CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OF YOUTH: EFFICACY OF SERVICE-LEARNING STRATEGIES OF THE JUNIOR YOUTH SPIRITUAL EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Political Science
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

June 2021

An Abstract of the Thesis of

Cassidy Kenney for the degree of Bachelor of Arts
in the Department of Political Science to be taken June 2021

Title: Civic Engagement of Youth: Efficacy of Service-Learning Strategies of the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program

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The present study investigated the impact of the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program (JYSEP) on the civic engagement of its participants. The JYSEP was evaluated as a service-learning program whose goal is to promote civic engagement. This research explored whether participation in this service-learning program improved its participants' civic engagement, practiced service-learning strategies effectively, and if these strategies affected the civic engagement outcome of JYSEP participation. The civic engagement of non-participants of the JYSEP was compared to participants and factors such as age, gender, race, and religion were also studied for their relationship with civic engagement. The civic engagement of JYSEP participants did not appear to be correlated with participation, however participants reported that the JYSEP practiced effective service-learning. This pilot study uncovered what is a small piece of the puzzle of the empowerment of youth. Further research on the JYSEP is necessary to better understand its impact on the civic engagement and development of young people.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Craig Kauffman, Dr. Barbara Mossberg, and Dr. Erin Beck, for their service on my thesis committee, their guidance and wisdom in this process, and for the exemplary ways they have taught me how to learn and discover. I would also like to thank the animators of junior youth groups across Oregon and Washington whose selfless commitment to empowering junior youth inspired this project and helped make it a reality, to their junior youth who agreed to share their stories and experiences, and to Carmel Lakhani, April Colgrove, Shadi Miller, and Kathryn Athay without whom this project would not exist. Thank you to my mom and dad for their tireless encouragement and assistance at every step of the way. And thank you to my dear Tucker, for whose loving partnership and faith in my successful completion of this project I am immensely grateful.

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Introduction

The Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program (JYSEP) is a grassroots community building program focused on the development of youth that takes place in over 150 countries around the world. The JYSEP works with middle schoolers (referred to within the program as junior youth) and their families and engages them in conversations about channeling their talents and capacities into meaningful change in the various communities of which they are a part. The following quotation describes spiritual empowerment within the program: "At an age when burgeoning intellectual, spiritual and physical powers become accessible to them, [junior youth] are being given the tools needed to combat the forces that would rob them of their true identity as noble beings and to work for the common good" (Universal House of Justice, 2010). The program, inspired by principles of the Baha'i Faith, believes that adolescents have a deep inclination to be of service to their communities and strives to empower them to make this service a lifelong habit. The program focuses on developing junior youth's powers of expression, their spiritual perception, and their moral character (Ruhi, 2014). These goals are achieved through four primary activities including the study of texts, service, art, and recreation. In each of the texts studied, junior youth are prompted to consider the application of spiritual themes such as choosing an alternative to violence when faced with adversity or using a critical eye when consuming media. The program encourages junior youth to consider the application of these themes to their own lives. Animators (older youth who serve as mentors in junior youth groups) ensure that discussion of these themes are centered on the junior youth's own communities and guide the participants to translate their reflections into action.

For the past three years, I have served as an animator of multiple junior youth groups. I have witnessed firsthand the ways this program uses unique approaches in order to stimulate the civic engagement of an age group which is often neglected by society. I am interested in investigating the potential of the JYSEP to achieve this goal because I believe that civic engagement, particularly that of youth, is crucial to the progress of humankind and its ability to create change. I hope that my findings will serve as a means to collaborate with others involved in this as well as other service-learning programs to improve our collective practice of empowering young people.

The objective of the study is to investigate the efficacy of service-learning practices within the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program in the improvement of civic engagement of its participants. My research was guided by the following questions: Does the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program stimulate and improve the civic engagement of its participants? Does it practice service-learning strategies identified as being effective ways to foster civic engagement? If so, how does the program impact its participants' attitudes and behaviors regarding civic engagement? Is this effect only present through the duration of the program or does it impact participants after they graduate the program?

Definitions

Civic engagement refers to attitudes and behaviors that address a social or political issue. For the purposes of this study, civic engagement might otherwise be referred to as community engagement. The word "civic," as opposed to "community," may imply that the community being referred to is limited to geographical area (city, region, nation) or to sector (public vs private, profit vs non-profit). However, the definition of civic engagement employed by this study includes both attitudes or behaviors that are not defined by geographical area or sector and involve intentional individual action or collaboration with others in the community, including individuals, groups, or organizations, with a focus on the common good (Prentice, 2007: Carpini, 2000). One may be civically engaged in their attitudes, their behaviors, or both. Because social and political issues must be addressed in all sectors, civic engagement is better understood as including more than that which is of "public concern". In fact, it is disempowering to citizens to limit the definition of civic engagement to, for example, picking up trash in a public park versus in a neighbor's yard. While civic engagement is often understood as activities whose primary focus is to address a social or political issue, service includes activities whose primary focus is on helping others. This distinction is common, especially among young people. However, imagining community participation as including both of these goals provides a more comprehensive, more helpful conception of using service experiences to influence civic engagement.

Service-learning is defined as a "method of experiential education" in which participants are given the opportunity to exercise concepts they have studied in order to

apply and supplement their learning with activities also beneficial to the community (Morgan, 2001). Service-learning has emerged as a means to, in some cases, promote and improve civic engagement of youth. It aims to provide youth with the content or curriculum of a civic education and the opportunities to apply their learning in community service (Morgan, 2001).

Regarding the relationship between service-learning and civic engagement, all service-learning is civic engagement but not all civic engagement is service-learning. The field of service-learning may be categorized as a subsection of civic engagement (Gottleib, 2002: Carpini, 2000). Civic engagement is not inherently service-learning unless the civic engagement is accompanied by the "conscious cultivation of knowledge, attitudes, and skills" (Clark, 1997).

Youth autonomy in the context of service-learning is a practice that promotes and centers the ideas and opinions of youth, involves youth in decision making, and places youth in leadership roles (Morgan, 2001). Youth are provided such opportunities while being well supported and guided by adults in a process of "preparing youth through scaffolding, mentoring, and direct instruction" (Zeldin et al., 2014).

Youth-adult partnership (Y-AP) occurs when youth and adults work together towards a shared goal in a cooperative and unified manner (Zeldin et al., 2014). A mechanism for assessing youth-adult partnership developed by Shepard Zeldin suggests that the quality of Y-AP is determined by two primary factors: a supportive adult relationship and youth voice in decision making. This observation suggests that there is significant interrelation between aforementioned service-learning strategies.

Literature Review

Civic engagement, particularly that of youth, is crucial to the progress of humankind and its ability to create change. Civic engagement centers on the connection between the individual and society. Civic engagement requires that the individual or group intentionally participates in a larger sphere of civic society. In essence, civic engagement prompts the individual to contribute to that which is bigger than, or outside of, oneself. Literature on civic engagement commonly recognizes that in it the individual and society are growing and progressing together, mutually contributing to the progress of the other (Bobek, 2009). The potential of civic engagement to have a positive two-fold impact may be particularly high for young members of society. Through civic engagement, youth learn to make use of their own capacities as well as those found in their community, the result being their participation in something individually and socially beneficial (Barber, 2013).

Regarding the individual transformation affected by civic engagement, it is suggested that such engagement, if sustained after the transition from adolescence to adulthood, is indicative of the development of a sense of purpose, an essential component in the healthy development of one's identity (Barber, 2013: Bronk, 2011). A psychological study conducted by Kendall Cotton-Bronk examines how identity formation in adolescents develops concurrently with purpose. Cotton-Bronk asserts that not only do these components co-develop, but identity exploration informs adolescents' larger life aims and goals. Identity formation requires opportunities in which adolescents recognize their ownership of and influence over their own contributions to society (Bronk, 2011). In addition, students develop the communication, research, and

critical thinking skills necessary for effective participation in the community or workplace. (Clark, 1997).

Civic engagement has a considerable impact on a societal level and contributes to collective progress, making it essential to properly address the global issues of today. Mark Pancer's extensive text on the psychological implications of civic engagement explains that areas that report higher levels of civic engagement demonstrate a multitude of positive health factors. These include but are not limited to "a greater sense of community, lower levels of crime, and citizens who are healthier and happier… lower rates of disease, mental illness, and suicide… as well as having greater economic prosperity, better-educated children, and more effective governments." (Pancer, 2015). The political, social, and environmental challenges of the current moment have left communities across the world frustrated and eager for change (Clark, 1997). The commitment of youth is required in order to greet the challenges of today's world with perseverance and ingenuity.

