

Empowering Youth to Advocate for Gender Equality

Masters of Arts, Community Development
Research Project

Prepared for:
Shannon Newman-Bennett
Director, Family Services
YWCA Metro Vancouver

Prepared by:
Chantelle Krish
MACD Candidate
School of Public Administration
University of Victoria

Supervisor:

Dr. Thea Vakil, Associate Professor and Associate Director
School of Public Administration, University of Victor

Executive Summary

Teaching youth about gender issues early on is a key element of creating active and knowledgeable citizens committed to equality. Youth programs that feature partnerships with adults, whereby young people play a role in decision making, program design and execution is a paradigm shift away from top-down approaches to working with youth. These youth-led models offer leadership opportunities for members while at the same time produce new learnings for program staff about how youth are experiencing issues that affect them. The YWCA Metro Vancouver's Strong Girls, Strong World project features a Youth Advisory Council led by young people. The focus of the council is on media literacy as a response to sexualization of women and girls in media. This topic was chosen because sexualization is a barrier to gender equality and is a key advocacy priority for the YWCA. The Youth Advisory Council offers the organization with the opportunity to work directly with youth on the topic, encouraging critical thinking and community engagement.

Research Questions

The research project explores how the Strong Girls, Strong World initiative contributes to youths' experiences with empowerment, leadership and civic engagement. It also aims to examine five additional Strong Girls, Strong World projects across Canada to identify possibilities for YWCA Metro Vancouver to adopt best practices and enhance its work. The research questions are:

1. To what extent does the Strong Girls, Strong World project contribute to youth leadership development and empower members to advocate for gender equality?
2. To what extent do the five additional YWCA Strong Girls, Strong World projects approach youth empowerment and measure success?

Literature Review

The literature reviewed examined topics of empowerment, civic engagement, sexualization and media literacy as they relate to youth.

Empowerment: Empowerment is an internal process whereby individuals build self-efficacy and confidence. At its essence, empowerment relates to how one views one's capacity to positively affect the things that matter. Building strong networks through acquiring social capital is a key feature of empowerment. For young people transitioning to adolescence, empowerment occurs through decision making about their own life as well as

taking part in initiatives that have a larger purpose. During this time, instilling a sense of civic duty can lead to empowerment and pay off in dividends down the road.

Civic Engagement: Providing young people with the opportunity to participate in community projects with a social impact not only has an empowering effect, but it also enables them to see themselves as actors within civil society. Participating in decision making, generating ideas and executing projects builds valuable leadership skills that can be applied to future endeavours. Programs with governance structures which strike a balance between youth and adults enable all members to meaningfully contribute. This approach enhances youths' personal development, builds tolerance and sets the foundation for a lifelong commitment to civic participation. Fostering a generation of civically minded youth is a fundamental element of social progress.

Sexualization: Media influences how people perceive the world. Often, representations of women and men are skewed, playing into polarized social norms that portray women as passive, sexualized beings and men as aggressive, powerful and hypermasculine. Sexualization of women and girls in media is a significant barrier to gender equality. Not only is it linked with increasing mental health issues among young women such as eating disorders and depression, but it also contributes to the societal tolerance of violence against women. Despite these impacts, sexualization occurs in virtually every form of media.

Media Literacy: The transition to adolescence is ridden with challenges for young people as they form their identities and develop views about the world. Skewed media representations of women and men can negatively impact how young people establish ideas about gender and have lasting impacts, both personally and on society. Media literacy is a tool to mitigate the harm caused by sexualization, particularly with youth. Media literacy is the practice of breaking through complex media messages by understanding who created the message and for what purpose. Learning about the forces behind media creation is an important step towards taking action against harmful media practices that perpetuate gender imbalances. Furthermore, providing opportunities to learn about media literacy and apply knowledge through community initiatives can empower young people to see themselves as active agents of social change.

Methodology

A participatory action research methodology was used to conduct qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 11 participants. This approach seeks to create change through collaborative inquiry and reflection and requires an environment conducive to open dialogue. The researcher was known to the research participants through attending council meetings and building relationships. This helped research participants to feel comfortable and provide feedback about the program. The interviews were structured to first encourage participants to reflect on their experiences followed by tailored questions focussed on ways

to enhance the program. The interviewees were represented in four groups consisting of male and female youth ages 16 - 21 years old, as well as YWCA staff working with youth. The sample of research participants provided an array of perspectives about the YWCA Youth Advisory Council.

Findings and Discussion

Four overarching themes arose from the findings and discussion which were media literacy, empowerment, civic engagement and leadership development. The discussion on media literacy showed an alignment between participants' experiences with the program and the literature reviewed on the topic. Specifically, media literacy was an effective strategy for youth to learn about harmful media practices such as sexualization, which was a new concept to many of the young participants. Staff felt this could be attributed to differences in youth vernacular as well as the high frequency at which youth receive sexualized messages, rendering them somewhat desensitized. Participants felt the program taught them about how to think critically of media and ways to discuss media issues with their peers. The discussion emphasized the value of bringing diverse perspectives to the table when talking about media's influence on society. Intersectionality, which for example involves the study of race, gender and socioeconomic status as they relate to sexualization, was also identified as a topic that should be further explored in the program. The discussion pointed to media creation as a new form of media literacy worth considering for future programming.

The project examined if the Youth Advisory Council empowered members to become agents of change. The discussion on empowerment emphasized self-efficacy through civic participation, and the experiences of youth council members. For example, planning and executing the YWCA youth conference on media literacy was a catalyst for empowerment. The youth-led model contributed to leadership development by building knowledge, skills and a personal sense of accomplishment to make a social impact. Youth and staff were partners in decision making and collaborated to develop a shared vision for the council. Authentic youth-adult partnerships are an innovative approach to youth programming that empower young people by providing ownership and meaningful ways to contribute.

Developing relationships with likeminded people around a shared vision fosters a sense of civic duty. Youth council members valued the opportunity to connect with new people with whom they could share their perspectives and find common ground. Community engagement involves a commitment to civil society and the research highlighted the importance of starting this process early. The YWCA Youth Advisory Council offered such an opportunity because of its focus on a specific social issue, gender equality, around a community-based project, the YWCA youth conference.

The secondary research question aimed to identify how five other YWCA Strong Girls, Strong World projects performed. However, the YWCA Halifax was the only project that agreed to participate outside of the YWCA Metro Vancouver. Therefore, it was challenging to garner enough data to support this segment of the research. Findings from this group were considered when exploring the topic of intersectionality in the recommendations.

Recommendations

1. Establish the YWCA Youth Advisory Council as a permanent program
2. Enhance opportunities for youth council members to develop leadership skills
3. Expand approaches to media literacy programming
4. Build youth council members' knowledge of advocacy
5. Incorporate content on hypermasculinity into youth advisory council programming
6. Integrate youth advisory council programming into relevant YWCA programs and service areas

Conclusion

The YWCA Youth Advisory Council works towards the organization's vision of achieving gender equality by teaching young people how to use media literacy as a tool to combat sexualization of women and girls. The literature review and interviews showed that the program was successful in empowering members to become agents of change. The youth council offered members with the opportunity to build knowledge and apply skills, ultimately developing confidence in their ability to make a social impact. The research provides a series of six recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of the YWCA Youth Advisory Council and offers tactics on how to work on each recommendation over the short, medium and long term. The next page features a table of contents outlining the framework of this research project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	i
Research Questions	i
Literature Review	i
Methodology	ii
Findings and Discussion	iii
Recommendations	iv
Conclusion	iv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Project Client	1
Project Objectives	1
Context	2
Research Questions	2
Organization of Project Report	3
CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND	4
Sexualization of Girls and Women	4
Advocacy Approaches	5
CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW	7
Empowerment Theories	7
Psychological Empowerment	7
Civic Engagement	7
Youth Empowerment and Engagement	8
Integration and Collaboration	9
Media Literacy	10
Summary	11
CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY	13
Sample	13
Recruitment	14
Instrument	14
Interviews	14
Analysis	15

Limitations	15
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS	16
Introduction	16
Group One and Two.....	16
Background	16
Experiences with Leadership.....	17
Media Literacy and Gender Learnings	17
Empowerment and Leadership Development.....	18
Group Three	19
Background	19
Youth Council Perspectives	19
Leadership and Empowerment.....	19
Enhancing YWCA Youth Programs	19
Group Four	20
Background	20
Project Focus, Skills Building and Empowerment	20
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION.....	21
Media Literacy	21
Empowerment	23
Civic Engagement	24
Leadership Development	25
Summary	26
CHAPTER 7: RECOMMENDATIONS	28
CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION	32
REFERENCES	33
Appendix 1: Interview groups and questions	37

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In Canada, women and girls are most affected by gender inequality, compared to men and boys. This is demonstrated by higher rates of violence against women versus men, the gender pay gap where women earn less than their male counterparts, and unequal representation of women in senior positions across most sectors. According to Statistics Canada (2011) there is a higher percentage of university-educated girls versus boys (p. 8), yet lower rates of female participation in the labour force (Statistics Canada, 2015, p. 1). Girls and women are disproportionately sexualized in virtually all forms of media, contributing to increased mental health issues, reduced cognitive development and poor sexual health among young girls (American Psychological Association, 2010, pp. 21-24)

Gender inequality is largely based on beliefs and attitudes held and executed through institutions and systems. Advocacy is the practice of using information and exercising resources to influence systemic change (Thackery & Hunter, 2010, p. 575). Systemic structures that perpetuate inequality, such as government policies and school curricula, can be changed to reflect ideas and encourage behaviours that promote equality. Affecting change at a systemic level is an incremental process, which requires time, knowledge and commitment. To that end, building on the passions of youth by engaging them in successful social change efforts and equipping them with advocacy skills can create a generation of potentially enlightened policy makers and social change advocates (Thackery & Hunter, 2010, p. 575).

