

**Youth Outreach Work: Using Solidarity to Empower
Marginalized Youth**

by

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ABSTRACT

Youth Outreach Work: Using Solidarity to Empower Marginalized Youth

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What approaches do Toronto youth outreach workers (YOWs) use to make meaningful ties with marginalized youth, so that youth become interested in their own social development? In this thesis, I explore the practices that YOWs use to build reciprocal relationships with marginalized youth. I conducted semi-structured interviews with 17 YOWs who shared their experiences of working with marginalized youth, their perceptions of the issues faced by youth, and their specific strategies of support. By using Sherry Ortner's practice theory, I identified that what she calls "relations of solidarity" are present in the support relationships between YOWs and marginalized youth. The tie between the YOWs and the youth is a mutual bond that includes non-judgement, reciprocity, and compassion. This study indicates that practice theory and relations of solidarity are useful because they expose the nature of the relationship between marginalized youth and YOWs, and reveal how YOWs are able to support and educate marginalized youth.

KEYWORDS:

Youth outreach workers, Marginalization, Solidarity, Relationships, Toronto, Youth

DEDICATION

To the marginalized youth seeking their personal redemption

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	8
CHAPTER 3: FIELD SITE AND RESEARCH METHODS.....	31
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION.....	42
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION.....	82
WORKS CITED.....	87
APPENDIX 1: Interview Questions.....	92

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:

SOCIAL SOLIDARITY AMONG TORONTO'S YOUTH OUTREACH WORKERS AND MARGINALIZED YOUTH

Reflecting back on my adolescent days, I think about the impoverished conditions and social inequalities that surrounded me. As a young person, I was not interested in school or working, and my peers demonstrated the same behaviour. Considering the negative direction my life was heading, my future was not certain at a young age. I do, however, remember the youth outreach workers (henceforth YOWs) in my neighbourhood always facilitating programs that were geared towards educating youth like me. The programs that were delivered by the outreach workers included support with schoolwork, employment, and life skills. This type of work was performed to encourage young people in the neighbourhood to take an interest in their social development.

This reflection upon my own experiences led me to ask: what approaches do YOWs use to make meaningful ties with young people so that the youth become interested in their own development? In this thesis, I explore the practices that youth outreach workers use to build reciprocal relationships with marginalized youth by focusing on the following questions:

- a. What strategies and practices do youth outreach workers use to support the social development of marginalized youth in Toronto?
- b. How do youth outreach workers create and maintain relationships with marginalized youth?

- c. How do youth outreach workers use the relationships between themselves and marginalized youth to support and educate youth?

Youth Outreach Workers (YOWs), or Child and Youth Workers (CYWs) are full-time, part-time, or volunteer workers who work based on the needs of non-profit organizations that offer youth development programs. In this study I use the term YOWs to describe the participants who engage in this type of work. The types of support provided by YOWs to marginalized youth include training for part-time and full-time employment, finding temporary shelter or permanent housing, and providing academic support.

In the literature on youth development, the term “marginalized youth” refers to young persons between the ages of 15–30, who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, face negative peer pressure, and tend to achieve below average grades in school (U.S. National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983:113). The ages of the youth that the participants of this study support are between 15–24 years of age.

I conducted 17 interviews with YOWs to answer the research questions identified above. The participants interviewed in this study are youth outreach workers currently working in Toronto, Ontario, and many of them have been working with youth from 2–15 years. During the semi-structured interviews, participants provided their experiences of working with marginalized youth, their perceptions of the issues faced by youth, and their specific support strategies. In order to understand the perceptions and experiences of the participants, I asked them questions that would reveal information about supporting marginalized youth in Toronto. For example, I asked, “what approaches do you use when you support marginalized youth and their social development? Have you had to modify your workshop in order for you to get a better reception

from the youth? When do you know that your message is being understood by the youth?" The responses to these questions provided me with YOWs' understandings of their support strategies and answers to my main research questions.

When YOWs described their experiences of supporting and educating the development of these youth, I identified that what Sherry Ortner calls "relations of solidarity" (2006:16) are present in these relationships. Ortner uses the concept of relations of solidarity in her practice theory, which explains the "production of social subjects through their practice in the world" (Ortner 2006:16). She states that relations of solidarity are formed between social actors who co-participate within a social structure. The literature suggests that the social actors who participate within the social structure maintain a mutual attachment between them. The bond formed among co-participants involves reciprocity, sympathy, and reasoning (Bayertz 1999:3). As such, the actors are always in relations of solidarity (Ortner 130:2006). Practice theory and relations of solidarity are useful in this study because they expose the nature of the relationship between marginalized youth and YOWs and reveal how YOWs are able to effectively support and educate marginalized youth.

My findings suggest that YOWs intentionally revealed their own vulnerability as a practice to support marginalized youth. In the social science literature vulnerability is not clearly defined. Rather, researchers have described the characteristics of vulnerable persons. For example, education researchers Professor Mona Gleason and colleagues suggest that vulnerable persons are physically, emotionally, or socially susceptible to be victimized and scrutinized among others (Gleason et al 2010:1). However, in this thesis, I use the concept of vulnerability to refer to the potential for harm to or loss of identity. I use vulnerability to illustrate how the YOWs and youth build relationships that are not based on moral judgements. Vulnerability

allows YOWs and the young people to reveal something about themselves without judgment. The participants shared their vulnerability to encourage marginalized youth to be comfortable sharing personal information about themselves, which provided insight into the lives of these youth. By using this practice, YOWs disarm youth so they are comfortable building a reciprocal relationship that fosters their learning. Through understanding their young clients' vulnerability, the participants attempted to work with marginalized youth to establish solidarity with them.

The participants understood that they were more educated than the youth they support. However, they described their relationships with marginalized youth as level rather than hierarchical. The YOWs interviewed in this study found that when treated with respect, youth are more likely to actively receive support provided by YOWs. Moreover, YOWs revealed to me that being consistent in attitude and in their actions was their approach to maintain relations of solidarity with youth. I found that some youth that the participants worked with did not welcome their friendly attempts to build relationships right away. In those circumstances youth may reject YOWs by threatening them or ignoring the YOWs' support. By maintaining a consistent attitude with marginalized youth, YOWs interviewed in this study attempt to show that they are genuinely trying to help, and as a result the youth warm up to the YOWs.

YOWs seek to understand marginalized youth by paying close attention to their perceptions of the social barriers they face to access education, employment, and housing. I found that the participants were keenly aware of what youth are encountering. They work alongside youth when they were faced with a range of concerns linked to education, employment, and housing.

This study illustrates that YOWs use solidarity, which they have established with

marginalized youth, as a tool for support and education. For YOWs, caring for the development of youth is important. In addition, understanding how to care for the youth by considering their individual characteristics and needs is important. For example, the participants encouraged youth to learn about their cultural heritage or religion, depending on their individual needs. Some YOWs also stated that they see themselves in the youth they support and look back upon the days when they were once young, marginalized persons and experiencing similar difficulties. I found that the participants' personal histories were shared with the youth in order to create relatable and teachable moments.

My study shows that the participating YOWs treat marginalized youth as people who deserve to be heard. The participants demonstrated that teaching youth includes learning from them as well. I found that the opinions of marginalized youth regarding YOWs' practices mattered to the youth workers. As such, youth were seen to contribute to YOWs' own learning.

Youth outreach workers in this study claimed that the relationships of solidarity with youth are important as they encourage marginalized youth to build confidence, learn valuable life skills, and work towards an independent lifestyle. YOWs and youth were vulnerable with one another, which allows them to build relations of solidarity and avoid moral judgement, or criticizing each other. Instead, they used their vulnerability to understand each other's perspective of homelessness, education, and employment. YOWs pay close attention to the marginal status of the youth they support. They encourage youth to recognize that they are people worth listening to. Finally, a relation of solidarity between marginalized youth and YOWs inspires youth to be receptive to the supportive practices of the YOWs. Rather than emphasizing the importance of formal programs or support manuals, YOWs educate youth by focusing on the topics that interest these young people. YOWs stated that this youth-centered approach helped

with the youth's path to success.

The social development of marginalized youth is a public issue. If the marginalized youth are not regarded as people who should be heard when they access youth developmental services, their experiences of receiving support may lower their levels of confidence. Depending on the approaches of YOWs, marginalized youth may not be able to gain the required social skills for suitable employment, education, and knowledge about how to live independently. As such, school educators, youth development workers, and community outreach workers will benefit from learning that building relations of solidarity between marginalized youth and YOWs contributes to the social development of youth in a significant way.

I have divided my thesis into five chapters. In the second chapter, I discuss relevant contemporary literature concerning the anthropology of youth. The anthropological literature on marginalized youth focuses on how youth organize themselves in social structures when marginalized, rather than how marginalized youth can be socially developed to become productive members of their society. This chapter also outlines relevant research that discusses marginalized youth and the hindrances they face, such as residential concerns and social stigmas. Furthermore, the literature review introduces an anthropological theoretical framework of practice theory and relations of solidarity. These theories guide my thesis and provide an anthropological lens through which I interpret my data. In addition, this chapter examines previous studies on youth in disciplines such as youth studies, sociology, and social work. In chapter three, I discuss the field site and the methods utilized for this study. The third chapter also outlines the participant recruitment process and a list of participants. In chapter four, I discuss how youth outreach workers and marginalized youth establish a relation of solidarity, which helps with the youth's social development. The YOWs perceived that their relationships

with marginalized youth should remain open from the beginning of their relationship. In addition, I illustrate how Toronto youth outreach workers use relations of solidarity to support and educate marginalized youth. The final chapter summarizes my research discoveries and discusses this study's contributions to Anthropology of Youth, youth development studies, and various stakeholders such as YOWs and educators.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0. Introduction

To better support youth who are marginalized, research is required to investigate contemporary practices that support their social development. What strategies and practices do YOWs use to support the social development of marginalized youth in Toronto? How do YOWs create and maintain relationships with marginalized youth? To answer these research questions, it is necessary to review previous work on youth and youth development. The academic literature on marginalized youth provides limited information regarding how effective working relationships are established between YOWs and marginalized youth. This chapter examines studies from a range of disciplines, such as socio-cultural anthropology, sociology, and social work.

2.1 Definitions

At-Risk versus Marginalized

Originally, the term “at-risk youth” emerged in the early 1980s through academic discourse. The term was employed to identify youth who are between the ages of 15–30, who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, face negative peer pressure, and tend to achieve below the grade averages in school (The National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983:3). However, at-risk youth also run the risk of dropping out of school, being unable to succeed after graduating from school, facing homelessness, and not having the requisite literacy

and numeracy skills to obtain employment (McWhirter et al 2013:8). All of these factors make it difficult for at-risk youth to access employment, further their educations, and understand how to live independently.

The social environments that youth are subjected to can influence them to make their world through their social practices, but through their practices youth can influence their social structures also (Ortner 2006:16-17). The practices of youth in their environments illustrate how they understand how to lead their lives (Moyer 2000:132). Gender studies professor Wendy Frisby et al, suggest that “at risk” youth face sedentary lifestyles which can encourage youth to disregard school, and encounter criminal activity (Frisby et al 2010:215). The literature suggests that marginalized youth in Canada who practice sedentary lifestyles are poverty stricken youth who are racialized, and belong to mother headed households (Frisby et al 2010:216). However, research suggests that youth who are “at risk” are depicted to be the troubled or the troubling which creates the “at-risk” character of youth (Cousins 2009:96). Social worker Linda Cousins suggests that the social relationships between marginalized youth and their environments illustrates youth as posing a risk and not posing a risk (Cousins 2009:96). The social worker states that “when youth are framed as “criminals,” policies and practices are then implemented that treat them as such” (Cousins 2009:96). Anthropologist Mary Bucholtz suggests that it is appropriate to offer an account of how youth produce and negotiate cultural forms (Bucholtz 2002:525). It would do well to study and acknowledge the inherent and irreducible complexities of morality for youth who pose a risk or youth who are of risk. By not acknowledging the complexities and the practices of “at-risk” youth, we are contributing to the social economic, political oppressions, and social inequalities that marginalized youth encounter (Cousins 2009:96).

The developmental years for youth are crucial in determining if they will become socially marginalized. Anthropologist Philippe Bourgois states that “the complex interfaces among family, school, and peer groups are crucial to the construction and enforcement of social marginalization, especially in one’s pre-teenage years” (Bourgois 2003:174). The marginalization status of youth then hinders their societal membership and lessens their social opportunities. Because poverty is linked to marginalization very closely, it remains a marginalized youth’s only constant social characteristic, even when they work legal minimum wage employment (Bourgois 2003:115). Thus, the literature illustrates how marginalization is embedded within poverty and is a constant reality for youth who are marginalized.

The concept of “at-risk youth” lacks clear “definition and in some situations may be based on one’s social circumstances rather than chronological age or cultural position” (Bucholtz 2002:531). As a result, using the notion of “at-risk” to refer to certain young people is likely to misrepresent their lives. A less damaging and a more inclusive term is needed to substitute the concept “at-risk” youth (Riele 2006:140). Youth populations are constantly defined based on their socioeconomic background and cultural background (Comber 1998:5). The term “at-risk youth” may seem neutral, but it is a term that may unleash dangerous effects on youth, and can be problematic in terms of what it implies to youth with a low socioeconomic status (Comber 1998:5).

In this thesis, I follow Riele’s suggestion that the term “at-risk” be replaced with “marginalized” in order to shift away from the deficiencies associated with “at-risk” youth (Riele 2006:140). The literature suggests that marginalization is excluding and othering people by placing them in an inferior position in society (Angelides and Michaelidou 2009:30). Early childhood researchers Panayiotis Angelides and Antonia Michaelidou state that “‘othering’ is a

way of defining and securing one's own positive identity through the stigmatization of an 'other'" (Angelides and Michaelidou 2009:30). The researchers further state that "whatever the markers of social differentiation that shape the meaning of "us" and "them", whether they are racial, geographic, ethnic, economic or ideological, there is always the danger that they will become the basis for a self-affirmation that depends upon the denigration of the other group" (Angelides and Michaelidou 2009:30). Therefore, the concept of marginalization is useful as it clearly speaks to those who are socially disadvantaged by an elite class of people due to their socioeconomic position.

In summary, marginalized youth can be identified through their personal characteristics and their relationships (Riele 2006:140). This line of thinking provides a better understanding of marginalized youth, and the social relationships and structures in which they are enmeshed.

Youth Outreach Worker

YOWs work in different capacities (employment counselor, child and youth worker, and group facilitator) to support and educate marginalized youth. Because many of these youth have difficulties related to schooling, employment, and housing, YOWs work with youth to provide them the knowledge and training that is necessary to succeed in society. Researcher Naomi Nichols argues that youth work carries a particular kind of work duties that are conducted by people who hold professional titles, such as youth outreach worker (YOW) or child and youth worker (CYW) (Nichols 2014:4). As such, YOWs are frontline workers who are attuned to the day-to-day lives of the young people they intend to help (Haldane and Wise 2011:2).

The literature suggests that youth outreach work is a practice that engages youth through a professional relationship where the youth are the primary person who is supported (Sercombe

1997:1). YOWs attempt to understand what affects marginalized youth and help to support the social development of youth (Jeffs and Smiths 2010:3). For instance, YOWs support the work of institutions (e.g., schools and places of work) by working with youth so that they recognize institutional expectations and processes (Nichols 2014:4). Thus, marginalized youth are people whose lives are being shaped in negotiation while YOWs consider their social context (Sercombe 1997:6).