In order to ensure long term and effective civic engagement of future citizens, we have to educate youth to be civically engaged. It is likely that early participation in service to the community predicts service and volunteer behavior later in life (Barber, 2013). Thus, civic engagement must be made a part of an education during adolescence if it is to become a lifelong practice. Clark writes, "if we expect students to perform as effective citizens, we must educate them through a curriculum that includes all steps we value of citizens" (Clark, 1997). The purpose of educating youth is not just to produce civically engaged adults, but to give them the preparedness to be civically engaged now, during a critical period of their lives. Youth have long been identified by social

movement scholars as the spearhead of social transformation (Earl, 2017). Their ability to recognize injustice and hypocrisy, their strength and tenacity in the face of challenges, and the elevation of their aims and vision of society have and will continue to distinguish them in communities across the world (Ruhi, 2014). Youth must be provided early and continuous education of engaged citizenship in order for these potentialities to be realized.

Service-learning is a particularly effective approach for the education of civic engagement concepts and values. There is general agreement in the existing body of research that experiences which revolve around service and community based action do much to contribute to the development of civic engagement (Schmidt, 2007: Morgan, 2001). The existing literature on service-learning has found that when theoretical learning is combined with experiential learning, the result is one in which the participant feels empowered to grow in their civic engagement (Clark, 1997). A study using data from the National Household Education Survey in 2007 explores the nature of the relationship between service experiences and the development of civic engagement. The study found that volunteer service experiences generally "improved civic attitudes, appreciation of diversity, increased responsibility towards the community, increased political-efficacy, -awareness, -interest and -knowledge, a willingness to volunteer and vote in the future, and a sense of positive contribution to society" (Schmidt, 2007). In other words, this research indicates there is a positive relationship between engaging in service activities during adolescence and continued and deepened attitudes about the importance of civic engagement in one's community.

Some research goes further than just showing a positive relationship, indicating that service-learning might be the most effective way to foster civic engagement in youth. Unlike learning limited to a classroom setting, service-learning prompts students to develop their own perception to assess their community and its needs. Moreover, they learn to see themselves as protagonists in the service-learning process, responsible for working to address problems they identify and capable of contributing to their solutions. Through such experiences, youth better understand the purpose of education and their commitment to learning is crystallized (Clark, 1997).

The tentative relationship between service and civic engagement is subject to variables such as the type of service, the involvement of family, and the underlying principles which guide youth in their service (Barber, 2013: Morgan, 2001: Zeldin et al., 2014). In other words, not all service experiences produce a positive effect on attitudes and behaviors regarding civic engagement. In fact, other research suggests that other experiences, such as engagement in spiritual or academic spaces, influence civic engagement considerably more than service oriented activities (Melchior, 1998). Thus, it is important to target the relevant factors within service learning in order to draw conclusions about exactly how and why service experiences impact civic engagement. Some research indicates that service-learning may only produce "sympathizers" or those who believe civic engagement is important but do not take action (Prentice, 2007). Conversely, other research indicates that service-learning may only produce behavioral changes with minimal effect on the civic attitudes of its participants. Such an effect is more common when the service-learning is decided and organized entirely by

adults or leaders who do not directly participate in the service-learning activity (Clark, 1997).

Service learning which emphasizes the importance of a supportive youth-adult partnership, youth autonomy in the service process, and involvement of the family unit produces particularly strong positive effects on civic engagement (Barber, 2013: Morgan, 2001: Zeldin et al., 2014).

A strong youth-adult partnership (Y-AP) characterized by support and mutual learning can greatly improve the impact of service experiences on civic engagement. Youth are often overlooked or explicitly barred from participating in service-learning as equals to their adult teammates. When youth and adults intentionally collaborate throughout the service-learning process in order to create a collective vision, consult about key decisions, and reflect on their action, service-learning becomes an opportunity for mutual learning (Zeldin et al., 2014). When this exchange occurs, service-learning allows youth to be "active agents in their own development and that of their community" (Zeldin et al., 2014). Research has shown that such Y-AP is connected to the civic engagement of youth across highly diverse contexts (Zeldin et al., 2014).

On the part of the mentor, leader, or adult in the service-learning context, service learning should consider the psychological impact of perceptions about the cognitive and moral development of adolescents. Society's negative stereotypes of the period of adolescence are often characterized by risk taking, rebellion against authority and parents, and lack of integrity in the face of peer influence. Youth empowerment programs are not always protected from these stereotypes and can easily and

accidentally present the conception that service experiences as non-essential to civil society (Zeldin et al., 2014). When this perception is different, however, and consciously promotes the understanding that adolescents are willing and capable of acting as central actors in service to their communities, similar service experiences are shown to result in higher and more sustained levels of inspiration to participate in civil society (Bronk, 2011). Thus, research indicates that when efforts to produce sustained civic engagement include a strong belief in adolescents' natural altruism and inclination to be of service, these efforts produce a stronger and longer impact on civic engagement.

Emphasizing youth autonomy and promoting the voice of youth in service-learning produces a substantial impact on long term civic engagement. In order to elevate youth voices systemically, service-learning programs must involve youth in leadership roles, encouraging them to develop ownership over their service-learning projects (Morgan, 2001). When youth participants are provided choices over the approach and nature of service-learning, they are more likely to continue to participate or voluntarily participate (as opposed to initially participating per request of a parent) (Barber, 2013). Youth who had more ownership and influence over their service-learning experiences demonstrated improved self-concept (the belief they can succeed), political engagement, and tolerance towards out-groups (Morgan, 2001). Youth autonomy is essential in social development as it serves as "an important precursor to competence, identity formation and social trust" (Zeldin et al.,2014).

Research also indicates that service learning in which families are engaged demonstrates higher motivation in adolescents to grow in their civic engagement. By

analyzing data from the US-based National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Carolyn Barber and her colleagues found that youth whose parents demonstrated high levels of civic engagement were more likely to be civically engaged themselves years into adulthood. This likelihood was even higher when parents and their children were involved in some of the same activities (Barber, 2013). Clearly, interactions between caregivers and children regarding civic engagement is influential in the development of such engagement in youth over time. Involving parents and family members in service-learning alongside their children and relatives conveys to youth that their parents and family value civic engagement enough to participate in it themselves. Such experiences are foundational to the short and long term development of the civic attitudes and behaviors of youth (Kaye, 1998).

The JYSEP incorporates these three service-learning strategies (youth autonomy, Y-AP, and family involvement) into its practice of empowering junior youth and youth. Service experiences are framed by concepts and principles presented by a series of texts studied by junior youth with their animator. Such texts aim to provide a moral or spiritual education, encouraging junior youth to explore and strengthen their understanding of the ideas studied through service. The JYSEP claims that it practices the three service-learning strategies mentioned above; In theory, the program trains its animators to cultivate the capacities already inherent in junior youth, promotes youth autonomy in its activities, and systematically involves parents and family in the junior youth's service-learning experience.

The animator training materials of the program encourage young adults to serve as "wise mentors and true friends" to the junior youth in their group (Ruhi, 2014). The

name of the position is intentionally distinct from other similar titles such as teacher, mentor, or leader. The term “animator” reminds animators and junior youth alike that junior youth require guidance and sincere encouragement if they are to take charge of making positive contributions to their communities. Instead of viewing junior youth as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, animators are trained to identify and uncover the “gems”, or valuable talents and capacities, latent in junior youth (Ruhi, 2014). The responsibility of an animator is to create an environment which is “free from the fear of censure and ridicule” in which junior youth learn “to listen, to speak, to reflect, to analyze, to make decisions, and to act on them” (Ruhi, 2014). Animators encourage junior youth to recognize their ability to better themselves and the world around them.

The capacities of junior youth to organize and implement service projects in their communities are nurtured gradually. Animators are instructed to assist their junior youth to develop the ability to observe and draw insights from their communities. Through this capacity, junior youth begin to envision ways they can improve their communities. Animators are encouraged to begin by guiding and supporting junior youth in simple acts of service in order to build collective capacity. Then, as their experience and skills grow, junior youth are supported in the implementation of more complex projects. In doing this, the service experience remains suited for the capacity of the junior youth. Because junior youth are able to understand their service experience, they are more likely to learn something from it.