Project Client

The client is the YWCA Metro Vancouver, a charitable organization serving women and families through delivering services and advocating for systemic changes that support its vision of achieving women's equality (YWCA Metro Vancouver, 2015, p. 2). YWCA's youth education programs focus on the social and emotional learning of female and male youth transitioning to high school (YWCA Metro Vancouver, 2015, p. 22). Themes of the youth education programs include gender equality, body image, media literacy, sexual orientation, and ending violence against women. The program goals are to encourage respectful behaviour among youth, develop confidence and teach them about healthy relationships.

Project Objectives

The objectives of the research are to develop a framework for understanding and enhancing leadership development and advocacy training for youth participating in YWCA programs. The research will assess the effectiveness of the YWCA youth advisory council, identify key themes, trends and experiences of youth and deliver a set of recommendations that will

strengthen the YWCA Youth Advisory Council and YWCA youth education curriculum. The aim is to implement two of recommendations in the following year. This will be based on the scope and feasibility of the recommendations

Context

In 2014, the YWCA created the youth advisory council, consisting of eight boys and girls ages 16-21, to support and inform the organization's advocacy against the sexualization of girls and women. The group received skills building and leadership training to grow their knowledge and to develop and execute a youth-led conference on media literacy. The advocacy strategy is to engage youth early to learn about media literacy as a response to sexualization and prevent the development of harmful attitudes towards women and girls.

The youth advisory council provided the YWCA with an opportunity to work with young people interested in advocacy and engage them with the mission and vision of the organization. In 2015, the YWCA secured two-year funding for the youth advisory council through Status of Women Canada's Strong Girls, Strong World initiative, a national project to empower youth to become change-makers in their communities. The youth advisory council was rebranded as the YWCA Strong Girls, Strong World project. For the purpose of this report, the group will be interchangeably referred to as either the youth advisory council or the Strong Girls, Strong World project. YWCA Metro Vancouver is one of five YWCAs in Canada carrying out local Strong Girls, Strong World projects. All projects feature youth advisory councils and focus on leadership development and skills building with a focus on gender equality issues. The current YWCA Metro Vancouver youth advisory council consists of one returning member and eight new 16-21-year-old girls and boys. The group meets monthly to learn about gender related issues and develop skills and capacity to become advocates for social change.

Research Questions

The research project will examine the effect of the youth advisory council and identify to what extent it contributes to participants' leadership development and ability to advocate for social change. It will further examine five other Strong Girls, Strong World projects to ascertain potential opportunities for strengthening YWCA Metro Vancouver's Strong Girls, Strong World project. The research will answer the following questions:

1. To what extent does the Strong Girls, Strong World project contribute to youth leadership development and empower members to advocate for gender equality?
2. To what extent do the five additional YWCA Strong Girls, Strong World projects approach youth empowerment and measure success?

Organization of Project Report

The report has eight chapters, this introduction being chapter one. Chapter two provides background on the topic to set the context of why investing in young people to become change-makers is vital to the future of the social economy. Chapter three delivers a literature review on the topic and chapter four describes the methodology of the research. Chapter five reports on the findings of research and chapter six delivers a discussion of the research. Chapter seven offers recommendations for the YWCA Strong Girls, Strong World project. Chapter eight concludes the report.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

Addressing social challenges that disproportionately impact women, such as domestic violence, sexual assault, sexism, pay inequity and sexualization, is central to the YWCA vision of achieving equality. The organization tackles these issues through advocacy and program delivery and the Youth Education Programs are a core part of this work. Since 2005, the YWCA has run after-school programs for grade seven girls and boys across Metro Vancouver, which aim to support youth in making healthy, positive choices by providing them with peer-based mentorship opportunities and leadership skills development. These programs generally host 20-30 youth participants with 3-6 high school, university, college and adult facilitators. Facilitators lead workshops, role-play and deliver a community service component. The curriculum for the programs reflects experiences and challenges faced by grade 7 youth and is created by YWCA staff with the support of an education advisory committee. The objective of these programs is to enable the next generation to become empathetic and socially conscious citizens by developing healthy relationships and positive social and emotional skills (YWCA Metro Vancouver, 2015, p. 3).

Sexualization of Girls and Women

A strategic advocacy priority for the YWCA is to end the sexualization of young girls and women through public awareness about the negative impacts of sexualization on youth, and by working with youth to mitigate these impacts. The American Psychological Association (2010) defines sexualization on a continuum within four definitions: 1) the attribution of value to a person's physical appearance and sexual attractiveness at the cost of other characteristics, 2) equating narrowly defined physical attractiveness with being sexy, 3) objectification whereby a person is considered a sexual object for someone else, without their own ability for decision-making or critical thinking and, 4) when sexuality is wrongly imposed upon a person, for example a youth (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. 1). Consequences of sexualization for girls include the high prevalence of mental health issues such as eating disorders and self-harm, stunted cognitive development and engagement in risky sexual behaviour (American Psychological Association, 2010, pp. 19-25).

On a broader scale, sexualization is linked to increasing sexist attitudes, unhealthy relationships and the societal tolerance of violence against women (American Psychological Association, 2010, pp. 28-31). Portraying children sexually in advertising appears to be on the rise and Bartlett (2008) argues this is because everything in advertising is portrayed in a sexual manner and important consideration must be given to the connection between sexualization of girls and profit (p.109). The concept that sex sells is not new, however, the frequency, complexity and pervasiveness by which sexualization

occurs has increased, along with the pressure for young girls and women to be sexy (Bartlett, 2008, p. 110). Results from a study conducted by Starr and Ferguson (2012) where girls were asked to identify how they associate with certain dolls, some sexualized and others not, revealed girls as young as six years old associated with the sexualized dolls and felt the desire to be sexy (Starr & Ferguson, 2012, p. 463). High school age girls have reported increased pressure to send naked or sexually provocative photos of themselves to their male peers, trying to fulfill a sense of belongingness and acceptance (Palmer, 2012). It is not simply a matter of turning off the television or avoiding certain magazines. Social media and accessibility to the internet have permitted the bombardment off sexualized messages on youth, which perpetuate the idea that a woman's main source of value comes from her physical attractiveness and appearance (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. 27).

Media literacy delivers an opportunity to break through the complex sexualized messages present in contemporary media by deconstructing its economic, social and psychological implications on society. The YWCA Youth Education Programs' media literacy curriculum encourages critical thinking about dominant messages and narratives produced by media. The goal is to create empowered, active consumers who use an analytical lens to question who creates media messages and for what purpose (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. 34). While media literacy cannot be the only response to addressing social issues like sexualization and more broadly, gender inequality, it is an important tool when understanding media influence on dominant values, ideas and opinions (Brown, 1998, p. 47). Following the integration of media literacy components into YWCA Youth Education Programs and advocacy work in recent years, the YWCA Youth Advisory Council was created to pilot a more focused approach to working with youth. A main objective of the council is to empower a small group of young people to take action against sexualization by learning about media literacy, developing leadership skills and engaging with their communities on related issues. The YWCA youth conference on media literacy was developed to provide the youth council members with a platform to exercise their new-found knowledge and skills. It began as a YWCA staff-run event but soon grew into a youth-led initiative executed by the youth council members themselves. Developing confidence in one's own self-competency and efficacy is a key feature of empowerment (Zimmerman M., 2000, p. 708). Providing youth council members with the opportunity to lead a successful initiative was intended to build confidence, self-awareness and explore advocacy for social change.

Advocacy Approaches

Advocacy is a core function of the YWCA and the organization has three guidelines for selecting issues to advocate on: 1) connection to frontline service, 2) sound research to substantiate the issue and 3) organizational capacity. When advocating for systemic change like policy reform for example, the YWCA aims to identify a win-win with key

stakeholders, meaning, the organization does not take an adversarial approach and instead, looks for ways to ensure stakeholders have the opportunity to participate in solutions-based work. This method has its challenges and the organization places significant emphasis on developing relationships with influential stakeholders. Sometimes it means forgoing purist ideologies and understanding the need to compromise on certain issues. In relation to public awareness advocacy, the organization aims to empower change-makers instead of shame perpetrators. This could look like encouraging people to get informed on key issues and take positive action in their day-to-day lives. Grassroots advocacy is done at a program level, whereby the organization works with program participants to teach them how to advocate for themselves on issues that impact or matter to them and the youth advisory council is an example of how the YWCA is carrying out this approach. The most successful initiatives offer a combination of all three approaches.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the topics of empowerment, youth civic engagement and media literacy to identify how these topics interrelate and provide a basis for youth programming focused on gender equality. The review identifies empowerment theories and applications that promote youth civic engagement. A review of media literacy research provides context as to why teaching youth about media literacy is a key component in mitigating some of the negative impacts of skewed gender representations in media and advancing gender equality.

Empowerment Theories

Numerous studies examine empowerment theories and practices. In an examination of organizations, Duvall (1999) suggests managers cannot create empowerment for employees, rather it is an internal employee process of decision-making that leads to a sense of personal and professional achievement with one's own abilities (p. 207). In a community context, empowerment occurs through decision-making and influencing policies that positively impact members (Keiffer, 1984, p.10). Rappaport (1984) describes empowerment as a long term learning process of gaining personal mastery over one's own life and suggests that empowerment, like perception, is invisible and thus easier measured by its absence in the form of powerlessness, than as an observable phenomenon mainly because it affects people differently (p. 3).

