Opportunities to Make Decisions for Oneself (Appropriate to One's Age and Abilities)

The Science of Resilience

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Definition

Opportunities to make decisions for oneself connotes a relationship between the individual and their interactions with the people and environments around them. This is to say that 'opportunities to make decisions for oneself' is in part predicated on individual autonomy and decision making while also being contingent upon the people and environments that provide openings to exhibit these traits. Opportunities to make decisions for oneself is characterized by the active participation of the individual in their environments and the iterative relationship between both. In this sense decision-making ability is defined in a dialectical way that accounts for the presence of opportunities to develop this ability.

However, this quality is tempered the age appropriateness of decision-making activities. For instance, in referencing the child welfare system, Simmons-Horton (2017) states that positive outcomes amongst youth were related to the ability to exercise some control over their lives but describes these as the "age and developmentally appropriate activities and encounters, which promote healthy development of youth" (p. 384). Similarly, Ungar (2015) contends that opportunities to experience age appropriate amounts of risk and responsibility are crucial in developing a sense of control amongst young people. Ungar, Theron, and Didkosky (2011) also found that developmentally appropriate, culturally relevant contributions to family welfare positively contributed to child development. Thus, while opportunities to make decisions for oneself is defined by structure and mediation, it also insinuates that this is done so with the appropriateness of the individual in mind.

Opportunities

Insofar as opportunities to make decisions for oneself relates to young people specifically, a relationship exists with the shift in child development studies from a deficit model to the positive youth development (PYD) approach. Child development has traditionally been studied through the lens of young people as beset by problems, at risk, and endangered by inevitable, biologically based shortcomings (as cited in Lerner, 2017). In this sense, positive development is viewed as the absence of negative or risk behaviors (such as drug use, truancy, delinquency) (Lerner 2005; Lerner et al. 2013). Lerner (2017) highlights a shift in the 1990s to a strength-based model (positive youth development (PYD)) that seeks to enhance positive attributes of young people rather than attempting to prevent or reduce undesirable characteristics. In this sense, PYD is an asset-based approach that "views youths as resources and builds on their strengths and capabilities for development within their own communities" (Development Services Group, 2014). Similarly, "Positive youth development occurs when opportunities are made available to youth in meaningful ways and when the people around youth support them to develop their own unique capacities and abilities" (Sanders, Munford, Thimasarn-Anwar, Liebenberg, & Ungar, 2015, p. 41).

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Drawing on PYD, 'opportunities' can thus be understood as those that "include the encouragement of personal agency in youth, respectful approaches to youth and their families, and a focus on young people's strengths and competencies alongside the risks and challenges they may confront" (Sanders et al., 2015, p.41). Opportunities to make decisions for oneself therefore borrows from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) developmental systems or ecological systems theory which considers the person-context relationship (the multilayered web of family, school, and community in which an individual exists). For instance, Heinze (2013) stipulates that "enriching environmental conditions, such as supportive relationships with adults and engaging activities, help build individual strengths and skills, like positive identity and social competence" (p. 278). When understood in this way 'opportunities' are indicative of the relational quality to this trait. This is to say that opportunities to make decisions for oneself is in part defined by the relationships and environments that provide and sustain said opportunities.

In regard to young people specifically, the relationship with adults is critical in providing opportunities to make decisions for oneself. For instance, Ungar (2013) concludes that:

> "youth-adult relationships that were attentive to the needs of young people, engaged their voice in decisions affecting them, encouraged negotiation rather than the imposition of pre-selected interventions, and sustained equal participation when reasonable to do so, were all contributing factors to young people experiencing benefits from these relationships" (p. 323)

Additionally, Benson & Saito (2000) describe four settings that can provide such opportunities: programs, organizations, socializing systems, and community. In this sense 'opportunities' can be considered as an 'external' developmental asset. As per Benson's (2006) distinction, external developmental assets include strength-building experiences and relationships within family, school, and community contexts. When understood in this way 'opportunities' are not limited to those afforded to young people but operate as assets to be developed and drawn upon throughout the course of one's life.

