IGNITE THE LEADER WITHIN:
VIRTUAL LATINX YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AMID COVID-19

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ABSTRACT
Summer Youth Programs continue to grow as a way to provide alternative educational spaces for Youth of Color who are often framed in deficit ways and that position them as being "at-risk" or in need of assistance (Weiner, 2006; Brown, 2016). To address these perceived deficits, after school and summer programs have been created and funded to serve the needs of children and Youth of Color, in particular Latinxs and African Americans. The literature often centralizes a pathologizing narrative that Youth of Color need saving (Tuck, 2009) via Summer Youth Programs to "keep youth off the streets" and avoid delinquency (Baldridge, 2014). Recent scholarship points to the necessity to interrogate the underlying racialized discourse that permeates through summer youth programming towards one that acknowledges and centers youth agency, resiliency, and identity. This article presents findings from a study of Latinx youth that participated in a summer youth program hosted virtually through collaboration with the Prevention and Early Intervention Division of the Texas Department of Family & Protective Services, and two universities in Central Texas. Due to COVID-19, the summit was re-imagined virtually and strives to build and nurture a community of youth leaders. This qualitative study also examines and evaluates Latinx youth

participants' (ages 13 to 18) expectations of and experiences in the virtual summer youth summit. Our study questions included: 1) How do Latinx youth learn about leadership through an Online Youth Summit amidst COVID-19? And 2) How does the Youth Summit provide a (virtual) space to re-narrate Latinx youth leadership? Emerging findings indicate that Latinx youth were given opportunities to re-narrate leadership and activism, co-create networks and virtual connections with other Latinx and Black youth, and reflect on their own identities and community involvements.

Keywords: Latinx Youth, Youth of Color, Summer Youth Programs, Youth Leadership, COVID-19

Introduction

As of 2019, according to the Pew Research Center, Latinxs constituted approximately 18% of the total U.S. population (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020). Within the K-12 system, Latinx[1] students represent the largest minority population in the United States' western and southern regions, 41% and 21%, respectively (NCES, 2013). In a Latinx policy and issues brief published by UCLA's Chicano Studies Research Center, Pérez Huber and colleagues (2015) revealed that out of 100 Latinx students who begin at the elementary school level, only 63 Latinas and 60 Latinos graduate from high school. The policy brief indicates that the apparent increase in overall Latinx educational attainment in the last decade may be due to a general nationwide Latinx population increase of 18 million, or 5%, inferring that the gains may be attributed to the demographic change and not necessarily to more equitable education (Pérez Huber et al., 2015).

Summer youth programs often provide alternative educational spaces for Youth of Color who are often framed in deficit ways and position them as being "at-risk" or in need of assistance (Brown, 2016; Weiner, 2006). To address these perceived deficits, after school and summer programs have been created and funded to serve the needs of Children and Youth of Color, in particular Latinxs and African Americans. The literature and philanthropic efforts often centralize a pathologizing narrative that Youth of Color need saving (Tuck, 2009). Summer youth programs are often seen as a way to "keep youth off the streets" and prevent troublemaking and delinquency, since there is an underlying assumption that youth have an abundance of free time (Baldridge, 2014). Recent scholarship points to the necessity to interrogate the underlying racialized discourse that permeates through summer youth programming towards one that acknowledges and centers youth agency, resiliency, and identity.

This article presents a subset of data from a more extensive study that draws from non-Black Latinx youth experiences of youth who participated in the virtual Texas Summer Youth Summit from June 22nd to June 25th, 2020. The Youth Summit is an annual event that brings together young leaders from Community Youth Development (CYD) programs across Texas for an opportunity to build and enhance their leadership skills, ignite their commitment to service and positive change in their community, and provide opportunities to connect with and learn from their CYD network of peer leaders. Due to the global pandemic caused by COVID-19, the Youth Summit was hosted virtually for the first time in 2020. The youth leaders and leadership team reimagined a virtual Youth Summit that bridged together multiple youth sites throughout different regions in Texas. In order to better understand how the virtual format of the summit contributed to a space of youth empowerment, engagement, community activism, and leadership development, we draw from a culturally sustaining pedagogy framework (Paris, 2012) to pose the following research questions: (1) How do Latinx youth learn about leadership through an online Youth Summit amidst COVID-19? and (2) How does the Youth Summit provide a (virtual) space to re-

narrate Latinx youth leadership? This project speaks to the educational leadership, well-being, and educational pursuits of a multiplicity of Latinx youth.

Background and Literature Review

Summer Programming and Youth of Color

After school and summer youth program initiatives that serve Children and Youth of Color are often guided by deficit perspectives (Brown, 2016; Weiner, 2006). Research indicates that summer youth programs provide a safe space for youth to "drop in and hang out" (Halpern et al., 2000), provide youth with a designated mentor (de Anda, 2001), or have youth engage in activities and attend field trips (Perkins, 2007). Similarly, summer youth programs provide youth with employment opportunities or teach them employment skills. Most youth programs highlighted in research studies provide youth with programming that is preventative, diversionary, and enriching (Green et al., 2000). Community youth development (CYD) programs tend to focus on Youth of Color from lower socioeconomic communities. Previous research shows (Allen et al., 2006) that these youth were categorized as "at-risk" and "disadvantaged," framing youth in deficit terms because of where they live, their racial and ethnic backgrounds, and their families' socioeconomic standing. In addition to the focus on youth employment in summer youth programs, this categorization indicates an ideology of meritocracy. Modestino (2019) highlights that policymakers seek to utilize summer youth programs to offer an "alternative pathway" to youth that makes "criminal activity less attractive" (p. 601). The underlying assumption is that if youth have the tools to gain employment, they will stay out of trouble.