The structure of the program makes family involvement an essential component. Because the JYSEP is a grassroots community building program, it is often born from and sustained by parents and families in the community. They act as strong

collaborators in a junior youth group, providing the support and resources that, in a more formal context, may otherwise be provided by an organization. In addition, animators are asked to develop equally strong relationships with the families and parents of their junior youth as they do with the junior youth themselves. Fostering these relationships is "an important requirement for maintaining a dynamic junior youth group" (Ruhi, 2014). This kind of relationship is achieved through the practice of regular "home visits" during which animators visit junior youth with their families to discuss the goals and activities of the group and the experience of the junior youth. I theorize that the JYSEP has a substantially positive effect on the civic engagement of its participants because, at its core, the pedagogy of the program encourages and empowers youth to demonstrate their values in service-based action.

Hypothesis

Since the JYSEP is a service-learning program with civic engagement as its goal, I expected that participation in the JYSEP would be associated with higher civic engagement (CE) scores. Among JYSEP participants, I predicted to see reports that the program practices service-learning strategies at high rates. Provided that these service-learning strategies theoretically improve civic engagement, I predicted that participants who reported the practice of those service-learnings strategies in their JYSEP experience would have higher CE scores than those who reported that the program did not practice the identified service-learning strategies. If observations from my data confirm these hypotheses, it would suggest the JYSEP is an effective service-learning program to foster civic engagement in adolescents.

Methods

Materials

I tested my hypotheses by using a survey research design, surveying youth that participate in the JYSEP and those that do not. These non-participants served as a control group. Then, among those who have participated in the JYSEP, I used a self-report survey design to assess the extent to which participants believe the JYSEP practices the service-learning strategies identified as being effective ways to foster civic engagement.

The survey materials included a Civic Engagement Questionnaire (CEQ) and a Junior Youth Group Reflection Questionnaire (JYGRQ). All study materials were available in English only. Below are descriptions of each of the research materials and the data they collected:

Civic Engagement Questionnaire

The first survey, the Civic Engagement Questionnaire (CEQ), was designed to establish the level and type of civic engagement of youth who have and have not participated in the JYSEP (see CEQ in List of Accompanying Materials). This survey was closely modeled after one developed by Deborah Bobek in 2009 to measure civic engagement in adolescents. This survey contained measures to establish behavioral and attitudinal civic engagement in order to observe civic engagement categorically. This survey also collected demographic information in order to control for the influence these variables may have on respondents civic engagement. Demographic factors collected by my survey included age, gender, ethnicity, race, religion, and socio-

economic background. Provided that respondents were primarily minors, socio-economic background was approximated by asking whether either of the respondents parents received higher education (NCES, 2012).

Survey questions to measure civic behavior asked respondents to report how often they have engaged in particular civic activities in the past 12 months. By limiting reported behavior to the past 12 months, the survey provided a more current representation of civic action. Questions on civic behavior asked respondents to report how many times they have participated in a variety of types of civic activities in various locations in order to observe general civic behavior. Respondents were asked how many times in the past 12 months they had participated in activities taking place in their neighborhood, church, school, and work on a scale from 0 to 6 or more times. These frequencies were modeled after those used in Bobek's tool which were established to capture an age appropriate picture of civic engagement and, thus, are frequencies appropriate for assessing civic engagement in adolescents.

The survey also asked respondents questions to measure their civic attitudes based on a Likert scale. Survey questions to measure civic attitude asked respondents to rate civic topics on level of importance. Topics included reducing hunger and poverty, making the world a better place, treating others fairly, helping others, and speaking up for equality. The attitudinal section included two additional questions asking respondents to rate their level of agreeance with provided statements: "I believe I can make a difference in my community" and "It's not really a problem if my neighbors are in trouble and need help" which were used to assess "civic commitment or civic duty" (Bobek, 2009).

The questionnaire was designed specifically to be read and responded to by adolescents. Therefore, the language it used was designed to be well understood by all participants. This survey took participants approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Junior Youth Group Reflection Questionnaire

The Junior Youth Group Reflection Questionnaire (JYGRQ) was designed specifically for this study and collected qualitative data on the participant's experiences while in a junior youth group (see JYGRQ in List of Accompanying Materials). It assessed these experiences for the program's ability to demonstrate the employment of effective service-learning strategies.

The survey asked participants to share their reason for joining and something they learned from their experience in the program each in 1-2 sentence answers. Responses to the first question indicate their motivation for their participation (strong or weak, voluntary or involuntary). Because research suggests the degree to which participation is voluntary may impact how participants report about their service-learning experience, in particular youth autonomy, this question was included in order to better inform the qualitative evaluation of responses. Responses describing something participants learned in their junior youth group indicate broad themes about program practice as well as gage the depth of their understanding of the program and/or the degree to which they remember details about their experience when asked to reflect.

Respondents were asked to report the duration of their participation in order to measure whether duration was correlated with reported practice of service-learning strategies and to observe program retainment.

The primary purpose of the survey was to ask participants to report the extent to which they felt the program changed civic attitudes and practiced youth autonomy, Y-AP, and family involvement. To assess attitudinal change, respondents were asked to reflect on the extent to which they felt their participation in the program impacted their attitudes in three areas: tolerance, equality, and social action. Such questions assessed civic attitudes in specific areas targeted by service-learning (Schmidt, 2007). Responses to these questions provided a self-reported assessment of the extent to which the program may have changed civic attitudes, in addition to the assessment of their civic attitudes in the CEQ. To assess youth autonomy, participants were asked to rate their level of agreeance with statements about having real responsibilities, challenging tasks, a role in planning service projects, and a role in making important decisions in their junior youth group. To assess Y-AP, participants were asked to rate their level of agreeance with statements about trust, balance of power, mutual learning, and respect between junior youth and animators. Questions used to assess youth autonomy and Y-AP were taken from measurement tools created by William Morgan and Shepherd Zeldin et al. respectively (Morgan, 2001: Zeldin et al., 2014). To assess family involvement, participants were asked to rate the level of involvement of their parent or caregiver, how often their parent or caregiver and siblings were involved in conversations about and activities related to their junior youth group, and how likely it was that their parent or caregiver would know the title or subject of the book they were studying in junior youth group.

Much of the same language and concepts are used in the JYGRQ as in the CEQ, ensuring that all data collection materials were consistent and well understood by all participants. This survey took participants approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Sample

The study relies on data collected in the Spring of 2021 from three groups of respondents: non-participants, current participants, and past participants. All respondents completed the CEQ, while only participants (current and past) completed the JYGRQ. Responses were limited to individuals in Washington, Oregon, and California in order to control for differences in program practice that may be present if surveying participants from other regions. Respondent population groups were as follows:

Group 1: Control Group

These participants were 6th-12th graders who do not participate nor have ever participated in the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program. Consequently, this group only took the CEQ. This group served as the control group whose civic engagement was compared to those who had participated in the JYSEP. Participants in this category spent approximately 10 minutes in total completing the survey. Invitations to participate in this section of the study were extended to approximately 30 parents of children currently in middle or high school. While my original proposal was to collect responses for the control group through a local middle school in order to avoid selection bias, the school district was unable to coordinate the research to take place through the

school. Instead, the control group was selected via connections with a group of parents in the area. Parents invited families via word-of-mouth whose school aged-children had not participated in the JYSEP to take the survey. Because the control group was composed of those who volunteered to participate in research on civic engagement, they are likely relatively more civically engaged than a true random sample. Adolescents ages 11-18 were included in this group in order to compare civic engagement of participants and non-participants. Responses from 20 non-participants of the JYSEP were collected.

Group 2: Current JYSEP Participants

This group includes current participants in the JYSEP who took both the CEQ and the JYGRQ. This includes 6th, 7th, and 8th graders who currently participate in the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program. Invitations to participate in this section of the study were extended to approximately 30 junior youth groups in total from Oregon, Washington, and California. Given that the typical number of participants per group is 4-8 with some groups having more or less than this range (not including the group's animator(s)), invitations to participate were extended to at least 60 individuals. Invitations were distributed via animators whose junior youth group had met within the last twelve months as I considered "current" participants to be those who had participated in a junior youth group activity within the last 12 months. Participants in this category spent approximately 20 minutes in total (10 minutes for each survey) participating in research. Collecting responses from current participants had two purposes: to observe CE of current participants and to observe how the program

currently practices service-learning according to participants. Responses from 19 current JYSEP participants were collected.

