stage, *Program Experiences,* describes the participants' perceptions of the program design as an external and active force impacting their inter- and intrapersonal engagement in real time. The second, *Identity Transformations,* describes the participants' internal experiences of metamorphosis, or the ways in which their previous relationships to self and the parameters of their own selfhood had evolved as a result of the Program Experiences. The third, *Habits of Mind,* describes the epistemological ways of knowing that began to inform participants' subjective perceptions and interpretations of the world. These ways of knowing were a result of the program's impact and the subsequent Identity Transformations. The fourth stage, *Ways of Being,* describes the resultant behaviors and practices that the participants enact everyday as they engage with and move through the world around them. This logic model can also be represented as a schematic diagram of concentric nested circles, with the impact of the program experience rippling outward (see Figure 2). I propose that this process of transposing micro learnings onto meso- and macro-level modes of engagement is how the principles of HCE translate into young people's lived praxes of abolitionist values. The kernel of this process takes

place at the phenomenological level, as young people inhabit, perceive, and make sense of their own subjective experience of participating in an SJYA program.

Figure 2

Concentric Circles of Impact



My findings indicate that SJYA programs did indeed cultivate and encourage abolitionist praxes for each of the six interview participants via this four-stage pedagogical trajectory. Moreover, I posit that the sequential nature of this pedagogical experience is a defining characteristic of effective SJYA programs. Beginning with identity and selfhood as the initial seedling of transformation, and then scaffolding the transference of those individual experiences onto broader social modalities, allows the principles of HCE to inspire abolitionist engagement

in an organic and authentic way.[5]

When we place this four-stage pedagogical trajectory in the context of the central research question of this study, we can see the ways in which this scaffolding actually connects the core elements of HCE (as articulated in Ginwright, 2018) directly to the three core elements of the contemporary abolitionist movement; the data provides a sort of continuum that leads one to the other. As mentioned in Chapter III, I used the HCE framework from Ginwright's 2018 Medium article for this analytic process, rather than Flourish Agenda's CARMA principles, which were used in the design of the Interview Protocol and would thus result in redundancy or tautology. While not mutually exclusive, grouping the thematic findings into these three strands to connect the elements of HCE to those of abolition offer one way of organizing and making sense of the participants' shared qualities and experiences of this pedagogical trajectory (see Table 4).

The first element of HCE is that it is "explicitly political, rather than clinical" (Ginwright, 2018, para. 13), which finds expression in the Program Experience[6] through young people's exposure to an Expanded Definition of Art that comprises identity-based, activist, and political works. Developing this political dimension is furthered in the Identity Transformation stage, both by virtue of Expanded Spheres of Knowledge, as well as the participation in Marches, Protests, and Direct Action. Expanded Spheres of Knowledge introduce young people to new paradigms for conceptualizing the world. This leads to an increased capacity for Critical Analysis of systemic

[5] Through my experience in the field of SJYA, I have also observed that programs which do *not* follow this scaffolded model are less effective and successful. Specifically, I have witnessed programs that begin with the *Ways of Being* stage. This thrusts young people to the front of marches or conferences before they have had a chance to situate their own autobiographical lived experiences in the context of larger structural analyses. Doing so can cause real harm to the developmental trajectory of young people, particularly adolescents who are vulnerable to direct impact by systems of injustice.

[6] In this section, to support clarity of reader comprehension, I have chosen to capitalize any references to headings and subheadings of the main data findings (see Table 4).

injustice, which in turn leads to a behavioral commitment to Speaking Up and advocating for justice and equity. This scaffolded series of developmental thresholds brings us to the first element of our abolitionist framework: Dismantle, or a Structural Analysis of Oppression.

Table 4

SJYA Pedagogical Trajectory

HCE	Program Experience	Identity Transformations	Habits of Mind	Ways of Being	Abolition
Explicitly political rather than clinical	Expansive Definition of Art	Marches/Protests/ Direct Action Expanded Spheres of Knowledge	Critical Analysis	Speaking Up	Dismantle (Structural analysis of oppression)
Culturally grounded/ Healing as identity restoration	↑ Storytelling Relationships ↓	Positionality Awareness	Cultural Humility Belief in the Ineffable	Standards of Reference re: Relationships	Change (Future vision)
Asset-driven/ Focused on well-being	Safe Space	Departure From Family Norms	Intentionality	Re-Creating Accessible Spaces	Build (Organizing strategy)

The second element of HCE is that it is “culturally grounded and views healing as the restoration of identity” (Ginwright, 2018, para. 14). This second element can be found in the Program Experience in terms of autobiographical Storytelling as a key community-building practice. It is also evident in the Program Experience with an emphasis on positive and mutually supportive Relationships with both peers and mentors. These program components supported

young people's development of Positionality Awareness at the Identity Transformation stage; they understood themselves more deeply in dynamic relationships with others and with the potential power dynamics therein. In the next stage, Habits of Mind, a practice of Cultural Humility appeared throughout the interviews as a way of situating one's own identity in a position or posture of learning, as well as a Belief in the Ineffable which affords a sense of faith or confidence in principles that cannot quite be explained. This trajectory leads to a Way of Being that this study has termed Standards of Reference. I define this as a sort of refusal to be in interpersonal or cultural spaces that do not uphold certain qualities of accountability, humility, reciprocity or intentionality. These scaffolded stages of development lead us to the Abolitionist value of Change, or Future Political Visioning. This value of Change posits a more utopian reality, in which individual identity and cultural expression can exist without hindrance from oppressive social or structural dynamics.

The third element[7] of HCE is "asset driven and focuses on the well-being we want" (Ginwright, 2018, para. 15). This third element is evident in the intentionally designed components that make SJYA programs into Safe Spaces, such as community agreements and interpersonal care. At the Identity Transformation stage, participants described a Departure from Family Norms, in which aspects of home life were identified as not fully safe or supportive, reinforcing a more autonomous or sovereign sense of individual identity. This helped to cultivate Intentionality as a key Habit of Mind, bringing a mindful awareness and deliberateness to individual behavior, interpersonal relationality, and creativity and artmaking. This trajectory contributes to a commitment to Re-Creating Accessible Spaces as a Way of Being. Participants

[7] The fourth element, in which "Healing centered engagement supports adult providers with their own healing" (Ginwright, 2018, para. 16) is beyond the scope of this study, and represents a potentially important area for future research (see Chapter VI).

described this as the ways they strive to design and facilitate experiential containers for human experience that replicate the values present within their SJYA programs. This aligns with the third and final Element of abolitionist theory: Build, or Practical Organizing Strategy.

As mentioned, these themes are by no means mutually exclusive, but they dovetail throughout the findings as they appear and reappear in dynamic conversation with one another. Throughout the rest of this chapter, I will parse through the specificities of each individual theme, evinced from the participants' recollections of their experiences through coding and analysis. Doing so will allow me to elaborate upon the qualities and mechanics of each of the four stages of the SJYA pedagogical process. Despite the American Psychological Association's stylistic preference towards paraphrasing rather than quotation, I have chosen to comprise this section primarily of direct quotes from participant interviews, as I believe that their voices best represent the holistic and complex meanings of the collected data. Participants are quoted at length to elucidate the phenomenological subjectivities of these particular facets of the SJYA program experience. These quotes also illuminate the overlapping intersubjectivities that provide us with an in-depth understanding of the shared qualities that contributed to these thematic groupings.

Program Experience

In this section, I describe the interviewees' recollections and perceptions of the specific design features—pedagogy, ethos, tone, and curriculum—of their respective SJYA programs. Coded thematically, these memories organized themselves into four primary strands: (a) the Safe Space of the program's ethos and design, (b) autobiographical Storytelling as a core value and practice within that safe container, (c) an Expansive Definition of Art offered to participants that

introduced more identity-based and/or political art, and (d) mutually respectful and reciprocal Relationships with the other people in the program, both mentors and peers.

Safe Space

Several participants referred to their respective SJYA programs as "safe spaces," describing an ethos of community care and permission for authentic selfhood. Silvana used the term repeatedly throughout her interview to describe the specific value that she derived from her time in the program:

> It was very dear to me, and still very healing to me that I was able to go to the program after school, and know that I was in a safe space, that I was among people who wouldn't look at me differently … it made me feel that this was a safe space to be in, and it was. And more specifically, more importantly, it was a safe space for me to talk to people about if I was ever unsure, and to figure myself out, even if I meant that I didn't have a label, or I didn't have a specific sense of what I was, you know? It also gave me the words to also formulate what I was thinking.

Both Ché and Natalie specifically identified the practices of space agreements or community agreements that are key components in the formation of that "safe space" ethos. As an alternative to traditional rule setting, space agreements or community agreements are often employed in social justice and/or youth arts spaces. Doing so allows facilitators and participants to collaboratively develop a list of agreements that everyone can adhere to in order to help keep the space safe and creative, and to help everyone's needs get met. For Ché, these agreements in other programs could feel like simply a perfunctory exercise, but said in YAAW, "I truly believe you guys really held that standard … ensuring that we are all actually in a safe space." Julia also recalled community agreements being employed in CoLab that explicitly supported the openness of the space: "I do think that 4C LAB is an open minded space," she said, "and that's very clear in the beginning. We usually create our own rules with whatever group we're working with and open-mindedness is always on the list." Similarly, for Natalie, the community agreements

provided an intentionality[8] that helped hold the container of the experience and also gave permission for self-care when things got deep:

> A big part of it was we were all just intentional with each other … I think because the cohort was so established, we didn't have to do community agreements every time. I don't remember y'all explicitly naming content warnings, even though things were heavy. But I do think there was a space to be like "oh this isn't my thing" or like "I just can't sit through this, gotta go" ... Just knowing that if you needed space or if this was a lot then anyone could really just feel comfortable moving in and out of the space if needed.

Silvana also remembered the YAAW program being a space in which difficult topics were broached and then processed with care, which afforded her an increased sense of trust and respect:

> It was also the fact that you guys mentioned from the very beginning that "hey, a lot of the things we're going to be talking about, they're hard. A lot of the things that we're going to be talking about, you might not know. You might have difficulties learning, hearing, talking about them. But there is importance, and there is meaning in these things having to be taught." And so I think for me that was also very profound, because it was it was the sense that we were kids and we were students but we were also being treated like leaders, like adults, like "hey, we are giving you these tools and this knowledge and these resources so that you guys can also teach other folks about them."

The specific language of "safe spaces" did not come up as explicitly with the interviewees who participated in CoLab, but a similar principle of community care around potentially tough content arose repeatedly. Diana recalled an environment in which the "tough stuff" was coming directly from, and taken care of by, the youth themselves:

> It was such a small community. So if one person in class, you know, did a monologue about cutting themselves, and you know, an hour later someone caught them with their sleeve up, and it was obvious that that was real, we as a community would do what we had to do … one student would eventually have a conversation that was too loud in front of an adult. And that's how those kids would eventually, hopefully get all of the resources that they were needing for that situation … somebody was gonna come and check up on you and make sure that wasn't too much for you to say.

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[8] As we will see later in this chapter, this sub-theme of intentionality recurred throughout multiple interviews and appeared across the main thematic codes.

John also recalled specific moments in his SJYA experience that were defined by enough of a sense of safety to disclose personally vulnerable narratives:

> In terms of connectivity it feels very personal ... there was this workshop that we had where we spoke to a woman, she was a social worker, a psychologist ... It was a workshop where the students were able to express themselves, to talk about trauma that they've experienced, to hopefully dig deeper into who they really are in case they have never had that chance to to have that space, to have that freedom to be in a zone of comfort, where nothing you say is wrong, where it's gonna be heard, you know? And that's worth something valuable ... I know that from my perspective, everyone's kind of dealing with their own personal lives, and that was an escape to feel comfortable in that.

For John, the feeling of being cared for also manifested in a sense of permission to be imperfect, while still being respected and held accountable by the program's leadership and administration:

> Even though you have your mishaps, they respect that. Sometimes I'm not the best communicator, but they still find a way to get to me. You know what I mean? I fucking love that, that's so super cool of them because, like what you said with Marissa, respect sees respect, you know?

Self-disclosing one's own challenges, struggles, or narratives of personal vulnerability constituted another key characteristic of participants' memories of their program experiences. This type of Storytelling was consistently present throughout participants' experiences as a dialogic process of community-building.

Storytelling

Both programs engaged participants in the practice of facilitated dialogues comprised of autobiographical or personal reflections on curricular themes. While known by different names within the world of SJYA programs, in this study I refer to these spaces as "circle dialogues." The concept of intentionality was a salient quality of Julia's experience in her SJYA program, a quality which felt present in the program's use of circle dialogues to build community connections around particular themes:

> It leaves perfect room for those connections to grow and build, because when we're in those circles the intention behind it is to receive that information from someone, and to hear that, and then to speak if you relate in that, and I feel like that dynamic is only there in support of relationships growing … it's like we're talking about what we're actually going to do with our experiences, our shared experiences, and then go from there.

Like community/space agreements, circle dialogues were a curriculum design feature shared by both programs: a collective, informal, facilitated conversation in which participants shared knowledge and personal experiences about a particular social justice theme or issue. These specific conversations formed some of the clearest recollections for the interview participants. For Silvana, it was a conversation about immigration and citizenship:

> I remember that one of the things that happened during that program was that I had received my permanent residency card. And I remember that I actually broke down during one of the classes or sessions, and I let folks know just how grateful and thankful I was, and I just remember everyone giving me all of their love and support. And we did a big group hug, and I just felt so safe.

For Silvana, the space for autobiographical storytelling and self-disclosure offered by the circle dialogue format created space for a sense of healing and belonging. For Natalie, a different circle dialogue (in which YAAWs self-identified in terms of having loved ones impacted by the carceral system) opened up a space of consciousness-raising and curiosity:

> Seeing so many people in the program raise their hands and demonstrate that they have loved ones that are impacted by the carceral system—I think that was like the first, like, the cogs started turning in me. Like, "wait, if this many people have people they know that are being impacted by this system—why? That doesn't make sense."

In both YAAW and CoLab, circle dialogues took place in order to explicitly engage with the relevant political issues of the moment. Julia remembers a recent example in which the sharing of emotional responses resulted in an enhanced feeling of community closeness:

> I remember we sat down over the summer this summer, and we were talking about Roe v. Wade because that was something that just happened, and a lot of us were collectively feeling upset, sad, disappointed, scared for the future because it's such a big turning point for so many other things, you know? So it's really nice to feel those collectives, but it's also really nice to be able to understand each other without having those experiences, and be able to keep that as a collective—being able to be so open-minded to understand that I don't necessarily share that experience with you. But I can understand it and I can see it, and I can feel it, and I can help you through it.

When I asked Julia to expound on this feeling of collectivity, she connected the practice of storytelling in circle dialogues to the practice of storytelling as performance. She then further connected it back to the ethos and practice of emotional safety and community care:

> Laurel: Would you say that the way that that sense of collective sharing gets operationalized inside of 4C LAB, the way that it takes shape, is the conversations that happen in a big circle? Is that where that feeling of collectivity arises? Or how does it happen?
>
> Julia: When we sit down and talk and kind of debrief before we actually start creating, I would say that that's the biggest moment that that happens. And of course even when performing, feeling those things when performing … there's many times where we've been performing, I mean me, myself, every single time I perform Keep Breathing I always break down because it's so hard to relive those fears … and when one of us recognizes someone's feeling emotional like that, it doesn't just fall on that person—everyone else then feels that, and we all balance off each other. And that support feeling, that happens on stage. It also very much happens when we sit down and talk.

For Julia, the depth of these story-sharing experiences forms the social and emotional underpinnings that then inform and support the artmaking. "Most of my memories are not even about performing," she says. "It was about the literal social interactions that we would have with each other and community building that we would have." Similarly, for John, the practice of personal disclosure and autobiographical storytelling is the fundamental backbone to his artistic process:

> I personally just take it on such a deep level. To me it's not just fucking spitting poetry: I got shit that's detrimental, I got things on the line, I got family to worry about, I got my own self to take care about, this isn't like "I'm showing up to please you with my art." Nah, this is coming from a really deep personal space, my own personal place, you know? And I only hope that that can be resonated and can be respected.

Bringing the personal and autobiographical to the artmaking process was just one way that both programs inspired a paradigm shift in terms of the participants' understandings of what art can be, and do.

Expansive Definition of Art

Julia remembers a sense of both surprise and ease when she realized that her own story could comprise the content of the art activity, which ultimately served as her arts-based catalyst for the interview:

> I just remember feeling comfortable doing it about things that I knew, because it was my story and my things … I remember in like English, or American Lit, I'd have to write these crazy things, and I feel like I was writing just to write. And then, if you change the meaning of it—which I feel like is really what 4C LAB is, you know, putting so much intention of yourself in it—it makes it so effortless and so easy. So I remember feeling nervous, and then I started writing and I was like "I know all of this. This is so easy. I know exactly what I'm writing, I know exactly what it means."

Notably, the sub-theme of intention appears throughout multiple interviews and across multiple codes; Natalie mentioned it four times, and Silvana five. Julia mentioned it 12 times, including when describing how her experience in the CoLab program expanded her personal definition of art:

> That is the number one thing I would say 4C LAB changed for me. Even saying I was most comfortable in dance before, I started in a kind of competition based system, which is so much of dance, and as much as I enjoyed it because I was moving my body, and that feels like such an important part of myself, it felt so mindless because it was just literally a competition—look pretty or don't, you know? And that was the biggest thing I would say 4C LAB has changed is putting meaning towards it, and having so much intention. Because I would have intention when I was dancing, but the intention was to look good, you know? ... But the intention doesn't make me happy—I'm doing it to look pretty, which then feels like it's for someone else. And all of the work that I've done, especially these poems, these writings, it's all for me. And then if I get the chance to say what I want to say out to people, for people to hear, to relate to, it's because it's real. It's actually who I am, it's from me. And I feel like that changed my whole thinking of, like, everything.

Like Julia, Ché experienced a significant shift in their understanding of the more personal and conceptual dimensions of artmaking. For Ché, this shift was in large part because of the program's emphasis on introducing young people to a broad range of examples of contemporary art:

> We were exposed to a lot of art around identity. I think up until YAAW, me making art was, like, I just wanted to draw a pretty picture and I didn't really understand if it was a reflection of me as well. And I think the more we learned about other artists and activists and how they used art to portray what they wanted to say about either the mood that they were passionate about, or about themselves, really affected me, like "how do I want my art to present itself?" And also getting me to think about the thing that I just created, what does that say about me? Why did I do that? And it just made the cogs in my brain go "hey, something is happening here, and it's really important."

This paradigm shift in understanding the role of one's own intentionality in the artmaking process impacted several of the interviewees' self-identities as both artists and activists. Natalie recalled this moment of identity formation taking place during her time in the program:

> I could say I'm an artist and an activist, really believing and knowing that my art is able to communicate these larger social issues or reflect on these larger issues. It's not just cute and fun, there's just so much more that is tied to my process.

For Silvana, this new understanding of these roles brought with it a sense of responsibility:

> The program definitely made me feel more secure in terms of pursuing an art career, and being more passionate about art, and that art isn't just a medium by which I can make what I want. But it's also a way that I can cultivate stories, stories about other people, and make those people feel seen, and make these stories also more prevalent in people's minds—that it's a medium, and it's also a tool. It's very important. It's a tool and a vehicle by which to open up about these injustices ... art really has to be about critical thinking, and we really have to be conscious about what it is we make and whose story we are telling, to be kind about it. To really be asking ourselves the question of "what is it that I want to portray? And is that portrayal for my own benefit? Or is it for the benefit of others? And how can I use that?"

Diana also attested to the feeling of responsibility that she felt as a member of 4C LAB in terms of using the artistic platform to make work about socially and politically relevant themes.

For Diana, this meant that the work might be less subtle, opaque, or abstract than other contemporary forms:

> We see a lot of that art that seems to be considered highbrow, or whatever. It's nice—and a relief sometimes—just to go and see art and not do the extra work of "What did they mean?" You're just like "This is what it is." And when you're talking about things that we're talking about, you need to be more in people's faces about them. Not necessarily aggressive, but you need to be like "I don't want you to walk away from this misunderstanding me. I'm talking about interracial relationships. I'm talking about gun violence. I'm talking about sexual abuse." I don't want you to be like "Oh, that girl piece with the girls was so pretty." You know?

For both Diana and John, the tendency for Social Justice Youth Art to take a more on-the-nose approach to thematic material could sometimes be in tension with more conventional or traditional expectations of aesthetic quality. John described feeling surprised when he first attended a CoLab show, which inspired him to join the program as a participant:

> I went to the show, and it actually was like—I was shocked *(laughs)*. I'm gonna be honest, I didn't think it'd be that good, you know? But it blew me away. It was an amazing show—like, dang, people were actually really trying here, they believe in themselves enough to identify themselves with their art. And I thought that was really interesting and really cool, really inspiring.