According to the literature, what are some of the impacts and successes of summer youth programs? Allen, Cox, and Cooper (2006) analyzed the resiliency results of disadvantaged youth who participated in an outcome-based camp compared to a "traditional" camp. The outcome-based camp implemented Benefits Based Programming (BBP), in which specific goals were set with activities purposefully designed to reach those goals. Traditional camps were camps that did not have goal-oriented activities. Compared to the traditional camps, BBP resulted in an increase in "resiliency" skills, while traditional camps did not show such results. In another study, de Anda (2001) interviewed youth and mentors to evaluate the impact of a mentor program for "at-risk" youth. Youth and their mentors built close and trusting relationships over time. Overall, the youths' expectations matched the outcomes, and they received favorable concrete, interpersonal, and affective benefits from the mentorship program. Other researchers developed theoretical propositions as to why and how summer youth programs work (Larson & Angus, 2011; Modestino, 2019). For example, Oakland Freedom Schools, implemented a culturally relevant summer Language Arts enrichment program for African American children. They saw that their curriculum positively influenced the youths' racial identity and views towards African/African American culture and precepts (Bethea, 2012).

COVID-19 & Online Interfaces: Re-narrating Latinx Leadership

The novel COVID-19 virus drastically altered many aspects of everyday life for people across the globe. Given the severity of the virus, numerous states across the U.S. temporarily closed down services and mandated "shelter in place" orders in March of 2020, which were set to stop the spread of the virus. However, as of July 2020, Texas had more than 430,000 cases as one of the states with the highest COVID-19 rates, according to the Center for Disease and Control Prevention (Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the U.S., 2020). Due to the rapid spread of

COVID-19 and the reality of the virus across the state of Texas and nationally, hosting an in-person summit was not possible due to the closure of the university campuses, where the summit would have been held. In addition, a face-to-face summit would have tremendously exposed youth, coordinators, and families to contagion. For these reasons, the youth summit was transitioned from an in-person summit to a virtual platform within weeks while maintaining the summit's purpose and mission to educate, engage, and empower youth. Although the youth summit was not initially envisioned to be virtual, this change provided an avenue to create multiple online interfaces to explore the role of virtual Latinx leadership, or what we call in this article, a step towards *re-narrating* Latinx leadership and activism.

George Floyd & Black Lives Matter Movements for Racial Justice and Against Police Brutality
        Simultaneously, another pandemic was brought forth once again (and one that has been historically present for centuries): the systematic violence and institutionalized anti-Blackness that permeates through every facet of U.S. society, especially around police/ing. The murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor at the hands of police reignited a worldwide social movement for racial justice, and many news outlets noted this movement as the United States' most extensive collective action against racism and anti-Blackness (Buchanan, 2020). Coined by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, the #BlackLivesMatter (#BLM) movement garnered national recognition in 2015 after the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and the subsequent murder of Eric Garner in New York City by the cities' respective police departments. Although these two murders gained national media coverage, the #BlackLivesMatter movement expressed the enduring and generational violence against the Black community under the guise of "law and order." Black Lives Matter organizers have made great strides since 2015 to systematically address issues of racial profiling, institutionalized anti-Blackness, hyper surveillance of the Black community, and race-based murders by all law enforcement. However, the recent murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd demonstrated the perpetual negligence of the concerns raised by the Black Lives Matter movement and Black communities.
        Given the immediate realities of the multiple pandemics occurring at the time of the Youth Summit, the virtual interfaces for the youth summit leadership also centered the importance of #BlackLivesMatter. As recent scholarship demonstrates (Dixson, 2017), schools often neglect the socio-historical contextualization of movements such as Black Lives Matter through watered-down multicultural curricula. Many scholars urge educators to critically examine the complexities and realities of Black Lives Matter through racially liberatory pedagogy, Black Lives Matter-aligned teacher education and the creation of a "language of solidarity" between Black and non-Black Latinx students (Castillo-Montoya et al, 2019; Martinez, 2017; Mayorga & Picower, 2017). In this light, the Youth Summit hosted an array of Black speakers and workshops centered on the Black Lives Matter movement through social media, emotional intelligence, mental health, poetry, education, art, music, and non-Black youth solidarity, among many other topics. Non-Black students, especially non-Black Latinx students, ideally would benefit immensely from a multiplicity of ways to engage processes of leadership that are conscientious of Black solidarity and the issues of Latinx anti-Blackness. The Director, Dr. Edwards, and some of the team members of the non-profit that hosted the youth summit identify as Black and shared their perspective on the importance of acknowledging Blackness and movements towards coalition building. Dr. Edwards explained:

> We serve based on who we are...We teach based on who we are. We can't separate who we are, our life experiences, how we are being and becoming. My experiences of growing up in predominantly white schools, my entire you know K through 12 experience. And really not understanding my own racial identity until late high school into college makes me passionate about wanting all [of] us to understand Black culture, Black history. Because, I believe that the whitening of our history, the whitening of our country is really the basis of how we maintain racism and education is the first place in our schools that...kids learn about race. And so from me being Black influences how I want kids to reimagine how they understand America and how they understand activism and understand the role of movements in this country because I think tied into every movement, we've ever had in this country, whether that's women's rights, farm workers rights, the civil rights movement...stem from enslaved Africans fighting to be free.

