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To cite this article: Lorraine Munoz & Marcela Raffaelli (2019): Parental involvement in their adolescents' organized youth programs: Perspectives from parent-adolescent dyads, Applied Developmental Science, DOI: [10.1080/10888691.2019.1692662](https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2019.1692662)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2019.1692662>



Published online: 26 Nov 2019.



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Parental involvement in their adolescents' organized youth programs: Perspectives from parent-adolescent dyads

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ABSTRACT

The current study explored how parents and their adolescent children describe parents' involvement in the adolescent's organized youth program. As part of a larger study of youth programs, 36 adolescent-parent dyads participated in semi-structured interviews. Youth (63.9% female) were 13–18 years old ($M = 15.9$, $SD = 1.2$) and ethnically diverse (38.9% Latino/a, 36.1% European American, and 25% African American or Black). Qualitative analyses centered on two domains of parental involvement (*type and level*). Parents and adolescents focused on different types of involvement, with parents most commonly describing on-site involvement in their children's programs (e.g., attending activities, volunteering) and adolescents emphasizing parents' off-site involvement (e.g., emotional or informational support). Despite these differences, most respondents described the level of parental involvement as "good." Factors that inhibited parents' involvement in their child's program activities were also identified (primarily competing obligations or work conflicts). Implications for research and practice are discussed.

Youth programs are defined as structured leisure activities that are organized and headed by adults, involve commitment and frequent participation, and motivate skill-focused activities (Fawcett, Garton, & Dandy, 2009). Youth programs such as after-school, out-of-school, and summer programs provide a bridge that naturally integrates school and home contexts, which is essential to youth's positive development (Little, Wimer, & Weiss, 2008; Riggs & Medina, 2005). Out-of-school programs allow youth to spend time in a safe, structured, and supervised environment (Vandell, Larson, Mahoney, & Watts, 2015). Research suggests that participation in structured activities is linked to positive youth development across multiple domains (for review, see Vandell et al., 2015). As such, organized youth programs represent important developmental contexts for adolescents in the United States (Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

It is widely recognized that parents play a key role in facilitating and managing their children's involvement in youth programs (Gutiérrez, Izquierdo, & Kremer-Sadlik, 2010; Outley & Floyd, 2002). For example, parental support and encouragement influence youth's motivation and participation in

organized activities (Anderson, Funk, Elliott, & Smith, 2003; Simpkins, Davis-Kean, & Eccles, 2005; Simpkins, Vest, & Price, 2011). Parental engagement in a child's program activities (e.g., in the form of modeling, provision of activity-related materials, and coactivity) can foster the child's academic achievement, prosocial behavior, and positive parent-child relationships (Coulton & Irwin, 2007; Little et al., 2008; Riggs & Medina, 2005; Simpkins et al., 2005). Prior studies have described a number of ways parents can be involved in their children's activities (Dunn, Kinney, & Hofferth, 2003; Fletcher, Elder, & Mekos, 2000; Outley & Floyd, 2002). Much of this work has focused on the age period of late childhood (as opposed to adolescence) and involved either youth or parents (as opposed to both members of the dyad), limiting what is known about the phenomenon. The current study utilizes qualitative data from a diverse sample of parent-adolescent dyads to generate an in-depth picture of parental involvement in organized youth programs. We asked the following questions: How are parents involved in their adolescents' programs? Do parents and adolescents perceive parental involvement in similar ways?

Theoretical foundation

We conceptualize parental involvement broadly as the engagement of parents with their adolescents' organized youth program. To develop this conceptualization, we drew on several strands of scholarship. We started with the youth program literature but found that theoretical models used in youth program studies (e.g., the Expectancy-Value model; Eccles et al., 1983) focus more on explaining the impact of parents' beliefs on adolescents' behaviors and motivational beliefs (e.g., Simpkins, Fredricks, & Eccles, 2012), rather than on how parental involvement is described by youth and parents. The extant literature on parental involvement in youth programs (reviewed below) provides a rich catalog of the specific ways parents can be engaged in their children's program activities, but offers no single conceptual framework for systematizing empirical findings. Unpublished findings from a prior study conducted by our research team suggest that parental engagement in their adolescent's program can be classified into on-site involvement (e.g., attending program events) and off-site involvement (e.g., providing encouragement at home). Some of these actions are similar to concepts in the broader developmental literature, such as parental monitoring (Keijsers, 2016) and social support (Dunkel Schetter & Brooks, 2009), but the categories of on-site and off-site involvement represent broader domains of behavior and tap into the context within which parental involvement occurs.

This distinction between on-site and off-site involvement is analogous to conceptualizations of how parents are engaged in their children's learning through school-based and home-based involvement (e.g., Mapp, 2003), and we ultimately drew primarily on this literature for sensitizing concepts and in our interpretations of findings. School-based involvement occurs within the context of school activities; for example, taking part in parent teacher conferences, volunteering, or attending school events like performances or games (Altschul, 2011; Epstein, 2001; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Mapp, 2003; Shumow & Miller, 2001). Home-based involvement pertains to parents being involved in their children's learning in the home context. For examples, parents may provide verbal support, encourage children to excel, show interest in what the child is learning, help with homework, collaborate on school projects, and generally monitor how things are going in school (Epstein, 2001; Mapp, 2003; Shumow & Miller, 2001).

Factors that hinder parental involvement in their child's school activities have been identified in the

education literature, and we also drew on this literature. In empirical studies, parents typically identify multiple external constraints to being involved in their child's educational activities, including work schedules, lack of transportation, and other responsibilities like childcare (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Mapp, 2003; Zarate, 2007). Other barriers include lack of resources, low socioeconomic status, and lack of understanding of expectations (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Immigrant parents who cannot communicate with faculty and staff may not take part in academic activities (Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Zarate, 2007).

