



# Individual Impacts of Youth Organizing for School Reform

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# Presentation Overview

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- What is youth organizing?
- Research on youth organizing
- Research questions and methodology
- Findings
- Implications

# What Is Youth Organizing?

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- Youth organizing has expanded exponentially in the last decade, building on the tradition of young people's involvement in social movements and responding to the criminalization of youth in the 1990s (HoSang)
- Youth organizing draws on positive youth development practices and community organizing tactics
  - ◆ Combines academic and social supports with leadership development and political education
  - ◆ Emphasizes systems critique of social and economic conditions
  - ◆ Engages young people in direct action campaigns on issues that affect them

# Research on Youth Organizing

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- Many case studies from youth group perspective, describing both policy impacts and individual impacts (Hosang; Simon; Su)
- Literature framing youth organizing as good youth development practice (Ginwright; Sherman)
  - ◆ Develops socio-political capacity of young people alongside traditional youth development outcomes
  - ◆ Effects institutional and community change
- Scant empirical research on individual-level impacts of youth organizing
  - ◆ One outcome study comparing youth organizing, youth development, and identity development groups (Gambone, Yu, Lewis-Charp, Sipe & Lacoë, 2004)

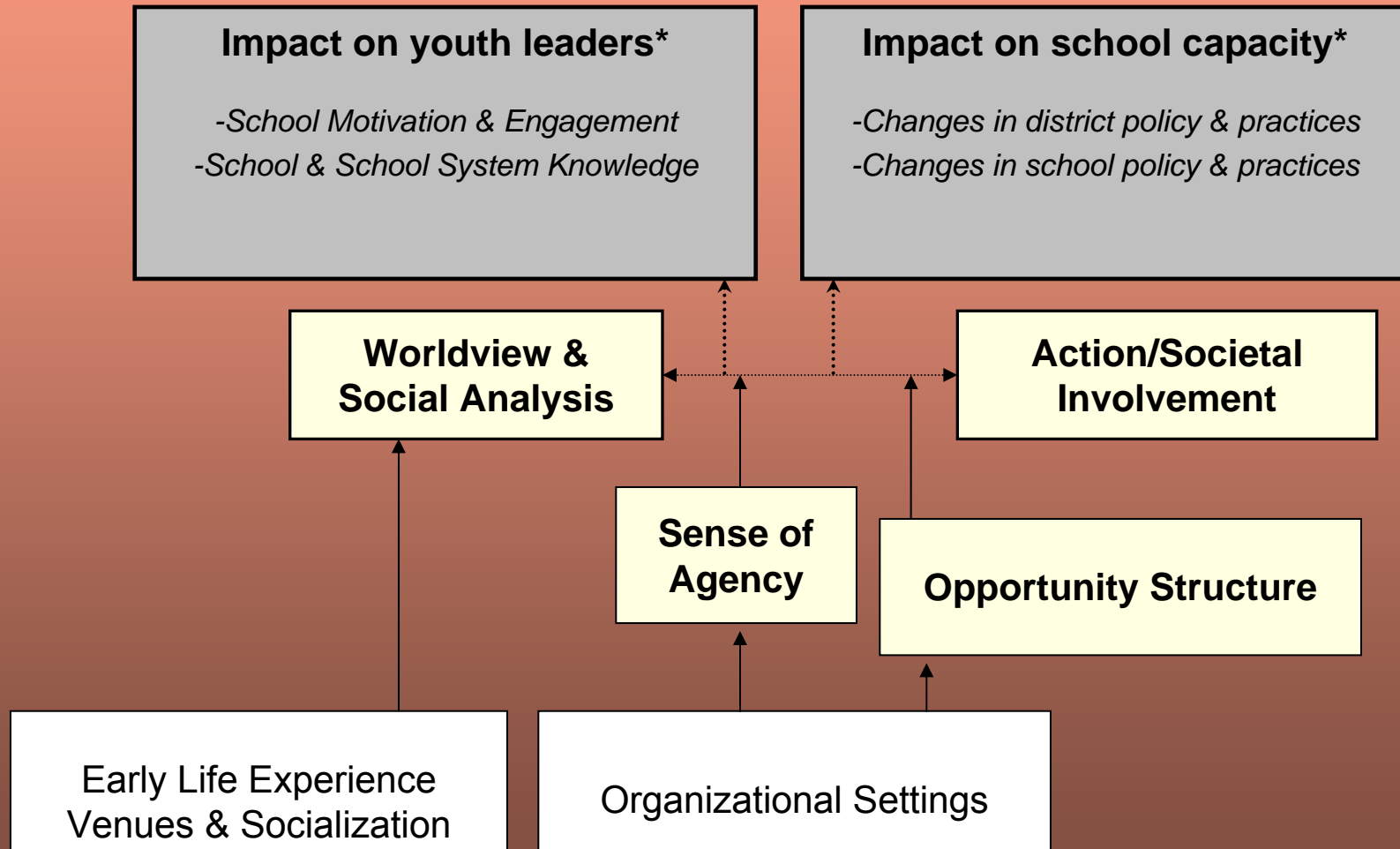
# Research on Youth Organizing

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- Rich, emerging body of theoretical work on political development of young people, particularly young people of color
- Social Justice Youth Development (Ginwright)
  - ◆ Emphasizes structural barriers to development, and frames young people as “agents of change” capable of confronting these barriers
  - ◆ Critical consciousness of oppression leads to action
  - ◆ Self-awareness, local awareness, global awareness
- Socio-political Development (Watts, et al.)