Latinx Youth in Texas

Discussing the school context in Texas is important to address the deficit perspectives often faced by Latinx youth, especially since they are founded on a socio-historical and political context of discriminatory practices that have negatively affected Latinx and Hispanic communities for generations (San Miguel, 2013; Valenzuela, 1999). Key factors such as school and residential segregation, racially segmented labor incorporation, denial of political access, and surveillance and containment by policing forces, including the Texas Rangers, have an enduring legacy that continues to influence the current context of Latinx, Tejanx lives in Texas (San Miguel, 2013). Systemic inequities continue to deny equal educational opportunities to Latinx, Hispanic students, often pushing youth out of schools or into the school-to-prison pipeline rather than to four-year universities (Robinson, Urrieta, Counts, 2014; Urbina & Wright, 2015). Valencia (2000) described, for example, the widespread school failure of African American and Mexican American students in Texas public schools by citing long-standing systemic public school inequities. Valencia (2012) showed that Latinx student failure is often the result of historic school segregation and deficit perspectives that structure the consequent limitations in the learning opportunities afforded to African American and Mexican American students in Texas public schools.

Using school district data, Valencia (2000) also highlighted the detrimental impact that segregated schooling has on African American and Mexican American students' academic achievement. Segregated schools produce inferior schooling and diminish academic performance, evidenced by lower scores on high-stakes standardized tests. Furthermore, students attending high minority schools in Texas were more likely to be taught by non-certified teachers, who were more likely to teach in schools with lower test scores, indicating a correlation between teacher certification and students' test performance (Valencia, 2000). Fassold (2000) also showed that exit-level testing in Texas harms African American and Latinx students, mainly because they attended schools with the lowest accreditation scores.

Latinx and African American students in Texas remain disproportionately tracked, especially into lower-level math courses, which has a long lasting impact on educational access (Fassold, 2000). Poor school quality and culturally irrelevant school curricula have a negative impact on learning opportunities and correlate to poor test performance, which is strongly associated with disparity in educational opportunity in Texas public schools (Conchas, 2001; Fassold, 2000). High school exit exams have also impacted African American and Latinx students'

high school graduation rates since the 1990s (Haney, 2000). Latinx, Hispanic students, especially those of low socioeconomic backgrounds, generally have systematically been denied positive learning opportunities in Texas, making it difficult for them to be academically prepared for four-year colleges or university enrollment despite the top percent admissions policies in place (Perna et al., 2010). Coupled with dwindling funding opportunities, Latinx, Hispanic students are often funneled to community college systems as their only option for entry into higher education (Del Real Viramontes & Urrieta, 2018). Even when they are enrolled in "higher status" schools, Latinxs are not seen as key contributors to educational policy regarding racial injustices and concerns for lack of diversity and representation at their respective schools (Rodriguez, 2017). Given this socio-political education context as well as deficit perspectives, Latinxs, Hispanic and African Americans are often targeted for after-school, summer, and other enrichment programs.

A Youth Summit Planned by and for the Youth as Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

We draw on the theoretical framework of culturally sustaining pedagogy to situate the youth summit's creation, the youth's responses to the summit, and future considerations for Latinx youth leadership. Culturally sustaining pedagogy calls for centering youth voice, advocacy for community-based educational accountability, humanizing research, and encouraging critical consciousness (Johnson, 2017; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris, 2012, 2019). Culturally sustaining pedagogy is not only responsive or relevant to the cultural practices and experiences of youth, but also supports youth in "sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities…" (Paris, 2012, p. 95). Youth are positioned as carriers of knowledge who draw from their communities' cultural wealth and their embodied epistemologies (Bernal, 2002; Yosso, 2005). One of the aims of culturally sustaining pedagogy is to raise critical awareness and to center youth voices. The Youth Summit generated a space where Latinx youth could collectively re-narrate their understanding of leadership. A group of youth representatives shared their opinions, perspectives, and ideas at monthly meetings and planning workshops. Youth leadership informed programming decisions and guided the planning and virtual implementation of the Youth Summit. Therefore, both the process of creating the summit and the summit itself had deep connotations of culturally sustaining pedagogies that spoke to centering youth epistemologies (Paris & Alim, 2014) and honoring the communities from which they come (Yosso, 2005).

Additionally, through culturally sustaining pedagogies, we unsettle the "damage-centered" discourse (Tuck, 2009) of youth summer programming by centering youth voices, and allowing them to re-narrate their own experiences of leadership and advocacy; in essence, to *hablar por mi mismo* (to speak for myself). Paris and Alim (2014) state that equity and access will best be achieved "...by centering pedagogies on the heritage and contemporary practices of students and communities of color" (p. 87). Culturally sustaining pedagogy requires knowledge of what youth in the community deem to be of cultural, linguistic, and sociopolitical significance, not only historically but also contemporaneously.

