

The Role of Teen Centers Investing in the Success of Latinx Youth

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores how a teen center within a local police department in California impacts the lives of local Latinx youth. Through a mixed methods approach of surveys, focus groups, and interviews, the study explores Mexican American youth, the most populous Latinx youth in the United States who are uniquely challenged by varying immigration statuses, mental health, and academic barriers. Theoretically, the study draws out intersections unique to the Latinx youth experiences growing up in America and engages in inter-disciplinary debates about inequities in health and education and policing practices. These intersections and debates are addressed through in-depth qualitative analysis of three participant groups: current youth participants of the teen center's Youth Leadership Council (YLC), alumni of the YLC, and adult decision makers of the program. Pre- and post-surveys and focus groups are conducted with the youth participants over the span of a full year, while they take part in the teen center program, capturing how the teen center directly impacts their academic achievements, feelings of belonging, mental health, and attitudes towards law enforcement, over time. Interviews with alumni and key decision makers of the teen center further reveal broader patterns in how the YLC program positively impacts the lives of Latinx youth and the challenges it faces when federal immigration enforcement complicates local policy relations with local communities.

## DEDICATION

To the everyone that makes the Teen Center staff feel like home to those who need it most.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Latinx youth within the United States have a unique experience navigating American culture and meeting standardized educational markers. Facing barriers from many institutional contexts, these youth's grow up experiencing high barriers that are intersectional and difficult to separate. They are tasked with navigating a world between two cultures, which at times produce deep conflicts that shape the nature of their belonging. Acculturative stress often causes anxiety and depression amongst Latinx youth, which stem from growing up: in mixed-immigration status families, in traditional gender roles (machismo vs. marianismo), speaking two languages, and commitment to preserve their family's culture.

The Latinx population is the fastest growing ethnic population in the United States, which faces a large gap in academic success when compared to their white counterparts. Historically, discriminatory policies and legal segregation in public education have marginalized Latinx students to the periphery, as not fully belonging. De jure segregation specifically of students from Mexican origin was an accepted practice until being challenged in court in *Romo v. Laird* (1925), *Roberto Alvarez vs. the Board of Trustees of the Lemon Grove School District* (1931), *Mendez v. Westminster* (1947). Although these court rulings provided core civil rights in the educational setting, Latinx students continue to experience marginalization. They are often quietly tracked into less rigorous courses on the basis of their ethnicity and denied access to essential resources. Marginalization, whether intentional or not, is internalized. Having worked in an alternative high school setting, where Latinx students are placed due to insufficient

credits, suspension/expulsion terms, and/or risk of dropping out, I have heard their stories about not belonging. School counselors are unhelpful in their process of picking classes, or actively discourage enrolling in challenging courses.

Many of these youth face a range of other barriers that are legal and political in nature. As a result of living in families with varying immigration statuses, and current efforts to apprehend and deport undocumented immigrants by the federal government, they grow up in a state of limbo that prevents them from being able to plan for their future.

President Trump's administration has further fueled this sense of not belonging and crises through anti-immigrant, anti-Mexican, anti-Latino rhetoric. On the campaign trail, Trump likened Mexican immigrants to "murders" "rapists" and overall "bad hombres". This rhetoric is echoed throughout the Latinx community and causes enormous harm to youth.

It is through the intersection between education, mental health and immigration enforcement that Latinx youth navigate the world differently than many of their peers. When youth grow up experiencing that they do not belong in their educational setting, they face a greater risk of low performance and engaging in risky behaviors. Latinx students are disproportionately reprimanded for disruptive behaviors, which creates a racial and ethnic divide. This results in a lack of trust in academic institutions. Their experience of the American Dream and their identity as Americans often emerge from much more complex and inter-related factors, including their reception as immigrants, their racialization as Latinx, and their unique cultural challenges in health care and education. Mexican American youth are experiencing higher rates of mental health issues and decline in academic success due to their fear of deportation. Immigration enforcement becomes entangled with health and education. Latinx youth are more likely

to be labeled by schools and the juvenile justice system as defiant or delinquent, compared to their white peers.

This thesis the intersections between mental health, education, and immigration enforcement with a focus on how they shape belonging. Chapter 2 places the scholarship on how each of these core institutions shape Latinx in order to set up the broader intersections that I argue shape belonging. Chapter 3 sets up basic design and methodologies that guide the empirical research for the thesis, which focuses on a single case study of a Teen Center, where I interview, survey and conduct focus groups of Latinx youth. I explain that the center offers a safe setting for not only identifying the intersecting barriers these youth face, but also a space for empowering the youth.

The focus of this study is to analyze how teen centers mediate this harsh political environment and internal cultural barriers among Mexican American families to improve the lives of youth. First, the study asks: What positive impact do teen centers that are housed in local police departments have on Latinx youth's health, education and relation to immigration enforcement? Second, and more broadly, the study asks: How does community policing create a more inclusive model of local citizenship in an age of anti-immigrant, anti-Mexican national politics? Chapters 4 and 5, the thesis unpacks each of the three intersections that have shaped belonging and then analyzes the important role the Teen Center plays in providing a safe space for the youth to build a stronger sense of belonging. The thesis end with Chapter 6 with a more critical eye on the youth program itself, particularly how the racial, ethnic and class-based features of its board of directors and their relationship with the youth prevent a more complete sense of belonging from forming within the program.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

It is an innate need as humans to seek identification and belonging to some sort of community. Throughout time humans have live collectively whether it had been in nomadic groups, villages, city-dwellers, examples of established communities are recorded. Being connected to a group provided protection from predators and aid in survival (childrearing, hunting, procreation, etc.). Without being connected to a group, we are left vulnerable. Today, our need for belonging and protection may be different than the primitive definition of survival, belonging to a collective protects our vulnerabilities to poor mental health, failures, and/or victimization. To contextualize the role of the youth program in this research, I employ the *theory of belonging* (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), “the need to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of interpersonal relationships, is innately prepared (and hence nearly universal) among hum beings” (499). There is need to find others that will accept, support, and be continuous. In other words, it is important to maintain relationships that are stable, reliable, and beyond the surface level for us to feel fulfilled in our community establishment. If we do not feel as though we belong, there is a risk of negatives effects such as greater levels depression and anxiety (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that membership to social, religious, and athletic organizations led to greater sense of belonging amongst Latinx undergraduate students. Once one feels established with a supportive community, such as a friend group, church community, or in the case of this research, a teen center, the need to establish more relationships diminish, as one focuses on maintaining and strengthen the community. This aspect, however, is challenged when

there are life changes, such as graduating high school, moving to a new city, or starting a new job, that may change one's access to their previously established group. Thus, I also use the *theory of ecological systems* (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), specifically looking at the ability to establish a new network or community based on life changes, in looking at alumni of a youth program are able to find community and networks as they move into adulthood.

There are a multitude of reasons as to why a parent may encourage their child to enroll and/or participate in an after-school youth program. Most after-school youth programs, such as the Boys and Girls Club of America, the YMCA, and/or community teen centers are housed within their own buildings and disconnected from the youth's place of study. The youth, even if pushed by their parent(s), attends such programs voluntarily. Unlike their school, which they are mandated to attend by law, the youth participant is able to choose how much they want to be involved in the programs at these youth organizations. Youth organizations must also work to keep the youth interested in being a part of this after-school community (Roffman, Pagano, & Hirsh, 2001). Most importantly, the youth program needs to create a culture of belonging. At the age of adolescents, there is greater influences from experiences and interactions with peers, adults, and others that youth may be in contact with in their own interpretation of self. Developmentally, this is also a time where youth are starting to internalize the how others perceive them through words or the interpretation of actions towards them (Mead, 1934). By seeking connection to a group or community "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that group membership"

helps to establish their overall identity in the group (Tajfel, 1981, 255) and group membership increases a sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Having a supportive environment, such as a teen center, where students feel that they belong, could greatly impact the overall health of a youth as they grow into adulthood.

Having established support systems overall increases their ability to succeed in school and avoid harmful decision making that could lead to risky and/or delinquent behaviors such as teen pregnancy, substance use, gang affiliation (Borden, Perkins, Villarruel, & Stone, 2005; Lee, Borden, Serido, & Perkins, 2009; Roffman et al., 2001). Latinx youth may grow up in hostile racial climates which decrease their sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Thus, to seek belonging at a youth organization is especially important amongst marginalized, minority youth, such as Latinx youth, as they begin to feel the pressures and differences due to their attempt to navigate the societal pressures established by the white majority while also trying to stay true to their cultural roots (Roffman et al., 2001). Acculturation, “a multidimensional construct that describe phenomena resulting from continuous contact between groups of individuals from different cultures and subsequent changes to the cultural patterns of one or both group”, may create added layers to a youth’s ability to understand their social identity or where they stand within a community (Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004). To have a network that helps to understand the cultural clashes or the feelings of isolation due to living biculturally is instrumental in helping Latinx youth develop a positive sense of self, especially at a time when the media and political rhetoric is increasingly anti-Latino.

The Latino population is estimated to make up forty-percent of the total youth population in 2016 (Haack, Kapke, & Gerdes, 2016, 2315). The Latino population is

young and is twenty-seven years old, on average (Zeiders, Umaña-Taylor, & Derlan, 2013, 951). This is reflected in the Pew Research Centers findings that Latinos constitute a fifty-six percent growth of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Stanton-Salazar (2001) stated that the Latino population comprises forty percent of the elementary and secondary school population within California (p. 3). This is important as it compliments how the Latino population is growing to the largest minority group of the United States and the importance of the current education system in their academic success of this population. The U.S. Census of 2007 identified that Latinos, were 25 years of age or older, forty percent did not have their high school diploma (Wagner, 2005). Now, Mexican Americans cannot be discussed without also including both first- and second- generation populations. “Children of Mexican origin vary widely in terms of how long their families have lived in the United States (i.e. generational status) and their socioeconomic circumstances (i.e., socioeconomic status, SES)” (Hernandez, Robins, Widaman, & Conger, 2016, 243-244). With this in mind, “only 60% of immigrants without documentation complete high school compared to 92% of US-born young adults” (Raymond-Flesch, Siemons, Pourat, Jacobs, & Brindis, 2014, 324).

Due to the lower levels of educational achievement, past scholars have looked to using instruments that were said to measure the intelligence of those that were being tested based on the argument that humans do not have equal intelligence. This has also been attributed to the nurture vs. nature debate. This is based on the “misconception of egalitarian fallacy, the gratuitous assumption that all human populations are essentially identical or equal in whatever trait or ability the tests purport to measure” (Suzuki & Valencia, 1997,1103-1104). The use of such tests helped aid in the false narrative that

Mexican American students were inherently less intelligent than their white counterpart (Gonzales, 2013, 71). Such tests were not provided in a way that it could fairly measure one's intelligence. The biggest issue with these tests were how they were designed and given in English only. Having the test provided in only English is problematic as language skills could attribute to lower scoring tests as the youth may not understand completely what is being asked of them (Gonzales, 2013, 70).

With the belief that Mexican-Americans having lower intelligence levels, the education system has continued to rationalize their ability to marginalize the students and place them in institutions that provided less opportunities and less access to post-secondary education options. Many students have been placed in educational tracks or pathways that do not provide college readiness but instead are designed to promote vocational, skill-based classes, or more disproportionately Mexican-American youth are placed in special education classes (Suzuki & Valencia, 1997; Covarrubias, 2011; Valencia, 2013; Oakes, 2005). Covarrubias (2011) stated Mexican Americans are 44% more likely to drop out of high school (92). Of the 56% that do obtain their high school diploma, only 27% will continue to college (Covarrubias, 2011, 92). Of those that continue their post-secondary education, 10% will obtain a bachelor's degree, and 2% will obtain a master's degree, and 0.2% will obtain a doctoral degree (Covarrubias, 2011, 92). Compared to their U.S.-born counterparts, "only 60% of immigrants without documentation complete high school compared to 92% of US-born young adults" (Raymond-Flesch, Siemons, Pourat, Jacobs, & Brindis, 2014, 324). Two-thirds of undocumented Mexican-Americans will drop out of high school, one-third will continue



onto a post-secondary career, only 5% percent will succeed in graduating with a bachelor's degree and 1% will obtain a master's degree (Covarrubias, 2011, 94).

When looking at the statistics and tracking that Mexican American students are susceptible to, we must also look at how mental health risks may play a part in this narrative. Fourteen percent of youth are diagnosed with a mood disorder receive lower, and have a higher rate of failing grades, compared to the seven percent of students diagnosed with learning disabilities (Blackorby, Cohorst, Garza, & Guzman, 2003). Generally speaking, it has been found that Latinos suffer from anxiety, depression, stress, and substance abuse that vary in severity (National Institute of Mental Health and the United States, 2001). Latino youth report higher levels of “sadness, depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation and suicidal attempts” compared to non-Latino youth (Cervantes, Cardoso, & Goldback, 2014, 458).

### **Mental Health and Acculturation**

Mental health has started to become more visible and discussed amongst Latinos. Second generation Latinos are more likely to seek mental health intervention; however, first generation Latinos have lower levels of poor mental health. Cervantes et al., (2012) found that Hispanic populations, within both adults and youth, were at risk of experiencing problems with their mental health due to stressors related to acculturation. Acculturation stress is “the result of one’s culture of origin interacting with host culture values, attitudes, customs, and behaviors” which are exacerbated by “exposure to racial or ethnic discrimination” constituting “daily stress” (Cervantes et al., 2012, 188; Romero

& Roberts, 2003; Berry, 1991). Of the students that are diagnosed with mental health illnesses, only 30% will seek intervention, and that number is even less for Latino youth (Haack, Kapke, & Gerdes al, 2016, 2316). According to Tello, Cervantes, Cordova, and Santos (2010), acculturation is possible at the individual level and/or the family level by way of understanding and being proficient in language (Spanish and/or English), place of birth, “culturally related behavioral preferences” such as media consumption in English, and/or ethnic identity (802).

Cervantes et al. (2012) developed The Hispanic Stress Inventory - Adolescent Version as an assessment tool with a culturally informed lens. It should be noted that the researchers developed an assessment for both immigrant Hispanics and non-immigrant Hispanics to identify the difference in stress factors experiences by both populations that share cultural norms including both unique to the immigrant experience and “stressors specific to the acculturation process” (Cervantes et al., 2012, 188). The factors closely related to the immigrant experience were: “left close friends in home country; thought about life in home country; hard leaving people in home country; separated from some family members; had to leave family behind in home country; members of family ‘homesick’, and learning English was a struggle” (Cervantes et al., 2012, 191). Other stressors experienced by immigrant-status Hispanics include their legal status, fear of deportation, or learning of the lack of resources available to them if they had recently learned of their undocumented status. “Individuals of Mexican descent born in the United States tend to be at even higher risk for mood disorders, especially depression, as compared with those of Mexican heritage who immigrated to the United States after the age of 13 (Leung, LaChapelle, Scinta, Olvera, 2014, 43). In relation to immigration

status, when conducting research on undocumented populations, it has been found that the attrition rate is high due to possible fear of information provided throughout the studies could be used by authorities to identify their location, making participants feel at-risk of being deported (Raymond-Flesch et al., 2014, 324).

When furthering the discussion of mental health, Haack, Kapke, & Gerdes (2016) identified the lack of participants that were monolingual, Spanish-speakers within the research that discusses mental health amongst Latinos (2317). The lack of such a participant pool can speak to the lack of resources available to Latinos suffering from poor mental health. Also, when discussing acculturation and acculturative stress, the research that is available discusses such effects on Latino adults, thus the area of acculturative stress and Latino youth still has greater need to be researched (Haack, Kapke, & Gerdes, 2016, 2317). Furthermore, there are differences in mental health based on gender within the Latino culture (Zeiders et al., 2013, 959).

Latinas are more likely to experience depressive symptoms, including the practice of self-harm and suicidal ideations (Cervantes, Cadroso, Goldback, 2015, 458). Latino adolescent males have higher self-esteem reports than their female counterparts, however, Latinas have an increased self-esteem over time due to their identities in relation to gender roles (Zeiders, Umaña-Taylor, & Derlan, 2012, 957 & 960). Stein et al. (2011) acknowledged the connection to cultural norms and values that may attribute to the increased risk of mental health for Latino youth (p. 1340). This is echoed by Zeiders et al. (2013) when discussing “female adolescents face increased pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and becomes less assertive, which in turn is related to a less positive view of one’s self and to increased depressive symptoms” (960). The research

conducted by Zeiders et al. (2013) continues stating that the increased self-esteem that Latino male adolescents report is partly due to their higher regard in gender role and/or status in cultural norms (p. 960). This will later become an implication in their lowered self-esteem due to the increased pressure to exert dominant traits or fall into the *machismo* cultural norms which can also give them greater freedoms than their female counterparts, again leaving them vulnerable “vulnerable to perceptions of ethnic discrimination during early adolescence” (Zeiders et al., 2013, 959). According to Bulcroft (1996), adolescent Latinas, raised within households that continue to practice cultural gender roles, have less exposure to such perceived ethnic discrimination as they spend more time at home or within the shelter of their familial interactions (Zeiders et al., 2013, 959).

Therefore, acculturation attributes to mental health concerns in the following ways. Low acculturation is when an individual adheres to their native culture although they are now living within a new host culture (Masten et al., 2004, 15). Bi-culturation describes “the maintenance of Latino culture of origin while simultaneously adapting to the U.S. mainstream culture” (Haack et al., 2016, 2317). Another way in which this can be described is how one “maintains the cultural integrity of the home country as well as becomes an integral part of a larger society” (Masten et al., 2004,15; Padilla, 1980). High acculturation can be viewed as complete assimilation of the host culture, meaning the individual fully accepts the host country’s culture (Masten et al., 2004, 15). High acculturation can also be a predictor of poor mental health, as could low acculturation due to the stresses placed on being accordance to the preferred cultural norms (Masten et al., 2015, 16; Haack et al., 2016, 2317). Alegría, Canino, Shrout, Woo, Duan, Vila, &

Meng (2008) explored the phenomenon, which was coined the “*immigrant paradox*” as “Latino immigrants report lower rates of physical and mental health problems than second- or later-generations of Latinos, despite the stressful experiences and socio-economic disadvantage often linked to immigration” (Haack et al., 2016, 2317). This could impart be due to Latino immigrants learning coping skills and having increased resiliency than their United States born counterparts.

In finding community or belonging at school or a community youth program, youth are able to build protective factors and relationships that could help mitigate the negative mental health outcomes of acculturation or stressors caused by systemic barriers. Having a such a network helps a youth feel as though they have purpose in their community. It is also at this time that “teens develop more advanced skills and strategies for connecting to their groups, experiencing bonding and acceptance, participating in leadership and team-building, and becoming more concerned about the possibility of rejection from their significant group” (Newman & Newman, 2001, 524). Baumeister & Leary (1995) indicated that as one becomes more deeply connected a group there is more care in protecting the relationship. In finding belonging at a teen center, a teen is more likely to think about how their decisions will affect their ability to participate or continue membership in the organization (Borden, Perkins, Villarruel, & Stone, 2005). In having positive connections to a group, there is a greater likelihood that a youth will avoid harmful decision making for this reason. There are greater protective factors that will then carry over into their success in other aspects of their life, such as their academic achievement.

Building networks and finding belonging can be a fluid experience. Youth may find their belonging within a youth organization but may feel completely isolated at school or in their community. Newman and Newman (2001) identify adolescence as continuous changes in group membership. This is a time of learning group culture and the acceptable behaviors associated with joining, leaving, or obtaining a role of leadership within a group. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory would further this point to say that as a youth experiences new information or is exposed to new ideologies they would then be more equipped to move or replace groups to better fit their needs and/or desires to feel protected or accepted.

### **Educational Achievement**

The importance of combining an intersectional approach to identity, mental health, and academic success is to help increase the educational successes of the Mexican American population. Villegas-Gold & Yoo (2014) identify the importance of having culturally sensitive and historically accurate mental health support that will lower the experiences of depressive symptoms and increase the mental and physical health of Mexican American students. Another important factor can attribute to parent-child interaction. There are cultural expectations and boundaries that create the family unit that current therapeutic interventions may not consider. The Latino culture does not always foster a space for open and emotional conversation between parent and child. Having interventions that involve the parents with respect to the culture could increase resiliency and lower behavioral issues that may be attributed to a poor sense of self (Carlo, McGinley, Hayes, Hayes, & Martinez, 2012; Vargas, Roosa, Knight, & O'Donnell,

2013). “Latino youth are at a similar, or potentially greater, risk for psychopathology compared to non-Latino youth, yet they are less likely to be identified” (Haack, et al., 2016, 2316). Stanton-Salazar (2001) also stresses that schools don’t see the struggles of adolescent youth’s as the byproduct of being an immigrant or growing up in a home with immigrant parents who have limited education (107-157).

