Challenges and Opportunities to Latino Youth Development

Increasing Meaningful Participation in Youth Development Programs

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This study examines the cultural and contextual factors that influence Latino participation in youth programs. Although youth programs are increasingly recognized for their positive influences, little is known about the factors that influence a young person's decision to participate. In this study, 67 Latino youth were asked about the reasons youth choose to and choose not to participate. Utilizing the Concept Systems method, youth participated in three phases of data collection—brainstorming, sorting, and ranking—to provide an in-depth understanding of reasons for and barriers to participation. Overall,

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youth ranked personal development and confidence as their top reasons for participation. Participants also ranked factors for participation higher than barriers to participation. Gender and intergenerational differences are discussed in more detail.

Keywords: *Latino youth; youth development; youth programs; participation*

Time spent in youth programs is the most consistent predictor of youth thriving. Compared to family and community factors, participation in youth programs contributes to enhanced self-esteem, increased school performance and aspirations to attend college, the ability to overcome adversity, willingness to engage in efforts to help others, leadership skills, efforts to maintain good physical health, and involvement in political and social activities in young adulthood (Holland & Andre, 1987; Quinn, 1995; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000; Scales & Leffert, 1999). Despite these robust findings, much less is known about the factors that influence young people's decision to participate in youth programs or the barriers that influence their lack of participation. This issue is particularly salient for underserved youth populations (e.g., Latino, Asian, and African American youth). This study begins to address this gap in the literature by focusing on the reasons that Latino youth give for participation, or failure to participate, in youth development programs.

Participation in Youth Programs

Youth-serving organizations struggle to reach youth who identify with specific ethnicities or religious cultures (Carnegie Council, 1994). Youth workers and researchers have noted that youth do not participate equally in youth programs and that there is a need for more research to develop "culturally-sensitive approaches to engage unserved, underserved, and disenfranchised audiences" (United States Department of Agriculture Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, 2000). This challenge is important to program and policy professionals for several reasons. In 2000, 92% of White 18- to 24-year-olds had completed secondary schooling, compared to 84% of Blacks and 64% of U.S. Latinos (Llagas, 2003). Deleterious outcomes are prevalent among disengaged youth of color in the juvenile justice system. Specifically, research has noted that African American youth (Juskiewicz, 2000; Poe-Yamagata & Jones, 2000) and Latino youth (Villarruel & Walker, 2002) are both disproportionately

represented at the various levels of the juvenile justice system and tend to receive harsher punishments. These youth are also less likely to have reported participation in after-school programs.

A variety of factors, including community conditions, family and peer influences, culture, and the availability of programs, influence a young person's choice to participate in youth programs. Barriers to involvement in youth programs may vary depending on such characteristics as age, family structure, ethnicity, and cultural and socioeconomic background (Huber & Kossek, 1999; Markstrom, 1999; Quinn, 1999). Because many of these factors contribute to an interacting and dynamic system (Ford & Lerner, 1992) or context, they cannot be effectively studied in isolation. An examination of social network/community and institutional/societal relations can contribute to an understanding of how context contributes to or inhibits healthy developmental outcomes (Lerner, Villarruel, & Castellino, 1999; Villarruel & Lerner, 1994). Thus, to better understand how to provide opportunities for some of the most vulnerable youth, research is needed to determine contextual factors that motivate or inhibit their involvement.

Factors Associated With Participation

Studies of youth programs with participation as a dependent variable have shown that individual, peer, and family factors are linked to adolescents' participation in after-school activities. Although not directly examining adolescents' decisions to participate, these studies are informative. Davalos, Chavez, and Guardiola (1999) found that higher levels of acculturation predicted involvement in school-based extracurricular activities. Other factors associated with participation in community or school-based activities include parent endorsement and modeling of activity involvement (Fletcher, Elder, & Mekos, 2000) and having friends who endorsed the activity (Huebner & Mancini, 2003). Gender also has been found to predict patterns of activity participation. Girls have been found to prefer social (Passmore & French, 2001), prosocial, and performance activities (e.g., dance and band), as well as school involvement activities, including student government and pep club (Eccles & Barber, 1999). Boys are more likely to report participation in sports (Davalos et al., 1999; Eccles & Barber, 1999).