However, while it was critical to center youth voices, it was also crucial, from a culturally sustaining pedagogy framework, to continuously raise youths' critical consciousness. Paris and Alim (2014) warn that it is necessary to examine and critique ways in which youth expression may be regressive or problematic (ex: homophobic, misogynistic, racist) and to give youth opportunities to learn and grow from these moments. These moments are illustrated within the findings of the youth summit where non-Black Latinx youth felt that Black lives were too central in the final outcome. However, through a culturally sustaining pedagogy, we analyze that hesitation as a generative possibility to imagine how sustaining practices can further fortify strong(er) non-

Black Latinx and Black community coalition building. These learning experiences provide non-Black Latinx youth an opportunity to critically reflect on how standing in resistance and in solidarity with Black Lives Matter does not decenter or take away from their own struggles (Enomoto, 2017).

Setting: Texas Youth Summit

The Youth Summit is a multi-day virtual event sponsored by the Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) Division of the Texas Department of Family & Protective Services (TDFPS), and two universities in Central Texas. The purpose of the Youth Summit is to build and nurture a community of youth leaders throughout the state of Texas who are committed to serve, equipped to lead, enterprising in action, and plugged into a network of other youth who are passionate about making positive change in their communities. The event is intended to provide an opportunity for select participants of their Community Youth Development (CYD) programs to attend an online leadership conference. CYD program sites, which are situated in communities with high rates of juvenile crime, are located in 18 sites across Texas.

Youth Summit Pedagogy

The Youth Summit is grounded in a culturally sustaining pedagogy framework. The summit provided Texas youth with a four-day summit that educated youth on how to become advocates for change through an exchange of ideas, concepts, projects, and reflections that address local needs and global issues including the Black Lives Matter movement and the global pandemic. The summit engaged youth through educational and leadership activities that encouraged them to achieve their highest goals and potential. With a focus on youth empowerment and critical consciousness throughout the summit, youth were encouraged to discover their voice and realize their ability to make a change in their communities.

Youth Summit Curriculum

The culturally sustaining curricular approach included a combination of workshops, motivational speakers, and engaging activities designed to inspire leadership, build community, and encourage social change. The workshops emphasized youth empowerment, identity and leadership development, activism, self-reflection, racial and social justice and awareness, and using their voice to make a change in their community. The final Youth Summit schedule included Dr. Bettina Love and Dr. Farima Pour-Khorshid as keynotes. Youth participated in workshops and activities that focused on social justice education, student activism, queer activism, radical healing, Hip-Hop activism, community leadership, and youth mental health, to name a few. Interactive and collaborative learning activities included icebreakers, art, drumming, music, improvisation, and self-defense activities.

The Youth Summit brought together approximately 100 youth (n=100), along with their Youth Coordinators (n=18) and undergraduate and graduate students (n= 8) from three Central Texas universities, as well as a planning committee and leadership team. For this study we focus on data collected from a subset of 12 non-Black Latinx youth and two members from the leadership team.

Youth Summit Leadership

This year's Youth Summit Chair was Dr. Edwards. She is an outspoken advocate and change-maker who experienced parental incarceration during childhood. As an adult she spent 10 years researching the impact of schooling, race, and incarceration. Her research and work with the

community led her to found a non-profit organization dedicated to transforming how communities and families combat the school-to-prison pipeline. Her work is inspired both by her family history and the inspiration she has drawn from the resilience of the young people she's encountered who are working to reconstruct their lives after confinement. As the Youth Summit Chair, Dr. Edwards felt that it was important this year to empower youth to lead and to use their voices to advocate for their communities.

Dr. Hernandez serves as the Chief Operating Officer of Dr. Edwards' organization. There, he works with adolescents to develop their critical consciousness via experiential learning opportunities to empower them to become agents of change in their communities. Dr. Hernandez's goals for this year's summit were to help youth build their leadership skills, while engaging and prioritizing community by encouraging youth to recognize and use their voices.

Methodology

The larger study consisted of a mixed-methods approach that included pre-summit and post-summit youth, coordinator, and parent surveys. Additionally, twenty five participating youth (ages 13 to 18) were interviewed before and after the Youth Summit to gain more insight on the impact of the youth summit on youths' self-concepts about identity, their potential for leadership, and positive behavior decisions in their communities. This article specifically examines data from youth interviews, Town Hall presentations, and leadership team interviews to better understand the expectations and experiences of twelve non-Black Latinx[2] participants' (ages 13 to 18) in the virtual Texas Summer Youth Summit. Our study questions included: 1) How do youth learn about leadership through an Online Youth Summer Summit amidst COVID-19?; and 2) How does the Youth Summit provide a virtual space to re-narrate youth leadership? Reflexive qualitative and participant observation methods (Davies 2001; Spindler, 1982) were used prior to, during, and after the summer youth summit, and include: pre- and post-surveys, observations of the youth in the various components of the virtual summit by the research team members, multiple Zoom interviews with a subset of the study youth participants (n=25), and document and video analysis. A constant comparative analysis method (Creswell, 1988; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) was used to examine the data. Further discussion of the research methodology follows.

