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What Adolescents Learn in Organized Youth Activities: A Survey of Self-Reported Developmental Experiences

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This research inventoried adolescents' reports on different developmental and negative experiences in organized youth activities, including extracurricular and community-based activities. High school students' experiences were assessed using a newly developed instrument, the Youth Experiences Survey (YES). These youth reported higher rates of learning experiences in youth activities than in 2 other major contexts of their lives. Youth activities were associated with experiences related to initiative, identity exploration and reflection, emotional learning, developing teamwork skills, and forming ties with community members. The findings also suggest that different youth activities offer distinct patterns of learning experiences. Service, faith-based, community, and vocational activities were reported to be frequent contexts for experiences related to identity, prosocial norms, and links to adults. Sports were a frequent context for those related to identity work and emotional development.

The different activities in which adolescents spend time can be seen as differing learning environments, with distinct "opportunity structures" for development and growth (Larson & Verma, 1999; Whiting, 1980). Among adolescents' many daily activities, organized youth activities such as community programs and extracurricular activities provide opportunities and conditions that may be particularly suited to fostering development. Research shows that teenagers consistently experience higher

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levels of motivation and cognitive engagement in youth activities than in other contexts of their lives (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Larson & Kleiber, 1993). These conditions, it has been argued, may fuel a rich array of personal and interpersonal developmental processes (Larson, 2000).

Consistent with this prediction, outcome research shows that participation in youth activities is correlated with general indicators of development. Controlled longitudinal studies have found that participation has a predictive relationship to outcomes such as reduced problem behavior, staying in school, and increases on general measures of positive adjustment (DeMartini, 1983; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Eccles & Templeton, 2002; Hanks & Eckland, 1978; Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997; Howell & McKenzie, 1987; Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer, in press; Marsh, 1992). We have little scientific information, however, on the specific developmental processes that occur within youth activities, or how these might differ across youth activities. Quantitative research has largely treated youth activities as a black box. It has done little to differentiate what processes or experiences within an activity are related to positive changes (Brown, 1988; Eccles & Templeton, 2002; Holland & Andre, 1987; National Research Council, 2002).

The objective of this study was to inventory the types of developmental experiences that adolescents report across organized youth activities. We followed the dictum that the first place to start in studying social and psychological processes should be to ask participants to report on their experiences (Newell & Simon, 1972; Stone et al., 2000). Thus, we employed a survey to ask youth whether they had a wide range of different learning-related experiences in a specific youth activity. We also asked about a smaller number of negative experiences. The focus of the analyses was, first, on how often adolescents report having this range of different developmental experiences in youth activities. It was predicted that they would report higher rates of these experiences in youth activities than in two other major contexts of their daily lives (academic class and socializing with friends). Second, we examined how the frequencies of these experiences differ across categories of youth activities. Given the differing nature of sports, arts, service activities, and so on, we expected that each would be associated with distinct patterns of learning experiences.

Types of Developmental Experiences Expected in Youth Activities

Scholars, policy makers, and youth leaders have attributed a long list of positive developmental experiences to youth activities (National Research

Council, 2002). Our review of the literature suggested six basic domains of learning experiences, which we have divided into the two overarching categories of personal and interpersonal processes suggested by others (Larson, 1994; Youniss, Yates, & Su, 1997).

Personal development. The first overarching category includes developmental processes that can be described as occurring within the individual. Our literature review suggested three general domains. First, it has been argued that youth activities facilitate identity work. Waterman (1984) reported that adolescents try out different youth activities as part of their identity exploration. Youniss and colleagues found that youth in service activities used their experiences as reflective material in the process of identity development (Youniss, McLellan, Su, & Yates, 1999b; Youniss & Yates, 1997). Similarly, high school youth in two qualitative studies described processes occurring in youth activities that included personal exploration, gaining self-knowledge, and developing a stronger sense of who they are (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003; Fredricks et al., 2002).

Second, it has been argued that youth activities can provide a context for the development of initiative. Larson (2000) defined initiative as the capacity for devoting effort over time toward achieving a goal. Qualitative evidence suggests that when activities are structured to be youth based and involve long-term challenges, adolescents develop skills for working toward goals, which include developing plans, organizing their time, contingency thinking, and problem solving (Heath, 1998, 1999; Rogoff, Baker-Sennett, Lacasa, & Goldsmith, 1995). As with other types of learning experiences, however, we do not know how frequently youth activities provide conditions for learning these elements of initiative, nor whether certain categories of youth activities provide more opportunities for learning these than others.

A third domain includes development of basic emotional, cognitive, and physical skills. The literature on youth activities has argued that these skills are a context for learning emotional competencies, but it has provided little elaboration of the processes involved (Catalano, Berglind, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 1999; National Research Council, 2002). Adolescents in activities that demand high performance report having experiences with strong emotions such as anger and anxiety (Fredricks et al., 2002; Scanlan, Babkes, & Scanlan, in press), and some youth report gaining insights into how to manage these states (Dworkin et al., 2003). The development of cognitive and physical skills are a major goal of many activities, such as sports and music (Brudstad, Babkes, & Smith, 2001; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993). But other activities, too,

have embedded curricula aimed at building academic competencies (McLaughlin, 2000). Again, little information exists on how often or in what activities these learning experiences occur.

Interpersonal development. The second overarching category of developmental processes includes those that involve developing social connections to others and learning skills for cultivating these social connections. First, many youth activities are believed to develop teamwork and social skills. In youth activities in which teens have to work together to achieve goals, the literature suggests they have experiences that foster social competencies, learn to work with others, and develop leadership skills (Dubas & Snider, 1993; Eccles & Templeton, 2002; Mahoney, in press; Patrick et al., 1999).

Second, youth activities are believed to promote interpersonal relationships and extend peer networks (Brown, 1990). Within this domain, there are two subdomains that we feel are of particular developmental importance. It has been argued that youth activities provide a unique context for developing relationships with and better understanding of peers from diverse ethnic and social class groups (Holland & Andre, 1987; National Research Council, 2000; Patrick et al., 1999). In addition, it has been argued that peer relationships within youth activities can reinforce the internalization of positive ''prosocial'' norms (National Research Council, 2002), particularly in civic and service activities (Dubas & Snider, 1993; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997). But there is a need to determine how often youth have this experience and in what types of activities.