Meanwhile, YOWs allow youth to freely enter and end relationships when they want (Jeffs and Smiths 2010:1). This type of relationship with youth encourages YOWs to strategically operate the various opportunities open to them (Jeffs and Smiths 2010:1). Research has demonstrated that YOWs purposely develop programs that attract young people so they have fewer chances to exercise ending the relationship (Jeffs and Smiths 2010:2). This illustrates that youth outreach work can be a practice that carries a wide range of strategies that attract youth to be interested in the developmental programs (Sercombe 1997:2). Programs offered by YOWs are often unstructured and the creativity of YOWs is important in designing effective programs.

There have been scholarly debates regarding what constitutes youth work practice, and the roles that youth workers should take (Sercombe 1997:2). Some scholars argue that YOWs should take a position of not being concerned about results of successfully educating youth and to not be over-anxious about the outcome of their work (Jeffs and Smiths 2010:5). They argue that instead, YOWs should be concerned with informal education and of being there for young people who are involved in youth groups (Jeffs and Smiths 2010:5). This perspective on YOWs encourages us to understand youth work and how it will benefit youth and the public.

2.3 Theoretical Frameworks: Practice Theory and Relations of Solidarity

The anthropological frameworks used to structure this literature review, and to illustrate the anthropological nature of this thesis, are practice theory and, in particular, the concept of “relations of solidarity.” Anthropologist Sherry Ortner’s work on structuralism provides a contemporary, theoretical model for understanding how relationships between YOWs and marginalized youth are created and maintained. However, Ortner’s work does not specifically discuss the relationships or the practices used by YOWs to support and educate marginalized youth. I use practice theory to investigate the participation of YOWs and marginalized youth in their relation of solidarity. Based on their participation in a structured relationship, I will show how YOWs and youth come to understand the solidarity that is established between them.

2.3.1. Practice theory

Ortner proposes that “practice theory is a general theory of the production of social subjects through practice in the world, and of the world itself” (Ortner 2006:16). Likewise, Pierre Bourdieu, a practitioner of practice theory, suggests that practice theory illustrates the roles, or predetermined discourses and actions of subjects through social structures (Bourdieu 1977:2). The literature suggests that the theory sets out to exemplify the truth of the experiences of our social world, and people’s relationships with common environments. The social subjects construct objective relations which structure practice and representations of practices (Bourdieu 1977:3). Bourdieu states that the construction of the social world through the practices of social subjects “presupposes a break with primary knowledge, whose tacitly assumed presuppositions give the social world its self-evident, natural character” (Bourdieu 1977:3). In articulating a

theory of practice, Ortner observes that “the production of the world through human practices—seemed new and very powerful, providing a dialectical synthesis of the opposition between ‘structure’ and ‘agency’ that had not previously been achieved” (Ortner 2006:16). Ortner argues that we make our world through our actions, but that can also mean that we recreate our world through our actions (Ortner 2006:16-17). This theory is important because it shows significance of the relationships between marginalized youth and youth workers. Instead of a top-down teaching, or a hierarchal way of teaching, this theory helps illustrate how YOWs support and educate youth for their social wellbeing.

The literature suggests that practice theory has yet to make links to learning processes (Coburn and Kay Stein 2006:26). Rather, scholars have explored practice theory in terms of its implications for learning (Coburn and Kay Stein 2006:26). Environmental science professor Tom Hargreaves states that practice theory turns its attention to the “social and collective organization of practices that shape individuals’ perceptions, interpretations and actions” (Hargreaves 2011:79). The theory looks at the ways in which mundane practices can eventually lead to behavioural change, which are above and beyond the attitudes or values of people. Simultaneously, practice theory reveals the profound difficulties people encounter when attempting to challenge or change social practices. The challenges extend beyond “the removal of contextual ““barriers”” to change” (Hargreaves 2011:79) and instead illustrate the organization of ordinary everyday life. A practice theory approach suggests that it is necessary to develop a deeper understanding of social and power relations between different groups of people (Hargreaves 2011:79). Thus, practice theory defines a contemporary sense of social structure, and throughout this research project this theory will be used to examine the social relationship between YOWs and marginalized youth.

Practice theory can be used to understand the cultural practices of youth outreach workers' teaching and supporting youth. Ortner states that "the fundamental assumptions of practice theory is that culture constructs people as particular kinds of social actors, but social actors, through their living, on-the ground, variable practices, reproduce or transform –and usually some of each –the culture that made them" (Ortner 2006: 129). The cultural scripts of the youth worker are to "reproduce or transform" (Ortner 2006: 129) the ideology of the marginalized youth they support.

Kimberly Bess and Douglas Perkins, both professors in the Human and Organization Development Department at Vanderbilt University, weigh in on practice theory by stating that "institutional norms, values, and beliefs promote structure and processes within human services that necessitate participatory practices" (Bess and Perkins 135:2009). The requirement of the YOW is to motivate youth to participate in the structured philosophy of learning. However, how does this actually happen? Rae Bridgeman, an anthropologist, suggests that YOWs encourage marginalized youth to get involved with employment training programs so that youth can get acquainted with certain employment culture, such as construction work. These training programs are mandated to support and train youth, but also encourage marginalized youth to get excited about employment (Bridgeman 2001:789). Bridgeman's anthropological study does illustrate a context in which youth outreach workers support marginalized youth, though the research was conducted in the early 1990s. Bridgeman's research suggests that Canadian youth outreach workers work to change the ideology held by marginalized youth by focusing on the importance of social skills development (Bridgeman 2001:785). As a result, the support encourages and motivates marginalized youth to participate in mainstream society so they can meet their individual needs, such as employment.

For marginalized youth to be successful in mainstream society, they need to transform their behaviour and have the full co-operation of the YOW. Once the youth are provided with the necessary training and support, they have an increased opportunity to “make it” in culturally unfamiliar environments (Delpit 1992:296). Sociologist Lisa Delpit suggests that supporting people, including youth, involves a high demand and an extraordinary amount of time and commitment. Practice theory provides a useful lens for understanding how YOWs work with youth in specific ways so that marginalized youth are willing to transform their behaviour and succeed in mainstream society.

2.3.2 Relations of Solidarity

Successful and effective relationships between YOWs and marginalized youth are structured based on solidarity. The literature suggests that solidarity is comprehended as a mutual attachment between people. The term encompasses a common ground between individuals and a normative level of mutual obligation between individuals (Bayertz 1999:3). It is important to recognize that solidarity co-exists with reciprocity, sympathy, and reasoning. Independently, solidarity motivates generosity between individuals where they are connected by some shared meaning (Arnsperger and Varoufakis 2002:171). Economists Yanis Varoufakis and Christian Arnsperger suggest that people think that solidarity is different from selflessness; however solidarity does not differ from selflessness. Rather solidarity incorporates the selflessness, which means understanding the unfortunate conditions of people when they do not have someone who cares for their wellbeing (Arnsperger and Varoufakis 2002:171). We know from the literature that the use of solidarity is a response to the emotional needs, and characters of people (Arnsperger and Varoufakis 2002:11). As an analytical tool, solidarity is capable of providing new insight on underdeveloped theories of human motivation (Arnsperger and Varoufakis

2002:172). Therefore, I use the concept of relations of solidarity to illustrate the unique relationships between the YOWs and youth by examining how their mutual relationships support and educate marginalized young people.

The research on the relationships between youth and YOWs reveals that the role adults play in the lives of marginalized youth can, at times, overshadow the role youth play.

Anthropologist Lawrence Hirschfeld state that “there is an impoverished view that cultural learning overestimates the role adults play and underestimates the contribution of youth in their own development” (Hirschfeld 2002:611). For this reason, it is necessary to convince society that youth deserve broad-based scholarly regard (Hirschfeld 2002:611). The author maintains that youth do, in fact, have some autonomy within their relationships with adults. Mary Bucholtz, an anthropologist, suggests that researchers have found that the relationships between youth and adults are hazy and ambiguous, rather than clear and defined (Bucholtz 2002:531). This could mean that youth have some autonomy in the relationship between themselves and YOWs.

However, how much agency could they possibly have? Ortner states that:

The very categories historically standing behind practice theory, the opposition “structure” and “agency,” seem to suggest a heroic individual -The Agent -up against a Borg-like entity called “Structure.” But nothing could be further from the way I envisage social agents, which is that they are always involved in, and can never act outside of, the multiplicity of social relations in which they are enmeshed (Ortner 2006:130).

Ortner claims that the independence of a person can never actually be obtained while in social relations; rather, a person’s agency is “enmeshed” (Ortner 2006:130) in a social structure with others. The social embeddedness of social actors is always in relations of solidarity (Ortner 2006:130). As such, a social actor participates within the social structure, which compliments other actors within the structure. Previous anthropological research has focused on relations of

solidarity, but paid attention to the implications of solidarity when it fails to be formed among people. Anthropological research faces a dilemma when it exposes issues and practices of those of who inhibit solidarity (Leach 2012:116). As anthropologists, we do not want to do further damage to the relationships of people we observe; rather we want to know the conditions that cripple solidarity (Leach 2012:16). Although previous studies consider these implications by discussing the relations of solidarity, they have not examined the type of solidarity formed between marginalized youth and YOW.

2.4 Vulnerability

By displaying vulnerability, a YOW can establish reciprocal relationships with marginalized youth in which there is solidarity. I am using the term “vulnerability” to illustrate how YOWs and youth are not morally judging or criticizing each other, and how they are able to feel safe and free of judgment while being vulnerable with each other. Previous anthropological research proposes that vulnerability can bind people together to create a basis for solidarity (Leach 2012:117). However, the literature that addresses vulnerability as it is connected to marginalized youth focuses on how marginalized youth are vulnerable to victimization (Asdigian and Finkelhor 1996:3). The literature does not mention how vulnerability can form relationships between YOWs and marginalized youth. Lisa Delpit suggests that as people who support youth, their position is to educate and support them by being open (Delpit 1992:297). The role of the YOW is not solely to be approachable and welcoming, but they should also trust the youth they work with (Jeffs and Smiths 2010:3). Consequently, the character of the YOW is fundamentally important (Jeffs and Smiths 2010:3) while they are supporting the development of marginalized youth.

The research on vulnerable relationships between YOWs and marginalized youth suggests that they need to trust each other. However, it also mentions that YOWs may use marginalized youth's vulnerability to control them. Youth development researchers Filip Cousse, Griet Roset and Maria De Bie suggest that youth outreach work has a plan to "civilize" marginalized youth by enforcing social control on the youth's vulnerability (Cousse, Roets and De Bie 2009:421). The work of YOWs has focused more on an outcome-based approach with a heightened emphasis on monitoring and manipulating the vulnerability of marginalized young people (Cousse, Roets and De Bie 2009:421). This is because marginalized youth are labeled as troublesome, underclass, and dangerous (Cousse, Roets and De Bie 2009:425). Thus, the study conducted by Cousse and colleagues suggests that it is better for marginalized youth to be led by paid YOWs who can act as positive roles models (Cousse, Roets and De Bie 2009:426).

An outcome-based approach (monitoring and manipulating the vulnerability of marginalized youth) encourages youth to seek employment and become a contributing member of society (Cousse, Roets and De Bie 2009:426). Consequently, this particular research reveals that vulnerability can be used as an instrument by YOWs to encourage youth to join mainstream society, rather than used as a basis for forming strong ties between YOWs and marginalized youth.

In summary, the literature on vulnerability does not illustrate how positive working relationships are created and maintained between youth and YOWs. Instead, it focuses on how to manage marginalized youth to ready them for mainstream society. Ortnier's concept of relations of solidarity provides a means through which to understand these relationships, but her discussion does not directly focus on the relationships between YOWs and marginalized youth. In this project, I use her concept as a tool to analyze the nature of these relationships.

2.5 Social structures that form the marginalized youth identity

Anthropological research focuses on marginalized youth from a perspective of how youth behave and organize themselves within social structures. There are many complex interfaces, “such as family, school, and peer groups that are crucial to the construction and enforcement of youth’s social marginalization” (Bourgois 2003:174). Being a marginalized young person can mean living in overcrowded homes that are only meant for two or three people, or attending schools that do not meet the individual needs of the young person (Vigil 2002:5). Drug and alcohol use tends to be an issue for these youth, but these substances are not the only problems they face (Adalf and Smart 1991:1000). The status and the social structures that relate to youth can hinder their societal membership, but also lessen their opportunities in life.

2.5.1 Social Environments

The social environments that youth are in can influence them to misbehave and resist change. Anthropological research on marginalized youth suggests that negative behaviors are forms of resistance that are demonstrated by marginalized youth against a society that has oppressed them (Hewelett and Schlegel 2011:286). Anthropologists Patricia Drapper and Henry Harpending suggest that marginalized youth who are reared in certain low socioeconomic environments should be the subject of widespread attention. Paying attention to the personal histories of youth can reveal a lot that maybe hidden, and also makes it easier to understand their behaviors up to their adulthood (Drapper and Harpending 1982:255).

Research suggests that youth who are raised in female-headed households are usually raised in lower socioeconomic environments. Youth who reside in these environments are also

frequently raised without fathers and suffer a more precarious existence, usually because of their mother's economic status (Drapper and Harpending 1982:256). Drapper and Harpending suggest that because of these environments, adolescent male children are aggressive and look down upon women. Young women in these environments show early signs of sexual interest, sexual activity, and negative attitudes towards males (Drapper and Harpending 1982:256).

In the existing research, marginalized young people, particularly Blacks, are illustrated as deviant and broken (Stack 1970:22). Anthropologist Carol Stack states that the "culture of poverty notion explains the persistence of poverty in terms of presumed negative qualities within a culture: family disorganization, group disorganization, personal disorganization, resignation, and fatalism" (Stack 1970:23). Stack illustrates poverty and its negative qualities as characteristics that portray an individual who is marginalized. However, the persistence of such circumstances has been compounded by public and private sectors which have normalized marginalized conditions for youth (Bernat 1999: 122). The literature thus suggests that many marginalized youth face impoverished conditions and family environments whereby there is limited upward mobility. As a result of the distressed circumstances, these youth face social risks that hinder their development towards adulthood.

Social environments and the associated peer groups can add to a youth's involvement in a "deviant" lifestyle. Youth who are influenced by their peer groups can encounter alcohol and substance abuse, criminal activity, and a disinterest in school. Bourgois suggests that school is a powerful socializing force for marginalized youth. They go to school, but they avoid going to class. Rather, they spend most of their time in the hallways, with their peers, where they can avoid teacher control (Bourgois 1995:191). Considering that many marginalized youth do not spend a lot of time in class, they are learning from their peers while hanging out in the spaces of

the school (Bourgois 1995:194). Consequently, youth are learning from peers, but during this process of learning they are susceptible of learning a deviant lifestyle.

Research suggests that peer groups can encourage youth to adopt a deviant lifestyle which could lead to criminal offenses, such as theft, distributing illegal drugs, and violent attacks on others (O'Grady 145:2011). Living a deviant lifestyle can cause youth to face limited or no education, and even homelessness. The experiences of contending with the adverse condition of street life are more closely related to criminal activity (O'Grady 145:2011). Many environments not only influence, but also create, unsafe places for marginalized youth.

The social environments create a disposition of basic personality features that integrate into a person's identity (Sokefeld 1999:417). Martin Sokefeld states that "in social anthropology the concept of identity is used in the context of ethnic identity. This illustrates "self- sameness but to the sameness of the self with others, that is, to a consciousness of sharing certain characteristics" (Sokefeld 1999:417). The range of characteristics can include language, and culture within a group" (Sokefeld 1999:417). These distinctive understandings complement and fit together; however, the group a person belongs to "constitutes an important part of the social environment in which personal identity is formed" (Sokefeld 1999:417). Sokefeld states that "the self thus becomes subject in the dual sense of being subjected to the conditions of the world and, simultaneously, being the agent of knowing and doing in that world" (Sokefeld 1999:417). Therefore, the identity of marginalized youth is created through cultural relationships in specific social environments.