Due to the risk of being marginalized through a tracked educational path or due to immigration status, many Mexican American students may feel a sense of hopelessness due to limited resources (Gonzales, 2016; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Covarrubias (2011) found that Chicano populations are more likely to stay within a working-class socioeconomic status even if there is economic growth across the population (99). Latinos are more likely to live in poverty and make less annually than other ethnic populations (Roosa, O’Donnell, Cham, Gonzales, Zeiders, Tein, Knight, & Umaña-Taylor, 2011, 309). This is attributed to the limited amount of educational interventions and opportunities provided to the individual. Even if there are resources available within the academic setting, the youth’s sense of belonging within the school setting also plays a part.

There are introductions to various curriculums that are being implemented to help increase the identity and confidence of Mexican American and other marginalized populations. Curriculums like the Identity Curriculum, formulated by Taylor-Umaña, are being used as interventions to increase the successes of students in ways that past interventions have not been successful at (Taylor-Umaña, Komienko, Douglass, & Updegraff, 2018). This program’s results have portrayed increased confidence of self, lower rates of depressive symptoms, and higher grades in school. The students attribute it

to feel as though they are part of a community and able to see their reflections within their mentors. Studies have also found that if there are counselors available on campus that are bilingual, students are more likely to seek their help and support, thus decreasing their risk of poor mental health. Another intervention is a gang intervention program designed by UCSB and implemented in Santa Barbara by Rios, Lopez-Aguado, Galicia, Lopez-Tello, Flores, & Sarabia (2010). Students at risk of gang initiation or gang violence are connected with a gang interventionist where they are provided case management and emotional support during school hours. Although in theory this intervention is promising, this program only provides a single counselor for males and a single counselor for females and they meet with students at all the public schools and junior highs. This is problematic not only due to the heavy caseload for each interventionist but also because there are feelings of distrust by the youth due to the counselors' connections to potential rival gang members. Another curriculum, El Joven Noble, to decrease the chances of "(a) unwanted or unplanned pregnancies, (b) substance abuse, (c) community violence and increase ability of youth to act in a responsible, and (d) respectful way in reference to their relationships" (Tello, Cervantes, Cordova, & Santos 2010, 803). Such curriculums are important, however, if they are not widely available then we still run the risk of not meeting the needs of our students.

Overall, the educational system, is a present-day example of continued colonial practices that continue to marginalize, and segregate based on who is accepted as belonging within a society. There have been numerous attempts to inhibit the access to education based on citizenship, or the interpretation of who should or should be allowed to belong. Such instances (*Plessy v. Doe*, California Proposition 187, Arizona State Bill



1070, Arizona's Coyote Law) create a message for Latinx residents of the country that they do not belong and that they should not have access to education, social services, and/or health care (Margolis, 1994, Martin, 1995, Szkupinski Quiroga, Medina, & Glick, 2014). Propositions added to Arizona's infamous SB 1070 in 2010 "declared English to be the official language of Arizona and required citizenship, legal residency status, or 'being lawfully presented in the United States' to be eligible for state-subsidized services, such as in-state tuition, financial aid, English as a Second Language classes, and child care" (Szkupinski Quiroga et al., 2014, p. 1726). In California, a similar attempt was made through Proposition 187, also known as *Save Our State*, stating that in order to obtain health care, social services, and access to public education, individuals would need to complete a citizenship system (Margolis, 1994; Martin, 1995). Prop 187 also used language that allowed individuals working within the context of education (teachers, administration, staff), social services (case workers), and the medical professions to act as pseudo-immigrant law enforcers, asking that they inform the state authorities with identifying information of individuals without documentation who attempted to receive such services. Although the provision against education access did not stand, there still maintained fear and distrust towards individuals in positions of power. Also, it was the immigrant community had conflicting information, and continue to have conflicting information, to what is law and what is not. There is fear that forces individuals into isolation because they are fearful of immigration enforcement and the risk of deportation.

In education, there is already a marginalization due to unfair treatment and barriers to opportunities for the success of Latinx youth. Latinx youth have to work harder, against the barriers systematically, internalized, and culturally to be able to have

success. Being that the education system praises individuality, this may be difficult for a youth whose culture is based in the value of community. The importance of community in the Latinx culture is above individual. In this case, navigating the education system is difficult as it lacks genuine relationships for Latinx youth and may appear transactional. You do the work you get the grade, nothing else matters. Most schools are not equipped or do not practice culturally competent approaches to learning. The academic institution does not take into account the student that carries traumas from their own immigration or the immigration of their parents, or the student that is helping to raise their younger siblings as both their parents work multiple jobs at less than minimum wage to provide shelter and food for their family, or the student whose parents want them to succeed academically but are unable to help with homework or with college applications because they do not understand how to do it themselves.

Junior high school and high school, as previously stated, is a time where adolescents are beginning to internalize the experiences presented by institutions and individuals they come in contact with as a means to define themselves. This is when “one confronts a new psychosocial conflict in which desires to ally oneself with specific groups to learn to be comfortable functioning as a member of a group vie with tendencies to feel overburdened by social pressures, unwelcome, isolated, and lonely”(Newman & Newman, 2001, 821). Policies, regardless if a Latinx student is documented or not, have an affect on their mental health and ability to feel supported by the community, furthering increasing feelings of loneliness, unwelcomed, and/or isolated (Szkupinski Quiroga, 2013; Szkupinski Quiroga et al., 2014). In a study conducted by Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy (2004), parents reported having unwelcoming experiences on school campuses.

Parents also may not have the ability to provide the support or help develop positive self-identification due to “contextual factors (e.g. socioeconomic status, family structure transitions, parental adjustment, neighborhood, marital adjustment, and social support) [which] are thought to exert their effects on youth adjustment indirectly, most notably through their effects on parenting practices” (Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004). Youth may become disconnected from their academic expectations because of feeling unsupported both at school due to structural barriers, lack of adult mentorship within the school, or the inability to access such support from parents.

### **Community Policing**

In discussing acculturative stress, interaction with law enforcement should be further explored, especially in the ability for Latinx to feel safe and have the ability make positive choices that will affect their future goals. Community policing was designed as means to better relations between the public and local law enforcement which would therefore increase communication, public safety, and collaboration (Thomas & Burns, 2005, 74). Community policing may be implemented by way of townhall meetings, citizens’ academies that teach civilians their laws through courses taught by their local law enforcement agency, neighborhood command posts, community outreach events and more. This approach is taken by police agencies that are wanting to better rapport with their community and to decrease criminal activity (Thomas & Burn, 2005, 74).

Community policing has become increasingly important and a topic of debate during the debate on whether communities are taking a stance for or against sanctuary policies in communities with immigrant populations. As previously discussed, Latinx youth may

experience increased levels of stress due to the immigration status of themselves or of family members.

In 1996, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) revised the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 so that state and local law enforcement agencies were given the opportunity to work alongside the Immigration and Naturalization Services at the federal level to enforce immigration law within their communities (Theodore & Habans, 2016, 972). As of 2012, the United States and Customs Enforcement (ICE) shared that “more than 1300 state and local law enforcement officers in 19 states have been trained and certified in to enforce immigration law” (Theodore & Habans, 2016, 972). In continuous debates surrounding immigration and policing, this alliance between immigration enforcement and local law enforcement could be detrimental to the law enforcement agency’s ability to maintain trust and collaboration within communities, especially those with minority and immigrant populations. In a study conducted by Thomas (2013), it was reported by 44% of Latinx surveyed that they would be less likely to voluntarily contact police officers after an event of victimization due to the potential risk of being asked about their immigration status or the immigration status of someone that they know. Latinx individuals may be more cautious on such questioning due to practices of racial profiling or the assumptions of one’s legal status based on Latinx pan-ethnic labeling and lack of collective identity placed on Latinx identities despite varying cultures, dialects, colonization histories, and immigration-influencing histories (political crisis, war, American interventions, etc.) (Romero, 2008; Suarez-Orozco & Paez, 2008; Flores-González, Aranda, & Vaquera, 2014).

## **Youth and Law Enforcement Interaction**

An approach some law enforcement agencies have taken in practicing community policing has been through interaction with their communities' youth. This interaction has been completed in various fashions such as community centers, mentorship, interventions fostering communication between the two populations, and/or a greater presence in youth activities. Minority youth have been found to have greater distrust and negative attitudes toward police officers (Hurst & Frank, 2000; Brunson & Miller, 2006, Lieber, Nalla, Farnworth; 1998). This can be for a myriad of reasons but one that will be focused on here will be due to vicariously experienced interactions with policing agencies rather than interactions that the youth personally experienced. Such interactions are those that have been internalized by the individual after being exposed to knowledge or shared the events of what had occurred through familial relation, an acquaintance, or possibly through the media (Theodore & Habans, 2016, 975; Rosenbaum, Schnuck, Costello, Hawkins, & Ring, 2005). As law enforcement agencies within the United States have been used as means of social control, immigration issues may create greater distrust and lack of feeling protected by Latinx communities (Solis, Portillos & Brunson, 2009, 48). Immigrant communities often rely on social networks to understand their new communities and to help in their adjustment to the new culture they are now interacting with (Menjívar & Bejarano, 2004). If there has been a negative interaction with law enforcement, this can become a shared experience within the community creating a sense of fear and distrust from those that were not personally involved in the experience.

In order to repair such distrust, police departments have decided to focus aspects of their community policing efforts on the youth. The Teen and Police Service (TAPS)

Academy, implemented by the Houston Police Department, is an 11- week program where at-risk youth were paired with police officers that took the role as a mentor within a restrictive setting such as an alternative school or juvenile detention center (Jones, Penn, & Davenport, 2015, 31). The purpose of this intervention was to decrease the social distance between minority youth and local law enforcement. Social distance is defined as “the degree to which individuals or groups have positive feelings for other individuals, institutions, or their legal systems” (Murphy & Cherney, 2012, 184). Another point of contention for increased tension between minority youth and law enforcement is through neighborhood class position due to the intersectionalities that race and class influence one’s neighborhood and the type of discrimination individuals may experience (Weitzer, 1999; Lee, Heafner, Sabatelli, & LaMotte, 2017, 808). Another intervention, the Side-by-Side Program (SPS), funded by the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management in 22 different communities, also provided a mentorship approach with youth. The foundation of this intervention was to reduce tensions and biases through “optimal contact conditions” based on Intergroup Contact Theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

In both interventions, police officers were found to have more positive attitudes towards youth that were also echoed by the minority youth that they interacted with (Lee et. al, 2017; Jones, Penn, & Davenport, 2015). In both evaluations, participants had mostly high satisfaction during their time in the programs. The researchers on the evaluation for the TAPS program in Houston inferred that mentorship between same raced mentors could also help to increase the positive experience between youth and law enforcement officer due to the shared understanding based on culture, racial experiences,

and/or language (Jones, Penn, & Davenport, 2015, 41; Rhodes, 2002). Local law enforcement agencies, in order to meet the needs of mentoring Latinx youth in ways that are culturally sensitive, are in need of diversifying their officers so that they are more representative of the community in which they serve (McCluskey & McCluskey, 2004). This would work as a best practice approach in community policing as a diverse law enforcement agency may be able to build stronger relationships with community members and be more understanding/empathetic towards the needs of the community (McCluskey & McCluskey, 2004, 71; Alozie & Ramirez, 1999).

The intersections of community policing, mental health, and academic success is an area that needs further research. With the increasing anti-Latino rhetoric that is becoming more prevalent in society, there is risk that higher levels of stress and anxiety may be felt by the Latinx population as a whole. If parents are experiencing increased levels of stress and anxiety, they may pass down such mental health experiences through countertransference. Schools and mental health agencies are also experiencing major shifts in funding due to the current political environment. This is problematic because the limited funds that were available are now becoming even harder to obtain, leaving the marginalized less access to quality care and opportunities, thus leading Latinx youth to be more at-risk of poor decision making and limited opportunities in their future due to legal consequences, risky sexual behaviors, academic disadvantages (Calabrese & Noboa, 1995). There are many layers that need to be exposed and unpacked to provide a greater understanding in how to give the Mexican American students the education and resources that they are entitled to be quality competitors to the white counterparts.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This research aims to answer the following question: How do teen centers housed in police departments mediate the current political environment and internal cultural barriers among Mexican American families to improve the lives of youth? This case study was conducted with a mixed methods approach of interviews, focus groups, and pre- and post-surveys to provide a conversation on how the investing in building the social capital of Mexican-American youth that participate in programs within a teen center could help to reduce their risk of poor mental health and/or increase their academic success in high school. The youth within the organization chosen for this study are often identified as low-income, first- or second- generation Mexican/Mexican American and attend the local public high schools. Parents of the youth may not have access or the knowledge of how to advocate for greater educational opportunities for their children and entrust the schools to provide the best options for them. Also, if a student is able to gain access to post-secondary opportunities, there are cultural barriers, financial barriers, and possible immigration status barriers that may prevent the continuation of education. Given that the students attend a teen center supported by the local police department, this study also aims to explore the health and academic success of the youth participants in relation to the current political discourse on immigration.

#### **The Youth Program's History**

In the early 1990's the city's chief of police recognized that there were no huge prevention programs within the city to help the community's youth from becoming



involved in gangs or partake in risky behaviors. The chief approached older police officers at the time asking if they would want to help implement a program to help give the community's youth an opportunity to make healthier life choices. The officers initially stated that they would help, however, there was no real traction to create a new program. The chief of police was beginning to see an increase in the violence being used between the city's east and west side gangs, and their use of youth to enact the violence. The youth were used as pawns to commit certain crimes because of their juvenile status, being less likely to serve long sentences in an institution, and the ability to have a sealed record at the age of eighteen, compared to the adult, more recognized, gang members within the community. A younger, newer officer, Ron, had overheard the requests and the wheels started to turn in his mind, but he did not speak up at the time.

A couple of years later, the city saw a spike in youth related violence and Ron, tired of being called to scenes of a stabbing, gang-related fight, and/or other serious calls, decided to approach the chief and recalled the conversation he overheard years prior. He asked the chief for permission to research different prevention programs and to help find one that would best meet the needs of the community. Ron visited different programs such as the Boys' and Girls' Clubs, Girls' Incorporated, and other non-profits within the city and in neighboring cities. While visiting a non-profit in a neighboring city, he was introduced to a youth program framework that involves police officers involved in the mentorship, athletics, and positive well-being of youth. The framework, originally from the east coast, focused on athletic programming and development of youth, having police officers interact as coaches and mentors. The original framework became an inspiration for other departments, however, on the west coast there became more of a push towards

leadership, mentorship, and academics in the police-youth interactive spaces. Ron visited an already established program being ran in Bakersfield, California and felt that the west coast approach best suited the vision he had and the needs of the community. He wanted to provide programming to the community that was free of cost, accessible, and secure to any child within the community.

Ron came back to the community and recognized that the police department did not have access to a facility to house such a program. To rent a space was financially out of reach due to the non-existent fund to support the program at the time. He met with the director of the Boys' and Girls' Club on the west side of town with the following approach. He stated that if they could collaborate and the Boys' and Girls' Club would offer them space in their facility, Ron would bring in more funding and new activities that the participants of the Boys' and Girls' Club could access. The director of the Boys' and Girls' Club agreed. Not only was it beneficial in terms of funding and programming, but having more of a police presence provided safety to the club as it's building neighbored the park that was becoming more known for its gang activity and as a gang meeting spot of the west side and less known as a safe place for children to play.

The new police-led youth programming started with a basketball team in 1999, then grew to include dance classes, then a soccer team, and then a youth leadership council in 2004. Although it initially started with athletics, the purpose was to build mentorship and rapport with the youth participants. Ron formed a structured practice time and held the players to expectations of not only being respectful team players but successful in school and in their community. The basketball program consisted more than a free work-out, open gym, concept that was being seen at the other local youth programs

in town. Ron made sure that practices were scheduled and held every Monday night at six o'clock in the evening. The players were expected to attend practice if they wanted to be played in upcoming games. He wanted to nurture pride, responsibility, and reliability of being on an organized sports team. As the programming grew, in its initial years, Ron was very interactive with the 30 consistent youth in the program. He got to know their parents, siblings, asked about their school life and grades, and eventually was introduced to their friends. For the first couple of years, the funding for the programs also came out of Ron's pockets. He estimates spending about five thousand dollars of his own money to keep the programs afloat.

The program began to gain traction. It began to grow and faster than Ron thought it would. Soon it was moved from being a one-man show to needing a supporting staff. Ron called on his network of friends to help form a non-profit board of directors, many business owners and/or bankers in the community, to help create a financial revenue to pay for the extra support and the growth of the programs. Initially, Ron did not have to worry about being paid for his time implementing the program, because his salary was covered by the police department. This was the same for any other officer he asked to interact with the programming and youth. Ron was also starting to gain access to funds for youth activities provided by the city because of the outcomes the programming was having. Parents also shared that they appreciated the structured approach because it provided security to the youth. Officer Ron also reached out the fellow officer, Alejandro, to help access the Latinx community and to share the programming opportunities available, free of cost. Officer Alejandro, having a strong, positive rapport with the community, began to market the program, took up coaching the after school soccer

programs, believing in its mission, that he also enrolled his own adolescent children in the program.

As the program continued to grow, the police department provided office space to Ron and the newly hired support staff. In 2005, the Youth Leadership Council began having their weekly meetings in one of the police department's breakrooms. By being in the breakroom, the Youth Leadership Council members were introduced to other officers while they were on duty eating their lunch or grabbing a quick snack. At this time, the Youth Leadership Council was the only leadership focused program being offered by the organization. There were about six consistent YLC participants, initially. Also, at the beginning of the programming, the YLC was opened to junior high and high school students. This would change as the organization grew.

After about 5 years of having office space in the police department's annex, the organization again needed more office space and staff to help match the community's needs. At the inception of the organization, being that Ron was still a full-time patrol officer, the department placed the organization and Ron under the supervision of Captain Michael. This maintained the hierarchy of the police department, as well as established a connection to the police department that would support Ron. When the organization moved to another office space, Captain Michael was retiring from the force. Captain Michael had become a strong advocate for the youth program while it was under his supervision, so retiring from his police officer career, he lateralled over and became the Executive Director of the youth program.

Captain Michael and Officer Ron collaborated well together and were able to bring the organization to a place of financial security and be able to meet the needs of the

community more effectively because there was a greater team effort. The organization grew in its athletics programming by contracting with the local school district and helping to run an after-school sports league (soccer, basketball, flag football) at the junior high level. The organization provided the coaches, referees, and score board keepers, while the schools provided the uniforms, facilities, and equipment. This provided youth a safe, secure, positive environment after school. The YLC began to expand as well. From initially having 6 consistent members it had grown to having 15 members. The organization also saw interest from other programs in the community that wanted to collaborate with it to offer programming to its participants. Again, adding to the growth and access that the program was providing.

In 2010, the city came to the organization with a proposition. There was a facility in the downtown area of city, close to the main station, in neutral territory from gangs, and a couple blocks away from the police department that the city was trying to fill. Previously, the building was run by another youth program as a teen center but there was not as much buy in from the community. They were unable to maintain the teen center due to lack of resources, income, and youth participation. After the previous youth program decided not to resign their lease, the city approached the police department's youth program to take over and continue running the building as a teen center. The department agreed and finally had a home where the organization staff and youth participants could all be under one roof at the same time. The youth programs were still free of cost to all participants and the city, again seeing the positive outcomes of the program, charging the department one dollar a month in rent.

With this new space, the teen center has grown immensely. Presently, the youth center has seen about one thousand youth participants in its programming. They offer free tutoring in their computer lab every day after school. The youth participants have access to computers, internet, printing, and academic support through the teen center. The organization has a Family Outreach Coordinator that will help families navigate the education system, provide information on access to college and scholarships, and attend school meetings to help participants succeed academically. The Program Director is in constant communication with parents and oversees the daily functions of the teen center. She is also in charge of the Youth Leadership Council programming. The YLC now has 25 active members. Due to its rapid growth, the council is now only available to high school participants and they must go through an application and interview process to be selected onto the council. The organization also offers Jiu Jitsu classes, art classes, music lessons, flamenco and hip-hop classes, workout sessions, and a social-emotional support group for girls. There are now also four police officers assigned to the organization. The department also asked the organization to oversee its growing police explorers post, a program for high school aged youth who are interested in pursuing a career in law enforcement where they are trained on the tactics and foundations of police work. Another opportunity provided by the teen center is implementation of a program where youth learn automotive technician skills and learn how to work with computer operating systems within cars. This program provides dual-enrollment credit with the local community college and was sponsored by a lieutenant of the department.