Psychological Empowerment

A study by Çavus and Demir (2010) on the correlation between burnout and feelings of empowerment among nurses revealed a decrease in burnout when nurses had the opportunity to participate in their environment and shape work climate and culture (p. 68). Online activities can lead to a sense of empowerment as well. For example, research by Leung (2009) found that online content creation on blogs and social media websites about civic and community issues, was a catalyst for physiological empowerment because of the ease by which users could contribute thoughts and ideas to public discourse (p. 1343). Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz, and Checkoway (1992) identified three components of psychological empowerment: intrapersonal which relates to the perception of one's own ability to influence systems and environments that are important to them: behavioural which constitutes actions taken based on these self-perceptions and interactional, which is the connection between the intrapersonal and the behavioural. In addition to taking action to influence social and political environments the authors connect the behavioural component with participation in community initiatives and helping others (1992, p. 708).

Civic Engagement

Adler and Goggin (2005) describe civic engagement as a personal sense of duty to participate in community service or collective action to influence civil society or

participating in the electoral process, which extends beyond voting or working for a political party to registering as a candidate, campaigning and becoming an elected official (p. 238). Lin (2002) emphasizes the central role social capital plays in civic engagement, noting that investment in social relations produces political, economic and community benefits in the marketplace (p. 19). Putman (2000) characterizes social capital as informal relationships rooted in reciprocity and social trust, based on the idea that people are motivated to act in favour of an outside interest with the assumption that the favour will be returned (p. 20). Social capital supports participation in public policy advocacy and is a central factor of social cohesion (Klijnjin & Koppenjan, 2012, p. 588; Putnam R. , 1995, p. 66). Putnam (1995) considers strong networks and social capital to be a core component of effective civic engagement initiatives whereby individuals are encouraged to think collectively in terms of ‘we’ instead of ‘I’ (p. 66).

Youth Empowerment and Engagement

A key feature of the transition from childhood to adolescence involves participating in decision-making that teaches responsibility (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014, p. 216). A growing body of research suggests that engaging youth in community development activities – from conceptualization, governance, development, to execution, can have an empowering effect by reinforcing self-perceptions of capacity for systemic change (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014, p. 217; Christens & Peterson, 2012, p. 630; Rappaport, 1984, p. 4). Youth engagement contributes to a greater understanding of civil society, social responsibility and builds interpersonal skills (Smith, Peled, & Hoogeveen, 2013, p. 9). For youth who spend much of their time online, digital civic engagement is an effective approach to promoting participation in civil society because of its accessibility and opportunities to contribute self-generated content. Raynes-Goldie and Walker (2009) suggest that online platforms like blogs or social networking sites are precursors to encouraging physical action by providing youth with knowledge on social issues, connection to likeminded people and tools to use offline (p. 162). Creating a generation of young people who are interested in civic life can have positive impacts as they enter into the workforce and carry with them early experiences and knowledge of community development (Thackery & Hunter, 2010, p. 578).

To leverage the passions, ideals and expertise of young people, collaboration between youth and adults is essential. Adults involved in initiatives that actively engage youth are required to be open to new ways of working that include the co-development of project goals and outcomes and encourage power-sharing (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014, p. 229). Zeldin, Christens and Powers (2012) recommend youth-adult partnerships to increase civic participation and enhance community development initiatives (p. 386). Wheeler and Edlebeck (2012) suggest these types of partnerships represent a paradigm shift away from top-down approaches to working with young people and set the foundation for idea sharing, mentorship and a greater understanding of community needs and interests (p. 92). The

process of establishing youth-adult partnerships in program development and execution is an iterative cycle of action, reflection, dialogue and new action (Zeldin, Camino, & Mook, 2005, p. 126). The outcome can be relevant and compelling programming that resonates with youth. Through these partnerships, young people receive the structure and space to work on key issues as well as skills building opportunities that contribute to their leadership potential. At the same time, being at the table making decisions with adults about how to develop and execute community initiatives sets the foundation for psychological empowerment (Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz, & Checkoway, 1992, p. 708).

Early participation in social change efforts by youth promotes personal development, better decision-making, preparation for civil society development, and tolerance and respect for others (Lansdown, 2011, pp. 5-8). Youth engagement can also create a lifelong commitment to civic participation and contribute to enlightened public policy professionals later in life (Thackery & Hunter, 2010, p. 578). A study of student led Gay-Straight Alliances in American High Schools reported students felt empowered following participation in efforts to reconcile challenges for homosexual and transgender students, because students took part in creating new school policies and observed change taking place at a systemic level (Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Laub, 2009, p. 898). These findings are consistent with what Zimmerman et al. (1992) considered as key components to psychological empowerment (p. 798) and reinforce the idea that creating opportunities for youth to develop programs about social issues builds confidence in their abilities to influence social and political systems (Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz, & Checkoway, 1992, p. 708).

Integration and Collaboration

The new governance approach is a decision-making framework characterized by collaboration to address complex problems, engages multiple stakeholders in the policy process and is a key component of empowered organizations and groups (Evans & Wellstead, 2014, p. 9; Salamon, 2000, p. 1623). Zimmerman (2000) argues that empowered individuals, communities and organizations are interdependent parts of systemic change (p. 46). Rappaport (1984) posits that differing ideas and approaches based on a range of community and individual experiences produces innovative policy solutions (p. 4). Collaboration and divergent reasoning are valuable approaches to exploring solutions to social problems (Rappaport, 1984, p. 2; Zimmerman, 2000, p. 54).

In the organizational context, empowered employees are those with freedom to choose how they move towards organizational goals as well as the opportunity to contribute their unique ideas and approaches (Duvall, 1999, p. 208). Diversity is a key feature of empowered teams and can positively impact productivity when people with different backgrounds and experiences participate in organizational decision-making. For example, a study on corporate governance found that diversity of board directors was correlated with

effectiveness in oversight, particularly in times of organizational conflict (Erhardt, Werbel, & Shrader, 2003, p. 109).

Media Literacy

A ten-year study carried out by the American Psychological Association's Task-Force Against Sexualization of Women (2010) suggests women are sexualized in virtually all forms of media (p. 3), contributing to gender inequality through the development of sexist attitudes and societal tolerance of violence against women (pp. 21-26). At an individual level, a study by Pasha and Golsheko (2009) found that the internalization of narrow body ideals is a leading cause of body dissatisfaction among young women (p. 1730). Research by Bartlett (2008) links sexualization to increasing mental health issues and stunted cognitive functioning among girls (p. 39). The misrepresentation of women in media is a contributing factor to distorted views of reality, particularly relating to women and men's roles in society. For example, in popular television and movies, women are often depicted as passive, sexualized, dependent and with a story line linked to a man whereas male leads are portrayed as powerful, sexually aggressive and hypermasculine (Flicker, 2003, pp. 311-312; Wood, 1994, p. 32).

The development of sexist attitudes and violence against women is present in the online context, where young people are spending much of their time, unmediated and without filters. A survey of elementary students across Canada, found that, despite 75% of respondents observing sexist content and behaviour directed at their peers or themselves, they felt the people posting sexist comments were just joking, did not mean to hurt anyone and while they did feel it was important to report it to an adult, they did not take steps to do so (Steeves V. , 2014, pp. 3-6).

Buckingham posits media has replaced family, church and school as the major socializing influence on society (Buckingham, 2013, p. 7). Media literacy is an area of study and practice currently used by educators to address the negative effects of media on youth. Media Smarts, the Canadian centre for media and digital literacy, advocates for early teachings on how media shapes ideas about attractiveness, sexuality and value, so youth can develop critical understandings of distorted gender representations (Media Smarts, 2016, para. 6). Berman and White (2013) suggest media literacy is a tool to mitigate harmful impacts of unrealistic media representations of women, such as lowered self-esteem, body dissatisfaction and decreased confidence (p. 38). The authors' evaluation of the Australian school-based media literacy program SeeMe, found media literacy curriculum developed collaboratively by educators and students was an effective approach to teaching critical media analysis skills (Berman & White, 2013, p. 40).

In addition to being a tool to mitigate the harmful impacts of media on young people, media literacy can also be a mechanism of self-expression through the creation of media (Smyth & Volker, 2013, p. 183). Luke (1999) describes media literacy as the process of reflecting on pleasure and satisfaction derived through selective media consumption (p. 623). Hobbs (1998) defines it as the ability to critically analyze and create media (p.16). Sholle and Denski (1995) suggest that effective media literacy approaches involve the inclusion of marginalized voices and the creation of space for new media producers and contributors (pp. 11-12). A study by Gill (2012) examining media literacy and young girls found that the link between developing media literacy skills and acting against or being protected from harmful media messages could have a disempowering effect because, despite having extensive vocabularies and understandings about media messages participants still did not feel better when confronted by sexual images of women; some reported feeling trapped because of the contradiction between what they knew and how they felt (p. 740).

Summary

Evidence suggests that empowerment is a psychological process experienced differently from person to person. It can occur through a sense of self-efficacy in personal decision making, being part of something larger than oneself, or by having the opportunity to improve one's surroundings. In these contexts, empowerment is a critical element of civic engagement. The research indicates that becoming empowered through participating in civic life rests on one's belief in one's ability to make a valuable contribution.