2.5.2 Poverty and Other Financial realities

Poverty is closely linked to marginalization, as it remains a marginalized youth's only constant social characteristic, even when they work legal minimum wage employment (Bourgois 2003:115). Because these youth are living in poverty or very close to the poverty line, they are susceptible to risky behaviors such as dealing illegal drugs for money (Bourgois 1995:174) and violent actions. Anthropologist Christopher Bernat states that youth who are marginalized and accustomed to street life “develop their own social organizations, territorial domains, and networks of support linked to the sharing of food and goods, these networks are maintained as expressions of political alliance” (Bernat 1999:122). Considering these networks within which marginalized youth associate, they are still seen as “un-socialized or are asocial threats to established order” (Bernat 1999:122).

Bridgeman suggests that in Canada there has been a tendency to classify marginalized youth in terms of being criminal and deviant (Bridgeman 2001:783-784). Additionally, the state has gradually withdrawn from the provision of social services to the young and blamed consequent increases of homelessness and poverty on the most marginal youth themselves (Bridgeman 2001:784). Canada is world-renowned for its social programs that help with youth development. It is also true, however, that such programs are being dismantled (Bridgeman 2001:784). The lack of opportunities at an early age, due to unemployment, poverty, and available state assistance, forces marginalized youth to fend for themselves (Baron and Hartnagel 1997:410). Bridgeman suggests that a brief look at relationships among youth, poverty, and existing social assistance programs offers insights as to why youth remain marginalized (Bridgeman 2001:784). Some of these reasons are the result of some youth “falling between the cracks” (Bridgeman 2001:784) of the youth care system in Canada. Literature from sociologists

Stephen Baron and Timothy Hartnagel suggests that the result of youth falling “between the cracks” (Bridgeman 2001:784) is that they spend a lot of time without adequate shelter and are inhibited from seeking employment or obtaining permanent residency (Baron and Hartnagel 1997:410). The lack of support alienates youth from the mainstream society and puts them further at risk (Baron and Hartnagel 1997:410). The lack of support for marginalized youth remains a growing social issue in Toronto that can affect their social development, but also their health (Adalf and Smart 1991:999). Many youth have to negotiate social/economic/living conditions on their own and this makes it challenging for them to overcome the conditions that contribute to their marginalization.

A sufficient income to sustain a livable and healthy lifestyle is a necessity for youth, but also for their families. There are families that rely on government funding (welfare) to obtain basic necessities, such as food or clothing. The literature suggests that youth who are raised on this type of financial funding are likely to continue to use it in to their adulthood. Carol Stacks states, “many of whom were raised on public welfare, and now, as adults in their twenties to forties, are raising their children on welfare” (Stack 27: 1974). She suggests that many marginalized youth, who are raised on monetary social assistance, may continue the cycle of the monetary dependence in their adulthood. This example illustrates how the place of marginalized youth is culturally constructed through their relationships with kin, and this type of financial support can affect a youth’s upward mobility.

Many youth who share the same dwelling as their parental guardians also share financial, social, and material poverty stress. Anthropologist Mary Bucholtz states that youth “in late industrial societies may not experience adolescence as a distinctive life stage” (Bucholtz 2002: 529). This may be “due to economic and other constraints that move them quickly into adult

responsibilities” (Bucholtz 2002: 529). Potential stressors, other than material poverty, can be linked to single parent households, teenage parenthood, and oversized family units where little attention is given to the individuality of the youth (Schute 2008:19). Thus, the literature suggests that youth also share the financial responsibilities with their parents or guardians, which quickly moves them into adulthood.

In summary, the marginalized identity of youth is constructed by their social environments. Poverty and other financial pressure can hinder their development towards adulthood. Many of the poorer households can be disruptive environments, where youth are ultimately casualties when households disintegrate (Bourgois 1995:260). Peer groups of youth can deter their positive growth, as peers may not be interested in positive places for learning, such as the classroom.

The literature reviewed in this section discusses the environments surrounding marginalized youth and their influences on youth development. However, the research heavily focuses on how marginalized youth behave and organize themselves within social structures. How do we as researchers understand the social barriers that youth face and how they are supported by non-kin? The literature examined in this section does not discuss what strategies to be employed when teaching marginalized youth. Understanding how to support the upward mobility of marginalized youth is important in understanding how to integrate them in to the fabric of mainstream society.

2.6 Effective Strategies of Youth Development

Marginalized youth are supported by YOWs to gain skills and training, so that they can join mainstream society, but the support can be compromised. Sociologist Linda Burton suggests that there is an expectation of youth to adhere to protocols of adult monitored activities. The literature suggests that during the activities in these places youth are treated like “older children.” However, in other places, such as the home, marginalized youth are treated like “grown folks” (Burton 1997:213). The reason youth are treated like “grown folks” (Burton 1997:213) is because they are saddled with adult responsibilities that are “in direct conflict with the “older child”” (Burton 1997:213) treatment and adult monitoring they receive while with YOWs. Youth are constantly negotiating their rights to social needs, but there is a common inconsistency in the developmental expectations of marginalized youth set by the people working with them (Burton 1997:213). Thus, a YOW has a duty that must incorporate strategies to engage youth, but they must also consider their family obligations and expectations.

2.6.1 Culturally Relevant Learning and Teaching

YOWs respond to the many concerns that these young people encounter, such as seeking employment and academic difficulties in school. However, current academic literature suggests that understanding how to effectively teach and support marginalized youth means taking their learning abilities and their discourses into consideration. Anthropologist Barry Osborne suggests that those who work with youth and “teach in culturally relevant ways spell out the cultural assumptions on the structure of learning” (Osborne 1996:288). The anthropologist further states that “this can be done in a variety of ways, including brainstorming with youth” (Osborne 1996:288); this ensures that youth “are clear about what is going on in their classroom” (Osborne 1996:288). Additionally, such strategies support the patterns that are used by the youth in their

homes and communities (Osborne 1996:303). The anthropologist suggests that if youth are permitted to make use of patterns that are familiar from their homes and their communities while they are being taught, then they are more likely to earnestly participate and engage more during learning activities, which results in them learning more (Osborn 1996:303).

Literature also suggests that competency of marginalized youth should be considered when supporting and educating them. Anthropologist Douglas Foley suggests that the ability of racialized and marginalized youth's "communicative competence at turn-taking, question-asking and answering, story-telling, and general speech style creates cultural conflicts that can lead educators to treat them differently" (Foley 2009:61). Marginalized youth who are socialized in different contexts attend learning environments "differentially prepared and positioned to respond to the demands of learning" (Hull and Shultz 2008:579). Thus they experience learning differently (Hull and Schultz 2008:579). YOWs need to have the capacity to utilize these home/community participation structures as part of their knowledge base to serve youth (Osborne 1996:303). Therefore, a lot is gained from such learning processes which allow youth to think about who they are, the environments they live in, and how they can make changes to society (Cammarota 2011:2).

The literature further suggests that the use of culturally relevant teaching materials and techniques is appropriate when teaching marginalized youth. However, Anthropologist Gloria Ladson-Billings suggests that prospective educators "regularly and loosely use the word "culture" as an explanation for forms of students' behavior they cannot describe" (Ladson-Billings 2006:104). The anthropologist suggests that educators mention "culture" as the problem and the response to their issues with youth who are different than themselves (Ladson-Billings 2006:104). Ladson-Billings argues, "the problem of culture in teaching is not merely one of

exclusion. It is also one of over determination...Culture is randomly and regularly used to explain everything” (Ladson-Billings 2006:104). As a result, educators, including YOWs, educate youth to learn nothing regarding their culture (Ladson-Billings 2006:104). Rather, educators “use it with authority as one of the primary explanations for everything from school failure to problems with behavior management and discipline” (Ladson-Billings 2006:104). Thus scholars show that culturally based learning can be either effective or ineffective for different reasons. Osborne argues that there is effective use of culturally based teaching measures, because they make learning clear for youth. While Ladson-Billings notes that culture is used as an explanation for learning deficiencies in marginalized youth. Considering both accounts, the current literature shows inconsistency in terms of how to support and educate marginalized youth. The literature recommends that culturally relevant practices are effective, but then suggests that it can be counterproductive when educating youth.

2.6.2 Relationships with Marginalized Youth

Prior to educating any marginalized youth, YOWs are encouraged to develop relationships with the youth by being warm toward and respectful of them (Osborne 1996:296). Educators such as YOWs maintain a relationship that is a “you can and you will do it” (Delpit 1992:299) approach to ensure they meet their expectations. For support to be practiced in this manner, YOWs are able to maintain a relationship that incorporates a style of teaching that supports youth within the rules of dominant discourses, which also helps youth to succeed in mainstream society (Delpit 1992:299). Youth, on the other hand, learn through this type of relationship to want to learn from those who support them (Delpit 1992:299). Thus, despite the difficulties entailed during the process to educate marginalized youth, the relationships between

marginalized youth and the YOWs encourage youth to acquire the necessary training so that they can establish a less marginal position in society.

2.7 Educational Expectations

The expectation of many YOWs is to influence youth so that their understanding of society is broadened. This will enable them to make informed, positive life decisions. The role of a YOW is to structure an environment with the goal to socially integrate marginalized youth into mainstream society. A YOW also assists them through their transition to adulthood. Bucholtz states, “the emphasis on adolescence as a staging ground for integration into the adult community often obscures young people’s own cultural agency or frames it solely in relation to adult concerns” (Bucholtz 2002:525). One of the main goals of the educator is to ready youth for real world, or “adults concerns” (Bucholtz 2002:525), making the agency of the youth seem overpowered by adults. To prevent the youth from feeling overpowered by their adult supporters, the youth must want to embrace change for themselves. Anthropologist Carol Stack states, “individuals risk trusting others because they want to change their lives” (Stack1974:39). As such, the youth need to trust in order for them to change socially. This would not lessen their agency, but enmesh it with the agency of the YOW.

Concentrating on the relationship tension between youth outreach workers and youth complicates the view of their relationship and takes away emphasis on how relationships are manifested and maintained between youth and YOWs. Osbourne suggests that YOWs need to rethink what they are doing to support youth. Rethinking will not automatically and drastically change the way to support youth, but it will begin to provide a clear framework for understanding youth, and teaching them. Rethinking avoids blaming, and it informs teaching

processes that are designed to maximize learning for all youth (Osbourne 1996:285). The anthropological literature suggests that young people are the agents and the “experiencers” of cultural variations (Bucholtz 2002:530). Thus, the literature suggests that youth should not be forced to accept these ideologies, but to choose to accept them as agents of their individual success. There is a level of involvement that is expected from the YOWs to motivate youth, but also reconstruct their ideology so that youth as agents adopt a practice that is accepted by mainstream society.

In summary, the literature on the development of youth examines how they should accept the dominant ideologies of YOWs for their success. However, the literature lacks focus on the creation and maintenance of relationships between marginalized youth and YOWs. What do these relationships look like? How do these relationships play a role in facilitating youth’s acceptance of mainstream ideologies? Ortner’s work provides a lens for understanding these relationships of solidarity.

2.8 Conclusion

The anthropological research on marginalized youth is underdeveloped. It does not provide practical recommendations that can assist with the growth of marginalized youth. The lack of information can result in missed opportunities for the success and well-being of marginalized youth. A detailed examination of marginalized youth being supported by YOWs, and an analysis of their relationships to positively develop youth could be beneficial in the anthropological studies of youth.

CHAPTER 3

FIELD SITE AND RESEARCH METHODS

In this chapter, I describe my field site and research methods. My research was conducted in Toronto, Ontario.

3.0 Priority Neighbourhoods in Toronto

My research goal is to gain a better understanding of how YOWs within non-profit organizations in Toronto strive to educate and support marginalized youth. It was imperative that this study took place in an area that was significantly populated with YOWs, so I could have a clear understanding of their experiences and perspectives. There are some 55,000 social service non-profit organizations in Ontario (Ontario Nonprofit Network 2015), and 22% of these organizations serve youth (Labsy et al, 2006:7). Toronto was chosen as it is a major city in the province.

The city of Toronto is comprised of eleven priority neighbourhoods, which are integrated into different municipalities. These municipalities are: Scarborough, North York, Etobicoke, East York, York, and Toronto. Toronto identifies the following neighbourhoods to be of priority because of their low socioeconomic locations. The priority neighbourhoods are the following: Weston – Mt Denis (located in the York area), Jamestown (located in the North York area), Scarborough Village (located in the Scarborough area), Dorset Park (located in the Scarborough area), Lawrence Heights (located in the York area), Westminster – Branson (located in the North York area), Flemington Park (located in the East York area), Crescent Town (located in the East York), Malvern (located in the Scarborough area), Jane and Finch (located in the North York area), Kingston – Galloway, Eglinton Ave. E – Kennedy Park (located in the Scarborough area),

and Steeles – L'Amoreaux (located in the Scarborough area). These neighbourhoods are areas where many non-profit organizations, and the respective YOWs, locate themselves in order to serve and support marginalized youth.



Figure 1 Map of Toronto Priority areas (Metro News 2013)

3.1 Statistics on Marginalized Youth in Toronto

In this section I illustrate statistical data that support my definition and characterization of marginalized youth, which reflect the age group that I defined earlier. Specifically, the data that I included are concerned with education, unemployment, criminalization and homelessness. Statistical data is relevant to understanding the socioeconomic position of marginalized youth in Toronto. According to the non-profit organization Youth Without Shelter, 28% of Toronto's homeless people are youth (Youth Without Shelter 2015). Research has estimated that each year, 10,000 youth experience homelessness. This includes chronic homelessness (an individual who has been homeless for years), episodic homelessness (a person who has been homeless less than

a year and has fewer than four episodes), and transitional homelessness (a person who is transitioning from an emergency shelter to a permanent residence). Additional statistical data support my characterization of marginalized youth. According to Statistics Canada (2013), 36% of Ontario's youth have not attained high school education. Of those who drop out of high school, 41% are male and 31% are female (Statistics Canada 2013). The number of Toronto youth who have been criminally charged in 2013 was 6,239 (Statistics Canada 2013). The majority of youth who have been criminally charged can be considered "at-risk youth". The unemployment rate for Toronto youth in the year of 2014 was reported to be 18% (Statistics Canada 2014). These figures provide a context in which youth development programs are developed.

3.2 Youth Outreach Workers

YOWs are full-time, part-time, or volunteer workers who work for non-profit organizations, or government organizations, providing youth with development programs. YOWs mentor marginalized youth so that they can find part-time and full-time employment and temporary shelter or permanent housing. YOWs also provide them with academic support.

Individuals who volunteer as outreach workers, such as students, are usually seeking to gain the necessary skills and training for a future in community outreach work. Students who volunteer as youth workers typically do it for academic reasons. College, university, or co-op placements help provide employability skills, and theoretical and practical knowledge to excel in their post-secondary studies. Thus, both paid workers and volunteers serve to support marginalized youth.

The availability of outreach workers is vital because youth must be able to access them for support and resources in times of crisis. Understanding that the outreach worker is the frontline staff who directly support the youth, their presence is needed to ensure that youth are being served in a timely manner. Many outreach workers work an average eight-hour day shift (8am to 4pm), but there are also individuals who work evening shifts (5pm to 9pm), and night shifts (11pm to 7am).