Fewer studies examine the motivation to participate in youth problems. When youth were asked why they didn't participate in extended-service school programs, the most frequent responses were that they had "other

things to do," they were "not interested in the activities," or their "friends did not attend" (Grossman et al., 2002). In a study of urban African American youth who attended activities at the YMCA or Boys & Girls Clubs, Gambone and Arbreton (1997) reported that youth most frequently identified "fun" as the motivation for their participation. Carruthers and Busser (2000) evaluated Boys & Girls Club programs in large cities in the Southwest and reported on the perceptions of youth participants, the majority of whom were African American or Latino and living below poverty levels. They found that a sense of safety and belonging, the acquisition of positive behaviors (e.g., "staying out of trouble" and "getting along with others"), and the development of competence and self-esteem were the themes most frequently mentioned as benefits of participation. Providing a safe place and valued relationships with program staff were the two most frequently mentioned reasons for participation by Latino youth attending youth programs in Chicago's West town (Halpern, Barker, & Mollard, 2000). A study of a teen center in Texas found that Latino, African American, and non-Latino youth chose to participate because the program provided a fun, safe place, opportunities for social interactions with peers, an escape from home, a chance to learn healthy behaviors and achieve improved academic performance, and gave youth something to do (Baker & Hultsman, 1998). Participants further noted that youth who did not attend perceived the center as boring or might be involved in drugs and alcohol, which could keep them from participating (Baker & Hultsman, 1998).

Latino Youth

Research on Latino youth is sparse and must be interpreted cautiously. In a review of research published in youth development journals, Rodriguez and Morrobel (2002) noted that there was a serious lack of content addressing Latino youth issues. The paucity of research is parallel to what Graham (1992) and McCloyd (1998) have noted for African Americans. Furthermore, when minority youth are included, researchers often fail to report separate results by ethnicity (Rodriguez, Morrobel, & Villarruel, 2003), even when the number of participants is very high (Rodriguez & Morrobel, 2004). This study will address these limitations by specifically examining the reasons why youth of Latino origin, primarily of Mexican descent, choose to participate in youth programs. These participants also were asked to speculate on why their peers were unlikely to participate in youth programs.

Method

This study is part of a larger study that utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods to examine the reasons youth from various racial and ethnic groups (African American, Arab American, Chaldean,[1] and Latino) choose to participate in youth programs at neighborhood community-based organizations (CBOs) (see Perkins et al., 2005). These youth, who were themselves all active in community-based youth programs, were asked to offer reasons that young people participate in youth programs as well as why they felt their nonparticipating peers chose not to participate. The methods for collecting and rating reasons offered by youth participants are based on the Concept Systems methodology (Trochim, 1989). Concept mapping is a structured conceptualization that involves brainstorming, sorting, and ranking as three distinct phases of data collection that when combined reveal a conceptual framework presented as a relational data map. For this article, only the findings from the Latino youth who participated will be reported. A brief summary of all three phases of data collection and the analyses performed by the concept systems software is offered to help readers understand the methodology. Findings from the brainstorming session are presented in a separate manuscript (Perkins et al., 2005).

Data Collection

Phase 1: Brainstorming. The first phase of data collection—"brainstorming"—took place in a series of 11 structured focus groups with youth from community-based youth programs in urban communities in Michigan. Study participants were young people between the ages of 9 and 19 who participated in some type of organized youth program and identified their ethnicity as Latino. Prior to meetings with the young people, parental consent forms were sent home with each youth for signature. The forms and the accompanying explanatory letters were in English and Spanish. At the beginning of each session, the researchers asked each of the young people to affirm her or his intent to take part in the research project. They explained that the youths' ideas would be recorded but their identity would be protected. A total of 67 youth participated in the brainstorming sessions. The average age of the participants was 11.1, with 62% of the sample being female.

