Cultural Impact on After-School Program Engagement

A Study of Pacific Islanders in Salt Lake County, Utah

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Executive summary

Utah Pacific Islander communities face high poverty rates that stem from educational gaps. To help gain understanding on how we can shift these trends, I partnered with Spy Hop Youth Media Matters, a Salt Lake Based not for profit organization offering in and after-school media education programs. The focus of this study is to identify cultural factors influencing Pacific Islander youths' participation in such programs in Salt Lake County, addressing two primary questions:

1. What cultural factors among low/moderate-income Pacific Islanders influence after-school program participation in Salt Lake County?
2. How do gender-specific cultural factors impact this participation?

The research questions coupled with a mixed-methods research approach informed data collection, utilizing interviews, surveys, and focus groups. The study revealed the following findings:

Finding 1   Family expectations and responsibilities highly influence activity prioritization and participation decisions.

Finding 2   Community endorsement of programs increases trust in program efficacy.

Finding 3   Financial constraints automatically rule out programs as options.

Finding 4   The desire to preserve and transmit cultural heritage is vital to the community's continuity.

Finding 5   There's growing recognition of the benefits of diverse after-school programs among second and third-generation American Pacific Islanders.

Finding 6   The community values skills and community involvement over gender-specific roles.

Based on these findings, the study proposes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1   Engage trusted community leaders regularly.

Recommendation 2   Address and mitigate decision-making gaps.

Recommendation 3   Establish and maintain community feedback mechanisms to ensure programs meet the community's needs and values.

Organizational Summary
SPY • HOP (V)
THE ACT IN WHICH A DOLPHIN RISES ABOVE THE WATER IN ORDER TO NAVIGATE AND DETERMINE ITS POSITION IN RELATION TO OTHER MEMBERS OF THE POD. 2. TO LOOK AHEAD. 3. TO TUNE IN.

Spy Hop Youth Media Matters is a nonprofit established in 1999 in Salt Lake City. The organization has been at the forefront of youth media education, enabling young people to harness the power of film, audio, music and digital design in storytelling and creative expression. The organization's origins can be traced to a group of visionary individuals who recognized the need to provide a platform for young people to tell their stories and make a meaningful impact in the media landscape and their communities.

At the core of Spy Hop lies a set of deeply held beliefs that guide its mission. The organization firmly believes in the transformative power of creativity as a means of self-discovery and personal empowerment. The organization operates on the principle that media arts education is not just a tool for skill acquisition but a dynamic force for social change, providing youth with the skills, confidence, and perspectives needed to navigate an increasingly complex world.

Spy Hop's ethos is grounded in acknowledging and respecting the indigenous caretakers of its community—the Eastern Shoshone, Paiute, Goshute, and Ute Tribes (Utah American Indian Digital Archive: Homepage, 11/20/2023). The organization is committed to anti-racism, drawing inspiration from the principles and contributions of figures like Fannie Lou Hamer, Paulo Freire, Maya Angelou, Ibram X. Kendi and The Black Liberation Collective. This commitment is evident in the organizational culture, where collective multicultural and inter-generational wisdom guides and nurtures an evolving ecosystem, ensuring that all participants have the opportunity to thrive.

The mission was clear; equip youth with the skills, tools, and knowledge needed to not just navigate the digital world, but to transform their communities. Spy Hop serves youth between the ages of 9 to 19 from elementary school students to young adults. Diverse relevant programming reach youth at various stages of their development, tailoring programs to meet unique needs and interests whilst amplifying youth perspective as a powerful force for change. The organizational reach has come a long way since its first year in operation serving 12 students. Spy Hop now serves a diverse