YOWs usually live within or close to the neighbourhoods in which they support youth. This poses a great advantage to youth since the workers are easily accessible. Also, many of the non-profit organizations that support marginalized youth are usually located in priority neighbourhoods. Thus, youth who need their services are able to easily access them.

The geographical location of a non-profit organization and its employed outreach workers allows YOWs to sustain a fluid relationship with marginalized youth. Also, the compatibility of the outreach workers and the youth could be the beginning of a lengthy, and sometimes a lifelong, bond. If YOWs cannot provide the necessary support to marginalized youth, the youth are unaware about the services and the supports that are offered, which limits their opportunities to socially integrate into mainstream society (Connolly and Joly 2012: 525).

Given the varied roles and responsibilities of many YOWs, it is important to not consider them homogeneous. The skills and experience of YOWs vary considerably in accordance with their roles within non-profit organizations. The relationships that they create, build, and maintain with youth can vary as well, depending on the individual YOW. The duties and responsibilities of YOWs suggest that the norm is to serve youth in many areas of social support. Thus, outreach workers are relied upon by many marginalized youth to be knowledgeable on many topics such

as employment, health, education, and affordable housing, as well as the locations of services like employable skills training centres, food banks, and Goodwill centers. Knowledgeable outreach workers are able to share wisdom with many marginalized youth, increasing their chances for social success. Connolly and Joly state, “successful outreach is very often identified by examining engagement, meaning the point at which workers have developed rapport with their client, meet their basic needs, and empowered them to take further steps in accessing services” (Connolly and Joly 2012:525).

3.3 Non-profit organizations

Various non-profit organizations located in Toronto provide many marginalized youth in different neighbourhoods with services for human social development. In these community organizations, youth are supported in a variety of services, such as employment skills, literacy training, and leadership training (Thompson 2012:58). Community-based organizations are particularly important for marginalized youth because their schools and neighbourhoods seldom offer social services (Thompson 2012:58).

Not-for-profit organizations are financed by public and private donors. The money received by non-profits funds the programs and compensates the staff who facilitate workshops. There are many ways that these types of establishments provide services. There are either mobile outreach or fixed outreach sites. The participants in this research worked in fixed outreach sites. Fixed sites are usually centres that are located in the community where youth reside.

3.4 Research Design

In this thesis project, I used snowball sampling and in-depth semi-structured interviews. Observing outreach workers engage youth would have been ideal for this project, but given the

limited access to the youth outreach organizations and the limited time I had to complete the project, participant observation was not an option for me to gather data. The absence of participant observation was not, and should not, be considered a major limitation to this project. Without the use of that anthropological method, I was still able to extract relevant data from participants who work for various non-profit organizations. Speaking to many outreach workers from different organizations provided me with high quality data. Additionally, with the new relationships that I built during my research, I placed myself confidently in the position of a trustworthy researcher.

3.4.1 Recruiting Participants

Meeting YOWs and program coordinators prior to conducting interviews was important to establish trust between the interviewees and myself. It was essential for many of the outreach workers to meet and speak with me because they wanted to ensure that the information that they were sharing with me would remain confidential. In meeting with outreach workers, I was able to provide them with clear understanding of who I was and my reasons for conducting this project. Tokenism was mentioned by several of the outreach workers as the reason for the pre-meeting. The concept of tokenism speaks to researchers or journalists who aim at gaining data from minority and marginalized groups but make a minimal, or token, effort at exchange for information for their purposes. Multiple outreach workers mentioned that tokenism was not useful to non-profit organizations or to the youth they support.

To avoid being a researcher who demonstrates “tokenism,” I made it my goal to meet and greet YOWs personally, participate in group meetings, and inform those YOWs at such meetings of my personal experiences working with youth. At no time during initial meetings did I extract data for my project.

The participants were recruited through snowball sampling and they were selected based on their self-identified status as a non-profit youth outreach worker. At first, connecting with YOWs was a challenge. There was a period of three weeks where I was unable to connect with workers. I spent days calling different organizations, speaking with representatives of the organizations over the phone, and emailing my information letter to program facilitators. I gained access to phone numbers of many organizations that I reached out to by using a website. The site provided me with phone numbers, the names of the organizations, and their addresses. In many circumstances there was a link associated to the organizations profile that was on the website. Once I clicked on it, I was forwarded to the non-profit organizations' websites. By contacting many organizations via phone, I was able to speak with representatives. Many of them requested me to forward my student credentials, and my research information to their general email. The representatives would then inform me that someone would contact me to follow up, with an interview or a meeting at a later date. This usually did not happen.

Those that did not follow through could have been because of “tokenism”, which I spoke of earlier. “Who is Warren Clarke and what type of research is he really doing?” This could have been the question that was present in the mind of the person who was reading my research information. Considering I will never know the reasons as to why I did not receive a response, I do not hold any malice towards anyone.

A well-known program facilitator in the community outreach sector assisted me when I encountered research obstacles. Following several introductory emails she sent to other outreach workers, I was able to recruit six youth workers who were more than willing to participate in my research. After meeting and interviewing the six participants, they introduced me to the additional 11 participants. All of the youth workers with whom I communicated showed an

interest in the project by sharing valuable information that has abetted in the final production of my thesis.

The in-depth semi-structured interviews commenced on August 2014, and were finalized in October 2014. I spoke with 17 people in Toronto, Ontario. Participants were interviewed at libraries, coffee shops, and restaurants. It was a pleasure speaking with each participant and I valued their enthusiasm and their experiences supporting marginalized youth.

The interviews consisted of twenty opened ended questions (see Appendix A – Interview Questions). However, because of the flow of the conversation, many participants addressed a few of the questions prior to being asked. The interview questions were divided into four themes. The first theme consisted of questions that set out to understand the youth workers' perception of supporting marginalized youth. These questions were used to engage the participants in the conversation and to help me gain an understanding of how YOWs support youth during their scheduled youth programs. The first theme inquired about their perception of social integration. The second theme consisted of questions that corresponded to the social spaces used to support marginalized youth. The third theme dealt with the relationships and the dialogue between YOWs and the youth they support. The fourth theme dealt with how the youth outreach worker used their gender role to serve youth. Many of the interviews lasted between thirty to forty minutes. Two interviews continued past an hour, while a few interviews only took twenty minutes. Interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and the analysis was coded in Nvivo10 data analysis software.

Time was a crucial element of my project. Several participants had to withdraw from the project due to conflicts in their schedule. A few of the participants provided fifteen to twenty minutes, rather than the recommended forty to sixty minutes for the interview. Due to the youth

workers commitments with the marginalized youth they support, some of the youth workers had to withdraw from the research project, or could only provide a limited amount of time.

3.4.2 Participant Profile

Of the 17 participants, four were project coordinators who were employed by a non-profit organization. Out of the four project coordinators, three were female, and one was male. The remaining 13 participants are identified as YOWs, street outreach workers, youth employment counsellors, and student success counsellors. Street outreach workers, youth employment counsellors, and student success counsellors are alternative titles given to YOWs. Of the 17 participants, 11 were males and six were females. Considering that I did not recruit participants based on their gender, there is no identifiable information suggesting that YOWs are gender-specific. The table below illustrates the age, gender, the general area where the participant support youth, and the duration of involvement in youth development programs. The duration of involvement includes an interviewee's involvement in youth outreach programs as YOWs and, in some cases, as a youth. For example, John, LeBron, and Janet included the years of involvement as recipients of support; they later on found careers as a youth outreach worker. Some of the participants started working as a youth camp leader around the age of 15.

	Participant	Age	Gender	Duration of Involvement in Youth Outreach Programs
1	Adele	20 – 25	Female	3 years
2	Michael	30 – 35	Male	14 years
3	Will	25 – 30	Male	6 years
4	Felicia	30 – 35	Female	15 years
5	Jordan	20 – 25	Male	10 years
6	Dwayne	30 – 35	Male	10 years

7	George	30 – 35	Male	10 years
8	Justin	30 – 35	Male	12 years
9	Kyle	30 – 35	Male	15 years
10	Kent	30 – 35	Male	15 years
11	Courtney	30 – 35	Male	6 years
12	Michelle	25 – 30	Female	10 years
13	Janet	20 – 25	Female	10 years
14	John	25 – 30	Male	17 years
15	Candace	25 – 30	Female	6 years
16	Stephanie	20 – 25	Female	2 years
17	LeBron	25 – 30	Male	20 years

Table 1 Basic Participant Profile Information

Youth outreach workers	Area
5 youth outreach workers 3 male and 2 female	Toronto Central
6 youth outreach workers 6 male and 0 female	Toronto East
6 youth outreach workers 2 male and 4 female	Toronto West

Table 2 Participants' Gender and Area

Each participant was informed that the data they provided would be available to them following their interview and would be kept confidential. None of the participants asked to review, or change any of the information that they provided. I felt that each individual who I interacted with trusted me to safe-guard their information and to represent their views and experiences through my thesis. My research is intended to denote the words of the participants accurately, as they are the key source for my research project.

3.5 Ethical Issues

Standard interview protocols and ethics were adhered to in my research project. The risks of participating were minimal since the participants' confidentiality was kept throughout the research project. I chose not to recruit multiple participants from small organizations due to the confidentiality concerns for the project. Interviewing multiple people from small organizations makes it easier to identify my research participants. This could potentially put their employment and work reputation at risk.

Having the approval of the ethics board at the University of Guelph, and informing the participants of the approved research project, I felt a sense of trust between the participants and I. Participants were asked to read and sign a consent form before the interview; that form indicated that they understood the terms of their participation in the project and that they approved of their participation. Also, each participant was asked a second time to confirm their consent on the audio-recording prior to the interview.

CHAPTER 4

THE STRATEGIES OF TORONTO YOWs TO SUPPORT MARGINALIZED YOUTH

The relationships created between marginalized youth and YOWs is a relation of solidarity that supports youth development. Through these relationships, youth are able to relate their personal concerns about issues such as homelessness with a person who not only can support them, but who also understands or has experienced similar issues. This is a bond that is relational because the youth are supported by someone who understands or has experienced similar social barriers. In this project, I found many themes that illustrated the relationships between the YOWs and marginalized youth. During the interviews, the Toronto YOWs discussed that the creation and the maintenance of positive relationships is what educates and supports the development of marginalized youth. Without positive relationships, a youth's entry into mainstream society can be difficult.

Throughout the interview process with participants, the most important theme that was mentioned was how YOWs strive to maintain a reciprocal relationship with youth in which there is an exchange of shared vulnerability. Such a relationship encourages youth to feel safe, free of judgement, and comfortable discussing their concerns. Also, vulnerability is used as a strategy for YOWs to educate and befriend marginalized youth. This way it was easier for the YOWs and the youth to understand each other and build a trusting relationship that supports and educates marginalized youth.

YOWs discussed their role as individuals who saw themselves in the youth they serve. Through their reflection of self in the youth, the participants relied on their memories to support youth through their issues. They used their life experiences as examples to teach and guide youth with difficulties such as challenging school situations and tough residential concerns. The use of their experiences encouraged youth to learn from people who are not only knowledgeable, but also have experienced similar concerns. Thus, YOWs relied on this type of support as their strategy to support marginalized youth.

This chapter will illustrate that supporting marginalized youth as a YOW is more complex than just helping them seek employment so they can join mainstream society. In order to understand the complexities of their relationships, we must consider the reciprocal relationship in which there is an exchange of shared vulnerability. Without building a reciprocal relationship with marginalized youth, there is a chance youth would resist their support and seek to end all relations with YOWs. By acknowledging the importance of this equality, we are able to understand the practices used by YOWs to support marginalized youth and how YOWs construct their identities in this context.

4.0 The Passion to Support Marginalized Youth

The first way in which YOWs attempt to establish a balanced, reciprocal relationship is through a commitment to and passion for supporting the well-being of marginalized youth. In order for YOWs to educate, support, and appropriately guide marginalized youth, they need to understand the intricate issues that youth face. To understand the social issues of the youth, the YOWs work together with youth to understand the youth's concerns holistically and then YOWs suggest strategies to resolve the issues. The participants emphasized in detail the importance of

understanding the environmental and social concerns of marginalized youth and also using their wisdom to implement effective supportive practices. Thus, to demonstrate to youth that they are passionate about supporting them, YOWs used the strategies of sharing personal information, encouraging open dialogue, encouraging youth to speak their mind, and being physically available to them.

In summary, the supportive practices of the participants include multiple measures to support youth. Each participant showed no signs of uncertainty in their careers and was poised for the success and social development of youth. The success of YOWs is not measured by the number of youth served but rather by the determination for the social well-being of the individuals in need of support.

4.0.1 Vulnerability and Relationships

“My relationship is a love and an ‘I don’t care’ relationship” - Kyle

YOWs structure reciprocal relationships to show that they were vulnerable to marginalized youth. This strategy created and maintained positive relationships with youth and made their practices relevant. Considering that the participants had an authoritative role to play, none of them demonstrated the need to use force or coercion to structure positive relationships.

Jordan has been working as a YOW for over ten years. When we met for the interview, I was interested in learning as much as I could from him. We met at a local coffee shop in Toronto, but before we entered into the proposed meeting place he lead me around the corner to show me a painting on a nearby wall. The street graffiti was done by a youth that he works with. He was so appreciative of the art that he needed to show me. Jordan’s thoughtful act to introduce me to something that is meaningful to him initiated a conversation that was open about the type

of relationship he forms with youth. His observation that he is a vulnerable YOW was insightful.

He states:

I think a big part to build positive relationships with youth that has been successful for me, is showing vulnerability. I think a lot of the success that I have had working with young people is me being open. I think that's with anybody, it's hard to connect with a person that you feel is invulnerable. The youth that I deal with know that I'm not perfect, I have messed up, and I still mess up. Whatever that stuff is that shows you to be a real human, I think, is a really important part in building that trusting relationship with young people. When that happens, they can be like [The youth say] "you're a real person. You're not just a perfect dude, and you're willing to tell me stuff about yourself. So, I'm willing to tell you real stuff about me.

Jordan's vulnerability is intentional and he expects his the youth he supports to reciprocate the same vulnerability with him. For youth being candid about themselves allows a relation of solidarity to begin between the YOW and the young person. The defencelessness that Jordan spoke of is his agency and it is "enmeshed" (Ortner 2006:130) with the marginalized young person's agency; together, a relation of solidarity is formed. Jordan's demonstration of vulnerability convinces the youth he supports to reciprocate the same understanding. This tactic encourages youth to open up with the YOW, but at the same time they are able to understand the person who is supporting them. As such, the agency of the YOWs and the agency of the youth are complementary within the structured relationship (Ortner 2006:130).

Why should the YOWs illustrate their agency in such a fashion? When Jordan spoke of himself in this way, he did so unworried. Is he not concerned with how youth perceive him? He explains further:

So, it's all about disarming people. When I start and introduce the workshop I'm a goof, I'm a one hundred percent goof, and it's one hundred percent intentional, because I want to make people feel comfortable. If I'm the goof in the room, everyone else will feel comfortable being a little goofy. That makes for a much more comfortable situation

where people are like [The youth say] “oh I can mess up. I don’t have to be so straight, and act like I’m wearing a three piece suit all the time.

Thus, Jordan’s agency is enmeshed in a set of social relations with the youth he supports, where the youth understand his “goofiness”. The intent, as Jordan mentions, is to “disarm” marginalized youth so they are comfortable in building a relationship that fosters learning. Considering the YOWs’ interaction is one that shows vulnerability, its purpose is for youth to trust and to be open with YOWs. It is important for the YOW to encourage youth to learn to trust them so they can appreciate the tutelage that will benefit their social development.