The education literature provides a useful lens for thinking about parental involvement in the context of organized youth programs. By applying frameworks originally developed to understand parental involvement in their child's education, we hoped to gain an in-depth understanding of how parents and adolescents describe and perceive parental involvement in organized youth programs.

Parental involvement in youth programs

Past studies have described multiple ways parents can be involved in their youth's activities. Much of this work has involved pre-adolescents, so we differentiate the age of study participants as "children" (i.e., pre-adolescents) as opposed to "adolescents." For example, parents contribute resources such as equipment and money, monitor their child's activities or accompany their child to activities (Outley & Floyd, 2002), drive children to activities, and attend or volunteer in children's activities (Dunn et al., 2003). Across childhood and adolescence, parents provide encouragement and permission to participate, as well as money for fees (Dunn et al., 2003; Fletcher et al., 2000; Outley & Floyd, 2002; Simpkins et al., 2011). Parents also play an active role as adolescents select and join a program (Kang, Raffaelli, Bowers, Munoz, & Simpkins, 2017). The different ways that parents are involved in their child's organized program appear to fit the school-based vs. home-based distinction found in the school literature, although the distinction has not been explicated in prior studies.

With respect to barriers, previous literature on factors that might deter parental involvement in the context of organized youth programs is limited. Much of this work has focused on prevention or intervention programs, rather than general programs (Coulton & Irwin, 2007; Wright, John, Alaggia, & Sheel, 2006). Parental involvement barriers identified in these

studies tend to be at the program level. For example, parents of youth participating in a community-based arts program mentioned feeling left out of the program and not being notified in advance of performances (Wright et al., 2006). In contrast, a study of out-of-school activities in low income neighborhoods indicated that concerns about neighborhood safety inhibited parental involvement (Coulton & Irwin, 2007), suggesting that other contextual factors can have an impact on parental involvement in out-of-school programs. Based on the school involvement literature reviewed earlier, it is also likely that other barriers limit parental involvement (e.g., work schedules, competing responsibilities). Finally, some considerations may be unique to youth programs as opposed to school. For example, a qualitative analysis of autonomy-related issues identified by adolescents participating in youth programs, and parents of some youth participants (not a matched sample), found that some parents said they tried to respect the child's autonomy by limiting their involvement in the program and only coming to special events and activities (Larson, Pearce, Sullivan, & Jarrett, 2007). Similarly, some adolescents stated that they wanted to be left alone or that they were okay with infrequent visits (Larson et al., 2007). Taken together, this work indicates that parental noninvolvement in organized youth programs can stem from an array of factors.

Parental involvement may take different forms, and youth and their parents may be attuned to specific types of parental involvement. Therefore, it is important to take into account whether or not the perceptions of parents and their youth are in alignment. We could not locate any studies that looked at distinctions in how parents and youth perceive parental involvement in youth programs, so again we turned to the education literature. In a qualitative study, parental involvement in education was described by Latino parents and youth as parents providing academic support (e.g., attending parent-teacher conferences and listening to their child read) and nonacademic support (support outside the context of school; e.g., being aware of the child's life, providing advice and general encouragement, and teaching good morals) (Zarate, 2007). Of note, youth perceived nonacademic support as most valuable to their academic success; too much academic involvement was seen by the youth as their parents trying to intrude on their personal space (Zarate, 2007). In another study, differences between adolescents' and parents' reports on three aspects of parental involvement (involvement in school functions, interest in schoolwork, and

achievement values) were examined using a quantitative design (Paulson & Sputa, 1996). Findings suggest that parents and their adolescents perceived the same parental distinctions between mothers' and fathers' involvement (e.g., mothers were more involved in school functions and homework than were fathers) but that parents reported themselves having higher levels of involvement than did their adolescents. These studies support the value of a dyadic approach that takes into account the perspectives of both parents and adolescents.

Overview of current study

The current study was designed to generate an in-depth picture of parental involvement in organized youth programs. We utilized a qualitative approach (e.g., Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) that incorporated concepts and frameworks from prior research on youth programs and the education literature. Specifically, we examined how parents are involved in adolescents' youth programs, and whether parents and adolescents perceive parental involvement in similar ways. The study was designed to address a key gap in the literature, which is that prior studies of parental involvement in youth programs have typically involved either youth (e.g., Anderson et al., 2003; Outley & Floyd, 2002; Persson, Kerr, & Stattin, 2007) or parents (e.g., Dunn et al., 2003). It is important to get both perspectives to obtain a more holistic depiction of parental involvement and to determine if perceptions of parental involvement align between parents and their youth. This work can provide insights for youth program leaders regarding how parents can be involved in different ways in their youth's organized youth programs, and for parents about the type of involvement that adolescents describe and value.

Method

Procedure

Data were from a mixed method, longitudinal multi-informant study conducted in 13 out of school and after-school youth programs. Programs were purposively selected to ensure they met several theoretically-relevant criteria. All programs were project-based and focused on arts (e.g., performing or visual arts), leadership (e.g., community service, event planning), or science-technology (e.g., nutrition education, video production). The programs met a set of criteria related to program quality (e.g., minimum

of 120 contact hours, experienced staff, low youth drop-out rates). To obtain geographical diversity, programs were recruited in three study sites (two Midwestern cities and one non-metropolitan area in a Midwestern state). In keeping with the larger study's goals of examining program-related experiences in a diverse sample of youth, programs served mainly Latino, European American, and African American youth. For additional information about program characteristics, see Griffith and Larson (2016). The larger study followed youth, parents, and program leaders across a single program cycle and involved various forms of data collection.