The purpose of the brainstorming sessions was to solicit youth-generated statements for use in the second and third phases of the study. Youth were

asked to brainstorm responses to the following two target questions: (a) "One of the reasons young people take part in youth programs is ___" and (b) "One of the reasons other young people are NOT involved in youth programs is ___." After the statements had been collected from the 11 focus groups, statements were edited to avoid duplication. Two master lists were created: (a) the reasons youth participate in youth programs and (b) the reasons youth do not participate. The 68 reasons describing why youth participate and the 63 reasons describing why youth do not participate were printed on individual cards for the sorting portion of data collection and on survey questionnaires for the rating portion.

Phase 2: Sorting. The second phase of data collection involved the structural sorting of the statements. Sorting generates the data required for hierarchical cluster analyses to create a relational data map. The participants were given a deck of cards containing the previously generated reasons that youth participate in community programs and were asked to completely sort and title these statements before moving on to the second deck of cards containing the reasons youth do not participate. Youth were asked to sort the statements into different piles or groups based on conceptual similarity. Participants also drafted titles to describe the statements in each pile and stapled these titles to the clustered statements. A "sort" refers to the completed collection of statement piles from one deck of cards by one individual.

A preliminary trial of this methodology with a cohort of young people who did not participate in the initial brainstorming sessions indicated that youth age 12 and older were better able to complete the sorting task than were younger youth. Thus, not all of the participants in the brainstorming phase participated in the sorting task as recommended by the Concept Systems. Moreover, older youth who did not participate in the brainstorming session were recruited as participants to complete the sorting task. The median age of these youth was 16 years, and 60% of the participants were female. A total of 30 youth conducted individual sorts, and these sorts were used to develop the cluster maps for the reasons youth participate. This falls within the recommended range for the Concept Systems protocol (Trochim, 1993). The stress value (a diagnostic measure similar to reliability) for these sorts was .293. Eighteen sorts, with a stress value of .307, were included to generate the cluster maps for reasons youth choose not to participate. The data provided here falls within the acceptable range for generating cluster maps used to understand the dynamic issues that influenced choices made by these participants (Trochim, 1993).

Phase 3: Rating. The third phase involved collection of rating data. Youth were asked to rate each of the youth-generated statements based on its personal importance. Each item was rated on a five-point scale with Likert-type responses ranging from 1 (*this isn't important to me*) to 5 (*VERY important reason*). To garner a perspective from a specific ethnic group of Latinos, Latinos from the urban high school Latino club as well as youth who participated in the brainstorming sessions completed rating questionnaires. A total of 80 individuals rated the importance of the reasons youth participate (*M* age = 14.2, females = 54%) and 70 individuals rated the importance of the reasons youth do not participate. Due to the rater time constraints (i.e., 10 raters had to leave to avoid missing their transportation home), the number dropped from 80 to 70 in the second sorting.[2]

Concept Systems Analyses

Concept Systems software performs two major analyses to calculate a graphical representation of the conceptual ideas in the form of a map. Multidimensional scaling locates each statement as a separate point on the map and then hierarchical cluster analysis partitions the statements into groups or clusters of similar concepts based on how the youth sorted the statements. The point map contains all of the statements situated according to how the youth grouped the concepts, looking rather like a sky chart of star constellations (see Figure 1). Points that are closer together on the map were placed in similar cluster piles more often by the youth doing the sorting activity. The maps are then examined at various levels of aggregation. It is the responsibility of the researcher to determine the "specific cluster solution that seems appropriate for the intended purpose of the project" (Trochim, 1999, p. 16). Generally, the goal is to reduce the number of clusters sufficiently to obtain clarity without obscuring the distinction between concepts.