The third domain of experiences is developing connections to adults and acquiring the social capital that comes with those connections. It is an objective of some youth activities to provide teens with connections to adults in the wider community (McLaughlin, 2000; Eccles & Templeton, 2002). These relationships are then sources of social capital: They provide resources such as access to assistance and information (e.g., about jobs or colleges). It is also possible that adolescents' relationships to parents may be enhanced through participation in a youth activity (National Research Council, 2002).

As a whole, these six domains of learning experiences furnish a provisional topology of six domains of developmental processes hypothesized to occur within youth activities. We do not know, however, whether these experiences are any more common in youth activities than in other parts of adolescents' lives, nor do we know whether some of these experiences may be more likely in some youth activities than in others.

Negative experiences. Just as youth activities provide opportunities for growth experiences, it is possible that they are contexts in which certain types of negative experiences are more likely, experiences that have developmental costs. Research indicates that participation in competitive sports is associated with increased stress and anxiety over competition (Scanlan et al., in press; Smoll & Smith, 1996), and the same may be true of music and other competitive youth activities (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993). Researchers have noted that there can be negative group dynamics in some activities, including encouragement of alcohol use and promotion of undesirable social norms (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Eder & Parker, 1987; Mahoney, 2000). Negative interactions with adult leaders have also been reported, particularly in sports, including conflicts, leaders' coerciveness, and leaders' modeling of inappropriate behavior (McEwin, 1981; Scanlan et al., in press; Smoll & Smith, 1989). Thus, although participation in youth activities is generally viewed as positive, the potential for negative experiences exists and their occurrence needs to be assessed.

This Research

The purpose of this research was to inventory how often adolescents in youth activities report experiences within each of the six domains of learning and within the domain of negative experiences. We employed a newly developed instrument, the Youth Experiences Survey (YES), designed to assess the variety of experiences within each of these domains. To permit us to evaluate this wide array of experiences in depth, we asked each adolescent to focus on a single activity in which he or she was involved. This ''target activity'' for each youth was selected by a randomizing procedure aimed at getting the sample as a whole to report on a full range of youth activities (not just those activities that are most frequent, such as sports). It should be noted that this target activity was limited to activities in which an adolescent was participating; thus, the potential for self-selection effects to influence the data was not ruled out (e.g., if youth who participated in academic clubs tended to have a particular response style; see Dubas & Snider, 1993; Quinn, 1999).

We focused on youth in a medium size, ethnically diverse school. We chose a medium-sized school to avoid the atypical pattern in small schools, where there are usually few choices of youth activities but stronger support and pressure for youth to participate, and the pattern in large schools, where there are more choices but fewer youth participate (Holland & Andre, 1987). We selected a diverse school because we wanted to evaluate how often youth activities are a context for cross-ethnic friendships and understanding.

The first objective of the research was to inventory how frequently the different learning and negative experiences were reported in organized youth activities and to evaluate whether they were experienced more often than in other parts of adolescents' lives. To permit this comparison, a subset of the sample was asked to use one of two comparison activities as their target activity. These two comparison activities, participating in an academic class and socializing with friends, were selected because they are the two most frequent activities in American adolescents' daily lives (Larson & Verma, 1999) and because they effectively represent, respectively, the obligatory, ''work'' segment of daily life and the discretionary, leisure segment (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Larson, 2000). For the survey we used the expression *hanging out with friends* as the colloquial phrase we thought would best denote unstructured socializing with peers. We hypothesized that many or most of the learning experiences within the six domains would be more frequent in youth activities than in these two other major segments of adolescents' lives.

The second objective was to evaluate variations in reported experiences between youth activities. Scholars writing about different activities have emphasized distinct developmental features. Youniss and colleagues argued that faith-based and service activities provide a context for identity work and developing connections and commitment to the community (Youniss et al., 1999a, 1999b). The literature on sports suggests that they are a context for development of initiative, teamwork, and physical skills, but they are also associated with stress (Danish, Kleiber, & Hall, 1987; Scanlan et al., in press). Studies of the arts suggest they are a context for the development of discipline and artistic talents (Catterall & Waldorf, 1999; Dreck, Baum, & McCartney, 1999). Research comparing different activities, however, is rare (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993, and Eccles & Barber, 1999, are two exceptions). We expected that the different opportunities provided by these activities would be related to distinct patterns of learning and negative experiences.

It should be cautioned that the survey method used here did not test whether learning actually occurs in these activities, only whether youth report experiences that are related to its occurrence. Research shows that self-reports can be imperfect: Respondents may inaccurately recall events that are further in the past, and emotions, social desirability, and cognitive factors can affect reports (Schwarz, 1999; Stone et al., 2000). Nonetheless, because youth activities are a context in which adolescents are likely to be active and conscious producers of their development (Larson, 2000; Silbereisen, Eyferth, & Rudinger, 1986), we argue that their reports are a valuable source of information on the developmental processes that are occurring.

METHOD

Sample

The sample included 450 students from the high school in a small city in central Illinois. This city of 45,000 is typical of many working-class cities in the Midwest. Data from the 2000 U.S. Census showed that education levels for its population were slightly below the state norms (75% of adults had graduated from high school, as compared with 80% for Illinois), the number of families living below the poverty line was higher (13% vs. 8%), and median household income was low ($30,400 vs. $46,600). Two thirds of the students in the high school were European American, 26% were African American, and 5% were Hispanic. Like other working-class schools (Holland & Andre, 1987), sports were afforded high prestige and the school had high-quality sports facilities, but it also offered a rich range of extracurricular activities, including arts programs and student clubs. A variety of programs for youth was also available in the community.

All students in the 9th, 11th, and 12th grades who were in class on the day of the study were asked to participate. The 10th graders were unavailable because of a special course they were enrolled in. Of the 646 students invited, 506 (78%) agreed to take part and 450 (70%) completed the YES and provided data that met our quality criteria for inclusion in the final sample. Sample attrition was partly due to administration of the instrument in a nonacademic class during the week of final exams. Some students expressed the need to use this class period to prepare for upcoming exams, and some just wanted to relax.