Young people are just beginning to identify themselves as actors within civil society and research shows that creating opportunities for youth to participate in projects relating to issues affecting them can have an empowering effect. The literature further illustrates that groups are more likely to have impact when they collaborate over a shared vision. In the context of youth programming, the establishment of partnerships between youth and adults is a promising approach to encourage youth to becoming civically minded and adds to the development of new ideas. Furthermore, programming that is co-created by youth resonates among young people.

A growing area of research relates to skewed gender representations in contemporary media and the impacts they have on young people. For example, the literature revealed that the sexualization of women in media perpetuates ideas that equate women's power with their desirability, physical attractiveness and sexuality. When youth internalize these messages, it can have harmful impacts on their development, such as body dissatisfaction, mental health issues and stunted cognitive functioning. On a societal level, sexualization contributes to the development of sexist attitudes, hinders equal opportunities for women and has an overall negative impact on gender equality.

Scholars and educators point to media literacy, that is teaching young people how to deconstruct media images and ideas, and develop critical thinking skills, as a method of mitigating some of the harmful impacts of sexualization. Although top-down approaches to media literacy programming are common, it is increasingly recognized that youth-adult partnerships are a more effective way to reach young people, while empowering them to see themselves as valuable contributors to community development.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted using a participatory action research methodology. This qualitative approach is characterized by collaborative, self-reflective inquiry that involves the researcher and research participants learning about their environments and eventually taking action to improve them (Baum, Macdougall, & Smith, 2006, p. 854). Participatory action research is based on education that encourages participants to critically think about systemic forces driving their own oppression, teaches approaches to change and ways of dealing with injustice (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, pp. 4-5). Cammarota and Fine (2008) further suggest that an asset of the methodology is that the researcher is an insider in the group he or she is researching, contributing to balancing power dynamics within the group since both researcher and research participants are stakeholders of the project (pp. 4-6).

A core objective of the youth advisory council is to empower youth to become advocates for gender equality by teaching media literacy skills and building leadership capacity among participants. This research aims to build an understanding of the extent to which empowerment occurred through participation in the youth council. The methodology complemented work being done to build knowledge about key themes of the youth council; media literacy and empowerment, by asking youth participants questions on these topics, fostering critical thinking. The research design enabled the researcher to hear personal accounts and learn about experiences of youth participants, and provided youth the opportunity to contribute to the future design of the program. Participants' feedback is expected to shape the recommendations which are intended to enhance the empowering effect of the program.

Sample

The research sample was identified through purposeful sampling which involves carefully selecting research participants who can provide information-rich data to support the research question (Emmel, 2014, p. 34). This approach was used because it supported the qualitative research methodology by selecting participants who could provide a deep understanding of the research topic. Participatory action research involves interviewing subjects who are in a position to reflect and learn, thus the sample had to represent direct experiences with the youth advisory council. The sample further required past and current council members because they could speak directly to experiences with the program as well as perspectives from staff involved in the program design and execution.

The sample included participants from four groups. Group one consisted of three former council members and group two included five current council members. Group three was made up of two YWCA Metro Vancouver staff responsible for delivering and designing YWCA youth programs. Group four consisted of the project coordinator from YWCA

Halifax where a similar program is offered. In total 24 individuals from four groups were invited to participate and 11 took part in the research.

Recruitment

Groups one and two were recruited through a private Facebook group accessible only to members of these groups. Communicating through this closed Facebook group streamlined the recruitment process by excluding youth involved in other YWCA programs. Facebook was also identified by YWCA staff as the primary way youth council members were communicating with each other about the program. The council co-chair was responsible for initially informing groups one and two about the research. The rationale was that members of these groups might feel more connected to the co-chair, who is a youth, increasing participation in the study. The co-chair posted a message on the Facebook page to 17 youth from groups one and two and eight agreed to participate. These members received a formal invitation letter which included the background, purpose, intention and process of the interviews.

Group two represented YWCA Metro Vancouver staff perspectives which were vital to the research because they provided context and background of the design, goals and objectives of the YWCA youth programs. The researcher verbally asked the two members to participate and they agreed.

Status of Women Canada federally funds five YWCA youth councils across Canada and understanding how these local projects empowered youth would provide valuable comparisons to Vancouver's project. The researcher invited all five regional coordinators to participate by email and one agreed to take part. The participant from YWCA Halifax, made up group four.

Instrument

A semi-structured, 30-minute open-ended interview was used with a set of questions created in advance. Group one and two had the same set of questions and group three and four had similar questions (see Appendix 1 for an interview guide with interview outline, group details and interview questions). The interviewer recorded the interviews and transcribed them directly afterwards to limit interruptions and build a connection with research participants.

Interviews

The researcher conducted interviews with 11 participants from the four different groups. Prior to conducting interviews, the researcher reviewed the details of the research, how it would be used and stored and obtained verbal consent from 10 participants. One interview subject was a minor and provided a signed consent from a parent. The interviews maintained a conversation-style flow which was useful in attaining information-rich data,

particularity with youth participants who could express themselves somewhat freely. The method allowed participants to openly discuss their experiences and insights and provided the researcher with the liberty to follow topical trajectories as they arose (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006, para 1-2).

Analysis

Thematic analysis was applied to transcribe and analyze the interviews. This method involves examining themes relevant to the research question to identify relations or patterns. Because thematic analysis identifies patterns in the data, it is useful when exploring qualitative information where responses can be varied and are subjective (Braun & Clark, 2006, pp. 6-8). The researcher took an inductive approach to the analysis and established themes as they emerged, rather than defining them a priori. Findings were then compared amongst participants to determine commonalities relating to empowerment, media literacy and gender equality. This method enabled the researcher to condense wide-ranging raw data into a summarized format and explore correlations between data and research objectives in a transparent, verifiable manner (Thomas, 2006, p. 238).

Limitations

The sample size of the research is small and does not guarantee a complete representation of experiences with the project by youth advisory council members which limits the information that was available. However, given the research project is being conducted for the YWCA Metro Vancouver about a two-year-old initiative, the number of people who have participated or been involved with the program is relatively small.

The presence of the researcher during the interviews may have affected participants' responses because they could have felt limited or intimidated by the topics being discussed. To mitigate this issue, the researcher provided a framework of questions to participants in advance to ensure they had a sense of what they would be asked. As well, the open-ended questions and conversation-style flow of the interviews created an environment where participants could freely express themselves.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

Introduction

This research examines themes of empowerment, media literacy, and youth engagement to determine to what extent the YWCA Youth Advisory Council empowers members to become advocates for gender equality. The research objective is to develop a framework for understanding and enhancing leadership development and advocacy training for youth participating in YWCA programs. The YWCA Metro Vancouver has a vision of achieving gender equality. Working with youth during transitional periods in their lives is a key service area of the organization. Program goals involve developing knowledge about healthy relationships, positive body image, and an understanding of how media representation informs one's ideas about gender. To that end, the work of the YWCA youth advisory council aims to empower youth, by building leadership skills and knowledge, to become the next generation of change-makers.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of 11 interviews with research participants from four different groups. It delivers personal accounts and experiences gathered by the researcher through asking similar questions to compare results. Findings are presented within their groups and further categorized by topics of inquiry related to the research question. Group one and two consist of former and current program participants and findings reflect direct experiences with the program and are categorized together. Group three and four represent staff perspectives and present best practices, challenges and observations relating to YWCA youth programs in Metro Vancouver and Halifax respectively.

Group One and Two

Background

Group one consisted of five current youth advisory council members, two males and three females. One male was in grade 12 and the other was in third year university. One female was in grade 12 and two were in second year university. All of the youth were visible minorities, four were born in Canada and one immigrated from Ethiopia as a child. All participants live in Metro Vancouver, two in Vancouver, two in Richmond and one in Surrey. Group two was made up of three former youth advisory council members, two males and one female who participated in the youth advisory council one cohort ago. Since participating two members have graduated high school and are in first year university. The remaining male is in second year university. Two members are visible minorities, living in Vancouver and the third is Caucasian living in Vancouver.

Experiences with Leadership

Of the eight participants in these groups, seven had experience with leadership activities. For example, half of them were involved in high school and university student councils. One was a sports team captain throughout high school and the remaining youths participated in volunteer activities outside of their schools with neighbourhood houses and volunteer groups focussed on social justice. Following participation with the youth advisory council, one youth became involved with municipal government through a university project on civic engagement and provided a student perspective to Vancouver City Council during the transit plebiscite in 2015. This youth reported feeling empowered by the process of working with local government. The remaining youth that had no leadership experience until participating in the youth council and reported considering herself as a late-bloomer. She became interested in the YWCA youth advisory council because of its focus on media literacy and gender issues.

Media Literacy and Gender Learnings

All the youth participants reported being part of the YWCA as well as the focus of on media and gender issues, as main reasons for joining the youth council. One member considered media as a key institution that teaches values and beliefs and informs the way people think about the world. She felt that understanding media literacy was an important part of developing ideas about gender roles. Two youth noted that high school curriculum does not adequately teach students about the impacts of media representation on ideas about gender and considered media literacy as an important element of modern day social studies. None were aware of any similar program like the YWCA youth advisory council, throughout their networks.

Six out of eight participants reported sexualization and hypermasculinization as new concepts they were unfamiliar with prior to joining the council, being unaware of a link between media representations of women and gender equality. They reported feeling confused with media depictions of women in relation to empowerment. For example, two female participants raised reality star Kim Kardashian as a popular figure in the media and were confused with how she portrayed herself as an empowered woman yet was highly sexualized. They had not discussed these issues at school or with friends with a high level of detail and reported gaining new knowledge through the youth council, including vocabulary and ideas that helped them to deconstruct media messages such as these.