Following IRB-approved procedures, at each program a member of the research team presented study information to the youth and gave interested youth a parent information letter describing the study and providing instructions on opting out of the study. The letter was provided in both English and Spanish at sites serving Latinos. During the first data collection session, a researcher went over the assent form and answered questions before youth gave written assent. A subset of youth and (with their permission) one parent was invited to complete in-depth interviews. Youth and parents were interviewed individually by different interviewers and received \$10 for each interview they completed. Youth all spoke English; parents were given the option of completing the study in either English or Spanish. Interviews were carried out by graduate students, staff, and faculty members from various disciplinary (majority social science) and ethnic backgrounds. All interviewers participated in group trainings on the protocols. Those who interviewed Latino parents were bilingual. The current analysis focuses on 36 parent-adolescent dyads who participated in interviews at the relevant time points and answered the questions of interest (described below). The interviews lasted an average of 30 minutes.

Sample

Adolescents in the analytic sample were 13–18 years old ($M = 15.9$, $SD = 1.2$). Most (75%) were U.S. born but over two fifths (44.4%) had one or two parents born outside the U.S. The youth sample included more female ($n = 23$, 63.9%) than male ($n = 13$, 36.1%) participants. (Originally approximately equal numbers of boys and girls were recruited for the interview sample but more boys than girls dropped out of the program, and fewer caregivers of boys were interviewed, reducing the number of parent-son dyads.) On average, youth had been in the program

for about two years ($M = 1.9$, $SD = 1.7$). The 36 parent-adolescent dyads were ethnically diverse: 14 Latino/a (38.9%), 9 African American or Black (25.0%), and 13 European American (36.1%). In all dyads, parents and adolescents were of the same ethnic background.

Parents who completed interviews were predominantly females (72.2%) and biological or adoptive parents (97.3%). Two fifths reported being separated, divorced, or single (41.7%). Twelve parents (33.2%) chose to be interviewed in Spanish. Based on parent reports of family income, 30.3% of families earned under \$25,000 a year, 24.2% earned between \$25,000 and \$49,999 and 45.5% earned over \$50,000.

Interview protocols

Interviews consisted of structured open-ended questions based on the research team's prior studies and the literature on parental engagement in youth programs. Questions were piloted with program participants and their parents (including seeking input about wording) to ensure they elicited the intended information and were worded in a way that made sense to respondents. In the first year of the study, parents were interviewed at three time points; in the second year, the second and third interviews were combined to reduce respondent burden and because preliminary analyses indicated that redundant information was being obtained. The same topics were covered regardless of the number of interviews. The current study draws on data collected during the second interview for the youth and the first and second (in Year 2; third in Year 1) interview for the parents, when relevant questions were administered.

Parents and youth were each asked about ways parents were involved in the program and how they felt about the level of involvement. Questions were worded as broadly as possible, to allow respondents to report varying types and levels of involvement without feeling defensive or judged. Wording was also varied across interviews, to ensure respondents had the opportunity to describe multiple aspects of parental involvement. For example, parents were asked: "Are there ways you've been involved in your child's program activities?"; "Parents can be engaged in their child's program activities in various ways at home. Every family is different – we are interested in your experiences"; and "How do you feel about the level of your involvement in your child's program? Would you like to be more or less involved than you are?" Youth were asked: "Some parents help youth with ideas or work for program activities and some don't.

What has your experience been?” and “How do you feel about the level of your parents’ involvement and support? Would you like your parents to be more or less involved than they are?” Interviewers were trained to probe and follow up on experiences described by interviewees.

Coding and analysis

Interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, and checked by the original interviewer. Coding and analysis occurred in several major stages spanning approximately a year. The analytic process involved elements of both inductive (e.g., in vivo codes, constant comparison) and deductive (e.g., sensitizing concepts, theoretical analysis) approaches (Miles et al., 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), with the aim of generating an in-depth picture of parental involvement in the context of youth programs. The qualitative data analysis software NVivo (QSR International, 2010) was used to manage, code, and analyze the data.

At the first stage, responses to the questions of interest were analyzed using open coding to get a sense of the data. Open coding aids in breaking down data so that themes can be identified and examined (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Initial codes were derived inductively from the data (e.g., using participants’ own words to represent key ideas) but also drew on sensitizing concepts and analytic concepts based on the education literature (e.g., specific forms of on-site vs. off-site involvement were identified and coded). A draft codebook was developed based on both parent and youth data. Although the codes and definitions were in English, we attempted to ensure that they reflected the experiences of respondents from different linguistic (and ethnic) backgrounds. For example, parent interviews were coded in the original language (English or Spanish) and the codebook included examples in both languages.

After this, a bilingual undergraduate (second coder) was trained on the draft codebook then coded youth and parent transcripts under the supervision of the first author (first coder). Following an inductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), the first and second coders worked independently and met weekly to compare coded transcripts, establish consensus regarding the application of specific codes, and refine codes by combining, splitting, or revising them (Hill et al., 2005). The second author (first author’s thesis advisor) served as a senior member (auditor) when questions arose. Analyses were

organized around the two domains of *type of parental involvement* and *level of parental involvement*. Overarching constructs and categories (codes) identified within each domain were given descriptive labels, and the codebook was updated.

At the last stage of analysis, another bilingual undergraduate (third coder) was brought in to establish reliability with the first coder (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Kappas for parents were: 1.00 (type of parental involvement), 0.96 (level of parental involvement); kappas for youth were: 0.80 (type of parental involvement), and 0.79 (level of parental involvement). This corresponds to “almost perfect” (parent data) and “substantial” (youth data) consistency between coders (Landis & Koch, 1977). The differences in kappas may reflect the fact that parents tended to answer questions in a direct and straight-forward manner, which facilitated coding. In contrast, youth would often say one thing in response to a question then go on to say something different (as if they were thinking out loud), which made coding of youth interviews more challenging. Discrepancies were resolved by discussion (and consultation with the senior author if needed), and the final codes were applied to the data. Through this process, different perspectives were taken into account at all stages of the analytic process (Hill et al., 2005).