Decisions for Oneself

Making decisions for oneself can be defined through the lens of power and control. As Prillenltensky, Nelson, & Peirson (2001) argue:

> power and control entail having the opportunity to experience positive circumstances because power and control do not derive exclusively from either internal or external sources, but from both. The convergence of internal capacities and external conditions creates opportunities for control of life's circumstances for children and adults. Although for some individuals mastering the environment is easier than for others, power and control are not just abilities people are born with; these are capacities that are developed in constant interaction with the social environment. (p. 145)

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Thus, while making decisions for oneself is rooted in individualistic concepts of autonomy, control, and decision-making, these are also structured and mediated by the individual's environment. For instance, Gray (2011) argues that play is a critical aspect of a child's development given that it provides young people with opportunities to learn how to make decisions, solve problems, exert self-control, and follow rules. Yet, intrinsic to play is the notion that it is directed and controlled by the players themselves and that "in play, children learn to control their own lives and to manage the physical and social environment around them" (p. 454). Play in this sense is one such opportunity for young people to make decisions for themselves. Furthermore, intrinsic to the definition of 'opportunities to make decisions for oneself' is the notion that individuals possess the capacity for healthy development or positive decision making and that providing opportunities to exercise control over their own lives helps to further build or enhance such capabilities. Making decisions for oneself in this context is thus not merely an individualized trait but rather is consistent with the social-ecological model used to describe 'opportunity' above.

Relationship to Resilience

Opportunities to make decisions for oneself is related to resilience primarily through the mode of 'control' insofar as 'making decisions for oneself" is an exercise in exerting control over one's life. This is to say that the correlation to resilience is predicated on the notion that individuals benefit psychologically when afforded opportunities to make decisions that affect their lives (Prilleltensky et al. 2001).

Control is related to resilience in part by its bearing upon psychological outcomes such as anxiety and depression. As Weems and Silverman (2006) note, "there is a wealth of evidence to suggest that departures from optimal control can play a role in emotional dysregulation" (p. 114). For example, Gray (2011) states that "clinicians know for certain that anxiety and depression correlate strongly with individuals' sense of control or lack of control over their own lives" (p. 449). Similarly, Abramson, Metalsky, and Alloy (1989) highlight a relationship between helplessness, or the lack of control, with depression.

In relation to the ability to overcome adversity or hardship, control has also been found to mediate against the negative effects of stress by contributing to an individual's ability to cope with or manage stress. From a biological standpoint, an investigation of the medial prefrontal cortex, the presence of control was found to actively inhibit the impact of stress (Maier, Amat, Baratta, Paul, & Watkins 2006). From a different perspective, Ungar (2004) argues that even in families facing significant risk, child and adolescent well-being can be maintained when young people are given opportunities to feel in control of their lives. However, Ungar (2004) makes an important distinction insofar as he highlights the negotiation of these opportunities. This is to say that to determine the age-appropriateness of

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opportunities to make decisions for oneself can be an iterative process between multiple actors.

In examining adverse childhood experiences and the quality of life in adulthood, Bethell, Newacheck, Hawes, and Halfon (2014) suggest that building resilience can ameliorate the negative impacts of adversity. Importantly however, the authors define resilience as "staying calm and in control when faced with a challenge". In this sense control operates as a defining characteristic of resilience. Other studies have defined the relationship between control and resilience in more distal terms. For instance, resilience is often conceptualized as primarily related to personality or 'rugged' qualities, of which control is one such trait. In arguing that control is correlated with positive outcomes following stress and trauma of military deployment, Schok, Kleber, and Lensvelt-Mulders (2010) combine 'personal resources' of self-esteem, optimism, and perceived control into resilience as a latent variable. Similarly, Major, Richards, Cooper, Cozzarelli, and Zubek (1998) found that resilient personalities (characterized by self-esteem, control, and optimism) helped women cope with abortion related stress.

Yet, as Prilleltensky et al. argue, "person and environment influence each other, as we cannot speak of control without invoking the opportunities for control afforded the person by her or his environment" (p. 155). Thus, control as an innate personality trait is contested in that it is also understood as intimately connected to a person's environment. Experiences of control in the latter conceptualization are therefore intrinsically tied to the *opportunities* afforded to an individual in which such experiences can be had.