Group 3: Past JYSEP Participants

This group includes those between 15 and 30 years old who have participated in the program in the past. The age limit for this participant population was limited to those 15-30 for two reasons. First, because the program was formally founded in 2000, its oldest participants would likely be no older than 30 and, second, because the JYSEP training curriculum considers "youth" (those outside of the age range eligible to participate in the program as junior youth) to be those in this age range. Participants in this group must also not have participated as a junior youth in a junior youth group activity within the past 12 months. By creating these exclusionary criteria, the participant population of this group was limited to those considered past participants. Invitations to participate in the study were extended to approximately 20 individual graduates of the JYSEP from Oregon, Washington, and California. Collecting responses from past participants to observe CE of past participants in order to investigate if the program produced effects on civic engagement after participants leave the program. Past participants from as many different junior youth groups as possible were invited in order to capture variance. Responses from 13 past JYSEP participants were collected.

Refer to Table 9 and to the accompanying commentary in the Appendix for characteristics of participants including average duration of participation, program retainment, reasons for joining, and the reported learnings of JYSEP participants.

Procedure

The study utilized an online survey format. All questionnaires were distributed and data was collected via Qualtrics. Participants completed all questionnaires on their personal electronic devices, not provided by the study or those administering the survey. Participants in Group 1 completed the questionnaire in their own time at home. Participants in Group 2 either completed the questionnaires individually during their free time or as an activity during their regular Junior Youth Group meeting during which their group's animator was present (in-person or on Zoom). The researcher was not present for the administering of any of the questionnaires.

Methods

The data analysis software STATA was used to analyze collected data. Data was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. All data was aggregated and reported anonymously.

Quantitative data from the CEQ was analyzed using a basic OLS linear regression analysis with a bootstrap standard error to compensate for the small sample size. I conducted linear regressions to test the likelihood of correlation between five independent variables: participation in the JYSEP, age, gender, race (white vs non-white), and religion (Baha'i vs non-Baha'i). Separate models were run using three different CE scores as the continuous dependent variable: the attitude score, behavior score, and CE total (sum of attitude and behavior scores). All models included participation as the primary independent variable in order to test my hypothesis. Different models combined participation with various combinations of control variables, including age, gender, race, and religion. This was done to limit the number

of independent variables in any single model given the small sample size. In order to test for correlation between participation and CE scores among middle schoolers only, responses from those between 11 and 14 years old were isolated and a linear regression analysis was conducted with participation as the independent variable and CE score as the dependent variable.

For the purpose of qualitative analysis, the CEQ uses a form of latent class analysis (LCA) which involves categorizing respondents into three distinct civic engagement categories. These classes were developed by Voight et al. in 2013 using Bobek's assessment tool to understand how civic behaviors and attitudes cooperate (Voight et al., 2013: Bobek, 2013). The responses are the criteria on which categorical membership is based. I created thresholds for behavioral and attitudinal civic engagement in order to categorize respondents based on the degree to which respondents answered affirmatively to questions in the respective categories. Respondents had to respond affirmatively to a majority of the questions in order to be considered attitudinally or behaviorally engaged. With the range of possible behavior scores ranging from 8 to 32, respondents whose civic behavior scores were less than 20 were considered not behaviorally engaged while scores 20 and higher were considered behaviorally engaged. The range of civic behavior scores observed in my data was 10 to 29. With the range of possible attitude scores ranging from 7 to 39, respondents whose civic attitude scores were less than 28 were considered not attitudinally engaged while scores 28 and higher were considered attitudinally engaged. The range of civic attitude scores observed in my data was 26 to 39. The three categories identify differences in

combinations of attitudinal and behavioral civic engagement characteristics. They are as follows:

> Moderates: This category is characterized by low levels of attitudinal and behavioral civic engagement. It indicates the lowest or near-lowest probability of frequent involvement in and agreement with civic behaviors and attitudes.
>
> Sympathizers: This category is characterized by high levels of attitudinal civic engagement and low levels of behavioral civic engagement.
>
> Actors: This category is characterized by high levels of attitudinal civic engagement and high levels of behavioral civic engagement.

This LCA approach is designed to identify the "sympathizer" class, a distinction often neglected by continuous variable approaches to measuring civic engagement. Identifying this class is particularly useful to my research as the JYSEP focuses on the instilment of civic behaviors and civic attitudes. Because the program is focused on creating those characterized by the "actors" class, this approach allowed me to assess the extent to which the program effectively practices service-learning strategies.

Additional qualitative analysis of the CEQ included calculating average CE scores of subgroups of respondents and proportion of each typology within subgroups. Subgroups included those based on participation, gender, age, race, and religion. Raw CE scores and CE typologies were compared between subgroups in order to clarify correlation between such variables in the linear regression analyses.

Basic OLS linear regression analysis using a bootstrap standard error was also used to analyze quantitative data from the JYGRQ. I conducted linear regressions to test the likelihood of correlation between CE scores (attitude score, behavior score, and CE total) and three independent variables: participation status (current or past participant), duration of participation, religion (Baha'i vs non-Baha'i).

Qualitative data analysis from the JYGRQ included calculating percentages of participants who reported program practice of service-learning strategies, calculating percentages of participants based on how they were introduced to the program, and identifying recurring themes in open responses.

Responses from each survey were linked in order to conduct quantitative and qualitative analysis of CEQ and JYGRQ responses among participants only. Basic OLS linear regression analyses using a bootstrap standard error command were conducted using CE scores (attitude score, behavior score, and CE total) and three independent variables including participation status (current or past), duration (of participation in the JYSEP), and religion (Baha'i or non-Baha'i). Qualitative analysis of this comprehensive data set included calculating average CE scores based on participation status, duration, and religion.

Results

Phase I: CEQ

First, I wanted to investigate the extent to which participation in the JYSEP was associated with higher CE scores when participation was the only independent variable being considered.

Table 1. Regression Results for Civic Engagement Questionnaire (CEQ) based on Participation

	CE Total Score		**Attitude Score**		**Behavior Score**	
	Coefficient	p value	Coefficient	p value	Coefficient	p value
Participation (NP:P)	3.606061	0.096*	1.10101	0.193	2.505051	0.069*

*, **, *** indicates significance at the 90%, 95%, and 99% levels, respectively
Source: STATA linear regression using Bootstrap standard error (CEQ)

Participation

A simple linear regression was calculated to predict correlation of CE scores based on participation in all respondents. While no significance was found for correlation between attitude scores and participation, a significant regression equation was found for behavior score ($F(1, 49) = 3.31$, $p=.069$), with an R^2 of .0583 and a coefficient of 3.606061 (see Table 1). Further analysis indicated that participants have civic behavior scores that are 2.5 points higher on average than non-participants (see Table 2 in Appendix). When total CE score was assessed for correlation with participation, there was a significant correlation detected (p value= 0.096) (Table 1).

I also wanted to see if other variables identified in my literature review such as age, religion, gender, and race were related to CE scores. The next model I tested included all 5 independent variables (see Table 3).

Table 3. Regression Results for Civic Engagement Questionnaire (CEQ) based all 5 Variables

	CE Total Score		Attitude Score		Behavior Score	
	Coefficient	p value	Coefficient	p value	Coefficient	p value
Participation (NP:P)	3.606061	0.989	.2131789	0.844	-.1870472	0.835
Age (younger:older)	4.683673	0.007***	1.12402	0.103	2.188975	0.031**
Gender (M:F)	2.81203	0.018**	2.363216	0.012**	1.077353	0.242
Religion (non-Baha'i:Baha'i)	7.949393	0.002***	.8187597	0.378	4.171119	0.018**
Race (non-white:white)	2.756757	0.001***	1.737728	0.142	4.872454	0.000***

*, **, *** indicates significance at the 90%, 95%, and 99% levels, respectively
Source: STATA linear regression using Bootstrap standard error (CEQ)

Age

A significant positive relationship was found between CE total score and age (p value= 0.007) and civic behavior score and age (p value= 0.031) (see Table 3). Given the coefficient calculated is positive in both cases, the older the respondent, generally, the higher their CE total score or civic behavior score.