Coding and interpretation necessarily reflected the research team’s positionality. The first author is a bilingual Latina raised by Mexican-born parents in a predominantly Polish neighborhood in a large city. The two undergraduate coders were both bilingual and bicultural Latinas. The first author and undergraduate coders had all participated in youth programs. The second author, who did not participate in youth programs while growing up (primarily in the U.S. and Brazil), has conducted research with ethnically diverse adolescents and families in the U.S. and has a working knowledge of Spanish. She served as auditor, providing feedback to ensure that coding and interpretation accurately represented the data (e.g., by questioning assumptions and conclusions).

Results

Findings are presented separately for the two domains of perceived type of parental involvement and perceived level of parental involvement. We describe the constructs and categories (i.e., codes) within each domain and compare parent and adolescent perspectives. In the presentation of results, we provide illustrative quotes from participants. To maintain

Table 1. Examples of types of parental involvement constructs and categories.

Constructs	Categories (codes) and illustrative quotes
On-Site Parental Involvement	<p><i>Active Participant</i> They're always interested in what I do and what I wanna do so I think they just kinda accepted. and they love coming to everything that happens and even when I was selling tickets I think they came. (Nick, 15, M, White)</p> <p><i>Contributor</i> Well, I came with her when they were still in school last year ... I got some greens one time, I got some green tomato and I get some coupon to buy me some if I don't come over she'll get it for me with the coupon and she loves cucumber, so then she come get her cucumber. (Mia, 71, Female, Black)</p> <p><i>Checker</i> So, I might touch base or contact somebody from The Station to let them know I am coming you know ... (Angie, 47, F, White)</p>
Off-Site Parental Involvement	<p><i>Verbal Supporter</i> Well, if I have ideas I wanna tell the staff about, my mom always encourages me to do it, because she's like go ahead, if no one else does it, you can be the first one to try it out and see if it works. She's always saying, you can never lose anything. At least you know that the 'no' you have it already secured, but what if they say yes. You never know. She's always encouraging me to say what I think will work out. (Isabella, 18, F, Latina)</p> <p><i>Emotional Supporter</i> I found that most of the parents are really supportive in one way or another. Some of them are silent supporters ... But they're there for encouraging you and pushing you to keep going. (Liliana, 16, F, Latina)</p> <p><i>Instrumental Supporter</i> Taking her to take her photos. We took her there. She had to go with some of her friends, I do not know where, and also we took her over there. For when she is going to take her things, they give her the camera that's when we take her. [Translated] (Ana, 40, F, Latina)</p> <p><i>Informational Supporter</i> They can tell me what they think about it. Of how - other ways we can reach out to people. And what we can do to make the event better. (Sofia, 14, F, Latina)</p>

Note. Types of parental involvement categories are listed from most frequently mentioned to less frequently mentioned within each construct.

confidentiality, youth and parents were given pseudonyms.¹

Perceived type of parental involvement

On-site and off-site involvement

Parents and their adolescents described multiple ways that parents were involved in the child's program. These fell into two overarching constructs: "on-site" and "off-site" involvement (see Table 1 for example quotes). *On-site parental involvement* involved parents taking part in program activities or being at the program site. Parents and youth described three categories of on-site involvement that were labeled *active participant*, *contributor*, and *checker*. *Active participant* describes a parent who is actively involved in their adolescent's out of school program by participating in activities, attending meetings, going to program events, or volunteering at the program. *Contributor* is a parent who provides time, money, or resources pertaining to the program; forms of contribution include transportation to program activities, bringing food or other items to the program, and providing financial support to the program. *Checker* describes a parent who shows up at the program site unexpectedly; for example, to observe program activities, check in with

program leaders, see if their youth needs anything, or make sure the youth is where they say they are.

In contrast, *off-site involvement* occurs "behind the scenes" (typically at home). This type of parental involvement was coded into four categories that were labeled *verbal supporter*, *emotional supporter*, *instrumental supporter*, and *informational supporter*. *Verbal supporter* includes parents who verbally encourage and motivate their youth's program engagement; for example, telling their youth to share their ideas with their program leader and suggesting ways to prepare for program activities. *Emotional supporter* is a helpful parent who listens to their adolescent talk about things that happened at the program. *Instrumental supporter* is a parent who helps with program related needs such as driving youth around outside of program hours to work on a project (e.g., taking photos, filming a movie), obtaining supplies for a project, and helping their youth practice skills they are learning in the program at home (e.g., cooking a recipe, practicing skeet shooting). Finally, an *informational supporter* is a parent who wants to know what is going on in the program; these parents ask their youth questions about the program, as well as, give their youth ideas, opinions, feedback, and advice on the program.

Parent vs. adolescent

The percentages of parents and youth reporting each type of parental involvement is displayed in Table 2. Most participants (80.5% of parents, 75% of youth)

¹Preliminary analyses were conducted to examine differences between ethnic groups in the major constructs within each domain. However, power analyses indicated these analyses were insufficiently powered to detect significant group differences. Therefore, only the results for the overall sample are presented here.

Table 2. Types of parental involvement described by youth and parents.

	Parents <i>n</i> = 36	Youth <i>n</i> = 36
On-Site	12 (33.3%)	3 (8.3%)
Off-Site	8 (22.2%)	17 (47.2%)
Both	9 (25%)	7 (19.4%)
Neither	7 (19.4%)	9 (25%)

reported some type of parental involvement in the program.