Data Sources/Collection

Survey: Pre-summit and post-summit anonymous surveys were conducted with each of the youth participants. Youth participants were asked to rate their overall Youth Summit experience, how well the Youth Summit achieved its goals, the importance of workshops, activities, and keynote sessions.

Interviews: Semi-structured pre-summit and post-summit interviews were conducted with twenty five (n=25) youth participants to learn about their experiences in the virtual youth summit. This included questions about what they learned, enjoyed, short and long-term leadership goals, plans for engaging community action, and their own cultural and civic identities. For this study, we draw from the data collected from twelve youth (n=12) who self-identified as Hispanic or Latinx. All of the interviews were conducted via Zoom.

Observations: Observations and accompanying fieldnotes of the planning meeting day and the virtual youth summit were conducted by the Co-Principal Investigators and the three graduate research assistants online via Zoom.

Documents/Artifacts/Video: The following documents and artifacts produced by the youth participants were collected: a) individual and collaborative video projects, b) written reflections

about social action community projects and c) video of collective activities during the virtual youth summit.

Seven of the 12 non-Black Latinx youth interviewed identified as female and five as male. Their ages ranged between 15 and 18 years old. Although there is a regional diversity represented, most of the youth interviewed were from South Texas. Notably absent were non-Black Latinx youth from North and far West Texas. The following table shows a brief profile of the youth interviewed.

non-Black Hispanic/Latinx Youth Participants Interviewed

Pseudonym	Race/Ethnicity	Age	Region/City
Melissa	Hispanic	17	Corpus Christi
Jose	Hispanic	15	Pasadena
Ruben	Hispanic	16	Pasadena
Carlos	Hispanic/White/biracial	17	Lubbock
Maria	Hispanic	17	McAllen
Iris	Hispanic	18	Laredo
Diego	*Initially identified as White, but also talked about being Hispanic	17	Laredo
Alberto	Hispanic	15	Austin
Salma	Hispanic	17	Brownsville
Jackie	Hispanic	17	Corpus Christi
Stephanie	Latinx	17	San Antonio
Itzae	Hispanic	15	San Antonio

Findings and Discussion

The findings from this study indicate that non-Black Latinx youth found that the youth summit provided them an opportunity to re-narrate their understanding of leadership and service within the context of the simultaneous pandemics of COVID-19 and institutionalized anti-Blackness and racism. Through our analysis, youth expressed that the summit offered generative possibilities to re-narrate leadership, especially how to co-create leadership possibilities virtually, imagining leadership through multiple online interfaces, youth self-advocacy, and youth activism. Additionally, the findings suggest opportunities for growth such as more explicit youth leadership opportunities to bridge Black and non-Black Latinx solidarity.

Co-create Virtual Leadership

The virtual space necessitated by COVID-19 to avoid face-to-face contact provided a platform for youth to co-create knowledge, community, and leadership development, guided by

culturally sustaining pedagogy. Many of the youth surveyed expressed that having an in-person summit would have offered opportunities to meet new people, interact with the speakers, and share a community space. However, most of the non-Black Latinx youth also understood the necessity to host an online summit given the "shelter in place" state guidelines, and therefore expressed the ways in which the summit offered virtual leadership opportunities that they could co-create with other youth and with the workshop session speakers, even if they were not physically in the same space. For example, Jackie, a 17 year old youth from Corpus Christi said:

> Since the summit was virtual like it actually got us to be together, talking about these topics that we really need to discuss. But even though we couldn't see each other in person. We were there for each other. You're talking about topics. When you're talking about. It was really effective.

For Jackie, being able to discuss important and needed topics outweighed that the youth summit was virtual. The fact that they were not physically present in one location did not diminish the feeling of togetherness for Jackie as well as the effectiveness and feeling of unity that the virtual summit brought to her. Melissa, another 17 year old youth from Corpus Christi also shared:

> Even though it was virtual, the way the speakers interacted with us in the breakout rooms and made things interactive. It was, I know it's kind of hard, especially since we're not in person, but they really knew how to make everything fun and interactive and try to get the talk. That's what I really like also.

Like Jackie, Melissa also appreciated how the speakers in the summit made an effort to be interactive and "try to get the talk," despite the difficulty of using an online platform. The speakers made the summit fun for the youth participants like her.

As both Jackie and Melissa discussed, although there were limited aspects of a virtual summit, there were also possibilities that virtual online sessions provided to collaborate that were unique. The summit opened up avenues for the youth to bring forth their digital media literacies into their youth leadership and activism as legitimate and valid ways of enacting youth leadership epistemologies. Jocson (2018) argues that there is much to learn from the "making, unmaking, and remaking of meaning" of youth within learning spaces that show how youth draw from new media literacies to "make statements about place and uneven relations of power as they understand the world around them" (p. 152). The social media used during the summit mobilized different capacities to enact activism, leadership, and center youth voices through multifaceted digital landscapes and this moved youth leadership and activism towards multidirectional possibilities via online interfaces. The capacity to use online interfaces to open up spaces for possibility and creativity was best captured by what Salma, a 17 year old youth from Brownsville, shared:

> For sure creativeness because just by the thought of the summit being virtual we had to find ways to be able to interact and just be there in the moment, even though we're not there. We didn't notice since we were thinking outside the box in ways that we could imagine ourselves there.