Furthermore, Weems and Silverman (2006) argue that conceptualizations of 'control' are varied, and thus, they distinguish between concepts of locus of control, learned helplessness/attributional style, self-efficacy, and perceived control to argue that perceived and actual control are often confounded. In this sense opportunities to make decisions for oneself can be understood to relate to resilience in its ability to increase actual control while also enhancing traits associated with perceived control. To this point, Roddenberry and Renk (2010) argue that while having control is typically stress reducing and lack of control is in turn often stress *in*ducing, research has noted that the opposite is sometimes true as well. They therefore argue that "individuals' beliefs that they are in control can be as important as actually having control". As Prilleltensky et al. (2001) argue, real *and* perceived control have the potential to enhance quality of life for both problem-free and disadvantaged communities. Thus, it is important to consider the relationship between opportunities to make decisions for oneself and both real and perceived control as they relate to resilience.

Increasing experiences of actual or real control over one's life has been associated with positive health and well-being outcomes. Prilleltensky, et al. (2001) state that "opportunities to experience power and control in one's life contribute to health and wellness" and that "evidence indicates that a sense of personal control, empowerment, and self-determination are associated with positive mental health" (p. 143). Similarly, in an investigation of self-determination theory, Ryan and Deci (2000) found that "conditions supportive of autonomy

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and competence reliably facilitated this vital expression of the human growth tendency [*intrinsic* motivation], whereas conditions that controlled behavior and hindered perceived effectance undermined its expression" (p. 76). Thus, opportunities to make decisions for oneself relates to resilience insofar as it provides opportunities for individuals to experience control over their lives (i.e. to exercise actual control) which in turn correlate with positive health outcomes.

The ability to exercise control over one's life is particularly important for vulnerable populations or in adverse situations. Prilleltensky et al. (2001) argue that control acts as a protective factor in the face of adversity. Citing Delgado (2006), Ungar (2013) states that "creating opportunities for youth to become leaders benefits the disadvantaged child the most" (p. 331). Relationships that foster such opportunities are key to this trait. For instance, a common protective influence that helps at-risk youth avoid risk behaviours is their bonding to adults and groups that facilitate successful maturation by providing opportunities for young people to develop a sense of legitimacy (as cited in Development Services Group, 2014). Similarly, in a study of Romanian children who have been neglected and subsequently adopted, the capacity of the caregivers and professional supports created conditions for vulnerable children to achieve developmental gains (Beckett et al., 2006). In citing Wyman (2003), Ungar (2013) notes that such relationships must also be attentive to the cultural context at play given that what may be beneficial in one context may be ineffective or negative in another. In the context of control, opportunities to make decisions for oneself is therefore mediated by the cultural context of the individual.

Relationship to Locus of Control

When understood as an experience of control, one way that opportunities to make decisions for oneself is related to resilience is through the enhancement of an internal locus of control. Locus of control refers to where individuals place control of what they achieve. For instance, an internal locus of control relates to the belief that personal outcomes are dependent on one's own effort and actions, whereas an external locus of control relates to the belief that outcomes are determined by external forces (Rotter 1966). Citing Lefcourt (1991), Kronborg, Plunkett, Gamble, and Kaman (2017) state that:

> An internal locus of control indicates that an individual believes that he or she is responsible for the expected outcome experienced—that is, the person's actions, qualities, and characteristics are determinants of the experiences that take place. Conversely, an external locus of control indicates that the person believes the outcomes are due primarily to external forces, such as luck, social context, or other individuals. (p. 420)

While initially described as a personality trait, locus of control has more recently been conceptualized as a coping resource facilitating certain coping styles (as cited in Reknes, Visockaite, Liefooghe, Lovakov, & Einarsen 2019). This is to say that "individuals strive to build

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and maintain valued resources in their lives, including objects, conditions, energies, and personal characteristics" (Reknes et al. 2019).

Internal locus of control (i.e. the perceived control over one's outcomes) has been related to good health and well-being while external locus of control has been related to stress and poor outcomes (Reknes et al., 2019). In regard to the ability to overcome adversity, Krongborg et al. (2017) found that students with a more internally focused locus of control had higher levels of reported resilience (defined by the authors as interactional, multidimensional, and ecologically based). The authors found that locus of control was related to resilience insofar as the internally focused students displayed a greater Sense of Mastery, lower levels of Emotional Reactivity, and a higher Sense of Relatedness compared to the externally focused students. In a study of PTSD amongst firefighters in Nigeria, Onyedire, Ekoh, Chukwuorji, and Ifeagwazi (2017) argue that the relationship between locus of control and PTSD (in which internal locus of control is correlated to a lesser likelihood to experience PTSD symptoms) may be mainly due to the indirect effects of locus of control via threat appraisal. In this sense external locus of control contributes to a worldview of threat in which people may engage in maladaptive or avoidance-coping whereas those with an internal locus of control are able to find meaning in their lives which enables positive coping strategies. Luthar (1991) echoes this relationship between locus of control and resilience via coping strategy in arguing that "when people believe they are powerless to control what happens to them, they become passive and restricted in coping abilities. On the other hand, when individuals believe that events and outcomes are controllable, learned helplessness is avoided and instead, active attempts are made to overcome aversive situations" (p. 610). Ungar (2004) cites Zimmerman's notion of 'learned hopefulness' to describe this phenomenon. Learned hopefulness is "the process whereby individuals learn and utilize skills that enable them to develop a sense of psychological empowerment" (as cited in Ungar 2004. P. 152).