Gender

When civic attitudes and gender were assessed for correlation, a linear regression analysis produced a significant p value of .012, implying that there is a likelihood of correlation between gender and attitudinal civic engagement at the 95% level (see Table 3). In other words, regardless of participation in the program, gender and civic attitude are correlated. Upon further assessment, females had a higher average civic attitude score than males (see Table 4 in Appendix).

Religion

A simple linear regression detected a significant positive relationship between Baha'i identity and CE scores. A significant p value of 0.018 was calculated for the correlation between civic behavior score and Baha'i identity and a p value of .002 was detected between CE total score and Baha'i identity (see Table 3). Upon further

assessment, Baha'i respondents had higher civic behavior scores and CE total scores than non-Baha'i respondents (see Table 4 in Appendix).

Race

There was a significant relationship detected between civic behaviors and race with a p value of 0.003 and a significant relationship detected between CE total score and race with a p value of 0.004 (see Table 3). Upon further assessment, white respondents reported higher civic behavior scores and CE total scores than non-white respondents (see Table 4 in Appendix).

The third model I tested only included respondents ages 12-14 and included participation, gender, religion, and race as my independent variables while CE scores remained my dependent variables. In doing this, I was able to observe such factors in relation to CE among the target age group of the JYSEP.

Table 5. Regression Results for Civic Engagement Questionnaire (CEQ) based all 5 Variables among 12-14 year olds

	CE Total Score		**Attitude Score**		**Behavior Score**	
	Coefficient	p value	Coefficient	p value	Coefficient	p value
Participation (NP:P)	1.717327	0.273	1.555066	0.224	0.1622614	0.873
Gender (M:F)	3.959373	0.039**	2.207048	0.065*	1.752325	0.224
Religion (non-Baha'i:Baha'i)	6.260646	0.005***	1.942731	0.347	4.317915	0.086*
Race (non-white:white)	4.091043	0.028**	0.4757709	0.769	3.615272	0.001***

*, **, *** indicates significance at the 90%, 95%, and 99% levels, respectively
Source: STATA linear regression using Bootstrap standard error (CEQ)

No significant relationship was detected between participation and CE scores. However, a significant relationship was detected for gender, religion, and race based on civic behavior score and CE total score (see Table 5).

Phase II: JYGRQ

I wanted to see if JYSEP participants reported that the program produced attitudinal changes and practiced youth autonomy, Y-AP, or family involvement.

Reported civic attitude changes, youth autonomy, Y-AP, and family involvement

As seen in Table 6, 81% of participants reported that their JYSEP experience changed their civic attitudes, 97% reported that the JYSEP practiced youth autonomy, and 84% reported that the JYSEP practiced Y-AP while only 27% of participants reported that the JYSEP practiced family involvement.

Next, I wanted to investigate whether participation status, duration, or religion were correlated with self-reported attitudinal change, youth autonomy, Y-AP, or family involvement.

Table 7. Regression Results for JYSEP Questionnaire

	Attitude Change		**Youth Autonomy**		**Youth Adult-Partnership**		**Family Involvement**	
	Coefficient	p value	Coefficient	p value	Coefficient	p value	Coefficient	p value
Participation status	.43026	0.569	-.6554374	0.366	-3.208333	0.083*	-2.409721	0.328
Duration	-.2724586	0.501	-.0076832	0.982	-.2050866	0.837	.3239229	0.854
Baha'i (Baha'i:non-Baha'i)	.68026	0.424	1.094563	0.174	.6720779	0.749	4.168528	0.176

*, **, *** indicates significance at the 90%, 95%, and 99% levels, respectively
Source: STATA linear regression using Bootstrap standard error (JYSEP Questionnaire)

Participation Status

As reported in Table 7, four individual simple linear regression tests of correlation for (self-reported) attitudinal change, youth autonomy, Y-AP, and family involvement were conducted based on participation status (current or past participant of JYSEP). Of these tests, a significant relationship was found between Y-AP and

participation status only, which had a p value of 0.083. When responses from current and past participants were compared, similar numbers of participants reported change in attitude, youth autonomy, and family involvement. However, 95% of current participants self-reported that the JYSEP practices Y-AP, only 69% of past participants reported practice of this service-learning strategy (see Table 6 in Appendix).

Duration

Four individual simple linear regression tests of correlation for (self-reported) attitudinal change, youth autonomy, Y-AP, and family involvement based on duration found no significant relationships between any of these four variables and duration (see Table 7).

Religion

When linear regression analyses were conducted to detect correlation between attitudinal change, youth autonomy, Y-AP, family involvement and Baha'i identity, no significant relationships were found (see Table 7). In other words, whether a respondent was Baha'i did not appear to be correlated with how they reported on the variables mentioned above.

Phase III: Comprehensive Data (CEQ+JYGRQ for JYSEP participants only)

I wanted to investigate if JYSEP participants who reported the practice of those service-learnings strategies in their JYSEP experience had higher CE scores than those who reported that the program did not practice the identified service-learning strategies.

While I hypothesized that participants who reported attitude changes, youth autonomy, Y-AP, and family involvement would have higher CE scores, the data

collected did not contain enough variance to conduct an accurate linear regression between these variables.

Mean CE scores were compared between those who reported attitude changes and service-learning strategies and those who did not. Those who reported attitudinal changes had higher CE scores on average than those who reported no attitudinal change in the program. Participant CE scores were not compared based on whether they reported youth autonomy because only one respondent reported youth autonomy was not practiced in their JYSEP experience. Those who reported Y-AP had higher CE scores on average than those who did not. Respondents who reported family involvement also had higher CE scores on average than those who did not report family involvement.

Lastly, I wanted to see if duration, participation status, or religion were correlated with CE scores among participants. First, I conducted a linear regression test including all three of these variables as independent variables.

Table 8. Regression Results for Comprehensive Data (CEQ + JYSEP Questionnaire)

	CE Total Score		**Attitude Score**		**Behavior Score**	
	Coefficient	p value	Coefficient	p value	Coefficient	p value
Participation status	4.328014	0.090*	1.152482	0.380	3.175532	0.080*
Duration	.179078	0.894	1.088652	0.280	-.9095745	0.2322
Baha'i (Baha'i:non-Baha'i)	5.078014	0.063*	.6524823	0.581	4.425532	0.020**

*, **, *** indicates significance at the 90%, 95%, and 99% levels, respectively
Source: STATA linear regression using Bootstrap standard error (Comprehensive Data)

Duration

When a linear regression test was used to detect correlation between CE scores and duration of participation in the program, no significant relationship was found between CE scores and duration (see Table 8).

Next, because participation status and Baha'i identity were detected as being correlated with CE scores, I conducted a model included only these two variables.

Table 9. Regression Results for Comprehensive Data (CEQ + JYSEP Questionnaire)

	CE Total Score		Attitude Score		Behavior Score	
	Coefficient	p value	Coefficient	p value	Coefficient	p value
Participation status	4.414617	0.028**	1.678962	0.192	2.735656	0.099*
Baha'i (Baha'i:non-Baha'i)	5.164617	0.011**	1.178962	0.421	3.985656	0.006***

*, **, *** indicates significance at the 90%, 95%, and 99% levels, respectively
Source: STATA linear regression using Bootstrap standard error (Comprehensive Data)

Participation Status

When CE scores and participation status were assessed for correlation using a linear regression analysis, a significant relationship was found between civic behavior score when based on participation status (p value= 0.099) and between CE total score and participation status (p value= 0.028) (see Table 9). Civic behavior scores and CE total scores were higher among past participants than current participants (see Table 10 in Appendix).

Religion

When CE scores and Baha'i identity were assessed for correlation using a linear regression analysis, significant positive relationships were found between civic behavior score (p value= 0.006) and CE total score (p value= 0.011) when based on Baha'i identity (see Table 9). CE scores were higher among Baha'i participants than non-Baha'i participants (see Table 10 in Appendix).

Discussion

When assessed in isolation, participation appeared to be correlated with CE scores, confirming my initial hypothesis. However, when age, gender, race, and religion were considered, participation did not appear to be significantly correlated with CE scores, a finding which did not support my hypothesis. My secondary hypothesis, that participants would affirm that the JYSEP practices service-learning strategies, was supported by my data. Given the limitations of my study sample, I was unable to test my third hypothesis, that those who reported service-learning practices in their JYSEP experience would have higher CE scores.