Officer Ron retired from the force in 2015 but continues to be a fixture in the organization. He sat on the board of directors for many years until moving to another

state. However, he is still in contact with many of the youth he mentored through the years. The community, especially past participants who are now adults, often recall their time in the youth program with a story associated with Officer Ron, Officer Alejandro, or both. Officer Alejandro continues his assignment with the teen program and also helps as a training officer to the police explorers post. Both officers, as well as the three other officers currently assigned to the program, have travelled to conferences with the youth as chaperones, attend annual summer camps hosted by the youth program, and continue to mentor past participants of the program. The organization continues to grow and continues to implement new opportunities to the youth in various programming by “build[ing] positive mentoring relationships between teens, the police department, and members of the community through educational, athletic, and leadership development programs.”<sup>1</sup> The organization now also offers transportation to programs that are not offered at the Teen Center, agreements with summer camps to offer participants structure during the summer school break, and four teen center staff to help meet center function smoothly. Starting with 30 participating youth, a \$5,000 budget and its marketing by 1 police officer, today the organization estimates about 100 youth a day, 4-5 programs offered daily, a \$60,000-\$70,000 annual budget, four police officers with the support of not only the chief but also 2 other supervising officers, and a 10 person board of directors. This year marks in 20 year anniversary and its establishment within the community.

## The City

In order to maintain the confidentiality and safety of my participants, I decided to not include the name of the city within the written document of my research. I, however, can give a description of the local, demographics, and why this organization has gained so much traction. If one were to hear the name of the city, immediate reactions are often: “vacation destination”, “paradise”, “rich”, “home to big Hollywood names”, “beaches”, and “white”. The municipality helps to paint such a picture through its laws against billboards, only allowing a limited number of big-named chained businesses and having ordinances in the downtown most tourist-visited area of having Spanish-styled architecture with terracotta roofing. What is not often discussed is the great social economic status disparities, large achievement gaps amongst the youth, gang violence, and/or large Latinx (majority being Mexican/Mexican-American) population. However, there is so much wealth in the community and individuals wanting to give that the city is also known to having the largest number of nonprofits per capita than any other place in the United States. The amount of non-profits within this city range from 400 to 1,000 organizations, these numbers not including religious or government sponsored organizations (“Celebrate Nonprofits,” n.d.). Non-profits board of directors within the city are more often having their seats filled with the elite, white, and/or the privileged members of the community. Individuals receiving the services and benefits of the non-profit organizations are usually of lower socioeconomic status, Latinx, and/or marginalized members of the community.

With an estimated population of 95,000 residents, the city’s racial demographics consist of ~40% Latinx, 55% non-Hispanic white, 1.5% Black/African American, and



4.0% Asian (“U.S. Census Bureau,” 2018). Essentially, based on the racial breakdown of the city, the city is pretty equal in its amount of white and brown residents. Locals are surrounded by Spanish and cultural traditions with Spanish and Mexican roots, regardless if this is part of their family history or not. The city highlights its Spanish roots with an annual city-wide festival paying homage to its history, however, most of the food vendors and public entertainment fits closest to Mexican cultural tradition. The city was founded by Spanish missionaries that colonized the land and converted the native people to Catholicism in 1542. Buildings from this colonial period are still existent and revered as beautiful and historical. The streets comprise of Spanish surnames or dichos (Spanish sayings) that explained the significance of that road during the early history of the city. The Spanish used the native people as the workforce that built the city and these revered buildings. They indoctrinated Spanish as the forced language of the land and ceased control under the belief that it was God’s plan.

In 1821, this city was now under the jurisdiction of the newly formed Mexican government. The Mexican government’s reign was swift and came to an end after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1948. The United States acquired the city through its victory of the Mexican-American War.

Under the United States government, the city grew as Americans began to move westward into the land. The U.S. also brought with its new cultural ideals and values. With the building of the wharf in the 1870s, the city became a port for trade and increase tourism. In the 1920s, the city became the home of the silent movie industry, therefore bringing in more tourism and the glitz and glamour of pre-Hollywood days. People of wealthy backgrounds started to call this area home as the climates are close to perfect

year-round and the seclusion accessible in its luscious green mountain sides. With such wealth and the influence of eastern American culture, organizations began to form within the city that resemble modern day non-profit organizations and aid in access resources such as social services, mental health services, financial resources, etc.

With the quick acquisition by the United States government, there came the beginnings of segregation of the Latinx people living within the community from the white settlers that began to call this city home. The Mexican influences and ideologies that helped in obtaining their independence from Spain are often forgotten or unspoken within the history classes within the community. There is little to no reverence of the Mexican's cultural influence on the city's formation. The Spanish colonial era is romanticized and celebrated. It is as if the Mexican tradition or cultural importance are glossed over as if this era was just a stepping stone.

Today, the city continues to boast wealthy community and a city that relies heavily on tourism. The Spanish street names are Americanized in pronunciation. However, the city's functions are still reliant on the Mexican people that live and work in it. There are large discrepancies in socio-economic statuses between the residents of the city. The wealthier areas are majority occupied by white single-familied homes. If one were to drive through the east and west sides of town, you would hear Spanish being spoken on the streets, in the music blasting from cars, and Mexican restaurants on every street. In these areas, it is not uncommon to find multiple families living within a single-family home to make ends meet. Careers in hospitality, caretaking, landscaping, and the service industry are performed, more so than not, by the Latinx community.

There is a large Mexican immigrant population within the community. This is in part due to its connections (historically and traditionally) to Mexico but also due to families that began settling in the area due to programs such as the Bracero program. Often times one family will settle and begin to call the area home and then, with time, they will have influenced other family members from their home country to come to the area. The city, acknowledging its reliance on the Latinx community's work in the blue-collar workforce, has become known as having a progressive view on immigration, acceptance, and protection of its residents, regardless of documentation status. This was exemplified in 2003 when the city council introduced a resolution that boasted pro-sanctuary policies at a time when the federal government took a more forceful approach to immigration enforcement. In 1999, California passed Proposition 187 which became known as the "Save Our State" regulations that would require individuals seeking health care (non-emergency), social services, and education must complete a citizenship screening system (Martin, 1995). Although the educational aspects were later not imposed, as I will later go into depth in Chapter 5. To have the city pass a resolution that showed solidarity with the immigrant community but the state having regulations that were contradictory could be confusing and increase fear due to confusion on which regulations are being implemented. In 1999, Governor Gary Davis signed a bill that would repeal Prop 187. In 2014, Governor Jerry Brown signed legislation that introduced the state as being a pro-sanctuary state and not working in conjunction with federal immigration policies. Again, especially with the current federal administration, there are tensions to who holds the authority and what rights do residents have when confronted with immigration enforcement.

The city, in terms of land, is not very large. For this reason, it is easy to see the stark differences of economic status within the community. However, it is hard to avoid the crossing of paths from one side of the spectrum to the other. For instance, there is a single public-school system that serves the whole community. This school system also spans between two law enforcement agencies. For the purpose of this research this is important to keep in mind as the two agencies have different approaches to enforcement within their communities. The school district works with the local law enforcement to have School Resource Officers (SRO) available to assist with different such as assisting in taking reports of assault or abuse shared to school administrators, build rapport with the students so that they may feel safe to approach a police officer, and/or intervene when a crime has been committed on campus (i.e. drug offenses or threats). Two high schools have a sheriff officer as the SRO while one high school, being within the city limits, thus having two different agency approaches. The sheriff's department has jurisdiction of the surrounding county communities. It also oversees the county jail. The head sheriff is also in favor of stricter immigration enforcement laws and in aiding with federal agencies. The municipal police department is in accordance with the pro-sanctuary policies implemented by the city and have a community policing approach to their enforcement. The chief of police has been vocal in her support of protecting all residents within the city, regardless of documentation status. The Teen Center is within the municipal police department's jurisdiction limits.

Along the differences of policy enforcement apparent within the schools, the examples of socioeconomic differences are also visible. The children of the privileged and not-so privileged, you would assume, would share the same classes and have the

same access to resources because they attend the same schools. Unfortunately, this is not the case. There are distinct trajectories within the school systems in which tracking based on ethnicity/race is still practiced. Although the community, at the surface, appears to be progressive and inclusive to its Latinx community, there are behind the scenes examples of where the progressive tendencies are stunted by prejudices and/or implicit biases. Currently, within the community, there is a debate on whether or not programs that have been allowed to hold trainings and workshops on equality and discussions of discrimination based on race/ethnicity and sexual orientation is a protective factor for marginalized students or if it created distrust and scapegoated white students and administrators. Ethnic studies have also been a topic of tension as such classes are not a requirement, having members within the community feel that access to ethnic studies courses would help in creating acceptance and understanding from students. Due to the demographics, the policies implemented at the state and city levels, and the community policing approach of the local law enforcement, the teen center and its participants was an ideal place for me the ability to explore my research question.

### **Positionality and Limitations**

As a researcher, I have the responsibility to obtain data that will help me analyze a topic and provide an insight through scientific methodology, within ethical bounds. A master's program provides education and the mentorship to be able to conduct meaningful research, however, being on a 2-year track, the time available to do so is limited. Because of this limitation, I pulled on my resources and community in order to explore my area of research. I have always been interested in the role teen centers have

played on the success of Latinx youth. This interest formed due my identification as a second-generation, Mexican-American, who benefitted from the mentorship received from a teen center. In fact, I am an alumnus of the teen center examined within this research. I was raised within the city previously described and am a product of its high school system, community, and experienced the barriers in receiving adequate resources and educational opportunities.

I was the founding member of the Youth Leadership Council in 2004. I was 14 years old and in the eighth grade. I had known about the youth organization because my older brother was on its traveling basketball team. Being a dancer, I attended the hip hop classes provided by the youth program, but I really found my sense of being with the formation of the YLC. We held our meetings in a room within the Boys' and Girls' Club on the west side of town. I did not spend much time on this part of town as I lived on the east side. Within the community, there is a separation of the east and west side communities. The rest of the council consisted of two of my cousins, neighborhood friends, and a couple people brought in by Officer Ron. I came to know Officer Ron through my father. My father is Officer Alejandro.

Although my father still currently is a police officer with the city's department and actively connected to the teen center, he was still new to force when he introduced us to the organization. For most of my early childhood, my father worked in the automotive industry, working as a mechanic or in the parts department of local car dealership. He immigrated with his parents and 2 siblings to the United States when he was 4 years old. My grandfather was lured to the city after his brother settled here and they were recipients of working permissions provided by the Bracero Program. My father attended

the local public schools and graduated from the same high school I attended. As did my mother.

My parents had by older brother in their early 20s and I followed swiftly after. As young parents, with limited income, they made the decision to have my brother and I attend a local private, parochial elementary school. They sacrificed their time, wants, and finances to give us the opportunity of a privileged education. My older brother and I struggled to get the same recognition for our academic accomplishments compared to peers. We received financial assistance to afford the school's tuition and looking back now, we were treated differently because of it. I was never given leadership positions within my own school and often felt out of place at school. I found acceptance within the YLC. I had the acceptance of my cousins but also the acceptance from neighborhood friends. My classmates lived in large homes, their mothers were always available to help during the school day, and they always had the newest, latest fads. My parents both worked to provide for our household. My parents and great-great aunt were fortunate enough to purchase a 3-bedroom, 1 bath home together for us to grow up in. At times, it homed not just my immediate family, but aunts, uncles, cousins, and my paternal grandparents when they were in need of support. At one point, there were 14 family members living in that house while my mother was pregnant with my younger brother. I do not think anyone at my elementary school knew that's what my home life was for a time. My grandparents and great-great aunt helped take care of my brother and I by picking us up from school and taking us to our extracurricular activities. My mom, for a time, worked part-time, sacrificing financially, to be sure that she was home to help us with our homework. In seventh grade, I transferred to the public junior high school mid-

year after my seventh-grade teacher made a comment, she may have thought was a joke, to my mother about my younger brother, a kindergartner, probably being a better student than I was. I was enrolled in the public junior high the next day.

I attended a private high school that was a 45-minute commute outside of hometown my freshman and sophomore year because my older brother had chosen to attend it for its academic support and opportunities to play competitive sports. My parents wanted us to attend the same high school and to also have as many educational opportunities they could have only dreamed of when they were entering high school. Again, we were scholarship kids, and again, we felt it. I was one of very few Latinx students enrolled in the school. There was also tensions between the American born Mexican students and the boarding students from Mexico. My nickname at this school was “chola” due to the neighborhood I grew up in. This nickname was bestowed upon me by my sophomore history teacher. After my brother graduated, entering my junior year of high school, I transferred to the public high school in my community.

While at the public high school, I was surrounded by peers that looked like me, lived in the same neighborhood, and had parents that not only were the same age as mine, but had also been their classmates growing up. Even with the comforts of community and belonging, I had to push and advocate to be placed in rigorous course work such as honors, dual-enrollment, and/or advanced placement classes. Entering my senior year, I asked to change my remedial English class to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade advanced placement English course. My academic counselor tried to persuade me to change my mind, maybe look at the honors English class because, ‘you’ll feel out of place, no one will look like you in



that class'. I pushed back and the change to my schedule was made and soon after I was switched to another counselor's caseload.

Moving from one school to another was difficult, however, having the Youth Leadership Council provided me a sense of stability. I was able to build friendships with peers in my community that I was able to connect to once I transferred to the public high school. I had a place I could work on homework and adults that saw me for me and helped me build leadership skills that I was not given the opportunity to explore within my schools. If it had not been for the YLC teaching me that my voice mattered or what advocacy meant, I do not know if I would have felt empowered enough to push back against my academic counselor or to be adaptable to starting at a new high school midway. It was through this experience that I learned that you can find different means of finding community and sense of self. I learned how to network and to be part of a governing board. I learned how to create an agenda, to track on past meetings through keeping minutes, how to interview possible new members for the group, how to plan fundraisers and keep track of funds. However, with building all these skills and growing as a leader, I never felt confident enough to pursue any type of leadership role within my educational settings.

The board members of the teen center were influential in my academic success beyond high school and continued to invest in my growth after completing my undergraduate studies. The organization provided me with a scholarship during their main fundraising event, during which a donor in the audience doubled the award. After obtaining my undergraduate degrees, I returned to my hometown and began to mentor YLC members and teaching flamenco as an afterschool program. The organization then

asked me to sit on their board of directors as the liaison between the youth and the board. Again, they invested in me and my career development, connecting me to other members of the community helping me become a community activist. My younger brother would later join the YLC throughout his high school years, graduating in 2015. He, unlike me, also joined the governing student body within his high school.

Recognizing my connection to the program helped me in formatting my research. I understood the history and complexities of the program, not just as an outsider, but because I experienced it first-hand. I have a close relationship with members of the board of directors and the teen center staff. This allowed me to be objective because the program trusts that I have the best intentions at heart when analyzing the program, the good and the bad. The adults connected to the program have seen my growth as a youth to adulthood and recognize that providing me with such guidance has helped me be in a position where I can look critically at the programming and provide insight that could help strengthen their approach.

My positionality as an insider-outsider in a research world was most exemplified through my work with the current youth and the alumni. The current youth have known me as a figure within the program since they began attending the Teen Center. I have attended summer camps and mentored many throughout their high school careers. I was often called in by the Program Director to meet with youth that were going through emotionally trying times, or with parents who needed help accessing services, due to my work as a counselor. The youth trusting me came easy because I had either helped one of their friends, or they trusted the Program Director so they felt comfortable with her decision to bring me in, or because I could relate to their experiences.

The limitations in my positionality is that I do recognize the privileges afforded to me. My father's change of career to becoming a police officer came with his acquirement of U.S. citizenship. My immediate family and I have never had to be fearful of our immigration status or mixed-immigration status. My mother received her undergraduate degree when I was in high school, therefore, being able to provide us some insight in my own college application processes. Also, barriers based on gender roles and expectations due to my culture were not impressed onto me growing up. My parents nurtured my independence and allowed me to explore the possibility of moving away to a four-year university after high school. Also, due to my father's career change in my early adolescence, my family's financial situation changed drastically, allowing us to live more comfortably and with greater access to resources such as tutors and travel opportunities. My father was and still is one of the officers closely tied to the teen center. Due to the demands of his position as one of the few bilingual officers that is also a local and trusted by the community, having his children attend the Teen Center was a way for him to play double duty as both community police officer and spend time with his children and build our relationship as a father.

The youth and alumni may not have fully understood my role as researcher, regardless of my introduction to them in my new role. This is because of the already established relationship as mentor, alumni, and/or counselor I may have formed with them in the past. With that, the youth may have felt more comfortable to share information with me compared to if I had been someone they did not know. In working as a researcher in this context, I also had to recognize the different roles I played in

participants' lives and needed to learn to be comfortable shifting between the roles to continue to receive their respects.

## **Participants**

### **Current Youth Members**

In order to have an understanding on the overall programming of the Teen Center, I chose to ask various key players to partake in my study. Being that the Teen Center offers a multitude of programs, I chose to focus on the Youth Leadership Council due to its consistent membership and the program's focus on academics and leadership skill building. It has also been a long-standing program, providing a dependable foundation and not much overturn in program support as it has been under the same Program Director's supervision for almost ten years.

The Youth Leadership Council has space for 25 consistent members. I chose to focus on 12 current students based on my time constraints and ability to access the youth. I worked closely with the Program Director in scheduling when and how the interviews would take place with the study participants. The Program Director was also instrumental in helping me get in contact with the legal guardian of the study participants to have consent forms signed. I asked to focus on 6 returning members of the YLC, meaning that they had at least one year of participating on the YLC board. The other 6 I asked to be new members to the program. I decided to pursue this because I wanted to see if the outcomes could be seen greater amongst the new members compared to the already established members. There were 4 male participants and 8 female participants ranging from the ages of 14 to 17. My intentions for completing a case study for my master's

thesis was twofold. First, I wanted to explore how the Teen Center provided support to its participants and if it had positive outcomes on the youth's academic success, mental health, and perception of police officers. Secondly, I wanted to provide data and feedback to the organization's staff, police officers, and board members in how they can further support or better support their current participants.

### **Alumni**

With the Youth Leadership Council having been established for almost 15 years, there was the opportunity to reach out to past participants to see the long-term outcomes, if any, the program may have on the trajectory of its participants. I was able to contact with nine alumni. Although the Teen Center has been established for twenty years, there is still a connection with many of its past participants which creates a family-oriented approach to providing support and continued mentorship, even after high school graduation. Three of the Melissa, Penelope, and Rosa are current Teen Center paid staff. Melissa and Penelope are pursuing their education at the local community college. Rosa is attending a local private religious four-year university. Sara is currently working for the city government, having previously worked at the police department in their administrative office and replaced on the board of directors when I left to pursue my master's degree. Other alumni I interviewed are established in their careers as a sheriff officer and nurse. Two other alumni are also full-time students pursuing their undergraduate degrees. Eight of the nine alumni that participated in this study identify as female. Two identify as being undocumented residents of the community. Two others identify as being from mixed-documented families. All identify as Mexican/Mexican

American. Four of the alumni participated in the YLC during the time I was also a member of the program.

### **Police Officers**

The police officers contacted for the study are all Beat Coordinators and share the assignment to the Teen Center. There are four Beat Coordinators total. I also interviewed my father as he is currently a Beat Coordinator and is the most senior officer connected to the program. Officer Alejandro is also the only Mexican, bilingual officer connected to the program. His connection to the program since its inception was important for me to explore. Also due to our relationship, he was easily accessible and offered insight without censorship and openness. Officer B is the newest to be assigned as a Beat Coordinator but would interact and help with Teen Center events through his own accord and desire prior to his new assignment. When I was a Teen Center participant, Officer K was a recent graduate of the local University of California and working was the Program Coordinator of the youth organization. He left the organization after four years to pursue a position with city before deciding he wanted to become a police officer. After being hired by the local police department and working as a patrol officer, Officer K returned to the youth organization to replace Officer Ron following his retirement. Officer K was familiar with the program, although it had grown immensely, and was able to move into this new role with ease. During the time of the study, Officer K was the assigned Program Officer, however, at the completion of my written thesis, he has been reassigned to the SWAT team and leaving his post as Beat Coordinator and Program Officer. Officer L, the only female officer connected to the program, having been a Beat Coordinator the past

few years and instrumental in the training of the police explorers post, has been newly assigned as the Program Officer for the Teen Center. I was also able to talk with Officer Ron about the history of the Teen Center, his vision, and his role now that he is a retired officer and former board member.