For Salma, the virtual summit demanded creativity and "thinking outside the box" to engage in interactive ways with the other participants. Salma also mentioned the need to imagine herself "there," even if she was not physically "there" with the rest of the participants.

One of the highly successful youth leadership co-creative projects during the youth summit were the Town Hall Presentations hosted on the last day. Each Youth Site was charged with doing a community needs assessment on pressing social issues in their communities and finding solutions to the issues. The youth received the instructions months in advance to brainstorm, do their research, and together deliberate solutions. Youth were instructed to present these issues and solutions in a presentation in the manner they wished, whether that was through creating a skit, a video, or a song, to name a few options. Youth were encouraged to be creative in their solutions to the issues they addressed, as long as the presentation was appropriate and related to the topic of the forum. Many of the youth groups had an opportunity to work on these projects before the "shelter in place" orders, but others did not, and some changed the issues they wanted to address based on the changing and pressing social issues in their communities such as the pandemics. This year's presentations ranged from addressing issues of access to health care and the COVID-19 pandemic, police violence, food security, teenage pregnancy, gun violence, and mental health to poverty and barriers within society. The Town Hall presentations helped build on culturally sustaining pedagogy, by rethinking youth community leadership and building leadership capacity, through the centering of youth input. Additionally, culturally sustaining pedagogy mainly focuses on centering youths' own communities, and the Town Hall projects were a perfect opportunity for that. However, we also suggest that culturally sustaining pedagogy can help build solidarity among communities, by furthering youths' understanding of their peers' communities and sharing the Town Hall presentations via the summit was key for building solidarity.

A highlight from the Town Hall presentations was a group of youth from a site in the greater Houston area that presented on police violence against the Black community. Their presentation reflected the nations' uprisings against police brutality. The youth re-enacted police violence against Black people in the U.S., and said the names of Black people who have been murdered by police. Included were George Floyd, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, and Sandra Bland. Their call to action was to create a platform that would allow youth to voice their ideas on social injustice. Figures 1 and 2 are screenshots of the group's Town Hall and demonstrations of the realities of anti-Blackness and police violence on the Black community and other People of Color.

Figure 1. Town Hall on Police Brutality

A group of youth from a site in "the valley" in South Texas called attention to their community's lack of access to emergency healthcare. This access to emergency care was heightened specifically in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially because Latinxs, Hispanics account for 50% of all infections in the state, and South Texas has been a hot spot with increasing numbers of casualties (Killough et al., 2020; Trevizo, 2020). In this case, the city of Raymondville, as shown in Figure 3 below, lacks access to emergency healthcare. Even though this was identified as a long time issue, the COVID-19 pandemic made it much more evident as a pressing need. The closest healthcare center is a 40-minute to an hour drive away, which is extremely inconvenient and unsafe in emergency situations.

Figure 2. Town Hall on Police Brutality

Figure 3. Town Hall Presentation on Lack of Emergency Healthcare

The youth from Raymondville, all Latinxs, proposed building a new emergency clinic which would benefit not only their surrounding area, but also the rural towns nearby that do not have access to emergency healthcare either. These are only a few examples of the creative ways that the youth were able to collaborate on projects that involved leadership, activism, and social and racial justice.

"Hablar por mi mismo" (To speak for myself); The importance of youth self-advocacy and voice
          As discussed, Black Lives Matter was a central component of the youth summit as the #BlackLivesMatter movement provided countless ways to learn about leadership, activism, coalition building, and youth voice. Centering and uplifting youth voice is an essential tenet of culturally sustaining pedagogy. The Director and Chief Operations Officer, both who identify as Black, discussed the importance of centering youth voices in line with the central components of the summit. The director, Dr. Edwards for example commented:

> That's always our focus, we want to send youth out in the community with a voice and we want them to feel like they have a voice and we want them to feel like they have an opportunity to advocate for the things that they believe in.

Thus, while the themes of advocacy, activism, and movements ran through most of the four-day summit, self-empowerment was highlighted as key in centering youth voices, as mentioned by Dr. Edwards. For Dr. Hernandez, the Chief Operating Officer, experiential learning was also key to

developing a critical and inquisitive mind in the process for youth to recognize and use their voice. According to Dr. Hernandez:

> I'm providing ultimate spaces for them to engage in learning outside of the classroom to kind of maximize experiential learning positions them to not just be a better student, but to be a better overall individual and that's critical, you know, positioning them to learn to grow to ask questions. I think a world in which we empower youth to not only recognize their voices but know how to use their voices. I think that positions us to make significant strides and [be] a more equitable society.

Throughout the summit, youth were guided in experiential learning opportunities to reflect and to use their voices in purposeful ways.