When individuals have completed the sorting task, the results must be combined across people. A square group similarity matrix is calculated such that the values can range from zero to the number of people who sorted (Trochim, 1989). This final similarity matrix is considered the relational structure of the conceptual domain because it provides information about how the participants grouped the statements. A high value in this matrix indicates that many of the participants put that pair of statements together in a pile and implies that the statements are conceptually similar in some way. Then, a two-dimensional nonmetric multidimensional scaling (Kruskal & Wish, 1978) of similarity matrix is conducted. Nonmetric

Figure 1.
Cluster Rating Map of Statements for the Reasons Young People
Participate in Youth Programs.
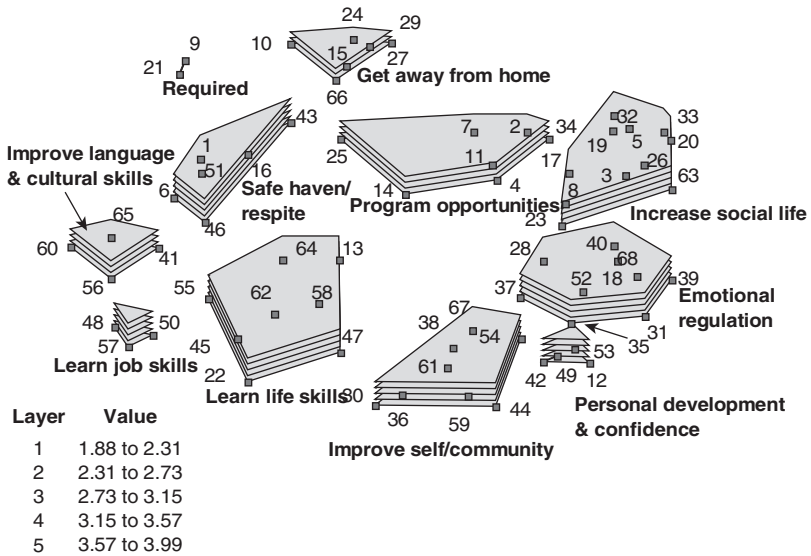
Layer	Value
1	1.88 to 2.31
2	2.31 to 2.73
3	2.73 to 3.15
4	3.15 to 3.57
5	3.57 to 3.99

Note: Layers portray average importance value for all statements within cluster as rated by Latino youth ($N = 80$).

multidimensional scaling is a technique that takes a proximity matrix and represents it in any number of dimensions as distances between the original items in the matrix (Trochim, 1989).

After the cluster maps were generated, youth members of the Latino Club at an urban Midwest high school were asked to create titles for each cluster. These youth-suggested titles were very helpful in the selection of the final titles to represent the breadth of ideas within each cluster. An important aspect to remember is that the clusters are based on multivariate analyses that yield a graphic representation (i.e., a cluster map) of how the group of youth conceptually sorted the ideas. Thus, although it is likely that the final cluster map does not replicate the exact cluster inclusions of any one individual, it does contain the mathematical approximation of the sum total of the sort information.

Table 1
Cluster Ranking of the Top 5 Reasons Youth Participate
in Out-of-School Programs

All Latino Youth ($N = 80$)	Latinas ($n = 50$)	Latinos ($n = 30$)
1. Personal development/ confidence (3.99)	1. Personal development/ confidence (3.92)	1. Personal development/ confidence (4.11)
2. Improve self/ community (3.66)	2. Improve self/ community (3.62)	2. Increase social life (3.83)
3. Learn life skills (3.64)	3. Emotional regulation (3.62)	3. Learn life skills (3.77)
4. Emotional regulation (3.63)	4. Learn life skills (3.56)	4. Improve self/ community (3.73)
5. Safe haven/ respite (3.60)	5. Learn job skills (3.56)	5. Safe haven/ respite (3.70)

Note: Values in parentheses represent the average rating within each category. All statements were rated on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = *not important* and 5 = *VERY important*.

Results

Reasons Youth Participate in Out-of-School Programs

The reasons youth participate in out-of-school programs are presented in a cluster-rating map in Figure 1. The cluster-rating map is essentially the original cluster map overlaid with the aggregated rating data indicating how Latino youth rated each of the statements individually on a scale of importance from 1 to 5. The size of the cluster is not important but the thickness of the cluster indicates relative importance as rated by participants. Each cluster is displayed as a series of layers to represent the average rating for the statements within that cluster. Thus, clusters displaying more layers received higher importance attributions by study participants.