### **Board Members**

Although the police officers, Teen Center staff, and the participants have the most interaction with the programming and outcome of the organization, it is the board of directors that make the overall financial decisions that ensure the ability that the programming may still be offered. I interviewed Sara as both an alumnus and a board member because of her unique dual connection to the program. I also met with Shannon, a new board member to learn about her connection to the Teen Center and to explore why she felt compelled to be a part of this board. Due to time constraints and the number of participants already attached to the study, I was not able to meet with other board members.

### **Tools**

#### **Pre- and Post-Survey**

To help evaluate the outcomes of the program, I implemented a pre- and post-survey for the current YLC participants to complete. The pre-survey was conducted at the beginning of their Fall academic semester. The post-survey was completed at the end of the semester. The survey was conducted through Qualtrics to compare, if any, changes in their experiences at the Teen Center, academically, or socially/emotionally. My decision

to use a pre- and post-survey was to also provide distance between the youth participants and me, as a researcher. Due to my positionality, my relationship with the youth could be seen as complicated. As discussed, previous, many know me on a personal level in different capacities. Due to this convolution, I wanted to provide space that allowed students to feel unpressured in their answer, in hopes that their answers would be honest and true to their experiences. The youth were sent a link by the Program Director, allowing the them to decide when and where they felt most comfortable to answer the questions. Participants were asked to use their teen center identification numbers, rather than their names, to maintain anonymity and to easily compare their pre- and post-surveys. The surveys asked the youth participants to answer questions based on their experiences at school and at the teen center, mental health, and perceptions of police officers. The survey questions were designed to have the participants answer 97 five point Likert scale (1-strongly agree, 2-agree, 3-neither agree nor disagree, 4-disagree, 5-strongly disagree) and 18 questions based on their demographics.

### **Focus Group**

In addition to the surveys provided to the youth, I also facilitated a focus group for the duration of an hour in October 2018 with 10 participants. Two of the participants had prior engagements and were unable to attend. The focus group was held in a private room within the teen center during their weekly meeting time. This was decided to be considerate of their schedule and transportation abilities during the week. In order to maintain confidentiality to the responses given in the focus group, the teen center staff agreed to not enter the designated meeting room until the completion of the focus group.



For the purpose of data collection, the youth participants were obtained parental consent to be audio recorded for the focus group. As the facilitator, I asked the youth to not use identity markers in their responses as a way to further protect their confidentiality within the study. Through the use of surveys and focus groups, I was given an insight on the communal intervention that is creating a space in which youth may be obtaining greater social capital and why they are not obtaining it through their high schools. In the focus group, I asked questions asked within the surveys to have a greater discussion on the topic. The focus group was also a way for me to connect with the youth and allow them to view my research as transparent. Again, due to my already established relationship with the youth, asking questions based on sensitive-topics allowed me to observe their emotions, body languages, and reactions to stories shared by their peers.

## **Interviews**

With the adult participants, I conducted individual interviews. Each interview took about an hour to complete. Being that my master's program is located in Phoenix, Arizona I attempted to conduct as many adult interviews as possible during the winter break, as this was the most time allotted to me back in my home community after receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board. Due to difficulties of living in a different state as my research site, I conducted most of my interviews with the aid of online video conferencing applications. This allowed me to still observe body language and reactions to questions being asked. I was able to meet with the police officer participants, 4 alumni, and 1 board member in person to conduct their interviews.

## **Participant Observation**

Although the focus group, interviews, and surveys provided rich data and understanding of the participants' experiences with the program, I also pulled from field observation notes and my interactions with participants, officers, and teen center staff that were outside the survey, focus group, and interview settings. Through discussions with the Program Director, Executive Director, and other key members of the program I was able to gain greater insight on how the Teen Center is able to implement its programming, mentorship, and support. Also, through these interactions I was able to see the emotional labor in action that cannot be captured by words in an interview. Relations are strengthened at the teen center through interaction and trust building. This happens over time and are captured by watching the daily interactions and conversations that are had in passing. Participant observation was important it helped identify aspects missed by formal, scheduled conversations.

To protect the location and identity of all participants due to the sensitive discussions associated with immigration and documentation status, all participants have been given false names and the city in which the program is located will be kept confidential.

## CHAPTER 4

### EDUCATION AND MENTAL HEALTH

In order to better understand the how the Teen Center helps its participants' development of healthy self and academic achievement, I explored the experiences of present youth participants and alumni of the program. In focusing on active members, I sought to see any changes in their academics and/or mental health during their time as a member of the Youth Leadership Council. However, having conversations with the Teen Center staff and board members provided an insight on the programming approach to provide a space for youth prosperity and growth.

#### **Education**

The Latinx population is fast growing and can now be identified as the majority-minority in the United States. As stated in the Pew Research Centers findings, Latinos constitute a fifty-six percent growth of the U.S. population being a greater risk of dropping out of high ratio of one out of every five dropping out before high school graduation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2009). The youth at the Teen Center represent all three of the local public high schools. Within each school, the Hispanics make up 56% at High School A, 51% at High School B, and 43% at High School C of the student population according to data collected by the Department of Education (2015-2016). White students are the second largest population at each high school. The local continuation high school is 92% Hispanic and 6.1% White. The continuation high school is designed to meet the needs of students who are at risk of dropping out of high school due based on insufficient fund due to various reasons such as

low attendance, teen pregnancy, expulsion, or institutionalization in the juvenile justice system. Latinx students are also at risk of dropping out if they experience socioeconomic barriers, disinterest in their academics due to class choice and/or due to failing grades, and more (Fashola & Slavin, 1997). Other barriers to success at the macro-level may include “high poverty, language issues, and recent immigration status have been shown to relate to higher drop-out rates for Latinos (Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004). Two alumni shared experiences of needing to place their educational aspirations due to a parents’ loss of employment giving them the responsibility to take on helping to make ends meet within their household. However, for one alumnus, Penelope, it was after high school graduation putting their higher education goals on pause while the other, Ashley, was during their senior year of high school. Another alumnus, Rosa, recounted family tensions as adding to their stress in school, having them move out of their family’s home and renting their own room their senior year of school. The demographics of the school district’s population is important to keep in mind when in the discussion of the youth participants’ reflections of their academic experiences. This is to put into perspective the demographical breakdown of the city in which the participants of the study reside.

Latinx youth are at risk of being placed into English Language Development (ELD) class which are also known as English Language Learning (ELL), Limited English Proficiency (LEP) and/or English as a Second Language (ESL) courses for long periods of time without the chance to be reclassified (Umansky et al., 2015). Umansky et al. (2015), in their overview of reclassification criteria across various California school districts found that many reclassification criteria were not consistent between each other. The ability of being reclassified out of ELD classes could be more difficult for some

students. Also, ELD classified students have higher rates of being placed into special education courses compared to non-ELD students (Romero-Little, Eunice, Sims, Christine, & Romero, A-dae, 2014; Umansky et al., 2015). Romero-Little et al. (2014) challenge the identification of ELD students as the education systems lack of seeing the gifts and talents of the student based on their English language proficiency stating that the idea of giftedness in the American education is “founded on Western psychology and an individual-based, competition-oriented paradigm, promotes a monocultural (Euro-American) and monolingual (English) view of giftedness that leaves no room for those besides the mainstream English-speaking learner” (166). The education system is also notorious for labeling students that affect the ability for a student to succeed based on the track that is instilled upon them and basing failing/succeeding on the norms prescribed by the dominant culture (Covarrubias, 2011; Freire, 2008). In the school districts demographics, out of the total enrollment of the district, 25% of its students are designated as LEP. Forty percent of all Hispanic students within the district are classified as LEP (Department of Education, 2016). As supported by the literature, it is difficult for youth to feel empowered to advocate for a new trajectory or to be placed on a new academic track. Also, when parents are unfamiliar with the school system, it is also difficult to get the support in having a parent advocate for their child to be reclassified or removed from a class.

Ashley, now getting ready to transfer to a four-year university, joined the teen center when she was in high school. Her family moved to the city so that she and her sister could have a better academic experience. Ashley shared that before their move, her parents were both commuting and working two jobs each in the next county over, leaving

her sister and her to their own devices after school. She shared that she felt disconnected from her parents and was starting to not do well in school. She was getting in trouble and not paying much mind to her grades. Once her parents moved their family, her mother decided to not work a second job. Although not working the second job caused finances to tighten up, Ashley shared she appreciated having her mom at home when she'd come home from school and feels that it helped rebuild their relationship and increase their communication. In high school, Ashley started attending the Teen Center and was soon recruited to the Youth Leadership Council. She stated that she did not have any friends when she first moved. She described herself as shy and introverted her first year in her new city. The YLC and Teen Center, she said, provided her with a place to belong. She met friends at the Teen Center that also went to her high school. As the Program Director started to push her towards leadership positions, she said she felt her confidence grow. She felt that she had a voice and that she was able to enact change.

In my interview with Ashley, she recounted approaching her high school counselor for two years before she was formally reclassified as being proficient in the English Language. She recounted having to take two English classes, her required English course to meet graduation requirements, as well as an ELD class. She expressed frustration in having to continuously prove herself and felt stuck in classes that did not challenge her. She had shared that she asked her counselor to reclassify her so that she could enroll in Advanced Placement (AP) English and was discouraged because of her ethnicity and her language abilities. After asking to be moved to another counselor's caseload, she was reclassified, enrolled in AP English, and then became the Teaching Assistant for that course.

“So, it was in high school, I started off taking regular classes. Um, but there were some challenges just because a lot of the forms, since I am undocumented and my parents are only Spanish speaking, um, it was really hard to get out of those seconds like English as a second language courses. So, the point where I had to fight with the counselors, and I reached out to one of my counselors and every year I was passing the exam that they would make you take just to see how fluent you were in English. But somehow, even though I was passing it the next year to come, I would have to repeat the same test and repeat the same test. And I that for two years. And I reached out to my counselor and said, I am clearly passing the test. I don't understand why I have to keep taking it over and over.”

- Ashley

Ashley’s testimony is not unique to the Latinx academic experience. The experience the alumni disclosed with this particular academic counselor shares similarities to my experience with the same academic counselor, however, ten years after my own time as a high school student. We both ultimately asked to be switched to other counselors’ caseloads. Ashley reached out to Teen Center staff and they helped her in finding the language needed to be taken seriously. She shared that she felt empowered to advocate for herself and that she used the skills she gained in her leadership positions to help herself.

“ So basically, I would have to take each semester, two English classes, the basic one and then the regular one. So, they (parents) were like, well why don't you reach out? And at

that point in time, the high school like doesn't really have a good reputation of counselors. So, I was like, they're not going to reach out to me if I don't want to keep taking these classes. I have to go and advocate for myself because my parents can't do it for me. They barely speak any English. So, at that point when I was already in all these leadership positions, I had to be that leader for myself and advocate for myself. So, I walk myself to the counselor's office and I scheduled an appointment. during my time at High School, the first counselor that I initially had, I had no relationship with. And if I was a first generation student, I knew that I needed that extra support as more marginalized students. So once again, I advocated for myself and I asked to be switched with a different counselor. She was so encouraging throughout the last two years of high school and I saw her as a role model and since we developed much more of like a friendship, she knew my background story and like where I came from and she really expressed how much she wanted to see me succeed and knew that it wasn't fair if I was already passing the test, why would I still be having to prove my prove, my fluency in English? So, taking that extra step.”

- Ashley

Although the school counselor can become a barrier to the success of students, it should be noted that many counselors are inundated with a caseload of hundreds of students at a time, leaving their job to be focused on the clerical aspects of the job (balancing students' course schedules, meeting the needs of Individual Education Plans, etc.) rather than being able to take the time to build the rapport necessary to meet the needs of the individual student (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Within this school district, 40% of all the Hispanic students are classified as LEP (Department of Education, 2016).



The college readiness of the LEP students in this district is alarming, as less than 10% are enrolled in Gifted/Talented programs and only 1% report taking the ACT or SAT (Department of Education, 2016). Mentioned by both alumni and the present youth participants is the lack of parent understanding of the school system, and also the expectations and rigor of the class (Roosa et al., 2012). Latinx students may not be pushed out of school due to the inability to succeed but may be the schools lack of interest in their achievement and/or they may be lost in the cracks. In the focus group with the present youth participants, a theme that surfaced was their parents' surprise at the difficulty of their classes and/or empathy once they returned to school.

“Like, especially if you're first generation too, like it's, it's gonna be hard. Like you don't know what to do, where to go, who to ask for help. Whereas if you're like, oh, maybe you're the second generation, like you have support from the first generation with, you know, what you're doing in a sense.”

“For me it's changed just because my mom has like a, I used to be like a, what's it called? An only child. But like once, like my brother that came in, uh, she's been kind of like, oh well, like, uh, a its kind of hard getting money now. So, uh, she started taking like college classes and the thing is like, I'm pretty advanced in math, so, but like she was like, Oh yeah, you're, advance at math you're good at math and whatever, math is probably easy. And once she started going into college, she got like, placed in like low math and then she's started seeing the math that I was doing and all of a sudden you now like, her attitude changed towards me. She was like, “oh, Whoa, I like, this is really hard. This is really

difficult.” So, she just kind of started like respecting me, like kind of like, oh, just go at your own pace. Like if I say like, dude, try harder. Like just, I know it's really hard because even for me it's really difficult to even do this kind of math. So that's kind of how it changed for me.”

This reflects Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) discussion on ecological transitions involves “a change in role, that is, in the expectations for behavior associated with particular positions in society” (6). Bronfenbrenner (1979) explores the connections between various settings and how much information is known by the networks within those settings for developing youth. For example, upon entering the American school system, how much do the parents and their child know about the expectations or what is necessary to be successful within its realms ((Bronfenbrenner, Urie, 1979, 6). Through the Teen Center’s resources, the more recent alumni and current teen centers share that they were made more aware of their educational options.

For the purpose of this study, the demographics of the school district is used to paint a picture of the academic environment the youth live. To fully unpack the experience within their educational institute would be another study completely, however, in this study, I am focusing on the role the Teen Center plays in helping its participants navigate the educational pipeline. Roosa et al. (2012) identifies the importance Mexican American youth place on obtaining guidance from role models within their families. Most of the youth participants disclosed that they were referred to the teen center by family members (i.e. siblings and/or cousins). This creates a familial community within the teen center of many members after seeing the success of their own

family members. In the focus group, five current members are the younger siblings of alumni of the program. Also, current participants shared that they utilize the free tutoring services and computer lab provided by the Teen Center to help complete their work and/or obtain extra support in various subjects in school.

Of the alumni interviewed, all have continued in higher education. The majority of the alumni that responded to the interview request are currently pursuing their bachelor's degree. Three are currently enrolled in the local community college, two are in a four-year university, one alumnus is transferring to a four year university, and three graduated from a four-year university after transferring from the local community college. All the alumni currently at a 2-year college have desires to transfer to a four-year university. Of the current participants, all expressed a desire to attend a college or university upon graduating high school. None of the current participants indicated a desire to work full-time post-high school graduation or to obtain vocational training. The school district shows that 31.6% of the Hispanic population took the SAT or ACT in the 2015-2016 academic year (Department of Education, 2016). Only 0.5-2% of students enrolled in ELD courses took the SAT or ACT that same academic year (Department of Education, 2016). This is concerning as it brings to light the access to being provided an access to post-secondary education options being limited, either due to courses that will prepare for continuation and/or the knowledge that there are options to their courses.

Within the focus group, the current participants shared their utilization of support from the youth center as a means to feeling supported in the academics. The youth identified the Program Director and Family Outreach as key members in helping to navigate their academic expectations to for college readiness. The program asks that the

participants provide updates of their grades and academic standings as a means to help in support of the youth's academic goals. The Program Director, who oversees the YLC program, shared the use of progress reports as a way to hold students accountable but to also aid in observing changes in the students' academic statuses as a way to intervene if students begin to fall behind. Through the collection of the participants' GPAs, 7 participants saw an increase in their overall GPA scores from the end of their Spring 2018 semester to the end of their Fall 2018 semester, 2 stayed within the same range, and 2 participants saw a decrease in their overall GPA. The most significant difference in GPA score was a 2-point increase. Another interesting aspect of the GPA's of three members having GPAs that exceed the 4.0 mark. Of these students, they disclosed being enrolled in dual-enrollment and/or Advanced Placement courses offered by their high school or have been/are enrolled in courses at the community college. In the post-survey, more students indicated taking AP courses than the pre-survey, however, the majoring of students indicated that they were enrolled in College-Prep courses. None of the responses reflected being enrolled in ELD classes for the Fall 2018 semester, compared to 1 response for the Spring 2018 semester.

In the pursuit of higher education, finances and access can be a barrier. The recent participants acknowledged their socioeconomic statuses in our discussion and how a higher education could help change their families' living situations. Education is seen as a way out. A way of moving forward, economically, and in their social standings (Anthony P. Carnevale & Megan L. Fasules, 2017). Many shared that their parents discuss higher education as a means to have better jobs than what they see their parents working and as a means to have access to better living situations. However, when a

current member discussed how her parents discuss her pathway to higher education as not only being able to have greater job options but as a means to helping her family financially as an adult. One participant shared how her parents joke that it will help her afford to buy them a new house later. This particular comment resonated with most of the participants. They all laughed and agree but there was also an underlining tension of expectation to provide for their families through their access to educational opportunities.

“Well for me it's also my parents because they weren't born here and my mom's always talking to me about how I'm supposed to go to college so I can have a better job than what she's doing right now. And then say with my dad, because we're a low income family so I have to like do better so I can help them out in the future”

“I find the same pressure from that like ... And sometimes they do this jokingly. Because my parents, they expect so much and sometimes like they do this jokingly like, like we expect you to have such a, like a really good job. And like I'd be waiting for my house when you get older, like you're going to buy me a house and like there's like this pressure on me to be like ... do I actually have to buy them a house I don't know, it's, it's, it's like, it's hard. Yeah.”

Another barrier to access discussed was the difficulty to attend after-school SAT/ACT preparation courses and/or meeting with university outreach and recruitment specialists. However, all traditional high schools in the area post schedules of college outreach and recruitment specialist schedules in the College and Career rooms. The lack

of students knowing of when these presentations are happening could be attributed to many factors. One factor may be that the youth do know about these opportunities but forgot about them at the time of the focus group or knew them by another name. Another factor, the classes the youth are enrolled in may not be given the reminders about the presentations or the permission to miss class to attend. Additionally, the youth or their guardians may not know where to look for a schedule of university outreach and recruitment specialists. Regardless of the barrier, the reality for this particular group, there is a thirst for more information on what their options could be.

When asked of this opportunity to receive SAT/ACT prep, a current participant answered:

“Yes, but it's just cause like it's always like afterschool and like I don't have a ride on my transportation and go there cause it's always late at night. And then like if it is like, oh your parenting has to be with you by my parents who were constantly so it's not like they can get a day off and be like, oh yeah, we'll go and support you. It's like you did like this. They supported me either way, but like, it's just really hard when you don't have the transportation to go right”

Currently, the local community college has an opportunity for students graduating from any local high school to obtain their first two years enrolled completely free of charge. This financial program was enacted the 2016-2017 academic year. Students graduating prior to 2016 cannot obtain this program retroactively. This opportunity is open to all students, regardless of citizenship, granted undocumented students meet

AB540 requirements. The program pays for all course fees, student (athletics, health, etc.) fees, and all books/materials needed for a class. In the surveys, some of the current students indicated wanting to attend a 4-year college, however, the discussion of financial burden to do so straight out of high school surfaced during the focus group. The youth discussed that the community college seems to be their best option because of its ability to save them money. This came with a mixture of positive feelings towards being given this opportunity, but some youth also expressed wishing to have the option to attend a 4-year university without the financial barrier.

“My friend was talking about going to some private college in New York City and then I think the best option for me is CC right now cause I don't know what I want to do but if I had the money, I think that it just experimenting would be fun to have that experience I guess Sometimes it's hard but yeah.”

