

Policy & Individual Impacts of Youth Organizing for School Reform:

Key Research Findings



Community Involvement Program
Annenberg Institute for School Reform
at Brown University

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Presentation Overview

■ **Research overview**

- Background and literature review—what we already know
- Research questions—what we want to know
- Research methods—how we went about it

■ **Impacts of youth organizing**

- Policy and practice impacts—how your schools and districts have changed
- Individual impacts of organizing on youth—how young people have changed

Background

- Youth organizing, within the context of CBO's, has grown rapidly in the past 10-15 years
- Confluence of policy trends resulted in growth
 - Zero-tolerance school disciplinary policies
 - Test-based accountability measures
 - Small high school reform

What Is Youth Organizing?

- Like traditional youth development programs, youth organizing groups provide academic and social supports, but they also...
- Emphasize a systems critique of social and economic conditions, and provide the tools to engage in action to change those conditions.
- Youth organizing groups accomplish this through leadership development and political education.

Research on Youth Organizing

- Action research efforts (Research for Action, UCLA IDEA)
- Policy impacts of youth organizing
 - Many descriptive case studies, from youth group perspective
 - No research on educator perspectives/attributions
- Individual-level impacts of youth organizing
 - Rich, emerging body of theoretical work (Watts; Ginwright)
 - Empirical research on individual-level impacts is scant, and consists mostly of case studies; little research on outcomes
 - One outcome study comparing youth organizing, youth development, and identity development groups (Gambone, Yu, Lewis-Charp, Sipe & Lacoë, 2004)

Study Overview

- 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

District and School-Level Impacts of Youth Organizing

Research Questions

- What are the schooling practice and policy reform demands & strategies of youth organizing groups?
- What impacts do educators attribute to youth organizing groups? Why or why not?
- Do schools show evidence of improvement in the areas targeted by youth groups? If so, is there evidence of improved student outcomes?

Data Analyzed

- 23 interviews with youth leaders
- 41 interviews with organizers (most organizers were interviewed more than once)
- 24 interviews with educators (most were district administrators)
- Analyses of administrative data
- Media coverage
- Documents produced by your group

Looking at School Capacity

Data Sources	School Capacity Domains			
	District & Community Influences	School Climate	Professional Culture	Instructional Core
Group Attributions				
Educator Attributions				
Administrative Data Analyses				

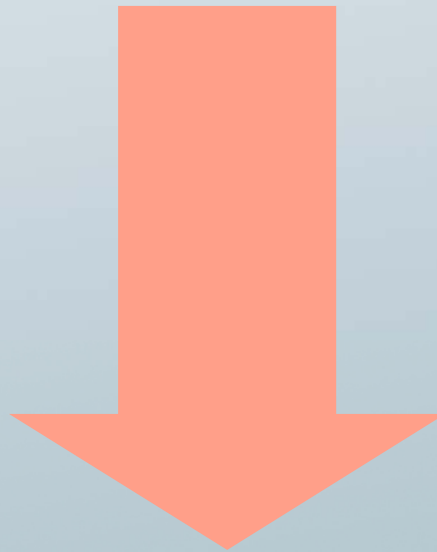
Summary of Findings

Major Campaigns

SBU (1999)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ School facilities and safety improvements❖ Access to guidance counseling and college preparation❖ School funding❖ Student-teacher relationships❖ Student leadership in high school design (Leadership Inst)
SC-YEA (1997)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ Facilities resources and repairs❖ Access to guidance counselors and text books❖ School safety❖ College preparation policy
YUC (1993)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">❖ School facilities improvements❖ College access curricula and counseling❖ Small school reform (2 campuses)❖ Discipline and safety improvements❖ Testing and test preparation

Core Strategies to Improve High School Graduation & College-Going Rates

- **SBU:** Leadership Institute & Student Success Centers
- **SC-YEA:** Rigorous, college-preparatory curriculum for all
- **YUC:** Small high school redesign



Improved student outcomes

Findings Across All Three Sites

■ Interviews:

- Impact on policy (A-G, small schools) and resources (facilities \$)
- Impact on how administrators think about student voice
- Some school level impacts on climate (facilities or safety improvements, more student voice)

■ Administrative data:

- Using administrative data descriptively to understand the context of your schools
- Changes inside schools will take time to show up in the data
- Too early to assess impact on student outcomes

What Educators Say About Your Work

Educator Attributions: SBU

District/community influences	School climate	Professional culture	Instructional core
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Built political support for facilities reform ❖ Focused district on importance of student voice - provided information & critique re school problems ❖ Raised demand for college prep & counseling ❖ Improved training for school safety agents (citywide) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Increased youth voice to speak out about problems in school ❖ Norms of youth leadership in new small high school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Principal learned value of youth voice ❖ Increased teacher awareness of community through neighborhood tour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ New school curriculum includes themes of social justice and youth leadership ❖ College visits and other opportunities provided by SBU

Educator Attributions: SCYEA

District/community influences	School climate	Professional culture	Instructional core
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Forced district to focus on academic achievement goals ❖ Helped elect new school board leadership who shared priorities ❖ Built new district awareness of community engagement ❖ A-G changing how the district works ❖ Engaged diverse constituencies in A-G ❖ Focused public attention on needs of underserved communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Empowered youth and parents to speak for themselves ❖ Developed youth capacity to articulate their concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Mediate internal school conflicts within school administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ A-G course implementation will transform HS graduation requirements & expectations for rigor

Educator Attributions: YUC

District/community influences	School climate	Professional culture	Instructional core
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Focus district on highest need schools ❖ Focus district on small schools strategy ❖ Restructuring of Kensington & Olney ❖ Testing/test preparation policy ❖ Consistent youth voice on schooling issues, and dialogue on concerns ❖ Increased community engagement in small schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ School facilities improvements ❖ Focus on instructional quality issues inside schools ❖ Student voice in YUC schools ❖ Improved student attendance in small schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Coalition work reduced teacher vacancies & turnover ❖ Keep administrators focused on instructional quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Improved testing and test prep practices

Why Educators Listen...