Because the cluster data is aggregated, small numeric differences in the average rating scores suggest a notable difference in how youth rated the statements within those clusters. Table 1 depicts the relative ranking of the top five cluster groups overall and by gender. The cluster titles are listed on the vertical axes in descending order of the average score for statements within that cluster. The three clusters that were rated the highest by Latinas were "personal development and confidence," "improve self/community," and "emotional regulation." The top three clusters rated by Latinos were "personal development and confidence," "increase social life (refers to

Table 2
Cluster Comparison by Generation in the United States:
Reasons Youth Participate in Youth Programs Listing
the Top 5 Answers

| Youth or Parents Moved to U.S. ($n = 23$)	Youth From Families in U.S. at Least Since Grandparents ($n = 44$)
1. Personal development/confidence (4.03)	1. Personal development/confidence (3.92)
2. Learn job skills (3.86)	2. Increase social skills (3.67)
3. Safe haven/respite (3.81)	3. Emotional regulation (3.64)
4. Learn life skills (3.76)	4. Improve self/community (3.63)
5. Improve self/community (3.76)	5. Learn job skills (3.54)

Note: Values in parentheses represent the average rating within each category. All statements were rated on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = *not important* and 5 = *VERY important*.

increased number of friends and increased number of invitations to social events),” and “learn life skills.” Both genders assigned much less importance to the clusters containing statements that described participation as mandatory (“required”) or driven by a desire to get away from family (“get away from home”).

Pattern matches also were calculated to compare youth from families with different generational histories in the United States. Familial generational histories were used to form two groups of youth: youth who reported that they and/or their parents had immigrated to the United States ($n = 23$) and youth who indicated that either their grandparents had immigrated to the United States or their family had been in the United States for many generations ($n = 44$). Table 2 displays the relative ranking of cluster groups by average rating scores for both groups of youth. The clusters with the highest importance rating for the more recently immigrated youth were “personal development/confidence,” “learn job skills,” and “safe haven/ respite.” Youth from families who have been in the United States for many generations also rated “personal development/confidence” as the top cluster, followed by “increase social life” and “emotional regulation.” In this study, emotion regulation refers to the individual’s ability to control their feelings, such as anger, frustration, and excitement.

The cluster-rating map of the statements for the reasons young people do not participate in out-of-school programs is shown in Figure 2. The cluster rating scores for the top five reasons (see Table 3) show that Latinas and Latinos both rated statements describing “home/school/work” constraints

Figure 2.
Cluster Map of Statements for the Reasons Young People
Do Not Participate in Youth Programs.
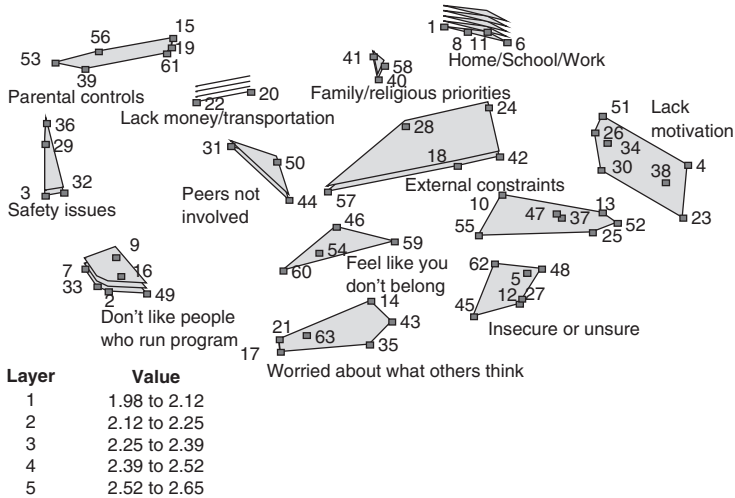
Layer	Value
1	1.98 to 2.12
2	2.12 to 2.25
3	2.25 to 2.39
4	2.39 to 2.52
5	2.52 to 2.65

Note: Layers portray average importance value for all statements within cluster as rated by Latino youth ($N = 70$).