“I think like for like American wise, like if you are white and you do have the money, like I think it's just easy for you because your parents can contact so many people to help you. And for first gen? Yeah, it's a struggle and everything, but you eventually figure it out. But it also like sucks if your second because if the first generation was like at a high pedestal and you'd have to meet those standards, it's more like, okay, I know what I'm doing, but I just can't meet up to the standards that they put up for my like family in a way. If that makes sense.”

For the alumni, the discussion of financial barriers provided the different realities of the high price tag to attend a post-high school institution. Three of the alumni graduated high school before the opportunity was provided by the community college. Penelope was forced to take time away from school to focus on financial helping her parents make ends meet. She had initially enrolled in a summer program at the community college, but because of the new financial responsibility placed upon her, Penelope step away from school worked 3 jobs at the local mall for the next couple of years. Another alumnus, Melissa, enrolled at a private 4-year institution out of high school, having been given scholarships and a helpful financial aid package. However, due to financial barriers, she left the university to attend the community college. Paul, an alumnus from the graduating class after Melissa and Penelope, left to attend a 4-year university in a different city. Rosa, an alumnus who had the opportunity to utilize the community college's financial promise, opted to attend the same private 4-year university that Melissa once attended. Rosa was given scholarships, financial aid, and is working 2 part-time positions to help fund her education. Another alumnus, Sara, having graduated high school in 2007, shared that she attended the local community college for 5 years, from which she received 2 Associate degrees, before transferring to obtain her Bachelor of Arts from a state university.

“So, I did go straight from, I went to school at CC over the summer. So right after I graduated, I started summer 2014 at CC and I took classes up until the spring of 2015 and then I took a break because I had to work full time job and a part time job to be able to, um, help my family out because my dad lost his job so I couldn't, um, he was without a job



for a couple months. And so, I was the only person bringing an income home. Um, so I didn't go to school then and I went back fall of 2017 I believe. So, I missed about a year and a half of school, almost two. And right now, I am working on getting my AA in psychology, so hopefully I can be finished. I should be finished by this, um, fall of 2018.”

- Penelope

“So right after high school I went to Westmont College for two and a half years and then, um, tuition kept going up and my financial aid kept going down, so I couldn't afford to pay \$56,000 a year. So, I moved on over to city college and I've been there for a year. Yeah, a year. I'm starting my half year here and I graduate next semester. So yeah, I mean a little setback. It's going to be with an a, not a BS, but slowly I'm getting there.”

- Melissa

Ashley is finishing her time at the community college with plans to transfer to a public university Fall of 2019. Having a sister, a year ahead of her in school, she was fearful of being unable to attend the community college because of the costs being that her parents were inundated with helping to support her sister in the nursing program. She had plans to take a semester, or a few, away from school after high school graduation to work and save money to attend school. She obtained a part-time job at the local mall and began working after school during her senior year. She shared that although she knew it was going to be difficult, she knew it would be necessary to reach her educational goals and did not want to stress her parents out. However, she acknowledged how much the community college's efforts to provide a full-expense paid opportunity ended up being a

great relief. The opportunity came to be known at the end of her senior year, thus relieving her of having to delay her college education and the ability to not work the rest of her senior year of high school. This also allowed her the flexibility in her time to attend a summer program to help recent high school graduates to transition to college.

In line with the experiences of the alumni, Latinx are showing higher enrollment numbers in college and universities. The increased enrollment, however, does not guarantee success (Anthony P. Carnevale & Megan L. Fasules, 2017). The retention rate of Latinx is less promising. As previously stated, of 56% Latinx individuals obtain their high school diploma from which only 27% will continue to college (Covarrubias, 2011, 92). Ten percent will remain in school to achieve their bachelor's degree and the statistics for further education begin to diminish significantly (2% for completion of a master's degree and 0.2% for a doctoral degree (Covarrubias, 2011, 92). The youth and the alumni share the odds stacked against them in their ability to succeed, however, due to changes in policies and investment of the community, the current participants may be able to see a light at the end of the tunnel, at least in obtaining their education at the community college level. In our discussion of financial barriers, there was no mention of financial ability after their first two years of college.

## **Mental Health**

The Youth Leadership Council is structured as a program with high expectation of responsibilities and positive academic achievement. The program asks students to maintain a 2.0 GPA to remain active. What happens when this is not met? The Program Director and Family Outreach Coordinator work collaboratively to help the students meet

the academic requirements. The Program Director will pull the participant aside and have a private meeting with the student. This meeting is not to chastise the student or to tell them that they are now unable to continue active membership. On the contrary, the Program Director takes a restorative approach in trying to understand what caused the participant to lose traction. In past conversations, students have disclosed stressors (familial, immigration, feeling overwhelmed), bullying, traumatic events, or that they are struggling to understand their classes. The Teen Center wants to help the youth succeed and that often means by taking on a wrap-around approach. The Program Director and the rest of the Teen Center staff express that they care about the well-being of the youth, that goes beyond their programs. This is evident by the formation of the Family Outreach Coordinator position. This position was created due to having parents of program participants coming to the Teen Center for help in navigating the education system. Parents, many, if not most being mono-lingual Spanish speakers, did not understand why their child was being sent home with a disciplinary note, how to support in their academics, confused why their child was unable to meet with their school counselor. The Outreach Coordinator acts as the liaison between the school and the parent, often attending meetings with parents to help translate or to help in advocating for the needs of the family.

The Teen Center also recognizes that the Youth Leadership Council may not be for every participant that walks through their doors. They offer art classes, music lessons, flamenco classes, fitness programming, and large recreational areas filled with video games, foosball tables, and tables for students to interact with each other. It is a means to help instill positive self-images for the participants by allowing exploration to realms

they may explore in. This is to help decrease the risk of poor mental health for participants and allowing a safe place to decompress from the challenges in their lives. The Teen Center staff collaborates with various local mental health resources in a Mental Health Taskforce, meeting monthly at the Teen Center while the youth are at school, to brainstorm and build networks to better support youth within the community as a whole. This is a place of sharing and learning about different resources and approaches to ensure the safety and positive growth the community's youth.

The teens face challenges and barriers not only academically, but emotionally that may impede their success. Participants expressed difficulties with family structures as a means to feeling confident or supported. One participant, shared through emotions, that it can be hard to meet the standards that her parents hold for her. She shared that her older sister, an alumna of the YLC program, was a high achiever in high school, however, for the current student, it is difficult to understand content at school. She expressed the difficulty of being constantly compared to her sister:

“like I'm like slow and it takes a long time for me to realize things and my sister was quick. And then my parents like sometimes they're like, oh yeah, why can't you be like ... They don't say that but ... They just like, you should be more like my sister, but like I can't, like I'm trying to do, but I can't, so I feel pressure”

Other teens also expressed feeling pressured to follow, if not excel past, the pathway that their older siblings marked for them. One participant expressed how her sister's legacy, holding the office of president in YLC, is sometimes hard to live up to and/or an expectation she does not want. Another expressed the comparison to his

brother. The pressure to succeed and/or to excel the examples provided to them can be overwhelming. The comparison to their siblings was described as being disheartening and a loss of individuality. In conversations with the Program Director, there was the priority of providing siblings of past participants the space to grow individually. The Program Director watches for changes in mood, dedication, and/or grades and indicators to intervene and check-in with a youth. At times, after speaking with the youth, the Program Director and/or the Family Outreach Coordinator have met with parents to discuss their concerns and provide support in how to better support the youth's growth as an individual. In the description of the comparison to their sibling, most would look down at the table when speaking, their eyes would water, or their voices would tense. The youth appear to internalize their frustrations and take it as a personal failure when they do not meet their parents' expectations.

“Like my sister and she has a best friend and they're like really close and like my parents are always comparing me to them. Like why can't I take Like honors classes and things like that. Like if I can't well, they just always say that we're not trying hard enough and that gets me mad. And then ... yeah.”

“Yeah, I feel a lot of pressure to be like my sister or do more than her. Like she claims that like I can do better things than her, but like my mom and my dad are always like, okay, you have to do better you have to do more. Oh, you be like your sister. Yeah. Yeah, that's a lot of pressure.”

“Like my brother. Cause like my brother had straight A's student, he was in so many like that, so many scholarships and like, like he was in higher classes and everything. Like he could have graduated early but he just didn't like for me at least like I'm not taking that, those advanced classes that. He did. I did not win as much awards as he did like one like at home, like if you get an award, my parents put it on the wall and like most of it is his like I don't have any up there and all of them were from high school and it's my last year of high school it's just like nerve wracking and just like wow, I didn't do what they wanted me to do, which makes like I dunno it difficult.”

Two quotes shared above are from the younger sisters of two alumni. Of the two alumni, Rosa was the only that responded for the request to be interviewed. Rosa, enrolled in a 4-year university, has aspirations of attending medical school. She worked tirelessly through high school, the oldest of three, to be the first to attend college. The staff and I were constantly worried about her mental health and checked in often to validate that she had a lot on her plate and that it was okay to take a break. When she was not leading as the President of the YLC, Rosa was taking AP classes, enrolled in evening French-language courses at the local community college, and working part-time at a local grocery store. Her senior year, tensions rose at home, and she moved out and began renting a room. She had the opportunity to attend a 4-year university in Arizona, which we were all hoping she would accept so that she may escape the familial pressures to take care of everyone, however, she decided against it due to her parents' fears of the state's immigration laws. She decided to stay local and although she's living on campus, she

still is expected to come home on the weekends to be with her family and to help support her siblings.

Her younger sister is now a junior in high school. She expressed in the focus group how her parents compare her to her sister a lot and how her sister can sometimes add to the pressure because of how high performing she was in high school. The younger sister, starting the semester with a 4.33 GPA and ending with a 4.67 expressed being overwhelmed with pressure and expectations placed on her. She too is enrolled in evening classes at the community college, taking AP courses, but is not working a part-time job as Rosa did. Rosa is very involved in helping her choose courses that will stand out on her college applications and helps her pick which teachers she should take while in school or how to balance her schedule. The Program Director keeps a watchful eye on the current participant because although they are sisters, she acknowledges that they are different and does not want to place more expectations on her than she would any other youth. Rosa and her sister have different ways of handling stress. Rosa, starting from a young age, was expected to act as the third parent in her family. Her sister has more flexibility to enjoy her youth.

Although, on paper, the outcome of such a high GPA is fantastic, the program needs to stay vigilant as to what that may mean for the participant's mental health. Are they being pushed too hard? Are they being held to a standard that is unrealistic or not the norm that is being placed on others in the program? Comparatively speaking, another current participant started with a 1.58 GPA at the beginning of the Fall semester and ended with a 3.33 GPA. In contrast, this student benefitted from the structure and the pressure to succeed provided by the YLC program. Prior to the start of the school year, he

was experience structural changes to his family, his father became absent, and his mother was working hard to provide for their family. He started to gain guidance from the Teen Center staff and in order to maintain his position on the YLC, he needed to bring his grades up to a 2.5 minimum. He made use of the Teen Center's tutoring program and also joined the AVID program at his school, after being pointed in that direction by the Family Outreach Coordinator. In this context, to see such a great jump is representative of the structure and importance of the expectations placed on the program participants. The program's ability to build a relationship with each child helps to influence the type of mentorship and support they are providing to the youth. Yes, in the example of the alumni's younger sister, she is doing great academically, but her needs may need to be sure that she is not overwhelming herself and placing inconceivable pressures to succeed on herself. Whereas the big increase in GPA of the second youth is testament that pressure for academic success through membership to the YLC is a positive approach.

Some of the teens expressed the pressure to succeed due to their immigration status. Many of the students are first-generation Mexican-Americans, noting that their parents moved to the United States to provide a better life for them. There is a pressure of acknowledge the sacrifices. There is a pressure of a dream that is not just their own to take the opportunities given to them through educational access and extracurriculars. This is difficult, as acculturative stress suggests, that the teens are caught between two worlds and cultures with different expectations. Again, acculturation stress is "the result of one's culture of origin interacting with host culture values, attitudes, customs, and behaviors" which are exacerbated by "exposure to racial or ethnic discrimination" constituting "daily stress" (Cervantes et al., 2012, 188; Romero & Roberts, 2003; Berry, 1991). The youth



feel that the Teen Center staff can empathize or truly understand their experiences due to their shared culture. They do not have to explain in detail where the foundation of these cultural stressors is rooted as the Teen Center staff know the cultural barriers that come with navigating the American culture versus the Latino culture. There is a community approach to providing the youth with a network approach but also in helping to approach the youth's parents in providing supportive care and understanding to their child.

The Teen Center staff also intervenes when their participants have experienced traumas. The staff has heard participants' accounts of abuse, mental health disorders, suicidal ideations, and/or fear for their safety. In the surveys more teens stated feeling safe at the Teen Center than at school. When asked who they can turn to in times in need the youth responded with "people like our alumni from colleges. PAL tutors, the PAL staff". The board members also describe the importance of having the participants' well-being in the center of the experience at the youth center. A common theme for the interviewed board members was their choice to be involved in the Teen Center's governing body based on wanting to provide a safe place for the youth in the community to excel.

"Gosh, so many, so safe first and foremost, um, place for students to interact with adults where the adults are conscious that they can make a difference and that they're being watched as role models. Um, the, the positive purpose of the teen center. So, between the, the classes and the tutoring and the fun, the joy, the, every time I walk in there, there's laughter and there's talking and there's connections being made. It, that positive environment for particularly for teenagers is so important."

- Board member's response to why they decided to be on the Teen Center's board of directors.

### **Finding: Cultivating a "Sense of Belonging", Mental Health, and Community for Teen Center Youth**

Feeling as though they belong to a community or that their presence makes a difference is an important factor in the youth feeling supported and having a positive view on their self-confidence and self-image. At the Teen Center, the youth participants feel supported and heard by the adults. They feel that they are taken seriously. More of the teens indicated in their surveys that they felt that they mattered at the Teen Center than they did at school. Some of the teens indicated that they were active in extracurricular activities at their school. Most stated that their main extracurricular activities were through the Teen Center. When asked why they were not active in the student government on their campuses, the youths' answers indicated that they did not feel that welcomed based on their ethnicity to take part in the student government. Others stated that they were more inclined to engage in the Youth Leadership Council because they felt more comfortable at the Teen Center, having known people there longer, and feeling that they were in the company of others that look like them (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

"Um, I just feel like comfortable here. Like I've known a lot of these people for a long time and there's a lot of people here that like, like look like me or like, I don't know. Yeah. Or like come from a similar background. So, like it just seems more comfortable for me."

“Our voice actually stands here. Like when we say something like, it’ll actually be taken it serious and like say I say it at school. Like not everyone’s takes it serious”.

When asked if they feel that they are discriminated against because of their race or ethnicity in school, barring them from accessing opportunities on campus, on the surveys the teens indicated that they did not feel discriminated against. However, within the focus group, the teens expressed situations in which they felt that teachers had preferential treatment for their white classmates or would provide greater assistance to white students. The teens also indicated they felt teachers would reprimand Mexican students that engage in the same behaviors as their white classmates, such as talking in class. This may create a divide and feelings of inferiority amongst the youth in their success, thus affecting their ability to succeed in their academics. In seeing the differing responses to the topic of discrimination on race, I believe the ability to feel safe and hearing the stories of others, provided a group effect amongst the focus group. In answering the survey, the youth may not have understood the question or may not have perceived that they had been discriminated. However, as the conversation in the focus group focused on the topic of discrimination, academic experience, and school culture, the understanding of discrimination may have become clearer or the youth could have related to the stories of others sitting at the table.

“I mean they think they're better than us cuz like say they've got more money or like I don't know and if you're in an AP class majority is white. It's obvious. it's white. Yeah. And it's kind of like from me at least, I have like a certain AP teacher who kind of put all

the brown kids in one area and all the white kids because majority was white and they have more privilege because they were like, and then like they're expected to like pass and everything because they're white they just have more privileges than we do.”

“Well in my group of friends, we're all in an AP class, um, sometimes we were never really called on to like project our voice and be like, this is what we think on this point of view. This is what we think of a story that this and this doesn't really happen as much as white kids.”

“And if you're in an AP class majority is white. It's obvious. it's white. Yeah. And it's kind of like from me at least, I have like a certain AP teacher who kind of put all the brown kids in one area and all the white kids because majority was white and they have more privilege because they were like, and then like they're expected to like pass and everything because they're white they just have more privileges than we do.”

“So like in first period it's health and the teacher has a table of like all white kids. And like ... saying I'm talking and like I'm not going to say I don't talk cause I do talk, but like if I'm talking, she always like right away she gets me in trouble. Or like tells me you're gonna go to the office or things like that. But say there's like white kids talking, she doesn't tell them anything like she'll like ... She always points us out more than them.”

The Teen Center staff has played an important role in the success of the teens not only in their educational abilities but in providing positive self-love and confidence. The

teens have expressed that the teen center feels like a community or a family to them. In Latino cultures, familismo is an important value that is held to high regard amongst individuals. Also, it is seen that adolescents find support and build strong relationships with their extended family, not just relying on their immediate family members. In this way, the Teen Center staff and board members have become an extended family for the youth. The staff and board members are known to attending important life events (religious ceremonies, quinceñeras, graduations, etc.) for the youth as a show of support but also as a means to express their care for their individuality. The support does not end after the participant reaches 18 and ages out of the program.

Many of the alumni have returned to either work at the Teen Center or be mentors to the youth. At this time, the Teen Center staffs 4 alumni, 3 from the Youth Leadership Council and 1 from the Police Explorers program. Melissa recalls that she came to the Teen Center after her grandmother took guardianship of her in junior high. She found a community and her voice from being a member of the Teen Center. She now works at the Teen Center and says that now she is able to be a role model to the present youth and takes that position seriously. The board members have taken hands on roles in looking over the college applications of various participants. Board members have also used their networks in the community to help the teens obtain jobs that will help in their career development. For me, the board of directors provided me with a scholarship my senior year of high school, presenting it to me at their fundraising event, where a donor then double the amount in the middle of my acceptance of the award.

When Penelope was struggling to make ends meet for her family and working 3 drops while putting her educational goals on hold, the Teen Center staff continued to

check in on her and provide emotional support in the best way they could. The staff and board members worked together to create a paid position for Penelope to not only help her have stability that will increase her resume but also so that she could return to school. Penelope is now set to graduate from the community college this year. Rosa is now in her second year at the private university. After seeing the financial struggles that Melissa had to endure, the Teen Center staff came together to help Rosa find financial support to ensure success. Rosa works for a board member's business on the weekends and has just been hired on at the Teen Center as staff.

The support does not stop at academic support. In times of trauma or crisis, the Teen Center pulls from its network amongst the community to provide those in need with the support that they are in need of. Many of the youth trust the staff very much and trust when they bring in someone to help in whatever they may need. There is an ongoing joke amongst the Teen Center that once you're a member, you never leave. It's a sense of protection and family for anyone that has walked through those doors.

## CHAPTER 5

### POLICING AND A TEEN CENTER

Although the Teen Center is located in the downtown district of the city, just a block away from one of the busiest intersections, it is nestled on a corner with a large parking lot and along a relatively quiet, peaceful side street. However, that quiet is disrupted as soon as I walk through the front doors. The sounds of loud laughter, dozens of individual conversations, music, and the opening and closing of doors swiftly engulfs you. I walk up to the front desk to check in with Teen Center's staff to check in. Melissa and Penelope, alumni and now Teen Center staff, are usually focused on one of a couple youth participants leaning over the desk showing them something on their phone, telling them about their day, or just sharing a joke. They'll wait for that participant to finish their sentence before turning their attention to you to help you sign in or direct you to the person you are there to meet. The Program Director's office is usually filled with participants, getting ready for an upcoming event or working on homework. The Family Outreach Coordinator is in her office talking to a parent and their child. Officer K is playing foosball with a participant and engaging in friendly competitive while other youth participants gather around the table laughing and cheering. Officer L is talking to a group of young female participants about relationships and sharing her own past experiences. Both officers in full uniform. Some of the youth come up to me, asking how I'm doing, how long I am in town, or catch me up as quickly as they can with what is going on in their life. The activities are constantly changing, but this is a brief example of what a day at the Teen Center would look like. The staff are usually checking in with the participants, "Did you finish your homework? Guitar starts in 20 minutes, but if you're

not done with your homework then you should probably head to the tutoring center.” The participant will most likely groan but will grab their backpack and head to the free computer lab.