Two participants had studied media literacy in school, one in high school and the other in a first-year university course. The university student learned about sexualization and understood some of its impacts but reported a knowledge gap about hypermasculinization. She was pleased to learn about how these issues corresponded and particularly appreciated the study of intersectionality, whereby elements such as race, culture, and socioeconomic

background influenced how media represented certain groups differently. One male youth was not familiar with the term intersectionality prior to joining the youth council. He felt this enhanced his media literacy skills and gave him ways to describe his thoughts and feelings towards skewed media representations of men. Two female participants reported a deeper interest in hypermasculinization which they felt did not get as much attention as hypersexualization, both in media as well as in the program. One participant reported feeling depressed after learning about sexualization and hypermasculinization in relation to media literacy because she felt powerless to do anything about it. She reported conflicting messages by media, for example the new Ghost Busters movie which was both applauded and criticized for having an all-female cast. She felt people were not ready to see women in these roles and pointed out that the film had a hypersexualized male character that overcompensated for a lack of sexualization of women in the film. She struggled with how to reconcile these contradictions. All participants reported not being able to relate to the majority of people they see in popular television and movies because few actors or media personalities looked or acted like them.

Empowerment and Leadership Development

All eight members felt empowered as a result of participating in the youth advisory council. For many, empowerment occurred as a result of delivering the YWCA youth conference on media literacy whereby members reported feelings of self-efficacy and enhanced confidence in their ability to speak about media literacy and related issues. One member said that after completing the youth conference she felt like so many more things were possible and successfully applied for a youth leadership volunteer position with Metro Vancouver. Another member reported having a safe space to talk about complex issues, observing people develop knowledge and apply learnings had an empowering effect on him. One young man felt the program was empowering because it combined informal roundtable discussions on media issues with structured leadership training. He also reported decision making relating to council meetings, workshops and conference details as an empowering element of the program. Three youth were connected with programs outside of the YWCA and delivered workshops about media literacy with support from YWCA staff. These youths found these experiences contributed to leadership and empowerment. Five youth reported building relationships with likeminded people as the catalyst for empowerment. All participants reported an interest to explore new volunteer opportunities where they could give back to their communities. Five out of eight expressed wanting to continue learning and delivering work related to gender equality and media.

Group Three

Background

Group three had two participants made up of staff working with YWCA youth programs. One was a female youth who coordinated the Strong Girls, Strong World youth council. The second was a male staff member who manages YWCA youth education programs.

Youth Council Perspectives

Both participants felt that the youth council filled an important gap in YWCA youth education programming because it targeted the 16 to 21-year-old age group which is not being served through other YWCA programs. The council's focus on media literacy and gender equality was another distinguishing characteristic of the program. Both participants pointed out that the after-school youth programs which work with grade seven boys and girls, focus on healthy relationships and encourage youth to make positive choices but only have one weekly module focussing on media literacy and sexualization. Both members reported youth participants were often keen to learn more about these topics but the format of the after-school programs does not allow for it.

Leadership and Empowerment

The coordinator observed youth opening up throughout the course of the program, and described the lightings talks exercise, which involved members delivering a short talk about something of interest to them relating to media literacy, as a chance for them to develop ideas and opinions while working on public speaking early on in the program. The youth education manager noted that this is an important component of leadership development. Both members observed youth council members gaining new knowledge. The coordinator said at the beginning of the program she could see council members were not comfortable to share personal experiences or ideas but as time progressed, members began to open up. She attributed this to increased knowledge about specific topics as well as the development of relationships within the group. She noted that council members would often say they had not thought of things this way until discussing them at the meetings. The coordinator felt that the round table format provided a safe space to talk about new topics with ease and room for questions. Offering the opportunity to chair meetings and deliver presentations added to personal leadership development by giving youth responsibility and ownership over meetings. Youth also were involved in the design and governance of the council which added to self-efficacy and empowerment.

Enhancing YWCA Youth Programs

The manager of the youth education programs felt that the youth council members were a valuable asset to the organization because they were closer to many of the issues grade seven youth are facing and thus, had the potential to contribute content to after school youth programs. For example, he noted that many of the workshop scenarios where youth

were asked to role play and problem solve daily challenges, could be enhanced through consultation with youth. He suggested consulting with the youth council members when developing curriculum for the after-school youth programs, to ensure content is relevant and applicable. He also noted that the council offers youth with a program to participate in after completing the after-school youth programs.

Group Four

Background

Group four had one member, a coordinator of the YWCA Halifax Strong Girls, Strong World project. She was selected as an interviewee to determine how YWCA Metro Vancouver might be able to enhance its project through learnings from other similar projects. The Halifax youth council was unique in that all of its members were young single mothers accessing YWCA housing services. These mothers were at risk of homelessness and living in poverty. The coordinator noted that this group was selected for the Strong Girls, Strong World project because the young women had leadership skills and potential but lacked the opportunity to focus on this area of their development due to challenges with poverty.

Project Focus, Skills Building and Empowerment

Unlike YWCA Metro Vancouver's project, this member's focus was not on media literacy. However, its overarching goal was to empower its members to become change-makers in their communities which is consistent with Vancouver's project objective. The coordinator noted that since this group is juggling many competing priorities and facing major life challenges related to poverty, the project initiatives had to be as accessible as possible. The first part of the program focussed on creating a dialogue space where members could talk about issues important to them such as racism, homophobia and police brutality. To build skills and knowledge, workshops were offered focussing on community engagement, advocacy, public speaking, communication and governance. They learned how to write a press release, develop advocacy strategies and use social media to raise awareness on systemic barriers to housing, employment and community support. The final part of the program involved the creation of a newsletter where they would talk about what they have learned and how it applies to their experiences of being young mothers living in poverty. The publication would be sent to shelters working with young mothers across Canada.

The coordinator noted that project participants felt empowered to talk about issues affecting them but were not enthusiastic about becoming change agents because they experience social justice issues personally and know firsthand the impacts of marginalization. They were eager and knowledgeable but at the same time felt powerless. Many participants could not complete the program because of time constraints and personal circumstances such as dealing with child protection services and the justice system.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

YWCA Metro Vancouver works towards its vision of achieving gender equality partly through engaging directly with youth. A key strategy is teaching young people about healthy relationships, positive body image, and community engagement. To that end, the YWCA youth advisory council's special focus on media literacy and gender aims to foster leadership and empower young female and male members to become an enlightened generation of change-makers. This chapter integrates the findings from Chapter 5 with the literature reviewed in Chapter 4 within the context of the research questions and project objectives.

The primary research question is:

To what extent does the Strong Girls, Strong World project contribute to youth leadership development and empower members to advocate for gender equality?

The sub-question is:

To what extent do the five additional YWCA Strong Girls, Strong World projects approach youth empowerment and measure success?

The chapter is organized into four sections based on themes from the findings in relation to the literature reviewed and background. These are media literacy, empowerment, civic engagement and leadership development. Each area has secondary themes that will be discussed in this chapter. The purpose of this analysis is to provide a framework to understand the value of the youth advisory council to the YWCA Metro Vancouver.

Media Literacy

The findings and literature considered media literacy a tool to lessen harmful impacts of sexualization on youth, pointing to early intervention as an effective strategy (Media Smarts, 2016, par 6). Findings showed that sexualization was a relatively new concept to youth, particularly in relation to gender equality notwithstanding the literature indicating the prevalence of sexualization in nearly every form of media (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. 3). Staff interview findings noted this could be because of complex terminology as well as the pervasiveness by which sexualized images are received through social media. Staff felt youth were desensitized to it yet had not developed skills to critically understand the impact it has on themselves and society. Some youth felt conflicted by media personalities and celebrities who emphasized their sexuality in relation to personal empowerment. The literature identified this as one of the four contexts in which sexualization occurs which involves media portrayals of women emphasizing desirability above all other characters as well as equating narrow definitions of beauty with sexiness,

depicting women as objects for others' use and wrongly imposing sexuality on children and youth (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. 1).

The study emphasizes the importance of learning critical thinking and analytical skills to deconstruct media messages. One youth considered media an institution that informs how people develop their worldview. She thought of media literacy as a way to understand and positively influence ideas about gender. Another youth explained how learning about media literacy enhanced his ability to describe his feelings about how media contributes to negative notions of masculinity. Many of the youth were visible minorities and felt that popular media personalities in television and movies did not reflect themselves or their peers, making it hard identify with anyone in popular culture. These findings are consistent with the literature reviewed which highlights the importance of media literacy approaches involving underrepresented populations (Sholle & Denski, 1995, pp. 11-12).