Table 3
Cluster Ranking of the Top 5 Reasons Youth Do NOT
Participate in Out-of-School Programs

All Latino Youth ($N = 80$)	Latinas ($n = 50$)	Latinos ($n = 30$)
1. Home/school/ work (2.65)	1. Home/school/ work (2.55)	1. Home/school/ work (2.87)
2. Lack money/ transportation (2.45)	2. Lack money/ transportation (2.27)	2. Lack money/ transportation (2.80)
3. Don't like people who run program (2.33)	3. Family/religious priorities (2.23)	3. Don't like people who run program (2.59)
4. External constraints (2.23)	4. Safety issues (2.22)	4. External constraints (2.29)
5. Safety issues (2.22)	5. Peers not involved (2.22)	5. Safety issues (2.22)

Note: Values in parentheses represent the average rating within each category. All statements were rated on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = *not important* and 5 = *VERY important*.

Table 4
Cluster Comparison by Generation in United States:
Top 5 Reasons Youth Do NOT Participate in Youth Programs

Youth or Parents Moved to U.S. ($N = 23$)	Youth From Families in U.S. at Least Since Grandparents ($N = 44$)
1. Home/school/work (2.68)	1. Home/school/work (2.69)
2. Safety issues (2.47)	2. Lack money/transportation (2.57)
3. Don't like the people who run the program (2.39)	3. Don't like the people who run the program (2.35)
4. External constraints (2.36)	4. Family/religion priorities (2.25)
5. Lack money/transportation (2.33)	5. External constraints (2.24)

Note: Values in parentheses represent the average rating by all Latino youth and by gender. All statements were rated on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = *not important* and 5 = *VERY important*.

and "lack money/transportation" as the top two clusters. Beyond that, there is notable disparity in the ranking of cluster importance values. For Latinas, the next highest rated barrier had to do with family and/or religious priorities, whereas Latinos rated issues with program staff as the third-ranking barrier to participation.

Table 4 displays the relative ranking of the cluster groups by average rating scores for both groups of youth. For recently immigrated youth, the clusters with the highest importance for not participating were "home/school/work," "safety issues," and "don't like the people that run the program." The top-rated cluster for youth from families who have been in the United States for a longer period of time also ranked "home/school/work" as their top reason for not participating, followed by "lack of money/transportation" and "don't like the people who run the program."

Discussion

This study offers an understanding of factors that contribute to Latino young people's decisions to participate in youth programs. As such, it begins to address the need for research that focuses on the positive development of Latino youth. A unique feature of this study is that all three phases of data collection were youth-centered, that is, brainstorming possible reasons for—and barriers to—program participation, sorting and grouping statements into themes, and rating the importance of each statement. Eleven

major clusters or categories regarding Latino youth participation in youth programs and 13 clusters regarding barriers to Latino youth participation in youth programs emerged from this process. These clusters provide an understanding of both the factors that influence participation decisions and how these factors are related to one another. Findings from this study provide evidence that a complex combination of individual values, interpersonal issues, and external factors influence young peoples' decisions to participate in youth programs. The major findings are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Reasons to Participate

Generally, youth rated clusters that focused on positive development highly. Latino youth in this study identified personal development as one of the primary factors that influenced their decision to participate in youth programs. According to these young people, participation in youth programs offered them a broad range of opportunities that created the potential for personal gain, such as opportunities to be of service to others, to gain confidence, to reach their goals, and to increase self-esteem. These opportunities provided a pathway to personal development through social and personal responsibility to self and to others. These findings are similar to those found by Cabrera and Padilla (2004) in that student's success often is dependent on their ability to surround themselves with those individuals who can support their goals and aspirations. The second-highest-rated cluster overall encompassed statements related to self- and community-improvement, including opportunities to "be a good example" and perform community service. This was closely followed by the cluster of life skills, such as better behavior, improved school performance, and self-expression.

Youth deemed positive development opportunities more important for achieving success than the reduction of negative risk factors (e.g., disruptive behaviors and environments). These results are consistent with findings from similar studies exploring the opinions of inner-city youth (Ginsberg et al., 2002). In this study of more than 1,000 ninth-grade students—54% self-identified as African American and 32% as Latino—the respondents clearly prioritized supportive solutions such as assistance to attend college, access to good jobs, and meaningful connections with adults as key factors to increasing the likelihood of success. Youth in the present study further recognized the importance of youth programs as providing a safe haven/respite from the negative risk factors prevalent in their environments, ranking this cluster of reasons fifth overall.