Parents most commonly reported on-site involvement, either alone or in combination with off-site involvement (total of 58%). Within on-site involvement, parents most frequently described themselves as active participators (*n* = 14). Most youth reported off-site parental involvement, typically alone and in combination with on-site involvement (total of 67%). The most frequently described categories of off-site parental involvement described by youth were verbal supporter (*n* = 13) and emotional supporter (*n* = 8). It should be noted that most programs had opportunities for on-site involvement. According to youth leaders, over three quarters of the programs (78.5%) allowed parents to observe at least some program sessions and almost all programs (92.9%) had opportunities for parents to volunteer or participate.

Dyadic analyses indicated some differences between the perspectives of parents and adolescents. Eight dyads had fully matching descriptions (parent and youth both described the same type and category of involvement), 15 dyads were partial mismatches (e.g., parent and youth described different categories of involvement within the same type), and 13 dyads were complete mismatches. To elucidate the phenomenon of mismatches, we focus on dyads where parents described on-site involvement and youth off-site involvement. Several parents discussed going to the program site to participate in program activities, observe what is going on, or volunteer, whereas youth described their parents being involved in their program activities at home or outside of the program site. This pattern is illustrated by Annalise (36, F, Black), a mother who said: “Carolina and I did this service project together. There was a time when we were doing a nutrition class ... Like a cooking class together, so we have done a couple of things.” On the other hand, 17-year old Carolina reported her parents being verbally and emotionally encouraging of her program participation:

Like I mean, my parents really like, we would just talk to them about it. They really don't give us ideas, like give me ideas or anything... I mean they really don't say much about it unless like we bring it up ... But they love the program. They made that known

that they love it and they love that we do it ... Like my [parents] always ask like ‘You guys doin’ Nutrition Rocks again this year?’ ... just they make sure we're doing it and make sure we still wanna do it and stuff like that.

Additionally, a number of parents (19%) and youth (25%) reported no involvement. Again, there were mismatches between parents and adolescents. For example, three parents responded “no” when asked if they were involved in their child's program activities; however, all youth in these dyads reported off-site parental involvement. For example, Ethan (aged 17) described his father Adam (50, M, White) as being instrumental to helping him with his photography project: “my dad's a photographer ... I asked him how to do the lighting ... what backdrop to use. I told him what I wanted to do, white backdrop.”

These cases illustrate that parents and adolescents may think about parental involvement in different ways. In both examples, parents appear to be focused on being an active participator (or not), whereas adolescents seemed to have a broader view of parental involvement.

Perceived level of parental involvement

Good, more, or less

Responses to questions about how participants felt about the parent's level of involvement yielded three overarching constructs (see Table 3). Most parents and youth described parents as having a *good amount of parental involvement*, which could mean different things to different respondents. In most cases, youth expressed *appreciation for supporter* (regardless of what parents were doing). These youth described being grateful for any involvement their parents could have, and this gratitude was evident to parents. Some parents were described (by themselves or their child) as supporting the youth's autonomy by providing an appropriate level of involvement (*autonomy supporter*). These parents were described as being present and helpful when the youth needed them to be, but knowing when to step aside and let the youth do things on their own. In other cases, parents' level of support was described as fine the way it was, with no change desired.

More parental involvement included youth or parents wanting *more on-site involvement* (e.g., volunteering, coming to events, participating in activities), *more off-site involvement* (e.g., giving ideas and being more informed), or *more involvement in general*. In contrast, a wish for *less parental involvement* was described by one parent and two adolescents as a way

Table 3. Examples of level of parental involvement constructs and categories.

Constructs	Categories and illustrative quotes
Good Amount of Parental Involvement	<p><i>Appreciation for Supporter</i> My parents are really really really supportive and I you know, I'm really thankful for that. (Alexis, 16, F, Latina)</p> <p><i>Autonomy Supporter</i> It's not a contentious point in the household for sure. You know as long as I keep my step back and she knows it's more about her than about me, we're good. (Annalise, 36, F, Black)</p> <p><i>Good Amount</i> I think it is fine the way they are doing things. I mean, I think they should stay the exact way, so no change. (Steven, 17, M, White)</p>
More Parental Involvement	<p><i>More On-Site Involvement</i> Coming up here to volunteer, but I know some things she can do and some things she can't because like, she can't do too much movement. So yeah, some stuff if I ask her to take trips with us, that would be good. Or just coming for a whole day, just seeing what we're doing. Not even for the whole day, just until lunch time to see what we do. Something like that. (Lucia, 17, F, Black)</p> <p><i>More Off-Site Involvement</i> She isn't really like involved as I want her to be. She doesn't really give ideas or anything 'cause whenever I do talk to her about things it's basically about the different things that we've accomplished and not the things that we are basically trying to achieve. (Sidney, 16, M, Black)</p> <p><i>More Involved in General</i> So far I am satisfied. I wish I could be more involved, but my life is so busy right now. (Arelí, 40, F, Latina)</p>
Less Parental Involvement	<p><i>Autonomy</i> As long as I can do it, I feel like that's enough. There used to be a time where she didn't think I should do it, I wasn't going to do it, but now that I can do mostly what I want, it's fine ... Less. (Ryan, 16, M, Black)</p>

Note. Level of parental involvement categories are listed from most frequently mentioned to less frequently mentioned within each construct.

to allow youth to do things on their own and recognize the program was their space.

Parent vs. adolescent

A subset of participants (58.3% of parents, 94.4% of youth) provided codable data for perceived level of parental involvement (2 youth had uncodable data and 15 parents were either not asked the question or had uncodable responses).