# Theory of Sociopolitical Development

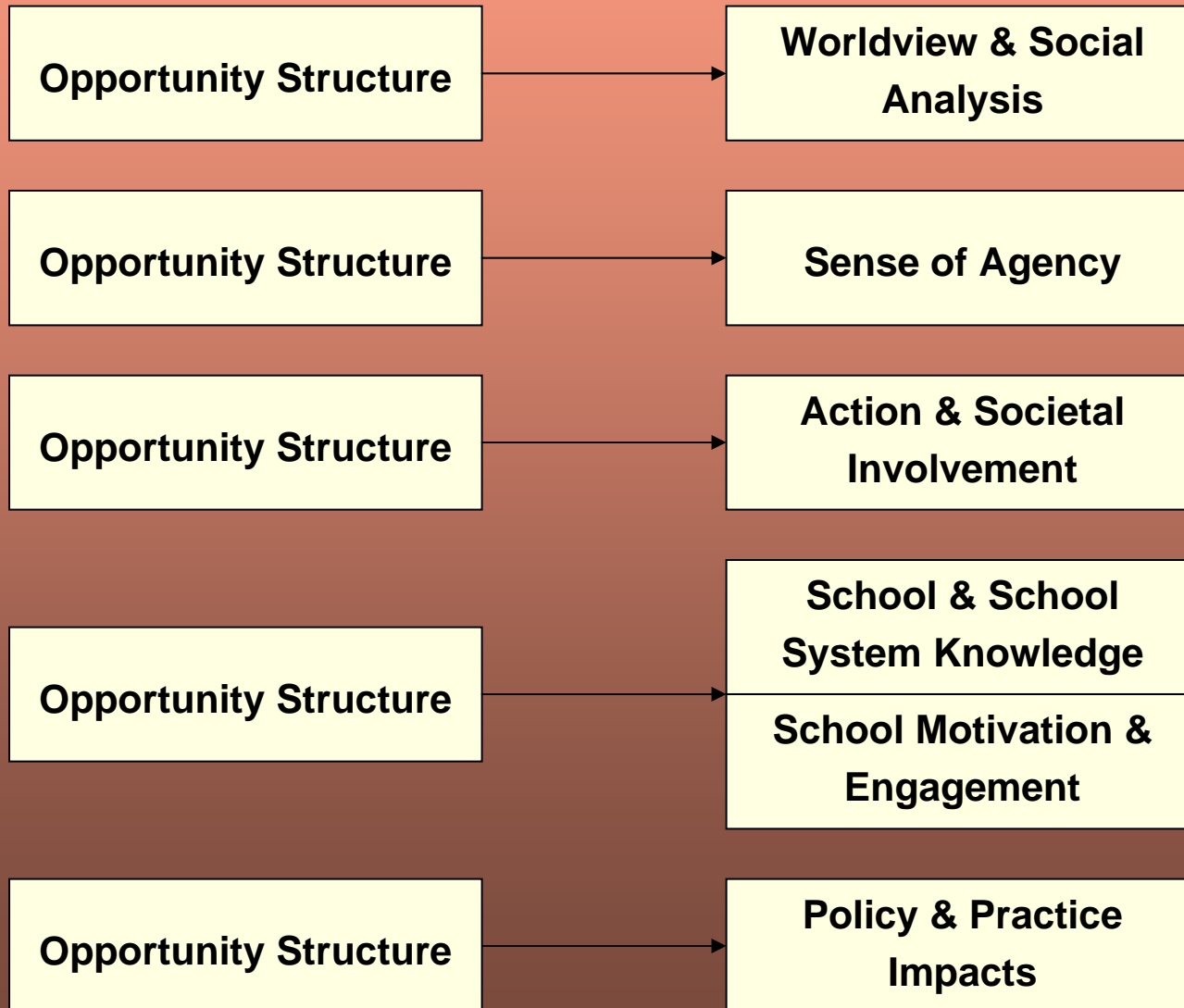
(Watts & Guessous, 2006)



*\*To create a better fit for our research questions, the CIP/AISR research team added these domains to the framework.*

# Research Questions

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# Methodology

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- In 2002, we began a national study of 8 community organizing groups, all working on education campaigns
  - ◆ 3 youth organizing groups
    - ❖ Sistas and Brothas United – New York City
    - ❖ South Central Youth Empowered thru Action – Los Angeles
    - ❖ Youth United for Change – Philadelphia
- Interviews, surveys, observations, media coverage, archival documents, administrative data