Multiple youth expressed the impact that the speakers and the themes had on their own perceptions of youth advocacy and using their voice. Even though the Latinx demographic of students we focus on in this article did not identify themselves as Black or African American, youth like, Rubén, a 16 year old from Pasadena, Texas, mentioned that the summit encouraged youth like him to "*Hablar por mi mismo*" (to speak for myself) and to speak on the injustices that others face. Carlos, a 17 year old Hispanic/White, biracial youth from Lubbock, also added, "I for sure improved on my leadership skills, learned how to be more outspoken, trying to teach others how to speak out loud." For Melissa, a youth from Corpus Christi, the summit was an eye-opening experience:

> ...it really opened my eyes into a lot of things, whether it was leadership, whether it was movements or different things. It really [pushed] the message of using our voice that was one of the main things that I got from the whole thing was just using your voice, using your voice. We are young, we're the voice, we're the change for the future. So that message really got put across throughout that whole summit.

The message of youth voice and empowerment seemed to resonate well with youth like Melissa who likened her experience to an awakening, an eye-opening experience.

Invited keynote speakers were also important during the summit because their message was amplified in special ways. For example, Dr. Bettina Love, acclaimed social justice scholar, presented on the importance of youth having confidence in the knowledge they carry and embracing who they are. She talked about creativity, social justice, Black joy, Black love, and the ways we find joy and humanity out of oppression by providing examples of Black creativity, ingenuity, and beauty through music, art, protest, and storytelling in community. Notably, she was widely referred to by many of the youth as a powerful speaker with a transformative message. Maria, a 17 year old youth from McAllen, commented:

> What the speakers talked about. She [Dr. Love] shared some significant quotes that she wrote down. One said to "use your powers" and I felt like that was very good. Because sometimes we don't have something that can help contribute to [fixing] issues, but she said to use your power and it's good advice because we can use it for, like the future.

Like Maria, youth participants surveyed overwhelmingly expressed that keynote speakers' topics were relevant to their lives.

Most of the non-Black Latinx youth interviewed related to how the recent murder of George Floyd and the subsequent actions across the globe for Black Lives Matter further elucidated the inherent systemic racism and anti-Blackness against Black people and People of Color. As Alberto, a 15 year old youth from Austin, expressed:

> Um, I guess, seeing like I said earlier, seeing connections between things, to maybe question things, if they don't seem right to me, and if I feel the need that like it should change it. Like speak out about it. Like I question police officers and what is systematic racism. Just around like a bias against People of Color, like and compared to like with white people. And just like the privilege that they get sometimes compared to other people. And especially recently with George Floyd, this like it showed me. [On] how unfair it can really be and even though it isn't all cops, I guess, kind of, it's kind of scary to think about the system is against, like calling people.

The culturally sustaining pedagogical and curricular components of the summit created paths for non-Black Latinx youth to also consider an intersectional critical consciousness to inform them and their communities on actions they "can take to resist systematic oppression and support Black liberation" (Castillo-Montoya et al., 2019, p. 1141). Clearly, Alberto made these important connections between systemic racism, policing, and white privilege.

The Youth Summit drew on culturally sustaining practices to make sense of non-Black Latinx leadership and activism, both as a way to encourage a "language of solidarity" (Martinez, 2017) between Latinx and Black communities, as well as to show the longevity and importance of Black epistemological thought in activism, social movements, and political struggles. Exploring this issue was evident and important for Jackie, who shared:

> It [the summit] did make a difference because we finally got to talk about some issues between our community and individually. We were talking about what we thought about the movement, like the Black Lives Matter movement and we talked about how our education needs to be better for us. And that we are really not learning much in school. We were basically talking mostly about things that go on in our lives.

Finding a "language of solidarity" between non-Black Latinx and Black students was imperative for the leadership team, especially because, as critical educators, they were acutely aware that most school classrooms do not provide opportunities for non-Black Latinx and Black youth to cultivate activist "stances and alliances that foster a sense of shared, historical, political, and linguistic solidarity" (Martinez, 2017, p. 188). In this way, activism and youth voice were contextualized in the summit to respond to the immediate (and pervasive) realities of anti-Blackness and police brutality, and to introspectively examine non-Black Latinx people's experiences and commitment towards racial justice.

A bridge not fully built: Non-Black representation

The Youth Summit focused far more on social and racial justice issues than in previous iterations. Understandably, this was due to the immediacy of the issues that surfaced after the murder of George Floyd and also due to Dr. Edwards and Dr. Hernandez's stewardship of the summit. However, focusing on the Black Lives Matter movement was also about facilitating and centering youths' voices and implementing a culturally sustaining pedagogy. However, there were

instances in which non-Black youth, including Latinx, felt that Black Lives Matter was *too* central within the summit itself. These anonymous survey responses include:

> All presenters were the same race. They did not represent my hispanic race. The keynote speakers all talked about the BLM, white supremacy and capitalism as evil! The presentations were not about leadership they were about joining BLM -- Anonymous Youth Survey Response

> I did not like the information presented it was all about joining BLM -- Anonymous Youth Survey Response

> I didn't like how doctor love was talking about the whole black [lives] matter the whole time. I am completely for black lives but the summit was not just black students it was all colors I think we forgot that. -- Anonymous Youth Survey Response

While in these anonymous responses, only one youth mentioned they were "Hispanic," these responses are useful to understand other non-Black youths' sentiments of the summit focus. The youth summit aimed to facilitate Black Lives Matter as a leadership building capacity, but not all youth felt that this was achieved successfully. Some non-Black youth even went on to say that the summit was misrepresenting leadership and their ethnic and racial background.