The final sample included more females (55.8%) than males and consisted of 156 freshman, 157 juniors, and 137 seniors. Sixty percent of the students were European American, 26% were African American, 4% were Hispanic, 2% were Asian, 2% were Native American, and 6% indicated other ethnicities or left this item blank. According to students' reports, the average education level of parents consisted of some college training, but not a college degree: Students reported that 69% of mothers and 64% of fathers had at least some college education.

Procedures

The YES was administered in paper-and-pencil format in physical education classes. Two weeks before data collection, letters were given to all potential participants explaining the study and procedures. Letters were also mailed to their parents, giving them the option to contact us if they did not want their child to take part (5 students were excluded at their

parents' request). On the day of the administration, researchers explained that the purpose of the study was to examine the learning experiences of youth in activities, and written consent was obtained from each student before he or she completed the questionnaire.

Measures

Assessment of participation in youth activities. The questionnaire began with a brief activity survey asking each adolescent if he or she was currently involved in any organized youth activity within five basic categories. These five categories were based on prior categorizations in the research literature (e.g., Eccles & Barber, 1999). Several examples were provided for each category to assist youth in identifying where activities fit. The five categories are listed in Table 1 along with the activities classified within each category.

When a student indicated current involvement in an activity within any of the five categories, the student was instructed to identify by name the specific activity. In addition, youth were asked to indicate their frequency of involvement as: ''once a week or more,'' ''less than once a week,'' or ''less than once a month.'' This produced a list of activities in which each youth was involved, as well as his or her frequency of participation for each. The average student reported involvement in close to two activity categories ($M = 1.83$, $SD = 1.27$). A substantial percentage of youth (30%) reported being currently involved in activities within three or more of the activity categories, and some students (15%) reported no involvement in any youth activity.

Identifying the target activity. The activity survey was used as the basis for selecting the target activity for each student—the activity that would be the focus of his or her responses for subsequent questions about learning and negative experiences. Our goal was to obtain approximately equal numbers of students reporting on each of the five categories of youth activities and a smaller number (a 60% share) in two additional comparison activities: academic class and hanging out with friends. Our strategy to achieve this distribution involved giving out 10 versions of the activity survey described earlier. These 10 versions listed the five categories of youth activities along with the comparison activities in different orders (as explained next). Students each received 1 of the 10 versions. Once they completed the activity survey, they were instructed to identify the activity they had listed first on the survey as one of the activities in which they were currently involved. This first activity, then, became their target activity.

TABLE 1
Activity Categories and Activities Within Each Category

Activity Category	*Activities (n for target activity)*	*Rate of Selection as Target Activity*	*Participation Rate Within Sample*
Faith-based and service activities	Religious youth groups (59), community service (4), FCA (4), tutoring (3), key club (2), SADD (1), other (11)	24%	43%
Academic and leadership activities	Student government (7), yearbook (4), quiz bowl (4), newspaper (3), language club (3), honor societies (2), chess (2), MTEA (2), history club (2), computer (1), other (13)	12%	22%
Performance and fine arts	Dance (25), band (22), art club (15), chorus (7), drama (2) , other (9)	22%	37%
Community organizations and vocational clubs	Boys/girls club (14), YMCA/YWCA (7), Scouts (4), 4-H (3), Career Acts (1), Peer Court (1) , other (18)	14%	19 %
Sports	Basketball (24), football (12), baseball (9), swimming (7), track (7), cheerleading (7), soccer (5), softball (4), wrestling (2), aerobics (2), hockey (2), volleyball (1), gymnastics (1), golf (1), exercise (1), weight lifting (1), bike riding (1), stat person (1), other (13)	28%	55%

The ordering of the activities in the 10 versions was constructed so that the first activities listed—and hence the assigned target activities—would oversample activity categories that we expected to be less frequent. In attempts to achieve this, we first estimated the likely frequency of the five categories, based on frequencies from prior studies (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992; Eccles & Barber, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 1995). Using these estimates, we then determined the proportions of each of the 10 versions of the activity survey that would be required to allocate equal numbers of students to each of the five activity categories. Proportionally more copies were made of the versions that listed less frequent activities first. Thus, for example, our estimate indicated that participation in leadership and community activities would be relatively rare; therefore, we had two versions of the activity survey that listed this category first, and these accounted for 30% of the questionnaires distributed. By contrast, because we assumed all students spent time hanging out with friends, this activity was listed first on only one version of the activity survey (accounting for only 6% of the questionnaires). For the other comparison activity, academic class, we alternated math class and English class on the 10 versions of the activity survey. Because all students in the school were required to be enrolled in both of these classes, the listing of academic class on the activity survey was treated similarly to hanging out with friends, with few youth receiving questionnaires that had this listed first.

This oversampling procedure was partially but not fully successful in achieving our goal of obtaining equal numbers of students in each category of youth activity. In the final sample, sports was the most common target activity ($n = 101$), followed by faith-based and service activities ($n = 84$), performance and fine arts ($n = 80$), community and vocational activities ($n = 48$), and academic and leadership activities ($n = 43$). Our failure to achieve equal numbers across categories was because there was higher numbers of youth in this community who participated in the first three activities, as compared with the studies on which we based our frequency predictions. Table 1 provides the rates of participation in each category of youth activity for the sample as a whole and the rates for which each activity was a target activity.

The number of students reporting on comparison activities was 94, which approximated the intended count. Forty-nine students had hanging out with friends as their target activity and 45 had an academic class (19 math class, 26 English class). Because responses to the YES scales did not differ significantly between math and English classes, we treated academic class as a single category. Of these 94 students, 34 were involved in an organized youth activity but received a version of the questionnaire

directing them to use a comparison activity as their target activity. These 34 students did not differ significantly from the others in their ratings of the comparison activities on the YES scales. We also found that youth who reported participating in more youth activities did not differ from those involved in fewer in how they rated their target activity (Hansen & Larson, 2002). These findings suggest that the effects of response styles and self-selection on the data were not large.