# Sample

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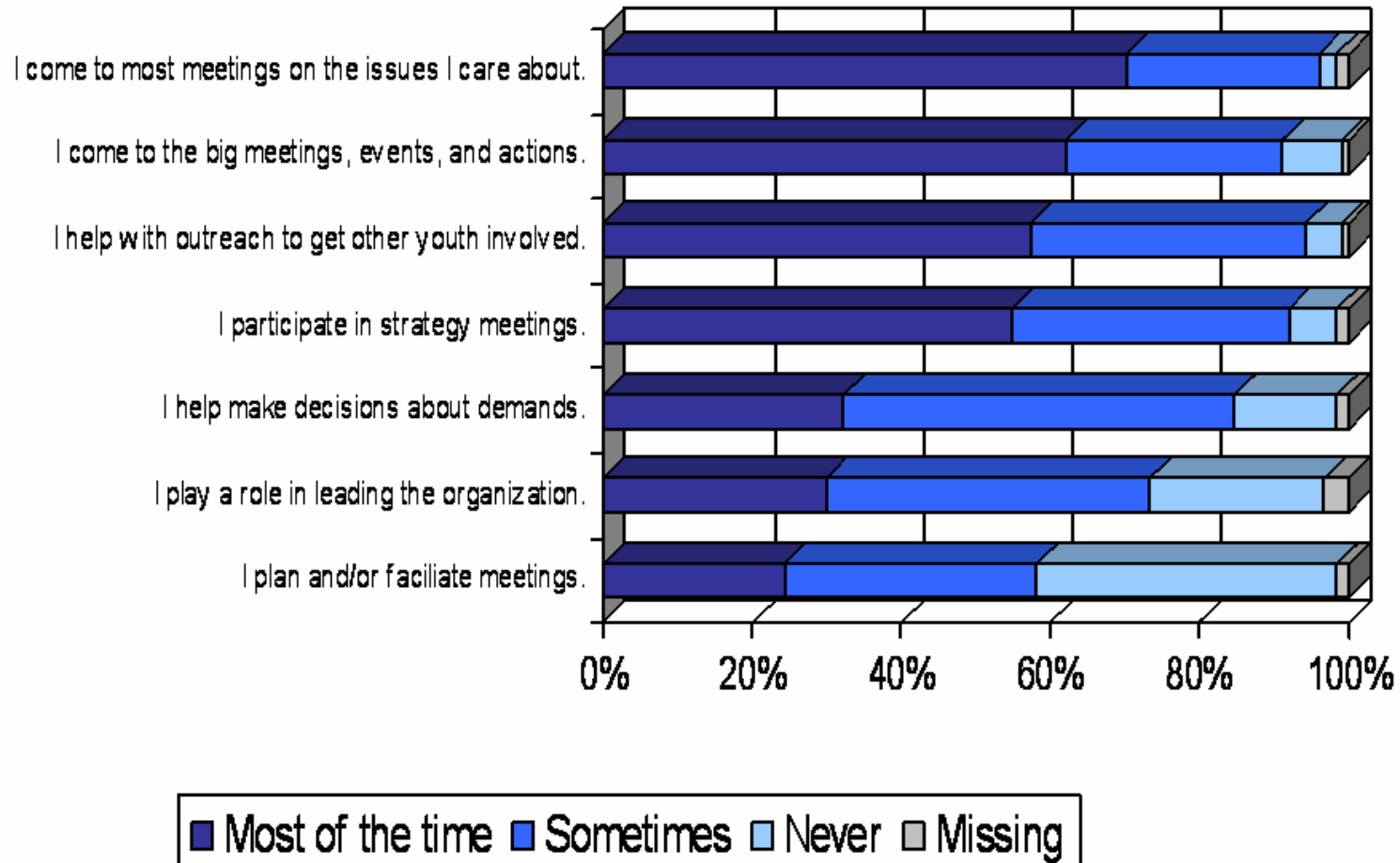
- **Surveyed** 124 youth ages 13-23
  - ◆ 42% Latino, 37% Black, 15% Biracial/Multiracial
  - ◆ 61% female, 39% male
  - ◆ 49% involved one year or less
  
- **Interviewed** 83 leaders, organizers, and educators
  - ◆ 23 interviews with youth leaders
  - ◆ 41 interviews with organizers
    - ❖ (most organizers were interviewed more than once)
  - ◆ 24 interviews with educators
  