This project aims to assist the YWCA Metro Vancouver's advocacy work against sexualization by mitigating its impacts on youth, which include body dissatisfaction, eating disorders and depression (Pasha & Golshekoh, 2009, p. 1730; Berman & White, 2013, p. 38) as well decreased cognitive functioning (Bartlett, 2008, p. 39). Findings showed the youth council filled a service gap within the YWCA by targeting a specific age group with focussed learning on media literacy in comparison to YWCA after-school youth programs. In part, this is due to the comprehensive curriculum of the after-school youth programs that covers a range of topics beyond sexualization. Additionally, youth in these programs are in grade 7 which is younger than youth council members who range from 16-21 years old. Thus, content must meet a set of YWCA age appropriate guidelines and findings highlighted the focus on media literacy as a distinct feature of the program. Youth research participants felt the discussions which took place at council meetings about topics such as sexualization, hypermasculinization, intersectionality and social media, offered the opportunity to delve into these interrelated issues while at the same time develop critical thinking skills about these topics. The findings revealed a keen interest in the topic of hypermasculinity and the role the media plays on boys and men. Although this subject was not identified in the literature consulted, many youth participants suggested increasing opportunities to talk about hypermasculinization at YWCA meetings, particularly in relation to how boys and men are uniquely affected. However, one youth interviewee felt powerless when confronted with sexualized images despite learning about media literacy, because of media's driving market forces that seem impossible to influence. This particular finding was consistent with research presented by Gill (2012) whereby enhanced critical thinking skills among young girls still resulted in feelings of disempowerment when they were shown sexualized images of women (p. 740).

Empowerment

One of the goals of this project is to discover the extent to which youth council members are empowered to become agents of change in their communities. For a number of youth, feelings of empowerment occurred when planning and delivering the YWCA youth conference on media literacy. Youth created workshops and executed presentations to their peers about media and gender equality. Several authors suggested that providing opportunities for young people to build capacity for systemic change through participating in community development activities, from concept through to completion, can lead to feelings of empowerment (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014, p. 217; Christens & Peterson, 2012, p. 630; Rappaport, 1984, p. 4). Zimmerman, Israel, Schulz, & Checkoway (1992) literature presented on psychological empowerment theory connected empowerment with participation in community initiatives, helping others and being engaged in civic life (p. 798).

For youth to feel like real agents of change, they must believe they are capable leaders. Both the findings and literature agreed that building confidence and reinforcing self-efficacy are key elements of empowerment (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 708). Findings showed media literacy education and public speaking training enhanced the youths' leadership development by building knowledge and skills. Decision making was also mentioned in the findings and literature as a core element of empowerment. One youth mentioned that it was the first time he participated in an initiative about a social issue where youth had an equal say to adult staff in how things were run. He felt that the YWCA provided the space and structure, but coming up with ideas and content was the youths' job, which was empowering for him. Another youth said that after finishing the conference, she felt capable and excited to keep giving back to her community. These findings are consistent with the literature which link influencing systems and environments for greater social good with feelings of empowerment (Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Laub, 2009, p. 898). Youth reported feeling empowered because they had ownership over the council, through shaping the culture and participating in governance while working towards the goal of the conference. This follows the literature which made the link between organizational empowerment and shaping culture and climate, contributing ideas, and working towards a shared vision (Duvall, 1999, p. 208; Çavus & Demir, 2010, p. 68).

The secondary research topic aimed to determine how YWCA Metro Vancouver might adopt best practices used by other YWCA youth councils across Canada that are implementing similar projects. Of five Strong Girls, Strong World projects operating across Canada, YWCA Halifax was the only one to take part in the study. While this low participation presented challenges in addressing this segment of the research topic, YWCA Halifax did offer some useful insights about the intersection between poverty, trauma and empowerment. Halifax operates a unique model of a youth council. The member from this

research group described how the project was structured to empower young mothers at risk of homelessness to become change-makers by teaching advocacy, communications, governance, and approaches to social change. The literature coincided, noting that providing opportunities for young people to develop tools and knowledge about social issues while connecting with likeminded people can lead to social action (Raynes-Goldie, 2008, p. 162). The interviewee reported that the intention with this project was to build capacity among the young mothers as ambassadors for systemic change rooted in their own experiences with marginalization. Thackery and Hunter (2010) suggested that individuals who draw on early experiences with community development can have positive impacts as they enter the workforce later on (p. 578).

The findings revealed members of this group were not empowered to lead change efforts despite their work on the youth council. The interviewee attributed this result to two things. Firstly, meeting basic needs such as food and shelter presented a series of continuous obstacles that made it hard for these young women to think about systemic change. Second, many of the young women reported a general distrust of political systems because of the ongoing challenges they experienced with the various systems they interacted with regularly. The literature reviewed did not examine how empowerment and civic engagement are impacted by poverty and trauma. The findings discovered that empowerment occurred for a few women when developing a resource for homeless shelters serving young mothers. The member of this group concluded that council members were more motivated to support other women with similar life experiences rather than to understand and possibly create systemic change.

Civic Engagement

This project is concerned with how to turn youth into active citizens. The transition to adolescence is a period when a sense of civic duty can be developed, through increased responsibility and decision making about one's own life (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014, p. 216; Adler & Goggin, 2005, p. 238). Both the findings and literature reflected extensively on youth civic engagement, making the connection between building confidence and knowledge about social responsibility with increased engagement in civil society (Smith, Peled, & Hoogeveen, 2013, p. 9, Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Laub, 2009, p. 898.)

Relationship building was identified in the findings and literature as an important element of civic engagement. Youth valued the opportunity to connect with likeminded people focussed on social issues and felt like they were part of something bigger which motivated them to explore new volunteer opportunities. This finding coincided with Putnam (1995), suggesting that social capital centered on community development fosters collective thinking for the greater good (p. 95). Smith et al. (2013) highlighted the link between youth engagement and enhanced interpersonal skills (p. 9) which was also reported in the findings

when youth talked about growing confidence to share their opinions at council meetings and connect with their peers on new topics of interest. The literature consulted on social capital and civic engagement described the community benefits, such as public trust, advocacy and social cohesion, that emerge through the development of strong networks (Klinjin & Koppenjan, 2012, p. 588; Putnam R. , 1995, p. 66; Lin, 2002, p. 19).

The findings revealed that a number of youth became involved in new civic engagement initiatives after serving on the youth council. These activities produced outcomes consistent with the literature on civic engagement which relate to tolerance, personal development and decision making (Lansdown, 2011, pp. 5-8). One youth said that after he left the youth council, he successfully applied to lead the student-run executive committee at the UBC School of Business and Computer Science. Another became a youth ambassador for municipal government during the 2016 British Columbia transit plebiscite. These examples, although not specifically focussed on gender equality, point to an ongoing engagement with community and civic life which is consistent with research that suggested the positive impacts that might come with a generation of young people engaged in civil society early on (Thackery & Hunter, 2010, p. 578).

Leadership Development

One of the objectives of this research is to develop a framework for understanding and enhancing leadership development and advocacy training for youth participating in YWCA programs by assessing the effectiveness of the YWCA youth advisory council. A theme that emerged throughout the findings and literature review relates to youth-adult partnerships. Both the findings and literature on empowerment showed participating in decision making, program design and execution of a successful community initiative contributes to empowerment and can create a lifelong commitment to community development (Lansdown, 2011, pp. 5-8; Thackery & Hunter, 2010, p. 578). The literature also highlighted the value of collaboration between youth and adults when designing and delivering youth programs, describing this approach as a paradigm shift away from top-down program models, to foster new and innovative perspectives on community challenges while providing mentorship opportunities (Wheeler & Edlebeck, 2006, p. 92). The findings and literature made the connection between youth-adult approaches and increased civic engagement (Zeldin, Christens, & Powers, 2012, p. 386).

The research explored leadership development in relation to the governance structure of the council which positioned youth as decision makers. Youth and staff interviewees reported the youth-led framework of the council to be an asset of the program because council members were involved in governance, selecting and developing content and program design. These activities are consistent with the literature reviewed on youth-adult partnerships that emphasized the importance of power-sharing and co-development of program outcomes (Blanchet-Cohen & Brunson, 2014, p. 229). A key component of this

project is to explore to what extent youth council members developed leadership skills. Staff interviewees reported that the youth-led approach built capacity among council members by providing them with a range of skills that contributed to leadership. Youth appreciated the opportunity to select which topics they would learn about and present to the larger community. Both the findings and literature agreed that this level of ownership and investment had an empowering effect.

The literature highlighted the new governance approach which involves collaboration between multiple stakeholders to explore and produce innovative solutions to complex social problems (Rappaport, 1984, p. 2; Zimmerman, 2000, p. 54). While it was mainly described in a policy context, new governance was applied to the youth council whereby members provided valuable insights into how young people are interacting with media. The findings emphasized the importance and value of integrating youth perspectives into YWCA programming. For example, staff reported youth were more in tune with emerging trends on social media and would speak candidly at meetings about how online interactions affected them.

Summary

Sexualization and hypermasculinization represent corresponding factors that contribute to the development of problematic notions of gender in society. The research confirmed that teaching media literacy to youth can mitigate harmful impacts associated with these issues, including low self-esteem, body dissatisfaction and depression. On a larger scale, distorted media representations contribute to the development and normalization of sexist attitudes. YWCA Metro Vancouver's youth advisory council offers an opportunity for youth to build knowledge and participate in community initiatives to address these issues. Findings showed youth were not exposed to media literacy programs in the high school context, nor did they engage with their peers on this topic. Youth reported gaining knowledge about the connection between sexualization and gender inequality as a defining feature of the program. On the surface, youth had thought about these topics, but lacked knowledge and opportunities to discuss them with peers and inform their opinions. To that end, media literacy and gender were motivating factors to join the council and confirm the need in Metro Vancouver for such a program. Staff interviewees felt the YWCA Metro Vancouver was well positioned to offer this program because of the organization's long standing history working with youth as well as its focus on gender equality and civic engagement. Staff also felt it filled a service gap within the organization by targeting late-high school and university aged youth with a social focus on media literacy.