Phase I

The first specific point of interest in this study was the extent to which civic behavior scores were correlated with participation. The detected p value indicates civic behavior score and participation are 90% likely to be correlated (see Table 1). However, as seen in Table 3, when other demographic factors were controlled for, participation did not appear to be correlated with CE scores. Therefore, the significant p value reported in Table 1 may be due to factors such as age, gender, race, and religion being strongly correlated with CE scores, variables which were not controlled for in the first model. However, because my small sample contains a disproportionate number of respondents who are white and Baha'i, this result is not necessarily generalizable to a larger population. Race, religion, and participation in the JYSEP are so closely intertwined in my sample that it is hard to differentiate each variable. Therefore, a

larger, more diverse sample is required to draw conclusions about the impact of the JYSEP as a whole on civic engagement.

Correlation between CE scores and participation was not seen when 12-14 year olds were isolated (see Table 5). This may be because the influence of gender, religion, and race on civic engagement were so strong. Again, this is a reflection of the need for a more diverse sample in that this sampling process produced a control group that was relatively more civically engaged than the general population.

My results detected correlation between civic behavior score and age but not between civic attitude score and age (see Table 3). It is possible that the reason why attitude scores were not correlated with age may be because adolescents may already have had high civic attitudes as research suggests is typical during early adolescence (Voight, 2013). Literature on civic engagement among adolescents suggests that as adolescents age, it is common for them to become less behaviorally civically engaged and for their level of civic attitudes to remain about the same (Voight, 2013). Whereas the continuity of civic attitude scores was present in my sample, civic behavior scores, alternatively, were higher among older JYSEP participants than younger JYSEP participants (see Table 10 in Appendix). The strength in civic behavior scores among older participants in my sample may suggest that the program itself influenced the civic behavior of its participants.

Baha'i identity is strongly correlated with civic behavior score but not correlated with civic attitude score (see Table 3). However, the participant population contained Baha'is whereas the non-participant population contained no Baha'is. Because I did not invite Baha'i non-participants to participate in the study, I cannot compare CE scores

between Baha'i participants and Baha'i non-participants to rule this possibility out. However, I also cannot rule out the opposite: that participation in the program does impact civic behavior scores for Baha'is. My sample would have been improved by surveying Baha'i non-participants in order to assess civic engagement based on participation in the JYSEP among Baha'is only. Including this population in further research may provide such an opportunity. The lack of detected correlation between civic attitude scores and Baha'i identity can be explained by the fact that my control group was likely relatively more civically engaged in their attitudes than the general population. This is reinforced by the fact that no other independent variable I tested was correlated with civic attitudes besides gender.

Although I collected data from non-Baha'i participants and non-Baha'i non-participants, I did not have large enough of a sample size to perform quantitative analysis comparing CE scores between these groups. A future study would undoubtedly be stronger by including a stronger age match control group as well as Baha'i non-participants in the study sample.

Another objective of this thesis was to determine the extent to which gender was correlated with civic engagement. My findings are consistent with other research that has found that females are more civically engaged than males, particularly in civic attitudes (Voight, 2013: Bobek, 2009). It is important that service-learning programs such as the JYSEP take into consideration how gender interacts with civic engagement in order to further refine and improve service-learning. The sample size was too small to assess correlation between CE scores and participation among boys and girls separately.

My results demonstrated a positive correlation between white identity and civic behavior scores (see Table 3). This finding is consistent with research that suggests white middle school students are more likely to be civically behaviorally engaged than their non-white peers (Voight, 2013). The variance in my sample did not allow me to conduct further analysis on race other than between white and non-white respondents. If I could have conducted quantitative analysis that observed individual groups of racial minorities, I may have seen more specific correlations. Voight's research says not a lot is known about this relationship but, in his study, black students are more likely to be both attitudinally and behaviorally civically engaged or neither, Latin(x) students are especially likely to be attitudinally engaged and unlikely to be behaviorally engaged, and Asian students are especially likely to be not civically engaged at all (Voight, 2013). It could be interesting to explore this relationship in light of the growing visibility of racial issues and related activism.

Phase II

The next main point of this thesis was to examine how the JYSEP practiced service-learning and if participants reported that their experience in the program had changed their civic attitudes.

Participants reported the practice of service-learning at high rates for every strategy except for family involvement (see Table 6). I suspect this was because animators have less control over practice of family involvement than they do over other variables. While the program strives to practice family involvement, unlike other service-learning strategies, family involvement depends on whether families want or can be involved. However, low reports of family involvement may also have been

because animators do not practice this strategy as well as the other strategies measured. If family involvement is an effective service-learning strategy as predicted in my original hypothesis, it is possible that if the JYSEP practiced family involvement at higher rates, the correlation between participation and civic behavior may be even more significant.

High rates of reported practice of youth autonomy and Y-AP imply that the JYSEP appears successful at implementing these service-learning strategies. In an open-ended response to a question that asked participants to share something they have learned from their experience in the JYSEP, a participant reflected on youth autonomy, sharing that they "learned that it is possible to see change and be the change even if you are younger" (JYGRQ).

Participants also reported at high rates that their experience in the JYSEP had changed their civic attitudes (see Table 6). Although this observation was based on self-reported change and was not detected in quantitative analysis, there is, at least, a subjective sense of cause and effect, even if there was not a correlation between civic attitudes and participation.

When I investigated the correlation of attitudinal change and service-learning with participation status, no correlation was detected for attitudinal change, youth autonomy, or family involvement based on participation status (see Table 7). This would suggest that past and current participants did not report their service-learning experience differently enough from one another to detect correlation.

I did, however, find a significant relationship between Y-AP and participation status which has two likely explanations. Past participants may not have a current

relationship with their animator. Thus, this relationship may not seem, in reflection, as much like a trusting, supportive Y-AP. The other reason may be that animators have changed in their capacity to practice Y-AP in the program. Participants in JYGs are encouraged to serve as animators when they graduate the program. Because the program is rather new, past animators would have been less likely to have participated in a JYG as a junior youth. As the program ages, more current animators have participated in JYGs as junior youth themselves, thus providing them a deeper understanding of the relationship between an animator and their junior youth. As a result, past participants may have had a qualitatively different Y-AP experience than current participants.

Regarding the effect of duration in the program on attitude change and service-learning, no significant relationship was found between attitudinal change, service-learning strategies and duration of participation (see Table 7). This result may be because of the lack of variance in my sample (in reports of service-learning strategies and in duration). Another explanation may be that duration in the program did not change the extent to which participants felt that their experience had changed their attitudes or practiced service-learning. This explanation may indicate that regardless of how long one participants in the JYSEP, just by participating, they feel their experience has changed their attitudes. However, the significant relationship detected between duration in the JYSEP and total CE score indicates that duration has an effect on CE, an observation more important to my hypothesis than the former result.

My results detected no significant relationship was found between attitudinal change, service-learning strategies and Baha'i identity (see Table 7). This result also

may be explained by the lack of variance in my sample (in reports of service-learning strategies). The lack of significance detected between attitudinal change, service-learning strategies and Baha'i identity also may indicate that religion does not influence the experience of a participant in the JYSEP for the extent to which it practices service-learning strategies. This observation may be a result of animators creating a service-learning environment for junior youth of diverse spiritual backgrounds or due to the variables being unrelated otherwise.

The next point of interest in my thesis is data collected regarding program retainment of participants from year to year. Because I observed that a majority of past participants had participated in the program for 2-3 years (see Table 11 in the Appendix), the JYSEP appears to have strong participant retainment from year to year among those who participated in the study (given that the total length of the program is 3 years). However, this observation must be considered in the context of the sample of past participants. It is possible that past participants who had participated in the program for longer were more willing to participate in the study. If the program does elicit continued participation, this retainment may have other implications that were not studied.

Phase III

The following inferences considered the results of data analysis when CE scores were tested for correlation with duration, participation status, and religion. Regarding duration, I suspect that no significant relationship was detected between CE scores and duration because: (1) the lack of variance in my sample influenced the result, (2) that participation does not impact CE scores, or (3) that any amount of participation impacts

CE scores (see Table 8). Next, the significant relationship between civic behavior scores and participation status suggests that the program may have some positive impact on civic behavior. Despite other research suggesting civic behavior levels should fall with age, past participants reported higher civic behavior scores than current participants, suggesting participation strongly influences civic behavior as adolescents mature. Lastly, I suspect that such a strong significant relationship was found between CE scores and Baha'i identity because of the importance of civic engagement and service in the Baha'i community. Because service is considered a vital spiritual obligation in the Baha'i Faith, Baha'i families may be generally more civically engaged than non-Baha'i families. As stated in my literature review, research has found that spiritual communities provide ample opportunity for civic engagement, suggesting that members of spiritual communities are more likely to be civically engaged (Melchior, 1998). Further research on the cooperation between spirituality and civic engagement would help clarify this inference.