- Congruence between what educators believe and what youth groups represent:
 - Your group provides a way for educators to hear from students who are not typically involved in school discussions
 - Your group is focused on improving opportunities for all students
 - Your group has a careful methodology
 - Your group is fighting for things that educators care about

Why They Don't...

- Low expectations for young people of color
- Cultural differences between schools and youth organizations

Obstacles Identified by Educators

- Zero-sum negotiating stance
- Insufficient knowledge of pressures facing the school
- Impatience with political and/or bureaucratic timelines and pressures
- Agitational style

Cultural Differences

	Schools	Youth groups
Culture	Hierarchical, compliance orientation	Democratic, problem-solving orientation
Decision-making	Top down chain of command – decisions are made by administrators	Participatory and inclusive – decisions are made by the group, generally by consensus
Locus of expertise	School leaders and professional leaders are experts	Individuals – everyone has something to contribute
External pressures	Political interests & regulatory constraints	Need to “deliver” concrete victories to constituents on concerns

Strategies for Change

- Political education and issue analysis
(moving from peripheral concerns to core teaching and learning issues)
- Alliance building with other youth organizations, unions, and research organizations
- Identifying district-level allies based on shared goals and self-interest
- Building new institutions with high expectations for learning
- Building institutions with new norms of youth leadership and community engagement

Individual Impacts on Youth Leaders

Overview of the Findings

Young people are strongly impacted by their involvement in organizing. Youth involved in organizing:

- Feel confident about their leadership skills;
- Have a strong belief that neighborhood problems can be solved collectively;
- Possess a critical social analysis; and
- Are politically active, at rates higher than the national average.

Overview of the Findings

Because of their involvement in an organizing group, youth say they are:

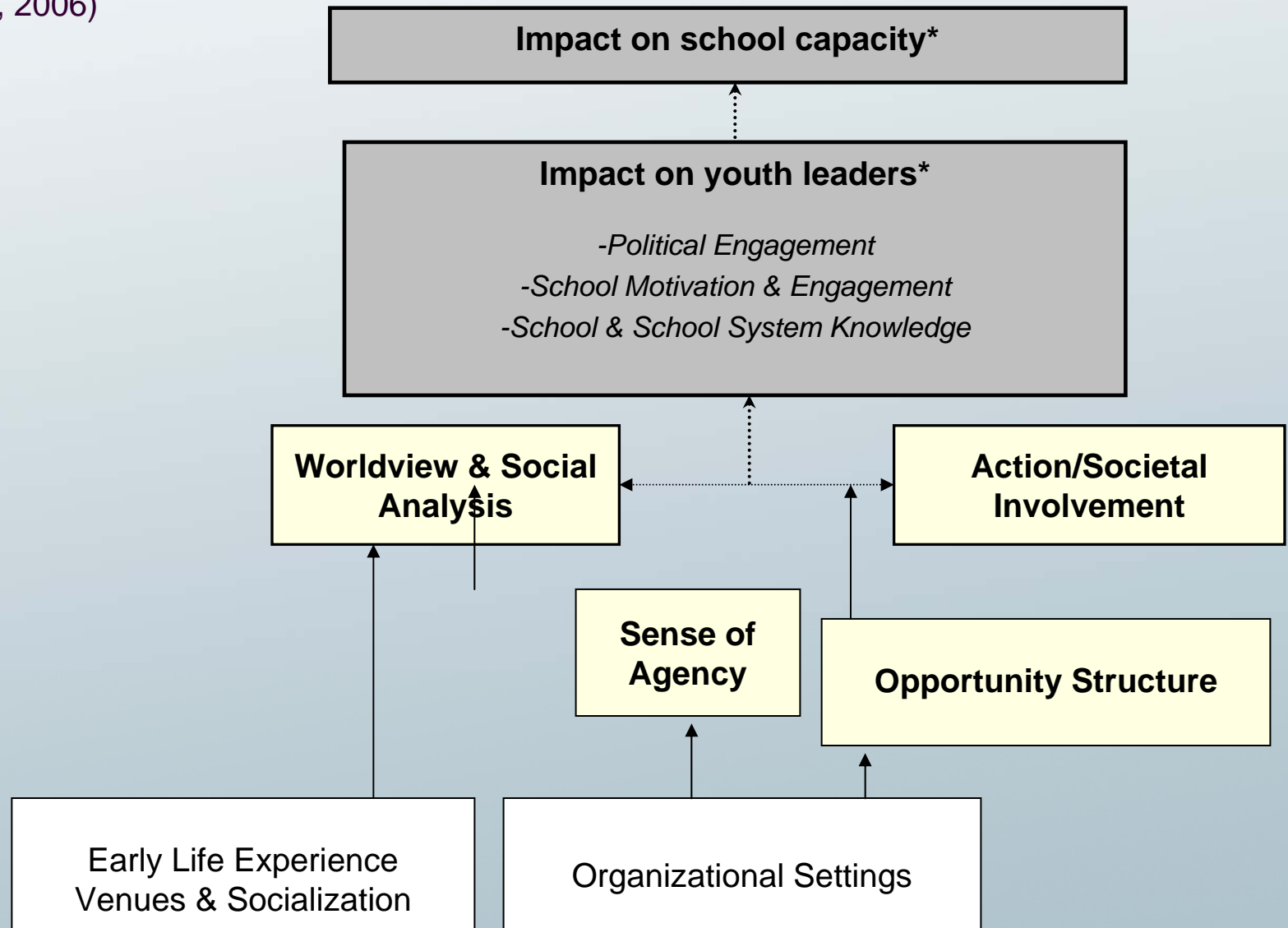
- More likely to be politically engaged;
- More knowledgeable about their schools and school systems; and
- More motivated about their own schooling.