Community engagement gives young people the opportunity to build and apply leadership skills and consider their role within larger civil society. The literature suggested that gaining responsibility is a key characteristic of the transition to adolescence and programs where youth can exercise decision making power support this period of development. The

findings revealed that skills building around the media literacy conference provided a particular opportunity to engage with community on what the youth had learned and apply their new skills. Staff observed leaders emerge during this process and suggested the ongoing focus on the media literacy conference acted as a mechanism for youth to understand how media literacy, leadership, empowerment and community engagement can interact.

The YWCA Halifax youth advisory council delivered an alternative model of the Strong Girls, Strong World project, whereby participants were dealing with issues interrelated with poverty and trauma. The staff member from this project suggested that for these young women, systemic change was not a motivator to participate. The research did not highlight the intersections of trauma and poverty with feelings of empowerment. Given the lack of participation by other Strong Girls, Strong World projects, it will be difficult to develop recommendations for best practices based on these other projects. However, one possibility would be to increase understanding of intersectionality on the YWCA Metro Vancouver youth council, whereby themes of poverty and trauma are examined in the context of media representation. In fact, intersectionality was identified by the youth as a new and interesting concept they were keen to learn more about.

The goal of the council was to create a group of empowered, civically minded young people equipped with leadership skills. The experiences reported by youth relating to empowerment are consistent with the research on psychological empowerment. For example, the interactional element of psychological empowerment, whereby building networks for action based on common interests was supported by findings that youth felt empowered through engaging with peers and learning about media literacy. The findings and literature confirmed that providing youth with the opportunity to participate in a successful initiative, contributed to personal empowerment and increased civic engagement. Providing decision making and program design opportunities resulted in the development of leadership skills, confidence, and self-efficacy to make a difference.

CHAPTER 7: RECOMMENDATIONS

This project examined to what extent the YWCA Youth Advisory Council contributed to experiences of empowerment and leadership among members. The objective was to determine if participation in the council affected members' capacity for civic engagement. Findings showed empowerment occurred when youth had the opportunity to build knowledge and take part in initiatives where they could apply media literacy and leadership skills and see projects through from start to finish. These findings are consistent with the literature review which noted that increased confidence and self-efficacy leads to empowerment.

The Youth Advisory Council is a two-year project funded by Status of Women Canada and will be completed in spring 2017. The findings showed that the program was a positive experience for youth participants and was well positioned to carry out the organization's advocacy work against sexualization of women and girls by working directly with youth on the topic. A set of six recommendations are presented based on the literature review, research findings and discussion. Recommendations focus on enhancing the impact of the YWCA Youth Advisory Council as a mechanism for creating knowledgeable, civically minded youth between 16-21 years old. The recommendations are organized in order of importance. Proposed implementation time frames are either short term (one year), medium term (two years) or long term (three years).

1. Establish the YWCA Youth Advisory Council as a permanent program:

Short term

- a. Present research findings and discussion to YWCA Board of Directors, management team and key staff.

- b. Develop master project plan for YWCA youth advisory council to include:
 - i. Goals and objectives
 - ii. Outcomes
 - iii. Budget
 - iv. Timeline
 - v. Evaluation framework

The current project framework was created for the project funder, Status of Women Canada. YWCA Associate Director overseeing youth advisory council would create an updated master project plan to reflect how the organization would carry out the Youth Advisory Council program within its own systems.

Short term

- c. Explore new funding opportunities for the youth council.

2. Enhance opportunities for youth council members to develop leadership skills:

Short term

- a. Invite youth to deliver workshops to YWCA youth education staff in preparation for the YWCA youth conference. Practicing these presentations offers youth the opportunity to work on public speaking and presentation skills to an audience of YWCA staff who can provide constructive, meaningful feedback.

Medium term

- b. Identify avenues for youth to deliver presentations on media literacy through:
 - i. External partnerships with schools, neighbourhood houses and youth-serving organizations.
 - ii. Send regular program updates to these stakeholders by email and through social media to keep them informed of program activities and generate interest in collaborating.
 - iii. Partner with existing YWCA youth and mentorship programs.
- c. Provide opportunities for youth to present to YWCA donors about benefits of the program. This can build confidence among youth by talking about successful initiatives they participated in, while at the same time engage donors who might be interested in funding the program.

3. Expand approaches to media literacy programming:

Short term

- a. Continue to deliver YWCA youth conference on media literacy and explore new themes such as intersectionality between sexualization, race and gender, social media and digital safety.

These new topics will build knowledge among both youth council members as well as conference attendees about various instances where sexualization occurs, its impacts and ways media literacy can mitigate harm.

Medium term

- a. Incorporate a youth-created media project into the program.
 - i. Research youth-created media, such as social media campaigns, videos and zines, as an effective tool of civic engagement.

- ii. Explore partnerships with local media and digital agencies to assist with media creation such as video, zines and graphics for social media.
- iii. Provide youth council members the opportunity to create their own media with a focus on media literacy and gender equality.
- iv. Disseminate media through YWCA social network channels, marketing and communications materials.

4. Build youth council members' knowledge of advocacy:

Medium term

- a. Research advocacy approaches with a special focus on youth civic engagement. Include youth council members in the process by conducting focus groups with council members about their experiences with advocacy.
- b. Develop and deliver training to youth council about various approaches to advocacy, based on research findings and current best practices.
- c. Support youth to create a workshop about advocacy for youth conference.

5. Incorporate content on hypermasculinity into youth advisory council programming:

Medium term

- a. Research hypermasculinity and deliver training for youth focussing on:
 - i. Media representations and men
 - ii. Social norms of masculinity
 - iii. Impacts on men and boys
 - iv. Impacts on women and girls
- b. Offer youth council members the opportunity to present on the topic at a council meeting through a short talk or media analysis activity.
- c. Staff and youth council members co-develop workshop about hypermasculinity for youth conference.

6. Integrate youth advisory council programming into relevant YWCA programs and service areas:

Medium term

- a. Review after-school youth education curriculum and identify opportunities for youth council members to provide suggestions. For example, invite council members to develop scenarios for after-school youth programs' content on media literacy, body positivity and self-expression.

- b. Create media literacy content for YWCA blog and organizational social media channels based on ideas created by youth advisory council members.

Long term

- c. Develop programming content about the impact of poverty and trauma on feelings of empowerment. Include discussions about privilege and intersectionality into this topic area.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

Youth are the future and they hold the power to one day tackle the complex, interrelated social challenges facing civil society. Creating a generation of civically-minded young people requires fostering a personal sense of duty to play a role in improving people's lives. Instilling this duty should start early through providing opportunities to participate in successful initiatives with a social impact. These initiatives can build confidence and self-efficacy and lead to empowerment.

This research found that the YWCA Youth Advisory Council empowered its members to see themselves as change-makers within their communities. A goal of the youth council is to build knowledge around how sexualization of women and girls is perpetuated by media, and position media literacy as a tool to mitigate the impact of sexualization on young people. The project presented six recommendations focussing on two areas. First, establishing the youth council as a permanent fixture within YWCA youth and advocacy programs. Second, suggesting ways to enhance youth council programming to optimize learning around media literacy and civic engagement.

Findings and the literature revealed the importance of considering the intersectionality of issues relating to sexualization, such as race, socioeconomic status and gender. Hypermasculinity and media was also identified in the findings as an area of interest among youth which aligns with the YWCA's advocacy work building public awareness on this topic. The literature consulted focused on approaches to media literacy and noted that offering ways to create media is an effective form of media literacy. This has not been a feature of the youth advisory council to date, presenting an opportunity to expand programming and enhance youths' knowledge.

Learning about civic engagement and approaches to advocacy can also leverage the existing programming of the youth council and contribute to the goal of equipping youth with tools and knowledge that build leadership capacity and encourage community engagement. The YWCA's work with youth is vital to its vision of achieving gender equality by empowering young people to see themselves as effective actors within civil society.

REFERENCES

- Adler, R., & Goggin, J. (2005). What Do We Mean By “Civic Engagement”? *Journal of Transformative Education*, 236-253.
- American Psychological Association. (2010). *Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls*.
- Ansell, C., & Gash, A. (2007). Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 543 - 571.
- Bartlett, M. (2008). Teaching Media: Sex Sells: Child Sexualization and the Media. *Screen Education* , 106 - 112.
- Baum, F., Macdougall, C., & Smith, D. (2006). Participatory action research. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 854–857.
- Berman, M., & White, A. (2013). Refusing the Stereotype: Decoding negative gender imagery through a school-based media literacy program. *Youth Studies Australia*, 38-47.
- Bish, R. L., & Clemens, E. G. (2008). *Local Government in British Columbia*. Richmond: Union of British Columbia Municipalities.
- Blanchet-Cohen, N., & Brunson, L. (2014). Creating settings for youth empowerment and leadership: An ecological perspective. *Child & Youth Services*, 216-236.
- Braun, V., & Clark, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*.
- Brown, J. A. (1998). Media Literacy Perspectives. *Journal of Communication*.
- Buckingham, D. (2013). *Media Education: Literacy, Learning and Contemporary Culture*. Malden: John Wiley & Sons.
- Cammarota, J., & Fine, M. (2008). *Revolutionizing Education: Youth Participatory Action Research in Motion*. New York City: Routledge.
- Çavus , M. F., & Demir, Y. (2010). The Impacts of Structural and Psychological Empowerment on Burnout: A Research on Staff Nurses in Turkish State Hospitals. *Canadian social science*.
- Christens, B., & Peterson, N. (2012). The Role of Empowerment in Youth Development: A Study of Sociopolitical Control as Mediator of Ecological Systems’ Influence on Developmental Outcomes. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 623-635.
- Cohen, D., & Crabtree, B. (2006). *Qualitative Research Guidelines Project*. Princeton: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Retrieved from <http://www.qualres.org/HomeSemi-3629.html>
- Duvall, C. K. (1999). Developing Individual Freedom to Act. *Participation and Empowerment: An International Journal*, 204 - 212.
- Elections Canada. (2014). *National Youth Survey Report*. Retrieved from Elections Canada: <http://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=rec/part/nysr&document=br&lang=e>