Limitations and Generalizability

The sample selection process created limitations on the study. The process by which the control group was selected resulted in a control group that was likely more civically engaged than the average population. The disproportionate number of older, white, and Baha'i respondents in the experimental group (participants) also posed limitations for my research. Additional research would be greatly benefitted by better controlling for such variables in their study sample.

My results may also have been affected by any unforeseen imprecisions in the materials I used to measure civic engagement or service-learning. While my results did

not make obvious any specific imprecisions, it is possible that the types of civic engagement measured by the CEQ were different than those produced by the JYSEP. It is possible that if the CEQ was adjusted to measure other types of civic engagement, the data would uncover more significant relationships between civic engagement and participation.

Because of these limitations and because my research was based on a limited geographical region, my findings may not be readily generalizable for other JYSEP participants. However, the measurement tools created and used for this study were not created to be region specific and, therefore, may be able to be used to further study the JYSEP in other areas.

Conclusion

In summary, I did not find that participation in the JYSEP independently improved civic engagement. However, the demographic composition of my sample, provided that it was heavily composed of JYSEP participants who were white and Baha'i, indicates that this finding may not be generalizable to a larger population of JYSEP participants. Further research, when performed with a more diverse sample, may observe a significant relationship between JYSEP participation and civic engagement. While I was not able to confirm my primary hypothesis, my research indicated that, according to its participants, the JYSEP does practice service-learning strategies including youth autonomy and Y-AP at high rates and family involvement at slightly lower rates. JYSEP participants also reported at high rates that they feel as though their participation has changed their civic attitudes. These findings suggest that, although my study was not able to detect a correlation between participation and civic engagement, the JYSEP appears to be making a strong effort to practice service-learning. Even if the effect of participation on civic engagement is undetectable, minimal, or delayed until late adolescence, the importance of identity formation during adolescence means simply participating in such a program may be the difference between developing an interest in civic engagement and neglecting it entirely. Notably, past participants demonstrated improved civic engagement in my research when compared to current participants. Qualitative analysis of typologies within participants indicates that current participants are more often sympathizers whereas past participants are more likely to be actors than current participants. This suggests that participation in civic engagement may occur beyond the structure or duration of the program.

This pilot study of the JYSEP as a service-learning program can be used as an introduction to this unique program for those interested in youth empowerment. This research provides a valuable resource for animators and supporters of the JYSEP to reflect on the reported experiences of junior youth and grow in our capacity to adapt and improve program practice. Provided the richness of the responses collected by surveying JYSEP participants, I would encourage communities in the region and beyond to consider administering entry and exit surveys to participants in order to integrate voices of participants themselves into existing reflection spaces.

Civic engagement remains one of the most vital charges if we are to make progress towards cooperation, reparation, and unity. It is indicative of the physical, mental, economic, and spiritual health of our communities (Pancer, 2015). The civic engagement of society's younger members is a collective endeavor to which we are all capable of contributing. Research has made clear the potency of service in our effort to civically empower today's youth, identifying its potential to impart long lasting effects on civic attitudes and behaviors (Ruhi, 2014: Schmidt, 2007: Clark, 1997). If we are to further uncover how to best assist in the development of the civic engagement of adolescents, it will be important to conduct longitudinal research to study the relationship between participation in the JYSEP and civic engagement over time. Research whose focus is on a specific program or programs must extend their investigation beyond whether a program "works". We must understand whether such inventions are "feasible, palatable, durable, and cost-effective in all of the real-world settings in which they are operating" (Bobek, 2009).

List of Accompanying Materials

Civic Engagement Questionnaire

This questionnaire was completed by all participants.

Demographics Block

Are you currently or have you ever participated in the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program?

- Yes
- No

Are you able to read and respond to this questionnaire in English?

- Yes
- No

How old are you?

- 10 or younger
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16 or older

What grade are you in currently? (Only if respondents are 11-15 years old)

- Sixth grade
- Seventh grade
- Eighth grade

In what city do you currently live?

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other (specify)

Are you of Hispanic, Latin(x), or of Spanish origin?

- Yes
- No

How would you describe yourself?

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native

- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other

What most closely describes your religious background?

- Catholic (incl. Roman Catholic and Orthodox)
- Baha'i
- Buddhist
- Jewish
- Hindu
- Muslim
- Protestant (Baptist, Methodist, Nondenominational, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Episcopalian, Reformed, Church of Christ, Jehovah's Witness, etc.)
- Sikh
- I don't know
- None
- Other (specify)

Did either of your parents attend college or university?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Civic Engagement Behaviors Block

In the past 12 months, how often have you offered to help someone at school?

- 0 times
- 1-2 times
- 3-5 times
- 6 or more times

In the past 12 months, how often have you participated in school government?

- 0 times
- 1-2 times
- 3-5 times
- 6 or more times

In the past 12 months, how often have you helped make your school a better place?

- 0 times
- 1-2 times
- 3-5 times
- 6 or more times

In the past 12 months, how often have you participated in an after-school activity at your school?

- 0 times
- 1-2 times
- 3-5 times

- 6 or more times

In the past 12 months, how often have you helped someone in your neighborhood?
- 0 times
- 1-2 times
- 3-5 times
- 6 or more times

In the past 12 months, how often have you helped out at your church, synagogue, or other place of worship?
- 0 times
- 1-2 times
- 3-5 times
- 6 or more times

In the past 12 months, how often have you been a leader in a group or club in your neighborhood?
- 0 times
- 1-2 times
- 3-5 times
- 6 or more times

In the past 12 months, how often have you helped make your neighborhood a better place for people to live?
- 0 times
- 1-2 times
- 3-5 times
- 6 or more times

Civic Engagement Attitudes Block

How important is helping to reduce hunger and poverty?
- Not at all important
- Slightly important
- Moderately important
- Very important
- Extremely important

How important is helping to make the world a better place to live?
- Not at all important
- Slightly important
- Moderately important
- Very important
- Extremely important

How important is helping to make sure all people are treated fairly?
- Not at all important
- Slightly important

- Moderately important
- Very important
- Extremely important

How important is helping other people?
- Not at all important
- Slightly important
- Moderately important
- Very important
- Extremely important

How important is speaking up for equality (everyone should have the same rights)?
- Not at all important
- Slightly important
- Moderately important
- Very important
- Extremely important

I believe I can make a difference in my community.
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

It's not really a problem if my neighbors are in trouble and need help.
- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Junior Youth Group Reflection Questionnaire

This questionnaire was taken by past or present participants of the JYSEP. Depending on the status of their participation, language of questions was in past or present tense.

The following questions will give you an opportunity to tell us about your participation in your Junior Youth Group. Your responses will remain entirely anonymous and there are no right answers. Please answer openly and truthfully.

Are you currently or have you ever participated in the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program?
- Yes

- No

How old are you?
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- Older than 15 (specify)

Are you able to read and respond to this questionnaire in English?
- Yes
- No

In the past 12 months, have you participated in the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program in any capacity? (Participation includes any of the following: attended a junior youth group or junior youth camp, studied a junior youth text, participated in a service project organized by a junior youth group)
- Yes
- No

For how long have/did you participate in the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program?
- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 2-3 years

In what city or town do/did you primarily participate in the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program? (City, State)

General

The following questions will give you an opportunity to tell us more about your experiences while participating in your Junior Youth Group. Please answer openly and truthfully.

How did you first hear about the Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Program?
- A parent
- A friend
- An animator
- A flyer or an article
- A website
- Other (specify)

In 1-2 sentences, describe your reason(s) for joining your Junior Youth Group.

In 1-2 sentences, describe something you have learned from your participation in your Junior Youth Group.

Attitudes

The following questions will give you an opportunity to tell us more about your experiences while participating in your Junior Youth Group. Please answer openly and truthfully.