Through the research I have identified that vulnerability is a strategy for one YOW that builds and structures his relationships with the youth he serves. While speaking with LeBron, another YOW who participated in the study, he said the following:

LeBron: When you’re dealing with volatile, “at-risk” youth, it’s important that you level up with them.

Warren: What do you mean by levelling up?

LeBron: What I mean by levelling up is come to their level. You already know that you’re, so to speak, educated and in a place of authority, and they already know that. But, if you really want to reach them you have to humble yourself and come to their level and speak to them, and not talk down to them. That’s the only way that you’re going to reach those youth. That’s why I reach my youth. For example, right now I’m in an Aboriginal community and that’s the type of tactics and strategies that I use, the student gravitate to that. You can fake the funk, however the kids know that and they will eat you alive. That’s why some teachers, some educators, or some community activists don’t last in certain environments because they are not authentic. It’s important to be authentic, one hundred percent real and genuine wherever you are.

Listening to LeBron, I understood his strategy to reach “at-risk youth” is to demonstrate his true colors, figuratively speaking, when serving youth. By showing youth who he really is, and not “faking the funk,” it illustrates to them that the YOW is being real and, which creates positive and open relationships. The positive interactions are able to materialize because the youth “gravitate” to the realness of the YOW, which they can recognize. The participant suggests

that youth comprehend when they are dealing with YOWs who are “not real” with them, which could foster in unhealthy relationships or no relationships.

In summary, by being a vulnerable YOW, as Jordan mentions, or by being a person who supports youth with the idea of “levelling up,” YOWs build trust with marginalized youth. From the data, I understood that gaining the youth’s full attention and cooperation is a component of the YOWs’ plan to socially develop youth. It is not beneficial for the YOWs to reject the youth’s agency within their relationship because then they will not be able to holistically understand one another. Through the data, I understood it is valuable for the YOWs to structure the relationship with youth jointly.

4.0.2 Maintaining Consistency with Youth

Speaking with John, I understood the importance for a YOW to acknowledge the agency of marginalized youth and to work to support them. John states:

The young person gravitates to just meeting them where they’re at and just using those opportunities to have discussions. As opposed to, we are in a room together, and they kind of see it coming. Ok. [The youth say] “John is going to follow the youth worker script.” They have heard it so many times, that it’s like they’re closed off and a lot of times they will give you the answers you want to hear.

The youth worker script refers to the YOW’s blueprint for an outcome-based approach which focuses on monitoring and manipulating the vulnerability of marginalized youth (Coussee, Roets and De Bie 2009:421). John is describing youth’s reactions to this type of approach taken by YOWs. As John mentioned, youth “see it coming,” and if they are routinely being approached in the same manner by YOWs, then the education and support that is offered may not be effective. The youth may not benefit from this approach if they do not see value in the support. Therefore, the YOW script can weaken relationships between YOWs and marginalized youth.

John has been working as a YOW for the past 17 years. It was evident when listening to him that he has a plethora of knowledge about youth outreach strategies. During the interview with John, I felt fortunate to listen to his perceptions and experiences as a YOW. His demeanour was positive, and he spoke with confidence. When he discussed his relationship with youth he informed me that:

There's a lot of youth that don't like me from the bat, like right off the bat. But, I stay consistent. There's only so long you can fake it right, but once they see that you're consistently genuine then they start to warm up to you.

John's strategy to stay consistent breaks the barriers between him and the youth he works with. Subsequently, the practices of the YOWs are to structure a relationship that encourages the young marginalized people they work with to open their emotions and feelings so that dialogue can start. Additionally, the practices of the YOWs can give youth confidence to trust them during their interactions. If the YOW does not demonstrate individuality authentically, then the youth will not reciprocate their authentic character. I understood from my data that YOWs support youth with consistency so that youth comprehend that the YOWs are being honest, and upfront about themselves. This way youth are able to understand if the YOW is genuine and supportive of their social development.

4.0.3 Being Readily Available

Many of the participants mentioned to me that being available to the youth outside of regular office hours helps to support them. Candace explained how she manages her time with the youth she supports:

I don't close off at a certain time. If the program is done, and my phone rings and it's a youth, I don't ignore the call. No, I don't think like that. I don't confine myself to the

boundaries of time and space. So, this is my office but I don't just work here. I don't consider that I can only meet up with the youth here, no. I can meet up with them anywhere and the same with their parents. Whether it's at your house, whether it's at the community centre, or it's at Tim Horton's.

In this description, I understood that, for a YOW, being confined to time and space to support marginalized youth may not be effective. In Candace's description, I also understood that being unavailable affects the youth, but also affects the YOW. Specifically, the YOW will not be able to assist youth in times of need, which could imply that the relationship is only established during certain times and certain places. They can potentially perceive their relationship with YOWs to be time sensitive, which may make them feel unimportant. During a conversation with John, he provided me with his experience of managing his time with youth. Specifically, John manages his time through the use of Black Berry Messenger (BBM), a cellular phone application. He informed me:

One more thing that I will mention is the BBM group that we had. That one was actually really cool. Basically, I created a group on BBM where it was always accessible for youth to reach me and other youth from the program. So, you're talking like two, three, four o'clock in the morning people are messaging. And I heard the concerns with that from a lot of people. Many people said I'm a community worker and I won't be able to guard myself from burnout. The truth is I only respond when I can or when I want to. There's that unspoken understanding. It's kind of like when you're messaging your friend and your friends asleep they can't answer. There's this understanding that you're not being let down, and even with the other members the group can weigh in on a particular topic when the staff is not around.

As a YOW it is important to be available for youth who need social support. The moments spent with youth provide more opportunities to continue to nurture and educate them. It allows the YOWs to be able to be a part of the lives of the youth on a consistent basis, which creates a network of support that influences the youth, even during the times of the early morning.

4.0.4 Supporting Marginalized Youth's Entry into Mainstream Society

During each interview, I asked the participants how they define "social integration."

Felicia, a participant who has been working as a project coordinator for a youth outreach program, described social integration in this manner:

When I think about social integration I think about the young people that I work with who are marginalized for whatever reason. Often, because they face different barriers, whether that's on an individual level or a systemic level, I think of social integration as giving youth the opportunity and the skills to be able to participate in mainstream society.

The other participants in the study understood social integration of marginalized youth similarly. For instance, when speaking with Michelle, another project coordinator for a youth outreach program, she described social integration as the following:

Warren: How do you describe social integration?

Michelle: Social integration looks at pro-social activities. That can mean being involved in recreation, employment, or in education. Also, as an individual, when I think of social integration I just don't think if the youth are employed, rather being within fabric of a society. So when you look at social integration it can vary around different people.

Warren: Do you recognize the term "social integration" as a general term among YOWs?

Michelle: Yes, a lot of terminology is utilized, but not necessarily understood the same way by the individual youth worker. When you look at social integration it can vary around different people. But, again within that social servicing, once somebody is employed, and once they are not in the criminal system, that's social integration.

From Michelle's perspective, her strategies to foster youth's social integration involve not only helping youth seek employment, but also working with them so that they gain the necessary social skills to integrate in to mainstream society. The social skills discussed here include communication skills and leadership skills—what she refers to as "pro-social activities."

I understood from both Felicia and Michelle that social integration for marginalized youth involves enmeshing them into the "fabric" of mainstream society. Understanding the social position of the marginalized young person, YOWs are able to support them in areas where they are socially hindered, such as lack of academic training. Thus, YOWs bond with youth by

understanding their social position and then supporting them in the areas where they require assistance.

Dwayne has been working with marginalized youth for the past 10 years as a program facilitator. He has been focusing on marginalized youths' hindrances in high school. Dwayne's perspective on social integration was addressed in the following manner:

When I think of social integration, I think of bringing an individual that is in one environment, and moving them to another environment. Subsequently, the result of all of that would lead to the integration into mainstream society. There are times where it may seem as though someone is being integrated socially, but on a real core level it isn't really happening. It's kind of like taking a fish out of water, but the fish isn't familiar with its new environment, so it isn't actually integrating. The other side, real social integration, is a person actually taking on the values, principals, and practices of the new environment.

The participant illustrates that "real social integration" for marginalized youth occurs when they are willing join mainstream society by taking on the values and practices of the new environment. The practices can include finding and maintaining employment, and completing pre and post-secondary education, which could lead to upward mobility. However, in some cases marginalized youth seem to be socially integrated through certain support networks, but it may not be full integration for the youth. In this scenario, youth receive the basic training, such as resume building to seek employment, but they could be lacking certain areas of employment training that would help them understand the requirements of work. These requirements could include knowledge of appropriate work attire, or understanding the importance of punctuality. Therefore, "real social integration" occurs when a person actually takes on the values, principles, practices of the new environment. I learned that youth outreach work is about building substantial relationships that teach and support youth the pro-social skills, so they understand how to enmesh within mainstream society. I recognized that the supportive relationship between YOW and marginalized youth is the platform that allows YOWs to teach marginalized youth, but

also for marginalized youth to accept knowledge—the values, principles, practices of the new environment—from YOWs.

4.0.5 Supporting Marginalized Youth as Individuals

The participants of this study suggest that creating bonds with marginalized youth as individuals helped with youth's development. When speaking with a YOW by the name of Kyle, his reason for supporting the individuality of marginalized youth arose in our conversation:

Warren: What types of educational tools do you use to assist in the social development of marginalized youth in your program?

Kyle: The educational tools that I use are specifically geared towards the youth that I deal with. In a larger group, a general platform is used through Internet, books, and little bit of life experiences. Some youth, as you understand, learn on different levels and require different levels of integration. In smaller groups I deal with them individually, in which conversations that pertains to who they are, specifically, will allow them to assist in meaning. If a young man doesn't understand math the way math is being taught, and if I understand they live a certain life style then I will assimilate my communication and my learning methods towards that life style they have. So, it's cognitively embraced by them with relation.

For Kyle, it is not supportive to disregard individual learning behaviours of the young person.

The youth may experience ineffective social integration when there is no attention to their familiar worldview or their unique learning styles.

In summary, the YOWs worked together with marginalized youth to demonstrate their vulnerability as a way for youth to understand who they are and their will to support them. The YOWs do not employ a top-down way of educating but, rather, a relational approach to which youth are able to relate.

4.1 Understanding Youth's Vulnerability: Employment, Education, and Residential Stability

In the previous section, I discussed how relationships are created and maintained through vulnerability between marginalized youth and YOWs. In order for marginalized youth to be vulnerable, the YOWs have to show their vulnerability first. The vulnerability of the YOWs encourages marginalized youth to trust YOWs, and the youth must confirm the validity of the YOWs vulnerability. Once the youth has confirmed the vulnerability to be genuine, the youth reveal their vulnerability to the YOWs. In this section, I turn my attention to how YOWs understand marginalized youth's vulnerability as a measure to work with the youth when they address issues such as homelessness, unemployment, and education. Through these topics the youth would confide in the YOWs their personal feelings and current situations. In this section, I will illustrate how the exchange of vulnerability occurs between the YOWs and youth.

4.1.1 Employment

“I like to call it the Young and the Jobless. Yeah, the Young and the Jobless after my favourite soap opera the Young and the Restless. There is a really big issue with youth and employment, specifically unemployment” – Janet

Many of the YOWs that I interviewed support marginalized youth in seeking full-time or part-time employment. Considering what was mentioned previously in the study, the participants explained that assisting marginalized youth seek employment requires an understanding of the young persons as individuals, and then supporting them where necessary. Justin, a project coordinator who works with youth, stated:

So, if a youth is trying to find employment I make sure that they get their resume done, make sure that their interview skills are ready, and make sure they have suitable clothing for the interview. So, that's where I maintain relationships. I make sure that we hit everything that they need so that they feel they are getting the hundred percent full supports, that's my method.

Justin's employment training for young marginalized people includes working with them to write effective resumes, preparing them for job interviews, and even instructing them on how to dress

for potential employment. Justin attempts to make a type of bond that resembles a big brother-younger sibling relationship. Justin as the older sibling is teaching youth the necessary skills to be job ready. Justin's response encourages young people to understand the expectations at a workplace. Additionally, by considering his young person's employment setbacks, Justin can then teach and prepare them to be job-ready. He makes sure that youth understand the importance of creating a resume, or even dressing appropriately for a job interview, which can encourage them to be proactive and boost their self-esteem. Thus, Justin attempts to support the youth he works with so that they can integrate into mainstream society.

In many situations, YOWs perceive many youth to be enthused to find jobs, but there is also a sense of the youth being a bit over zealous in the expectations of the employment they are seeking. Michael, who has worked as a YOW for the past 14 years, and has worked with youth to seek employment, informed me of the following:

The majority of youth that I support tell me that they feel prepared or anxious for employment prospects. However, many youth are indifferent or unwilling to work 8 to 12 hours a day for minimum wage. These youth want employment but it's on their terms not the terms that are being presented. So, just to reiterate the idea of a low income for long hours is not something that the youth find desirable.

Michael notes that high expectations can result in undesirable employment or no work at all. Why would youth face unsuccessful results when they have high employment expectations?

Will, who has been working as a YOW, presents his answer to this question:

It's very challenging for marginalized youth right now. A lot of these youth have issues with qualifications and it's very frustrating. They don't have the experience, they constantly tell me how hard it is, and they tell me they can't seem to get a break.

Thus, the lack of experience can be the obstacle that many marginalized youth face when seeking employment. The ages of the youth who are seeking employment range from 15 to 24, and the jobs these youth seem to be seeking are in retail stores, restaurants, and even call centres. The

participants identified the education level of these youth to be at a high school level. The older youth (18–24) are hoping to start their careers in employment in various fields, but are facing barriers because of their limited experience and education.

Without experience or education, their chances of being hired for the positions that they want are next to impossible. Kent, a YOW who has worked with many marginalized youth in Toronto priority neighbourhoods states, “Youth are finding it hard to find employment. Some of them do not have the job skills to do the job, and even if they do get the job they find it difficult to hold, or maintain.” According to YOWs interviewed in this study, this is a reality that youth encounter when seeking employment.

Stephanie, who has recently surpassed the two year mark as a YOW, explains to me her experiences supporting marginalized youth seeking employment. She mentions that:

They don't know where to start and they're confused. They have never really taken the steps to understand what to wear to an interview. They don't feel like they will have luck in the job field. The youth that we work with perceive that employers view them as someone who they would not want to hire in the first place.

Listening to Stephanie, and observing her body language, I understood her deep concern for the youth she supports. Specifically, she is concerned about the unsuccessful employment outcomes marginalized youth receive as well as their perceptions of employers. The youth's outlook on employers could come from a reality that they have personally encountered, or what they heard from other young people. For a YOW it is crucial to provide the supports and training to encourage marginalized youth to think optimistically about being hired by an employer. However, the reality for marginalized youth is that they are often perceived to be unfit or unqualified for employment based on their socioeconomic position.

Speaking to Felicia, who has been working with youth for the past 15 years, I was informed that social and systemic barriers hinder youth seeking employment. Felicia mentions:

I think that a lot of young people feel systemic barriers that keep them outside of mainstream employment. So, a lot of them find it hard to seek employment, or don't even know where to begin. Young people can be much stigmatized. They can walk in to a room and because of the color of their skin or where they live they're seen in a certain light.

Felicia's description illustrates how marginalized youth are stigmatized during the process of seeking employment when they interact with potential employers. It is interesting that a young person's home address can restrict his or her employment opportunities. If this is a reality that many marginalized youth encounter, then that would mean that youth who reside in priority neighbourhoods in Toronto are not considered for employment because of their address.