Throughout her interview, Diana brought a canny analysis of resource inequity to her recollections of experiences within SJYA programs. For her, there was a tension in expanding the definition of art beyond straightforward aesthetics and into the realm of more process-based community practice. It challenged her to reconcile differing metrics of valuation:

> A lot of the programming that I chose was programming that was low cost or free. The reality of a lot of the situations of those kinds of organizations is that they don't have the same resources. They have all the talent, they have all the ability, they have all the creativity that they need. They just don't have the same resources. They don't have the same time, same security, same spaces, anything. So oftentimes the work doesn't look as professional, or clean, or whatever people consider to be of value. But the process is never deemphasized. It really has always been process over product before that ever became a coined term. And it always kind of competed with my desire to be really really good, or the best at stuff.

Fortunately, Marissa's mentorship deeply informed Diana's understanding of those valuation metrics, and helped broaden the scope of possibility in terms of a creatively engaged life:

> Marissa was coming out of movies and things that we had just seen. And she had all this really cool life advice, and experience at this age, but was also really young, so it felt very relatable. She walked into the room and was like "you don't have to be the best at anything to do what you want to do. There's so much more to do in art making. You don't have to be the best dancer, you don't have to be a choreographer. Hey, surprise! You can actually continue on in dance and never dance or choreograph ever again. There's so many other things you can do. Do you want to do light? You can use stage work? Do you want to make backdrops? Do you want to be the person that calls everybody and says, "oh, my god, a dance show!" She was just from a very young age like "art doesn't have to be celebrity success. You can have a lot of personal fulfillment and a lot of personal success and a lot of community success."

Relationships

The positive impact of being in relationships with other people in SJYA program spaces, both adult and youth/peer, was a recurring theme throughout the interviews. For John, the ethos of mutual care and shared investment served as a reminder of the power of collective support in creative endeavors:

> Without the help of the students, without the help of the teachers and volunteers that are putting their time in, I just think that's the power of it, that's the beauty of it, because there's people that are coming together. It's hard to do shit by yourself, you know, we need each other. You need someone to get you to the next step as much as someone says they got there on their own—that's bullshit. It takes someone to know somebody, and if not you know you needed help in some way, somehow, you needed to get through some door. This feels like someone's helping your hand hold that door open. You know what I mean? Metaphorically and literally, because this is someone who wants to put you in a good position. And that resonated. I really respect that. I admire that part of 4C LAB.

It was clear that participants' perceptions of the resources and human power that went into these programs impacted the degree to which they, as artists, showed up in return. This was particularly true for authentic and committed adult participation. Every one of the interviewees mentioned the role of mentors as crucial components of their program experience. For Diana, Marissa's presence in her life transcended the specificity of any one class or program:

> I was only at that school for my ninth grade year, and then left to go to a public high school that was closer to me. My arts involvement was a little strained, but Marissa was kind of like a through line: she always showed up at my shows, and I could reach out to her about things that were going on.

For John, it was also Marissa's unique essence that compelled him to trust her and believe in the program's value:

> I just felt in my heart that Marissa, she knew people. She knew people that knows people, those people know people, and even if she didn't, she was gonna find a way to gather them people, you know? And I just believed in her fire, and that's what really motivated me the most.

In a later section, I will explore the relationship between the participants' experiences of their SJYA programs and the dynamics within their families and home lives. In terms of mentorship, however, it was clear that the personal investment of program leaders as role models had a unique effect on the program participants, setting it apart from other forms of adult presence:

> Ché: the mentors at YAAW, like you, Jova, (names redacted), all of these adults had such an incredible impact on my life that I truly just trusted them. And I think that is so valuable to a youth program. I think there are a lot of young people who don't have great role models or have adults to look up to. And, truly, meeting you as mentors and knowing "Wow! These adults are so smart and creative, they make incredibly powerful works, and we have the opportunity to be taught and mentored by them?"

For Silvana, her recollections of the care that the facilitators put into the program's pedagogical approach were some of the most defining qualities of their unique adult presence:

> It showed me, and it taught me, that there are actual adults and people who are responsible, and who will hold themselves accountable, and that are kindly and passionately and consciously intentional about the work that they do, and the words that they use, and the topics that they discuss. Because every single day I would always go into YAAW being like "Laurel, Jova, (names redacted), they're going to teach us something awesome today, and it's going to be something that they find that is important because they're sharing it, and it's also going to be something that I know that they're very well-read about, and that they are going to have us be open about … they're gonna teach us something that is important to them, but it's not them trying to change our mind, it's just them trying to open up our minds to these certain topics and formulate our own opinions."

This posture of care came up repeatedly as a deeply meaningful characteristic of the programs' mentorship components. This offered Silvana a sort of counterbalance to the less-supportive energy experienced in other adult relationships:

> It was also because I had mentors like you and Jova and (names redacted) and everyone else who I knew wouldn't have looked at me differently, and that was something that I realized as a young person, and still realize now a lot of the times how grateful I was for, because I didn't have good adults growing up. I didn't have a safe space of adults, let alone mentors or teachers who were so loving and as open as you were all to us, and kids who were just really learning, and a lot of the time struggling with these issues but were open to teaching us everything about that, and so that for me—that's why I lit up because I was just, like, it was, um *(tears up)* oh gosh, it was very much a hard time.

This was far from the only emotional moment during the discussion of mentorship. Several of the participants and I teared up at different moments, including moments of gratitude:

> Ché: I just wanted to say thank you for mentoring me and being such a huge part of the formation of who I am as a person today. I talk about it with Hoi and Natalie all the time, how much you guys mean to us, but I feel like I don't ever get to say thank you enough.

Multiple interviewees also referenced the presence of guest artists as a deeply influential factor in their experience. For Ché, the curriculum of guest artists in the YAAW program reflected a sense of cultural humility on the part of the lead facilitators, showing the limits of their abilities to provide culturally relevant pedagogy about certain topics:

> The guests that you guys brought were, like, "this is the best person to talk about this subject and show you this work, because maybe it's not us." And I think that's mesmerizing to find experts and truly just keep bringing in all this exposure to these amazing adults with amazing works of art.

Silvana described how engagement with guest artists would often inspire a sort-of autodidactic impulse, compelling her to expand her sphere of reference knowledge through self-directed pedagogical exploration:

> In terms of the relationships with the fellow artists and mentors that would visit us, I would always, at the end of the workshops, look up the resources and the organizations, and also the work that they did afterwards. And then I would just read. I would read so much about not only the work that they, the artist, individually did, but the organization. It would lead me into different resources, different community works, again that intersectionality of how these things play in conjunction with each other, and it shaped a lot about my critical thinking, because I think part of it is definitely the reading part of it or the resource part of it. It's like "What are you gonna open yourself up to in terms of these topics? What are you going to seek in terms of books, in terms of research papers, or in terms of Ted Talks?" I remember one of our artists mentioned that they had a Ted talk, and I watched it on repeat again when I went back home, and it's still one of my favorite Ted Talks.

For Silvana, the presence of guest artists inspired a sort of reciprocity of commitment in terms of her dedication to her own program participation and personal artistic growth:

> Bringing in these different people and workshops from different avenues of life, I think to me that was just so intriguing and so wonderful in my young mind, or as a young person, just you guys having these people from different walks of life coming in and to sharing their experiences and their story, and then teaching us their art. I thought that was amazing, that here is a full adult person who is so open and willing to teach us young people about their craft. And so for me, personally, I guess it was them opening that up to me, and that kindness, I was like "well, I have to give back. I have to be kind in return. I have to ... not I have to, but I want to. I have to and I want to learn about them, learn about their art, try their art and see if that's something for me." And even if it isn't that, it's still some knowledge, and that piece that's always going to stay with me, that I will be thankful for all the time … I think it was the fact that you and Jova and (names redacted) and all of the teachers really instilled in us the sense of empathy, a sense of sympathy and empathy and sincerity about the fact that, "Hey, this is your space but we are also inviting other people into this space to teach you guys, and that has to be respected, and that has to be taking in with open arms, because, you know, they're taking their time to show you things."

This concept of reciprocity appeared in multiple different forms throughout the interview process. Participants seemed aware of the resources, both tangible and intangible, that went into the production of the program, and thus felt that their own participation in the program ought to reflect an equivalent level of commitment and contribution. Like Silvana, John was acutely aware of the time, energy, and effort put into the program by the people supporting it and making it possible, which inspired a sort of reverence or a feeling of importance:

> Just knowing that all of the members in this group were all aspiring artists, and we're all reaching towards the same goal, and no matter how long it's going to take we're gonna stick around and stick it through. And that's what's most important about being a part of it … I guess that's what encourages me most about the future for 4C LAB, and the future for creative visionaries in 4C LAB, because it feels like it fucking matters. You know what I'm saying? To put it bluntly. Because I believe that it does, you know? And there's people that are behind it, that are literally putting their time into it, and I think you have to respect that.

Like Diana, Natalie demonstrated an acute awareness of the financial and economic aspects within her memories of the SJYA program experience. For her, the feeling of gratitude for the abundance of guest artists was deepened by the fact that YAAW was a paid program:

> Having you as educators really say "we want to name all these things and give you access to all these rad people and with each other, and then you get paid to be here, to show up" just made it more, I think, accessible.

Several of the participants noticed that financial and labor transactions were taking place within and around these programs. In a few cases, interviewees articulated a labor analysis that, again, reflected a dynamic of reciprocity. They asserted that the programs did not embody or replicate an exploitative relationship in the dynamic of youth art and the financial compensation. Both Natalie and Diana brought their background understanding of, and experience with, nonprofit funding structures to their retrospective consideration of the transactional relationships within their respective SJYA programs. In both cases, they explicitly confirmed—without prompting—that the possibility of youth labor and artistic contributions being exploited by the program was not reflected in their actual experiences:

> Natalie: Money was spent. It was within this—to a degree—hierarchical, capitalistic system. But when I was like "Oh, I get paid to go to these workshops and get to dance hip hop? I get paid to learn? What a concept." And I think now it's a given in developing cohorts and programs, we want to compensate people for their time and showing up, and saying "look, we're invested in your learning so we want to pay you what is a competitive rate to actually get you to participate and show up authentically, because to step away from your actual jobs or whatever else you're dedicating your time to, that's a big ask to ask you to come and generate with us." Even though I know at YAAW we were generating together, but it was for each other. And then you get to report, saying "Oh, we ran this program," and I get that's how nonprofit structures and funding work but for me it wasn't extractive.
>
> Diana: Marissa now would never say that to these kids, "Now, you have to perform well, when all of our donors and everybody comes, so they think we're really good, and give us money." She would never ever say that to the students.

John used the business model of a record company to further describe the feelings of respect, importance, and value imbued into his experience as a creative visionary within the CoLab program:

> They want their artists. It feels like a record company, if you will. You know what I'm saying? That's really what it is: feeling wanted, feeling like you're important. Just because without that I don't think it would matter. Because if it feels like someone were to use you, use your art, you know, because they're getting some gain off of it, I don't think it would last. But it doesn't feel like that. It feels like a home.

This feeling of home and belonging was present for many of the participants. This was due not only to the programs' adult mentorship and support but also to the feeling of being surrounded by similarly creative or unique peers.

In both programs, young people self-selected in order to attend, meaning that at some point they came in contact with the program's marketing materials, decided to submit an application, and were accepted. This meant that to some extent, students must have already harbored an interest in the arts and/or social justice to identify their own desire or choice to apply. This self-selection process created a sub-community of young people whose shared

artistic identity served as a source of unity, connection, and understanding, distinguishing itself from other social spaces, including school:

> Ché: bonding over art, I think, is a very powerful thing. I think a lot of the kids, at their schools were individually the artsy kid or something like that. And coming together, I'm like "wow, there's so many other people who are really passionate about this art, or this topic, or this craft that I'm also passionate about. No one else at my school also cares about that but these kids do. And they get me and they wanna do this with me and we're making all this cool art together."

In one of my favorite anecdotes from the interview process, Natalie described a moment when she was approached by a fellow YAAW with whom she attended school but never interacted:

> Looking at all the other youth that were in the program, I would have never interacted with these youth if I had not been part of the program, let alone educators and other knowledge sharers … I remember seeing Hoi distinctly throughout freshman through Junior year, and being like, "oh that person's really cool but I don't think we'll ever talk." *(laughs)* … and then I get to YAAW, and I'm like "oh, my God, they're here! She's here!" And then the fact that she approached me. She also forgot this, but I was crocheting, and she approached me. She's like, "what are you doing? Teach me." And I was like "What? I'm just doing this thing" and then I showed her, and then she took over my project *(laughs again)* and just started crocheting! … I feel like that's just very literal—we were both background characters to each other's lives until that moment, and then we stepped away from the periphery into each other's circles.

In this vignette, the social chasm that separated Natalie from Hoi at school was easily bridged via Hoi's request for peer-to-peer skill sharing, affirming their shared interest in artmaking inside the third space of the SJYA program.

Diana recalls an overlap of the young people in her SJYA programs self-identifying as artists and also occupying other social positionalities that placed them outside the mainstream. These included personal experiences of trauma, vulnerability, and challenges at home:

> I hate to say that we were all misfits, but in a way we kind of were … Even the teachers were kind of misfits, but I guess that's kind of a buttery way to say that we were all experiencing an issue that was coming out in some way, shape or form, whether you were a kid that was getting in a lot of trouble and this was your last choice of school, or you were really looking for an alternative because you needed extra support in a different kind of a way. So I think most of our teachers had a sensitivity to that, you know? We weren't just coming to school with regular teenage drama.

Diana also recalled that her engagement in SJYA programs impacted her own mobility throughout her community's system of social grouping or cliques, inspiring her to move away from the mainstream and into a more diverse cultural space:

> I was growing up in Rancho Cucamonga, which is pretty middle upper class. We were pretty middle class inside of that town, and it had a very preppy culture which, from the early 2000s when I moved there to now, has divulged (sic) into a very conservative, Republican-esque culture. So the things that were happening there were not really spoken, but there was just a way of being, you know? Everybody wore Abercrombie, everybody wore Hollister, everybody had this haircut and went to Havasu. It felt like a one-dimensional space ... So when I was at SAE [School of the Arts and Enterprise], this idea of these kids that had really been othered, and felt othered, this was our common ground. I was around kids that had tattoos and piercings, and never would I ever have been around kids with tattoos and piercings, and they're the sweetest, smartest, most brilliant artists, and it was like "Oh, my gosh! This is all of the stuff that I've been looking for, these people who are, like, vulnerable." ... So when I left SAE, and I went back to the public school in my area, I was back in school with all these people that I had gone to Elementary and Junior high with, and I was not finding it easy to be their friends again. It sounds kind of weird to say, but for the sake of transparency and honesty the girls that I was friends with in junior high are the girls in high school who became popular, they were all very popular kids, and when I came back I I couldn't fit into that, and I didn't want to anymore, you know? I was like "I don't like that anymore. I don't want to do that. I'm gonna go hang out with the kids at STAND. They're cool. They're diverse. They're talking about real feelings and real things that I give a shit about, and I'm going over there anyway."

For Silvana, queerness was the specific "otherness" that defined her sense of belonging within her SJYA peer group:

> I went in there every day after school, and I was among fellow artists, and also, I think the more important thing for me is fellow queer people, specifically Ché and Natalie, who were older than me, but also open and so kind about their own experiences. And so for me in particular the way that the YAAW program shaped my own identity was specifically my queer identity, because not only did I have Ché and Natalie but I also had different queer artists coming in and being proud and out and beautiful in their own identities and their own self actualizations of who they were as people, and being proud of who they loved.

Being surrounded by peers who shared an identity category that had previously been marginalized in other social spaces often felt revelatory for the interview participants. They had

an acute sense that one's previous paradigms of reference or spheres of familiarity were being expanded or exploded by the program itself. This experience of revelation appeared in several different ways throughout the interviews, including in the participants' own self-concepts.

Identity Transformations

One of the a priori themes that I anticipated emerging from this research was some sort of shift or transformation in terms of how the interview participants self-reflexively perceived or experienced their own sense of identity. As I had anticipated, multiple participants commented that their own sense of identity or self-identification had been transformed by virtue of their participation in the SJYA program. John's identity was specifically aligned with 4C LAB as a component of his personhood and community of belonging:

> I associate myself with 4C LAB most definitely ... This is finally a space where I can classify myself as ... it's hard to talk about myself, to seclude myself from 4C LAB as an artist, just because I know that I wouldn't be who I am without the help of 4C LAB.

As John looked back retrospectively on his developmental trajectory before participating in the SJYA program, he identified a critical shift in his own alignment with the identity and practice of being an artist:

> I wouldn't say things was going good, but my head wasn't in the right direction in terms of fully committing to my artistic path. I didn't believe in myself enough to know that I can write something and perform it, and perform and gather an audience ... I wouldn't be pursuing art as diligently as I am if it wasn't for 4C LAB.

Julia expressed a similar phenomenon. Prior to her participation in her SJYA program, her artistic engagement was something separate from her personhood, whereas now the two have become inextricably intertwined:

> I didn't really associate my artist self with my self-self, because it felt so distant initially, and I think being with 4C LAB those two connected, and haven't lost connection yet, for sure. I feel like once I learned that, I couldn't look the other way … I've learned how to connect myself with my art self.

For Natalie, her own identity trajectory also met an inflection point around the time of her participation in the SJYA program. For her, however, it was more about self-identifying as an activist, which found a performative-artistic expression in terms of her "tagging" her own possessions at school:

> I just remember I had a whole phase where I would go around and I kept writing on all my binders and notebooks "I don't want to be part of the system." And SYSTEM is huge and I just underline it.

Silvana's own self-identification also transformed as an activist. This manifested in heightened self-reflexivity on her own indigeneity inside of an intersectional framework:

> In terms of where I am currently in terms of my identity, in terms of my own self journey, and just venturing into what it is about myself that I still don't know a lot about is definitely my indigenous identity, and ... I don't feel I would have sought that, or I would have known a lot of these issues that are prevalent in that community if I hadn't been a part of this program. Because being an activist, even though we all like one issue that we are more passionate about than others, it all has to do with intersectionality, because intersectionality is the important thing when we think about in regards to activism, because we can't just tackle one issue. We can obviously—like, people dedicate their lives and their community-based work to certain issues, but we can't not acknowledge and also continue with the erasure of how this affects people, and also different people at multiple different levels and multiple different ways and different factors, you know? I feel like that's very important. You can't talk about gender issues without talking about trans issues. You can't talk about women's issues without talking about trans women's issues or POC women's issues. So that intersectionality, I think, plays a pivotal point in how we do our activism work, and for me, being a young artist, and being a part of this program that cultivated my own identity because it made me look at other people's stories.

As a researcher, I was interested the way these interviewees' lived trajectories of self-identification might have pivoted or inflected during their SJYA programs. I also wanted to know what might have impelled or catalyzed that process and given it shape and form. Four key sub-themes arose in my analysis of this phenomenon: (a) how the SJYA programs expanded participants' spheres of knowledge beyond previously familiar paradigms, (b) how this expanded knowledge may have contrasted with narratives or discourses present in the participants' homes

and/or families of origin, (c) how participation in embodied forms of activism (e.g., marches and protests) served as a rite of passage in concretizing participants' identities as socially engaged members of a community, and (d) the development of a self-reflexive awareness of one's own positionality, particularly regarding the privileges of proximity to Whiteness.

Expanded Spheres of Knowledge

The participants employed different metaphors to describe their spheres of knowledge expanding via their experiences in the programs. For Julia, the concept of the bubble arose a few times. She used this specifically to describe individual spheres of lived experience that could be made more transparent through circle dialogues:

> I got to hear so many different experiences again living outside of that bubble, recognizing my bubble but more importantly recognizing other people's bubbles, and stories, and all that. I remember feeling shocked, not in a negative way, but almost like a distant collective, because each of our stories are so different.

Natalie also used "bubble" to describe how the program expanded her sphere of reference. This took Natalie beyond the vernacular of her family's discursive space to introduce more conceptual linguistics:

> Part of me was like "Wow! If my family actually knew what I was learning, or how I was being exposed to these things, I don't know if they would be like 'what are you doing?'" I really couldn't explain what we were learning, because, I think part of it was I didn't really have the language to communicate to them. And it's not because there was an actual language barrier, I grew up speaking English, and my mom, it's all English. But there was still such a language to find in the concepts that we were being exposed to, and just being in proximity to each other and learning from each other. And just ripping open my bubble in the best way possible, and just testing the process and being like "I love learning." It was just so great *(gets choked up)*.

Natalie used the concept of the bubble again when talking about how YAAW's critical pedagogy informed her political engagement later in life. When the racial justice uprising of 2020 occurred in response to the murder or George Floyd, Natalie's peers asked her to help explain what was happening:

> And I'm like, "what do you mean what's happening? Have you not been—where have you been?" And then peeling back layers more, and being like "oh, I'm lucky because I had access to these resources, this information, this bubble-shattering kind of lens-opening experience that just made it easier for me to connect and feel resonant with, like, just so much more of the struggle."