Method

- **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** leadership trainings, meetings, and actions

Theory of Sociopolitical Development

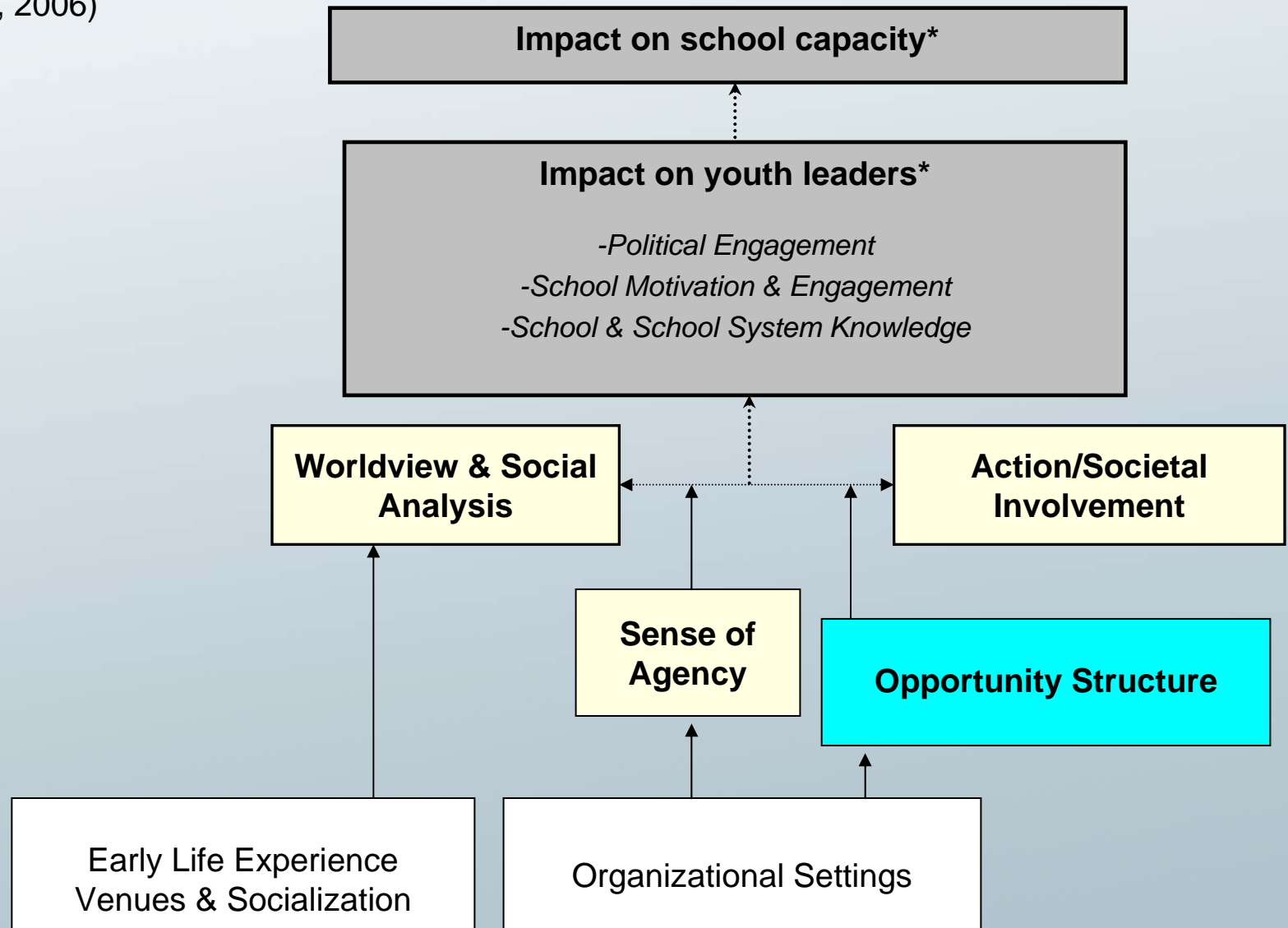
(Watts & Guessous, 2006)