Candace, who has worked with marginalized young people for the past six years as YOW informed me of the following:

Some youth feel that coming from a certain area and using the address that they have on their resumes hinders them from getting a job. So they have talked about what it's like. By putting their own address on their resumes, they feel like they are less likely to get called for an interview. Employers research where they live. As a remedy for this situation, youth tend to use family members' addresses, which might be in reputable areas in the city.

Candace maintains that there are youth encountering employment segregation, but also informs me about how marginalized youth seem to overcome this issue. By using other addresses that are not associated with a priority neighbourhood, marginalized youth seem to be finding employment success. However, there are youth who do not have alternative addresses, and they continue to endure employment segregation.

As I learned from LeBron, youth are irate, and frustrated to the point they want to give up on searching for employment. LeBron stated:

I see, a lot of the times, frustration, anger, and resentment. They often refer to the system as, the man, those guys, they, and it's a lot of frustration and misunderstanding. In the sense, or in relation to, why they cannot receive work, having tried going door to door, canvassing different prospective employers, sending emails and filling out those questionnaires many of them see it as a waste of time. They see it as a waste of time because they, typically, don't receive any response. For them it's frustrating. [The youth say] "Why would I waste my time it doesn't make sense?" They often say, "why waste my time filling out these 25 page questionnaires, applying online, and doing all these things for just a chance, or an opportunity to get turned down." This potentially is because of their location, where they live. If a person's area code or address is in a specific place, it could deter them from gaining employment.

When I spoke to LeBron, I felt his frustration when he spoke of the employment hindrances that many of the youth that he supports encounter. Although he was raising his tone when he spoke, he did not do it in a way to disrespect me, or show any negativity for my project. His heightened tone was a moment of emphasis. For LeBron, it was his time for him to be heard, but on behalf of the youth that he works with. When I spoke to Michelle she mentioned to me that she has heard marginalized youth say to her, "I'm done with this. I'm going to go on O.W. (Ontario Works) or O.D.S.P. (Ontario Disability Support Plan)." Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Plan are both monetary social assistance plans that are available for those who are unable to sustain employment. For many marginalized youth who are able to work, being dependent on government funded social assistance could indicate that they have given up and are deterred by their employment results.

Speaking with Jordan, I understood from his perspective that many marginalized young people who are racialized encounter barriers to employment. These barriers potentially are not encountered by non-marginalized, non-racialized youth. Jordan mentions:

I think working with a lot of racialized youth, there's a degree of hopelessness that comes with inherent racism that's involved in the employment world. There was a study done recently where there was a Latino guy, Jose Ramirez, applied for fifty or sixty jobs, and didn't get a single call back. He changed his name to Joe Ramirez, and all of a sudden all these offers for interviews came through. That's one example and it's anecdotal at this

point, but, we have all heard so many issues of the Black man and a White man applying for the same job, even if their resumes are identical. The call back rate for the Black man is way way lower then it is for a White man. I think Toronto marginalized youth live these same experiences. There is that degree of hopelessness sometimes, sorry not hopelessness, frustration might be a better word, that a lot of young people that I work with face, and it does play out. It's almost like, in my opinion, a self-defeatist approach where they're like, "what's the point in me trying, because the world's racist and the odds are against me." So, that's definitely a contributing factor. Working with the most excluded youth that I have worked with in the past, the idea of employment is so foreign to them, it's almost like there's no connection point between us, because they come at it from such a different perspective.

Jordan illustrated a reality that marginalized youth encounter when seeking employment, and what many YOWs perceive and experience when working with marginalized youth. Youth share their lived experiences with YOWs because the relationship between the YOWs and the youth has been established. From the data, I understood that youth felt comfortable expressing their situations, even if there was nothing the YOWs could do to prevent things from happening, such as employment segregation.

I have learned that the unemployment realities of marginalized youth are those that YOWs share with them. When speaking with Jordan, Candace, Michelle, Kent, LeBron, Stephanie, and Felicia separately, I heard the same message and the same frustration: unemployment is a concern for Toronto's marginalized youth. This is a challenge that YOWs and marginalized youth work together to address.

4.1.2 Education

I have had some youth tell me, "why would I do that?" You know, youth don't even believe that they are going to live to see themselves go to college or any other post-secondary institution. A lot of youths just need guidance – Stephanie

Encouraging youth to understand the importance of an education and how it can benefit their lives can be an obstacle YOWs face. This is due to the youth's perception of school and what they have experienced in educational institutions. Throughout my conversation with

Michelle, I listened to her firsthand experience handling a situation that involved a marginalized young person and one of the educators at the school they attended:

Michelle: Post-secondary is unachievable because many times the school systems makes youth think that way. For instance, I had a counsellor tell me that in front of a black youth.

Warren: I just want to clarify. Do you mean a guidance counsellor?

Michelle: Yeah exactly. A guidance counsellor at a school said to me, while I was sitting there with the young person, “well I would like to be proven wrong. I don’t think this kid would even make it to college or university.” So, if she was able to tell that to me imagine what she tells this young man when no one is around.

This situation illustrates a reality that this particular youth, and possibly others, experience within local school systems. If educators in Toronto schools maintain this type of assumption, it could discourage marginalized youth from considering the positives of academic learning. This could mean that youth are encouraged to skip classes, or even drop out at a young age. The conversation I had with John illustrated a similar experience:

John: For many youth there isn’t a clear vision of what’s next after high school, and even finishing high school isn’t anything that is certain. Some of them are just waiting to turn 16 to drop out.

Warren: So you’re saying they drop out at age 16 usually?

John: Yeah.

For many marginalized youth, 16 is the age to drop out of high school rather than the age to complete school. If, by chance, guidance counsellors and other likeminded educators perpetuate negative stereotypes towards marginalized youth, then it is likely that they will lose confidence in the school system and in their academic ability. According to Courtney, the youth with whom she deals do not really see themselves pursuing school further because of their negative experiences with school educators. “Youth do not see themselves pursuing post-secondary education, because they had rough experiences in attempting to be successful in school.”

Courtney’s experience illustrates that many youth do, in fact, doubt their ability to do well, let

alone complete school because of the “rough experiences” while in school. I also understood this from Michael when we spoke. Michael states that:

There is, again, anxiousness or lack of confidence in their ability. That’s not to say I don’t have faith in their ability, but they have come from really tumultuous situations which has shaken their confidence in themselves to the core. As a result, we have broken individuals that don’t see the merits of education.

The stories told by the YOWs illustrate that many of the youth that they work with encounter systemic barriers in the school system. The barriers cause restriction in their understanding of the importance of education, but they also diminish their confidence as successful learners.

To insinuate that the educators influence youth to like or dislike school is not taking into account other perspectives as to why youth dislike school. Kyle suggests:

Most youth don’t believe they will be able to do post-secondary education, for three reasons. One social status, meaning they are black, they are young, they are not capable. Second, financial means, they don’t believe they can afford it, and they don’t believe they want to afford it, because they’re other things more important to them. Then the third one, which I believe is the most important one, is the environment they live in.

Understanding the various reasons why marginalized youth may not be encouraged to attend and complete high school, or post-secondary training shows that there are other reasons that influence them. From my data, I understood that social environments could sway marginalized youth to be uninterested in school. Michelle mentioned that her attempt to support youth in academics is sometimes rejected by them, “because they have not seen others in their community do that.” Considering this, it can be said that many marginalized, but also racialized, youth dispel the ideology of school because of their peers who resemble them in likeness.

Speaking to Kyle and other participants, I understood that money was another reason why many marginalized youth did not consider post-secondary education. Justin, for instance, mentioned that, “some of the youth don’t want to go to college or university because they feel

like it's not necessarily going to get you money. [The youth say] 'School does not connect to getting money.'" From my data, I understood that the cost of education in relation to its perceived value was another determining factor for marginalized youth when considering education. LeBron mentioned:

Youth would often say to me [The youth say] "why would I waste my time with that bro? That's a waste of time". They always say, "I don't want to be taking any OSAP to owe the government money. You're crazy." It's just tough because they then refer to other individuals that they know, someone like me, who come from the same communities, and have gone through the culturally approved script; which is going to school to only find no job at the end. Depending on the individual, most at-risk youth that I deal with would say, "what's the point. They are never going to hire me anyways." The feeling of despair and lack of hope, you know.

The concern that many youth have with paying for school and their perception towards finding suitable employment after graduating hinders them from choosing to further their education. According to their "culturally approved script," furthering their education means the hardships of paying for education and not being financially rewarded.

Another barrier that many marginalized youth face when deciding to attend school is the financial responsibilities that they have within their households. Michelle informed me of the concerns that many of the youth that she works with endure when they must contribute financially to the family household. She mentions that, "some of the objections frame around money being important right now for them and their household. Their mothers are depending on them to bring in some sort of income." The responsibility that many marginalized youth have within the household possibly decreases the chances of them furthering their education. Many youth who are marginalized in their communities are also marginalized with the members of their households. The expectation in many low socioeconomic households is that everyone is to help with the financial burdens within the home, including the young if they are able to.

In summary, the social environments in which marginalized youth live hinder them from completing high school or pursuing post-secondary education. The pessimistic views regarding the future of marginalized youth maintained by some Toronto school educators discourage the youth from furthering their education. The financial responsibilities that the youth may have within the household can also make it difficult for marginalized youth to continue their academic training.

4.1.3 Housing: Living in the City of Toronto

That is one of the toughest things to deal with in our city. Housing is something that is very scarce. – George

Housing was a category that the participants spoke fluently on and passionately about, and it was a subject that was a concern to all of them. Their overreaching apprehension was for the youth who live in poverty stricken neighbourhoods in Toronto and youth who are homeless. One thing that I learned from the participants is that housing was not an easy subject to discuss with youth who are in need of shelter. The YOWs informed me that many youth feel ashamed when they discuss their housing situations with them. Jordan mentions that:

I feel that housing is an issue in which there is a great deal of shame and embarrassment that certain young people have when talking about being insecure in their housing situations. I feel like it's something that only comes up with the youth that I have worked the longest with, or I'm closest to, and they are comfortable sharing. [The youth say] "Ok, I'm living in a shelter right now and it sucks."

Jordan illustrates how he comes to know the housing situation of youth, which is based on the establishment of a bond that involves trust. For youth to be vocal about their housing situation, the relationship between the YOW and the young person needs to be open and safe. Felicia shares the following:

Housing is another tough one. I would say with housing there's often a piece of shame involved that a young person encounters. It could be a lack of housing, or issues within their own house, where they have to leave for some reason. So there's a piece of shame. This shame can come from the first time having to deal with an extremely intimidating situation. So, that's a very hard topic to address with young people. That's why it's so important that youth workers are performing positive non-judgmental relationships with young people, so they can come forward when they are facing hard issues like that.

Felicia illustrates how marginalized youth may feel shame when discussing their housing status.

In the above quote, Felicia also points out that the bonds between the YOWs and youth should be based on a non-judgmental relationship. Consequently, the youth will be able to discuss openly, but with the intent of seeking support with their situation.

The relationship between YOWs and youth illustrates reciprocity where they are using vulnerability in a non-judgmental way to relate to each other. Adele, who has been working with marginalized youth for the past three years, opened up to me with confidence about her relationship with youth. During our conversation I appreciated Adele's openness to discuss her personal residential situation with me. Our conversation went as follows:

Adele: So, I myself am a current couch surfer and I'm ok with that. But, there is a lot of shame around being a couch surfer and being under-housed or living in a shelter. Mentioning that to youth it's sort of okay. There shouldn't be any stigma, however there is a lot of shame towards the under-housed.

Warren: So, you sense shame from the youth?

Adele: Yeah. Usually people don't like talking about their housing situation.

Adele's strategy to convey her personal housing situation with the youth illustrates her vulnerability, but it is used to establish a relation of solidarity with the youth who she supports, and are in a similar position to her. The youth can then perceive the outreach worker as a person who is not only in an authoritative role, but also as a person who they see as an equal who faces the same struggles as them. The connection between the young person and the outreach worker can result in the youth being open and candid about their living situations.

4.1.4 Toronto's priority neighbourhoods

Many marginalized youth who are supported by the participants in this study reside in one of the priority neighbourhoods in Toronto. Some participants note that these neighbourhoods are areas that many young people feel the need to escape and never return to. This would include taking their families with them, if they had the opportunity. The question remains as to why. Why do youth want to leave priority neighbourhoods? Stephanie shared her perspective and her experience. She states:

Their reactions or discussions about housing usually are about how the neighbourhoods they live in are not always the best environments. They usually don't have pleasant things to say about their housing environments or the neighbourhoods that they come from. Usually, the conditions in the buildings where they live in aren't the best.

Candace shares this perspective when she shared her perspective on housing:

When it comes to housing, I listen to the concerns of the youth, especially the ones who live in Metro Housing or Toronto Community housing. Their biggest issue is that it's not kept up. They talk about, how nasty it is sometimes. The stairwells are nasty, the elevators don't work or they are not taken care of properly. When they do need something fixed, it takes forever, or it just never happens. I find this generation of youth to be very critical and they understand what is not right. [The youth say] "Just because we live in housing doesn't mean they shouldn't take care of it. We don't deserve not to have a clean stairwell, a clean hall way, or a clean elevator that works." So, they seem to really understand those things a lot.

Both perspectives illustrate the difficulties that many marginalized youth face when residing within Toronto's priority neighbourhoods.

From the data I understood that living within Toronto's priority neighbourhoods can be stressful for youth. Justin states that, "A lot of youth want to leave housing, and when I mean housing, I mean government housing. Their main goal is to move their whole family out of it." However, are all marginalized youth interested in leaving these neighbourhoods? What are some

reasons they may not want to leave? When speaking with Justin further, I learned the issue of housing is more complex:

Justin: But, at the same time when you talk about housing to the youth they think of their communities as home. So a lot of these youth don't leave their communities, a lot of these youth stay in their communities. So, if a youth lives in certain priority neighbourhoods in Toronto, then that's all they know. Because of those territory boundary issues a lot of youth are scared to leave their communities. They think they will feel safer in their own neighbourhoods. So, when you discuss housing I think a lot of youth find that their communities are where they would stay and they are very proud of these communities. Also, they say that they are from these communities, they represent these communities, and they find themselves not travelling elsewhere.

Warren: I would like to ask a question. So you're saying that many youth don't want to travel outside their boundaries and visit other areas because it's not safe?

Justin: It could be because it's not safe, and they are not familiar with it. They don't have enough experience and they may be scared. They're scared of failure. They don't want to fail outside their community. They want to stay in their own community because it's comfortable.

Listening to Justin I understood why some marginalized youth do not want to leave priority neighbourhoods. I understood that youth want to stay in these areas because of what they represent to them. It is a sense of home and a place where they feel they cannot fail. From the participant's perspective, if the youth leave these areas they think they are going to fail in unfamiliar environments.

Meanwhile, I also learned from the participants that youth have other reasons for feeling comfortable in priority neighbourhoods. When I spoke with Candace, she told me the following:

I find that housing also has turned in to a conversation of where you rep and where you live. It reminds me of a conversation all the students were engaged in, where they were asking each other where they rep. They were calling out different neighbourhoods that are priority neighbourhoods. One of the youth, who is now one of our mentors said to the other youth, "I don't rep anything because all you're repping (representing the area the youth reside in) is government housing. At the end of the day, all those areas that you guys are claiming are areas that are associated with government housing. I'm not repping that." So, there are some youth that recognize these boundaries that we have created around areas and they are also directly connected to the community housing that their

government has set up. So, what are we really repping and why? Discussions have gone to the extent where some youth has mentioned, “well what are you going to do when your family decides to move? Your family can decide to move to another area that you claim you don’t rep, and you won’t live in. But, it’s based on your parents’ decision, not yours. You only rep that neighbourhood because that’s where your parents decided to live.” So, there are those types of debates, happening among youth.