Later in her interview, Natalie used more liquid metaphors to describe this critical-political education collision to her family sphere:

> More recently, when people are like "When did you start learning about XYZ things or concepts?" I was like "Oh, in this art program" because literally the first day of the program we were learning about Occupy Wall Street, and I just remember (name redacted) saying Fuck The Police very intensely, and I was like "Oh, I've just never had to question any of that." And them just saying it so intensely, I was like "Oh, my God! If I was in the program, does my family know what I'm doing? Was it wrong or bad?" It just was so different from the lack of the conversations that I feel like my family has. So I think it if we're talking about the lukewarm pool that I was existing in, I feel like this was either dropping color dye into the pool, or was also changing the temperature of the pool, and I was like, "oh, this is a different flavor soup" and it's so much bigger.

The expansion of participants' familiar frames of reference took place in both conceptual and also literal geographic terms. Multiple participants mentioned that their SJYA program inspired them to engage differently with the city as a catalytic source of mind-opening information and perspective. Ché recalled the bus that traveled to-and-from the YAAW program serving as its own uniquely pedagogical space to process information without the presence of an adult interlocutor:

> At the end of every program, getting on the bus with the other YAAWs and talking about what we had just learned that day, and what we had just done that day, and what we thought about it—I think that was a way we all kind of understood identity a little better, because if there was, say a day that was about gender, sexuality, or how systematic racism is a thing, and then we would go home and we'd be like "you know, I never thought about it that way. What does this mean to me? What have I noticed? What have you noticed?" And just continuing to have these conversations after YAAW is all over, on the bus until we got off. We had to get off the train because we were home ... I truly think once you got us to start talking about it, we just never stopped talking about it.

For Silvana, the bus ride home was such a radical space that it inspired her to muster the confidence to enact a performance of what—at the time—a true gender rebellion meant to her:

> A sudden thought: I was on the bus home from YAAW, and then I saw a barber, and I was like "you know what? I'll stop." And then I just went in and I just said "just cut my hair. Just cut it all off."

Natalie also recalled mobility throughout different parts of the city critically expanded her frame of reference. She used the metaphor of the "pod":

> I do feel like I grew up in a very protected or sheltered way, and I think being able to—I would commute to school by walking, I wouldn't even take the bus—being able to go downtown after school, taking the buses, just being out, coming home late. Well not super late, but late enough, and it allowed me to physically explore and be in San Francisco at different times than I'm used to, existing in the city in different spaces. And that was another way that I think just helped raise my awareness of "oh, other people exist in these spaces and these communities on top of the guest artists that we were introduced to, or the field trips we had." Just having a program outside of my initial neighborhood really helped extend that pod.

Julia also used metaphoric language of the bubble to describe the cultural knowledge available to her because of her family's specific geographic positionality. The storytelling pedagogy of CoLab helped her realize that sphere of knowledge was uniquely valuable:

> At first I almost didn't get it, because then I almost—it was kind of cheesy to dance and tell a story. And then I realized how much these stories relate to not only myself but people that I'm surrounded by. So then there was this balance of speaking these things, that—it felt like only I knew these things because this is the community I grew up in. I live in Lincoln Heights now, and I didn't growing up. But I was so close to Lincoln Heights, and my grandma always did, so that was the life I really saw. My house wasn't in Lincoln Heights, but everything else happened in Lincoln Heights, Downtown LA, everything over there. So that was the life I lived, and because that was my bubble I didn't know that other people weren't experiencing those things. So then I go to 4C LAB and we talk about these things that I know, so initially it didn't feel important to me because it was just what I knew, you know? So when we start talking about these things and then I go to high school, and then I learn that my bubble is so small, although my high school was in Downtown LA there are so many other people and so many other experiences. And then I learned about all those different bubbles and all these different worlds in Los Angeles.

Many times, throughout the interviews, participants expressed a sort of astonishment upon developing a reflexive consciousness about this bubble effect. They often wondered why the information available to them within their SJYA programs had not been available to them elsewhere, especially in school:

> Ché: The more I was learning about all this different social discourse the more I was like "Why wasn't I taught any of this in school? Was I not paying attention?" And then I actually started paying attention more in school and just noticing we weren't really being taught relevant information … I feel like that was a trigger for me to continue to want to learn more, and just be politicized and educated about so many different topics. Truly a huge shift in my younger mind, to just go "We need to learn about the world, and we need to learn about our history. We need to learn what is going on in the world because we can't just keep being ignorant." My brain before, it's different now.

Taking this critical stance even further, Silvana expressed something akin to outrage at the fact that education systems often not only fail to provide students with critical knowledge, but can gaslight or deny its veracity or importance:

> You know that teaching is also a grounds for opening up people's eyes to a lot of these things that we aren't taught in school, discouraged from learning about, or told that we're crazy about making these points, even though the theories and the evidence is all there.

For Silvana, it was not only the engagement with social justice education but also the sense of community that she had been unable to find elsewhere:

> Being in that lab that you guys had so painstakingly given us as a resource, the sense of community that I felt as a kid that I didn't get or feel anywhere else—not in my home, not amongst my peers in school—it was the sense of community, of working alongside other artists, other young people, my age, and even younger than me, or older than me, that also wanted to create art that was this thought provoking, and that had to do with social justice issues and activism, and using that as a tool as a means to getting other people to understand and look at these issues as well.

For Natalie, experiencing a heightened presence inside of the YAAW workshops was a cue to notice the uniqueness of that experience. She questioned why it had not been available to her in other spaces:

> My mind was not elsewhere, and I think that's another big thing of what's important. It's like a flavor of escapism. But I think it's escapism in the sense of deep knowing, and like "If this is where we are now, where can we be?" It was always like that was the next question. Or "Oh, why haven't I been? Why haven't I experienced this?"

Departure from Family Norms

One emic theme that I did not anticipate arose in every interview. This theme was the relationship of the SJYA experience vis-a-vis the participant's family of origin. Interviewees often remembered a distinct contrast between the two spaces in terms of discourse style, political tenor, or a conceptualization of the role of the arts. John described this phenomenon as a "generational break":

> A lot of the youth that are in the program, including myself, we come from single-parent homes, or we come from homes where, speaking from my own personal background, I grew up with my great aunt, so my grandmother's sister. And we all have really deep, rich, dark backgrounds, and we're aspiring to be first generation this or that, you know? We're setting goals for ourselves. This is the first generational break where we can actually follow our dreams, where that seems possible. And I just think that should be noted only because, myself included and the rest of the youth, this is a long way coming. It's taken a lot to get to where we are. And this is just the beginning.

Several interviewees, including Diana, recalled their teenage years as a time of familial conflict, with the SJYA program serving as safe space or respite:

> I was in the middle of a really big family breakdown, with a very sugar coaty surrounding on it. It was nice to just go to (the SJYA program) and be able to cry, and it wasn't weird, ever, you know? Or be able to not understand things and have people just explain them to me and not make me feel like a weird kid.

Similarly, John described a home environment in which a sense of permission to be one's true emotional self was largely unavailable:

> When you're at home, when you're with family—most of us, we're all pretty young, you know? We have to hide away from that. We can't act like how we really feel, just because you don't want to show them that side of you, or you have to take care of your your cousins, or it's just not accepted in the household sometimes. In my poem, I come from a space where it's not okay to express yourself. From my home specifically, I know if I were to talk about how I feel it would just become combative.

Interestingly, for John, the topic of family serves as a frequent subject in his own artmaking process:

> I do like to talk about the difficulties that families have faced in the past that no one wants to talk about, only because they're still important to this day. I think a lot of us live in an atmosphere where we have everything now, and we don't value the steps that it takes to create something. And I mean that in terms of education, in terms of making a business, in terms of creating a sovereign community, building, you know, the city. I like to speak on what people haven't had the privilege to speak on, only because they've never felt that it's important. And when I say they, I mainly speak about my family: what they've been through, what they've overcome, and what other families have overcome that I'm familiar with or that I have close friendships or connections to.

For Silvana, healing intergenerational and familial trauma also affected her artistic process:

> It's like, learn to unlearn these things, and also learn to be kinder to yourself. It's that you're not the issue. It's these certain things that our parents have taught us that is not okay. And also teaching that to our younger brother. Because one of the things that I also portray in my artwork that's so important to me is stopping this generational trauma. That it begins with us. How do we stop this cycle of the dog biting its own toe? Well, we say don't bite my toe anymore, you know? ... and then taking that advice and being kind to myself, because that's the main thing. It's like learning how to be kind to yourself about certain things like "Hey, it's not your fault. You're still unlearning, you're still growing, you're still being taught about a lot of healthier ways and things that you should have been from the very beginning." And then, taking that into consideration into how I interact with people. And so that's my everyday.

In describing her own sense of agency when interrupting unhealthy intergenerational narrative patterns, Silvana again recalled her own rite-of-passage moment. It was an actual material defiance of her family's notions of gender:

> You invited several young people into the space, and you told them "Hey, you can do whatever you want." Obviously not to a certain degree, in terms of respect and accountability, but like "hey, you are okay in being in the space and figuring yourself out." And for me the biggest bit of agency from me was me realizing "hey, I can just cut my hair right now, and that's fine. Even if my dad gets upset and my mom goes ballistic. That is fine. I can literally do it right now, and that's okay, because it's my body." And that's what I did.

Natalie's departure from her family's frames of reference occurred during the YAAW program and continues today. It impacts the way in which she engages with her family around current

events, particularly regarding racial justice protests catalyzed by the murder of George Floyd in 2020:

> In trying to articulate things to my family and educate my cousin, who for all intents and purposes—he's the same age as me, we're like a month apart, we went to the same high schools, both went to 4 year colleges, for all intents and purposes it's just that he was socialized as a man, and didn't go to YAAW—I was just like "I don't understand why you don't get this." *(laughs, slaps front of left hand with back of right hand)* Because you also grew up in San Francisco, and had proximity and access to lots of things, and a very housing and food secure space. So I'm kind of like "what is your excuse?" And feeling lots of frustration around, like, he didn't necessarily ask me for free labor, but he was like "I don't get it," and I'm like "well, clearly I've been like chapters deep in this book, and and you're just looking at the title being like *this is scary*." *(laughs)*. And I'm like "Buckle up buddy, you got lots to read," and then I remember sending him links, and saying watch these YouTube videos, watch this podcast, watch these seminars ... I was like "yeah, well, study. You gotta do the work." I think this was the first time someone had actually articulated and named the volume of knowledge that I feel like I took for granted because I had access to through YAAW.

Marches/Protests/Direct Action

Another emic theme I did not anticipate was the role of marches, protests, and other forms of direct action. These events served as defining moments of civic participation for these young people during this formative time. Diana's first protest marching alongside her adult mentors was a rite of passage in her adolescent development:

> Marissa and (name redacted) took me to my first protest! … I was 14, and in a real protest, and being supported, and seeing the adults and these art makers in my life going for this cause, and showing that it was important for us at all ages, and listening to us too. It was really cool to have a group of adults not say "I see that you're mad but we have to do math today." It wasn't like we were gone for the whole day; We were gone for maybe 2 hours, and then they were like "Okay, that's the compromise. We're here, now it's time for the adults to do adult stuff. We need to all go back to school because we still have to get you home safe at the end of the day." And that was my first experience really being inside of it.

In addition to other social justice issues informing her activist engagement in high school, Julia recalled the Los Angeles Unified School District Strike as having formatively impacted her development:

> And then that just continued to happen to my high school experience, because in my junior year all the teachers went for protest. And then I learned about, I mean, I knew I wanted to go into education but then I felt really scared for my future. And then, you know, it continued to go and the ball never stopped.

John's participation in marches and protests dovetailed with both his engagement in SJYA programming and the development of his abolitionist consciousness:

> Prior to 4C LAB I had just barely started attending marches. In East LA there's a memorial, and every year there's a march celebrating the Green Berets. Not many have heard of them, but the Green Berets are like the Brown Berets for the Mexican community. And a lot of them are very old now because most of them are incarcerated to this day. And when I went to a few of their marches a few years back that's when I realized the frailties that my community is facing ... and so at that march I felt that it was super important to learn about cop brutality, sheriff brutality. There's a lot of killings that's going on that are going unnoticed. and I wanted to find a way to help. I want to find a way to stop people from being deported. ICE is a huge thing in our city. I just wanted to find a way to help, you know?

Ché felt similarly compelled to help, and to apply knowledge acquired in their SJYA program to the actual, practical experience of education for direct community action:

> I also feel, like I've been saying, knowledge is passed down. You have the opportunity to educate others, and have people meet the same standard that I expect all the YAAWs are at. And I really think the knowledge that you gave me, I just also give to other people. Like say I am going to a protest, and we're like, "Well, we should be prepared. In a worst case scenario, here's the rundown, this is what we're gonna do if we do run into a situation that's a little sticky. How do we keep ourselves safe? What are we gonna do?"

For Ché, this preparation for direct action was not just theoretical. They recalled a very specific incident of intervening in a real-life scenario that intersected with their YAAW experience. It clearly stuck with them as a core memory:

> I remember a very pivotal moment where I witnessed—I remember basically there was like a YAAW event and right before I went to the YAAW event I witnessed two undercover cops pin down a man in my neighborhood and commit an arrest. And I didn't know what to do in the moment, and I tried to intervene, but I didn't know the right resources. And remembering it being a very painful moment knowing that I had just learned all of this, about prisons or about police brutality, and witnessing it right in front of me. And I was the only person of my neighborhood at the moment. And it being just so hard, and not knowing what to do. And I remember going to the event after that—I was basically told off by the cops, after I tried to get their badge and I didn't know what to do, like take their badge number, write it down, I just didn't know what to do. And I remember you guys just offering the knowledge of what to do in the future, and just encouraging me. And I think that really changed my perspective on how to approach these things in the future. It just gave me more preparedness. I didn't have the information then on what to do, but after that experience and talking to you guys, I had a better idea. I know now: get the badge number, document everything. I should record it, I need to follow through with it as well, I have to write a report and also—just all the stuff. And I remember you gave me a little pamphlet as well for, like, legal.
>
> Laurel: I totally remember that pamphlet. It was the Center for Urban Pedagogy, "I've been arrested, now what?" Is it that one?
>
> Ché: Yeah. Yeah. I can't believe you just had it on you *(laughs)* but I'm like "yeah, that's definitely the kind of person Laurel is."

Like Ché, Natalie also felt some sense of shame about wanting to be able to do more direct action and intervention. She realized that she actually possessed of a lot of critical knowledge that can serve as a resource for social justice organizing efforts. In describing how this realization interfaced with the racial justice protests of 2020, Natalie again invoked the aforementioned sense of bafflement about "why isn't this information elsewhere?"

> Sometimes I am hard on myself. I'm like "oh, I'm not doing enough to support the communities that I know that I care about, because I just don't have access to or proximity to them" or like "this isn't direct action enough" and/or getting overwhelmed and not feeling empowered to support. So I feel between high school into now it's been waiting. I always know I have cared about dismantling a lot of these oppressive systems, but it's like "how am I carrying that and doing that work every day?" And I don't think it was affirmed until the protests happened. Because you had all these people being like "what's happening?" and I'm like … "Where have you guys been? What have you not been imagining? Why have you been stuck in this current reality?" When people are like "Oh, this is the new normal" and I'm like "Have you not been living and adapting to these terrible systems?" I'm not saying there wasn't a learning curve, because it wasn't learning, but just adapting … and I don't think anyone was ever, and can be, fully prepared.

Positionality Awareness

Another unanticipated phenomenon that became evident in the interviews was participants having developed a self-reflexive awareness and understanding of their own positionality, specifically a relative sense of privilege based on race. Silvana reflected on her positionality having lighter skin within the Indigenous community. That vantage point allowed her to assess the dynamics of oppression within that community:

> How do we benefit from a lot of these systems and institutions that don't give us the same accessibility and resources as other people? It's like "how do I benefit off of that?" And one of the things I looked at was definitely my own identity as being a light skinned Latina or, now, as I identify myself, an Indigenous person, you know, as a light skinned indigenous person. How do I benefit from these injustices that are prevalent in my community? And so that opened up my eyes to the community that I am now a part of, and making me learn a lot about my indigenous background. My family's history.

Quite similarly, John expressed a recently emergent understanding of his own positionality having lighter skin in the Latinx community. That understanding informed his relationship to being of service:

> Growing up I never understood White privilege, just because it wasn't really talked about. I'd say in the last few couple of years it's something that's been highlighted a lot, and I had to understand my place in that, just because I'm light complected and I fit in with that crowd. And that made me want to understand my roots more, just because I know that I'm White but I grew up with Brown people. If anybody saw my family, like "he's not White," you know? He just grew up a different way, and not that I needed that to be my identity, but I needed to know who I am and where I come from. And I felt that the most important way to do that so that it's not selfish is to help other people who feel the same way about that, even if you're not White. Even if you're of any skin color.

Julia's racial identity as a half White person broadened her ability to assess and analyze social justice issues and informed her stance on speaking up in instances of injustice. However, it also presented something of a double-edged sword, in which her obligation to speak up was tempered by the phenomenon of Whiteness being centered or taking up too much space. She once again invoked the important role of intentionality:

> If I hear something that catches me off guard, especially from a personal standpoint—being half White has so many privileges, and as a person who can actually speak up I'm not gonna not do that. And that's one of the biggest things I would think. I feel like it adds to a bunch of change in a good way. White people speak enough, I know that. But I'm saying in a different manner, in the sense of the intention is way different. ... It is really interesting as a biracial person, because I can understand both sides. But I do have a privilege that other people don't, which is why I choose to speak up about those things that I see and understand. Because I'm lucky enough to see and understand it, and I feel like that is the problem. There is a lack of understanding from, I would say, majority White people that are not getting it, you know? And I'm really lucky to see that and experience it and understand it, I think, most importantly. So that's why the biggest thing is speaking up, and also educating myself and other people. But I also think that kind of falls under speaking up, because communicating and saying it as much as I can is the thing that I do in my everyday life.

This relationship between Julia's bicultural identity positionality and the practice of "speaking up"—a theme that appears in the upcoming *Ways of Being* section—recurred throughout her interview. At one point, I mentioned code-switching as a possible framework to describe Julia's practice of cross-cultural amplification through art. For Julia, growing up in multiple cultural contexts meant that she felt a responsibility to amplify issues impacting the BIPOC community in predominantly White spaces.

Self-reflexive awareness of the relative privilege of individual positionality, as well as how to leverage that privilege in support of social justice, represents both an identity shift as well as the presence of a new habit of mind: a way of thinking about and conceiving of one's place in the world. In the following section, I detail other epistemological habits or tendencies that emerged for the interviewees, either as a direct or indirect result of their SJYA programming.

Habits of Mind

In their interview, Ché attested that their time in the SJYA program consisted of "so much personal change happening in a short time span." In this section, I describe the nature of those changes by outlining the "ways of knowing." These are epistemological habits of mind that the interviewees developed because of their time in the programs. They include: a) Humility, adopting the position of listener and learner, b) Intentionality, bringing a deliberate and mindful approach to decision-making, c) Critical Analysis, applying an acute understanding of systems and structures, and d) Belief in the Ineffable, or faith in the existence of principles that can't be proven. These habits of mind were not necessarily articulated as explicit program objectives; they may be more ancillary, secondary, or even unintended results of the SJYA pedagogy.

Humility

Several participants described an implicit permission to "be wrong" within their SJYA program experiences. The language of "unlearning" described how these moments of "not knowing" were framed as what Freire might call "conscientizaçao" and not as moments of shame. For Silvana, these moments were quite formative in how she relates to discourse in general:

> It helped shape a lot of my ideas, a lot of my morals, a lot of how I look into different subjects, and also how I'm not afraid to be wrong. I feel like that's such an important thing. I feel like a lot of the times when it comes to the very much political environment we find ourselves in now, in terms of debate and everything, the main thing that is difficult to have conversations on is because people are afraid of being wrong. For me, the thing is that we would always go into those workshops not necessarily being told that we were wrong, we were just always being told that, "Hey, this is how it is. It's not that what you're reading isn't true, but it's definitely skewed to a certain perspective, without actually telling and elevating the voices of the people who are actually being hurt by these things," you know? And so it was opening up that other side of the mirror honestly, and so it definitely shaped how I look at different topics today: how I don't judge a book by its cover, how I need to do my own work and my own research and reading to really formulate an opinion, and also just sometimes not even speaking about something, and being able to come to the understanding like "hey, I can't talk about this topic because I'm not well read, or I don't really know much about it, so I don't feel that it's right for me to have an opinion on it. But if you want to let me know about it and discuss it, hey, I'm open to that and listening to your thoughts."