Among respondents with valid responses, a *good amount of involvement* was most frequently reported by both parents (57.1%) and adolescents (67.6%). For example, Amanda's mother Diana (46, F, White) described her daughter's positive reaction to her presence at the drama program:

I did actually come to their practices a couple of times and she loved it. It was very welcoming, "come meet my friends come see what I am doing." And so I felt very welcomed.

From 16-year-old Amanda's perspective, "my mom's involvement is just a perfect level to me. She doesn't have to ask about how the play was. I just tell her, but she'll ask if there's anything that she can do to help." What is interesting about this case is that mother and daughter both perceive the same level of parental involvement but are describing two different types of involvement (on-site vs. off-site, respectively). While Diana describes being physically present and welcomed at the program site, Amanda values her mother's interest and willingness to help. The difference in perspective underscores how parents and adolescents

may perceive and experience parental involvement in distinct ways.

The second most frequently reported level of parental involvement was *more involvement* (38.1% of parents, 26.5% of youth). For example, Juanita (44, F, Latina) explained that if there were an opportunity, she would like to participate and work at her 15-year-old daughter Eloisa's program. Similarly, Eloisa described wanting Juanita to volunteer more at the program:

More ... I don't know, I feel like she should volunteer and come and be in the events because she's so friendly and she's always so positive about things. She has a really strong positive energy and I feel like she would be a great volunteer here. Not only because she's my mom, but she's a great person and she brings a lot to people.

In other cases, parents described wanting more on-site involvement, while their youth reported wanting more off-site involvement. For instance, Adriana's mother Rosa (F, Latina) explained that she would like to be more involved in her daughter's program activities and be at the program. On the other hand, Adriana (age 15) said that she would like more off-site involvement, so that her mother would inquire more about the program and know what she was doing.

Only one parent and two youth reported wanting the parent to be less involved, and the reason for this was to comply with youth's desire for autonomy. For example, Jaimin (16, Male, African American) said:

Table 4. Examples of reasons for lack of parental involvement categories.

Categories	Illustrative quotes
Other Obligations	Because of my busy schedule, I haven't been able to be involved (Dameka, 39, F, Black)
Work conflict	Well, the simple truth is that I cannot. Because I work, I come until five, five thirty to my house ... during the week, I cannot. So, I would like to do it, but I cannot. Unfortunately, that's why, no — I cannot participate. [Translated] (Ava, 42, F, Latina)
Parental Autonomy Building	Well, it's only been a few weeks, so I was letting him get a feel of things. (Abbey, Parent, F, Black)
Lack of Communication	The reason that I have not asked the question nor have they asked that's why (laughs) ... Lack of communication (laughs). [Translated] (Rosa, Parent, F, Latina)
Program Autonomy Building	I just didn't feel like it was <i>for</i> the parents. I just figured, I felt like it was for the kids. (LaDonna, 34, F, Black)
Lack of Information	Because I haven't had any information or anything from my daughter to participate in it yet. Once she finds or once she has something going on, then I would participate in it. (Jan, 47, F, Black)
Lack of Opportunity	Not really any opportunity. Like I say, if opportunity were given, it would largely depend on timing. The church nights, if there's ballgame or a swim meet, or something, but I wouldn't be reluctant to doing if there was a good opportunity. (Gregory, 49, M, White)
Lack of Transportation	And with me, it's like harder for transportation right now for me. (Katerina, 37, F, Black)

Note. Reasons for lack of parental involvement are listed from most frequently mentioned to less frequently mentioned.

Probably less involved because I like going through things by myself. I mean like something, if it's too much I'm like, "yo can you help me out." Other than that usually if it's stuff I can handle I rather go through it myself.

Among parent-child dyads with matching data, 41.7% reported the same level of parental involvement.

Reasons for lack of parental involvement

About half of the parents (52.8%; $n=19$) discussed reasons for not being (more) involved in their child's program. Parents who said they were not involved in their child's program were asked a follow up question ("We're interested in learning why parents might not participate in their children's program activities. Can you tell me some of the reasons you haven't participated?"). Other parents spontaneously gave reasons for lack of involvement even though they actually described being involved in the program.

Parents' reasons for lack of involvement in the program fell into eight overarching categories (see Table 4). The two most common reasons were *other obligations* ($n=4$, 21.1%) and *work conflict* ($n=4$, 21.1%). (Categories are not mutually exclusive, as three parents reported more than one reason). For example, Pablo (45, M, Latino) described having a hectic schedule that prevented him from being more involved in program-related activities and events, but identified work scheduling as the primary barrier:

Well, maybe it is work more than anything the scheduling that I have for work because I just started taking English classes but since I have a schedule of 11 [a.m.] to 7:30 or 8 at night then I find it a little difficult because the classes are regularly in the evening.

In another case, Elissia (38, F, Black) eloquently described how difficult it was to make time to attend her 16-year-old son's program events, given her

multiple competing obligations as a divorced parent raising three children while attending school:

It's a juggling act! And sometimes I literally have to bounce back and forth I know he might really want me to be at some things, but I have to make a living and keep a roof over our head. He knows I have to like—if I could clone myself it'd probably be an excellent thing, but I can't. And he knows he has to split that time because I have [two other sons]. So he knows it's a balancing act, so he's okay with it, but I know some times it's more like "Oh I wish you could make it." But when duty calls, he understands. Work or school conflict for me.

Other barriers were less frequently identified by parents. A few parents saw their noninvolvement as a way to support the child's autonomy or felt that the program was primarily for the youth (*parental autonomy building*, *program autonomy building*). More infrequently, parents reported what might be considered structural or logistical barriers to on-site participation, saying they had not communicated with the program regarding opportunities for parental involvement (*lack of communication*), that *lack of information* about opportunities for parental involvement posed a barrier, that the program did not give parents opportunities to get involved (*lack of opportunity*), or that they could not get to the program for events (*lack of transportation*).