Being required to attend was rated the least important reason to participate in a youth program. Regardless as to who was requiring participation (e.g., parents, school counselor, or police/judicial system), young people in this study were not motivated by the requirement to participate. These data point to the need for further studies comparing and contrasting youth programs and the ability of youth programs to promote positive developmental outcomes when these programs are mandated.

It is intriguing that reasons that are popularly perceived to drive participation received much lower ratings of importance by the youth in this study. The cluster of program opportunities (e.g., "You like the activities at the program," "You play sports at the program," and "The programs have activities that are not available at your school") was ranked ninth overall. Some adults may think that young people are attending youth programs simply for the activities offered, yet the young people in this study rated these reasons lower in comparison to other motivating factors.

Barriers to Participants

Understanding what motivates a young person to choose to participate in a youth program offers only a partial understanding of the decision-making process. This study also provides an understanding of the individual, cultural, and contextual factors that influence a Latino young person's decision not to participate in a youth program. Overall, the reasons for participation were rated more highly than were the reasons influencing decisions to not participate. This suggests that the youth in this study placed more importance on the reasons contributing to their participation as compared with the reasons contributing to nonparticipation.

Despite the narrow range of cluster ratings (1.98–2.65), the barriers to participation that youth perceive are important contextual factors. The key reasons for nonparticipation were personal obligations in the category of home/school/work, specifically, not having enough time to participate because of the need to study, work, take care of home responsibilities, and/or babysit. This particular category offers a clearer understanding of the daily lives of these young people and suggests that addressing contextual issues, such as family responsibilities, may be essential for increasing participation of minority youth in positive youth development programs. The young people in this study were very concerned about their personal and family responsibilities.

Other clusters that were rated as important deterrents to participation reflected external characteristics that may be important sociodemographic

factors that influence participation, including lack of money/transportation, external constraints (language barriers, lack of information, negative opinions of others), don't like people who run program, and lack of safety. Consistent with critical elements of youth programs literature (e.g., Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Villarruel, Perkins, Borden, & Keith, 2003), young people prefer environments that they feel are safe and where they feel supported by the staff.

The two clusters that received the lowest importance ratings concerned perceptions of embarrassment and exclusion (e.g., feeling self-conscious because of the opinions of others and being shy or feeling uncomfortable). These clusters had the lowest ratings, but it is likely that these reasons are a deterrent to participation for some young people. Although the young people completed the surveys individually, the activity took place in large rooms and it is possible that the youth may not have wanted to admit, even on an anonymous survey rating sheet, that their decisions to participate were influenced by feelings of embarrassment by their appearance or because of being teased by peers for participating in a positive activity. This is a feature that must be considered in designing and administering future studies to explore adolescent opinions.

Gender Differences

As in other cultures, the decisions that are made differ depending on gender. Latino youth decisions were influenced by a different set of preferences, priorities, and responsibilities, often relating to both cultural and contextual influences. Both Latino and Latina youth identified personal development as the primary reason for deciding to participate in a youth program but diverged on all other reasons. Latinas placed high importance on being a good example to children, performing community service, and getting personal advice, all statements within the cluster of "improve self/community." Latino adolescents seemed to be enticed by programs that provide a lot of social and fun activities (e.g., "it's fun, exciting, and enjoyable" and "spend time with your friends").

Regarding reasons for not participating in programs, both genders identified their need to be at home, to do school assignments, or to work. They also identified the lack of financial resources as a reason they chose not to participate. However, beyond the first two clusters, the ranking was notably dissimilar. Latinas placed greater importance on family and religious obligations as a barrier to participation. As reported by Perkins and colleagues (2005), the home/school/work issues most frequently mentioned by Latinas were parental expectations for the young women to do chores, such as

babysitting, whereas Latino respondents more frequently mentioned parental expectations to study. In two different brainstorming sessions for this study, Latinas stated that their parents prohibited them from participating in some out-of-school programs due to fears that the girls would become involved with boys. Martinez, DeGarmo, and Eddy (2004) posit that "*Familia* is the most powerful protective force for many Latino children" (p. 147).