Natalie also made a connection between the more humble posture of listening and learning cultivated within the YAAW program and her relationship to contemporary political discourse. Particularly in terms of recognizing which voices ought to take up space or be centered in a conversation, she said:

> I think just being able to name upfront, or, throughout YAAW, being able to say "oh, I'm afraid. I'm also curious. I'm also concerned." Having space to articulate that and not being judged because there was so much trust built. I just remember listening a lot and not feeling the need to comment or justify why I wasn't participating, which I think is a very—that's where people get burnt out nowadays, where it's like "oh, you know I might be surrounded by people who know so much more than me or are impacted and more knowledgeable about the things that we're trying to learn about" and then feeling the need to not be canceled. So you're trying to contribute. But it's just like you're taking up space when clearly you shouldn't be centering yourself … I feel like the biggest difference in YAAW was the way that we shared was that I never felt like one person was taking up a lot of space in the way that your eyes roll over when this one kid is trying to show off. That just didn't happen, because I think the sharing was very genuine and honest, and if people wanted to outwardly express their takeaways, or experience, they could. And the rest of us could witness and kind of be reverent in a way.

This quality of quietude, ceding, and deferring space to the stories of those most impacted by a particular injustice or social phenomenon was also key Silvana forming her discursive approach. On the concept of "safe space" again, she said:

> Whenever I would get into these conversations, I would always make sure to remember something that you told me during the program, which was sometimes, or oftentimes, we have to learn to be quiet and listen to other people's stories and their own experiences. Because a lot of the times we are not the voices of these experiences—it's other people's, and we have to be willing, not even willing, we have to offer them and give them that space, that safe space, so that they can voice out their stories and their experiences without us intruding or making a point of it, you know? Because that's not our place, and we have to respect them. We have to learn that … Yes, accountability. It's like holding yourself accountable for the things that you learn. And unlearning—that's the main thing. It's unlearning a lot of the things that we have been taught.

Natalie offered an inversion to this idea of "permission to be wrong," articulating it instead as a program ethos in which there were no wrong answers. This created more expansive possibilities for both artmaking and imaginative thought in general:

> Just being curious and wanting to see what everyone has to contribute and offer, and such a diversity of how we respond to the prompts, or engage in the content that was being presented. And it was just like, again, there's no wrong answers. And that kind of expansiveness I think helped build towards imagining spaces where, in a world where you can't be wrong, what can you do?

The concept of "not knowing" was similar in the CoLab program. Interviewees found themselves inhabiting a posture of humility more so around the artmaking aspects of the experience than the social justice aspects. For Julia, who grew up in competition dance culture, it was revelatory to feel that she could explore new art forms in which she did not yet have fluency, virtuosity or expertise:

> When she gave me the opportunity to explore many other things, that was a big pivotal moment for me, because then I was never close-minded to trying anything else. I just didn't know that world at all yet, you know? So that was, I think, always something that was actually heavily encouraged—as opposed to saying, with the values of 4C LAB, like "you must do this. You must think this way." Rather than that, we are encouraged to try all art forms, and to create what we can with that.

For both Ché and Natalie, moments of humility and unlearning occurred specifically when teaching and consciousness-raising about abolishing the Prison-Industrial Complex. In

Natalie's case, it was the moment when a fellow YAAW said "Fuck the Police" while standing in the middle of a leftist political screen-printing exhibition:

> I remember where I was standing when (name redacted) said that kind of thing. It just stuck. I just remember seeing the prints and stuff, and I'm like "oh shit." And I think underlying knowing that things on a systemic level were not okay. Just seeing the work that was done to invisiblize a lot of people or labor or things.

For Ché, the memory was similarly indelible:

> Okay, I have a really really specific memory. And it's literally the day you taught us about the prison industrial complex. I remember not knowing much about the prison industrial complex at all, and just not understanding why prisoners even mattered. Or I had an idea of, like, "Yeah, humanity, people should be treated well, even prisoners," but I didn't really understand how horrific the prison industrial complex was. And I remember quietly raising my hand, and being like "well, I think prisoners should still be, you know, imprisoned." Yeah. I raised my hand and I think I remember it because I was so embarrassed now as an adult. I was like, "you know I think we should still have prisons and prisoners should just be completely separate." Just understanding how complex the system was, like it's not just crimes, we're purposely putting Black people and Brown people and poor folks into prisons because we want them there. I didn't understand that. And me having been this teenager and just saying something like that so ignorantly and remembering that you so kindly just slowed it down, backed up, and tried to rephrase this information even better. And then you took even more time in the future to educate us and tell us more about the (school-to-prison) pipeline and everything. And also having us make works of art around a topic so complex really helped understand this. I put in the slide in the email of the zine I made around the Prison Industrial Complex. I think that's amazing how me being that kid who raised my hand and said "I don't understand why prisons matter" to creating a whole zine about statistics, that is the power that you guys have and were able to put into our—like how powerful of educators that you, Jova, (names redacted), everyone, I think that's truly amazing how you guys were through art able to help these teenagers understand something that I think even adults I meet today still don't understand, in like the span of a few weeks. That's amazing.

Intentionality

As previously mentioned, intentionality was a recurring theme throughout the initial set of thematic codes, so much so that it deserved its own mention and analysis. For Silvana, intentionality had come to define her own self-reflexivity about her chosen subject in artmaking:

> When you're young, and when you are learning how to first be an artist, a lot of it is definitely creating and cultivating your craft and learning all of these different skills and everything, but it's definitely learning what it is you want to draw or what it is you want to portray out into the world. And for me the way that that intersected for me in activism work, and then also being an artist with my indigenous identity, is I wanted to portray indigenous bodies, and I wanted to portray indigenous stories, particularly mine and my sisters. So the way that my art has definitely changed is depicting more Brown bodies, more Black bodies, that's for sure, and that was something that I never really realized I didn't do, but definitely was poignant enough for me that it was a lesson learned. What does it say about me that I do not portray these bodies? What does it say about me when I do? And what is the intention in that? And that was the main thing for me. It's like "what is the intention?" ... Something that I want folks to relate to is that our trauma, or these issues that we have, must be addressed, and they must be addressed in a kind way, but I also wanted to just draw characters and environments that my sisters could look upon and see, like "Oh, that's me! … or that's my sisters, or that's my community." And so that was very important to me. It was that intention of "What can I do for my community outside of donating and providing resources? Oh, with my art I can make people feel seen."

For Natalie, the energy of intentionality manifested not only in her individual experience, but as a key characteristic of collective interactions. This quality of the curriculum design resulted in a heightened state of presence and connection:

> I guess the deep emotional ties come from the intentional time of togetherness. I just remember being in the dance studio across the, downstairs, with the yellow, and doing lots of movement exercises. It was not "trust circle" but you did different prompts where we would step in and out based off of answering yes or no to prompts and seeing where other people were in relation to ourselves. So you're learning about others, you're seeing yourself in relation to them, but it's this intense intentionality that allowed for me to be present fully. My mind was not elsewhere.

For Julia, being intentional about her art practice has become a primary feature of her self-identity:

> The biggest thing is understanding the connection between my artist and myself. I'd say, that's the biggest thing of my understanding that has developed. The intention. Intention was something that I think is always important to me. But then that will was definitely a form of intention that I don't think I understood, either, until I heard it or got to practice it more. But that was really cool, because then it's what I lead with now.

Later in the interview, I asked Julia about the extent to which a lens of critical thought was present in her day-to-day experience. Again, she used the terminology of intention to describe her own self-identity in this regard:

> Laurel: How do you feel like that lens is present in your day-to-day experience as you move through the world? How do you feel like the way that you live is informed by that sort of criticality?
>
> Julia: I mean my initial answer is, like, how is it not? *(both laugh).* I think it just became my moral values, and that to me is really important. Whatever I do, one of my biggest moral values is intention, you know? Why are you there? Why are you doing it?

Critical Analysis

The capacity for critical, analytical thought about the structural injustice of oppressive systems was one of my most anticipated interview outcomes. Several interview questions asked about the ways in which this capacity had been developed both within the programs and in the years since; I also asked questions specifically about interviewees' understanding of abolition, both as a theory and a practice. Participants from both programs conveyed a complex analytical understanding of contemporary abolitionist praxis. The participants also exhibited critical comprehension of the role of capitalist economics in the broader social justice movement.

In general, and as expected, interviewees who participated in the YAAW program whose curriculum focused on abolition had retained a deeply nuanced and sophisticated grasp of the concept:

> Ché: I feel like a lot of people think abolition is getting rid of a system and then replacing it with a better one. And when I think of abolition it's like "no, you just get rid of the whole thing" *(laughs).* There is no real replacing, there is no putting back a new system. This is a system that doesn't need to exist, shouldn't exist, is harmful. There's so many other options, I think, specifically when thinking about PIC—because that's where I learned the term abolition, like abolitionist visions—and understanding prisons don't have to be a thing at all. Like, they shouldn't. There's so many other ways to implement justice, and so many ways—the amount of people we have in prisons that are just there for absolutely no reason, the most minuscule things, could have had their lives changed in a much more helpful way if they had the resources or the programs or the right help, and they just keep looping back into it because the system exists.
>
> Silvana: For me it was just the fact that from the get-go we were told that putting people in prison was not okay, and that should be a lens by which we always view the world. That people who are incarcerated it's just wrong, and that should be our everyday. I'm still very strong, and I still agree with that. I still am very passionate about that, like the entire incarceration and prison industrial complex has to be abolished.

On the other end of the spectrum, John was unfamiliar with abolition prior to the interview. However, over the course of the conversation, it was evident that his analysis was very clear, comprehensive, and informed in large part by personal experience. For example, John spoke about his grandparent's response to the recent incarceration of a neighbor (in this quote, John's use of the pronoun "they" oscillates back-and-forth between the people accused of a crime and a more abstract group of people profiting off of the existence of prisons and incarceration):

> He mentioned that it was great that they were locked away, because now they can never leave. They can never get better. And he said that in a good way. I was like "no, Pops, we got to find ways to build them, to help them figure their lives out." ... I see that there's change, and that is possible. But it's not gonna work if they're put in a position where people don't want them to be better, because by now they're getting money for these, you know, motherfuckers being motherfuckers, being assholes. And to see them doing good, to see them living like a civilized person, it means that they don't have to care for them. That means they're out. That means that it's, like, what are they gonna do?

John's ability to conceive of these two differently impacted demographics organically transformed his conception of justice into a larger-scale vision of structural transformation:

> If we take down these prisons, if we change it, that means a lot of people are losing money. A lot of people, you know? And for them to allocate those resources, it's beyond them. Someone needs to create that system before they ever turn their head. You know what I mean? And it takes people like us to believe in it prior to it ever coming into existence. You know what I'm saying? Because it's not going to change without a voice. It's not going to change without some paperwork. It's not going to change without some architectural designs—there has to be people on deck ready to implement resources. And I think it's possible, you know? I fully believe it's possible just because we're already doing it. It's the matter of the fact that we have to change this mindset that they can never be healed. You know what I mean? ... it's just a matter of creating that space so that it's possible, you know? And then earning grants and funding for it.

Julia also felt that anticapitalism was present in her and her generational peers' thinking despite it never having been articulated in her SJYA program experience. For her, the social justice discourse inside the program orbited around a critical analysis of capitalism without its explicit mention. This ultimately led her to that conclusion:

> You know for me, I think it's so much change in our economy, and the way that our world just kind of functions in support of other people and not in support of a big group of people ... We have definitely talked about capitalism and the economy, but I don't think head-on. In my perspective, I think that we've talked about everything around it, which—I would say I learned more about capitalism and the economy in high school, or outside of that world, or in my own research. But everything we did led to my current conclusion of "that is why everything is, like, that's why my generation wants to flip it on its head, because that is what we understand the root to be." Which, now that you've asked that question, I think that's so interesting, because I don't actually think we've ever said—I don't think we've ever even put on paper, in the signs or anything, like "screw capitalism." Which I think is so interesting because it almost, I think, would lead to a neutral kind of standpoint. But everything I've learned has definitely, like, I didn't really come up with that conclusion on my own, and I don't think I would have, I wouldn't have if we didn't talk about everything surrounding it that leads to that understanding.

Natalie also reflected on the ways in which the critical knowledge she acquired in the SJYA program informed her anticapitalist praxis. For Natalie, there was a recurrent underlying theme of gratitude for this knowledge acquisition. There was also a component of grief that moving through life with a critical-analytical lens inhibited her from participating in more mainstream ways of being:

> I just took it for granted because I had access to it through YAAW, and being in connection with other friends who are still organizing or doing things. It's always been a guiding thing, but it just became stronger. And I'm like, again, this is the way towards addressing capitalism. I think that's also informed how my job choices are made. But I think that's why I cried because I'm just like "yeah, I do think I would be a different person." Or I sometimes joke, I'm like "damn, I'd be such a good capitalist if I believed in capitalism" *(laughs).*

For Diana, an awareness of the financial and economic interests that undergird so much of contemporary life emerged early on. As she transitioned between her school-based SJYA programs, she began to perceive a drastic difference in terms of resource allocation. In remembering her first exposure to an SJYA-based program, she recalled thinking:

> This is the coolest school I've ever been to. Why don't you want to take care of us? Why don't you want to make this an option for us? Why do you want to make it seem like "Well, yeah, it's cool. But why do we not just go to a public school where everything is funded" and blah blah blah? But it was this open air campus, it was beautiful, and we had no effing money to do, you know, like, for us. We had money to do cool things, but we didn't have money to care for the kids, which is why kids were always in and out of the school.

As she moved through her educational experiences, Diana increasingly noticed a glut of funding allocated to more outcome-based (as opposed to process-based) programs. This echoed some ideological tensions as she entered young adulthood and the realities of making a living as an artist inside of the American economic system. These tensions reinforced her commitment to programs focused on critical storytelling:

> It just feels very unfair to have something that feels really good and really supportive and really important not get supported. And these things that feel superficial and what I now identify as very capitalistic, very systematic and patriarchal, get supported and gunned into your head. It's just kind of like, you know, you really do try to imagine a different future. I don't want to walk in the world constantly being told that I have to be this good, so that everything works out. I just want to be over here talking about what matters. What matters right now is what's affecting us for real, for real, I don't care. I do care about money. I have to care about money. I exist within a system which I unfortunately cannot move through without a certain access to finances. But people are sad. Money doesn't fix sadness. A lot of people have a lot of money and are really really sad. We need to talk about the things that create those structures. And I'm more interested in those things.

There is a fundamental distinction between programming that focuses on production or outcomes versus programs that focus on the experiential dimension of artmaking. This came to define Diana's assessment of the program's relative embodiment of capitalist or anticapitalist values:

> I think there's a lot of spaces, especially now, especially in this really hyper-capitalistic society that we're living in, there are so many spaces that emphasize your excellence versus everyone else. They want "come here, be the best at whatever it is that you're doing." There's not a lot of spaces that are just like, "come here, be you." Not "come here, be you, get better," you know? "Come here, be you." Like that. Period.

In a similar way, Julia identified storytelling, especially within SJYA programs, as a fundamentally anticapitalist practice, as it placed value upon a resource that transcended materiality. For me, subjectively, her articulation almost prefigured or anticipated some sort of revolutionary or post-apocalyptic moment:

> Julia: I would have never considered story as a form of art before, or I would say personal story as a form of art before. And that is all we have to offer, you know? So why not lead with that? If everything material is gone, that is what we can still provide.

Belief in the Ineffable

In the a priori coding process, I wholly unanticipated the final habit of mind that arose as a theme throughout multiple interviews. The theme itself is rather subtle and abstract, but once I perceived its presence, it reappeared in several different interviews. The participants repeatedly expressed a mystification, by which I mean a posture of bemusement, perplexity, wonder, or incomprehension of certain aspects of their retrospective program experience. For me, the most salient characteristic of this phenomenon was that the participants accepted it. They did not seem bedeviled by their inability to identify or articulate the precise nature of the experience. Rather, they inhabited an unworried embrace of the experience as an almost Zen-like practice. Not completely understanding something, but still knowing it to be true anyway, was a shared characteristic of the participants' ways of thinking about the human experience, and the SJYA

experience in particular. For Ché, the most elusive or ungraspable aspect of that experience was the profundity of relationship formation:

> It is so baffling how powerful these relationships are to me—how meaningful they are, and how important. I literally feel like if I were to ever lose any one of the YAAWs it would be like something was ripped out of my life, like it wouldn't feel right. I wonder if it is the intersectionality part of everything. I wonder if it is all of us learning to empathize, learning these very powerful topics together, and how they relate to each one of us, and sharing that *(unintelligible)* all around the room on a topic we might all relate to, or might not relate to but want to be supportive and understanding of. I think that creates a very deep bond when we know another person that we are cherishing and are friends with is struggling because of something that is not within our control. I think that is truly how our bonds formed, because we couldn't help but to be there for each other and support each other. Yeah, I think that's really, I think that's it. I'm not really sure. It's hard to grasp it. Yeah. But it's just so powerful.

When I asked Silvana an explicit question about how this community formation process took place, she responded with a similar bafflement:

> Laurel: How do you think we did that? How did that happen? How did YAAW encourage this sense of shared values, or cultural norms? What was the process?
>
> Silvana: It's really profound, and also bewildering to think about it now at this time, because, looking back on it, you would think that "no, that wouldn't work," you know? But it did, and it worked beautifully, and I think that is what also makes it so powerful and amazing and so inspiring. And mind boggling to me is that we were able to cultivate a space of young people from different backgrounds, different races, different genders, different orientations, and everything, along with these beautiful mentors, and create this amazing space and set of not only friendships but work, art, and community that I now know is just so important and needed for young people. And going back to your question, how do we do that? I have no idea. It was just, I think, the fact of bringing together artists and young people and giving them space and freedom to allow for open mindness. And again, like I said, bringing it back to that thing about, like, you have to learn when to shut up and listen.

Both Ché and Silvana's responses were striking to me. They provided numerous clear and comprehensive insights into program design and structure, which were then ironically bookended with statements of perplexity or incomprehension. In a similar tonal vein, John felt like an unknown or inarticulable force was at work; a sort of higher power or cosmic energy that had placed him in alignment with his SJYA program:

> It feels kind of unreal, but at the same time it feels like I'm meant to be here. I don't know if you get deja vu, but it's like "man. I've been here before," you know? … just because I'm talking to you about it, it feels like I'm taking it a step further, somehow, some way. I don't know where it'll take me, but I know the more that I talk about it, the more that I act on it, as long as it feels right, it feels comfortable. I feel like this is what's meant to be, what I should be doing. I just gotta keep on going forward.

Julia's sense of the mystical or inexplicable arose when we began discussing the *Change* and *Build* components of the Critical Resistance abolitionist framework, again relating it to a larger process of generational transformation:

> I know the way the world is the way it is right now, and I feel like I know and understand that. But I feel like I am in such a world of the Change right now that it's almost hard to see it. With my generation being the age that it's in, and how powerful it is, I don't really see the world, I don't really see it happening the same way anymore. So to me, as much as I feel like I haven't seen the Build, I feel like I know it's gonna happen, you know? And that's why I feel like I'm in that world of the Change, because that's where it's in right now, you know? ... I think our generation just needs to be older and have more American power, you know? I think that's what needs to be for that Build to actually start, but I do see it happening. I don't know if that makes sense. It is coming. I just don't think it's there yet.

As I reflected on the unifying energy of these quotes, I thought about this particular habit of mind: the ability to believe something to be true even though the concrete evidence continues to feel more elusive or intuitive than concrete. This ability feels like a deeply fundamental capacity for the development of an abolitionist consciousness insofar as a future beyond carceral capitalism requires a cognitive leap of faith. Julia described the challenges of holding on to this faith when confronted with the real circumstances of modernity. How could she "maintain hope even when the harshness of reality may suggest the opposite" (hooks, 1994, p. 13)?

> I think that is equally a pivotal thing of my generation, because I think we're really good at understanding our power. But I also equally think a lot of us are like "I'm only one person. What am I going to do?" And I definitely felt like I almost needed to fall into that mentality a couple of times in my life because I was talking about this recently: Hope is something that is so hard to hold on to. It is so hard to carry hope, because it's such a positive concept, and it's so hard to see what's happening and then to still carry hope, you know? It is a lot of work just to think of that concept. And I feel like something I always hear, especially with Marissa, with 4C LAB in general, is you know it is hard to carry. And I'm not necessarily saying responsibility. But I do think that understanding that holding that hope is so powerful, and is the start and is the kicker of why you do art, and why you create, it's so important to have that underlying feeling, because that is the start of change. You know? You're hoping for, you know, whatever you think is best … I don't think you can always carry hope, because you will have down days, and sometimes you have to feel really upset about those things, and I don't think that there's really room for hope in those places. But I think when you feel so encouraged to carry that hope, and to understand what that hope means to you, is the only way that anything is going to actually actively change ... having that underlying feeling of that hope is going to kickstart that change and understand what you want that change to be.