- **Observed** 15 meetings, trainings, and negotiations

# Measures

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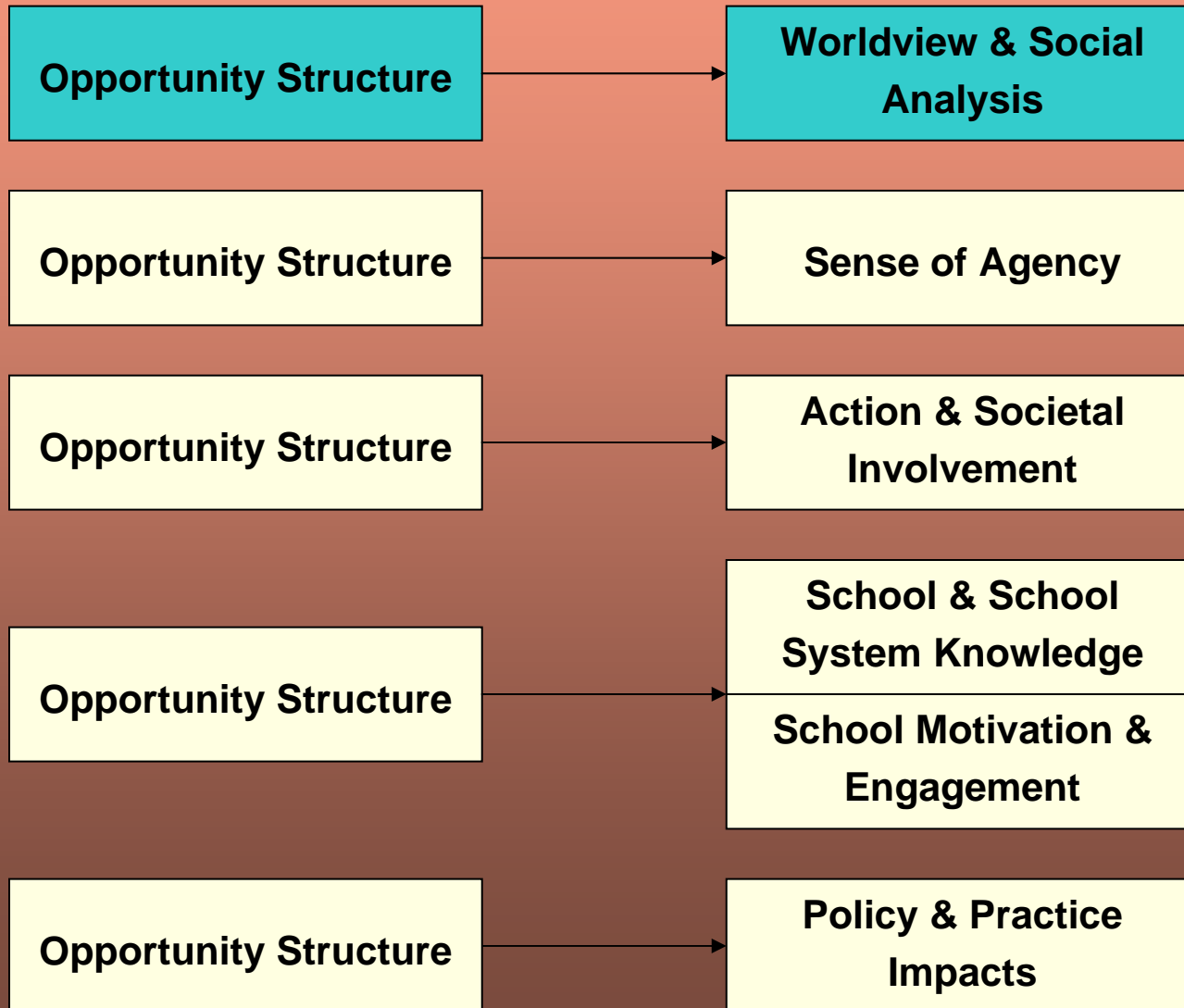
Construct	Measures
<i>Opportunity Structure</i>	Index of Organizational Participation (AISR)
<i>Worldview &amp; Social Analysis</i>	Global Belief in a Just World (Lipkus, 1991)
<i>Sense of Agency</i>	Confidence in Leadership (Watts) Leadership Competence (Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991) Perceived Control – Community-Level (Schultz et al., 1995)
<i>Action &amp; Societal Involvement</i>	Index of Youth Political Engagement (Andolina et al., 2003)
<i>Impact of Participation</i>	Index of Impact on School & School System Knowledge (AISR) Index of Impact on School Motivation (AISR)

# Organizational Participation



# Research Questions

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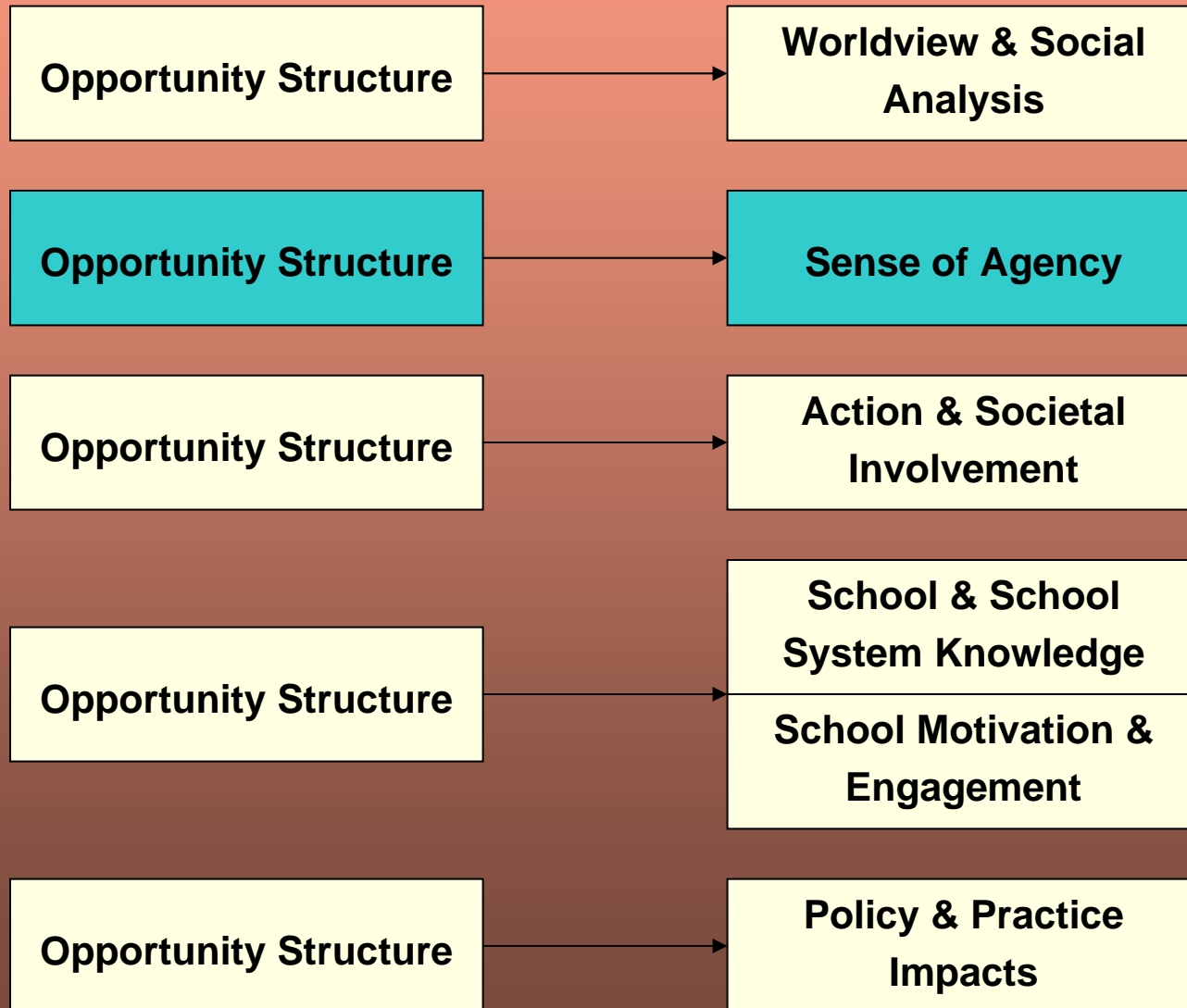
# Worldview and Social Analysis