  The centering of Black Lives Matter in the movement for justice in the Youth Summit aimed to also challenge enduring colonial discourses that permeate the cultural knowledge of different communities. An impediment to understanding the inclusion of Black Lives Matter by some of the non-Black youth, could also be due to the historical pitting of minoritized communities against each other. Anti-Blackness, sometimes unconscious, other times conscious, needs to be addressed and acknowledged.

Future Considerations

  Youth programs that centralize the Black Lives Matter movement as a crucial sociohistorical phenomenon that actively uproots the longevity of systematic racism and institutionalized anti-blackness, must consider ways to provide non-Black youth, including Latinx, explicit ways to re-narrate their leadership and activism in *collaboration with* Black youth. Due to the reality of Latinx anti-Blackness, this is especially imperative for non-Black Latinx youth to consider given the entangled anti-Blackness and anti-Indianness of *Latinidad* (Busey & Silva, 2020), the negligence of Black and Afro-Latinx voices, and the contributions of Black digital leadership especially via Twitter hashtags (Dinzey-Flores et al., 2019; Paris, 2019; Soto-Vega & Chavez, 2018). It is also imperative, drawing from culturally sustaining pedagogy, to help youth identify and constructively criticize ways in which youth can continue to perpetuate anti-Blackness, in order to support youth in growing their critical consciousness. More clearly articulated efforts to continue building these bridges between Black and non-Black Latinx co-collaborative leadership possibilities would have strengthened the experiences of more non-Black youth, including Latinxs, who may have felt that their voice was not being represented.

  We argue that these coalition building possibilities will demonstrate that Black Lives Matter is inherently for all marginalized peoples because it is through Black liberation that other systems of domination, such as immigration law enforcement, can be abolished. There is often a positioning of Latinx struggles against Black struggles in the media, especially regarding

immigration as a central Latinx struggle. However, we further problematize these positions because immigration is also a deeply anti-Black systematic power, since one in three non-citizens facing deportations on criminal grounds identifies as Black (Palmer, 2017). Therefore, we are not suggesting that these two different issues (police violence and immigration) are Black vs. Non-Black issues, but that both are Black struggles that non-Black Latinx youth can identify with in order to bridge their struggles with Black liberation movements.

Suggestions for improvement might include: 1) include speakers who are Black or AfroLatinx, 2) create explicit workshops or sessions on Black Lives Matter as a catalyst for non-Black Latinx youth leadership and activism, 3) provide more opportunities for Black and non-Black Latinx youth to co-create during youth programming, 4) present historical information on both the tensions and alliances between social movements of Black, Indigenous, Chicanx, Tejanx, Latinx, and People of Color, and 5) establish more robust, enduring youth leadership networks beyond the program/summit. In this particular case, due to the realities of COVID-19, the Youth Summit was re-envisioned virtually but the hope is that in the future it will be hosted once again in person. Regardless, the virtual Youth Summit provided generative ideas and directions to expand youth's digital literacies to further develop their activism, leadership, and their identities.

Conclusion

This study explored multiple online interface modalities for non-Black Latinx youth leadership and activism via an online summer Youth Summit in Texas. Due to the simultaneous pandemics of COVID-19 and the (continued) anti-Blackness and systemic racism, this study extends current discussions about the ways summer programs enrich youth experiences and impact their conceptualizations of leadership, activism, and identity amidst arduous and turbulent conditions. Specifically, the Youth Summit had an overwhelming influence on the non-Black Latinx youth, whose experiences we focused on in this article, especially in regard to leadership and activism. Although culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) does not necessarily focus on leadership building capacities, through our study, we foreground that CSP has the potential to center leadership as culturally sustaining and important for youth. The youth were able to co-create digital leadership and felt encouraged to speak on their own behalf, against racial injustices, and ultimately to re-narrate their own leadership and activism through digital interfaces.

However, a few non-Black youth, including Latinx, expressed concern of over-centralizing Black Lives Matter, and feeling unrepresented. We recommend that such voices be taken into consideration for future youth programming to create more robust culturally sustaining practices that are aligned with fighting anti-Blackness and bridging Black and non-Black Latinx solidarity. Young people are creating intricate and complex ways to participate in leadership and activism in the precarious situations of global pandemics and social distancing, where they are able to use their digital media literacies and familiarity with online platforms to expand the reach of their leadership capacities. We find that this study comes at a crucial juncture for fostering online activism, digital leadership, and non-Black Latinx solidarity capacities in the movement towards eradicating institutionalized anti-Blackness, racial violence and white nationalism against Latinxs, and other forms of systemic oppression (Landeros, Montes, Muñiz and Urrieta, 2021).

NOTES
1. We use Latinx to break down the existing gender binaries and acknowledge all intersecting identities within the Latina/o/x community. Further, we also seek to acknowledge and be inclusive of people who may identify as, trans, queer, agender, non-binary, gender non-conforming or gender fluid.
2. 11 youth self-identified as Hispanic and 1 youth as Latinx.

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