Ways of Being

I defined the final categorical grouping of themes that emerged from the coding process as "ways of being" or lived praxes. These are the behaviors—and guiding frameworks for those behaviors—through which the interview participants live their daily lives and make choices about organizing their time, actions, priorities, and relationships. Again, these categories are not mutually exclusive, but by moving from program experience to interior forms of thought to everyday actions, I demonstrate a chronological trajectory for the transformative process. The ways of being I identified include: (a) an imperative to speak up in the face of injustice, (b) maintaining a high standard for equity and mutual respect in both social relationships and labor relationships, and (c) a commitment to replicating values of accessibility when developing or facilitating spaces or programs of their own creation.

Speaking Up

Several of the interviewees identified a moral imperative to speak about critical social justice issues that were inculcated in them by virtue participating in SJYA programming. John was struck by discovering the sheer power and ability of the spoken word:

> It's shown in my poetry a lot because I've discovered the power of voice. I've been learning more about Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, famous speakers, how they talk when they're on mic. It's insane the fact that you can gather a crowd just by talking your ideas, your morals.

When asked about how she might currently embody the abolitionist value of change and changemaking, Julia immediately identified speaking up as almost an ontological obligation:

> I think the number one would be speaking up. I know I am a straightforward and bold person in general, but I think that being in the generation that I'm in, and learning all the work that I learned with 4C LAB and in my own personal life, it's like there's really no room to be quiet anymore. I'm truly here for too short to not say anything ever, you know? So that is the biggest thing.

Similarly, Silvana used the language of "disservice" to describe the unthinkable possibility of choosing to *not* use one's voice to speak up on behalf of justice:

> How do you take these things into conscious thought and thinking in your everyday life? That's something that stuck with me literally every day, because like you said it's a lens. Once you have that lens you can't take it off ... it has to do with the fact that keeping those lenses on for me is about love. It's about going through the everyday and going through these issues and these experiences with love, humility, and dignity for the people behind those experiences. If I take off my lens, and I do not critically think about these social issues, I'm doing a disservice to a whole group, a whole community, a whole bunch of people who are at the hands of these systems, of these institutions. We have a whole group, a community, a whole culture of people that have been going through all of these oppressions, these marginalized things, that we have to tell them to their face "No, you're crazy about that"? Or, like "They made it so you can make it?" No! So for me taking the lens off is such a disservice to not only myself, but also how I go about my day. Me having the lens on means that that's how much I care and I love, for people and my community.

For Diana, the act of speaking up began with consciousness-raising through peer exchanges about shared experiences vis-a-vis real world issues. She recalls Proposition 8, a

California state constitutional amendment intended to ban same-sex marriage, being at the center of these conversations. Here, Diana describes the way that SJYA spaces provided the necessary safety to have these dialogues within a potentially unfriendly sociopolitical context:

> The conversations that we had regarding acting up, standing up for what you believe in, you know sometimes it's—you can't just go about your normal days. And then you have to stop and assess and see the world around you for what it is, and that was STAND, you know? When I moved to the next school, we were talking about politics, we were talking about real world issues. My high school year was the year of Proposition 8—is that what it was called? That was my senior year. So that was all we were talking about. And STAND provided an opportunity for us to do that, not only to talk to each other about it, but to talk to the school, and to talk to classmates, and to get together as groups, and go out into other spaces where we could safely talk about these things. Because again, we were doing this inside of a suburb that wasn't really supportive of acting up. But there were spaces that we could talk about if it just had to be a little bit more covert, you know?

In Julia's case, the issue that became central to her act of speaking-out was gun violence. She described feeling empowered by the creative process in which her artistic work with CoLab amplified (she uses the term "explode") her and her peers' lived experiences:

> My 4 years of high school we each had different things, and in my sophomore year a big thing was gun violence. So now I'm experiencing this personal fear in a high school in Downtown LA of gun violence, with shared experiences with all my friends, and then I have this chance to speak about it with 4C LAB, and now I'm learning how to actually use that. These things that I would consider normal, that other people don't understand. So I have this really cool balance of: I can feel it here *(gesture of holding something in right hand)*, and I can understand it with people here. Now I can talk about it and then share it *(gesture of holding something in left hand)* through art. So that was really good timing for me, because I thought that I had the shared experience with other people, and not only could I take my story, I can take friends, and kind of explode and share what I'm feeling, what this collective group is feeling in gun violence, you know? Then go and share that.

In this creative process, the lived experiences of a young person's immediate community are amplified through their art to communicate with a broader audience. This can be traced back to the fundamental SJYA program experience of Storytelling as well as exposure to an Expanded Definition of Art.

Standards of Reference

As mentioned in the Participant Profiles section, the most salient takeaway from Ché's interview was the way they identified the standard of reference set by their time in their SJYA program, which would go on to inform social relationships in their life from then on:

> Meeting each other in that program created such a huge standard for us of what friendship should be and what people can be. It just feels like the people who participated in YAAW and are alums now are all just so incredible, and know how to hold themselves accountable, and know how to be active in their communities. They're just so passionate, even just following their social media accounts.

Later in the interview, Ché articulated some of the specific questions that were useful framing devices for assessing whether their relationships were, in fact, living up to the standard established by their time in the SJYA program. They described how that inquiry-based evaluation process was also a resource shared in community with other program alums:

> I also think having the friendships with Natalie and Hoi, being able to share these things like "I just had this uncomfortable conversation, I don't know what I could have done ... Is this relationship with this person so important that we want to continue to actually try to have these conversations? Or is this person actively hurting us? And you know, just exhausting us as well." … When you're forming community there needs to be a lot of reciprocity, like "How do we help each other? How do we all grow and support each other as a whole? ... What does my community need?" and "What can we do together as opposed to this single entity?" … "Is all the energy I'm giving to this person in terms of support, love, knowledge and all that stuff—is it being returned? Is it being appreciated?" And if not then it can't really go anywhere, and I think that helps create good boundaries. Not by fully cutting them off, but knowing where the limitations are with that person. And how to move forward in a relationship. I think learning, since we all grew up together, essentially with the same program, we have so many ways we can just give feedback to each other as we grow. What I learn about my interpersonal relationships I also share with the other YAAWs I'm still close to, and what they learn comes back to me. And I think that is a beautiful image of really good growth, and that's why I say they are the standard, because we only share knowledge and support and love for each other. And that's why I'm like "other people, do they do the same thing that these YAAWs do for me? Because if that is truly the standard, then why can't everybody else meet that standard?" And I truly believe people can.

Natalie also expressed that her time in the YAAW program had set a standard for her social relationships, which extended into the terrain of social media. She described instances of

engaging in social media discourse that were not met with that same standard of critical analysis. Recounting a conversation on a Facebook environmentalist group about incarcerated Californians serving as wildfire-fighters:

> I just shared an article naming how little they get paid to literally save our lives: "This is not ok, modern day slavery," all the things. And I was just like "this is just facts, and y'all need to make your environmentalism more intersectional," because it was not. People in the comments just—it was a mess, and I was like "why is this a mess? Why are you fighting me?" Just again a lot of the excuses we hear about why people should be receiving jail time and things like that. And I was like, "this is not okay." So I also left that group.

Natalie also transposed this standard of relationality from her social network to broader community-based spaces of mutuality and reciprocity, as well as her professional sphere:

> I feel like I continue to be guided and seek out alternative ways of coexisting with folks—small ways, not just mutual aid. I think Portland has a lot more trading that's happening, like "oh, I know this skill or thing, can I trade you for this skill or thing or experience" and I don't think I'd be as open to that, because everyone's like "wow Natalie you know lots of random skills and facts and things," and I'm like "oh, it's just because this is how I process. This is how I like to create." Or like, "oh, I know how to do that, too." And they're like "what?" I'm like "yeah, don't you want to make it too?" and they're like "no." *(laughs)* But I love to learn, and having those opportunities of learning and sharing knowledge, so knowing that I'm a lot more valuable than my paycheck.

Several participants described how their experiences in the SJYA programs influenced their decisions to enter the workforce in community-engagement fields. As Silvana said, "I had never been as involved in community work as I am now as a young adult, and also didn't know the full impact and importance and prevalence that there has to be in community based and activism work." Ché traced the trajectory from YAAW until now: "Natalie is working at a not-for-profit for API, I work in community health, there's so many impactful things—we have all grown up to serve our communities I think because there was such a huge impact from YAAW." Ché also described how the standard of integrity that informs their social relationships is also brought to bear on their career in public health:

> Working at a community health center was important to me because I was helping immigrant families, low income families, houseless families, families who were in actual need of healthcare. And then I was just so disappointed because this was a federally run program, and they would talk about how much revenue they made in a year, but also just pay us like *(laughs)* nothing. And also there were many conversations about policies while I was working there that were constantly changing. And literally someone who was a very high position person was like "if you don't like how we do things here, just go somewhere else." And I was just like, you know, I love helping others and I love impact ... But basically as much as I wanted, as much as I loved helping these communities and the connections I formed with my patients, it was not worth being underappreciated and just not treated well by a federally run program. I think it's shameful. It was also shameful because at a certain point I feel like it wasn't even about patient care, it was like "how many patients can we get in a day? We have quotas to hit." And that's disgusting. You can't just treat—like, you are affecting these people's insurance too by trying to get them to come in for appointments that they don't actually need. That's perverted. And I even voiced that when I quit. I didn't even show up for my last two days. I was very honest with my supervisor because she was actually a very amazing person. It was like the company standard as a whole.

Natalie expressed a very similar experience when her job in retail responded to a minor absentia with policies and practices that seemed to replicate paradigms of surveillance and punitiveness:

> I kind of ended it very curtly. I was like "you know, I will take the write up, but I just want to let you know this is very punitive and inherently harmful." … I definitely escalated it. But I was also like "no, you need to be called out for your shit. This is not okay." Because what also happens, I think, with a lot of the language—because woketivism is a thing and it's just coming into light—people want to appear to not be bad or guilty or whatever, and it's like "No, but you're still replicating all these things."

Later in the interview, Natalie described another work relationship that she chose to end because of a lack of integrity within the organization's practices:

> There were other things that were very appropriative, and I was just like "I'm not gonna hold back. What are the consequences? You guys are not cool." And yeah, I just saw myself out, in a way. Like, "I am done ... Have you never had anyone check you?"

Ché's and Natalie's refusals to tolerate workplace environments that were not up to their standards of integrity and equity seemed to represent a commitment to an abolitionist future vision in which all individuals and institutions are accountable to a more justice-oriented set of

social values. I asked Ché whether their experience in the SJYA program had contributed to this tendency:

> Laurel: I'm wondering whether you feel like the program encouraged that ability for you, the ability to sort of radically imagine, like "okay, if we're gonna abolish the prison industrial complex, we have to really reorganize society." Do you feel like your time in YAAW and/or in the years since that you have been able to practice that sort of radical visioning of a different way that social life could be organized?
>
> Ché: Honestly, I don't think, like I've actually truly thought about what it could look like. I think it's also just a hard thing. I feel like I see a lot of theories that it's a constant work in progress, that it's a goal. Not even just a personal goal too, it's a collective goal. So I think to me what I've done is really just show up when I feel like I need to, or when I can. I think this is the most important part. And then also just continue the little zine that I made. Me, Hoi and Natalie, we made a little collective just because we wanted to do grant stuff *(laughs)* so we made a little collective. But then we were tabling and at these zine events and it was just like "I have the zine but I don't wanna sell it at all. I just wanna provide information freely." I think while I don't really know what I envision an abolitionist future would look like, the best thing I can do, in the present, is to show up and provide free knowledge and statistics and resources the best that I can *(laughs)*.

This poignant response echoes several of the principles articulated elsewhere in this chapter, including a sort of humility or bemusement about the "not knowing" stance that an abolitionist position entails. The response also shows commitment to developing and producing original spaces that exemplify a practice of community accessibility.

(Re)Creating Accessible Spaces

The final thematic category in the Ways of Being section is a personal commitment to the creation or re-creation of spaces that replicate the same principles of accessibility found in the participants' SJYA experiences. This was especially true for Diana, who in the past couple of years had returned to CoLab as the Program Coordinator. In this new role, Diana expressed feeling a renewed connection to her younger self:

> Now I feel like I'm in this strange role reversal, where I wonder if this is what Marissa felt like when she was my age, working with students at this age. You know? Where you're just seeing it—like, none of us get a redo necessarily, right? But that concept of being the person that you needed when you were a kid, it blows up in your face where you're like "holy crap, that, this is what that means." It's not turning into the really cool person that I envisioned myself as as a child. It's all of those missing sections that you noticed when you were a kid and become illuminated when you're an adult, how important it becomes for you to then try to fill that in and create something in those empty spaces, especially if they're the same empty spaces you viewed as a child, you know? I wanted more caring community and talking and chatting and stuff when I was a kid. So that is my ultimate goal now.

Towards the end of the interview, I thanked Diana for participating. She responded with reciprocated gratitude, as the interview provided space for her to articulate the specific characteristics of the spaces that she hoped to facilitate for younger people:

> Thank you for wanting to talk about it, and helping me reflect on why I make these decisions. They're not so much like inner child healing—they're bigger than me, and I care that they're bigger than me, and I want to create a space where more people can feel like this, because that's really how it is. It's it's, you create an impact on the whole by starting with the individual. Everybody has to feel like they're bigger than themselves, and then they want to make people feel bigger than themselves, not like they want to be bigger than themselves, and then they want to go and tell everybody that they are bigger than themselves. I feel so big today! I want you to feel big, too. What do you need to feel big today? Let's do it.

Later in the interview, Diana reiterated the importance of maintaining CoLab's process-over-product ethos in current and future SJYA program designs:

> Those are the spaces I find myself in now. They're just recreations of this process over product. How do we create community? How do we make everyone feel like they can make really really good art regardless of what it looks like, you know? Like "it's good art, your art is important, and it matters. There's people who want to listen to you, and it doesn't matter their power or authority or ability to throw cash at you, or say your name to somebody famous. We can show people. We can show you that people care about your artwork." And we can show people that there are people out there talking about the things that they're thinking about, even if maybe they don't feel the creative spark to write a poem, or make a dance, or whatever, they want to be inspired and to talk about those things. And there are people out there doing it. So that's the kind of spaces we find ourselves in, and it feels the most comfortable, and it feels—not the most comfortable. I take back that last thing. It's not the most comfortable. It's actually the most terrifying space to be in. It's not comfortable, because when people come in and they're like, "I'm good at something," things just happen, and you just make work. You don't think about

> it. It's pretty because it's easy. But when you really work on the process, stuff *happens* [emphasis added]. You leave every day really processing your own stuff. You find yourself connected to people in really beautiful ways … That's more fulfilling, for me at least.

John was committed to creating spaces that could replicate the CoLab principles of community accessibility. The goal was both individual and collective artistic success, as well as a reciprocal intergenerational imperative to be of community service:

> I just naturally want to be the best, and I hope that other artists feel that way, too, because in real life it's a competition. There's the best that are really making it. It seems unreal, but they're making big money right now, and I want to be doing that some day, and hopefully give back and do exactly what 4C LAB is doing for the community. Because it takes one to know one, and there's always going to be another, you know? You have to respect that … I got big plans. I don't want to say everything, you know, because some of it's a secret. But I'm a visionary, naturally, before that creative visionary term was a thing. And I just have to find my bubble. But I do want to have a space for creative visionaries to come and present their art, whether it be music, whether it be poetry, whether it be painting, whether you do modeling, whether you do sculpting, any and every art form, films, it's all welcome. And I want to create a space where there's actual live performances, like at the Lincoln Park where they have the stage, but more active, more lively, more of a weekend fun space for you to hear what's going on in the community. Because there's so many young artists, and I've seen so many that just aren't in the positions to put them in that better spot, but you just know they should be. Like, "how are you this good?" I don't know, some people do, I don't know if it's luck, if it's fate, destiny, if they're in the right place at the right time, but it just works out sometimes for certain people that got the right cards. And I want to put myself in the place where I got the right cards, and if I'm more than lucky enough to receive that opportunity I want to give back. Because it feels more than grateful enough to receive that in the first place, if that were to come, you know? God willing. But I think you just have to give back, just because, like, if you don't, then you're gonna, it's like you're stopping the culture, you know? You're stopping, like, you're breaking a cycle of tradition, in a sense, because this is generations.

Silvana was also driven by her dedication to accessibility, as well as the principle of community uplift through service that had been impressed upon her by the program:

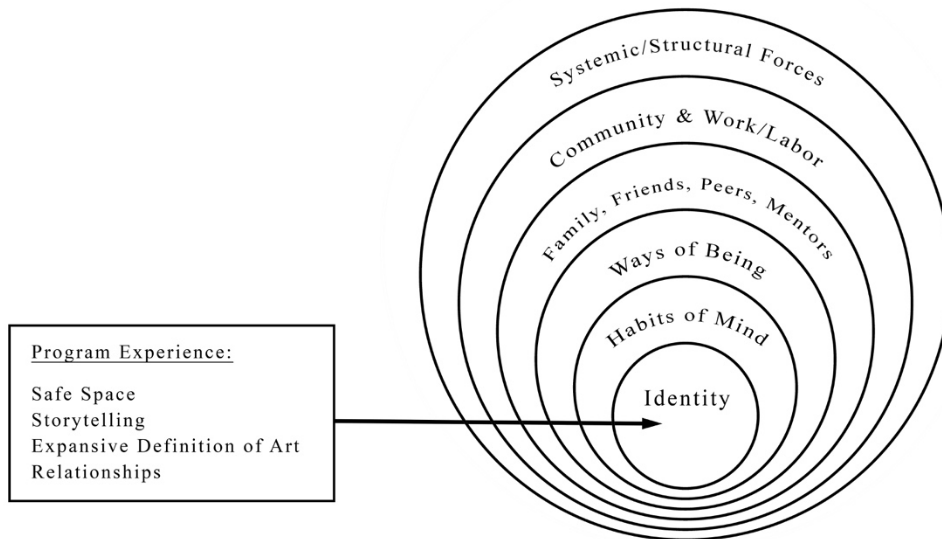
> Community work and a lot of activism, I feel personally in my opinion, is based on love for the people within our community, and the people who are disenfranchised, marginalized, and don't have the same resources or access to these things, you know? And the program, I think, definitely shaped my trajectory towards "I want to do more community-based work," or I want to be more involved in my community to help (those) who are marginalized, but also teach folks as well.

Interconnectivity, Concentric Circles, Nested Spheres, or "The Onion"

Throughout the interview process, I noticed a thematic throughline that seemed to defy or transcend my initial schematic for categorical organization. This was a dynamic process of interplay between the individual and the broader spheres of social experience: family, relationships, community, and the larger body politic. Every participant referenced this phenomenon at some point. When coding, I began to use the shorthand "onion," to conceptualize in my own mind a series of concentric circles or nested spheres—micro, meso, and macro—in which the impact of individual growth or transformation could have an outward ripple effect into broader spheres of engagement. This visual representation of the ecosystemic nature of both Healing-Centered Engagement and abolitionist thought serves as part of the overarching analytical framework that informs my interpretation of the findings. In this model, experiences that are practiced on a small scale within the environment of the SJYA program are scaled up and made manifest at more expansive levels later on in life (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Expanded Concentric Circles of Impact



As referenced earlier (brown, 2017), another way of conceptualizing this phenomenon is the geometric model of the fractal, wherein the form that occurs at the micro level is replicated over and over as the object expands and grows. For Julia, the inverse was also expressed, with community impact rippling inward and informing the trajectory of individual development:

> It's so interesting to think outside of yourself, you know, what are the things that surround you and have shaped your life, that I think are really unacknowledged, you know? Like your favorite food, I feel like it's just something you say that you enjoy, but never really notice how much that shapes you, and how you are as a person. Reading [my poem] now it's really nice to see where I was at that time, and who. This is an identity poem to me, you know? So I think it's interesting to see how I identified then, which I don't think is necessarily different—I just think it's nice to see. I think I see a lot of my moral values in there, too. Which is a good refresher and good reminder of how much my community and how much what I'm surrounded by really shapes who I am.

For Natalie, this phenomenon of dynamic interplay between self and community mostly manifested in terms of the healing process:

> When I focus on healing myself then my community is also healing. I am also part of the community in the same way that, if I am suffering, then my community is also suffering, and I don't think I understood that because I was like, "I just got to try my best" and I think that's been a big post-YAAW kind of growth point.

For Natalie, this multi-level healing process represented a sort of abolitionist antidote to the Prison Industrial Complex, in which dynamics of punishment or injustice can permeate and ripple from the systemic to the individual and back again:

> Prison Industrial Complex is not the way. How do we—on the personal, interpersonal, and then community and then systemic, all the little gears or layers—it's like "how am I replicating carceral systems on that interpersonal level?" *(Laurel snaps in affirmation)* And how can I stop and name that?