YES, Version 1.0. The YES was designed to survey youth about their experiences within each of the six domains of learning identified earlier and within the domain of negative experiences (Hansen & Larson, 2002).[1] The items and scales in this instrument were developed through several stages. First, 10 focus groups were conducted with 55 teens (23 males and 32 females) involved in a variety of youth activities. Students in the focus groups were asked about their experiences within each of the six domains described in the Introduction and within the domain of negative experiences (Dworkin et al., 2003). Transcriptions of these audiotaped sessions and the literature review were used to generate an initial pool of items representing each of these domains.

We then consulted with additional youth and adult experts to help reduce and refine these items, following procedures recommended by Sudman and Bradburn (1983). Youth in three new focus groups first, working individually, rated their own experience on all of these preliminary items for an activity and rated how good they thought each item was. Then, as a group, they provided oral feedback on the merits and wording of every item. These procedures allowed us to eliminate or revise items that had unintended meanings or that did not discriminate between students. In addition, 10 adult consultants, including three prominent researchers, six program leaders, and one parent who was a high school PTA president, provided evaluations and comments on the items. They rated each item on whether it dealt with a valuable experience and provided written suggestions. These steps led to the refinement of the items administered to the students in this study.

After the data from the current study were obtained, several methods were employed to develop scales within each domain and select items for each scale. As a first step, we eliminated all items that did not clearly belong in one domain. Interitem correlations, principal component analyses, and knowledge of the conceptual domains were then used to

[1] A copy of the YES and this unpublished paper providing detailed information regarding measurement development and parameters for its use may be obtained by contacting the first author at dmhanse1@uiuc.edu.

identify and refine scales within each of the six domains of development.[2] This process lead to the finalization of 18 scales for the different learning experiences. The items dealing with negative experiences were also subject to this process, which led to identification of five scales of negative experience.

The YES 1.0, which resulted from these stages, consists of 90 items that formed scales for the 18 subdomains of positive experience and the 5 subdomains of negative experiences. The written instructions for completing the YES were: ''Based on your current or recent involvement in [target activity], please rate whether you have had the following experiences.'' Students responded to a 4-point scale for each item, from ''yes, definitely'' (coded as 4) to ''not at all'' (coded as 1). Scale scores were computed as the mean of the items within each. As a result, a scale score of 4.0 indicates that a student marked ''yes, definitely'' for all of the items on that scale, and a score of 1.0 indicates that a student marked ''not at all'' for all items. Table 2 displays the complete set of scales, along with a sample item for each. The scales for learning experiences were generally intercorrelated, $r = .15$ to .76, indicating that when students perceived an activity to have provided one type of positive experience (e.g., goal setting, cognitive skills), they also perceived it as providing other positive experiences. The five scales for negative experiences were also intercorrelated, $r = .43$ to .67. In general, all scales had high reliability (see Table 2). A subsequent validity study with 65 high school students recruited from 10 activities showed that students' self-ratings for most of these scales were correlated with the leaders' reports of experiences for the same individual youth (Hansen & Larson, 2002).

Control variables. Several characteristics of students and their participation in the target activity were measured and evaluated as control variables. Students reported on their gender, school grade, ethnicity, and their mothers' and fathers' educational attainment and employment statuses. We also asked students how many years they had been involved in the target activity (length of participation), and we used their reported current frequency of participation from the activity survey.

The relationships of these variables to the YES scales were tested using zero-order correlations and ANOVA procedures. Among these variables, parents' education, parents' employment status, and participant's ethnicity were not associated with the YES scales at rates above chance expectation. We also found that exclusion of these variables from the study

[2] Data for the comparison activities were not included in these analyses.

models did not alter the pattern of results. Thus, these variables were not included as control variables.

The final pool of control variables for the analyses consisted of students' grade, gender, length of participation, and frequency of participation in the target activity. In the MANCOVA analyses described next, grade was significantly related to the YES scales for self-knowledge, exploration, problem solving, time management, group process skills, and feedback experiences, where older students reported more frequent experiences. Girls reported significantly more experiences involving group process skills and significantly lower scores on all negative scales than did boys. Students who reported a higher participation rate (e.g., more than once per week) reported higher rates for the YES scales of self-knowledge, exploration, goal setting, effort, and physical skills. Students who had been involved in the activity longer reported higher scores for integration with family. The limited sample size did not permit us to examine interactions among the control variables and the independent variables.

Plan of Analysis

Before conducting the analysis we excluded the data from students who did not meet our quality criteria for inclusion in the final sample. These included students who completed less than 40% of the YES items and those who did not correctly follow the instructions for selecting a target activity ($n = 44$). We also excluded students ($n = 12$) who responded ''yes, definitely'' to more than 80% of the YES items, a pattern we felt indicated failure to take the survey seriously. These exclusions yielded the final sample of 450 students.

MANCOVA was used to test whether the YES scales within each domain of experience differed between activity categories. The activity categories were used to create the independent variables (described next); the YES scales within each domain were the dependent variables. The control variables were entered as covariates. When the MANCOVA for a domain yielded significance, we examined the F values and η^2 (eta squared) statistics for ANCOVA for each YES scale within that domain. When these ANCOVAs were significant, Bonferroni contrasts were computed for the adjusted means, $p < .05$, to identify differences between activity categories.