Discussion

The goal of the current study was to generate an in-depth picture of parental involvement in youth programs using qualitative data from a matched sample of ethnically diverse parent-adolescent dyads. As discussed below, the findings contribute to the empirical literature on parental involvement in youth programs and have implications for scholarship, theory, and practice.

Parent-adolescent perspectives on parental involvement in youth programs

The majority of parents were described as being involved in their youth's program activities either at the program (on-site involvement) or outside the program (off-site involvement). Previous studies have identified various ways parents can be involved in their children's activities (Dunn et al., 2003; Fletcher et al., 2000; Outley & Floyd, 2002), but the conceptual distinction between on-site and off-site involvement has not been explicated in prior studies. These two overarching types of involvement are consistent with those described in educational research on parental involvement through school-based and home-based involvement (Altschul, 2011; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Mapp, 2003; Zarate, 2007). The current study extends this framework to the context of youth programs. Findings cast light on the myriad ways that parents engage with and support their adolescents' participation in organized youth programs. Additionally, the rich qualitative data allowed us to identify, define, and depict the different forms of on-site and off-site parental involvement.

The three categories of on-site parental involvement (active participator, contributor, and checker) largely match previous findings regarding parental involvement in youth programs (Dunn et al., 2003; Outley & Floyd, 2002; Simpkins et al., 2005). For example, the category of active participator is consistent with how Dunn et al. (2003) described parents being involved by attending or volunteering in activities and driving youth to their activities. Additionally, Outley and Floyd (2002) described parental involvement as parents contributing resources such as equipment and money or monitoring their youth's activities by accompanying their child, which fit the two categories of contributor and checker, respectively. However, some minor distinctions between the current findings and prior research were also seen. For example, contributor parents mentioned bringing food or other items to the program, which has not been mentioned in previous literature. Some checker parents specifically mentioned going to the program to make sure their child is where they say they are, or see if their child needs anything. These behaviors may reflect parental monitoring, which refers to "the parents' knowledge of their child's whereabouts, activities, and friends" (Jacobson & Crockett, 2000, p. 66). However, parental monitoring is thought to have the goal of preventing adolescent problem behaviors (e.g., Keijsers, 2016) and this was not identified as a motivating factor for checker parents. These distinctions

may reflect characteristics of the programs studied or forms of parental involvement specific to the program context. For example, because some programs had limited opportunities for on-site involvement, parents may have found other reasons to be present at the program such as checking up on their children or providing snacks or treats.

Barriers to parents' on-site involvement were described as stemming primarily from time constraints (e.g., competing obligations at home and work). Other reasons for why parents were not involved in their youth's programs included structural barriers (e.g., lack of information or opportunity) or economic factors (e.g., lack of transportation). These barriers are similar to those identified in studies of factors that hinder parental involvement in children's school activities (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Mapp, 2003; Zarate, 2007). Although language barriers were not reported in the current study as a reason for lack of involvement as in previous studies (Carreón et al., 2005; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Zarate, 2007), the only two parents who reported lack of communication between them and the program were Spanish speakers. Collectively, these findings provide insight into reasons why parents may not be involved at their child's program.

Prior research indicates that even if parents are not physically present at the program site, they still provide encouragement and support for their youth's participation (Dunn et al., 2003; Fletcher et al., 2000; Outley & Floyd, 2002; Simpkins et al., 2005; 2011). Unlike prior research, which has typically discussed this type of involvement in a general way (perhaps because studies focused primarily on what we call on-site involvement), we identified four categories of off-site parental involvement: verbal supporter, emotional supporter, informational supporter, and instrumental supporter. These categories are similar to the different types of social support (i.e., emotional, instrumental, and informational support) described by Dunkel Schetter and Brooks (2009). Of note, questions were not framed to elicit these specific categories of support; instead, they emerged inductively from the data. Previous studies indicate that parental support and encouragement (broadly defined) influences youth's decision to join and remain in organized activities (Anderson et al., 2003; Persson et al., 2007; Simpkins et al., 2011), and it would be informative to examine the role of various types of off-site involvement.

One novel contribution of the current study was the dyadic design, which allowed us to uncover apparent discrepancies in parent-adolescent perspectives.

The majority of parents emphasized on-site involvement at their child's program, whereas the majority of adolescents described off-site parental involvement. This discrepancy is in line with a dyadic study showing differences in parent and child reports of parental support and pressure in the child's sports (Kanters, Bocarro, & Casper, 2008). Although Kanters and colleagues addressed a different set of research questions, they found that parents and children tended to perceive situations and experiences differently, and that parents tended to report in favor of the more positive response (e.g., perceiving less pressure on youth and describing their youth as more skilled than youth perceived themselves). Parents' greater focus on involvement at the program site may be due to what the education literature calls "parental role construction" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005) – parents' beliefs about the role they should assume. If parents believe they should take an active role in their child's program, they might emphasize on-site involvement because they think this type of involvement is the most salient or valued. On the other hand, youth's emphasis on parents' off-site involvement is consistent with Zarate's (2007) finding that students placed more importance on the motivation and emotional support that parents provided, and viewed at-school involvement as a form of intrusion (Zarate, 2007). Future research can explicate how parents and adolescents perceive parents' on-site and off-site involvement in youth programs.