Silvana also articulated a layered model of her conceptualization of abolitionist work, including the ancestral as an additional sphere of impact:

> Abolitionist work is a work of love ... making life better for a community of folks who haven't been treated right, you know? And it is an act of love, in that it is striving towards not only betterment of one's own self, but of one's own community, of one's own ancestors, going back to that sense of dignity, that sense of, like, everyone has a right to live comfortably with happiness and with dignity, and with the resources given to them, and no one deserves to be put in a fucking cage for anything, you know?

With passion, Silvana described her own multi-level abolitionist praxis. It begins with personal accountability and mindful thought, and extends outwards into a practice of community engagement through critical education:

> It's being able to hold yourself accountable for the knowledge that you have, and learning from the mistakes of the past. It's like, how do we move forward and push through a lot of these things? It's by changing the way that we think. It's changing the way that we voice these opinions. It's about being mindful and being kind, and teaching humility and empathy to other people, like "Hey, even though these issues are prevalent, it's because of a certain reason, and that reason is because people aren't given resources and access, and the care that they deserve." Not even, no, not even deserve, scratch that out, no, not even deserve—that they are owed, as is their human right, as is their human dignity.

Diana also expressed an awareness of micro- versus macro-levels of engagement and impact. She described her own process of understanding that the most effective forms of activism might occur within a smaller sphere of influence:

> In all of those efforts I really have to look at systematically what it is that I've, like, what position I've chosen to take about certain systems, and how their long term effect really, like, what is their long term effect? My thought process here—like, again, not everybody is going to be a Martin Luther King, Jr. We're not all gonna have our name in lights, but in my very small sphere how can I rationalize things that I feel are going on in the real world versus how I really feel things should happen in the world, and how we push that forward.

John articulated a similar thought process about resisting activism writ large versus a more intuitive or organically considered individual notion of justice:

> I personally don't identify as an activist, but I personally do the actions that entail an activist. I don't know. I don't like the word activist. I think that they've just painted a bad cloud over that. it. It seems like you're someone who goes against a system, and I'm not towards any system. But I want equality, you know? I want, yeah, I just believe in equality for all and, you know, respect and honesty, and just treating another person like a human being. You know? Equal rights is what I believe in.

At the same time, John described a nascent or renewed commitment to community engagement and uplift within his immediate community of East Los Angeles. He distinguishes between external forces coming in to provide community organizing support versus those originating within the community itself:

> Now, not only am I building connections, but I'm building interest in what I grew up in. So I have a close part in it, you know? It's not like I'm—and not that there's any problem with it—but I'm not picking someone else's community and helping them build, like "They're not okay. They're not comfortable building on their own." You know what I mean? I want to be a part of the solution. And that's what I brought with me in 4C LAB.

It seems that SJYA programs can serve as the sort of "connective tissue" between these disparate layers of experience. Engagement and participation in SJYA programs can provide transferable skills as well as mobility and literacy that allows young people to slip between modes of engagement that center the individual, the relational, the familial, the communal, and

the systemic or structural, in order to build both real and metaphoric connections therein. SJYA programs illuminate and facilitate the interstitial spaces between young people's experiences, allowing them to travel more easefully between these experiential spheres and supporting the unfolding of their development with a broader perspective and holistic sense of personhood. This transferability is further explicated in Chapter VI.

Summary of Findings

In this chapter, I outlined the themes that emerged from the participants' recollections of their experiences. I defined and described each stage of the process by which SJYA programs cultivate the abolitionist praxis of young people later in life. As indicated, there were a number of salient themes that transcend or cut across these four areas. For example, Intentionality is primarily categorized as a Habit of Mind, manifested as a key characteristic of all four stages of the process. In other areas, one of the core themes of an earlier stage of the process appears in an evolved form at a later stage. For example, the Safe Space of the Program Experience informs the Re-Creation of Accessible Spaces that emerged as one of the Ways of Being. These are examples of places where the fractal or ripple effect detailed in Figure 2 seem most evident.

When conceptualized as a more linear process, the SJYA model shepherds young people along a continuum of experience that leads directly from HCE principles to abolitionist principles via three distinct but not mutually exclusive strands. The individual features of the participants' experiences that connect each HCE principle to an abolitionist principle are uniquely salient themes as well as interlocking phenomena that overlap, dovetail, and reappear at various points along the trajectory. Taken as a whole, however, these findings represent a holistic pedagogical arc, in which the key components of the Program Experience are an intentionally designed Safe Space, a central practice of autobiographical Storytelling through circle dialogues,

exposure to an Expanded Definition of Art that includes identity-based and political/activist works, and supportive and meaningful Relationships with both peers and mentors. These facets of experience impact young people's sense of self in such a way that it gives rise to fundamental Identity Transformations, which contribute to the development of Habits of Mind and Ways of Being aligned with the values and praxes of the contemporary abolitionist movement.

In Chapter VI, I will situate these findings in alignment with the theories that undergird the conceptual framework for this study, and expound upon the ways that they connect the core principles of Healing-Centered Engagement with those of abolitionist theory. These findings were, of course, not derived in a vacuum but in active and reciprocally dialogic interviews with myself in the role of researcher. Thus, in the next chapter, I outline some of the ways I have reflected upon, and made sense of, my own participation in the interview process. Doing so will add contextual and autoethnographic information for readers' interpretation of this study.

CHAPTER V: AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC SELF-REFLECTIONS

This section is not a traditional convention in the organization and formatting of a dissertation. It is my attempt to situate my own experience within the larger context of the research study. In my endeavor to achieve this, I engaged in self-reflective voice memos during the interview process. I also composed autoethnographic narrative reflections as a part of the larger dissertation writing process. Additionally, I similarly analyzed my own quotations from the interviews as I did with my participants' quotations in Chapter IV, coding for themes to structure a narrative flow as an approach to meaning-making. Thus, unless otherwise indicated, all of the quotations that appear in this chapter are my own.

Vulnerability and Selfhood

I conducted this research study during a profoundly liminal and transitional moment in my own career trajectory, marked by the birth of my first child (see Appendix A). My last interview was conducted exactly 1 year to the day after the beginning of my maternity leave. The rite-of-passage into motherhood is a widely known transformative experience, often comprised of identity crises that occur in distinct and also mutually informative spheres of a birthing person's life. Having worked in the field of youth arts education for the previous 20 plus years—over half of my life—my sense of identity was deeply bound to my practice of serving as a consultant, facilitator, mentor, program designer, and direct service provider in that space and field. My first year of motherhood included occasional consulting and facilitation work in addition to my regular adjunct professorship. My professional identity felt wobbly, unstable, and diminished in worthiness. As I labored intensely and invisibly in the domestic space of caring for an infant, I wondered: if and when I were to return to youth arts education work, would it have value? Or was it yet another traditionally feminized space of care work that would never amount

to, or result in, any meaningful or tangible changemaking impact? Did my work matter? Or would the world be better off if I stayed in the home?

These musings interacted, of course, with the sociohistorical moment at which they occurred. It was 2022, the third year of a devastating global pandemic which had wrought tremendous damage and compelled millions of people—myself included—to leave their full-time jobs and pivot their energies and efforts into the more clandestine domestic space of the home. My self-critical thought processes also interacted with another simultaneous personal circumstance, in which my husband sold his television show to a major studio network. I was thus navigating a new heteronormative labor dynamic in my marriage, in which my husband's highly visible and valuable labor as a Hollywood writer/director/producer contrasted with my relatively invisible and undervalued labor as a mother/adjunct professor/doctoral student. This only compounded my feelings of self-doubt, and my wondering whether opting-out of the field altogether would be the more logical, obvious choice.

In *Visual Arts as a Tool for Phenomenology,* Anna S. CohenMiller (2018) described "the structural obstacles and personal challenges of being a mother in academia":

> Women in academia face challenges individually and institutionally that are exacerbated once they have become mothers … Likewise, within academia, graduate student mothers face internal and external obstacles and challenges such as guilt, costs of childcare, and perceptions by others on academic focus. (p. 3)

In this article, CohenMiller researched the experiences of women who, like her and like me, became mothers during their doctoral experience. I encountered this article in June 2022, when my son was 5 months old and I was embarking upon writing my dissertation proposal. It was both affirming and disheartening to read the ways that the difficulties of the academic experience were only further compounded by the challenges and complexities of motherhood. In her dissertation, *The Phenomenon of Doctoral Student Motherhood/Mothering in Academia:*

Cultural Construction, Presentation of Self and Situated Learning, CohenMiller (2014) found that becoming a mother amidst a doctoral program was a gendered and strategic experience that challenged their sense of belonging. For myself, these three facets of the phenomenon converged squarely in my sense of professional identity: (a) the typically feminized labor of care, (b) the creative logistical negotiations and flexibilities, and (c) the inherent sense of "being in one's place" had been primary characteristics of my work in the field of social justice youth arts for decades. Now, these experiences were transposed onto the practice of motherhood, which is such a fully consuming experience. It felt like these skills and capacities might never find expression in any other sphere again. Perhaps parenthood was my value now. Perhaps my time as a youth worker had come to an end.

I conducted my first interview 10 months after giving birth to my son. As I descended the stairs afterwards to meet my husband in the kitchen, I could feel myself vibrating with an energy that I feared had been rendered dormant. I felt confident and self-possessed, having had the value of my work—not just as a mother but as an educator, a mentor, a program designer—affirmed and reflected back to me. Conducting the subsequent five interviews I felt the same palliative balm applied right on the heart of my professional insecurities, infusing my fragile sense of identity with a renewed sense of purpose and validity. I left each interview on a high, buzzing with the uncanny researcher's feeling that I had been right in my hypothesis; this work matters not only in the moment but in a long-term trajectory of transformative and life-changing impact. On a more personal level, I was moved to tears several times by the sheer nostalgia of the experience, in which I saw and was seen by such extraordinary young people, and shared space in such an intentional and formative way. For that reason, a decade later, the memories were still indelibly imprinted on our minds, bodies, and selves.

It was also personally meaningful to conduct research that felt very intimate and vulnerable, with a dynamic of mutual trust and respect. For example, I shared with Ché a little bit about the interaction between the interview process and my own postpartum moment. I expressed gratitude for being in continued relationship with them and the rest of the interviewees. This research supported a sense of historical continuity in terms of my own identity over time as well as validating the enduring importance of our work together:

> I don't think this happens to everyone, but I know it happens to a lot of birthing people, that when you become a parent—and I think it's specific to women and people who birth—your identity gets a little scrambled and you sort of end up on the other side of that experience being, like, "Who am I?" I read my resume and I'm like, "Am I that person? Have I done all these things?" And so to connect with you and have you describe work that I've done, and the person that I've been, in a program that I designed, and that honestly I put my absolute heart and soul into the design of that program despite a real lack of institutional support, it really ... yeah. I'm really grateful. I'm grateful to you for affirming all of that. And I'm just grateful to you for being the rad-ass person that you are in the world, and living these values in yourself and your one-on-one relationships and your friend community and your work. It's like every sphere that you engage in exemplifies these like really core values.

I expressed a similar sentiment of admiration to Natalie, telling her, "I can't imagine a more perfect person to support my fundamental thesis, which is that youth arts programs—if they're designed in a particular way—can really pivot young people onto an abolitionist trajectory." It felt appropriate to center this feeling of mutual respect as part of my commitment to uplifting youth voices as fonts of wisdom and expertise. I brought my established pedagogical practice of love into my discursive style as interviewer.

Researcher Transparency

The nature of this research design was participatory, and I had previously established rapport (and, in some cases, real emotional intimacy) with the interview participants. Thus, it felt appropriate and intuitive to share with them the theoretical underpinnings informing the research process, often connecting it to terminology that emerged from the interviews. For example, when

John introduced the language of "right relationship," it felt like a good moment to introduce some transparency about the research objective:

> Basically my research proposes that if a program is designed using this certain set of principles then the outcomes will be what you're talking about: the creation of young human beings who are in right relationship with the world around them.

A similar moment arose when Julia described how her art practice had become a way of life rather than something separate or outside of her daily existence:

> Julia: There is so much art that I live in my life on the daily that I wouldn't have considered before.
>
> Laurel: Yeah, yeah. Cool. That's really cool. That's a really cool answer, and speaks a lot to the sort of thesis behind this study, which is that participating in youth arts programs actually just impacts the whole way you move through the world.

With Diana, I was even more transparent, looping her into some of the different thematic throughlines that were arising in the research. I did so to share my excitement with her and also to enlist her potential help in snowball sampling:

> I'm getting that fizzy feeling where I can like the dissertation starting to write itself. You know, these themes of access, and these themes of having a reference point for relationships and the durability of that. It's all so cool. It's really cool. Is there anyone who you know that their life followed the trajectory of going through a youth arts program, and that that was this pivot point or that inflection point to live more radically in the world?

Diana was the oldest interview participant, as well as a former Master's student and current SJYA Program Coordinator. Thus, I may have considered her more of a peer in the research space. This sense of camaraderie or collegiality may have informed my instinct to connect with her around the emergent themes of the study:

> That's a theme that I'm already hearing, even just having done two interviews: this idea that as a teenager you have this sort of concept of what is possible in the world. And then youth arts programs sort of explode that wide open, and you suddenly realize there's this much more enormous scope available to you … you just have such a powerful articulation of so many of the themes that are so fundamental to this study. The idea of the concentric circles that, like the transformation of the individual, ripple out into the relational and the community and the larger civic impact. And just the idea of what a consciousness and an awareness of stratified capitalism you had at such a young age, to be moving through these institutions and witnessing what was being resourced and what was being deemphasized is just sort of striking.

In my conversation with Natalie, I incorporated the visual model of concentric circles, a recurring geometric schematic or diagram, which I referred to in my initial coding process as "the onion":

> Natalie: imagining spaces where, in a world where you can't be wrong, what can you do, you know?
>
> Laurel Butler: yeah, where you can remove the stigma and the fear that I think is so present for so many adolescents—and, as you just mentioned today, present for so many business owners, managers, HR Departments, Co-Op run—like whatever. Everybody is so afraid of being wrong. And if we can move past that paralysis, then what is possible if we can actually learn together, and if we can embody, like I just keep coming back to (name redacted) being like "I don't know how to do that. I want to learn. Teach me." Like that's the sort of other paradigm. Yeah. That's so beautiful. And I'm also just so glad to hear that you're on this trajectory around care, and interrogating what care looks like in terms of relationship to self. You did this dance move earlier in this conversation *(Natalie laughs)* which is one of my favorite dances in the world where you went like this. *(Laurel forms a sphere with her hands and expands it outwards, increment by increment, making larger and larger concentric spheres)* describing the layers of community. I think you were talking about abolition. You were like, you know, "How do punitive systems happen on (*Laurel repeats the movement)* this level, and then the community, and then your relationships, and then the world" right? And I think that inevitably at the center of that onion is the self, right?
>
> Natalie: Yes.

Looking back, I feel able to stand behind my decision to tell the participants about the theoretical frameworks that informed the study, both before and during/in the midst of the interviews. This exchange of information felt appropriate to honor a more equity-minded power dynamic. I hoped

to empower participants with necessary information to operate as insiders in the academic process, and cultivate a shared vocabulary that we could reference along the way.

Rhetorical Habits and Paraphrasing

In the spirit of active listening, I also attempted to paraphrase or make connections whenever it felt like a participant was articulating a lived praxis that exemplified any of the core themes of the study. In speaking with Ché, I chose to highlight their commitment to the principle of mutual aid:

> This idea of mutual aid is also really present in the abolitionist framework, and I just keep hearing in the way that you have constructed your life since the YAAW program that this idea of access is really an important value, from your work in public health and community health to your work as an artist. And I love that the zine collective existed. That's so cool, because that's also about access, right? Like, grant funding is there and we deserve to be able to have access to that pipeline of resourcing and funding. So that's a really beautiful theme, I think, because in a punitive framework not everybody has access to different resources, knowledge, opportunities. And so people get excluded and they get caged and they get ostracized and society disposes of them. And so that's a really tangible way, I think, to counteract that impulse.

With Natalie, I focused on her specific practice of skill sharing as a form of mutual aid. She identified that this practice was rooted and nurtured inside of the YAAW program, specifically in her anecdote about teaching Hoi how to crochet. In speaking with Natalie, I felt comfortable sharing one of my anxieties about the interview process: that the participants might have felt like they needed to portray all of their experiences in a positive light. Conversely, in my conversation with Natalie, we were unafraid to dive into the more challenging aspects of developing critical consciousness and alternative praxes at such an early age:

> I was worried that the power dynamic might create a sort of dynamic in the interviews where it was all rosy colored, where everyone's like "Oh, yeah, it was so beautiful, great" and that is a real experience for so many of us. But there's the other side of it that you articulated, which is that it makes life harder to move through with a lens of critical systemic analysis. I remember having that conversation, I think, year 2, the year after you left but were an intern, with maybe (name redacted) or someone who was going to college, and I was like "get ready because you're going to arrive in your first year of college, and you're going to be in classes with folks who have not metabolized this analysis."
>
> Natalie: Exactly
>
> Laurel: "and it's going to be hard." And it sounds like that happened inside of your family dynamics.
>
> Natalie: Yes.
>
> Laurel: And this is a theme that's come up in this interview, is that the things that we take for granted about moving through the world with a value system of social justice, or of mutual aid, and DIY aesthetics or relationships. I mean, that's another thing that stands out to me is that anecdote about Hoi coming up and being like "teach me how to do that." And now you're describing living in this community where one of the essential practices is skillsharing! And how cool to have had that template for that kind of relationship, getting together in a space and teaching one another how to do creative things. We take it for granted and then we move out into the real world, and we're like, "oh, this is not the way that dominant systems operate, it turns out." And the schism of that is not rosy colored. It's complicated.

Looking back at the interviews, I realize that I also went to a level of rather painstaking detail in explaining how I had used the Critical Resistance framework of abolitionist praxis to inform my interview questions. As such, this particular question was often somewhat verbose or unwieldy. For example, here I am posing it to Natalie:

> So, the Critical Resistance framework is Dismantle, Change, Build, and the "change" and "build" I've sort of defined inside of this framework as, like, "How do we envision the sort of radical imagined world that we want to bring into existence?" Right? A sort of post-capitalism, post-PIC way of living. And then how do we live now, and inhabit space now, in a way that is in alignment with that vision, right? And I think that that includes so many of the things that you've described, in terms of accountability practices, in terms of mutual aid practices, in terms of all of this stuff.

In terms of discourse analysis, I have some discomfort with the rhetorical trend that I am implementing here. I peppered in the interrogative "right?" throughout my speech as a way of encouraging a sense of agreement that might not have actually be organic to the interviewees. This is a habit that I hope to be more mindful of as I move forward in academic practice.

I noticed another undesirable rhetorical habit when looking back on the interview process. For a couple of moments, I felt like I wanted to draw out a particular theme that actually might not have been of as much significance as I might have wanted it to be. For example, Ché mentioned that YAAW had set a standard for them in terms of interpersonal accountability. I seem to have latched on to that, perhaps disproportionately in terms of its significance:

> You said such fascinating and interesting and compelling things. One thing that I want to like drill into is: I heard you use this phrase a couple of times as you were talking, about how being in YAAW raised your standard for the people that you bring into your life and your community, and the people that you relate to, and you used the phrase "people who know how to hold themselves accountable." And you've said that a couple times like it was this really important quality. What does that look like, or mean to you, in terms of being a personal quality?

Later in the interview, there was another moment in which Ché said something that seemed to resonate again with the concept of "concentric circles" of impact on personal, interpersonal, community, and structural levels. I focused on this moment as another opportunity to loop Ché into the overarching conceptual framework of the research study. However, I seemed to be forcing a connection between that statement and the earlier mention of accountability:

> You said something like "it's not just about social justice, but also on a personal level." And I forget what you were talking about, or referring to, but that's something that I'm really interested in in this research study is the relationship between those two things. The relationship between the way in which people move through the world as individuals, and how that reflects these larger systemic dynamics of power or oppression or accountability, and like transformative sort of collaboration for a better relational world. And so it sounds like this idea, for you, of people who hold themselves accountable, are people who are invested in that process of evolution and learning and growth as opposed to people who are just like "I'm not interested in evolving or learning or growing in response to this more critical systemic analysis." Does that feel accurate?

I feel somewhat awkward now about the degree to which I attempted to evince a theme that may have not been in the process of emerging on its own. Simultaneously, I am aware that the qualitative narrative researcher's role is to attempt to identify and pursue potential threads of useful inquiry. This was a tender balance for me to achieve throughout the interview process.