To address the first objective—comparing youth activities with the comparison activities—an independent variable was created that had three categories. All youth activities were combined into one category and evaluated along with hanging out with friends and academic class as the

TABLE 2
YES Scales and Sample Items

Category of Developmental Experience Scales (Cronbach' alpha)	*Number of Items*	*Sample Item*
Personal development		
Identity work (.81)		
Exploration (.63)	3	Tried doing new things
Self-knowledge (.56)	2	Learned what I am good at
Identity reflection (.80)	5	This activity got me thinking about who I am
Initiative (.91)		
Goal setting (.84)	4	I set goals for myself in this activity
Effort (.85)	4	Learned to push myself
Problem solving (.80)	3	Observed how others solved problems and learned from them
Time management (.75)	4	Learned not to overcommit myself
Basic skills (.87)		
Emotional regulation (.88)	6	Learned about controlling my temper
Cognitive skills (.74)	5	I have improved skills for finding information
Physical skills (–)	1	I have improved athletic or physical skills
Interpersonal development		

Teamwork and social skills (.93)		
Group process skills (.84)	5	Learned that working together requires some compromising
Feedback (.88)	2	I became comfortable giving feedback
Leadership and responsibility (.84)	5	Had an opportunity to be in charge of a group of peers
Interpersonal relationships (.83)		
Diverse peer relationships (.75)	4	Learned I had a lot in common with youth from different backgrounds
Prosocial norms (.81)	5	Learned about helping others
Adult networks (.83)		
Integration with family (.84)	2	This activity improved my relationship with my parents/guardians
Linkages to community (.87)	3	Got to know people in the community (other than adult leaders)
Linkages to work and college (.81)	3	This activity helped prepare me for college
Negative experiences (.94)		
Stress (.84)	4	Demands were so great that I didn't get homework done
Negative peer interaction (.83)	4	Teens in this activity got me into drinking alcohol or using drugs
Social exclusion (.78)	3	I felt left out
Negative group dynamics (.73)	4	I got stuck doing more than my fair share
Inappropriate adult behavior (.91)	9	Adults in this activity are controlling and manipulative

other two categories. It should be noted that one of the negative experiences scales, inappropriate adult behavior, included items that were specific to the leaders of youth activities. Students had been instructed to skip these items for the two comparison activities; thus, this scale could not be included for this set of analyses.

To address the second objective—making comparison among youth activities—the five categories of youth activities were tested as the independent variable. Data for the comparison activities were excluded from these analyses.

RESULTS

Rates of Learning Experiences in Youth Activities Versus the Com-parison Activities

The first objective was to evaluate our prediction that the students would report higher rates of learning experiences in youth activities than in the two comparison activities. MANCOVAs were conducted for the scales in each of the six domains of learning experiences and for the domain of negative experiences. All seven tests were statistically significant. The results for the ANCOVAs and the follow-up contrasts are presented in Table 3.

Experiences of personal development. Within the domains related to internal personal development, youth activities stood out most strongly from the comparison activities for initiative experiences. ANCOVAs and the follow-up Bonferroni contrasts indicated that the students reported higher rates of learning experiences for all four scales in this domain: goal setting, effort, problem solving, and time management. For example, they were more likely to report that "I set goals for myself in this activity" or that they "learned to push myself." The magnitude of these differences was substantive, as indicated by the η^2 statistics in the range of .03 to .09 (Table 3).

Youth activities differed from the comparison activities, though not as consistently, for the domain of identity work. Students reported significantly more experiences related to identity reflection than in both comparison activities. They also reported higher rates for the exploration scale in youth activities and with friends, as compared with academic classes. There were no significant differences in self-knowledge experiences, which were reported at high rates across all three activities.

Youth activities differed from the comparison activities in reports of learning basic skills. The students reported significantly more experiences related to learning emotional regulation in youth activities. For example, they were more likely to report that they "learned about overcoming fear

and anxiety." Scores were higher for the scale of learning physical skills in youth activities than in academic class; there was no difference for learning cognitive skills.

Experiences of interpersonal development. The students also reported higher rates of experiences that involved relationships with other people. The differences between youth activities and the comparison activities were most consistent for the domain of teamwork and social skills. ANCOVAs and follow-up Bonferroni contrasts indicated that students reported significantly more learning experiences related to group process skills and leadership in youth activities than in either comparison activity. The sizes of differences were modest.

Findings were less consistent for the two remaining domains. For the domain of interpersonal relationships, students in youth activities reported more experiences related to learning prosocial norms, but there were no significant differences with the comparison activities for diverse peer relationships. For the domain of adult networks, linkages to community and scores for linkages to work and college were higher than for friends, but there were no significant differences for the integration with family scale.

Negative experiences. Youth activities did not stand out distinctly from either of the comparison activities in rates of reported negative experiences. ANCOVAs indicated significant differences between activities for experiences of stress and negative peer interaction. Bonferroni contrasts indicated that the students reported greater experiences of stress in academic class as compared with youth activities and friends, and they reported more negative peer interaction with friends than in youth activities and class.

Differences in Learning Experiences Among Youth Activities

To address our second objective we compared differences in students' reported rates of learning and negative experiences between the five categories of youth activities. MANCOVAs were conducted to test differences among activity categories, and these yielded statistical significance for all six domains of learning experiences and the domain of negative experiences. As Table 4 shows, virtually all of the subsequent ANCOVA analyses for the individual scales were significant and the Bonferroni contrasts indicated differences between specific activities. For ease in exposition, we focus on what these contrasts indicated for each activity category.

TABLE 3
Differences Learning and Negative Experiences in Youth Activities Versus Comparison Activities

YES Scale	*MANCOVA F*	*ANCOVA F*	η^2	*Youth Activity (Ya)(n = 356)*		*Friends (Fr)(n = 49)*		*Class (Cl)(n = 45)*		*Contrasts*[a]
				M	*SE*	*M*	*SE*	*M*	*SE*	
Personal development										
Identity work	5.71**									
Exploration		10.31**	.042	2.96	.04	2.95	.12	2.36	.12	Ya, Fr > Cl
Self-knowledge		1.58	.008	3.37	.04	3.17	.10	3.31	.11	
Identity reflection		9.32**	.040	2.68	.04	2.36	.12	2.16	.13	Ya > Fr, Cl
Initiative	5.77**									
Goal setting		17.84**	.074	3.08	.05	2.44	.12	2.53	.13	Ya > Fr, Cl
Effort		19.39**	.082	3.19	.05	2.49	.12	2.66	.13	Ya > Fr, Cl
Problem solving		7.43**	.034	2.86	.05	2.41	.13	2.44	.14	Ya > Fr, Cl
Time management		13.52**	.058	2.94	.04	2.42	.11	2.48	.12	Ya > Fr, Cl
Basic skills	8.69**									
Emotional regulation		14.42**	.066	2.82	.05	2.34	.14	2.12	.14	Ya > Fr, Cl
Cognitive skills		3.33*	.016	2.36	.05	2.08	.14	2.55	.14	Cl > Fr
Physical skills		9.27**	.043	2.68	.07	2.20	.20	1.85	.20	Ya > Cl
Interpersonal development										
Teamwork and social skills	6.36**									