However, as Roos and Haanpaa (2017) note, the presence of an opportunity to participate in decision making does not guarantee that an individual will take advantage of said opportunity. Thus, while opportunities to make decisions for oneself may enhance an internal locus of control is it possible that the inverse relationship also exists. This is to say that locus of control may influence the extent to which available opportunities are made use of by an individual.

Relationship to Self-Efficacy

While both locus of control and self-efficacy are indicators of a person's perception of control, they differ in the type of expectancy they capture. For instance, in reference to health treatment specifically, Roddenberry and Renk (2010) state that "although individuals may have a high internal health-related locus of control and feel in control of their own health, they may not feel efficacious in performing a specific treatment regimen that is essential to maintaining their own health" (p. 355). This is to say that having a high internal locus of control does not

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amount to also have a high degree of self-efficacy, and vice versa. Ungar (2004) describes similar findings in stating that:

> However, as Christopher Peterson and Albert Stunkard (1992) explain, just because one has a general belief that one can control one's environment, as in how one handles a job interview, one may still choose a set of efficacy expectations (e.g., 'Am I good enough to get the job?') and an explanatory style (e.g., 'My getting the job will depend on the mood of the interviewer more than my behaviour') which can actually contradict an overall positive orientation towards one's personal power. It should, therefore, not surprise us that some youth, despite what caregivers perceive to be abundant opportunities to succeed and control health resources, will still seek out deviant and delinquent peers. How a teen experiences more acceptable trajectories through life may not be as their caregivers hope they do. (p. 152)

In this sense, while opportunities to make decisions for oneself has an important relationship to resilience it is difficult to predict the extent to which such opportunities will be utilized. Moreover, this finding reaffirms the iterative nature of this trait insofar as the individual plays a critical role in how and the extent to which they engage with the opportunities available to them in their environment.

Opportunities to make decisions for oneself can also be related to resilience insofar as it mediates one avenue by which personal efficacy is enhanced. Bandura's (1977) conceptualization of self-efficacy highlights this relationship. While self-efficacy is a measurement of the amount of confidence someone has in their ability to influence or exert control over their behaviour, actions, motivation, and social environment, Bandura (1977) argues that one of the four major sources of information by which expectations of personal efficacy are based is performance accomplishment. Performance accomplishment is based on 'personal mastery experiences' which refer to the experiences gained from taking on and completing challenges, as one can only become a master through practice and often failure. Thus, self-efficacy is in part predicated on the opportunities needed to achieve performance accomplishment and mastery. Citing White (1959). Ungar (2004) argues that "competence and self-efficacy are inextricably linked with experiences of competence resulting in 'mastery, power, or control'" (p. 159). Similarly, efficacy has been described as "the result of opportunities to make a meaningful contribution to others or find other ways to control one's world" (as cited in Ungar 2012). [See our write-up on Self-efficacy for more its relationship to resilience].

Relationship to Decision-Making

While decision making is a trait related to resilience in itself it is also a component of opportunities to make decisions for oneself insofar as decision making is in part predicated on the opportunities afforded to an individual to enact decision making power. For instance, Brooks (2006) notes that schools are a viable setting to enhance resilience insofar as they

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provide opportunities for students to participate in activities that have meaning and value and that such participation helps students build a sense of competence. Similarly, in citing Benard (1991) Morrison and Allen (2079) highlight that “opportunities to participate and contribute” are an important way in which environments can contribute to resilience.