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- $R^2 = .115$ ,  $F(4, 108) = 3.498$ ,  $p = 0.010$ 
  - ◆ Age ( $\beta = -0.285$ ,  $t = -2.992$ ,  $p = 0.003$ )
- In interviews, respondents reported:
  - ◆ Greater understanding of how policy impacts community
  - ◆ Increased knowledge of own community's needs, as well as larger global issues (i.e., sweatshops, homelessness)
  - ◆ Exposure to historical, political, and economic knowledge promotes development of more critical and systemic worldview

# Research Questions

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# Sense of Agency

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## ■ Self-efficacy

### ◆ Leadership Competence

❖  $R^2 = .155$ ,  $F(4, 108) = 4.971$ ,  $p = .001$

- Age ( $\beta = 0.297$ ,  $t = 3.183$ ,  $p = .002$ )

### ◆ Confidence in Leadership

❖  $R^2 = .274$ ,  $F(4, 108) = 10.177$ ,  $p = .000$

- Age ( $\beta = 0.261$ ,  $t = 3.026$ ,  $p = .003$ )
- Org. Participation ( $\beta = 0.366$ ,  $t = 4.094$ ,  $p = .000$ )

## ■ Collective-efficacy

### ◆ Perceived Control – Community Level

❖  $R^2 = .128$ ,  $F(4, 108) = 3.954$ ,  $p = .005$

- Org. Participation ( $\beta = 0.275$ ,  $t = 2.796$ ,  $p = .006$ )

# Sense of Agency

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## ■ Self-efficacy

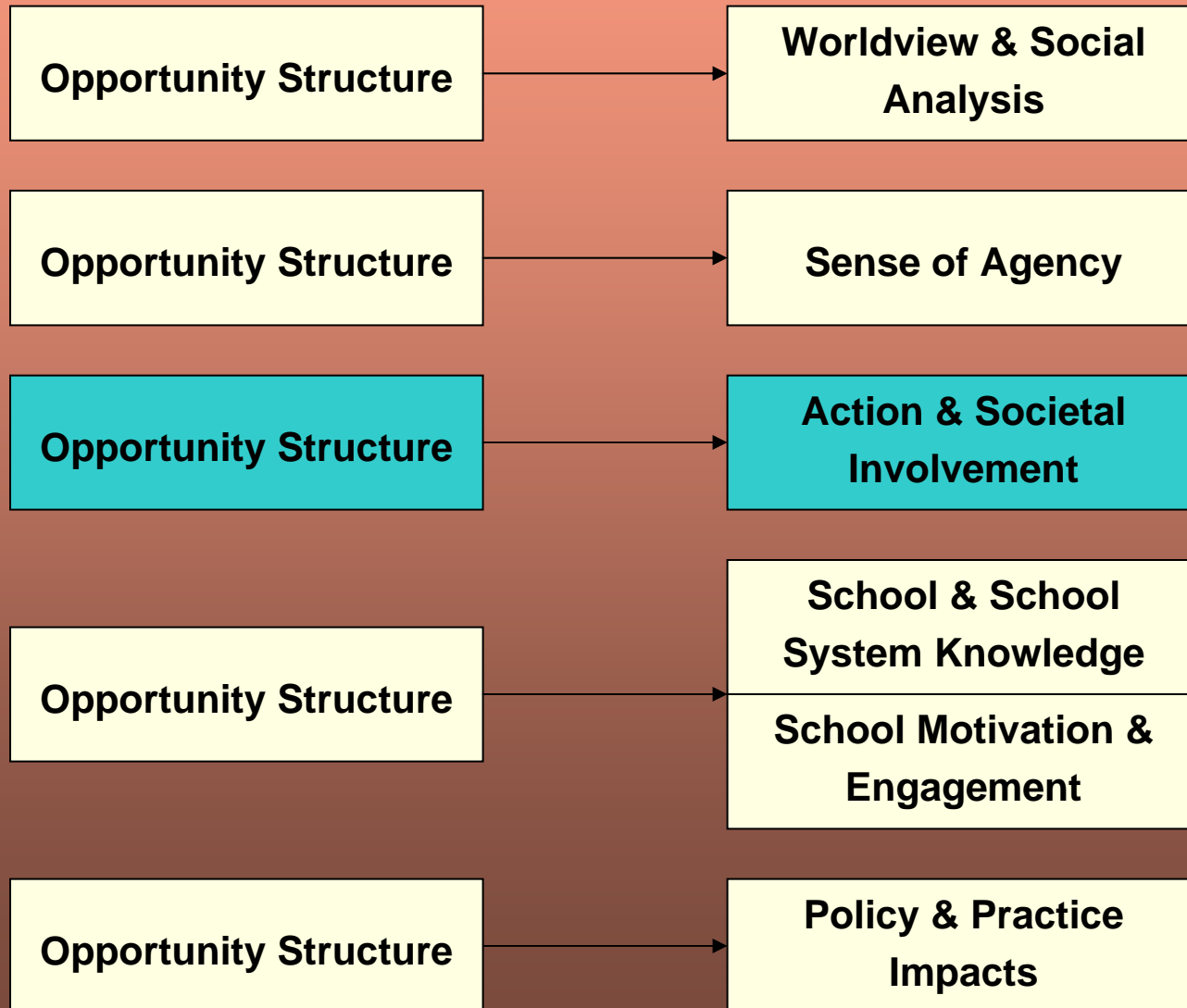
- ◆ Discovery of previously hidden leadership abilities (particularly outspokenness)
- ◆ Sense of *power* to effect change
  - ❖ Role as decision-makers
  - ❖ Relationships with powerful officials
  - ❖ Recognition as experts
  - ❖ Collective power
- ◆ Sense of purpose and agency in own life