Other differences in the cluster-ranking data by gender showed that Latinos identified problems with program personnel as a barrier to participation, as well as program regulations that were interpreted to be "too much like school" in restricting behavior. In one of the brainstorming sessions for this study, two Latinos expounded at some length on the fact that certain youth programs had rules that forbid participants from dating other program participants, a regulation interpreted by these middle to late adolescents as a definitive reason to not participate.

Generational Differences

Data from this study offer some insight into how immigration to the United States can influence the participation decisions made by young people. Although both groups identified personal development as the number one reason they chose to participate in youth programs, Latino youth who had recently moved to the United States identified the need to develop job skills and find a safe haven/respite as among the top three reasons they choose to participate in youth programs. Latino youth from families with a longer history in the United States identified the desire to increase social life and emotional regulation as their reasons for choosing to participate in these programs.

Regardless of length of time in the United States, home, school, and work responsibilities represent a barrier to participation for Latino youth. Both groups rated problems relating to program staff as a barrier to participation. This cluster contains statements that are potentially applicable to youth who do not speak English as their first language: "The people who run the program don't understand you" and "You have trouble with the language—the person running the program only speaks English and doesn't understand you."

The young people from families who had recently moved to the United States identified safety issues as the second-highest ranking cluster of reasons to not participate. For these youth, a place of safety and acceptance is definitely an attractive feature of youth programs, whereas feelings of

lack of safety are clear deterrents. In contrast, youth who have been in the United States longer rated family/religion priorities in the top five, whereas newer immigrants did not.

Summary

Overall, Latino young people, regardless of gender or status within the United States, identified that participation in youth programs had a positive influence on their lives, both now and with the potential to influence their future through job preparation and skill development. The data suggest that there are specific reasons for not participating in youth programs and that factors including gender and length of family history in the United States may alter the value associated with these reasons. Furthermore, these data suggest that increasing program participation among Latino youth must consider the influence of cultural and contextual demands placed on these young people through home, school, and work responsibilities.

Limitations

One limitation in generalizing our findings is that the youth in the study were already participating in youth programs. It may be that they have already overcome the barriers for participation and may not be representative of nonparticipating youth. Additional insight will be gained in future studies that explore the perceived barriers to participation by youth who are not currently active participants in out-of-school programs.

A second limitation is in regard to the findings on generational subsamples. Although this analysis offers some understanding of how enculturation may influence the choices young people make when determining their participation or nonparticipation in youth programs, the youth in this sample live in a low-low context, that is, in a community where there is a relatively low number of ethnic minorities in general and an even lower number of Latino youth. How this might play itself out in a high-low (i.e., high concentration of ethnic minorities and a low number of Latino youth) or high-high situation (i.e., high concentration of ethnic minorities and a high proportion of Latino youth) merits further study.

Another limitation in the present study is that participants were primarily from a homogenous ethnic population (i.e., Mexican heritage), although there were some within-group differences as denoted by immigration status.

We would hypothesize greater between ethnic Latino differences (e.g. Puerto Rican, Cuban) and geographic location differences. These warrant further exploration in subsequent studies.

Concluding Remarks

This data offers insight into how cultural and contextual factors combine to influence Latino youth involvement in youth programs. Clearly, participation is not just dependent on a young person's understanding of the benefits of participation but also on contextual variables (e.g., resources, family, culture, religion, outside responsibilities). What evolves from this preliminary investigation is a clear sense of the challenge to offer programs that provide Latino youth with opportunities more closely aligned with their personal responsibilities and cultural mores.

Notes

1. Chaldeans are an ethnic people who come from a region that is now Iraq. Chaldeans are Christians and many have immigrated to the United States. The 2000 census reported 34,484 Chaldeans in Michigan, but estimates from social services agencies suggest that there are between 45,000 and 90,000 Chaldeans living in southeast Michigan (M. Fahkouri, personal communication, June 10, 2002).

2. As noted, Ns vary by data collection phase, consistent with the concept-mapping methodology (Trochim, personal communication, 2001).

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