Taylor (2018) highlights four protective factors that are useful for resilience interventions; providing opportunities to build at least one stable & caring adult relationship, building their sense of self-efficacy and perceived control, providing opportunities to strengthen their adaptive skills and the capacity to self-regulate during emotional experiences, applying belief systems and cultural traditions, including religion. Yet they note that few decision-making programs address the latter factors. Thus, while it is important to provide opportunities for decision making, such opportunities are not always provided in practice.

Improving

Ungar (2001) notes that placement in institutions and community-based residential programs can offer high-risk youth opportunities to negotiate the identities they construct for themselves as a consequence of their problem behaviours. The author argues that “devaluing “deviant” behaviours is bound to be counterproductive” and that “the onus is then on caregivers to help find normative ways youth in placement can achieve the same or greater status and power in the mental health discourse”. In this sense the author highlights the importance of providing opportunities to make decisions for oneself that substitute rather than suppress problem behaviours when such behaviours are the target of interventions (Ungar 2001). Moreover, a critical component of this trait is the role of the parent or other caregiver in providing appropriate opportunities to make decisions for oneself (as also argued in Ungar, 2004).

Regarding children specifically, Ungar (2015) provides the following suggestions for how to provide young people with opportunities to make decisions for themselves:

- Let the child experience manageable and age-appropriate amounts of risk and responsibility.
- Give the child opportunities to make age-appropriate decisions for herself, like what she wears, eats, and when she goes to bed. If her choices begin to cause problems, use these problems as teachable moments and coach the child on how to make better decisions.
- Don’t be shy about telling your child that her failure was something she could have controlled.
- Don’t be shy about telling your child that her failure was something that she did not have the power to control, no matter how hard she tried.
- When children are successful, celebrate their success.
- Give children an allowance so they can manage their own money.

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Interventions

Drawing on 18 years of research, Lewis and Lewis (1989) argue that children are quite competent to enter child-centred programs that aim to teach children decision making, and to transfer increasing control over decision making related to health matters to the child. Despite this acknowledgement and the demonstrated effectiveness of such programs, the authors note that, at the time of writing, they had not been widely diffused. Similarly, Prilleltensky et al. (2001) highlight that interventions and program to promote wellness and resilience are seldom formulated in terms of concepts of power and control and instead are typically individualistic in nature. While they offer some examples of programs that address three important facets of power and control (access to valued resources, participation and self-determination, and competence and self-efficacy), they highlight that "very little has been said and done to empower children themselves to take action on issues affecting their health and wellness" (p. 155).

More recently Morton and Montgomery (2012) have noted that funders and practitioners increasingly promote youth empowerment programs (YEPs). YEPs are those that regularly engage young people in the decision-making processes that determine program design, planning, and/ or implementation. Some examples of such programs include the Youth Action Research Project (YARP), the Youth Leadership Program (YLP) and the Questscope Non-Formal Education (QS NFE) program. As evidenced below, many of these projects (as well as related projects) focus on opportunities to make decisions for oneself via engagement or participation in their communities.

Youth Action Research Project

Location

Hartford, Connecticut

Population

Urban, low-income, high school youth (ages 14-16) of colour (African-Caribbean and Latino).

Project goals

To reduce and/ or delay onset of drug and sexual risk in urban adolescents. To use group-conducted research for action along with involvement in multilevel social change activities (activism) to reinforce group cohesion and individual and collective efficacy. At the individual level YARP is designed to increase positive attitudes towards education, develop critical social analytic skills, instill self-efficacy and a sense of hope and empowerment to act, and reduce/ delay drug and sex risks. At the group level YARP is designed to develop group cohesion, group prosocial norms, and collective efficacy regarding the ability to act effectively

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upon the world. At the community level YARP seeks to bring about community level change in policies and institutions affecting youth via youth advocacy and action.

Project design

A 3-year summer and after school research and demonstration project. 20 hours per week (summer) and 4 hours per week (school year). Summer month is comprised of a 7-week youth research institute, followed by an 8-month action implementation/ reflection period from October-May. Over the 3-year study the program trained 3 cohorts of youth to become Youth Action Researchers. "Each YARP cohort discussed and agreed upon a study topic related to adolescent risk behavior and conducted mixed methods research on that topic following the protocol outlined above during the summer. They then developed their collective action plans and programs, which were designed to change public norms and promote social advocacy around issues of concern to youth at the school, community and policy levels and to develop and promote positive youth action programs in schools and youth serving agencies, throughout the school year. Each project involved a set of actions, a team of organizational collaborators, and one or more target audiences. Steps involved reviewing the data, transforming the research model into a social action model by identifying social actions related to each predictor domain in their research model, and planning, conducting and reflecting on actions." (Berg, Coman, & Schensul, 2009).