Group process		13.56**	.064	3.11	.04	2.64	.12	2.57	.12	Ya > Fr, Cl
Feedback		9.39**	.045	3.12	.05	2.82	.14	2.46	.15	Ya > Cl
Leadership		14.41**	.068	3.03	.05	2.64	.12	2.35	.13	Ya > Fr, Cl
Interpersonal relationships	10.56**									
Diverse peer relationships		3.85*	.014	3.20	.05	3.03	.13	2.85	.13	
Prosocial norms		17.45**	.091	2.92	.05	2.08	.14	2.46	.14	Ya > Fr, Cl
Adult networks	4.66**									
Integration with family		1.75	.009	2.52	.07	2.27	.19	2.21	.19	
Linkages to community		11.75**	.060	2.81	.06	2.17	.18	2.10	.17	Ya > Fr, Cl
Linkages to work and college		3.37*	.018	2.68	.06	2.21	.17	2.58	.17	Ya > Fr
Negative experiences	3.73**									
Stress		4.01*	.020	2.04	.05	2.11	.14	2.46	.14	Cl > Ya
Negative peer interaction		4.95*	.025	1.73	.05	2.14	.13	1.69	.13	Fr > YA, Cl
Social exclusion		.64	.003	1.80	.05	1.77	.14	1.95	.14	
Negative group dynamics		1.01	.006	1.93	.04	2.07	.12	2.07	.12	
Inappropriate adult behavior		—		—	—	—	—	—	—	

Note. Covariates included grade, gender, length of participation, and frequency of current participation.
[a]Bonferroni contrasts, $p < .05$.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .001$.

TABLE 4
Differences in Personal Development Learning Experiences Among Types of Youth Activities

				Faith Based and Service (Sf) (n = 84)		*Academic and Leadership(Al) (n = 43)*		*Performance and Fine Arts (Ar) (n = 80)*		*Community and Vocational (Cv) (n = 48)*		*Sports (Sp) (n = 101)*		
YES Scale	*MANCOVA F*	*ANCOVA F*	η^2	*M*	*SE*	*M*	*SE*	*M*	*SE*	*M*	*SE*	*M*	SE	*Contrasts*[a]
Personal development														
Identity work	4.75**													
Exploration		4.91**	.036	3.19	.08	3.03	.12	2.84	.09	3.14	.11	2.73	.08	Sf > Sp, ArCv > Sp
Self-knowledge		2.78*	.033	3.32	.07	3.03	.11	3.44	.08	3.38	.10	3.45	.07	Ar, Sp > Al
Identity reflection		6.53**	.063	2.97	.08	2.47	.13	2.41	.09	2.89	.12	2.61	.09	Sf > Al, Ar, SpCv > Ar
Initiative	2.54**													
Goal setting		2.41*	.019	3.18	.09	2.99	.13	2.86	.09	3.25	.12	3.12	.09	
Effort		2.42*	.033	3.05	.09	3.01	.13	3.15	.09	3.24	.12	3.38	.09	
Problem solving		2.89*	.029	3.06	.10	3.02	.14	2.68	.10	2.98	.13	2.72	.09	
Time management		1.28	.018	3.06	.09	2.92	.12	2.79	.09	3.10	.12	2.96	.08	
Basic skills	8.76**													
Emotional regulation		3.39**	.039	2.95	.10	2.37	.14	2.72	.10	2.86	.13	2.93	.10	Sf, Sp > Al
Cognitive skills		3.20*	.037	2.37	.10	2.60	.14	2.26	.10	2.69	.13	2.17	.10	Cv > Sp
Physical skills		15.50**	.174	2.19	.13	1.71	.19	2.78	.14	2.91	.18	3.28	.13	Ar, Cv, Sp > Sf, Al

Interpersonal development														
Teamwork and social skills	2.75**													
Group process		.796	.008	3.21	.09	3.13	.13	3.05	.09	3.21	.12	3.03	.09	
Feedback		.385	.005	3.10	.11	3.12	.16	3.16	.11	3.27	.15	3.05	.11	
Leadership		6.03**	.067	3.26	.09	2.93	.13	2.73	.10	3.34	.12	2.92	.09	Sf, Cv > Ar
Interpersonal relationships	5.01**													
Diverse peer relationships		2.12	.022	3.50	.09	3.34	.13	3.05	.10	3.29	.12	3.07	.09	
Prosocial norms		9.36**	.098	3.28	.09	2.84	.13	2.56	.10	3.21	.12	2.75	.09	Sf, Cv > Ar, Sp
Adult networks	3.05**													
Integration with family		4.44**	.054	2.77	.13	2.13	.18	2.12	.14	2.70	.17	2.59	.13	Sf > Al, Ar
Linkages to community		6.04**	.069	3.14	.13	2.54	.17	2.46	.12	3.13	.16	2.68	.12	Sf > Al, ArCv > Ar
Linkages to work and college		1.57	.023	2.75	.12	2.80	.17	2.44	.13	2.92	.16	2.59	.12	
Negative experiences	1.77*													
Stress		2.56*	.040	1.87	.12	1.78	.16	2.12	.13	1.98	.15	2.31	.11	
Negative peer interaction		4.02**	.057	1.61	.10	1.49	.14	1.50	.11	1.78	.13	1.99	.09	Sp > Sf, Al, Ar
Social exclusion		.476	.006	1.70	.11	1.68	.15	1.81	.12	1.83	.14	1.87	.10	
Negative group dynamics		.949	.014	1.82	.10	1.83	.14	1.93	.11	1.92	.13	2.07	.10	
Inappropriate adult behavior		3.74**	.053	1.57	.10	1.57	.13	1.76	.10	1.67	.12	2.03	.09	Sp > Sf

Note. Covariates included grade, gender, length of participation, and frequency of current participation.
[a]Bonferroni contrasts, $p < .05$.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .001$.