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

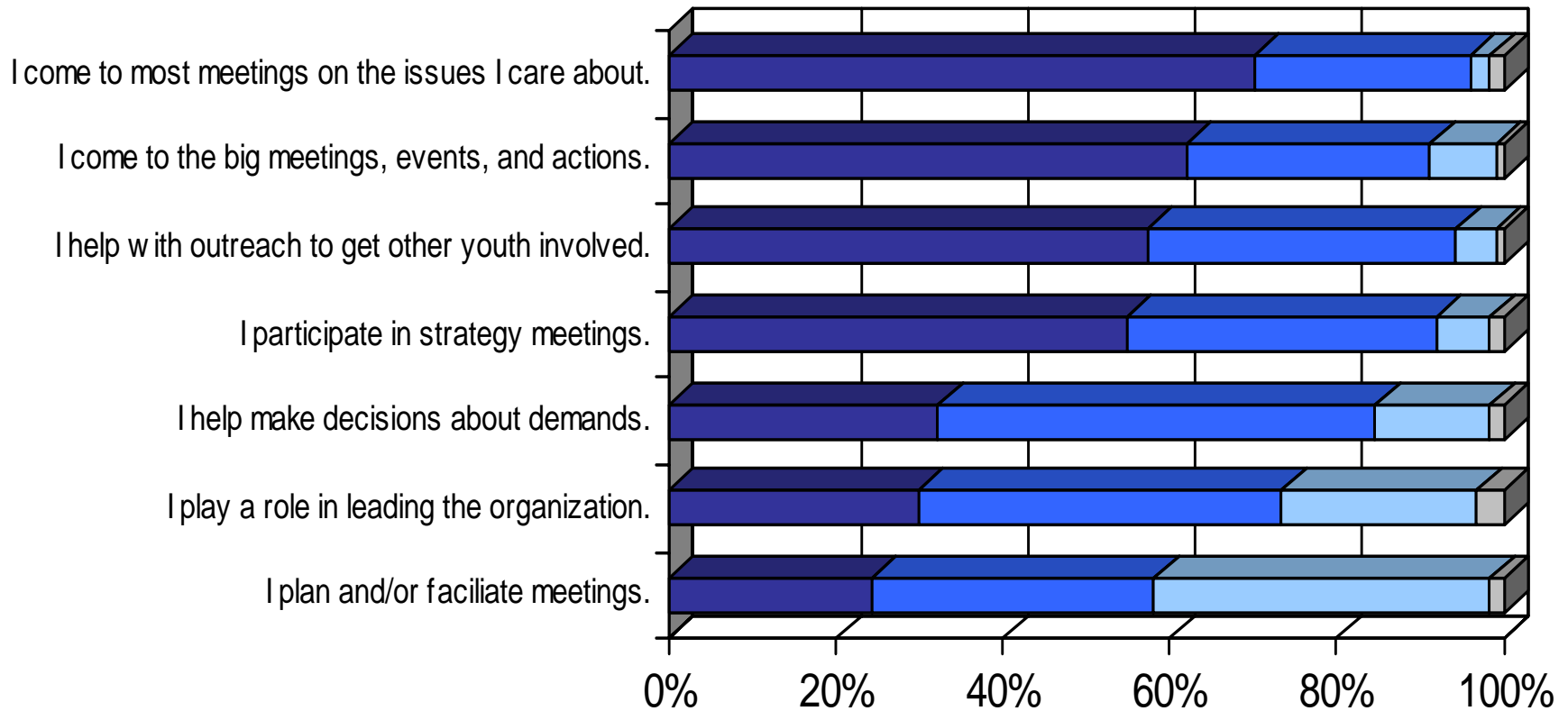
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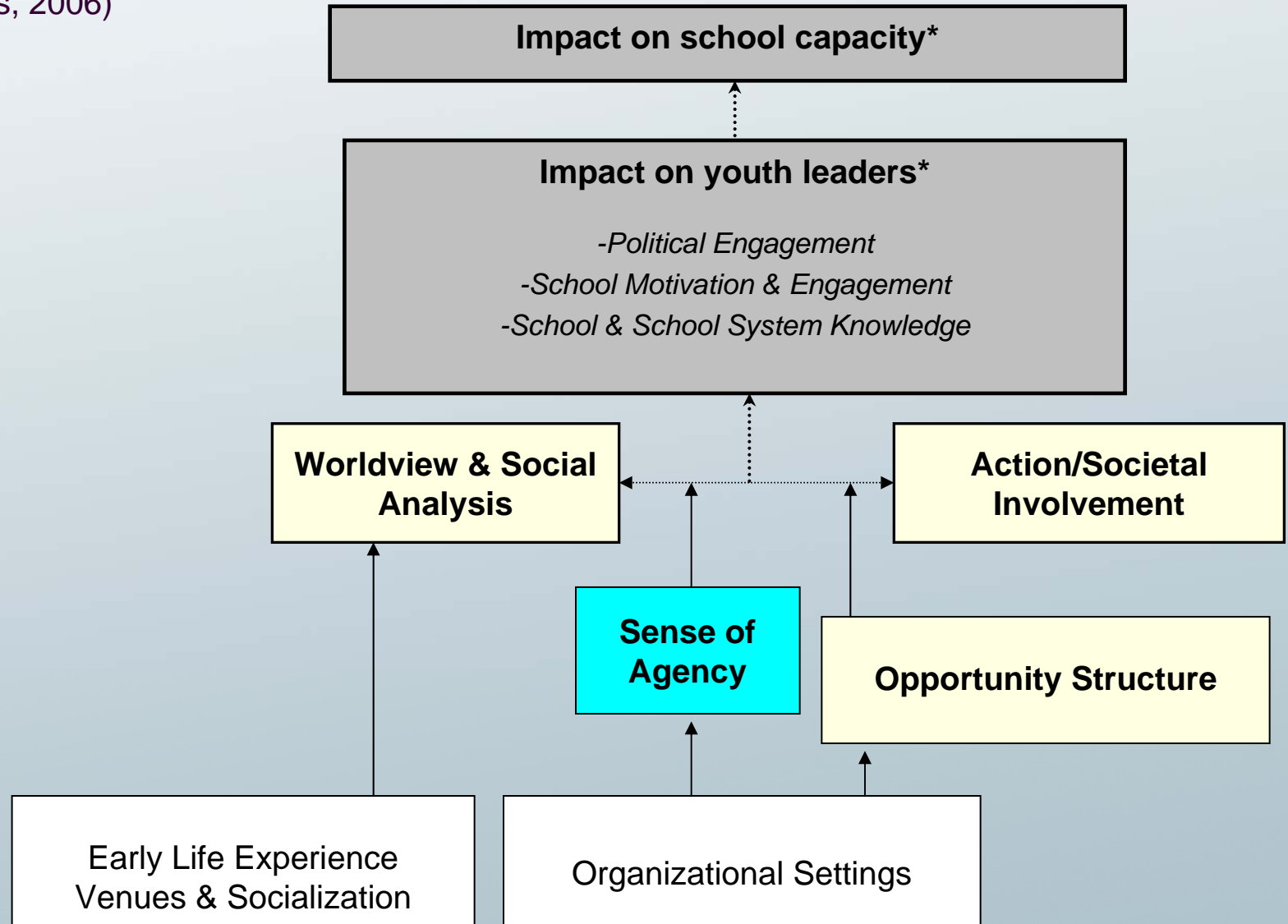
Organizational Participation