- Emmel, N. (2014). Purposeful Sampling. In *Sampling and Choosing Cases in Qualitative Research: A Realist Approach* (pp. 33-44). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Erhardt, N., Werbel, J., & Shrader, C. (2003). Board of Director Diversity and Firm. *Corporate Governance: An International Review*, 102-111.
- Evans, B., & Wellstead, A. (2014). Tales of Policy Estrangement: Non-Governmental Policy Work and Capacity in Three Canadian Provinces. *Canadian Journal of Non-Profit and Social Economy Research*, 7-28.
- Flicker, E. (2003). Between Brains and Breasts—Women Scientists in Fiction Film: On the Marginalization and Sexualization of Scientific Competence. *Public Understanding of Science*, 307-318.
- Gill, R. (2012). Media, Empowerment and the 'Sexualization of Culture' debates. *Sex Roles*, 736-745.
- Hobbs. (1999). The seven great debates in the media literacy movement. *Journal of Communication*, 16-21. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1998.tb02734.x/abstract>
- Keiffer, C. (1984). Citizen Empowerment: A Developmental Perspective. In J. Rappaport, & R. Hess, *Studies in Empowerment: Steps Toward Understanding and Action*. New York: Routledge.
- Klinjin, E., & Koppenjan, J. (2012). Governance Theory: Past, Present and Future. *Policy and Politics*, 587-606 .
- Lansdown, G. (2011). *Every Child's Right to Be Heard: A Resource Guide on the UN Committee On the Rights of the Child General Comment NO. 12*. London: Save the Children UK.
- Leung, L. (2009). User-generated content on the internet: an examination of gratifications, civic engagement and psychological empowerment. *New Media & Society*, 1327 - 1347.
- Lin, N. (2002). *Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action*. North Carolina: Cambridge University Press.
- Luke, C. (1999). Media and Cultural Studies in Australia. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 622-626.
- Media Smarts. (2016, September 7). *Body Image: Introduction*. Retrieved from Media Smarts: Canada's Centre for Digital and Media Literacy: <http://mediasmarts.ca/body-image/body-image-introduction>
- Palmer, M. (Director). (2012). *Sext Up Kids: How Children are Becoming Hypersexualized* [Motion Picture].
- Pasha, G., & Golshekoh, F. (2009). Relationship Between Socio Cultural Attitudes, Appearance and Body Dissatisfaction among Students of Islamic Azad University. *Journal of Applied Sciences*, 1726-1732.
- Passy, F., & Giugni, M. (2001). Social networks and individual perceptions: Explaining differential participation in social movements. *Sociological Forum*, 16(1), 123-153.

- Putnam, R. (1995). Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital. *Journal of Democracy*, 65-78.
- Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of the American Community*. New York: Simon and Shuster .
- Rappaport, J. (1984). Introduction to the Issue. In J. Rappaport, & R. Hess, *Studies in Empowerment: Steps Towards Understanding and Action*. New York: Routledge.
- Raynes-Goldie, K. &.-1. (2008). Our space: Online civic engagement tools for youth. . *Civic life online: Learning how digital media can engage youth*, 161 - 188.
- Russell, S., Muraco, A., Subramaniam, A., & Laub, C. (2009). Youth Empowerment and High School Gay-Straight Alliances. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 891 - 903.
- Salamon, L. (2000). *The Tools of New Governance: A Guide to New Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sholle , D., & Denski, S. (1995). Chapter I: Critical Media Literacy: Reading, Remapping, Rewriting. Counterpoints. *Counterpoints*. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/stable/42974972>
- Smith, A., Peled, M., & Hooegeveen, M. (2013). *A Seat at the Table: A Review of Youth Engagement in Vancouver*. Vancouver, BC: McCreary Centre Society. Retrieved from http://mcs.bc.ca/pdf/A_Seat_at_the_Table2.pdf
- Smyth, E., & Volker, A. (2013). Media and the Moving Image: Creating Screen Media Literacy. In P. Chilsen, *Enhancing Instruction with Visual Media: Utilizing Video and Lecture Capture* (pp. 177-190). Hershey, PA.
- Starr, C. R., & Ferguson, G. (2012). Sexy Dolls, Sexy Grade-Schoolers? Media & Maternal. *Sex Roles*, 464 - 476.
- Statistics Canada. (2011). *Education in Canada: Attainment , Field of Study and Location of Study* . Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- Statistics Canada. (2015, 01 28). *Labour force characteristics by sex and age group*. Retrieved from Government of Canada: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/101/cst01/labor05-eng.htm>
- Steeves. (n.d.).
- Steeves, V. (2014). *Project these days so not up to much other than writing and hanging at home. I'm the puppy won't be a distraction at all ;)* . Ottawa: Media Smarts.
- Thackery, R., & Hunter, M. (2010). Empowering Youth: Use of Technology in Advocacy to Affect Social Change. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*.
- Thomas, D. (2006). A General Inductive Approach for Analyzing Qualitative Evaluation Data. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 237-246.
- Wheeler, W., & Edlebeck, C. (2006). Leading, learning, and unleashing potential: Youth leadership and civic engagement. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 89-97.
- Wood, J. (1994). Gendered Media: The Influence of Media on Views of Gender. In J. Wood, *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture* (pp. 231-244). Wadsworth Publishing.

- YWCA Metro Vancouver. (2015). *Strategic Plan*. Vancouver: YWCA Metro Vancouver.
- YWCA Metro Vancouver. (2015). *Strategic Plan 2016-2018*. Vancouver: YWCA Metro Vancouver.
- Zeldin, S., Camino, L., & Mook, C. (2005). The Adoption of Innovation in Youth Organizations: Creating Conditions for Youth-Adult Partnerships. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 121-134.
- Zeldin, S., Christens, B., & Powers, J. (2012). The Psychology and Practice of Youth-Adult Partnership: Bridging Generations for Youth Development and Community Change. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 385-397.
- Zimmerman. (2000). Empowerment Theory: Psychological, Organizational, and Community Levels of Analysis. In J. Rappaport, & E. Seidman, *Handbook of community psychology* (pp. 43-64). New York: Kluwer.
- Zimmerman, M., Israel, B., Schulz, A., & Checkoway, B. (1992). Further Explorations in Empowerment Theory: An Empirical Analysis of Psychological Empowerment. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 707 - 724.

Appendix 1: Interview groups and questions

Interview Outline

Each interview consisted of a one-on-one, 30-minute discussion with a brief introduction by the researcher about the interview format, data storage and transcription process. The interviews generally took 20-25 with time at the end for questions by research participants.

Interview Groups

Groups	Description	Number	Attendees	Notes
Group 1	Former YWCA youth advisory council members	3	TBD	gender mix of self-identified male and self-identified female youth ages 18-21
Group 2	Current YWCA youth advisory council members	5	TBD	gender mix of self-identified male and self-identified female youth ages 16-21
Group 3	YWCA youth education staff	2	TBD	deliver information about how Strong Girls, Strong World contributes to the vision of the YWCA
Group 4	YWCA Strong Girls, Strong World project coordinators	1	TBD	offer insight into the strategies carried out by other Strong Girls, Strong World projects to determine possible applications for YWCA Metro Vancouver

Interview Questions

Group One and Two

1. Can you tell me what experience you have had in the past with respect to leadership?
2. What are some activities you have been involved with during your time on the youth council that display leadership?
3. Reflecting back on what you have done, can you tell me a little bit about your experiences? Maybe you can tell me what you learned about yourself as a leader?
4. Since participating in the youth council, what topics or issues were you made more aware of?
5. How do you feel about your contribution in terms of social change? Do you feel more empowered? Less empowered? Is it the same?
6. Would you agree or disagree that media literacy is an important part of gender equality?

Group Three

1. Why does the YWCA run youth education programs?
2. How does this apply to the vision of the organization of achieving women's equality?
3. Why is youth programming important today when young people already have networks such as school and home to learn about the world around them?
4. Do you think it is important for youth to learn about advocacy? How do you know that they have learned what advocacy is?
5. How does creating a space for youth to learn about advocacy inform their knowledge about social change?
6. Does being involved in a youth-led initiative build leadership skills among youth?
7. Are peer-based models effective at supporting youths' leadership development?
8. How has the YWCA youth advisory council supported members' leadership development?
9. How has the YWCA youth advisory council built members' knowledge around social change?
10. How can learnings from the YWCA youth council be applied to the larger YWCA youth education programming?

Group 4

1. What are the initiatives your local project has undertaken?

2. How many youths are involved in your project?
3. What was the biggest challenge with starting your project?
4. Have you observed youth from your programs develop leadership skills? What are they?
5. How do you build leadership skills among youth in your programs?
6. How do you build knowledge among the youth in your programs?
7. Why is it important for youth to learn about advocacy?
8. Does being involved in a youth-led initiative build leadership skills among youth?
9. Are peer-based models effective at supporting youths' leadership development?