## ■ Collective-efficacy

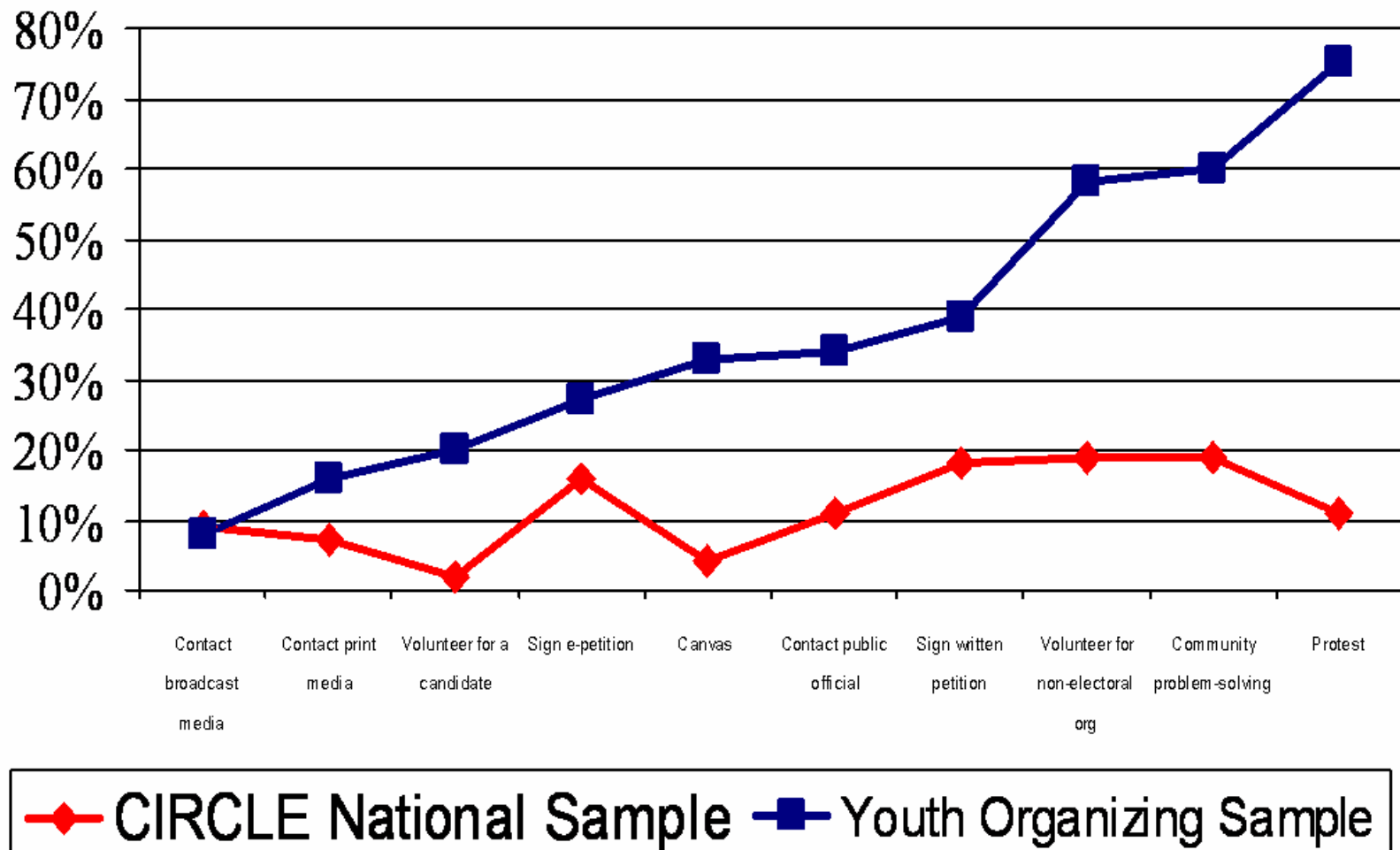
- ◆ Possibility of addressing own needs and community needs simultaneously

# Research Questions

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# Action & Societal Involvement