Currently, it is not unusual to see news stories or headlines highlighting police brutality based on racial tensions and/or law enforcement agencies in the implementation of federal immigration law. There are stories of unarmed, minority individuals being shot by police or videos showing excessive force (Racial Profiling, 2019). With regards to immigration, there is hysteria and chaos caused by the differing approaches based on the policy of that particular department and their agreement to collaborate with federal authorities. This research is not to deny that these incidences do occur or that they deserve less scrutiny. In this research, I challenge the perspective that all police are evil. I challenge the generalizations and blanket statements made about law enforcement officers that create further tension in those communities that are trying to better the relationship between its residents and law enforcement. This is the case study of how one police department aims to quell tensions through the incorporation of police building rapport with the community’s youth, providing the community with chances to interact with officers in events away from the enforcement of law, and the Latinx community being a focus on relationship building.

The Teen Center, providing programs, adult role models, and a building made as a space for the youth to call their own, would not initially appear any different than other community youth centers. What does mark a stark difference with this particular Teen Center is the connection to the local police department. There are different Boys’ and Girls’ Club chapters and YMCAs, along with community centers with youth programs,



but each serve a particular neighborhood or connect with particular schools. The Teen Center is located in the downtown area of the city, within walking distance from the main city bus station and offers its own transportation from schools and to programs that may not be housed within the Teen Center. This allows youth from across the city and in neighboring communities access to the programs. The Teen Center has youth participants that attend all local junior high schools and high schools. The centralized location provides neutrality, especially for youth and families concerned with gang territories and desire for safety. Another aspect adding to the reassurance of safety is the connection with the police department and the presence of police officers within the Teen Center and at Teen Center events.

### **Overview of the Relationship between the Teen Center and the Police Department**

Although the Teen Center is supported by and connected to the police department, they are two distinct organizations and situated in two different locations. The department and the Teen Center are both located in central areas of the city, however, there is distance between the organizations, allowing for separation of identity. Due to this set-up, the police department has designed the roles of a few police officers, the Beat Coordinators, to make their presences known at the Teen Center. The Beat Coordinators are four police officers that have applied specifically for the position, interview, and are then selected based on their abilities from within the department to serve as mediators between the community and the police department. Each Beat Coordinator is assigned different patrol zones in the city. They meet with community members for a variety of non-emergency situations, attend their community meetings, community events, and the

local schools for presentations, interventions, and/or asked to present on behalf of the police department.

The Beat Coordinators assigned to the Teen Center each have a hand in the various programs provided. The Police Explorers program, housed under the Teen Center, is a leadership and career readiness program for individuals between the ages of 14-20 who are interested in pursuing a career in law enforcement. “The Explorer Post provides in-depth education in skills such as leadership, interpersonal communication, community relations, command presence, career planning, and more” (Teen Center website). The youth within this program are invited to test their skills, with the coaching and guidance provided by the Beat Coordinators, at various competitions against other police department explorer posts nationwide. The Police Explorers program and the Youth Leadership Council are the two main leadership programs within the Teen Center. Currently, none of the local high schools offer ROTC, so providing the Explorers Post fulfills a void for youth that may also have military aspirations.

The Teen Center, knowing that not all participants may be interested in participating in leadership programs, or possibly may not have the confidence or ready to join the leadership programs, provide other programs to help create a foundation to meet the needs and interests of the youth. The Teen Center and police department have also introduced programs that focus on building vocational skills, performance skills (guitar and flamenco lessons), fitness classes, and a girls' emotional support group. A vocational program the Teen Center provides is the Drag Racing Against Gangs and Graffiti (DRAGG) program. This program focuses on automotive skill training in mechanics and customization of vehicles. Participants also receive dual credit from the local community

college. The DRAGG program has provided another opportunity that allows youth to see the possibility of being successful through a craft and to validate the interest in a vocational career. The program also came to fruition because a police officer in the department was introduced to the DRAGG program at a neighboring city's police connected teen center. He campaigned to bring it to the Teen Center by getting approval by the department and networking within the community to create a partnership with a local autobody shop to provide this opportunity. Through this program, the Teen Center is also reaching out to more participants and again fulfilling a void felt by youth in the community after local high school budget cuts have seen the extraction of automotive programs.

### **Community Policing**

To increase positive relations between the public and local law enforcement which would therefore increase communication, public safety, and collaboration, the local police department has taken an active role in community participation (Thomas & Burns, 2005, 74). This has particularly been an important strategy for the current chief of police and her predecessor in attempting to create a welcoming or an approachable relationship with the immigrant community within the city, particularly in regard to the conversation of immigration and enforcing immigration law. The police department attends community/neighborhood meetings to help answer questions of what their role would be in immigration enforcement. As described by a YLC alumnus that worked at the police department until last year, the chief of police sent department wide emails that

cemented the police department's policy as their role was to protect and serve everyone in the community, regardless of immigration status.

The police department also assigns a school resource officer (SRO) to the local public schools within its jurisdiction. This officer responds to community service and most non-emergency calls to service during that are specific to the schools. The SRO is meant to become a fixed figure to students. The SRO also intervenes in disciplinary actions such as contraband and weapons that may be brought to campus by a student. There are varying ideologies on the effectiveness of SROs on campus, both from the public view and department opinions ((Finn, 2006). In the context of this community, the officers assigned to the Teen Center often work collaboratively with the assigned SRO to help aid in mentorship, law enforcement, and teaching within the school community (Finn, 2006). For a time, one of the Beat Coordinators assigned to the Teen Program was also the assigned SRO.

Currently, Officer Alejandro hosts a question and answer segment on a local Spanish radio show for individuals that want to call in and maintain a level of confidentiality when asking for immigration law clarity. As a means to show their respect and inclusion of the Latinx community the police department provides extra security during the city's annual Spanish-themed festival and by hosting an annual menudo festival. The Menudo Festival, having police officers in uniform interacting with community members, is an event where the police department invites various restaurants in the community to compete to be named to have the Best Menudo in town. The proceeds made in this event go to the Teen Center programs but also brings free promotion to the restaurants involved. Officer Alejandro, being well connected in the

community, is often approached by Latinx business owners who want to give back and be a part of the Menudo Festival, whether it be through donating tents, tables or chairs, or providing their time as musical entertainment. The community's eager involvement and the positive reception received annually is a testament to the trust given to Officer Alejandro and the community's desire support positive youth activities.

The police department also hosts a community policing program twice a year called the Citizens' Academy. The Citizens' Academy is facilitated by the Beat Coordinators to teach community members about their rights as residents within the community. The use of "citizen" in the name does not mean the attendee must have proof of documentation or be a legal U.S. citizen. Instead, it refers to being a citizen/resident of the community. Attendees of the academy are able to participate in scenarios with and watch demonstrations from SWAT, the hostage negotiation team, routine traffic stops, K-9 officers, and the detective unit. This allows space for citizens to learn the many layers and facets of a police department and to ask questions to be answered by the police directly. The academy is presented in both English and Spanish.

Also employed by the department are civilians that work within their Restorative Policing Unit. Restorative Policing personnel work with the transient population and individuals in need of mental health assistance. They have connections with the county mental health services and mental health emergency response team. This program allows individuals with specialized training to provide services and resources to a vulnerable population within the community that deserve the utmost respect and approachable access to care. The police department recognizes that the average patrol officer is not an expert in the needs specific to the transient community and/or those that are in of mental

health care. Another civilian position to help in creating communication and awareness amongst the community is the Citizen Policing Program. This is a network of volunteers, mostly elderly individuals, that disseminate information such as upcoming townhall meetings, how to report a crime to police, and more. The police department also engages the community in events such as “Coffee with a Cop”, a set time at a local coffee shop to have space to have discussions with officers, and “Tip-a-Cop”, a similar concept but with a fundraising aspect where police officers serve patrons at supporting restaurants.

### **Immigration Enforcement and Education**

The police department, due to its community policing efforts, has made great efforts to impress upon the residents within the city limits that their safety and protection is of the department’s utmost importance, not checking documentation status. Each officer interviewed for study used call of services for domestic violence as their example to distinguish their role as law enforcers not immigration enforcers. In similar fashion, each presented the scenario of approaching the scene and the victim of an assault being nervous to speak to police officers due to fear of revealing their immigration status. In each description, the officer expressed how they hope to minimize the amount of fear by expressing their role of wanting to keep the individual safe and that they do not care about the documentation status.

“We treat them just as much as we would treat a US citizen or anything like that. So I know that that's been a huge conversation in a lot of our Spanish speaking academies and so we try and make it clear like if you need 911 call 911 we're not going to not help you

because you don't have a green card or you're not a US citizen or anything like that. Like that is not our goal.”

- Officer L

“And you could tell before we roll into that ... a person's apartment and if the domestic is a Spanish speaking or the Spanish community, their greatest fear would be, oh, are we ICE agents or a state or federal agents? And, uh, instantly I think in the first couple of sentences I'd be like, you know what? I don't care what country you're from. I don't care what color you are. We're here, uh, because of a report of violence, which is domestic violence. And you can instantly tell if they're undocumented or they're not allowed to be in this country, uh, that they are not worried to report that because that's the worst thing. If you're a victim or a survivor and then you're worried about getting deported. So, you're not cause domestic violence charge here, here, you're going to be victimized so many times.”

- Officer B

In the last year, the Beat Coordinators have seen an increase of requests from local churches and community centers to have presentations and discussions based on immigration enforcement and the police department's role. There is confusion amongst the community on what power each law enforcement agency possess, and which agency is working in congruence with the federal government. In asking the youth and adult participants, not including the law enforcement officers, if they were able to describe the

differences between local, state, and federal law enforcement, none discussed the level of involvement in immigration enforcement each possessed, if any.

Although the police department exercises a pro-sanctuary approach to policing, they are also following the example of the municipal government. In 2003, the city passed a resolution that was in opposition of the federal government's Patriot Act. This resolution marked the city's stance in its belief that the Patriot Act was a threat to the civil rights of its residents and was written in support of protecting the community. The resolution also indicates the city's expectation that the police department will use their position of power as a means to protect all the residents of the city, regardless of documentation status:

“[The City] affirms the policies and practices of the City's Police Department, and all City departments, of respecting and protecting freedoms of speech, religion, assembly, and privacy; upholding and advancing the presumption of innocence; acting at all times with due respect for the equality of all people, irrespective of race, religion, ethnic identity, or national origin; protecting residents from unreasonable searches and seizures; and guaranteeing the right to counsel and due process in judicial proceedings.”

- A Resolution of the City Council of the City Regarding the Protection of Civil Rights and Liberties and Expressing Concerns Regarding the USA PATRIOT Act (Public Law 107-56)

To discuss immigration enforcement within the context of this city we have to delve into the timeline of immigration reform bills that have been passed at the federal and state level. These particular cases and laws helped to shape the context and anti-



immigrant rhetoric in current political discussions and the ways in which immigrant families, documented or not, In 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court (*Plyler v. Doe*) ruled that every person has a right to education, regardless of legal status. This is especially important in this context of immigration as the Court expressed “that undocumented children are ‘persons’ under the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution and thus can assert claims under the Education Protection Clause” (Gonzales, 2008, 5). The court case came in response to a Texas state law enacted in 19875 that restricted “free elementary, junior high and high school education to U.S. citizens and foreigners legally in the country” (Nashua Telegraph, 1981).

In 1994, California passed the initiative *Save Our State (SOS)*, also known as Proposition 187. The proposition required individuals seeking health care (non-emergency), social services, and education must complete a citizenship screening system. The access to free, public education affected the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels of education (Margolis, 1994). Proponents of the initiative felt that with public education institutions becoming overcrowded, the state could not undertake, financially, the growing student populations, especially if the students included undocumented individuals, for which the state was not being reimbursed (Margolis, 1994). This was California’s response to the federal government that it would not support undocumented individuals and that the country was in need of stricter immigration reform, especially following the economic decline of 1990 (Margolis, 1994). Proposition 187 challenged the terminology used the *Plyler v. Doe* ruling in challenging the notion that although the “the U.S. Supreme Court decision declared that equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment protects everyone within a state’s border, regardless of

immigration status”, the ruling did not state “whether ‘equal protection’ for illegal alien children included the same education available to U.S.-citizen children” (Martin, 1995, 257). The initiative placed school administrators in a position of immigration enforcement as they were asked to “forward the names of suspected illegal immigrant children and parents to the INS, the California Attorney General, and the California Superintendent of Public Instruction” (Margolis, 1994, 371). This initiative also ordered that law enforcement agencies were to work in collaboration with INS in the enforcement of federal immigration law. The reaction from the community was widespread. Public services saw a decrease in individuals seeking needed services and fear amongst the immigrant community, particularly the Latinx and Asian communities (Suárez-Orozco, 1996; Margolis, 1994). Suárez-Orozco (1996) identified that there was also fear by documented immigrants that they will be profiled or identified as undocumented to officials based on having an accent, racial profiling, or due the xenophobia spreading against the immigrant community.

The influences of the previous legislation at the state level created fears and pressures for students. As continuously stated in my research, the Latinx student population is the largest growing group within the state of California’s public-school system. With fear to attend school due to the risk of status becoming known and reported, students had greater barriers standing in their way to achieve academic success. The fear was not just for those that are undocumented, but also for those that may be documented but have a mixed-documentation status family. Not all schools followed through with sharing documentation status, but the distrust within the community was apparent. In June 1999, Governor Gray Davis turned over the Proposition 187. California’s Assembly

Speaker Antonio Villaraigosa said, “The decision ensures that children can get an education, working families can get health care, and law enforcement can focus on fighting crime. We stand together today to say in one loud voice that Californians are tired of wedge issues and culture wars” (ACLU, 1999). However, the repeal only gave protections to elementary and secondary schools. In order to provide access to education at the post-secondary level, Governor Davis approved of the California Nonresident Tuition Exemption, Assembly Bill (AB) 540, allowing “students interested in attending eligible California Colleges, Universities and Career Education Programs to apply for state financial aid (“AB 540,”; “California Dream Act Application,”). Thus, allowing students that meet its provisions of having attended a California high school for at least three years, graduated from a CA high school after attending for at least three years, registering for a CA college or university, and other provisions, the access to more educational opportunities.

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) was signed by President Barack Obama in August 2012 as federal access to higher education and a path towards lawful residence to undocumented individuals. The Obama Administration used this attempt as legitimizing and investing in individuals that grew up within the seams of our society and are just as American as an individual born in the United States. With DACA, high school graduation rates has increased by fifteen percent nationwide (Nicole Acevedo, 2018). Upon the initiation of the Trump Administration, Trump has continuously tried to recall DACA as part of his hard-stance on immigration. The Supreme Court has ruled Trump’s attempts unconstitutional and has allowed individuals

with DACA status to continue receiving the protection, however, no new applications are accepted now.

In September 2014, California Governor Jerry Brown signed State Bill 396 which essentially repealed the rest of the unenforceable provisions of Proposition 187. Ten years after the passing of Provision 187, California has since “approved driver’s licenses, state-funded college scholarships and other government benefits” for undocumented residents within the state (Margolis, 1994) SB 396 addressed the unconstitutional treatment of the immigrant community while also attempting to safeguard the community from being victimized and targeted due to bigoted, de facto immigration law enforcers. Continuing in the spirit of inclusion and protection of its undocumented residents, California passed the Senate Bill 54 in 2017. This was the written stance from the California state government claiming it as a pro-sanctuary state. The bill repealed provisions in standing laws that required that law enforcement officers would have to report the undocumented status of an arrestee to immigration authorities (CA Senate, 2017). This legislation stood in contrast to the immigration reform and anti-immigrant, anti-Latino, anti-Mexican rhetoric pushed by the Trump Administration in 2016. The Trump Administration has responded with harsh criticism and threat to localities and states that have followed suit, threatening the removal of federal monies to law enforcement agencies if they do not comply with federal immigration enforcement.

## **“Sense of Belonging”: Capturing the Intersections of Policing, Immigration, and the Mental Health of Latinx Youth**

Bringing together community policing and the various legislation provides the context to understand the intersections of law, mental health, and education and how a Latinx youth must navigate their world. The youth in the Youth Leadership Council, as well as other teens at the center, interact with police officers whenever they are at Teen Center. They have the choice to attend any other youth program in the city yet chose to attend the Teen Center. Many of the youth and alumni shared that before attending the teen center they did not trust police officers. The teens shared stories of their parents turning onto a different street when driving if they saw a police officer. They said it was not because their parent was driving poorly, but just because the thought of having a police officer close was intimidating. Some youth expressed how their parents would threaten them to grow up that if they were being bad that the police would take them away. Parents that immigrated from countries where the police could not be treated could have brought that fear to their new country or there may be distrust due to the varying and constantly changing immigration law. Some of the study participants also expressed that they did not trust the police because their interactions with them had been when their parent or family members were getting in trouble for committing a crime.

Melissa came to the Teen Center after being placed under the care of her grandmother. She moved to the city from Orange County with a not so easy early life. She shared that many of her family members have/had negative interactions with law enforcement. She was introduced to the Teen Center by her aunt. Her aunt worked for another non-profit that worked primarily with people in the community who had

affiliation to local gangs. She worked as a case worker in helping individuals obtain services and employment. After a local junior high student was stabbed and killed in the downtown area, Melissa's aunt was feeling defeated. She felt that for all the work she was doing to help the community, she was not seeing an improvement in the tensions and possibly an increase in gang activity. She did not trust police officers but was friendly with Officer Alejandro. Through Officer Alejandro, Melissa's aunt was introduced to Officer Ron. After the death of the junior high student, Officer Ron approached Melissa's aunt and offered her a staff position with the youth organization. Due to her distrust with the police and not wanting to come off as a sell-out to those she worked with, she declined. About a week later, one of her clients said, "You know you'll never change us, right?" Melissa's aunt was disheartened and feeling like she was not making a significance difference, so she reached out to Officer Ron to see if the offer was still available. It was. Melissa's aunt was hired on as a teen center staff in 2008. She is now the Program Director and oversees all programs within the Teen Center.

Melissa's aunt shares how she lost a lot of friends due to her taking the position with the youth program. She shares with the youth often her story of feeling isolated but that the organization she worked so tirelessly for was toxic for her own mental health. She wanted to enact change and was given the opportunity to do so through the Teen Center. Melissa shares how it has been a shift in their family in not trusting law enforcement to now considering the program officers family. Some family members, due to their negative interactions with law enforcement, continue to distrust police and cannot understand Melissa's willingness to trust them, however, her perceptions have changed

from seeing officers as the ones who take away her family members as the ones who will help her and support her.

“Being born in Orange County and so like going into the game, he was always, oh my God, the police are here, hide or whatever, or you don't like those pigs or whatever the case is. And so, it was always everything negative was implemented in the, and my mom's like, Oh, if the police know that you're with me, they're going to take you away. And stuff like that. Or if they found out about this, they're going to take you away. So, it's always, oh, they're gonna take me away from my family. So, it wasn't really good. And so [Program Director] having worked for the police and all that stuff and having to meet one of the officers and he was a big officer in uniform [Officer Ron] and I was like, all right, so he's the one who's going to take me away. Like this was the plan all along. And he just sits there and starts joking around. And I was like, What the ... Because in everything I'd forgotten that in the end, police officers are humans just like us. They just enforced the law. So, they, it was a very like kind of hard change within me.”

- Melissa, Alumni

Coming to the United States, for many of the participants' families, came with many sacrifices and risks. Newly arrived individuals must adjust to a new community, set of social norms, language, and social systems. The difficulty to gaining access to all of these new experiences at once is overwhelming and can be inconceivable. Imagine not knowing who to call if you are a victim of a crime? Or maybe being told that if you were call the police that because of your undocumented status that you could actually get in

trouble? Or having to help your child navigate a school system in a language that you do not understand and with conflicting information on what is accessible to you or not. The parents of the youth at the Teen Center are able to get support in navigating these systems by their connection to the Teen Center. Being that the Beat Coordinators are also assigned to the programs, they are able to become a more approachable figure within the community to the parents. The officers acknowledge that the parents may feel more trusting towards their child being a participant of the Teen Center's program due to its connection to the police. This is because the police department takes more time to vet any volunteer, program instructor, or anyone coming to the Teen Center for any type of business due to the connection with law enforcement. When the parents, especially undocumented parents, feel at ease in approaching police officers for help or the staff at the Teen Center to help intervene on their behalf to better their child's academic experience, the vicarious stressors are lessened for the youth. Officer K, a monolingual English speaker, will be sure to pull in a bilingual staff to help communicate with a concern parent that comes to the Teen Center seeking support. He also builds rapport with the teens as they try to teach him new Spanish words or phrase, no matter how badly he butchers the words. The parents and youth share a laugh at his attempts which helps break down the barriers of power and control a police officer may represent. They are able to feel at ease in their need to be protected and have the ability to build the rapport necessary with police officers, especially with the tensions growing between law enforcement and communities of color.