I am also aware that these moments are indicative of a slippage or a dovetail between my current role as interviewer and my former role as mentor/educator. Pedagogically, my teaching style is inquiry-based. I also rely on my own verbal-participatory inclination to draw connections and re-present them to my students for their own consideration. This tendency arose again in my interview with Silvana. This time it was from a more caring and mentoring stance, as we reflected on one of the art projects that she created during her time with YAAW: an original script for a play written about a young person's coming out process:

> Silvana: And so that was very important to me; it was that intention of "what can I do for my community outside of donating and providing resources?" It's like, "Oh, with my art I can make people feel seen."
>
> Laurel: Yeah, yeah, wow, wow. I mean that's so interesting just thinking about the work that you made in our time in the program together, you know? I remember you writing the script for the play about young, queer people in San Francisco.
>
> Silvana: Yeah!
>
> Laurel: in collaboration with the Lavender Youth, right?
>
> Silvana: Oh, my goodness, yes.
>
> Laurel: and that's exactly the thing that you're describing, right? Like "I want to make art in order to sort of amplify the representation of folks in a specific community." … and I am, like, time traveling to just send so much love and pride to little Silvana, right? To Silvana like 8, 9 years ago—what a brave thing! What a brave thing to be wrangling those aspects of your own identity, and be like, "instead of shying away from them because it doesn't feel like I have the safety, I'm going to go so far into that space that I'm going to actually make art, not just about it, but in community with other folks having this shared experience as a way of giving myself what I need, and I'm not getting." What a courageous thing! What a smart thing to do for yourself, you know?

> And to identify this as a safe space. And so "I'm going to take advantage of that, because my needs aren't getting met elsewhere." I just think that that's so incredible and powerful that you made that choice, and that one thing happened before the other. That you weren't like "I am self-identifying as a queer person and so I'm gonna write this play," right? It wasn't like that.
>
> Silvana: No, no.
>
> Laurel: It was like, "I am going to write this play, because that's the piece of art that I want to make." You know what I mean? It really is moving.

As we recalled the ways her creative choices inside the program had offered her a form of care and healing that she was not receiving elsewhere, a sense of journeying back in time was palpable. With Diana, my impulse to paraphrase resulted in a similar function of connecting her past self as a youth arts participant with her present and future selves as a coordinator and facilitator of youth arts programs:

> That is such a beautiful, beautiful answer: that you're like "I got to, as a teenager, tune my barometer to understand what a creative, community-based space, an anti-capitalist space, a healing space, feels like and looks like." And now your life is just like "I just want to keep being in those spaces and recreating those spaces," right? That's the agenda.

This notion of time-travel became fundamental to the project. As I told Natalie, "part of my research methodology is that art and artifacts can sort of serve as a portal to memory, to accessing memory." Frankly, I was honored to hold space for these young people to take this voyage into the past. It allowed them to articulate their own experiences of deepening their personal self-actualization processes, both during their time in the SJYA programs and in the years since. I hope that my efforts at reflecting those experiences back to them did not overreach, influence, or obscure their authentic expression.

Capitalism and Abolition

I found that my own commitment to self-actualization was present in the interviews regarding labor and work. In several interviews, the participants and I expressed a mutual

commitment to maintaining a standard of quality and justice in our jobs, as well as a refusal to settle for jobs that failed to meet those standards. I have written elsewhere (Butler, 2014) about the lack of institutional support that I experienced during my time as Program Manager of the YBCA YAAW program. I spent those years attempting to hide and protect the youth from my burnout as a result of the organization's general mismanagement. Thus, it was refreshing to speak with the participants as peers in the world of work, empathizing in both our disillusionment as well as our idealism. As I said to Ché after they described leaving their federally-funded healthcare job:

> That's really fucking rad of you to have walked away from a job for reasons of equity or inequity ... I mean, without going on a tangent, every job that I have quit in my life, including my job at YBCA, frankly, and others, have been because the institution's practices are so out of alignment with either their professed values or my social justice values. Once that discrepancy becomes so evident that it's more about the numbers than the actual human experience, I leave *(laughs)* pretty much every time. And it's hard because we live in capitalism and we have to survive, right? But at the same time, why do we have value systems if we're just gonna compromise them, you know? So anyway, power to you. That's hard to do.

In my conversation with Natalie, I went even further, connecting our shared refusal to continue in oppressive workspaces to a larger abolitionist politic:

> I had really similar experiences in 2020, where I was working for organizations whose practices were so out of alignment with their professed mission statement, or whatever, that I saw myself out—I sacrificed myself, and was like, "I am going to relinquish the the reference, the career, the line on the resume, the money, to enact, not even my prerogative, but the imperative to hold you accountable and sort of hold up a mirror to what's happening, and that sort of inability to like just let it go by." I just think that's such an elegant definition of Abolitionist praxis, that the idea that we look at the PIC as an entity that needs to be dismantled in and of itself, but also an example of a paradigm that replicates itself in all of these other meso and micro spaces, that we can sort of use that as a lens to identify where those practices are being perpetuated and intervene on that level. It's a really cool way of thinking.

Natalie, Ché, Silvana, and I all participated in the 2013–2014 YAAW Residency, *Envisioning an Abolitionist Future*. It was a year-long immersive educational experience focused

on the history, theory and practice of abolishing the PIC. All of us shared, to some extent, the uncanny experience of having had such a deep-dive into that particular discourse. Then, 6 years later, we found that discourse dominating the American media landscape due to the 2020 murder of George Floyd and the subsequent uprising for racial justice. Personally, it was affirming for me to hear that experience echoed in the memories of my former students. This shared phenomenon first arose in my conversation with Ché:

> It's been really amazing to, you know, a decade later, see abolitionist discourse kind of enter into the mainstream. I feel like popular culture now has the vocabulary of the Prison Industrial Complex available in a way that it wasn't popularized in 2013, 2014 when we were all doing our work together, you know what I mean? So it's been really interesting to have been in that space together and be learning about it, because that was also a teaching moment for me, right? I was like, "How do I slow this down and really break it apart so that's not just me projecting my politic onto a bunch of young people, but actually offering a knowledge framework that everyone can enter into in their own way of understanding." You know what I mean? And then I feel like especially in 2020, after George Floyd was murdered and everyone started to become really invested in the idea of defunding the police, etcetera, it was like all of a sudden everybody on Instagram wanted to understand, like, What does it mean to abolish the PIC? And it was like, "oh, right, how do we do that? How do we actually have that conversation?" You know? And it's really interesting that we all got to practice that, in that space together.

Natalie also described the phenomenon of having people reach out to her during the racial justice uprising of 2020. People requested her expertise or insight, which is an experience that I also know very well:

> Laurel: this thing that you're describing about the racial justice uprising of 2020—that happened to me also in a major way. So many people in my community being like, "teach me," like literally asking for free labor. And I was like, "okay, I am in a privileged position to be able to facilitate that for you." But I think that happened to so many of us that we were like, "Oh, defund the police?" Like you heard (name redacted) saying Fuck the police in what, 2012, right?
>
> Natalie: Yes, yes.
>
> Laurel: And so that experience then happening on the mainstream discursive level in 2020, and these ideas of abolitionist thinking becoming sort of mainstream, I think for many of us who went through YAAW or similar programs, we were like: Hello! Welcome.

My interview with Natalie also took the conversation about PIC abolition to its next logical iteration: abolishing capitalism. Her memories of the program's pay structure invited me to unpack some complexities of reconciling an anticapitalist politic with a moral imperative to compensate people financially for their labor:

> Natalie: and then to get paid to be here to show up was just—it made it more, I think, accessible.
>
> Laurel: That's cool. I mean, this is one of the things that's at the crux. This is one of the sticking points of the research is that, you know, I think that for those of us who came into abolitionist practice through a sort of "abolish the PIC" paradigm, you play that out and like very quickly you get to the "abolish capitalism" paradigm. *(both laugh)* You know what I mean? Like that's just sort of where it leads. And at the same time we live inside of capitalism. We're doing all of this labor. We have to survive, and we deserve to be compensated just like you were describing, and so how can we hold both things at the same time? And that just reminds me that one of the fundamental catch phrases of the abolitionist movement is that it's both a process and a goal.

When interviewing the youth from 4C LAB, I did not necessarily have that same shorthand of shared reference for the relatively complex concept of abolition. So, I found myself again defaulting to an educator's role, offering a quickly condensed analytical framework as a way to move the interview forward. For example, John described his advocacy for resource redistribution as an alternative to his grandfather's punitive response to neighborhood crime. I grabbed onto that as a seedling for both broader conceptual understanding and also to bring some of my lived experience working with systems-impacted folks to the foreground:

> I mean, for someone who learned the term abolitionist 5 minutes ago your analysis is 100% on point. And you are absolutely correct that when you trace the the puzzle of how would we abolish prisons and policing, and all these things back to its roots it's about capitalism, right? And so part of the framework is about how we can live in ways that flip capitalism on its head, or reallocate resources in these really creative ways. I mean, yeah, everything you just said. And, just to be transparent, I taught in jails and detention centers and re-entry programs for a couple of decades so that's a lot of where my abolitionist politic comes from, like from having like 4C LAB-level relationships with students who were gang impacted, gang involved, incarcerated, and experiencing first hand, the genius and the beauty and the brilliance of these of these beloved human-being community members, you know what I mean? So yeah, the shit runs deep, even though you and I probably come from different community spaces, having these folks in our lives and our hearts is at the center of what it's about. And I think I'm really struck by this thing that you said where you were like "I tend to find optimism even in the most sort of pessimistic context" or something. And I guess what's trickiest about abolitionist thinking is that you have to be an optimist, while also having a really acute critical analysis about the magnitude of systemic oppression.

This critical-optimistic stance was echoed in several of the interviews. A quality of hope or hopefulness often arose towards the end of the interview, as we discussed the "Build" component of Critical Resistance's (2020) "Dismantle, Change, Build" framework. We talked about how our experiences in SJYA programs may have prefigured our visions of an abolitionist future. These were also the parts of the interview in which I, admittedly, tended to get the most excited:

> Julia: It is like coming. I just don't think it's like there yet.
>
> Laurel: Oh, that's so cool! I mean, I hear hope coming through the computer at me. And I will say that the Build part is the most abstract part. It's hard for people of every generation to be like "yeah, what would a future without prisons look like? What would a future without capitalism look like?" And a lot of the philosophers who are at the forefront of that thinking are like "we can't know yet. We have to live our way into the answer" kind of a thing. But the fact that you can feel it, you know, I think the author Arundhati Roy says "I can feel it coming, and on a quiet day I can hear it breathing."[9]
>
> Julia: Wow.
>
> Laurel: The hoped-for future. And there are moments, right? Like even just picturing everybody in 4C LAB sitting in a circle sharing stories. That doesn't happen everywhere! But maybe in the radical anti-capitalist future it does happen everywhere.

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[9] "Another world is not only possible, she's on her way. Maybe many of us won't be here to greet her, but on a quiet day, if I listen very carefully, I can hear her breathing." Roy, A. (2003, p. 75). *War Talk.* South End Press.

A bit later in the interview, I noticed myself returning to this idea that circle dialogues might be a component of the "hoped-for future." This practice is common in SJYA spaces but not necessarily other spheres of social life:

> So it sounds like 4C LAB creates these exercises or frameworks for people to bring to the foreground, and then share and disclose parts of themselves, and represent themselves in ways that you wouldn't really have another context to do that, right? Because we don't live in a world where socially, culturally, there are spaces to say really deep self-identifying stuff.

Natalie referenced circle dialogues and related theater exercises as a way the Change and Build concepts were operationalized inside of the YAAW program, almost prefiguring a sort-of utopian mode of relationality. In response, I expressed a similarly fervent sentiment:

> I think that this is a really elegant answer to the question. Because it's like, what would the world be like if we didn't require these really specialized spaces to create containers for people to just share aspects of their identity in a real-time embodied way? What if that was just the way that we all related to one another?

Pedagogical Fascination

Looking back on the interview process, I am aware of how much I felt the need to paraphrase and reiterate the 4C LAB pedagogy back to those particular interviewees. It was a way of verifying the accuracy of my own comprehension. I worked for 4C LAB as a consultant rather than a regular teaching artist or facilitator. As such, I did not possess the same lived experience of pedagogical design and implementation to give me the level of insider knowledge and shorthand when communicating with the YAAWs. Here, in my conversation with Diana, I attempted to say back to her what I was hearing and understanding about the program model:

> I'm struck by like a few things. First of all, the the way that 4C LAB creates a container—and we talk about this all the time, right?—for us to process our own personal lived experience and story, and then situate that story in the context of these larger systemic phenomena of oppression or power injustices, and the relationship between the personal and the political is sort of what makes the content. And then I've never really thought about the thing you said about how 4C really uses music that has a literal lyrical framework, right? Like 4C is not super interested in abstraction.

Re-reading this quote, I can feel myself really trying to grasp or wrap my mind around a succinct and coherent articulation of the 4C LAB pedagogical model. This feeling came up again when re-reading my interview with Julia:

> Basically what I'm hearing is that 4C LAB is not a didactic or pedantic program where the students come in and Marissa's like "ahem, here are the values that you should care about: social justice, social justice." You know? It's a program where you come in and you start with your own stories and lived experiences and from those stories and lived experiences you sort of arrive at this analysis that never quite gets articulated as an anti-capitalist analysis.

As a verbal processor, I think it was important for me to re-describe—over and over—what I was hearing about the program's model, particularly in terms of its distinctions from the YAAW program. This was a way of honoring the uniqueness and specificity of both programs while also attending to their overlaps and shared practices. For example, this pedagogical trajectory of "starting with story" was also mentioned in my conversation with Natalie. I actually focused on it as a phenomenon of fascination and curiosity to further my line of inquiry:

> When I was listening to you talk about the way in which the discourse style inside of YAAW felt like it really lent itself to the development of this analysis, I mean, first of all it was so beautiful to hear that it started with personal story and experience. This testimony of "yes, I know someone who's been incarcerated." And then that was the point of entry into the larger systemic analysis. I think it's really poignant. But I'm wondering if you can help me understand—and this is very abstract—how did we do that? *(both laughing)* How did we cultivate an environment where people sort of knew how much space to take up or not take up? People knew how to hold space for one another's testimonies without it feeling too high stakes or vulnerable.

My fascination with the experience of the young people in the program was, of course, the driving impetus for this study. Looking back at my quotes, I realize that there was also

something existentially confirming for me in hearing these reflections. I first mentioned this in my conversation with Ché:

> Frankly, when one is an adult facilitating a youth program, you often have no idea whether it's landing or not, right? You're just putting all these guest speakers and content and activities and workshops, and then you walk away at the end of the day and you're like "I hope it mattered!" And so now, a decade later, to have this affirmation that the impact was authentic is pretty pretty incredible. So I'm really grateful on a research level, but also just on a personal level.

I mention it again in my conversation with Silvana:

> I mentioned this to Ché that it's so interesting as a Youth Arts facilitator you often don't know whether what you intended in your program design lands effectively, right? And so to get, a decade later, this feedback: that what we intended—which was this dynamic of mutual respect, to make young people really feel like their art and their opinions and their right to learn and engage with difficult, conceptual content—should be respected just as much as any adult artist, that was such an intention that we had. So it's cool to hear that that translated.

I experienced an unexpected level of personal affirmation when, in her interview, Natalie mentioned that one of the theater games we practiced had informed her orientation to other situations that she had encountered later in life, including conflict de-escalation and navigating the pandemic. The transferability of these embodied ways of knowing was deeply validating information for me to hear:

> So yeah, Natalie, you just blew my mind *(Natalie laughs)*. I mean, you know so much of my raison d'etre in the world is like believing that theater games are *(Natalie laughs again)* the opposite of sort of frivolous, fun activities, but that they actually are fundamental to the way we make meaning in the world. And the idea—you know, when the election happened in 2020, I trained a bunch of, I trained like hundreds of election defenders here in LA to go to the polls and potentially de-escalate people who were at the polls trying to cause conflict. And so an interest in de-escalation is a really big thing for me, and then an interest in—like, I still play the Four Basic Emotions game with my college students that I teach now, I do it all the time, and I've never made that connection that having an awareness of how we embody emotions has real social justice implications, how we move through space when people are masked and body language is all we have to read. When we're in situations with a heightened level of political precarity, how can we use these skills that we learned in our theater game warm-up to really, you know, interact with the world with more empowerment and insight?

I also shared with Ché how struck I was by their description of the more informal, peer-to-peer learning that was occurring on the bus ride home from YAAW. I shared how this insight—that would have remained unknown to me without this interview process—felt like a relatively salient takeaway with possible implications for youth program design theory:

> I was riveted with you talking about the bus and the train. I mean, this is actually kind of a remarkable moment for someone like me who's really a scholar of how youth arts programs get designed: the idea that the workshop space is this important thing, but that there's this other, more casual, more informal space to process afterwards, without any facilitation or adult mentorship presence or anything. That's really significant.

I reiterated these sentiments to Natalie as well. I referenced her peer skill sharing interaction with Hoi again as an example of how the YAAW space's pedagogical function was activated and yet invisible to me at the time:

> I love that moment. That crochet moment is so special to me, because, as the facilitator, I had to hold the big picture in mind so often that those little more private moments were not on my radar, right? And so to hear all these little anecdotes, it's just so special to me, because that's what you want as a youth arts facilitator is for the learning to happen without your heavy handed facilitation but just "organically" was the word you used earlier. And so to know that that's happening, and then also so many interviewees have identified the commute as a space or a site of real eye opening and meaning making, and so, I don't know, it's all very fascinating to me.

I think the most salient quality that I observed in my process of autoethnographic self-reflection as I read own interview quotations was a deep fascination with the experience of young people who participated in social justice youth arts programs, and a passionate desire to understand that experience from the inside. I think this passion was both an asset and also something of a hindrance to the research process. On one hand, I cared very much about the data, and invested myself deeply and rigorously to the process of interviewing, listening, and faithfully representing these young people's experiences. On the other hand, I hope that my desire to arrive at coherent articulations of these experiences did not overshadow or overwhelm any degree of authenticity that might have been evinced if I had occupied a more passive or distanced role as interviewer.

I think it is also important to recognize the inherent limitations of my desire to access this insider knowledge. My prior relationships with the young people and the case study programs did afford me some degree of insider status. However, John reminded me of the significance that many interviewees might identify in some way as first-generation. That helped me remember the uniqueness of my researcher positionality vis-a-vis my interviewees:

> I'm so grateful to you for naming that, because I'm interviewing young people from 4C LAB and then I'm also interviewing young people from a program in the Bay Area, in San Francisco. And as I'm hearing you say that I think every single young person that I've interviewed is a first generation artist, citizen: Salvadoran, Chinese American, Hapa, all of these different backgrounds. But in every case there has been something in the interview about the family, and about sort of breaking from a family dynamic in order to transform this generational stuff. And I'm really grateful to you for highlighting that because it's really significant, and it's something that I, as not a first generation American artist or anything, might not have noticed. So thanks for putting a frame around it because that's pretty incredible.

This conversation with John took place prior to me sending out the demographic questionnaire to the interviewees and, as it turned out, my assumption was erroneous. Only half of the participants self-identified as first generation. I think this is one micro-example of the overarching tension that I have attempted to illuminate in this section: a constant obligation to myself, my interview participants, and the values and ethics of participatory research, to stay vigilant about my own assumptions—acknowledging them when they arise, deemphasizing them in favor of deeply listening to the participants' voices, and noticing how the assumptions interact with what participants say in the interview process. I tried to ensure that I was not so rigid in my passionate convictions about the impact of social justice youth arts programming that I do not allow those assumptions to be transformed by what I heard. I do not believe in objectivity in qualitative research. Still, I feel that I did my due diligence in reflecting upon the ways that various aspects of my subjectivity may have been brought to bear in my role as the researcher in this study.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSIONS

In this study, I investigated how the experiences of young people who participated in Social Justice Youth Arts programs—youth arts programs designed with the principles of Healing-Centered Engagement—inspired them to embody a lived praxis of the contemporary abolitionist movement later in life. Focusing on two distinct case study sites, I interviewed six young adults who participated in SJYA programs during their teenage years. These semi-structured interviews began with an arts-based catalyst, using an artistic work created by the participant to inspire recollections about that lived experience. The interview was a qualitative narrative inquiry, with a critical-phenomenological philosophy undergirding my listening and interpretation. I inductively coded the interview transcripts for both etic and emic themes, and then clustered those themes to form four salient categories: (a) Program Experiences, (b) Identity Transformations, (c) Habits of Mind, and (d) Ways of Being. These categories were organized into a four-stage pedagogical trajectory that served as the analytical framework for the study's findings, situating the interviewees' experiences on a continuum between Healing-Centered Engagement and abolitionist praxis. I also engaged in autoethnographic self-reflexivity to contextualize the interview process within my own lived experiences as the researcher.

I found that the characteristics of SJYA program design, as phenomenologically experienced or perceived by the participants, were shared across both programs. Those characteristics constituted the essential kernels for the transformational developmental process that followed. These characteristics also included an intentional and explicitly articulated sense of Safe Space, an emphasis on personal autobiographical Storytelling through circle dialogues, prioritization of the development of positive and mutually respectful Relationships with both

peers and mentors, and exposure to an Expanded Definition of Art that comprised identity-based, activist, and political works.