Faith-based and service activities. Youth reported higher rates for several types of learning experiences in faith-based and service activities. For experiences reflecting personal development, they reported high rates for scales dealing with exploration, identity reflection, and emotional regulation. These differences were in comparison with three other activities: academic and leadership, performance and fine arts, and sports activities. To illustrate these differences, youth in faith-based and service activities were especially likely to report that their activity was a ''positive turning point'' in their life. Of youth in faith-based and service activities, 45% reported that they definitely had this experience as compared with the next closest group at 27%.

The students in faith-based and service activities also reported higher rates for interpersonal development experiences, including leadership, prosocial norms, integration with family, and linkages to community. For example, they reported more frequent experiences of being ''counted on by other youth'' in their activity (42%) and learning to ''be supportive of others'' (43%). Consistent with the pattern for personal experiences, these differences were noted in comparison with academic and leadership activities, performance and fine arts, and sports activities. Service and faith-based activities were not significantly higher on any of the negative experiences.

Because this activity category included two potentially separable subcategories, we conducted independent t tests to examine whether faith-based activities were significantly different from service activities on the YES scales. The findings largely confirmed that these two subcategories yielded similar experiences. Faith-based and service activities differed on only 2 of the 18 scales. The students reported higher rates of identity reflection in faith-based activities, $M = 3.06$ versus $M = 2.64$, $t(82) = -2.22$, $p < .029$, and higher rates of integration with family, $M = 3.95$ versus $M = 2.15$, $t(76) = -3.27$, $p < .002$. It should be cautioned, however, that the sample for service activities was small, limiting the power of the t tests to detect only large effects. Thus, there may be differences between these two groups that were undetected.

Academic and leadership activities. Academic and leadership activities were rated as having fewer learning experiences than other youth activities for several scales, including self-knowledge, identity reflection, emotional regulation, physical skills, integration with family, and linkages to community. This pattern was evident in relation to community and vocational activities and in relation to faith-based and service activities. In no instance was this activity significantly higher than

others on learning experiences. Youth in this setting did not report more frequent negative experience.

Performance and fine arts activities. Similar to the findings for academic and leadership activities, performance and fine arts activities were not high on many of the learning dimensions compared with other activities. However, youth in arts activities reported higher rates of improving physical skills compared with either faith-based and service activities or academic and leadership activities. Performance and fine arts activities also reported higher rates of self-knowledge experiences than did academic and leadership activities. This was not a setting for higher rates of negative experiences.

Community organizations and vocational clubs. The students reported similar patterns of experiences for community and vocational activities as for faith-based and service activities. Youth in community and vocational activities reported higher rates of experiences related to identity reflection, cognitive skills, leadership, prosocial norms, and linkages to community. This was a particularly salient setting for experiences that encouraged them to ''think about their future'' (41% reported ''yes, definitely''), learn about the ''challenges of being a leader'' (54%), and learn about ''helping others'' (54%). This activity was not lower on any scale as compared with any other activity.

Sports. Sports activities were associated with higher rates for some learning experiences, as well as higher rates for some negative experiences. Youth in sports reported higher rates of self-knowledge, emotional regulation, and physical skills experiences. For example, ''learned about controlling my temper'' was high; 35% reported ''yes, definitely'' having this experience. Differences for these scales occurred primarily in contrast to academic and leadership activities. Sports activities were also the only setting in which the students reported higher rates of negative experiences, specifically, negative peer interaction and inappropriate adult behavior. For example, youth in sports were more likely to report that they had ''felt pressured by peers to do something they did not want to do,'' and that ''adult leaders encouraged me to do something I believed morally wrong.''

DISCUSSION

This research indicates that adolescents find organized youth activities to be contexts for a wide range of developmental experiences. Adolescents in

this working-class city reported high rates for a diverse set of learning-related experiences, and they reported these experiences at higher rates than for two other major contexts in their daily lives. The findings also suggest that different youth activities are related to distinct patterns: The students reported different types of learning experiences in sports, arts, and faith-based youth groups. Of course, these findings may partly reflect unique characteristics of the adolescents and youth activities in this one community and the limitations of self-report methodology. These findings, although not objective proof that learning occurs, show that this group of teens perceived youth activities as a context in which these diverse developmental processes were occurring.

Youth Activities Compared With Other Activities

The study focused on types of learning experiences that the literature suggests would be likely in youth activities. We compared rates for these experiences to academic classes and hanging out with friends, two contexts that account for large portions of adolescents' time and represent the obligatory and discretionary segments of their daily lives. Consistent with expectations, students in the study reported higher rates for many of these learning experiences in youth activities than in these comparison activities.

We found, first, that adolescents in youth activities reported more experiences related to personal development. The strongest differences were for those related to learning initiative. The students reported higher rates of experiences involving goal setting, problem solving, effort, and time management in youth activities than in hanging out with friends and in required academic classes. Larson theorized that youth activities present ideal conditions for development of these types of initiative skills because they are voluntary, challenging, and often involve working toward goals (Larson, 2000; Larson & Klieber, 1993). The participants also reported more experiences of identity exploration and reflection in youth activities than in the comparison activities. These results extend findings from qualitative research and studies of single activities (e.g., Waterman, 1984; Youniss et al., 1999a) to suggest that adolescents' use of youth activities for identity work is widespread. Finally, these teens reported youth activities to be a frequent context for emotional learning experiences, such as learning to manage anger, anxiety, and stress, a domain of developmental experiences that deserves more research attention.

We found, second, that adolescents in youth activities reported more frequent experiences reflecting interpersonal development. Differences with the comparison activities were strongest for learning experiences in the domain of teamwork and social skills. Teens in youth activities reported higher rates of experiences related to group process, feedback, and leadership. This is not surprising given that, compared with classwork, youth activities are more likely to involve collaborative group interactions, thus affording more opportunities for the development of teamwork skills (Rogoff et al., 1995). We also suspect that the greater structure, challenge, and goal orientation of youth activities make them a better suited context for teamwork experiences than hanging out with friends (Larson, 2000). The students' reports on developing ties to adults were low in absolute scores across activities, but youth activities had higher rates of links to community than the two comparison activities. Although adolescents' lives are typically segregated from adults', youth activities appear to be one context in which connections to community members are sometimes made. A surprising finding was that, contrary to prior research (Patrick et al., 1999), the students did not report youth activities to be a more frequent context for developing relationships with and understanding of diverse peers; in fact, in separate analyses, we found that experiences did not vary by the ethnic composition within an activity (Midle, 2001). These results may reflect the findings of prior research that it is not the presence of diverse peers in a setting but the conditions under which youth interact that influence changes in young people's behavior and attitudes (National Research Council, 2000).