My participation in my Junior Youth Group has changed the way I think or feel about people who are different from me.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

My participation in my Junior Youth Group has changed the way I think or feel about speaking up for equality (everyone should have the same rights).

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

My participation in my Junior Youth Group has changed my belief about my ability to make a difference in my community.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Youth Autonomy and Voice

Rate the following based on the level to which you agree with the statement.

In my junior youth group, I have had real responsibilities.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

In my junior youth group, I have had challenging tasks.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

In my junior youth group, I have had a role in planning service projects.

- Strongly disagree

- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

In my junior youth group, I have had a role in making important decisions.
- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

Youth-Adult Partnership

Rate the following based on the level to which you agree with the statement.

In my junior youth group, junior youth and animators trust/trusted each other.
- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

In my junior youth group, there is/was a good balance of power between junior youth and animators.
- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

In my junior youth group, junior youth and animators learn/learned a lot from working together.
- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

In my junior youth group, it was clear junior youth and animators respect/respected each other.
- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

In my junior youth group, animators learn/learned a lot from their junior youth.
- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree

- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Family Involvement

Select the answer which best describes the involvement of your parent or caregiver in your participation in your Junior Youth Group.

- My parent or caregiver is/was not at all involved
- My parent or caregiver is/was slightly involved
- My parent or caregiver is/was moderately involved
- My parent or caregiver is/was very involved
- My parent or caregiver is/was extremely involved

Approximately how often do/did you talk with your parent or caregiver about your Junior Youth Group?

- Never
- Once a year
- Once every few months
- Once a month
- Once a week
- More than once a week

Approximately how often does/did your animator speak with your parent or caregiver (with or without you present)? If you don't know the exact number, select your best guess.

- Never
- Once a year
- Once every few months
- Once a month
- Once a week
- More than once a week

Approximately how often is/was your parent or caregiver involved in an activity you did in your Junior Youth Group? (Service project, art, text study, social event, etc)

- Never
- Once a year
- Once every few months
- Once a month
- Once a week
- More than once a week

If you have siblings, approximately how often is/was your sibling involved in an activity you did in your Junior Youth Group? (Service project, art, text study, social event, etc)

- Never
- Once a year
- Once every few months
- Once a month
- Once a week

- More than once a week
- I do not have siblings

How likely is/was it that your parent or caregiver knows/knew the title or the subject of the book you were currently studying in your Junior Youth Group?

- Extremely unlikely
- Somewhat unlikely
- Neither likely nor unlikely
- Somewhat likely
- Extremely likely

List of Tables

Table 2. Average Civic Engagement Scores

	Behavior Score	Attitude Score	CE total score
Participants	19	35	54
Non-participants	17	34	51

Source: CEQ

Table 4. Average CE Scores Based on Demographics

	Behavior score	Attitude score	CE total score
	Gender		
Boys (n=20)	18	34	52
Girls (n=29)	19	36	54
Non-binary (n=2)	18	35	53
	Race		
White (n=39)	19	35	54
Non-white or BIOC (n=14)	16	35	51
	Age (years)		
12-14 (n=32)	16	34	50
15-17 (n=8)	21	37	58
18+ (n=10)	22	37	59
	Baha'i		
Baha'i (n=13)	22	36	59
Non-Baha'i (n=40)	17	35	51

Source: CEQ

Table 6. Reported Attitude Change and Service-Learning Practice Among JYSEP Participants

	Reported Attitude Change	Reported Youth Autonomy	Reported Y-AP	Reported Family Involvement
All Participants	81%	97%	84%	27%
Baha'i	92%	100%	75%	38%
Non-Baha'i	74%	95%	90%	6%
Participation Status				
Current (n=19)	79%	100%	95%	32%
Past (n=13)	85%	92%	69%	31%

Source: JYGRQ

Table 8. Average CE scores of JYSEP Participants based on Duration, Participation status, and Religion

	Behavior score	**Attitude score**	**CE total score**
	Duration of Participation in the JYSEP		
Less than 1 year (n=6)	17	32	49
1-2 years (n=2)	21	37	57
2-3 years (n=17)	20	36	56
	Participation status		
Current participant (n=19)	17	34	52
Past participant (n=13)	22	37	59
	Religion		
Non-Baha'i	17	34	52
Baha'i	22	36	59
18+ (n=10)	22	37	59
	Baha'i		
Baha'i (n=13)	22	36	59
Non-Baha'i (n=40)	17	35	51

Source: CEQ and JYGRQ

Table 8. Percentage of CE Typologies

	Actor	Sympathizer	Moderate
	Gender		
Boys (n=20)	32%	63%	5%
Girls (n=29)	39%	61%	0%
Non-binary (n=2)	0%	100%	0%
	Race		
White (n=39)	19%	78%	3%
Non-white or BIOC (n=14)	14%	76%	10%
	Age (years)		
12-14 (n=32)	23%	70%	7%
15-17 (n=8)	63%	37%	0%
18+ (n=10)	50%	50%	0%
	Baha'i		
Baha'i (n=13)	46%	54%	0%
Non-Baha'i (n=40)	8%	87%	5%
Participants (n=32)	24%	73%	3%
Non-participants (n=18)	6%	88%	6%

Source: CEQ

Table 9. Characteristics of JYSEP Participants

Characteristic	% (of participants)
How participants were introduced to the JYSEP (n=31)	
A parent	35%
A friend	42%
An animator	13%
Other	10%
Duration of participation in the JYSEP (past participants only, n=13)	
Less than 1 year	0%
1-2 years	23%
2-3 years	77%
Reason for joining the JYSEP*	
Spend time with existing friends	50%
Make new friends	25%
Per request of a parent	13%
Do service/make an impact in the community	40%
Learn something new or meaningful	19%

Source: JYGRQ
*Respondents were able to provide more than one reason for joining the JYSEP

Table 9: Accompanying Commentary

Participant Introduction to the JYSEP: As Table 10 indicates, 35% of participants were introduced to the program via a parent while 42% were introduced via a friend. These results indicate that a majority of participants are introduced to the program via a close social relationship. While these results indicate how participants who decide to join the JYSEP are first introduced, this data was not compared quantitatively to other variables.

Retainment: Among past participant respondents, 77% had participated in the program for 2-3 years, whereas 23% had only participated for 1-2 years (see Table 10).

Reasons for Joining: 1-2 sentence responses were analyzed from 32 respondents for recurring themes in reported reasons for joining a junior youth group. Some respondents provided more than one reason in their answer. Among all participants, over 50% of respondents reported one reason for joining was to spend time with existing friends while 25% of respondents reported one reason for joining was to make new friends. 13% of respondents reported joining per request of a parent. Nearly 40% of respondents reported one reason for joining the program was to do service or make an impact in their community while 19% of respondents reported one reason for joining was to learn something new or meaningful. It is notable that a large majority of participants provided reasons for joining that demonstrated they participated in the JYSEP likely voluntarily as opposed to attending despite not wanting to participate. Below are 4 responses given when respondents were asked to explain why they joined their JYG which illuminate the diversity between multiple answers and within individual answers.

Survey question: “In 1-2 sentences, describe your reason(s) for joining your junior youth group.”

Answer 1: “It sounded like a new way to hang out and learn things with my friends”

Answer 2: “I joined the junior youth group because I felt like I needed to be better at helping others, and I wanted to do something good for the community with my friends.”

Answer 3: “I needed something to center myself after a horrible time in my youth”

Answer 4: “I joined my Junior youth group to build community, learn about the Baha’i faith, and do community service projects”

Reported Learnings of JYSEP Participants: 1-2 sentence answers were analyzed from 32 respondents for recurring themes in reported learnings from JYSEP participants. The following are 8 distinct themes identified in at least 3 answers each:

Realizing one’s own capacity, agency to make change

Learned how to use voice, improve power of expression and leadership

Learned how to use power of observation and reflection

Learned about social issues: environment, poverty, inequality

Learned how to be of service to others

Learned how to practice values: cooperation, respect, selflessness, friendliness, hope

Learned how to have meaningful/spiritual discussions

Expanded worldview, exposure to new ideas, people, backgrounds

Among the most common themes were learning how to be of service, realizing one's capacity to make change, and learning how to practice cooperation and hope. Reported learnings align with the goals of the JYSEP mentioned in the literature review. Answers to this open response question suggest that participants' primary takeaways from their experience in the program align with what the JYSEP aims to provide.

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