■ Most of the time ■ Sometimes ■ Never ■ Missing

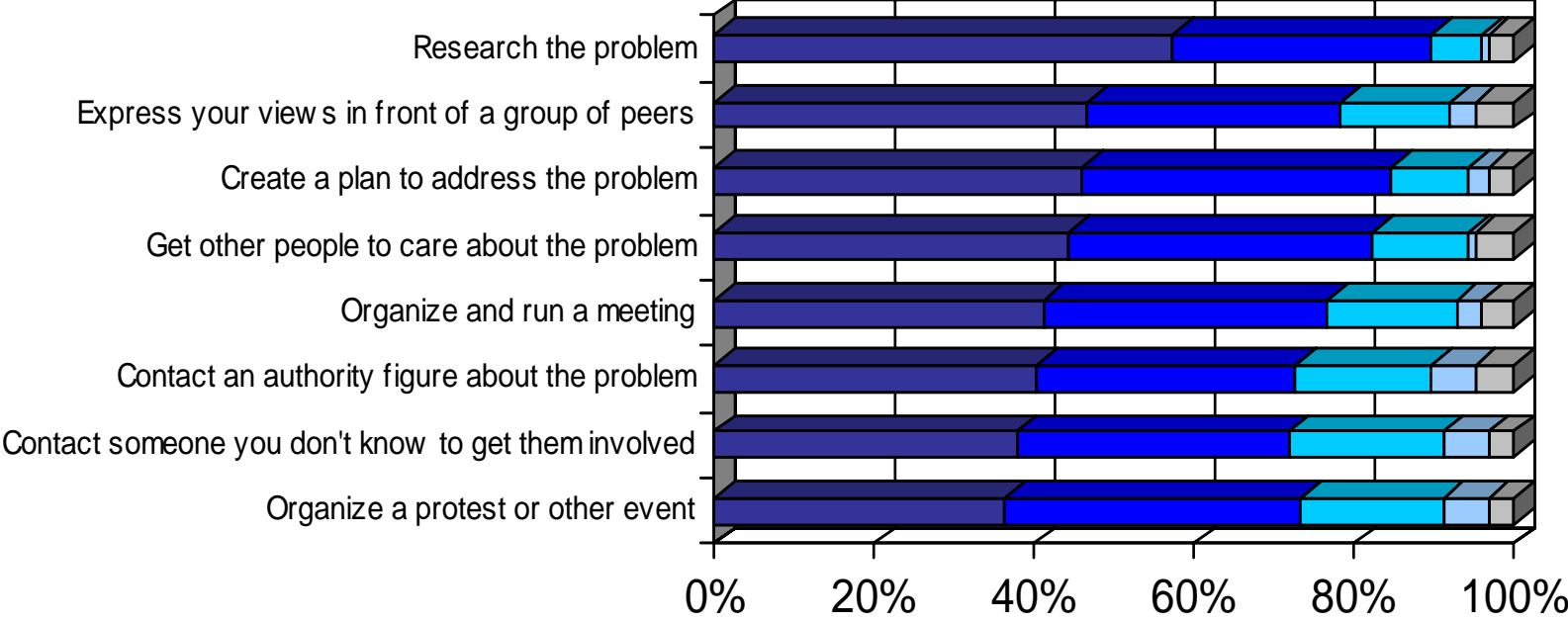
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Confidence in Leadership



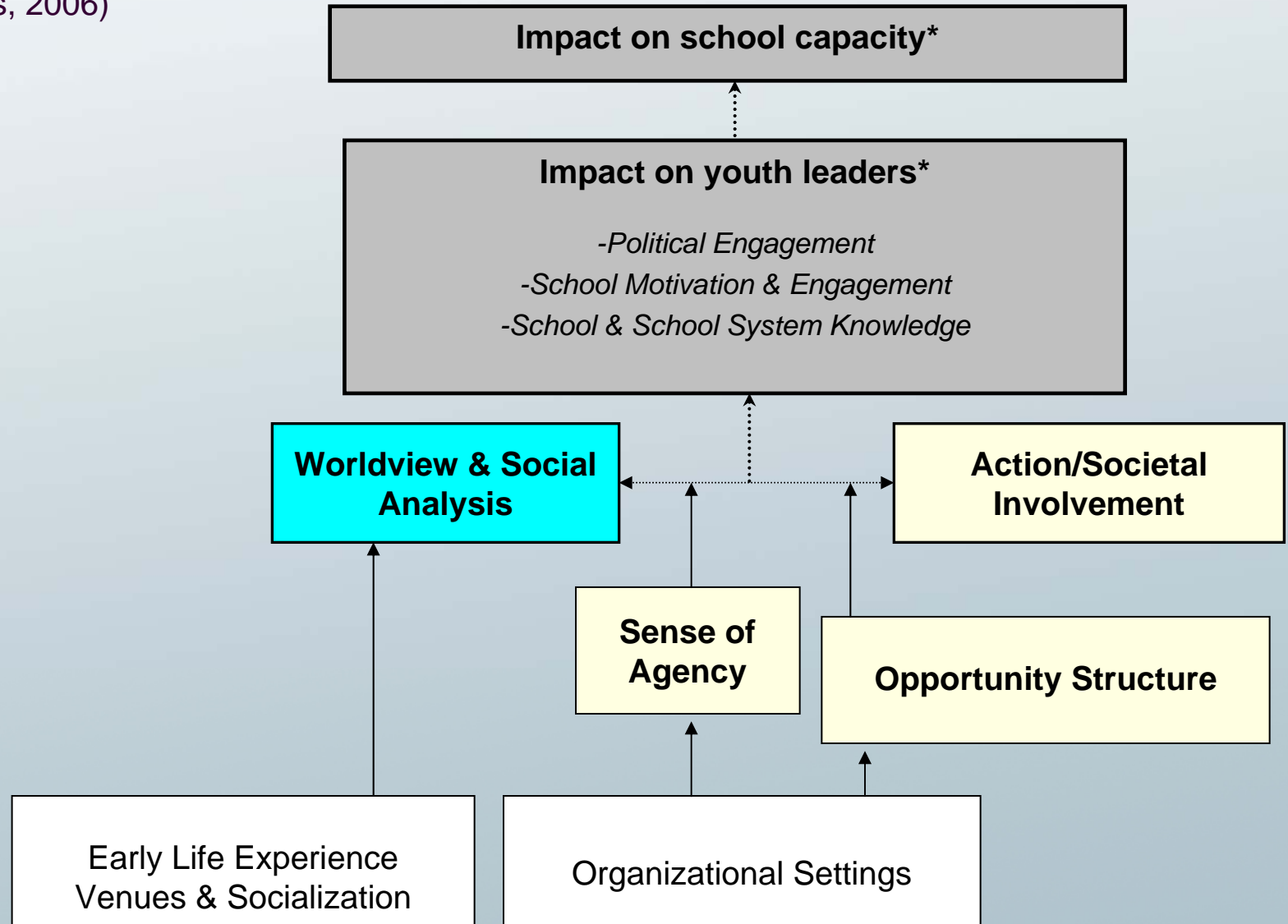
■ Very Confident ■ Sort of Confident ■ Not Very Confident ■ Not at All Confident ■ Missing