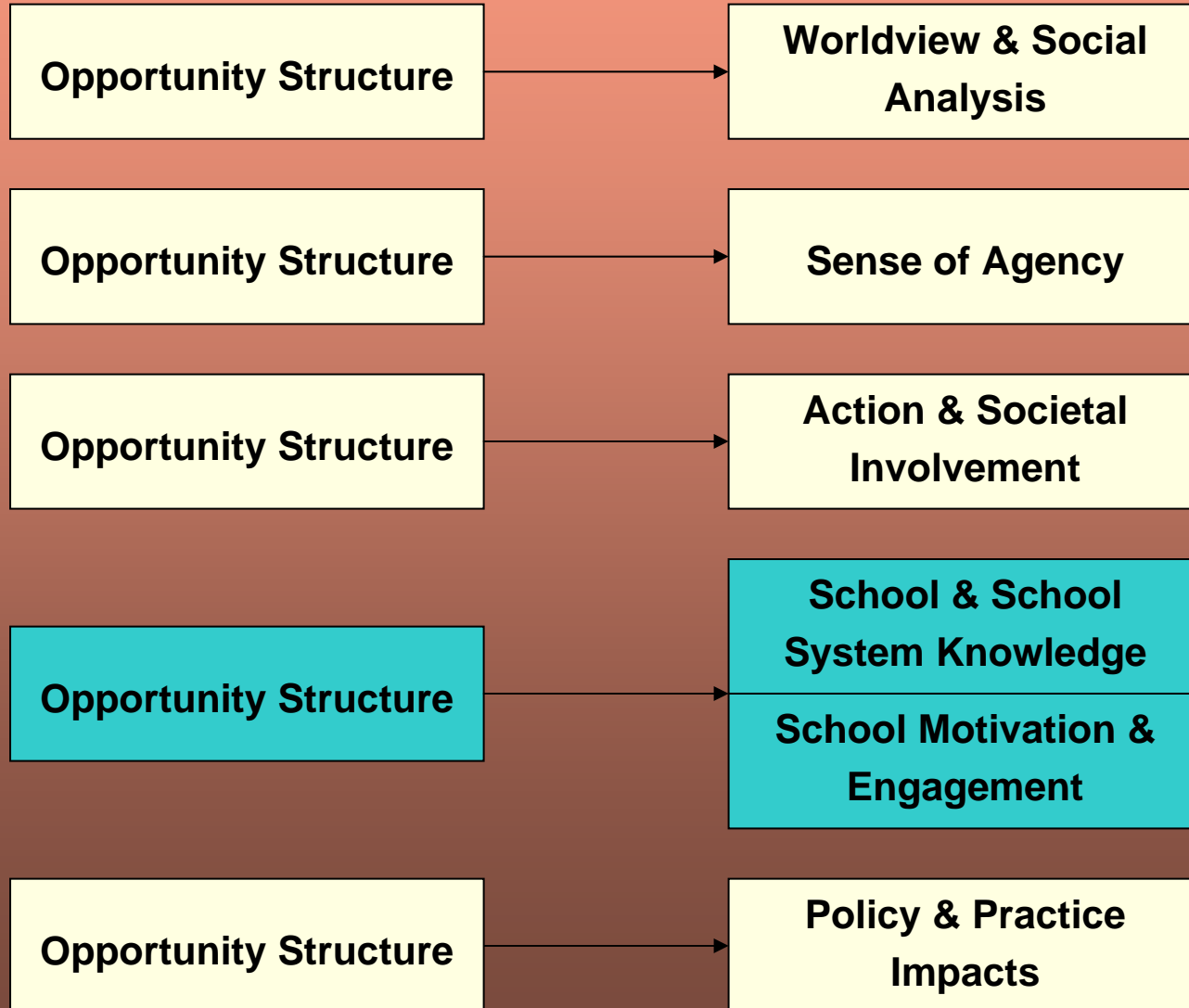
# Action & Societal Involvement

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- Index of Youth Political Engagement
  - ◆  $R^2 = .266$ ,  $F(4, 109) = 9.889$ ,  $p = .000$ 
    - ❖ Age ( $\beta = 0.270$ ,  $t = 3.121$ ,  $p = .002$ )
    - ❖ Grades ( $\beta = -0.178$ ,  $t = -2.146$ ,  $p = .034$ )
    - ❖ Org. Participation ( $\beta = 0.304$ ,  $t = 3.401$ ,  $p = .001$ )
  
- In interviews, respondents reported:
  - ◆ Involvement in activism beyond activities of organization
  - ◆ Intention to stay involved in activism in the future
  - ◆ Desire to return to neighborhood to work as organizer, activist, journalist, politician

# Research Questions

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# Education-Related Impacts

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## ■ Index of Impact on School and School System Knowledge