In terms of level of involvement, some participants reported wanting more parental involvement (and a few wanted less involvement), but most youth and parents reported a "good amount" of parental involvement. Although the meaning of "good" appeared to vary across respondents, youth and parents seemingly agreed about the appropriate level of parental involvement in the program, with parents being as involved as the youth wanted. A previous study found that youth wanted a limited amount of parental involvement in their programs and that parents respected their adolescents' wishes (Larson et al., 2007). The current study is in line with Larson and colleagues in terms of an understanding between parents and youth about what level of involvement is appropriate. This understanding appeared to stem from good parent-adolescent relationships and in some cases by parents wanting to support their child's autonomy. Additional research that investigates actual and desired level of parental involvement, and the motives behind parents' involvement, could shed light on these findings.

Limitations and implications

The current study had several limitations that can be addressed in future research. First, we were able to address our main goal of characterizing the phenomenon of parental involvement within a sample of youth programs. However, we were not able to explore variations in constructs and categories based on youth and parent characteristics (e.g., age, ethnicity), program type (e.g., focus of activities, cultural aspects) or context (e.g., rural vs. urban location, school vs. community-based). Future studies can extend our findings by identifying programs that vary on these or other specific dimensions, and exploring distinctions and patterns in parental involvement. Second, data were collected as part of a larger study, which limited the number of questions available for the analysis. Because the current investigation built on previous studies by the research team and interview questions were informed by that work and our pilot studies, the questions were well designed to target the phenomenon of interest; however, a larger number of questions could provide an expanded data corpus. Finally, parent and youth questions about parental involvement were phrased differently, which was necessary to allow tailoring to their respective experiences but may have affected their descriptions of parental involvement. It would be beneficial to design a set of parallel questions to elucidate parent and youth perspectives.

Findings have implications for research, theory, and practice. Starting with research, the current study contributes to scholarship on how parents and youth view parental involvement, and allows identification of directions for future research. Scholars can build directly on our findings by replicating this work in other samples and delving deeper into specific findings. For example, it would be informative to examine how parents from different ethnic or linguistic backgrounds view their role vis-à-vis their child's program, and whether their perspectives differ depending on the program's structure and focus. Another potentially fruitful direction would be to follow up on findings relating to the differing perspectives of parents and youth. Consistent with previous dyadic analyses (e.g., Kang et al., 2017; Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Daddis, 2004), there were discrepancies between parent and youth reports in the current study. Future research could explicate the reasons for these different perspectives. For example, it would be informative to discover whether parents are less likely to report off-site involvement because they do not feel this form of involvement is valued or because parents and

adolescents are trying to find a balance in parental involvement during this age period. Furthermore, parenting studies have identified individual and familial factors linked to parent-child discrepancies and level of congruence in other parenting behaviors (e.g., psychological control, maternal knowledge of teens' activities; Korelitz & Garber, 2016; Rote & Smetana, 2016). Future studies could examine the possible influence of individual factors (e.g., child age) and relationship dynamics (e.g., parent-child relationship quality) on how youth and parents perceive and describe parental involvement.

Theoretical models used to understand parental influences on their children's activity involvement typically use broad developmental theories (e.g., ecological or sociocultural frameworks; see Vandell et al., 2015) or process models that focus on predicting youth outcomes (e.g., the Expectancy-Value model; Eccles et al., 1983; Simpkins et al., 2012). Our in-depth examination of how parental involvement is described by youth and parents offers some insights that can be applied to developing focused theories of this phenomenon. One unique aspect was our borrowing of conceptualizations of parental involvement within education theory (e.g., Mapp, 2003) to establish a conceptual foundation that could be applied to the context of youth programs. The constructs of on-site and off-site parental involvement may prove useful in theorizing the roles parents play in their child's program. Moreover, there may be value in conceptualizing parents' off-site involvement as a form of support in future research (e.g., by applying models of support to the program context; Dunkel Schetter & Brooks, 2009). Finally, as discussed above, some categories of parental involvement had parallels in the parenting literature (e.g., monitoring) and that literature can be useful in thinking about how to conceptualize various forms of parental involvement.

With respect to practice implications, findings highlight the need to recognize and facilitate multiple forms of parental involvement. Program organizers and staff should acknowledge and value the different ways that parents are involved in their youth's activities and be clear about parental involvement expectations. The education literature has shown the importance of communicating effectively with parents about expectation for parental participation (e.g., Carreón et al., 2005; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Zarate, 2007). Similarly, scholars have identified ways to improve communication between youth program leaders and parents (see Kang et al., 2017; Simpkins, Riggs, Ngo, Vest Ettekal, & Okamoto, 2017).

Importantly, however, adolescents seemed to describe and appreciate off-site involvement more frequently than their parents. In light of this, we recommend that when communicating with parents, youth program leaders emphasize that parental involvement can take many forms and that adolescents may not necessarily desire a high level of on-site involvement. In addition, program leaders should recognize and communicate ways that parents can be involved off-site. Finally, to overcome barriers to parental involvement, program staff should engage in active outreach to parents who have little knowledge about youth programs and those whose primary language is not English (see Simpkins et al., 2017).

Conclusions

This study highlighted the various ways parents can be involved in their adolescents' program activities. Of note, adolescents emphasized parents' off-site involvement (e.g., verbal or instrumental support) more than on-site involvement (e.g., volunteering or attending events), whereas parents tended to discount their off-site involvement and focus on their on-site involvement. While parents and adolescents emphasized different types of parental involvement, however, they tended to give similar responses about how much parental involvement should occur within the context of the program. Overall, the findings suggest that there is more than one way to be an involved parent and the meaning of parental involvement may be different for parents and adolescents.

Funding

This research was supported by the William T. Grant Foundation (Grant No. 10914; R. W. Larson, PI and M. Raffaelli, co-PI). Support was also provided by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Hatch project ILLU-793-313 (to M. Raffaelli).

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