Sense of Agency

- Discovery of hidden leadership abilities; transformation from a shy person to an outspoken one
- Realizing the power of young people to create change
- Ability to simultaneously address own needs and community's needs

Theory of Sociopolitical Development

(Watts & Guessous, 2006)



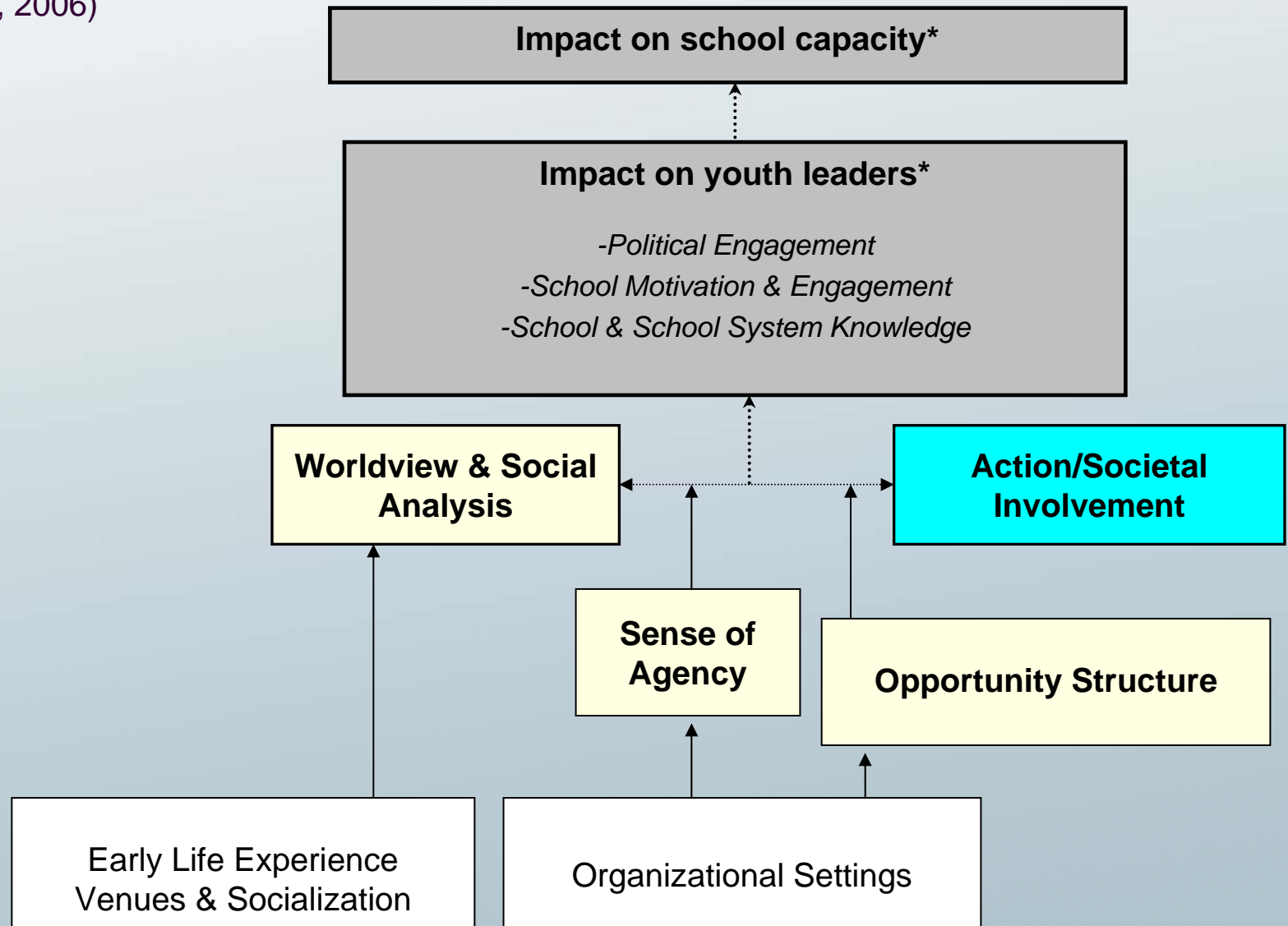
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Worldview and Social Analysis