The model is cited to have grown from years of engagement with the community, participatory ethnography to understand the lives of young people, assessing previous projects in the community, and testing different aspects of the approach through a series of interventions (as cited in Berg et al., 2009).

Evaluation

Berg at al. (2009) conducted an evaluation of the program to assess the way in which YARP empowered youth to engage in social action, how social action transpired to bring about other changes, and how this process affected youth attitudes and behaviours regarding drug and sex risk. The evaluation compared changes in three cohorts of participating youth with changes in a matched sample of three cohorts of non-participating youth.

Outcome data collection measures used were: (1) Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) measures of client outcomes, such as 30-day use of alcohol, marijuana and other drugs; (2) Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP 1999) core measures including scales for school bonding and retention, disapproval of drug use, self-esteem, social skills, assertiveness skills, perceived drug risk, attitudes toward drug use, and beliefs about peer norms; (3) selected items and scales which measure educational expectations, sexual self-efficacy, and drug self-efficacy and (4) collective efficacy was measured by a modified 11-item scale on community efficacy.

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The intervention had an effect in the intended direction on social-cognitive variables including peer norms and collective agency. The same pattern was seen in the development of community self-efficacy. The authors found that alcohol use decreased in the intervention group as compared to comparison group members as did number of sex partners at time 3, but these changes were not statistically significant. While the authors note positive results from the project, they also state that “more work is required to test this multilevel approach in other settings and with other partners to understand the degree to which it can bring about changes in social systems and individuals simultaneously”.

Other notes

The intervention appears to be developed by the evaluating authors and additional third-party evaluations of the intervention are not available. Positive evaluation findings are thus limited to the study noted above.

Questscope Non-Formal Education

Location

Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Population

Out of school youth in typically low-income communities. Age eligibility for men is 13-18 and 13-21 for women.

Project goals

Non-formal education aimed to engage adolescents in decision-making and positive group processes facilitating mastery and social experiences that improve participants’ sense of self-efficacy, social skills, positive connections, prosocial behaviours, and reduce psychosocial difficulties.

Project design

The program is the product of a partnership between a non-governmental organization, Questscope for Social Development in the Middle East, and the Jordan Ministry of Education. 2-year program consisting of three 8-month education cycles. Morton and Montgomery (2012) note that the program “operates in 40 schools and 17 community-based organizations spanning eight governorates in Jordan and has enrolled over 7000 youth since 2004”.

Programming takes place 5 days a week outside of school hours for 2-3-hour sessions. Each session includes dialogue-based learning activities and some session include vocational activities. All sessions include recreational or cultural activities. Youths are actively engaged in program decision-making via regular involvement in processes such as determining program guidelines, deciding learning topics and activities, and planning cultural and community events.

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Evaluation

Morton and Montgomery (2012) carried out a pilot study to assess the short-term effects of the program. Youths were randomly assigned to either an empowerment-based non-formal education program or to a waitlist comparison. Data were collected at baseline and at 4-month follow-up.

Outcome data collection measures used were: the General Self-Efficacy (GSE) Scale, Social Skills Questionnaire (SSQ), Social Support Appraisals Scale (SSAS), strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). An adaptation of the Learner Empowerment Measure was administered to each of the six QS NFE centers as an assessment of implementation quality focused on empowerment.

No significant intervention effects were found for developmental assets (e.g., self-efficacy or social skills). Higher level of empowerment, however, in program implementation appeared related to more positive outcomes. Analyses did show a significant, positive intervention effect on conduct problems, effects were mostly attributable to changes in the younger (13–15) age group. Implications for practice and research are discussed. The authors note that "although youth empowerment programs like QS NFE theoretically provide mastery experiences for young people through decision-making processes and participatory activities, in practice, these experiences may not be as frequent or intense as needed to change general attitudes about personal efficacy". They recommend that emphasis on challenging and age-specific leadership opportunities may strengthen mastery experiences and impacts on self-efficacy.