By adolescents' own reports, then, youth activities provide higher rates of learning experiences for many but not all of the types of learning experiences we evaluated. These youth also did not report negative experiences at higher rates in youth activities than in the comparison contexts. To adopt a critical stance, it is possible that these differences were influenced by self-report response biases. But given that these findings involve comparisons between activities, this would only be a concern if these distortions were systematically different for the youth activities and comparison activities. This is where self-selection into youth activities becomes a possible factor, given that a majority of the teens reporting on comparison activities were doing so because they were not currently in any youth activity. But the finding that these youth who were not involved in activities did not differ from those who were involved in their reports on the comparison activities provides some reassurance that self-selection was not a major influence on the reports. Future research would benefit from having the same youth report on both contexts, so that within-person comparisons can be used.

Differences Among Activities

The findings suggest distinct profiles in the developmental experiences adolescents report for different categories of youth activities. To begin, the students reported relatively similar patterns of experience in faith-based and service activities and in community and vocational activities. Both of these were associated with high rates of experiences relating to development of identity, prosocial norms, and ties to the community. The common theme here is preparation for taking one's place in adult society. Youniss and colleagues theorized that participation in religious and service activities provide socialization into roles and creates network ties that integrate teens into normative society (Youniss et al., 1999a, 1999b). Socialization into adult roles is also part of the deliberate goals of many community and vocation organizations (National Research Council, 2002). This study's findings suggest that adolescents in these activities, relative to those in other activities, perceive themselves as having more experiences of both personal and interpersonal integration into a larger world.

The pattern of experiences associated with sports was mixed and could be described under the heading of character building and character challenging. Youth in sports reported frequent learning experiences related to self-knowledge, emotional regulation, and physical skills, all experiences within the overarching category of personal development. But, it is curious, although the majority of youth were reporting on team sports, they did not indicate higher rates of learning experiences in the domain of teamwork and social skills, and sports stood out as low for learning prosocial norms. Furthermore, youth in sports reported higher rates of negative peer interaction and inappropriate adult behavior. The literature on youth sports suggests that both these positive and negative experiences may be related to the competitive nature of sports, relative to most other youth activities. It has been argued that the drive to excel promotes development of self-knowledge and strategies for controlling strong emotions (Danish et al., 1987). But at the same time, sports is an important context of social comparison with other youth (Roberts & Treasure, 1992), and competition for positions within a team can lead to rivalry with peers (Brudstad et al., 2001). Bredemeier and Shields (1996) reported that competition appears to impede athletes from taking the perspective of others, and they presented evidence that it impairs moral development. Coaches also face pressures to produce a winning team, which can lead them to be coercive or punitive, to encourage unsportsperson-like behavior, and fail to support youth's social and personal development (McEwin, 1981; Roberts & Treasure, 1992; Smoll &

Smith, 1989). In sum, competition may encourage the kind of self-examination and character building needed to contribute to the team goal but at the same time may limit development of collaborative skills and expose youth to negative experiences that challenge their character.

In general, arts activities and academic and leadership activities were not higher on learning experiences than other activities, and they were lower on several dimensions. The pattern for arts may partly be attributable to the fact that many youth were reporting on performance arts activities (band, chorus, dance) that were part of a school class. It is possible that providing credit and a grade for an activity, extrinsic rewards, reduces intrinsic motivation and the level of psychological engagement that is theorized to promote development in these activities (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001; Larson, 2000). It may also lead to participation by a wider range of youth, including those just interested in the course credit, and it may influence adults in the activity to adapt a more controlling leadership style. Further research is needed.

The differing patterns found for arts, academic and leadership, and other activities, it should be cautioned, may be partly attributable to distinct characteristics of the one community studied and the youth activities it offers. Although students in this working-class city reported fewer learning experiences in the arts activities and academic and leadership activities, it is possible that in a community with more resources, greater support for these types of programs might lead youth to report more learning experiences. Evidence suggests that the effectiveness of arts programs depends on high-quality instruction (Dreck et al., 1999). Likewise, research on sports documents substantial differences in adolescents' motivational and emotional experiences as a function of coaches' behavior (Brudstad et al., 2001; Smoll & Smith, 1989); therefore, the modal pattern reported here for sports may not be an accurate representation of any particular sports program. In addition to emphasizing possible community and program differences, we would stress that experiences for individuals are likely to differ. Much research is needed to understand the fit between programs and the developmental, personality, and cultural characteristics of individuals (National Research Council, 2002).

Conclusion

The findings of this study provide a tentative inventory of adolescents' reports on their developmental experiences in youth activities, at least for this one community. Further research is needed to replicate the study

across communities and employ more discriminate and diverse methodologies. Inclusion of more research sites would permit knowledge of how much community-level factors shape these patterns of experience. A strength of this study was its use of comparisons among activities as a tool to understand differences between them, but we have suggested that use of within-person comparisons would reduce the potential confound of self-selection effects on this approach. We also agree with Brown (1988) that there is a strong need for information from observational and field study research methods, so that convergent sources of data can be brought to bear.

Despite limitations, the results have value in showing that adolescents perceive themselves as having a wide array of developmental experiences in youth activities—at rates higher than in two other major segments of their lives. Because this is a context in which youth may be particularly active in shaping their own development (Silbereisen et al., 1996), these self-reports on their experiences may be particularly useful indicators of the underlying developmental processes. Understanding these experiences, we argue, is a valuable step in beginning to differentiate why participation in youth activities is associated with positive, and occasionally negative, outcomes. It also provides a means to begin distinguishing between what happens in one youth activity and another. The field needs to develop knowledge of how specific, controllable experiences in youth activities—experiences that leaders can influence—are related to positive developmental change.

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