- Locating roots of inequality in larger social, economic, political forces, rather than in individual deficits
- Young people surveyed had a more systemic analysis relative to other youth samples
- Age was an important factor

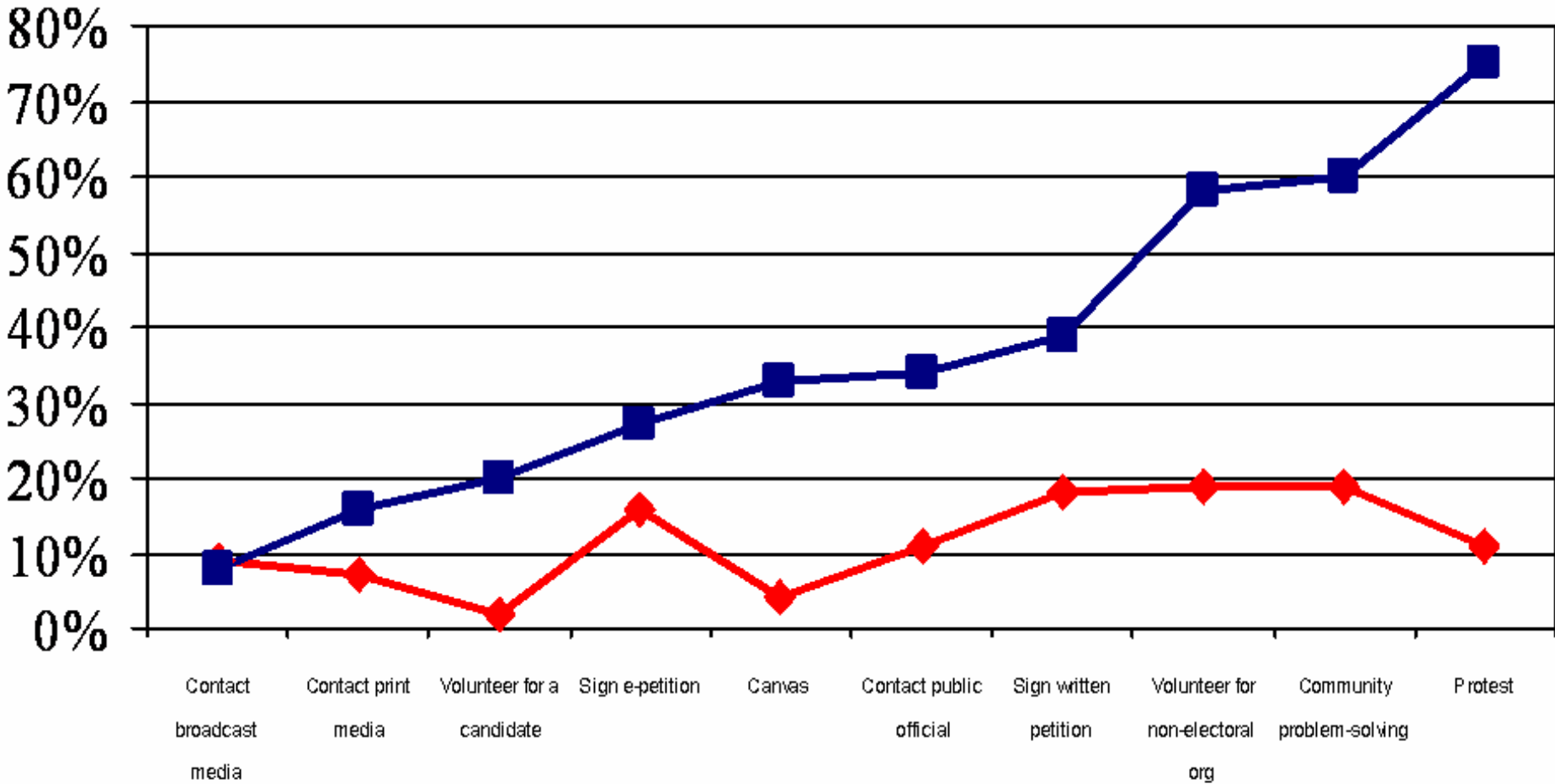
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Political Participation Behaviors