These elements of participants' Program Experiences contributed to what I call Identity Transformations, or new ways of relating to or defining oneself. These included: (a) a Departure from Family Norms, in which participants disidentified with certain aspects of their home culture or discourse; (b) a feeling of an Expanded Sphere of Knowledge, wherein the "bubble" of awareness or consciousness that had previously determined one's personal frame of reference had been significantly and irrevocably augmented; (c) Positionality Awareness, or understanding one's own intersectional identity and demographic characteristics in the broader social context of relative power and privilege; and (d) identifying as someone who participates in Marches, Protests, or Direct Actions.

In turn, these Identity Transformations gave rise to new Habits of Mind, or epistemological frameworks/ways of thinking that align with a social justice ethos. These include: (a) a Critical Analysis of systems of oppression, specifically capitalism and the Prison-Industrial Complex; (b) Cultural Humility, or a stance of not-knowing vis-a-vis other cultural experiences; (c) Intentionality, or a sense of deliberate mindfulness in decision-making regarding creativity and art as well as broader social engagement; and (d) Belief in the Ineffable, or an inner sense of conviction and faith in something that cannot quite be articulated or confirmed just yet.

The final stage of the SJYA pedagogical continuum is the Ways of Being, or everyday behavioral manifestations in praxis. These included: (a) Speaking Up in instances of injustice; (b) maintaining a Standard of Reference for anti-oppressive situations and relationships; and (c) Re-Creating Accessible Spaces for others to replicate the values of the SJYA experience.

Discussion

Two key research questions formed the central inquiry of this research study:

1. What elements of Healing-Centered Engagement are present in young people's memories of their experiences in Social Justice Youth Arts programs?
2. How have those aspects of that experience informed their relationship to the principles and practice of the contemporary abolitionist movement in the years since, over the course of their development from adolescence into young adulthood?

I determined that the elements of Healing-Centered Engagement were indeed present in participants' recollections of their experiences in Social Justice Youth Arts Programs. The programs were "explicitly political, rather than clinical" (Ginwright, 2018, para. 13) and refuted any diagnosis or pathologizing of young people in favor of honoring their lived experiences. Those experiences were situated in the context of larger systemic analyses via an Expanded Definition of Art and artmaking practices that centered identity, activism, and personal narrative. The programs were "culturally grounded and view[ed] healing as the restoration of identity" (Ginwright, 2018, para. 14) by encouraging the practice of autobiographical Storytelling within the context of a safe space and mutually supportive Relationships. The programs were "asset driven and focuse[d] on the well-being we want" (Ginwright, 2018, para. 15) by virtue of the intentional Safe Space design, which included collectively designed community agreements and explicitly articulated practices of interpersonal care.

I traced the strands of experience from these features of SJYA program design through the later stages of the participants' developmental trajectory, and came to understand these three core elements of HCE as prefiguring the three core elements of abolition:

1. Political Rather than Clinical → Dismantle (Structural Analysis of Oppression)
2. Culturally Grounded/Healing as Identity Restoration → Change (Political Vision)
3. Asset-Driven/Focused on Well-Being → Build (Practical Organizing Strategy)

These findings demonstrate that the six interview participants embodied the core values of the contemporary abolitionist movement in their everyday lived praxis. Interviewees demonstrated a high level of structural analysis of oppression, particularly regarding capitalism and the prison-industrial complex. They were committed to applying that analysis to forms of direct action that include speaking out against injustice. The findings also demonstrated the capacity for future political visioning; developing the habits of cultural humility and positionality awareness as ways of prefiguring the type of utopian social order towards the project of abolition inspires us to orient ourselves. When we broaden our definition or organizing practice to also comprise cultural organizing, we see that they are engaged in practical organizing strategies by using the safe spaces and intentionality of their SJYA experiences to inform the re-creation of accessible spaces in their own communities. The positive and mutually supportive relationships cultivated within the SJYA programs set an anti-oppressive standard of reference for social engagement at every level. Finally, the participants also demonstrated what I view as a key habit of mind for the work of abolition: belief in the ineffable, or a capacity to maintain a sense of faith in something that cannot yet be seen or apprehended.

Throughout the literature that undergirds this research study, a key question occurred and recurred regarding the unit of analysis that ought to comprise the subject of transformation. Namely, should we focus our transformative change and healing efforts on the systemic and structural, or the individual? In 2002, Ginwright and Cammarota proposed that we "shift the unit

of analysis from individual behavior toward social and community forces and their impact on youth" (p. 85) by using the paradigm of Social Justice Youth Development to counteract the problematically harmful individualizing paradigm of trauma-informed pedagogy. Two decades later, in *The Four Pivots,* Ginwright (2022) evolved his perspective to now consider individual self-reflection as the fundamental locus of social transformation:

> Social change is deeply connected to our own healing, reflection, and well-being. I've come to realize that so much of our work to improve social conditions and solve social problems has almost entirely focused on things external to us; we just haven't learned or created opportunities for deep reflection … So, our first step is to consider the connections between deep self-reflection and social change. When we weave these two seemingly unrelated things together, we heal ourselves, our communities, and our movements. (p. 37)

The findings of this study indicate that it is not one or the other, but rather the mutually informative interplay *between* the individual and the structural that generates the dynamic process of personal and social transformation. To address the individual experience alone without situating it in the context of social systems is insufficient and potentially pathologizing in a trauma-informed context. To study the systemic without centering our individual lived experiences renders it abstract, distant, and beyond the reach of personal agency. Conceptualizing the SJYA-to-abolition continuum as one of concentric circles (see Figure 3) makes room for this dynamic process to express itself as a series of ripple effects. The qualities of the immediate program experience are transfigured onto larger and larger spheres of impact over time.

Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

While this study sheds light on the pedagogical dynamics that can lead youth arts program participants towards abolition, there are a number of limitations to this study that may have impacted the findings. The first limitation is my proximity to the participants. In addition to

researcher/interviewer, my relationship with the interviewees has taken many shapes over time, including mentor, supervisor, teaching artist, collaborator, and friend. The varying power dynamics that these relationships entail may have informed the interviewees participation in the process. Likewise, those dynamics may have informed or biased my own research design, implementation, and interpretation. My White racial identity may also have been a limitation, as the discrepancy in privilege, access, and lived experience between myself and the group of nonwhite interview participants may have impacted the findings. I also did not come to this research as an unbiased scholar, but rather a scholar-practitioner with deep investment and faith in the efficacy of Social Justice Youth Arts programs in general, and in these two case study sites in particular. The participant pool for this research study was also relatively small, and comprised of young people with whose lived trajectories I was mostly already familiar.

My own time and capacity also limited the scope of the research. This dissertation coincided with my first 18 months of motherhood, three cross-country moves, and numerous professional and personal obligations and upheavals. These factors reduced my ability to conduct a study of the breadth I had initially intended. In my proposal I had hoped to interview each participant twice rather than once, and to perhaps conduct a larger focus group with many more former youth arts program participants. Because of the constraints on my own availability, however, the study took on a more condensed format. The relatively modest scope of this study also represents a limitation, in that only two case study sites were selected. Also, while the definition of abolition used for the theoretical framework did include a number of diverse voices, it represented only one cross-section of the vast and expansive scholarly discourse surrounding contemporary abolitionist theory and practice. Based on these identified limitations, recommendations for similar studies in the future might include: (a) a more neutral/unbiased and

potentially non-White researcher, (b) a researcher with more capacity, perhaps including financial support for the scholarly work, (c) a more varied or expansive set of case study sites and/or data collection procedures, and (d) a broader definition of abolition as a component of the theoretical framework.

One notable omission from the findings is the fourth principle of Healing-Centered Engagement. Namely, that it "supports adult providers in their own healing" (Ginwright, 2018, para. 16). This principle was not addressed in this study. However, through my own experiences, observations, and conversations with other adult leaders in the field, I can attest that this dimension of Social Justice Youth Arts programs is often subject to deemphasis. This comes at the expense of the mental and financial health of those facilitating these programs. Studies dedicated to burnout prevention and resourcing that could support the flourishing of SJYA program providers would be a welcome direction for future research and investment. Another welcome direction might be research that focuses specifically on the artmaking aspect of SJYA programs. One theoretical assumption that I brought to this research project was the anticipation that interviewees might talk more about how creativity and artmaking is the practice of imagining something that has never existed and then bringing it into being. This is a fundamental capacity for the abolitionist project. This theme never arose in any of the interviews, perhaps because the artmaking process was emphasized less in the research than it could have been. Other, more active or creatively-engaged ABR methods could be interesting or useful methodological applications in this regard.

As mentioned in Chapter II, while this study did incorporate member-checking and other elements of youth empowerment in the research process, it did not technically qualify as a Youth Participatory Action Research project, per se. Conducting future research on Social Justice

Youth Arts programs using a YPAR approach would, I think, yield a depth and quality of data that would truly benefit the field. In Chapter II, I also mentioned the existence of youth development programs whose work directly confronts the carceral state by participating in forms of cultural organizing and direct action. I believe that a similar longitudinal study that traces the lived trajectories of young people participating in such programs would also be an important contribution to the conversation around the cultivation and durability of abolitionist praxes in the transition from youth into adulthood.

Implications

The findings of this study have a number of direct implications for anyone invested in designing Social Justice Youth Arts programs' curricula and pedagogy to support the emergence of abolitionist praxes for young people. One of the most salient effective practices was collectively created community agreements, co-designed to determine the parameters of a Safe Space for participant creativity, vulnerability, and risk-taking. These community agreements should support beginning participants' program experiences with the practice of autobiographical Storytelling and circle dialogues. These dialogues center lived experience as valued and relevant, while situating it inside of a structural analysis of systemic oppression and power. Programs should also expose young people to an Expanded Definition of Art, including creative processes and existing works of art that emphasize and amplify identity-based, activist, and political themes. An emphasis on developing positive, reciprocal Relationships is also an important takeaway. SJYA program designers should be sure to allow spaces for informal and unfacilitated peer relationships—within the program environment and ancillary spaces, like transit—to emerge, in addition to facilitated relationship-building within the program itself.

In addition to an intentionality around those four key elements of program design, adult mentors facilitating SJYA programs should remain conscientious and intentional about how

practices and principles modeled for young people in SJYA programs might have the potential to be replicated in broader spheres of engagement. In particular, adult providers should model principles of cultural humility and mutual investment, sharing power *with* young people as opposed to enacting power *over.* Adult providers should also resist perpetuating exploitative dynamics in terms of the relationship between young people's artistic/intellectual production and the program's funding, development and finance models. Modeling one's own abolitionist habits of mind—critical analysis, positionality awareness, speaking up, direct action, and belief in the ineffable—is also an important consideration for adult providers. As this study demonstrated, the design of SJYA spaces has real implications in determining the standard of reference that young people will bring to future relationships, as well as their own practice of designing spaces that replicate their SJYA programs values and practices. Bringing a high degree of intentionality to the relative presence of HCE principles and abolitionist values to the curriculum design and pedagogical implementation of SJYA programs should be a primary takeaway for readers of this research study.

There are also, I believe, methodological implications to be derived from this study as well, specifically pertaining to the role of memory and healing within dialectic historical processes. In "Memory, Critical Theory, and the Argument from History" (1990), J. Robert Cox discusses Marcuse's "persistent impulse to identify memory as a basis of liberating praxis" (p. 4). Cox (1990) writes:

> For over fifty years, until his death in 1979, Marcuse returned again and again to what he saw as "the liberating power of remembrance" (Jay, Marxism 223-24; Cox, "Unresolved"). Memory, he believed, has the potential to subvert one-dimensional consciousness and also to prefigure an alternate future. (p. 3)

In this sense, remembering as an active individual and community-based practice is intrinsic to the abolitionist project of looking both backwards *and* forwards along an historical

continuum—a dialectical act. For Adorno, “dialectics is not only an advancing process but a retrograde one at the same time ... a reaching back” (Adorno, 1966, p. 157). In this study, accessing memory as a mode of traversing between different places on the chronological spectrum had healing implications as well, often demonstrating a soothing or palliative effect for the rememberer’s younger self as well as a feeling of hope or faith regarding individual and collective futures.

One of the unanticipated outcomes of this study was the healing effect that this process of remembrance had on not only the interview participants but also on myself as researcher. As discussed in Chapter V, my own sense of identity became somewhat scrambled or fragmented inside of the postpartum experience, during which the bulk of this research took place. The active practice of remembering, in dialogue with my interview participants, helped me “re-collect” or “re-member,” in a Hegelian sense, aspects of my selfhood that had been dis-membered. In this way, the act of remembering as research practice helped achieve, ex-post-facto, the fourth principle of Healing-Centered Engagement: supporting adult providers in their own healing.

Conclusion

Social Justice Youth Arts programs provided safe and intentional spaces for this group of six young people. The programs allowed the participants to explore personal stories and interpersonal relationships, while engaging an expanded definition of art and artmaking with a critical analysis of systemic oppression. These experiences had a transformative impact on the identities and self-concepts of these young people, which gave rise to habits of mind and lived behaviors aligned with the core values of the contemporary abolitionist movement. These findings can be brought to bear on the work of scholar-practitioners who are interested in the

development of young people’s abolitionist praxes as well as those invested in effective design and implementation of Social Justice Youth Arts programs.

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APPENDIX A: SELF-REFLEXIVE VOICE MEMORANDA

Dissertation Memo 1: *Tuesday November 8th, Election Day. Had a Zoom yesterday with Susie, and was really struck by the way in which the sort of genesis of this research - you know, 2+ years ago - that so many of those aspects have been kind of rendered obsolete, and so for her to sort of dive in now as a reader and get like a cross-section of that longitudinal process is really helping illuminate those obsolescences. But also, you know, I described to her my experience at the Create Justice Conference back in, mmm, whatever that was, 2018, 2019 it must have been, and she was like "maybe you should write about that, you know? Be honest about the shit that has caused you to have this frame of analysis." And that also reminded me that when I was on the phone with, I can't remember if it was, which interview participant it was, but one of the former YAAWs, was like "you know, after you left I became an intern at YBCA, and then I realized what a shitshow of an organization it was, and I realized how much you and Jova worked so hard to protect us from that." And so I guess I'm just preparing myself for this dissertation to not just be roses and rainbows and success stories and back-pattings, but that there's also like real struggle – I'm not going to use the word trauma, although there was trauma in the Create Justice space for sure, because we had just lost a student – but more like disillusionment and heartbreak upon learning that institutions tasked with the care of young people actually didn't care about them, or didn't express that care through concrete action and practice and policy, etc. That's what I'm thinking about today.*

(Rhythmic sounds of breast pump in the background) Self-reflexive dissertation voice memo #2: *It's November 20th. Saturday. I, um, I'm not conducting these interviews as I might have planned or intended. Our printer doesn't really work, we don't have the money or time to buy a new one, maybe it was chewed by the mice that inhabited our house while we were in New York, maybe it's just old like all the other things that we own. But it means that I'm using the last person's interview protocol to lead this interview and writing down just chicken-scratch notes in my notebook. It's all a little bit, um.. slapdash. Haphazard. And I just am reflecting on how much of this process has not gone the way that I might have intended. The LMU debacle, the transfer, the pregnancy, the New York of it all, you know? It's like "best-laid-plans" etc etc. But here I am, unshowered on a Sunday morning, pumping milk before my first interview and, um, it just is what it is, man. It just is what it is.*

APPENDIX B: EXAMPLES OF ARTS-BASED CATALYSTS

All works reprinted with permission from the artists

<u>Ché</u>

2013
Plaster cast

<u>Natalie</u>

Upcycled Chip Wrapper Backpack
Fishing Line, washed/collected Mylar chip bags, tape

Julia

I Am
Original poem

I Am

I am from myself and years of growth in therapy
I am from Glendale, California, but only lived in towns in Los Angeles
I am from a quiet place above a city that is unconsciously always awake
I am from English and American Sign Language
I am from Hot Cheetos and avocados
I am from being honest and loving Disneyland
I am from Michael Jackson and Whitney Houston playing while making an army of Christmas cookies
I am from honesty, being funny, and curiosity
I am from dance, cooking, and comedy
I am from "Knowledge is Power"
I am from "You are Intelligent"
I am from to accept, understand, and appreciate all of my successes and failures
I am from you cannot love anyone else until you love yourself
I am from environmental failure caused by humans
I am from environmental failure caused by humans
I am from environmental failure caused by humans
That's where I'm from.

John

40 before 40
Original poem

Why do I got to work a full 40 before 40,
I'm only 23 homie, I'm poor I can't afford it
If fortunes unfold
I'm told my poems is rich as Horace
I grew up in a home
where revealing your soul ain't that important
But 4CLAB foreseeing my future
Keeping me in focus
So ain't no virus,
Facing trial or error
Can't no sirens,
Heading my direction or theirs
Can keep me silent
4CLAB understands the assignment,
Valuing speech,
Opening up the space to let me be, me

Silvana

Forgiveness, Acceptance, Love
Animated video (link)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhXzlcY6Wao

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Section 1 – Program Memories

After watching or looking at or otherwise engaging with arts-based artifact:

1. How do you feel after looking at the artwork you created during that time?
2. What memories come up for you? Images? Sensations in the body?
3. When you think back on your time in the _______ program, what do you remember most?
4. When you think back on your time in the _______ program, how do you feel it impacted you at that moment in your life's trajectory? Do you feel like it changed or informed the path that you were on, in any way?
5. When you think back on your time in the _______ program, how do you feel it impacted/influenced/informed your development as an artist? As an activist?

Section 2 – Healing-Centered Engagement

1. In what ways do you remember the program encouraging a culture of shared values or norms? How did the program inform your own sense of identity, both independently and as part of a collective?
2. In what ways do you remember the program encouraging your sense of *agency* - your power to create or change personal conditions or external systems?
3. In what ways do you remember the program encouraging the development of relationships and connections with others?
4. In what ways do you remember the program encouraging your personal sense of meaning or purpose?

5. In what ways do you remember the program encouraging your sense of aspiration? In what ways do you remember the program encouraging you to explore possibilities for yourself? To set and accomplish goals?

Section 3 – Abolition

1. What does abolition mean to you?

If necessary, offer an orientation to the contemporary abolitionist movement: "...prison abolition requires us to recognize the extent that our present social order – in which are embedded a complex array of social problems – will have to be radically transformed." (Angela Davis, Abolition Democracy)

2. Do you feel like the program encouraged you to have a critical analysis of structural or systemic oppression? In the years since the program, do you feel like this is a lens you've used to move through the world? How does this lens manifest in your day-to-day lived experience? Can you think of any examples?
3. Do you feel like the program encouraged your ability to radically imagine or envision alternative futures? In the years since the program, do you feel like this is a lens you've used to move through the world? How does this lens manifest in your day-to-day lived experience? Can you think of any examples?
4. Do you feel like the program encouraged you to live in ways that build towards the world we want to see? In the years since the program, do you feel like this is a lens you've used to move through the world? How does this lens manifest in your day-to-day lived experience? Can you think of any examples?
5. Is there anything else you'd like to share about the way you live in the world now, as a young adult, that you attribute to your time in the program?

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT EMAIL FEEDBACK TEMPLATE

Hi ____________,

I hope you're doing really, really well these days :) I'm so excited to say that I have finished the process of writing up the findings from the interviews we did last Fall, and would love to hear your thoughts!

Here is a link to the document - it is a whopping 84 pages, but hopefully the findings are interesting enough for it to be pretty readable. Also, you don't have to read the whole thing! If you just press Command + F and search for your name then you can just look through your specific quotes and sections.

I am about to move back to New York in a few weeks, so there is no rush for you to respond, but I'm hoping that maybe you might find time to read through and send me your thoughts within one month's time, by Sunday June 11th? Does that feel do-able to you? (It could also be earlier, of course, if that would feel easier :)

The things I'm most curious about are:

- Are there any places where my interpretation of what you said doesn't feel accurate?

- Are there any quotes or parts of quotes that you would rather I didn't include?

- Is there anything that you feel needs to be added that isn't currently included here?

- Do you feel like this writing accurately represents your experience/perspective, or are there things you'd like to adjust or clarify?

It is my most important goal with this study to make sure that my interview participants feel like they are being represented in this research as authentically as possible, and feel empowered to have agency in their own representation. So, any thoughts or feedback you'd like to offer me will be more than welcomed.

Sending you lots of care and admiration—it has been such a pleasure to spend time with your brilliant words, and I'm excited to share them with the scholarly community later this year. All my best and looking forward,

Laurel

APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

What was your age at the time of the interview?

What age(s) were you when you participated in the program?

What pronouns do you use?

How would you describe your race and ethnicity?

Do you identify as First Generation? If so, in what way?

What do you do these days in terms of school, work, art, or activism?

What name would you like to be used in the writeup? (You can choose a pseudonym for now, and then after you read it you can decide whether or not you'd like to keep the pseudonym or just go by your actual name.)