Candace illustrates how some youth represent priority neighbourhoods as their home territory, and how they accept the living standards that are associated with priority neighbourhoods.

4.1.5 Youth seeking independent living

However, many youth are eager to leave priority neighbourhoods because they are unsatisfied with the area and the misfortune that comes with it. There are various reasons that marginalized youth may want to leave priority neighbourhoods. In certain situations, youth seek to leave their family homes to live independently because of the poor relationships they have with family members such as parents. John provided his perspective as to why many marginalized youth tend to seek independent living:

Some of the concerns that come up are their faltering relationships with their parents, so they need to get out. Also, it could be physical abuse, or it could be that they just feel like they are grown and they need to get out. But, it mostly comes from a place like [the youth say] “I’m ready to move out and I need your help.”

There are many reasons that marginalized youth decide to live on their own. However, the participants made it clear to me that they do their best to guide youth to make good decisions when they are seeking independent living.

Dwayne explained to me that having one-on-one consultation sessions with youth can clarify some of the independent living concerns that they have. Dwayne states that:

Youth are seeking to get their own apartment, or get their own space. The challenge at times is either financial or actually finding a space. How do you go about it? How do you navigate housing? The young person, often times, have no idea. So, it’s a challenge and

it's hard. Sometimes they say, "what do I do? How do I go about it?" Sometimes they don't even have the words to articulate that. So, they say, "I have been looking. I have been looking." That's what they would usually say. So, I would ask, "what do you do? How are you going about it? Where are you getting your information? What are you looking for? Why?" Sometimes they lack information and lack critical thinking skills of how to go about something.

The lack of information and the critical thinking skills can hinder the decisions of youth who are in need of housing. Dwayne suggests that many youth do not even know how to articulate their needs and wants appropriately in order to acquire adequate housing.

Based on their limited knowledge on how to search for suitable places to reside, youth at times make wrong choices. LeBron provided his perspective as to the possibilities for youth who are not prepared for independent living:

Okay, so, it's tough. I hear many things from different youth, but one of the main things is that it's hard to find a spot to reside in the city. The places where you can find, that are affordable, are typically in a bad, at-risk, troubled, high populated, single parent household, high violence, and gang infested areas. So, it's not an environment that is conducive to excelling when everything around you, around them, is negative. Yeah, you can find a spot to live that is a little bit cheaper and affordable, but there is a cost for that affordability. That internal affects how you navigate through life, and how you are successful in school, or in work. Sometimes in certain areas you may have to be looking after your safety, as a primary thing. Also, gaining access to resources, information, and jobs can be difficult. In certain situations, education is not important anymore. It's more about survival. Location plays a huge role in an individual's life.

Considering what LeBron mentioned, it is important that youth understand the realities of living independently. Youth between the ages of 18–24 may choose to live in an inexpensive unit but a cheaper residence can put them at risk. As LeBron mentioned, youth could be in a position where they have to worry about their safety consistently. This takes their focus away from other things, such as employment or school. Moving without understanding the potential risk of moving can create uncomfortable situations. I understood this reality further when I spoke to Michael. He states:

I would say up to 100% of the youth I serve have a desire and expressed interest in independent living. However, it comes down to affordability. Majority of the people that I work with they're usually on OW (Ontario Works) or ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program). For youth who are on OW specifically it really limits their options as far as housing. As an OW client, I think you top at \$599, or \$612, something low. That's for food, basic living and shelter, and transportation. In the event that they need to find suitable living, or at least a place that they find suitable, they're also confronted with the reality of crime-ridden neighbourhoods. In addition, they also encounter buildings that have rodent infestation, cockroach infestation. So, the idea of housing depleted on one level, but again characterized by anxiousness, uncertainty, and that has a lot to do with the fact that their income can't provide them with the lifestyle they would like to live.

Housing is a concern for marginalized youth in Toronto. The reality is that the environment in which they currently reside, or the environments they transition to can potentially hinder their social development. Instead of concentrating on completing high school, moving on to post-secondary education, or even seeking employment, many youth are placed in a position of worrying about their survival.

In conclusion, the YOWs and the marginalized youth they support work in relation of solidarity, but to support the well-being and the development of the youth. From the data, the participants illustrate a vast amount of information that described how confident and open marginalized youth are when discussing their concerns with them. In turn the YOWs inform youth of their personal information as a way to show solidarity and built trust between youth and YOWs. Therefore, the relationships that are created and maintained between youth and YOWs helps them understand each other with relation.

4.2 Educating and Supporting Marginalized Youth

How do we not support or help them get access to the resources they need? Sometimes youth don't have those connections and those mentorships – Janet

I feel like the work we do is very impactful, very professional, and very important –

Jordan

The previous section discussed how YOW and marginalized youth maintain a relation of solidarity by addressing shared difficulties together. This section discusses how the YOWs use solidarity to build a sense of trust that encourages youth to be receptive to their practices. I found that YOWs recognize the importance of the individuality of the youth they work with which helps support the youth's individual social development. The participants mentioned that they saw themselves in the youth they serve. Their reflection in a youth's life was a strategy they used to help support youth. The use of this approach can lead to the empowerment of youth and a balanced relationship where youth are treated as people worth listening to.

4.2.1 Caring for Marginalized Youth

Each moment I spent speaking with the participants I learned about many hindrances that marginalized youth face within Toronto. I also learned how the YOWs initiated relationships with marginalized youth as a measure to support them. I was interested in understanding how the relationships helped the YOWs educate marginalized youth. Why were their practices used to support youth? Why did they find them effective?

Many times their methods overlapped with each other, but their descriptions were unique to the individual who was telling them. A common practice that was mentioned many times was caring for youth and a common concern was understanding how to care. The participants mentioned to me that many marginalized youth receive no support from educators or family members when they are in need of care. Michelle stated that, "a lot of young people who walk into our doors have faced a world that has not cared for them. So, if you're leading with that

mindset that there's no more care that you can give to that person, then you're sending them back to a world that has not shown them care to begin with." I learned from Michelle that supporting youth is to recognize that they may have previously been rejected by others. However, Michelle further described how she cares for marginalized youth. She informed me of a supporting framework that she uses to gauge and understand the amount of care youth require in their lives. She states:

There is this thing called the 40 developmental assets that is utilized, which is a framework. It's also called asset development framework. When I use the framework, I'm encouraged to ask questions concerning the level of care in the young person's life. Do young people have people that care about them? Does the community care about the young person? These are different things that are looked at when working in youth development. So, if we as YOWs are investigating the types of care, then we can work towards supporting them effectively.

Michelle claims that the practices of YOWs is to start with caring for the well-being of the marginalized young person and understanding how to care for them. Caring for the adolescent is to consider their individuality, and what they are going through in their life. Michael informed me of the following:

We engage the youth to find out what they deem important and what's necessary in their life, and we try our best to send them down that path. So, in the event of the young African Canadian saying that they are interested in their Afro-heritage we use specified Afro-heritage tools of support them. For youth who say, "you know what I'm two-spirited and I need to learn in a place that would not judge me for who I am," then we use a culture specific place for youth to get in contact with. We use these places as they will be helpful as they represent religious, ethnic, gender specific, sexual orientation that are deemed important for the youth.

Initiating an opportunity for youth to gain access to programming that caters to their individuality addresses the youth workers' meaningful attempt to support them. Also, finding solutions to the concerns that marginalized youth encounter connects them to resources that they may not have heard about, or were unable to attain. Understanding how to support and care for

youth is one thing, but being knowledgeable about how to support youth in specified areas is equally important. George mentions:

I view myself as an advocate. Somebody who helps young people to access information that is available to them. I think more and more individuals are becoming less aware of the services that are available to them. Many marginalized youth feel that there is nothing there for them. Once we explore the different opportunities, the different services, and the different resources I find that their confidence is boosted and they feel like they belong. So, I view myself as an advocate, someone who is always looking at resources that can benefit the youth that I serve and for them to access it.

I took from George that his ability to serve young marginalized people encourages youth to gain confidence, and gives them a sense of belonging. The YOWs' strategy to encourage youth to feel liberated informs marginalized young people that they are being cared for and supported.

4.2.2 Reflection

Some YOWs state that they view themselves in the youth they support. For example,

Jordan states:

I view myself as an older version of them, and that's what forms the relationships I develop with them. If I see myself as you then that changes the way I interact with you. Supporting youth can involve an emotional side too. I know times are rough, but I've been on that side too, but it's going to get better. As an older mentor, I know how it's important to play a supporting role to them. Having that in my mind does impact, and really shapes the way I interact and mentor young people.

By envisioning himself as an older version of the youth he serves, Jordan is able to support them effectively because he can relate to them. His strategy can be encouraging for youth because despite informing them that he has had similar, challenging experiences, he also demonstrates that he has overcome those challenges. Jordan was not the only one to suggest that he sees himself in the youth he serves. For example, LeBron mentions:

I view myself as them. I see myself in almost every student that I teach, because I was like them at one point, especially the “at-risk”, volatile youth. The ones that don’t have, let’s say, a silver spoon, and the ones that don’t have life mapped out for them. I see myself as them because I was that student, and I am that teacher. So, I see myself in the kids that I work with every day, and it’s refreshing. Everyday I’m inspired because I see little me’s out there that are lost, and I just want them to see the light.

LeBron and Jordan both show that they understand what the youth they support are encountering because they were in similar situations themselves. LeBron specifically illustrates his way of understanding the youth he works with by remembering what he went through as a marginalized youth. It is his way to understand the young person, and potentially substantiate the service he provides, which benefits the social development of the youth he works with. Do female YOWs also see themselves in the youth they support? Janet who is a female youth worker explains her perspective:

I see myself as a female that has been through what many of my female participants been through. I think that there is this unspoken understanding like, [The youth say] “you get me.” With some of the conversations that I have with my female participants, I get the “I know you can understand”.

The approach taken by both male and female YOWs shows that they can closely relate to marginalized youth and their difficult situations in personally meaningful ways. Therefore, this type of solidarity allows YOWs to teach marginalized youth.

Other participants relied on the same reflection strategy that Janet, John, and LeBron used with the youth they serve. Kyle informed me of the following:

I view myself just like them. I choose to take a platform that I can connect with them with. I can talk to White kids, I can talk to Black kids, I can talk to Chinese kids, and I can talk to any kids in the world. Anybody can, but will they talk with you? A lot of these youth come in understanding that older people try to bring upon them knowledge with no experience. What I found in the community that I deal with is a lot of these kids look and they see these workers who come from Aurora, and come from different areas in the city, and they don’t feel a connection with them. They say to them [The youth say] “you don’t know what it feels like. You never have been there.” When I was mentoring at other organizations it was all the same thing. My first time meeting them, my routine is I say

nothing. Nothing is everything to them. After a while, the stare downs are done and they want to know what I have to say. When I went to this other organization I told them I live in the same area as you. I play basketball in the same areas you do. I went to the same schools as you, and I even went to summer school at the same schools you attend now, and I know the areas you know. I probably know your parents. I have been there. I know. I see what goes on. There's nothing you guys can tell me that I didn't see myself, yet there's nothing you guys can tell me that I won't respect, because you're the new age. Understand this, I could have gone anywhere, but I choose to come here because I felt you guys would connect.

Speaking to Kyle made me see the benefits of the YOW seeing themselves in youth, and using this to build relationships. This approach shows that the YOW is well informed of the social issues that many marginalized youth face, because they once faced similar, or the same ones. The approach illustrates what some YOWs see when they support youth: the agency of the youth worker and the agency of the youth are enmeshed in structure where they understand the same marginalization. The YOW is an experienced individual who can make use of this understanding of marginalization to guide, nurture, and support youth who are currently marginalized.

4.2.3 The Use of Slang

Strategically, the participants discussed how they can relate to and be relevant in the lives of the youth they serve. It was amazing to hear the many ways these YOWs worked to educate youth. Their tactics seemed to have no end when it came to getting through to youth. In one example, many participants used slang to get their message across. When speaking with Courtney, I understood the following:

Warren: If you feel you're not being understood, how do you gain their attention?

Courtney: I put it in language, or use examples that they are familiar with.

Warren: When you say you put in language what do you mean? Can you elaborate?

Courtney: In the sense of their day-to-day, how they speak to each other. I will use their own language to explain a concept. Many times when you speak about one thing, I guess in an academic language, they would say, "what is that?" Even though they do it, they

don't realize they're doing it because it's said in an academic way. They feel like [The youth say] "okay, I don't know what you are talking about." When you say it in language that they understand they will say, "oh, I get what you mean."

Warren: The language you're talking about, is it slang?

Courtney: Yes, slang.

It benefits many youth for YOWs to deliver the educational message in slang. It helps reach the young people and helps them understand the concept being taught. This shows that the YOWs recognize themselves in the young people and ensure that there is commonality in their relationships. Michelle elaborates:

Michelle: To me, it's about relationships, the context, the setting, and different pieces so I can have that level of dialogue with the young person.

Warren: So slang is a way to connect?

Michelle: Yeah, it's a way to connect, but I don't put it as the main way, or the best way. It's just a way to connect.

Michelle's perspective illustrates that using a familiar discourse helps educate marginalized youth.

4.2.4 YOWs' Creativity and Youth's Contributions

Thus far I have illustrated the culture of youth outreach work to be a systematic and planned practice that works to develop youth. However, there are aspects of the practices that are done at the spur of the moment. This type of practice seemed to be the alternative if their initial plan fails. Sometimes the unconventional plan is not developed strategically like the first one. When speaking with John, I understood that his alternative plan to educate was more concerned with the youth and their needs, rather than following the standard formal programming practices in youth outreach practice. John explains:

John: The way I work is everything goes. Sometimes it's in the box and sometimes it's out of the box. I work within a people centered approach. I don't necessarily believe in "cookie cutter" programs, but if it happens to be that way then that's what I need to get the job done. But, it always depends on who I'm working with.

Warren: When you say "cookie cutter" function what do you mean by that?

John: You'll have a program that registers a certain amount of kids, maybe 20, maybe 10-15. With that amount of youth, it's time-limited. So, that would mean I could only do 10-15 sessions, whatever the amount is there are specific target goals that are supposed to be met. For instance, week one you might do an introduction, week two you might talk about communication. It's very structured and there is no room for any flexibility and it becomes more about the process than the product, youth. For me it's the other way around, it's more about the product, youth, and then process. So, if I need to change my process around several times to adjust to the needs of the person I'm working with, then that's what I'm going to do.

John makes it clear what the term "product" means to him: the marginalized youth he serves. He structures a process that works for them and strives to educate them rather than following a fixed process that may not be effective. Through the research, I learned that YOWs need to seek multiple ways to teach marginalized youth. However, I noticed that the YOWs sometimes described the youth as creating workshops as partners. The YOWs informed me that youth can at times influence them to teach what they want to be taught, which alters the YOWs' plan to educate youth. As John and I spoke, I learned the following:

Warren: Have you had to modify your workshop in order for you to get a better reception from the youth?

John: Quite a few times, especially earlier on when I first started working for this organization. I walked in with my template on bullying. I had my definition of bullying, this is what it looks like, and this is how you gather supports for it. I found out very quickly that the particular group I was speaking to wasn't having it. They wanted to talk stories, experiences, and the outcomes of the stories. They weren't interested in spending 15 minutes going through what I planned. We must have spent the whole time talking about stories and me answering questions. So I had to throw my plan away and just talk.