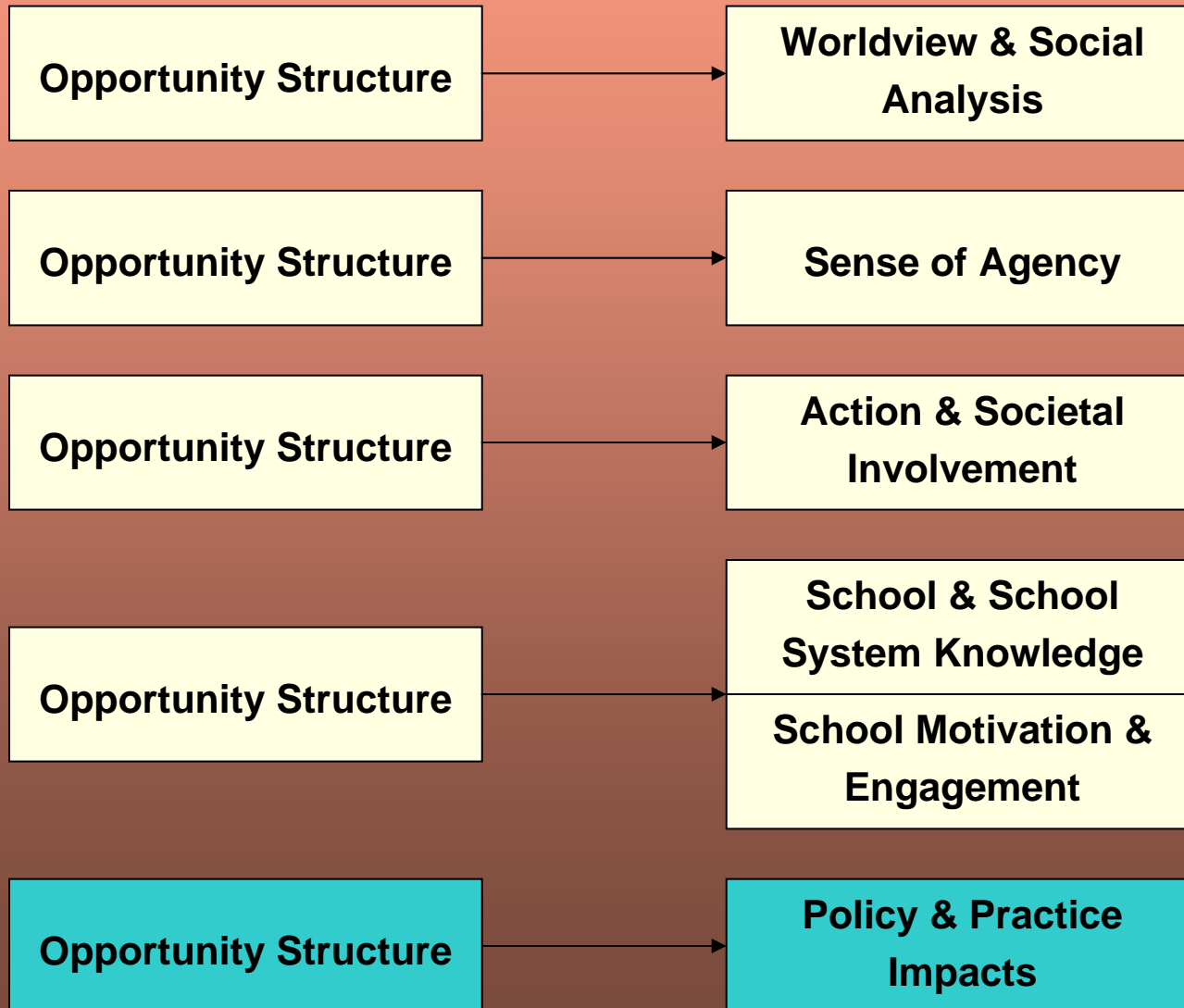
- ◆  $R^2 = .140$ ,  $F(4, 109) = 4.432$ ,  $p = .002$ 
  - ❖ Age ( $\beta = 0.294$ ,  $t = 3.143$ ,  $p = .002$ )

## ■ Index of Impact on School Motivation

- ◆  $R^2 = .194$ ,  $F(4, 108) = 6.489$ ,  $p = .000$ 
  - ❖ Grades ( $\beta = -0.237$ ,  $t = -2.711$ ,  $p = .008$ )
  - ❖ Org. Participation ( $\beta = 0.373$ ,  $t = 2.955$ ,  $p = .004$ )
- ◆ **74%** expect to complete a 4-year degree
- ◆ **49%** expect to complete a graduate or professional degree

# Research Questions

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# Policy and Practice Impacts

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## ■ District-level impacts

- ◆ School facilities resources (NYC, LA)
- ◆ College preparatory curriculum policy (LA)
- ◆ District-wide test preparation standards (Philly)
- ◆ Small schools policy (Philly)

## ■ School-level impacts

- ◆ Student voice (NYC, LA, Philly)
- ◆ Youth-designed school (NYC)
- ◆ Increased access to core courses (LA)

# Policy and Practice Impacts

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[Youth organizing] forces people to have a new perspective. It forces people to consider, whether they like it or not, that there's some other people at the table. And that's not always comfortable for folks; but I think slowly people have come to recognize that students having voice is an important resource...They've helped the district in finding their own building, because now we have 400 more seats, so that's something the district wouldn't be doing on its own...It benefits the district when they campaign for fiscal equity. It benefits the district when they campaign for facilities. It benefits the district when they campaign for better schools. I mean, all of that affects the district; I just don't know that the district recognizes that it's beneficial.

—A district administrator

# Conclusions

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- Youth organizing provides an avenue for leadership development, social analysis and political engagement, and...
- Also has the potential to enhance academic engagement and motivation.
- Developmental considerations are important.
- Organizing, as a youth development intervention, fits with the lived experience of young people of color—providing youth with an opportunity to be “agents of change.”

# Future Directions

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- Study of different models of leadership development and political education, and how they relate to socio-political outcomes
- Study of youth organizing alumni – long-term academic and socio-political outcomes
- Comparative study examining youth organizing groups and more traditional youth development organizations