Officer Alejandro is able to identify with many of the parents and especially with the experiences of the youth through his own immigration story. He is able to understand



how difficult it could be to navigate between two cultures with different expectations. His parents, my grandparents, moved to California in 1969. My grandparents did not trust the police, regardless to the fact that they were here with documentation. When seeing a police car, my grandfather would always change the route that he was driving. My grandmother worked as a housekeeper, my grandfather as a campesino (farm worker), tailor, or provided entertainment at events as a mariachi singer. They struggled with the English language. My father and his siblings learned English through ESL classes at the local public schools. They participated in church activities and folklorico classes after school. My father and uncle played soccer throughout their youth. My uncle and aunt were obedient, whereas my father was known as el travieso (troublemaker). As he reached adolescence, his relationship with my grandfather became strained. My uncle graduated high school and later receive his undergraduate degree in engineering. As my dad was getting ready to graduate high school, due to his rebellious ways and priority on his social life, my grandfather would express that my father would not amount to anything. With this message at heart, my father, who had wanted to attend a 4-year university and pursue a career in law enforcement, decided, instead, to follow his friends to an automotive school in Arizona, because that's where he felt most accepted. My grandparents did not attend my father's graduation from his program.

After becoming a father and having to provide for a family, my father decided to pursue his dream career. This process took about five years to obtain. He became a reserve officer with the department. He then had to change his status from a permanent resident and obtain his U.S. citizenship. From there, he tested and interviewed about 4 times before he was finally hired on and left to the academy. He graduated from the

police academy in 2002. My grandfather attended his graduation. After, my grandfather and dad were able to have a conversation reminiscing their relationship. My grandfather expressed to my dad that he just did not know how to parent him. My father, living between two cultures, brought situations, attitudes, and reactions to my grandfather that he was not prepared to address. My grandfather came from a generation and a culture where children did not question their parents, he parented with an authoritative approach. My father needed validations and emotional support that he found in his friends and not at home. My grandfather passed away in 2004. My dad is able to empathize with the youth that are struggling to connect with their parents, and he is able to share his story with them or able to help intervene through his rapport with their parents and help bridge the communication gap. Due to his position, life experience, and being exposed to the traumas of others, he maintains an openness and approachability that is caring that's accessible to not just the youth in the program but to his own children, as well.

The officers take their positions as being connected to the program seriously. Officer Ron made it a point to know each of the early participants on an individual level. He wanted them to feel special and important. He would get to know their family members, check on their grades, attend family events, or big school events. Officer Ron continues to mentor youth he met through the program even after he retired from his position and is now living in a different state. He actively helps connect past participants to scholarship opportunities or is open to being available in times of crisis. The officers within the program, all having children of their own, allow their parenting side to shine through on their position.

“I think what makes this program successful is, is the fact that it is, that it has the police involvement in it. Um, it's what separates it from a Boys and Girls Club or a YMCA. And I think what it, the reason it's successful is because, um, parents, parents that, um, that trust the police or have good interactions with the police, um, inherently have a, they, they obviously hold our programs to a higher standard because of the police involvement. And so, in therefore they, I, I think, um, trust us a lot. The, they trust us to provide a higher level of safety and security for their kids. Um, above and beyond. If, you know, if you're at a boys and girls club, you don't necessarily know who's going in and out of there and, um, you don't necessarily know who is working there and what they're, what they stand for and that kind of stuff. Whereas being in the police department, and I think, you know, we obviously have to vet our employees a lot higher to a higher standard and our philosophies and, and just, I think overall, um, the overall, it, it, it, it had also not only the parents, but the kids, the kids know that by coming to the police department sanction programs that they're, they're basically drawing a line in the sand of, I'm not going to be a part of a gang. I don't want to be a part of a gang. I know that if I go there, it's going to be a safe place where gang and drugs are not tolerated. And so yeah, it may dissuade some of those kids, French kids that are on, you know, they still want to be a part of the gang and they still want to do drugs and that kind of stuff. But, um, for the kids that don't want to do that, they know that that's a safe place.”

- Officer K

As the reaction from Proposition 187 proved, due to the current political rhetoric led by the Trump Administration, the fear of deportation is heavy on many of the youth in

our country. Due to the mixed-status of families, the fear is not that they the youth themselves will be deported but that they will come home and their parent will not return, or their parent will be stopped on their commute to school and taken into custody, and/or their information will be shared to immigration authorities through school documents. Schools across the country are experiencing higher rates of absentees from their students connected to the fear of deportation (Nicole Acevedo, 2018). This narrative was similar in the community of the Teen Center following the initiation of the Trump Administration. The local police department saw an increase in requests from local community organizations, religious institutions, and townhall meetings to have presentations on their role in enforcing immigration law. The youth also had questions and fears regarding the topics. The youth were also influenced by stories being shared across social media of immigration raids or instances in which police officers aided ICE. With this, the Beat Coordinators also took the opportunity to have open conversations with the youth about what was happening between communities and law enforcement.

“They're young and they're, they, ... you know, you know, they're still in this, you know, they're very anti authority and, you know, and sometimes they're in bad situations where their parents are also anti authority and, and don't have a good relationship with the police department. So that gets passed on to the kids. Um, but you know, and a lot of, most of the kids though, when they have interactions with us, they kind of see a different, you know, they see a different light. And then also when we kind of explain why it is, we do certain things and why we, you know, why this looks bad and, and you know, sometimes there just is bad stuff that happens. You know, I don't sugarcoat it or try to

change it into something it's not, but there is a lot of misinformation out there that I try to correct and as long as, I mean I'm very respectful about it and I don't talk down to the kids and tell them, you know, that they're stupid or anything because I believe that it's just, I try to get them to see the other side of it.”

Officer K

In having access to protection, the youth are able to focus more on their needs to continue their education, especially if they’re given access to education. This has become a point of contention for some students within mixed-status families. Some students are unable to benefit from DACA like their older siblings. However, with access to AB540, students have access to in-state options with protections and financial aid access. This does not mitigate the stressors placed on the students with citizenship status against their parents and/or siblings without status due to the weight of success being placed heavily on their shoulders. The Teen Center’s Family Outreach Coordinator helps parents and youth navigate the system in applying for AB540 and understanding what the child needs to access the AB540 resources, such as the resources provided by the local community college. If a student meets the requirements of AB540 they have access to the free tuition program their first two years enrolled at the community college.

“You are expected to, um, you know, in, in doing that you became, you know, you became a mentor, he became an advocate, you did all these things. Um, a lot of time outside of, you know, your day to day job.”

- Officer K

“You have to build up a rapport and that's just dropping, spending 20 minutes at the center. Maybe it's just the hanging out in the homework room or shooting pool. And that just builds rapport. And that's why I think we do it right. Because our youth is our next generation that's going to take care of us and our city. So, uh, that's, I think that's, that's the mentor mentoring philosophy too”

- Officer B

Above all, the participants in the program build a mentor-like relationship with the police officers and the Teen Center connected adults. A few of the alumni discussed how after high school they were faced with challenges and were able to seek the support of the program officer as part of their support network. Family members and youth have reached out to police officers to share situations such as traumatic events, their parents' substance use, violence within the home, or incidences of being bullied at school. The current participants and former participants of the YLC expressed different reasons to why their perceptions towards police officers changed. Some of the youth expressed that they feel most comfortable approaching the police officers connected to the Teen Center because they know them. They expressed how they have built a relationship and know when they can be humorous with the officers and when to be serious. There is still some mistrust towards police officers they do not know. The alumni recalled instances in which the officers were there for them in times of crisis and that helped to build a lasting, positive relationship with the program officers. The participants also expressed that their

friends outside of the Teen Center are surprised by their close relationship with the officers.

“When I went to Washington, DC I was with the rest of the Teen Center YLC kids. And I got news from home that one of my friends had committed suicide, one of the Teen Center officers at the time took me aside because he had heard from my mom. And um, then he took me aside. He told me he's all the stories and made me feel better at it. I knew that he was someone I could always trust or turn to. It just changed my opinion as officers, I saw softer side of them. The side that made me you know feel that they're there to help people.”

- Sara

“We got off campus lunch in high school. So, I would be walking and then the Teen Center officers would like pull up in their car and they'd say ‘Where are you going? You're supposed be in class.’ And I'm like, ‘We're actually at lunch. I swear I'm not doing anything.’ And then the rest of my classmates would look at me like, what the hell are you doing talking to police officers, and I would be like ‘You don't know them like you don't know them how I know them’. So, it, it completely changed my perspective. Like I don't see them as police officers anymore. Like I see them as friends, I see them as role models and people who can help me.”

- Ashley

As the youth progress and come into adulthood, they have found refuge in confiding in the officers that they grew close to while at the Teen Center. The officers make themselves available to the youth and alumni of the Teen Center's program. Officer K has helped in coaching a golf program, another coached an afterschool soccer team that would compete in local tournaments, a female officer attended the Jiu Jitsu classes so that the female participants could feel comfortable practicing the moves on someone. The officers knowingly apply to the Beat Coordinator position knowing that mentoring and being a part of the daily Teen Center activities and they do so with enthusiasm and willingness.

“I chose at one point to be a part of the, um, was the girl's self-defense and it was an umbrella of Jujitsu with Luis and I actually would go in civilian clothes and roll with Luis to be an example for the girls. But then at some points I even let some of the girls do it, do the example or do the exercise on me to show them that they were learning the technique properly and that they could roll 160 pound woman versus rolling their partner who was 70 pounds or whatever. Right? Yeah. Cause it was for self-defense. I wanted them to feel comfortable and know that they're learning the technique properly versus if they're just kind of goofing around and not learning it properly, that it wasn't going to work so that they would take it a little more to heart and serious and then also for them to kind of get that comforting level with me. Like to realize, oh, I rolled around with that officer and Oh, now I see her in uniform and now I know who she is and I have a face to it and that, you know, she's encouraging us rather than like discouraging us or anything like that, if that makes sense.”



- Officer L

Although the officers are able to help build the youth up, they understand that their interactions are limited. The officers shared barriers in their ability to give more of their time to the youth along with their other obligations or the desire to have other officers come in during a free moment of their shift to interact with the youth. One officer discussed setting up a snack and water station as a way to entice other officers to come to Teen Center to meet the youth. The officers are just one aspect of the adult interaction with youth obtain at the Teen Center but having someone in the position of power and law enforcement has helped the youth feel safe and cared for, especially when overwhelmed with anxiety related to their immigration status.

## CHAPTER 6

### MOVING FORWARD

The ability for this Teen Center to still be in existence after twenty years, much of its success is in a great part due to its board of directors. As stated in the Introduction, the early board of directors consisted of Officer Ron's network of friends that believed in the mission and trusted that he could implement it successfully. In its infancy, board members were much more involved than signing their name to check and adding to the fund of the program. They were attended the youth program events, had their children join the programs, and recruited others to join along with them. One member, who is still a member today, a local grocery store owner, graciously donates food supplies to all barbeques held for the Teen Center, whether it be a celebratory event or a fundraiser that the YLC wants to facilitate. This board member will donate beverages for booths or events that the teens are working and will gladly help to chaperone. Other board members will volunteer at the annual holiday dinners, serving the families', playing Santa, or manning a crafts table. The police department also has the supervising captain attend all board meetings and also attend the large Teen Center events and fundraisers. Officer Ron's vision for the board was for it to be hands-on, interactive, involved, and personable to the youth.

The board has grown in number along with the teen center since its inception and it has shifted in this time, as well. Some board members are still quite active, while others are not. The board has implemented a specific board position for an alumnus to help bridge the disconnect between adult and youth. This has become another means for the

organization to help invest in the skill building of their past participants. The members of the board still believe in the mission and work hard to be sure that the financial means are being met to continue to provide the programming to the community, however, there has been a loss in the connection between the organization's participants and the board of directors. There is also a disconnect, culturally, between those involved in the program. With a programming serving a majority Latinx population, the board of directors' ethnic/racial identification does not reflect the participants it serves.

In contrast, the ethnic/racial identification differences between the board and participants is representative of the socioeconomic divide within the city based on ethnic/racial identification. In other words, the board of directors is majority white, upper-class U.S. born citizens, whereas the participants are Mexican/Mexican-American, lower SES, mixed-documented families. Currently, no board member has their children enrolled in the youth programming offered by the Teen Center. The Teen Center offers free programs not based on SES level, but because Officer Ron wanted all programs to be free so that no child would feel like a "scholarship child". So that every participant came into the program as equals.

The lack of diversity in the Teen Center's participants could also be called into question moving forward. Being that the community is fairly even in terms of white to Mexican/Mexican-American, there should be greater inclusion of white youth. I acknowledge, however, that this point can be argued in two ways. In not feeling a sense of belonging at school (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), due to the educational system founded on white norms and society expectations, I can see, and have personally experienced, how the Teen Center can be a place of refuge. The youth organization's programs

allowed me a safe place to be myself, to excel in my leadership, and gain confidence because my peers and I could relate to each other and did not have to be on guard with each other or with the staff while in their programs. The current participants feel a sense of familial and cultural understanding with each other and the staff due to a shared ethnic/racial identity. It is a place where one can weave in and out of Spanish without feeling like they are going to be judged or felt like an outsider. It is a place where the staff can speak to you in your native/first language or can reach out to your parents without the need for translation. There is cultural pride within those walls.

With that in mind, this could also be a detriment to the overall development of the youth participants, especially with the emphasis placed on academia. As the literature shows, Latinx are underperforming in post-secondary education. Our retention rates are low, and the success gap is widening regardless of the fact that we are the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States. If the youth in this program are not taught or given the opportunity to learn to diversify their network, success in white dominated higher education may become a stressor as young adults. Through the alienation and segregation caused by the education system, Latinx youth are also internalizing their own perceived biases against their white peers. This is not to disregard that acknowledgement that white peers have privileges and opportunities that Latinx youth do not enjoy, however, when placed in situations, such as post-secondary education, it would be a benefit to know how to feel confident in one's ability to find belonging in a white-dominated setting.

I share this, from experience, but also in looking at the trajectory and barriers of the alumni in this study. Many of the alumni have aspirations to complete their postsecondary education. Although everyone has their path and the expectations set by

the white majority (must finish associate degree in 2 years, undergraduate degree in 4 years, master's degree in 2, etc.) is not an expectation that should be set across the board, I find it of interest to look at the trajectory of the alumni and the obstacles in their paths. For instance, Melissa, having started at a 4-year university before transferring to a 2-year community college, expressed financial barriers as her means to re-navigate her path. However, in past conversations, there were also expressions of not belonging or having a difficult time connecting to others on campus. The university she attended, the same that Rosa is now attending, is majority white in population. Rosa maintains her friendships with local friends, she has not mention friends made at her university. It could be a variety of reasons for difficulty to establish a new network such as the ease to return home being in the same community, the university being in a remote area and socialization is timid, but I also ponder if it is due to lack of connection based on cultural differences, lived experiences, or more.

The board could help increase positive interactions based on racial/ethnic identity by bridging the gap between their position of power and creating more a community with participants of the program. Also, hiring a diverse staff at all levels would also increase the ability to create more fluidity and diversity in social networking through the adults modeling. As of now, in the hierarchy of the programs, those with the power, influence, and largest paycheck are positioned by white individuals. This continues to exemplify the racial stratification expressed to youth participants daily, those in power are white, those being served are brown.

The program should also be weary of creating the pressure of the “golden child”. Yes, participants should be applauded and praised for their accomplishments. However,

with such a racial hierarchy in place, there are internalized expectations placed on the youth that they must perform because they are the example. Especially with the current political discussions of DACA, immigration, and the detainment injustices occurring at our southern borders, Latinx youth are inundated with examples of white individuals discussing what “kind” of Latino belongs and what “kind” does not. President Trump has referred to us as “rapists”, “murderers”, and “bad hombres”, generalizing an entire people as the worst of the worst. President Obama’s administration expressed support for the reprieves given to DACA recipients, but then that left out a whole group of undocumented individuals that did not meet the criteria. Therefore, leaving the impression that if you’re Latinx and you want to go to school or the military then you are good enough to stay here, after which of course you met all the criteria to receive such an honor. Whereas if you were off by a year, or maybe did not make the best of decisions and now had a juvenile record, you were not held to the same regard.

I would implore the board of directors to reflect on message they are trying to share with the youth on success. Moving forward, I ask that the board members continue to mentor the youth to succeed on their own merits, but to also recognize that unfortunately, society has placed a pressure on us that we are carrying a community with us as we pass each benchmark of success. We are used to being given an award but also acknowledge that we already assume that our ethnicity or level of diversity has something to do with it, we don’t need the reminder. Even if that is not the case, this identification to our successes has been internalized through microaggressions experienced throughout our youth and academic career. I would also suggest that the staff

and board work together to build a mentorship program that will help the youth transition from adolescence to young adulthood more easily.

## **Conclusion**

Latinx youth face barriers that are unique than other minority groups within the United States. There is a plethora of literature that discusses the experiences of education, mental health, immigration, and youth program participation. Sometimes, there are intersections in the research with education and mental health, or mental health and youth program participation, education and youth program participation, but there is a need to research the intersections of immigration and enforcement on immigration in the academic experience and mental health of Latinx youth.

Obtaining a higher education is seen as a measure of success within the American culture. Families will sacrifice and risk everything to provide their children with the chance to access better education and future opportunities. Thus, immigration to the United States for Latin American countries will continue. The United States, historically, has played roles in the instability in Latin American governments, therefore, the immigration north is a consequence of such intervention. Latinx youth face barriers that make it harder for their community to move from one socioeconomic status to another, for retention in educational settings to be lower than most other minority rates, and increased levels of poor mental health.

This study looked at a single case of a Teen Center within California. The city in which it was located has stood with pro-sanctuary policies that are also respected by their local police department. The police department, wanting to decrease the victimization

rates of the immigrant community while also opening communication to help protect the rest of the community, has enacted strong community policing practices. The police department introduces programs that act as liaisons between the city residents and the department.

The youth in the program showed considerable growth in the GPAs at the end of the semester compared to the beginning of the semester. They expressed strong senses of belonging and being understood by the adults within the program. The youth shared their changed perceptions towards police officers, even if it was only towards the officers within the program. Another aspect to be taken from this case study is that the alumni continued to receive mentorship and guidance from the Teen Center. There is an aspect that may be related to the Latinx cultural value of familism in which as one alumnus shared that the program starts to feel like a family.

As a researcher, I recognize that this may or may not be a unique situation. There are many Teen Centers that follow the same structure and mission as the Teen Center in this study. However, I believe location plays a big part in its ability to be successful. The city in which this Teen Center is located also has access to a large pool of wealthy funders. There are factors such as the free tuition program at the community college that also lessens the stressors for financial barriers to achieving higher education. Also, there is only one school district that oversees all the schools in the city. In a larger city, there may be greater options or greater examples of de facto segregation within the schools due to zoning and neighborhoods having greater divides in socioeconomic statuses.

Being in California, there are also aspects that may be beneficial to this Teen Center. Having a state that also practices pro-sanctuary immigration policies allows the



city to not feel at odds with a higher-powered entity. Also, having access to AB540 allows another resource to lessen the financial barriers and access to higher education. If this Teen Center were located in a different state, I wonder if there would be greater barriers based on immigration policy and the access to higher education. For example, undocumented youth in Arizona do not have access to a resource such as AB540. Undocumented college students in Arizona are then forced to pay for out-of-state tuition and do not have access to financial aid options, unless they access private funds.

Moving forward, I believe that greater understanding could be gained through a comparative study between similar youth programs. As the anti-immigrant rhetoric continues and the fear of the unknown increases, having law enforcement affiliated youth programs could help in the social capital gain of Latinx youth which, therefore, increases their academic and overall life success.