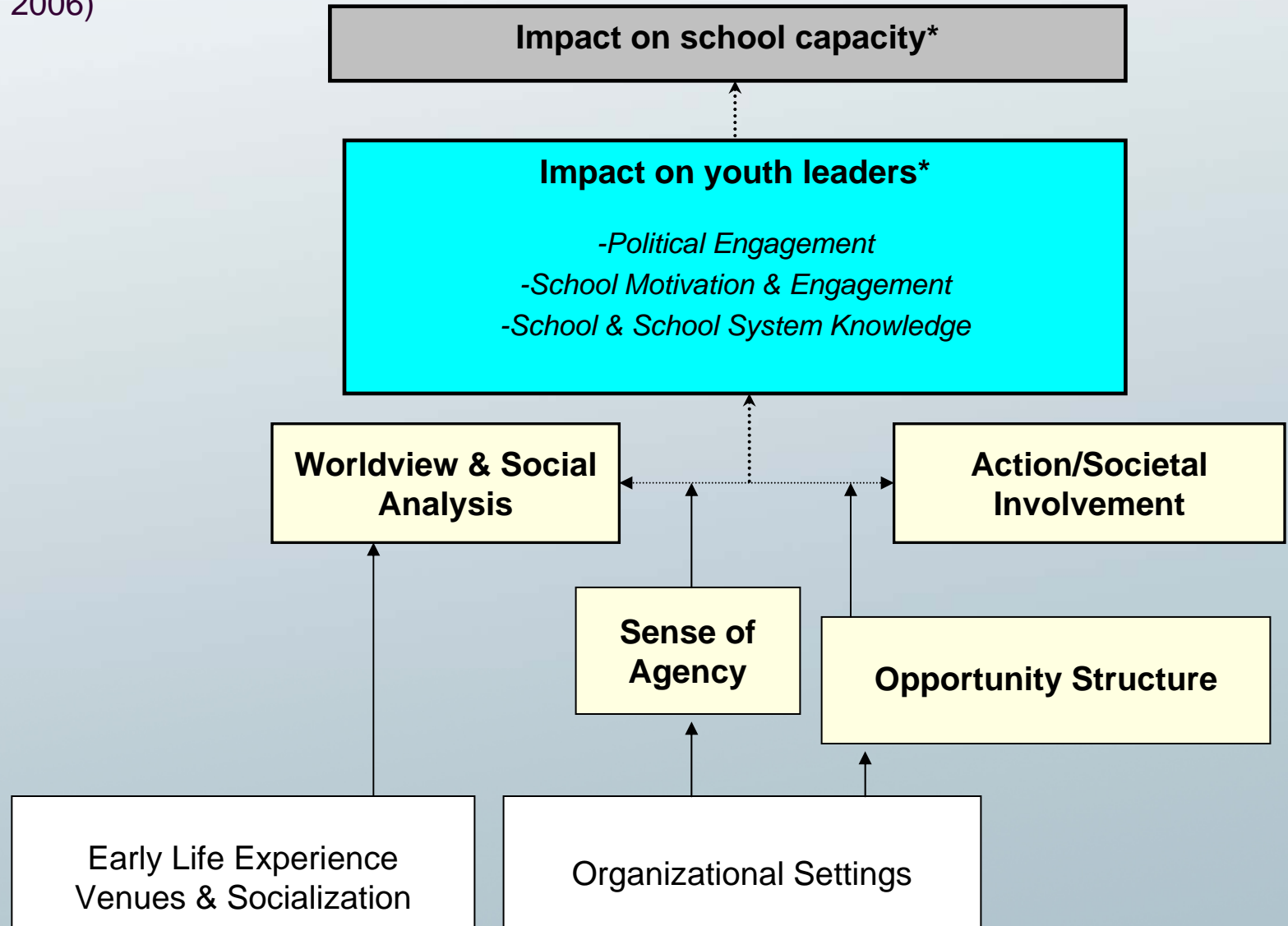
◆ CIRCLE National Sample
 ■ Youth Organizing Sample

Political Engagement Behaviors

- Meet with and negotiate with principals and city and district officials
- Speak at press conferences, hearings
- Train other youth organizing groups; inform other students about issues

Theory of Sociopolitical Development

(Watts & Guessous, 2006)



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Impacts on Youth Leaders

According to youth, involvement in organizing had **high** influence on their:

- Commitment to political engagement
- Knowledge of the school and school system
- Motivation to do well in school

Political Engagement Impacts

- Because of their involvement in organizing:
 - **79%** know more about how to solve community problems
 - **78%** think more about how larger issues impact their community
 - **74%** are more active on community issues
- **90%** will likely stay involved in activism
- **76%** are likely to find jobs in organizing

Political Engagement Impacts

“I always thought about starting my own youth organization. Like, being a director of another organization, but not just going to another organization, building it up from the ground... I’m not leaving the city to go away for college. And my decision has been to stay here so I can continue the work and keep going... I do sometimes wanna like leave and go somewhere and get a nice house, but there’s a lot of work that has to be done before I do that.”

School and School System Knowledge Impacts

Because of their involvement in organizing:

- **88%** know more about school policies
- **86%** know more about who makes decisions about school and district
- **84%** know how to make changes at school
- **84%** know more about their rights as students

School Motivation Impacts

- **74%** said they expect to complete a 4-year degree
- **49%** said they also expect to complete a graduate or professional degree
- Because of their involvement in organizing:
 - **89%** were more motivated to finish high school
 - **87%** were more motivated to attend college
 - **55%** take harder classes

School Motivation Impacts

- Higher school motivation attributed to:
 - Access to computers
 - Access to space to work on projects
 - Access to constant tutoring
 - Staff attention to academics, willingness to help, advocacy on behalf of students

School Motivation Impacts

“Really SCYEA has just given me something productive to do with my time. Because if I didn’t have SCYEA, I don’t know where I would be right now. I probably wouldn’t be going to college. I was not going to college before I came to SCYEA, so I think that is one thing that SCYEA has really done for me, teaching me the value of education.”

Predictive Findings: Organizational Participation

Regression analyses showed that higher rates of organizational participation predict:

- Increased motivation to do well in school
- Higher rates of confidence in one's leadership abilities
- Higher rates of believing that neighborhood problems can be solved collectively
- *...even after we control for age, gender, and GPA*

Additional Themes

■ **Sense of family**

“If I’m having problems, I can come to them and stuff like that. And it’s like a second family and I really like it. So, you know, I can always depend on and I can always trust the people here. And that’s really cool.”

■ **Safe haven**

“This is a terrible neighborhood to grow up in... This community just, the vibe is all wrong. And then you come here, you feel all cool and relaxed because you ain’t gotta look over your shoulder all the time.”

■ Youth are not necessarily involved because of their parents’ activism (contrary to other research)

“We’re all future elected officials, teachers, lawyers, doctors. Many of us are going to become staff at SBU and make it bigger- have it be all around the country. ... I can’t say now that I’m always going to keep up this work in this way. But whatever I do in the future, I’m going to change the world. I’m going to affect it. With my history and background, I don’t want to see today’s youth grow up in the way I did. I take everything in this organization personally because of that.”

Discussion Questions

- What do you think of the theoretical framework?
 - Is it relevant to your work? In what ways?
 - Could this be a helpful tool for looking at your organization's outcomes?
- Did any of the data on individual impacts surprise you? How so? Are there impacts that are missing?
- Did any of the data on policy impacts surprise you? Were you surprised by what educators gave you credit for, and what they didn't give you credit for?

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