Thus John is flexible and creative. He changed his plan when he saw that the youth wanted to talk about their own stories. Does this reduce the agency of the youth worker? Do the youth

control the teaching process? As much as this seems to be the case, I did not sense that happens.

For instance, Kyle informed to me that:

Some youth, as you understand, learn on different levels and require different levels of integration. In smaller groups I deal with them individually, in which conversations that pertains to who they are, specifically, will allow them to understand meaning. If a young man doesn't understand math the way math is being taught, and if I understand they live a certain "lifestyle," then I will assimilate my communication and my learning methods towards that life style they have so it's cognitively embraced by them with relation.

Considering the different learning styles and the lifestyles of the many marginalized youth, educating them in one particular way may not be effective. Also, for youth who seem to be taking control of the process, it seems that the YOWs involve them in the procedure as a way to appease their learning styles. The discussion that Felicia and I had sheds light on this type of process to support and educate marginalized youth. Felicia mentions:

I really see myself as co-creating with young people. I don't come in with answers or ideas that I think are right for the young people. But, I'm creating a space where they can come up with their own ideas and solutions and we're educating each other.

Felicia and others described their practices as ways to reach out to marginalized youth with the intention to educate them. The agency of the youth worker does seem as if it is lessened in the structured relationship with the youth they serve, but instead it is enmeshed to establish a relationship that fosters the youths' social development. Felicia states that it is effective to "support youth to make their own decisions and treat them as experts in their own lives. We are not making decisions for them; we are not teaching them what to think, or teaching them how to think. What we are doing is enhancing what they already know and already believe." Therefore, the YOWs attempt to enhance what youth already know and this is also a means of developing the social well-being of youth.

I learned from the participants that their efforts to support youth are done through trial and error. By analyzing the narratives of YOWs, I made the following discovery: integrating marginalized youth into jobs, supporting their housing needs, and assisting them to complete educational training depends upon the creativity of the YOWs. Describing the steps to support marginalized youth in my thesis is a way to illustrate the creativity of YOWs. When speaking with Jordan regarding the strategies used by YOWs to support youth, he said to me: “I don’t think you can ever write this down in a book, maybe you can, maybe it will be in your thesis, I don’t know.” His comments reveal that youth outreach work is complex and cannot be reduced to a few descriptive traits. However, I do not feel that Jordan was pessimistic when he made his statements. When I heard his tone of voice, I felt that he was saying this to encourage me to try to examine YOWs’ strategies. Jordan’s comments make it clear that there is a need to expand the Canadian literature on youth outreach work.

4.3 Discussion & Conclusion

From my data, I learned that the YOWs seek solidarity with marginalized youth, as a way to establish positive relationships with them. For YOWs and youth to establish a relation of solidarity, I learned that demonstrating their vulnerability was important. By showing vulnerability to each other, YOWs and youth avoid criticizing each other, and feel safe and free of judgement.

In order for marginalized youth to express their vulnerability, the YOWs would have to show their vulnerability first. Based on their vulnerability, youth examined the outreach worker to figure out if they were a person who was invested in supporting them. When marginalized youth confirmed the validity of the YOWs, then the youth would reveal their vulnerability to the YOWs, such as their shameful feelings towards their homelessness. Once the YOWs obtain the

personal information about youth, then they would work with youth to solve their problems. This type of sharing between youth and the YOWs enmeshed their agencies in a social structure and encouraged youth to participate equally in the relationship.

The literature on youth outreach work suggests that YOWs attempt to “civilize” marginalized youth and enforce social control by taking advantage of youth’s vulnerability (Coussee, Roets and De Bie 2009:421). Also, previous research claims that youth outreach work focuses more on an outcome-based approach with a heightened emphasis on monitoring and manipulating the vulnerability of marginalized young people (Coussee, Roets and De Bie 2009:421). However, the participants of this study do not necessarily believe that it is important to manipulate the vulnerability of marginalized youth or enforce social control over them. The participants report that they do not control the youth by taking advantage of their vulnerability. Instead, the youth workers attempt to share their own vulnerability with youth and address the youth at their level of understanding, so that the youth would not reject their support.

I learned that many marginalized youth repeatedly encounter an outcome-based approach with YOWs and have become closed off as a result. Once marginalized youth become closed off, they are not willing to establish supportive relationships with YOWs. The youth workers in the study informed me that being consistently genuine with marginalized youth and not being fake are the only ways to reach them. Although the literature suggests that enforcing social control over marginalized youth by taking advantage of their vulnerability is what civilizes them (Coussee, Roets and De Bie 2009:421), previous studies do not consider how youth perceive this type of approach, nor do they recognize how the youth react when they are faced with it. While my study does not provide the youth’s perception of this approach, YOWs who

participated in this study indicate that enforcing social control over marginalized youth by using their vulnerability is not useful in supporting them.

I have identified that anthropological research on youth focuses on how YOWs behave and organize themselves within social structures. For instance, Bourgois' ethnographic fieldwork informs us that youth act in complex structures such as families and peer groups (Bourgois 2003:174). Bernat informs us that marginalized youth who are homeless "develop their own social organizations, and networks of support linked to the sharing of food and goods" (Bernat 1999:122). Further, he tells us that these youth are seen as un-socialized to established order (Bernat 1999: 122). These anthropological studies, however, do not provide insights into the effective forms of support for marginalized youth. The participants of this study informed me that understanding the social barriers from the perspectives of youth can create solutions that ultimately benefit marginalized youth. For instance, one of the participants stated that understanding what the youth are going through from their viewpoint by asking series of questions helps him find concrete solutions to their concerns. The reason he questions youth proactively is because many of them would not know how to articulate the obstacles they are facing. The question and answer practice not only helped this participant to assist youth appropriately but it also helped the youth to recognize their social hindrances with a person who is supporting them. I have also identified that paying attention to the social barriers that marginalized youth face can reveal what stigmatizes them and what makes them feel ashamed. For instance, the participants informed me that homelessness was not an easy subject to discuss. This was because youth felt a sense of shame, and were only comfortable speaking with YOWs they could trust. Rather than investigating how marginalized youth structure and organize themselves, this study thus provides YOWs' descriptions of the systemic social barriers that

youth encounter and their experiences of supporting youth who attempt to join mainstream society by accessing various services and are stigmatized as they face social barriers in the process.

The YOWs used a sense of shared solidarity to encourage marginalized youth to be receptive to their educational practices. YOWs support youth by caring for them, and understanding who currently cares for them. One of the participants suggested that many marginalized youth encounter a world that has not cared for them. A YOW thus leads with a mindset to care for them, and youth will then feel empowered to strive for upward mobility. I understood that their strategy to educate begins with the YOWs wanting to care for youth and their development. As such, this study contributes to the anthropological literature that fails to provide nuanced accounts of the types and the quality of relationships formed between YOWs and marginalized youth. For example, Sercombe states that the practice of youth outreach work engages young people through a professional relationship, where the primary person is the youth (Sercombe 2014:1). Furthermore, marginalized youth are people whose lives are being shaped in negotiation while YOWs consider their social context (Sercombe 2014:6). This study suggests that the quality of relationships between YOWs and youth matters greatly. For example, Michael made it very clear that understanding how to care for that youth as a primary person is important for their development. He suggested that caring for marginalized youth means nurturing their individuality, and sharing what they are going through in their lives. I learned that caring for youth means considering what interests individual youth, such as their passion to learn about their ethnic heritage. I also learned from the YOWs that using culturally relevant way of teaching was a strategy that helped to educate the youth they serve.

Through the research I learned that some YOWs envisioned themselves as older versions of the youth they serve. With this recognition, they were able to support youth effectively because they can relate to them, based on their past experiences. This approach reveals that the YOWs are well informed of the social issues that many marginalized youth face because they once faced similar ones. This signifies that the agency of the youth worker and the agency of the youth are enmeshed in a structure where they understand the same marginalization. However, the literature on youth development does not discuss how the personal experiences of a YOW can be used to support and educate marginalized youth. Nor does the literature discuss if YOWs share the youth's understanding of their own marginalization. As such, I learned that the YOWs are experienced individuals who can make use of this understanding of marginalization to guide and support youth who are currently marginalized.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Through a shared sense of vulnerability, the youth workers and the youth they work with build positive relationships without morally judging or criticizing each other. Some studies state that YOWs plan to “civilize” marginalized youth by taking advantage of their vulnerability; in these cases, the goal is to create a place within mainstream society for the marginalized youth (Coussee, Roets and De Bie 2009:421). These scholars maintain that youth workers control the vulnerability of marginalized youth to monitor and manipulate them because marginalized youth are labelled as troublesome, underclass and dangerous (Coussee, Roets and De Bie 2009:425). However, these studies do not examine how vulnerability works to establish supportive relationships between youth outreach workers and marginalized youth. YOWs identify that understanding how to care for marginalized youth and understanding who currently cares for them are important factors in establishing the right supportive relationship. YOWs acknowledge that it is important to consider what interests young people and to address their interests in culturally relevant ways when providing support. In sum, I have shown through this research that YOWs pay close attention to the marginalized status of youth and their experiences. This approach not only allows us to understand what issues youth are facing, but also helps us understand how to provide practical support for their social development.

In this study, I conducted interviews with participants that uncovered current practices of supporting marginalized youth. I have shown that the culture of youth outreach work functions as a practice that educates and supports the well-being of marginalized youth. The solidarity established between the YOWs and marginalized youth encourages youth to confide in the

YOWs even in times where they may feel ashamed of themselves. The participants who graciously provided their time to this study demonstrated their overreaching commitment to the youth they serve and the meaningful relationships they entered into with young people.

5.0 Benefits and Contribution to Anthropology and the Community Stakeholders

This study offers theoretical insights into the anthropology of youth. The research illustrates how marginalized youth are supported socially by youth outreach workers during their transition into mainstream society. The contribution that this research provides to the anthropology of youth is new insights into relations of solidarity (Ortner 2006:130) because it considers the nature of the tie formed and maintained by YOWs and marginalized youth. I have shown how YOWs encourage marginalized youth to become interested in their own development.

Additionally, this study provides nuanced ethnographic data illustrating how YOWs share a sense of solidarity with youth that encourages marginalized youth's upward mobility in mainstream society. While previous anthropological studies examined how youth organize themselves when they are marginalized, my research provides an ethnographic portrait of marginalized youth as they access youth development programs and struggle to join mainstream society.

Supporting the social development of marginalized youth has public significance. Understanding how youth outreach workers come to know how to work in relation with marginalized youth is useful information for anyone or any group that wants to advocate for the well-being of young people, anthropologists or not. This thesis examines how vulnerability between YOWs and youth can establish relations of solidarity. I have shown how vulnerability

encourages YOWs and youth to trust and be open with each other. The findings of this research benefit youth workers, teachers, and any other people who work to support marginalized youth to rethink how to maintain relationships with youth. The study findings are also relevant to the public, who benefit from understanding how solidarity supports the development of marginalized youth. Therefore, my research provides the public with an understanding of how solidarity is established to help youth integrate into mainstream society.

Furthermore, the findings of this study can be used to raise awareness on the importance of social development of marginalized youth, and their social position in Toronto. For example, the City of Toronto would benefit from this study. Currently the City of Toronto's Community Crisis Response Program (CCRP) works throughout the City of Toronto providing social support and community resources to assist youth and adults who reside in priority communities and are impacted by traumatic incidents. CCRP offers training and educational sessions, promotes safety in communities, and works towards developing community safety projects. This study illustrates the importance of establishing relations of solidarity between community workers and marginalized youth. Solidarity with community workers can empower youth to be active learners and it also allows marginalized youth to be recognized as people who work together with community members for the development of safe community projects. Thus the findings of this study can be used to reconsider the nature of the relationship between those who support marginalized youth and those who are supported.

5.1 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

While I had trouble finding participants at the beginning of the investigation, I was able to conduct interviews with a number of experienced YOWs for the study. Due to the vulnerability of marginalized youth as research participants, it was not feasible to conduct

participant observation of marginalized youth and the outreach workers together for this study. It was also not feasible to interview marginalized minors for this study.

For future research, incorporating participant observation in a similar study will provide valuable insight into the development of marginalized youth. Participant observation will serve as an important method that will allow me to deepen my understanding of the relationship between YOWs and youth. Also, a next step in this study would be to interview youth (15–24 years of age) about their relationships with the YOWs. In this study, I will examine the youth's perceptions regarding the relationships they form with YOWs.

The concept of tokenism could be a hindrance for future research. To ensure that I am recognized as a researcher that has good intentions for the people I study and work with, I learned that partnering with a reputable organization and keeping in contact with individuals of the community is important. As a researcher who intends to advocate for the social well-being of youth, I plan to strengthen my relationships and network with members of the Toronto communities that work in the sector of youth development. The aim of this anthropological research is to illustrate the internal dynamics (Hedican 2008:30) of the youth outreach culture, and the outreach workers' view on supporting ostracized youth. As an anthropologist, I am not just collecting cultural facts; rather I am interpreting the realities in which they exist (Hedican 2008:34). The information gathered to complete this thesis illustrates the dynamic and significant work of youth outreach workers, and their dedication to marginalized youth. The importance of this thesis is to provide qualitative research that illustrates the experiences and the perceptions of the participants. I also show how YOWs play an integral role in educating marginalized youth, and how YOWs encourage the youth to be receptive to this culture of teaching. This study shows the importance of supporting and advocating for the well-being of ostracized youth in Toronto.

The findings of this study can be used to raise awareness for the well-being of Toronto's marginalized youth, work in relation with members of the community that seek positive development in youth, and ultimately create opportunities that assist in integrating youth into mainstream society.

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APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Theme 1 – How do you perceive many youth’s social skills after spending time in programs you teach?

- 1) How do you describe social integration?
 (“Social integration” is a term used by many support workers within non-profit organizations).
- 2) What types of education tools do you use to assist in the social development of marginalized youth in your program?
- 3) What responses do you receive from youth when discussing topics on employment?
- 4) What responses do you receive from youth when discussing topics related to post-secondary education?
- 5) What responses do you receive from youth when discussing topics related to housing?
- 6) As a support worker, how long have you worked within the non-profit sector which assists in integrating at risk youth in to society?
- 7) How do you use the classroom within the organization you work for as a way to educate the youth?
- 8) What are your thoughts on the youth’s perception of the place where teaching happens?
- 9) Do you think your teaching space is designed to serve youth?
 - a. If so, why?
- 10) Can you describe a situation where you utilized the workshop setting in a specific way to educate youth?
- 11) What other places are used in your organization to educate youth?
 - a) Why are these places considered to be useful?

Theme 3 – Language

- 12) How do you think the content of the curriculum is understood by the youth in the program?

- a. Have you had to modify your workshop in order for you to get a better reception from the youth?
 - b. If so, please elaborate.
- 13) Can you describe your relationship with the youth you teach?
- a. How do you view yourself when working with youth?
- 14) Can you describe your ideal working relationship with youth?
- a. What do you do to build positive relationships with youth?
 - b. How do you improve relationships with youth?
- 15) Do you think you can learn something important from the youth?
- a. Have you learned something important?
 - b. If so, what did you learn?
 - c. Have you applied what you have learned when you work with youth?
- 16) When do you know that your message is being understood by the youth?
- a. If so, can you describe a time?
 - b. If you feel you're not being understood, how do you gain their attention?

Theme 4 – The Identity of the staff

- 17) As a male program facilitator how do you view or see you're working relationships with the youth?
- 18) As a female program facilitator how do you view or see you're working relationships with the youth?
- 19) Would you like to receive a brief summary of the research findings from this study (1-2 pages)?