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APPENDIX A

YOUTH FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

## **YOUTH FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM (ENGLISH)**

### **Title of research, investigator name, and project summary**

The Role of Teen Centers Investing in the Success of Latinx Youth

*By: Courtney Gutiérrez*  
Master's Student, Social Justice and Human Rights  
Arizona State University

The purpose of my study is to understand or to provide a conversation on how the investing in building the social capital of Mexican American youth that participate in programs within a teen center could help to reduce their risk of poor mental health and/or increase their academic success in high school. This is a research project being conducted by Courtney Gutiérrez, a Master's student, under the direction of Dr. Allan Colbern, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Arizona State University. The focus group will be used for my thesis, journal article or other publications, and my Ph.D. dissertation in the future.

### ***Interview length and number of participants***

The focus group should take about 2 hours. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in the interview, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating at any time, you will not be penalized.

### ***Confidentiality policy***

Publications from this research will discuss the youth center and police department in in general terms, without naming the city, and without naming any specific individuals. My goal here is to lift up the work of an organization and individuals, not negatively portray them. Please know that you are free to decide whether you wish to participate in this study and you can end your participation in the focus group at any time. This will not be held against you. I will not refer to any identifying information such as the city of this research, the name of the police department or youth league, or any individual names in any publications from the research.

I will be asking your permission to audio record the focus group, using an audio recorder and iPhone. Let me know if, at any time, you do not want to be recorded and I will stop. Only the research team will have access to the recordings and transcriptions. All sources of information collected from the interview will be securely stored in two password protected ASU encrypted external hard drive.

## **A list of resources for the participant**

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, you can reach me at [cagutie8@asu.edu](mailto:cagutie8@asu.edu) or my cell at (805) 708-7021. You may also contact my thesis advisor, Dr. Allan Colbern, at [Allan.Colbern@asu.edu](mailto:Allan.Colbern@asu.edu).

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Social Behavioral IRB. You may talk to them at (480) 965-6788 or by email at [research.integrity@asu.edu](mailto:research.integrity@asu.edu) if:

- You want to talk to someone besides myself or the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

## ***Verbal Consent***

Before I can proceed, I would like to ask for verbal consent to audio record the focus group and written consent by the youth member, parent (for the named child to take part in this research) and Program Director to proceed with the focus group.

Is it okay that I audio record the focus group to make sure that I accurately represent and capture our discussions?

**Circle whether the participant said: YES | NO**

## ***Written Consent***

On Page 3 (the next page) of the consent form, I am asking for the youth member, parent/guardian, and Program Director to provide signed consent to proceed with the focus group.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of child (youth member)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of child (youth member)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of parent or individual legally authorized  
to consent to the child's general medical care

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

- Parent
- Individual legally  
authorized to consent to  
the child's general  
medical care (See note  
below)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of parent or individual legally authorized  
to consent to the child's general medical care

**Note:** Investigators are to ensure that individuals who are not parents can demonstrate their legal authority to consent to the child's general medical care. Contact legal counsel if any questions arise.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person obtaining consent and assent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of person obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Youth Program Director to consent  
process

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of Youth Program Director consent  
process

APPENDIX B

FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO PARA EL GRUPO DE ENFOQUE

## **Formulario de Consentimiento para el Grupo de Enfoque**

### **Nombre de la investigación, nombre del investigador, y resumen del proyecto**

El Papel de los Centros para Adolescentes y su Inversión en el éxito de la Juventud Latina

*Por: Courtney Gutiérrez*

Estudiante de Maestría en Justicia Social y Derechos Humanos  
Universidad Estatal de Arizona (Arizona State University)

El propósito de mi estudio es comprender o proporcionar una conversación sobre cómo la inversión en la construcción de capital social de jóvenes mexicoamericanos que participan en programas dentro de un centro para adolescentes podría ayudar a reducir el riesgo de una salud mental deficiente y / o aumentar su éxito académico en la escuela secundaria. Este es un proyecto de investigación llevado a cabo por Courtney Gutiérrez, estudiante de Maestría, bajo la dirección del Dr. Allan Colbern, Profesor Asistente de Ciencias Políticas en la Universidad Estatal de Arizona. El grupo enfocado se usarán para mi tesis, artículos de revista u otras publicaciones, y mi disertación de Ph.D. en el futuro.

### ***Duración de la entrevista y número de participantes***

La entrevista del grupo enfocado debe tomar aproximadamente 2 horas. Su participación en este estudio de investigación es voluntario y puede optar por no participar. Si decide participar en la entrevista, puede retirarse en cualquier momento. Si decide no participar en este estudio o si retira su participación en cualquier momento, no será penalizado.

### ***Política de Confidencialidad***

Las publicaciones de esta investigación discutirán el centro juvenil y el departamento de policía en términos generales, sin nombrar la ciudad, y sin nombrar individuos específicos. Mi meta es de elevar el trabajo de la organización y las personas, y de no proyectar su colaboración de ninguna forma negativa. Tenga en cuenta de que usted es libre de decidir si desea participar en este estudio y puede finalizar su participación en el grupo de enfoque en cualquier momento. La información que usted proporcione no será usada en su contra. No publicaré información confidencial como el nombre de estado o ciudad en esta investigación, o el nombre del departamento de policía o liga juvenil, o nombres de individuos en cualquier publicación de la investigación.

Le pediré permiso para grabar el grupo de enfoque con una grabadora de audio y un iPhone. Avíseme si, en algún momento, no quiere que grabe y me detendré. Solo el equipo de investigación tendrá acceso a las grabaciones y transcripciones.

Todas las fuentes de información recopiladas de la entrevista se almacenarán de forma segura en dos unidades de disco duro externo cifradas con contraseña de ASU.

### **Una lista de recursos para el participante**

Si tiene preguntas, inquietudes o quejas, puede comunicarse conmigo a [cagutie8@asu.edu](mailto:cagutie8@asu.edu) o a mi celular al (805) 708-7021. También puede contactar a mi asesor de tesis, Dr. Allan Colbern, en [Allan.Colbern@asu.edu](mailto:Allan.Colbern@asu.edu).

Esta investigación ha sido revisada y aprobada por el IRB de Comportamiento Social. Puede hablar con ellos al (480) 965-6788 o por correo electrónico a [research.integrity@asu.edu](mailto:research.integrity@asu.edu) si es que:

- Quiere hablar con alguien que no sea yo o el equipo de investigación.
- Usted tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos como participante de investigación.
- Desea obtener información o proporcionar información sobre esta investigación.

### ***Consentimiento Verbal***

Antes de continuar, me gustaría solicitar el consentimiento verbal para grabar el grupo de enfoque y el consentimiento por escrito del miembro juvenil, padre (para que el joven nombrado como participe en esta investigación) y del Director del programa para proceder con el grupo enfocado.

¿Está bien si you puedo grabar en audio el grupo enfocado para asegurarme de poder representar y capturar nuestras conversaciones con exactitud?

**Favor de marcar con un círculo si el participante dijo: SI | NO**

### ***Consentimiento por escrito***

En la página 3 (la página siguiente) del formulario de consentimiento, pido el consentimiento firmado por parte del miembro juvenile, el padre / guardián, y director del programa para proceder con el grupo enfocado.





APPENDIX C

PRE- AND POST-SURVEY YOUTH FORM

## **PRE- AND POST-SURVEY YOUTH CONSENT FORM (ENGLISH)**

### **Title of research, investigator name, and project summary**

The Role of Teen Centers Investing in the Success of Latinx Youth

*By: Courtney Gutiérrez*  
Master's Student, Social Justice and Human Rights  
Arizona State University

The purpose of my study is to understand or to provide a conversation on how the investing in building the social capital of Mexican American youth that participate in programs within a teen center could help to reduce their risk of poor mental health and/or increase their academic success in high school. This is a research project being conducted by Courtney Gutiérrez, a Master's student, under the direction of Dr. Allan Colbern, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Arizona State University. Pre- and Post- surveys will be used for my thesis, journal article or other publications, and my Ph.D. dissertation in the future.

### ***Interview length and number of participants***

Pre- and Post- surveys should take about 1 hour on different days. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating at any time, you will not be penalized.

### ***Confidentiality policy***

Publications from this research will discuss the youth center and police department in general terms, without naming the city and without naming any specific individuals. My goal here is to lift up the work of an organization and individuals, not negatively portray them. Please know that you are free to decide whether you wish to participate in this study and you can end the interview at any time. This will not be held against you. I will not refer to any identifying information such as the city of this research, the name of the police department or youth league, or any individual names in any publications from the research.

### **A list of resources for the participant**

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, you can reach me at [cagutie8@asu.edu](mailto:cagutie8@asu.edu) or my cell at (805) 708-7021. You may also contact my thesis advisor, Dr. Allan Colbern, at [Allan.Colbern@asu.edu](mailto:Allan.Colbern@asu.edu).

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Social Behavioral IRB. You may talk to them at (480) 965-6788 or by email at [research.integrity@asu.edu](mailto:research.integrity@asu.edu) if:

- You want to talk to someone besides myself or the research team.
  - You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
  - You want to get information or provide input about this research.

### *Written Consent*

On Page 3 (the next page) of the consent form, I am asking for the youth member, parent/guardian, and Program Director to provide signed consent to proceed with the Pre- and Post- survey.

APPENDIX D  
FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO PARA LAS ENCUESTAS PREVIAS Y  
POSTERIORES

## **Nombre de la investigación, nombre del investigador, y resumen del proyecto**

El Papel de los Centros para Adolescentes y su Inversión en el éxito de la Juventud Latinx

*Por: Courtney Gutiérrez*

Estudiante de Maestría en Justicia Social y Derechos Humanos  
Universidad Estatal de Arizona (Arizona State University)

El propósito de mi estudio es comprender o proporcionar una conversación sobre cómo la inversión en la construcción de capital social de jóvenes mexicoamericanos que participan en programas dentro de un centro para adolescentes podría ayudar a reducir el riesgo de una salud mental deficiente y / o aumentar su éxito académico en la escuela secundaria. Este es un proyecto de investigación llevado a cabo por Courtney Gutiérrez, estudiante de Maestría, bajo la dirección del Dr. Allan Colbern, Profesor Asistente de Ciencias Políticas en la Universidad Estatal de Arizona. Las encuestas previas y posteriores se usarán para mi tesis, artículos de revista u otras publicaciones, y mi disertación de Ph.D. en el futuro.

### ***Duración de la entrevista y número de participantes***

Las encuestas previas y posteriores deben demorar aproximadamente 1 hora en días diferentes. Su participación en este estudio de investigación es voluntario y puede optar por no participar. Si decide participar, puede retirarse en cualquier momento. Si decide no participar en este estudio o si retira su participación en cualquier momento, no será penalizado.

### ***Política de Confidencialidad***

Las publicaciones de esta investigación discutirán el centro juvenil y el departamento de policía en términos generales, sin nombrar la ciudad y sin nombrar individuos específicos. Mi meta es de elevar el trabajo de la organización y las personas, y de no proyectar su colaboración de ninguna forma negativa. Tenga en cuenta de que usted es libre de decidir si desea participar en este estudio y puede finalizar su participación en las encuestas previas o posteriores en cualquier momento. La información que usted proporcione no será usada en su contra. No publicaré información confidencial como el nombre de la ciudad en esta investigación, o el nombre del departamento de policía o liga juvenil, o nombres de individuos en cualquier publicación de la investigación.

### **Una lista de recursos para el participante**

Si tiene preguntas, inquietudes o quejas, puede comunicarse conmigo a [cagutie8@asu.edu](mailto:cagutie8@asu.edu) o a mi celular al (805) 708-7021. También puede contactar a mi asesor de tesis, Dr. Allan Colbern, en [Allan.Colbern@asu.edu](mailto:Allan.Colbern@asu.edu).

Esta investigación ha sido revisada y aprobada por el IRB de Comportamiento Social. Puede hablar con ellos al (480) 965-6788 o por correo electrónico a [research.integrity@asu.edu](mailto:research.integrity@asu.edu) si es que:

- Quiere hablar con alguien que no sea yo o el equipo de investigación.
- Usted tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos como participante de investigación.
- Desea obtener información o proporcionar información sobre esta investigación.

### ***Consentimiento por escrito***

En la página 3 (la página siguiente) del formulario de consentimiento, pido el consentimiento firmado por parte del miembro juvenil, padre / guardian, y director del programa para proceder con las encuestas previas y posteriores.







APPENDIX E  
ADULT CONSENT FORM

## **Adult Interview Consent Form**

### **Title of research, investigator name, and project summary**

The Role of Teen Centers Investing in the Success of Latinx Youth

*By: Courtney Gutiérrez*  
Master's Student, Social Justice and Human Rights  
Arizona State University

The purpose of my study is to understand or to provide a conversation on how the investing in building the social capital of Mexican American youth that participate in programs within a teen center could help to reduce their risk of poor mental health and/or increase their academic success in high school. This is a research project being conducted by Courtney Gutiérrez, a Master's student, under the direction of Dr. Allan Colbern, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Arizona State University. Interviews will be used for my thesis, journal article or other publications, and my Ph.D. dissertation in the future.

### ***Interview length and number of participants***

This interview should take about 1 hour. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in the interview, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating at any time, you will not be penalized.

### ***Confidentiality policy***

Publications from this research will discuss the youth center and police department in general terms, without naming the city and without naming any specific individuals. My goal here is to lift up the work of an organization and individuals, not negatively portray them. Please know that you are free to decide whether you wish to participate in this study and you can end the interview at any time. This will not be held against you. I will not refer to any identifying information such as the city of this research, the name of the police department or youth league, or any individual names in any publications from the research.

I will be asking your permission to audio record the interview, using an audio recorder and iPhone. Let me know if, at any time, you do not want to be recorded and I will stop. Only the research team will have access to the recordings and transcriptions. All sources of information collected from the interview will be securely stored in two password protected ASU encrypted external hard drive.

## **A list of resources for the participant**

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, you can reach me at [cagutie8@asu.edu](mailto:cagutie8@asu.edu) or my cell at (805) 708-7021. You may also contact my thesis advisor, Dr. Allan Colbern, at [Allan.Colbern@asu.edu](mailto:Allan.Colbern@asu.edu).

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Social Behavioral IRB. You may talk to them at (480) 965-6788 or by email at [research.integrity@asu.edu](mailto:research.integrity@asu.edu) if:

- You want to talk to someone besides myself or the research team.
  - You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
  - You want to get information or provide input about this research.

## ***Verbal Consent***

With this information, and before I can proceed with the interview, I'd like to ask:

Is it okay that I audio record the interview to make sure that I accurately represent your thoughts?

**Circle whether the participant said: yes | no**

APPENDIX F  
YOUTH FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

## Focus Group Questions

### Leadership and Academics

- Are you involved in your schools student government? Why or why not? If not involved in student government, are you involved in a student leader role on campus (i.e. club, sports, teachers aide)? Why or Why not?
- Why do you participate in the YLC?
- Where do you see yourself after high school? Do you feel you have the support to achieve these goals? Why or why not?
- Do you feel you've been treated differently in school because of your race/ethnicity? How so?
- What barriers, if any, have you experienced at school? (i.e. getting the classes you want, involvement, getting support)

### Teen Center Specific:

- In what ways could the Teen Center staff improve on their support for you? Do you feel supported by the Teen Center staff? Why or Why not?
- What barriers, if any, have you experienced at the teen center?

### Policing and Immigration

- What were your thoughts/feelings towards the police before joining the teen center? What are your thoughts now towards police officers?
- Do you feel safe to be approached or approach an officer that you have not been connected to through the teen center?
- There has been a lot of discussion about immigration reform currently in the United States. Do you talk about this subject with your friends? If so, what are you concerns/comments about the topic?
- What are your thoughts about having a School Resource Officer at your school?
- There are various types of policing agencies within the country. Do you know the difference between a federal immigration agent and your local police agency?

### Media:

I will use the following examples of media to provide more context and to allow the participants to feed off each other's answers to gain a greater insight about the program through the experience of the group as a cohort and not focus on the individual's experience. This exercise will be used to understand the value of the program the youth participants take part of and how it shapes their perceptions and impacts their health while also thinking about the program in a broader political context. This exercise is meant to be an understanding of the group and how they interact with each other and the program.

I will start this exercise by showing picture of officers connected to the program interacting with the community at the first day of school. By showing this pictures I will hope to gain the group's understanding and perception of community policing and their experiences of policing and their academic experiences.

I will then introduce two pieces of literature (a press release from the police department and a news article about a police department in New York) to explore different the group's perceptions about policing and community in a more removed context.



[Redacted text]



[Redacted text]



[Redacted text]

APPENDIX G  
ADULT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## Police Officers Interview Question

1. Were you assigned to this position or did you ask to become involved in the program?
2. What were your initial thoughts about your role in the program?
3. Do you feel supported by your superiors and/or fellow officers in implementing the mission of the program?
4. Have you discussed the current media covering police involved shootings and tensions with police and minority communities with youth at the teen center? How were those conversations started, and what impact do you think this had on youth?
5. Have you noticed any changes of attitudes or relation towards you from the youth since during moments when immigration policy or enforcement become more salient? If so, how have you approached conversations with the youth about this?
6. What do you think makes this program successful? Is it unique to this city?
7. When you have attended conferences with similar programs, has there been discussions and/or trainings for the adult attendees around:
  - a. Community policing? (note: ask for them to define this, if not clear)
  - b. Immigration enforcement?
  - c. The legal status of youth members?
  - d. Local sanctuary policies?
8. Do you think this program would be successful if modelled by the sheriff's department? Why or Why not?
9. What are some of the barriers you face in providing support to the program or to the youth in the program?
10. Do you think that the youth are comfortable enough to approach you with their personal and/or familial issues? (note: ask for examples)
11. Do you think families feel comfortable enough to approach you? (note: ask for examples)
12. How do you build trust within the community for parents to feel comfortable to enroll their children within the program? Have there been any barriers in this area? If so, what were they and how did you approach them?

## Alumni Questions

1. What years were you a member of the teen center's Youth Leadership Council?
2. How and why did you join?
3. Were you involved in any extracurricular activities in your high school?
  - a. If so, what were they?
4. What type of classes were you enrolled in high school (i.e. remedial, advance placement, GATE, Honors, ELD)
5. Did you continue your education after high school?
  - a. How many years?
  - b. Where?



- i. Major/vocational certification
6. What were your opinions of the police before joining?
  7. What were your opinions of the police after your time with the teen center?
  8. What is your profession now?
  9. Have you had any interaction with the police as an adult?
    - a. If so, has the interaction(s) been positive or negative (please provide explanation)?
  10. Have you referred anyone to the teen center since your time in it?
  11. What are your thoughts/opinions towards the police and their involvement in your community?
    - a. Is it positive or negative?
    - b. What could they do to better this relationship?
  12. Does your community trust the police? Why or why not?
  13. Do you live in an area within the sheriff or city police jurisdiction?
  14. Do you believe there is a difference in the expectations between the county sheriff, city police department, and/or California highway patrol in your community? If so, what are the differences from your understanding?
  15. What skills did you take from the teen center, if any, that you apply to your adult life?
  16. What are your thoughts towards the growth of the teen center since your time in the program?
  17. Does the teen center have a positive or a negative effect on the community?
  18. Due to the political conversation on immigration, do you and/or your family feel comfortable approaching law enforcement for help?
  19. What are your thoughts toward the press release given by the city police department toward the egg vendors in this past year's Old Spanish Days?
  20. If you are a parent, do you have conversations about how to approach law enforcement for help? If so, what do you tell your children?

#### Board Member Interview Questions

1. How long have you been part of the Board of Directors?
2. How did you get introduced to the teen center?
  - a. Friend, community referral, online, etc.
3. Why did you join the board?
4. Why this teen center and not another youth program in town?
5. What are the benefits of the teen center, in your opinion?
6. What barriers have you experienced in providing support for the program?
7. What were your feelings towards the police prior to joining the board?
8. With today's political climate, why did you believe the current participants of the teen center continue to attend?
9. Due to the current spotlight on policing in the country, as a board member to this teen center, in what ways have you seen the police department react in the teen center?
10. What are your thoughts on community policing?

- a. Do you feel the city police department is successful in this approach?
- 11. Do you feel the sheriffs department could have a successful program such as the teen center? Why or why not?
- 12. How does the teen center and the board support the youth in the teen center, specifically during the political discussion of immigrant reform?
- 13. In your words, what are the differences between the county sheriffs, the city police department, and federal law enforcement?
- 14. If you have children, are they members of the teen center? Why or why not?
- 15. In what ways could members of the community be weary of having their children attend the teen center?
  - a. As an organization, how does the teen center build trust in the community?