Related Programs/ Interventions

The Youth Empowerment Strategies (YES!) program is a photovoice program designed to create opportunities for youth to experience participation and self-determination (voice and choice), competence (self-efficacy) and to enact power and control (Wilson et al., 2007). The program is ultimately designed to engage youth as critical thinkers and problem solvers and to create opportunities for civic engagement with other youth. Target youth are those that are underserved and between the ages of 9-12 years old. Participants meet in groups for 90 minutes weekly after school for approximately 25 sessions. While not formally evaluated, Wilson et al. (2007) argue that photovoice projects such as YES! are useful insofar as they provide participants with opportunities to experience engagement in and control over their environments.

In assessing the impact of outdoor programs on risk and resilience of at-risk children, Ungar, Dumond, and McDonald (2005) state that "there is a remarkable similarity between the anticipated outcomes from outdoor adventure programming and characteristics of resilient individuals" (p. 325). In citing Rutter et al (1998), the authors list "promote self-esteem and self-efficacy through experiences coping successfully with stress" and "open up positive

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opportunities for change and growth as protective mechanisms related to resilience. While other mechanisms are also noted these most clearly relate to opportunities to make decisions for oneself and can be evidence in the two programs assessed by the authors. The two programs assessed are Winter Treasures and Choices Wilderness Programming. Winter Treasures is an earth-education program run through school-community collaboration and students are trained in leadership responsibilities. The program is organized around an experiential one-day excursion to a large urban parkland. Ungar et al. (2005) highlight that the meaningful responsibility given to participants through the experience was influenced by how the school environment they returned to promoted or constrained further growth. The Choices Wilderness Program targets youth who are harmfully engaged with drugs, alcohol, and/ or gambling and is an introduction to wilderness adventure as a form of treatment. The program is comprised of a 3-day wilderness trip on which participants are encouraged to come up with rules which they believe are necessary for communal living. While different in their approach and design, the authors note that both programs provide "opportunities for the development and demonstration of new competencies, problem-solving, autonomy, helpfulness and other positive attributes associated with resilience" (p. 331).

Assessment

While the associated components of opportunities to make decisions for oneself have robust available assessments, measurements of *opportunities* themselves are less readily available. In particular, many studies that comment on this trait rely on qualitative or anecdotal support.

For instance, in a study of foster care placements Drapeau, Saint-Jacques, Lepine, Begin, and Bernard (2007) rely on qualitative interviews with foster youth. From these interviews they are able to discern how placement can be an experience that helps young people regain control of their lives by providing new opportunities to experience positive outcomes such as control and self-efficacy. Similarly, Ungar et al. (2011) used in-depth interviews, photo-elicitation, and film in a study of resilience amongst disadvantaged youth in a variety of countries. From this study the authors concluded that youth's "experiences of precocious (synonymous with processes of adultification) and developmentally appropriate contribution facilitate their access to resources that nurture and sustain their well-being".

In addition to qualitative methods, scales that measure agency could also be used to determine individual's sense of available opportunities to make their own decisions.

A brief, self-diagnostic tool was developed by The Search Institute to assess the quality of relationships between caregivers and young people. It encompasses 5 components that are based in PYD. The components of "Share Power" and "Challenge Growth" are particularly relevant to 'opportunities to make decisions or oneself'. The checklist is intended as self-

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reflection tool only and has not been tested for formal assessment or diagnostic purposes. It can be accessed at: https://survey.search-institute.org/s3/RelChk

While not assessing opportunities per se, the Youth Program Quality Assessment (PQA) is an assessment of programs designed on the principles of PYD:

- Developed by The Forum for Youth Investment, 2012
- Consists of 7 sections, each bearing on a dimension of program quality critical for positive youth development: supportive environment, interaction, engagement, youth-centered policies and practices, high expectations, and access (Smith and Hohmann, 2005).
- There are several versions of this tool based on the age of youth participants and the context which you are interested in evaluating (e.g., School-Aged PQA for grades K-6, Youth PQA for grades 4-12, Youth PQA Short-form, Camp, Arts, Academic, Summer Learning, Health & Wellness, STEM.
- Validity: evidence of construct, concurrent, and predictive validity (Smith and Hohmann, 2005).
- Reliability: internal consistency, inter-rater reliability (0.38- 0.84) (Smith and Hohmann, 2005).
- Can be downloaded at: http://cypq.org/downloadpqa
- Quality assessment by Akiva (2005) determined that the most significant organization items involve sharing control with youth and staff.

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