population, reaching 18,000 students a year from more than 120 schools across 23 Utah counties, as illustrated in the figure below.
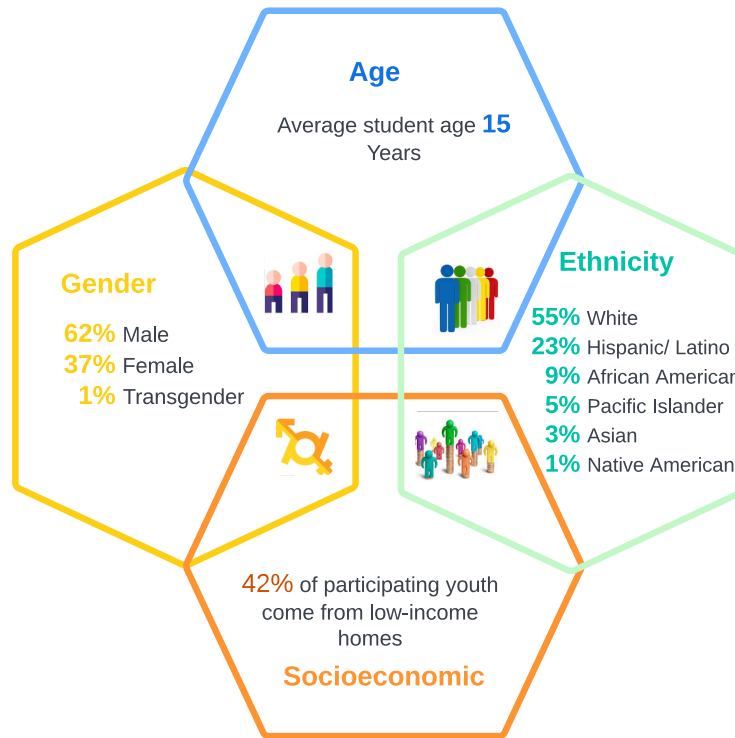
Figure 1: Demographics of Youth Served

Over the years, program offerings expanded to a wide array of programs provided in school, after-school in house, at the downtown center, or at satellite locations across the State. Spy Hop's in-school POPS Programs, or Professional Outreach Programs in the Schools, is a compelling digital arts curriculum administered to a single classroom, an entire grade level, or an entire school. Complementing this in-school endeavor are Spy Hop's after-school classes, tailored for students aged 13 to 19. Held year-round at the downtown Salt Lake City studio, these classes range from

introductory to advanced levels, covering film, audio, music, and design. Together, the in-school POPS Programs and after-school classes provide a comprehensive and immersive learning journey in the realm of digital arts.

The voices of youth in rural Utah, San Juan County, Tooele County, and the Uinta Basin, are amplified through The Voices of the West program. Through this unique program, Utah youth share their stories and celebrate unique aspects of their communities. Spy Hop's outreach extends to encompass the voices of youth in foster care, treatment, or care centers, and those who are incarcerated. The Sending Messages program, launched in 2009, stands as a testament to this commitment. The program involves podcast creation by incarcerated youth from Wasatch and Decker Lake Youth Centers. This initiative not only empowers these young individuals but also allows them to earn art or English credit through activities such as writing, performing, recording, and producing poetry, short fiction, spoken word, and interviews compiled into podcasts.

Spy Hop thrives on collaborative efforts. Internally, the organization is powered by a dedicated collaborative team of professionals with unique social, professional, and personal experiences encompassing experienced mentors, educators, social workers, and industry experts. The team is supported and cheered on by various community partners. Schools, community-based organization, government entities, and businesses power a robust support system that amplifies Spy Hop's impact on youth development through media education. As such, Spy Hop mindfully builds connections with local

entities that share a dedication to empowering young voices. These partnerships are also instrumental in keeping Spy Hop attuned to the specific needs and aspirations of the youth it serves, ensuring that programs remain relevant and impactful within the local context.

In October 2021, Spy Hop partnered with a Latina-owned Public Benefit Corporation to design its strategic plan with a participatory human-centered approach. The collective efforts among spy hop's team, board, students, partners, and community inspired a vision: "In 10 years Spy Hop will be an inclusive anti-racist multicultural organization actively engaged in youth-centered, systems-change work that leverages and values the power of youth voice and youth as partners in the pursuit of collective liberation."("Strategic Plan," n.d.) Six key strategic goals, listed below in figure 2, were defined to guide all organizational efforts.

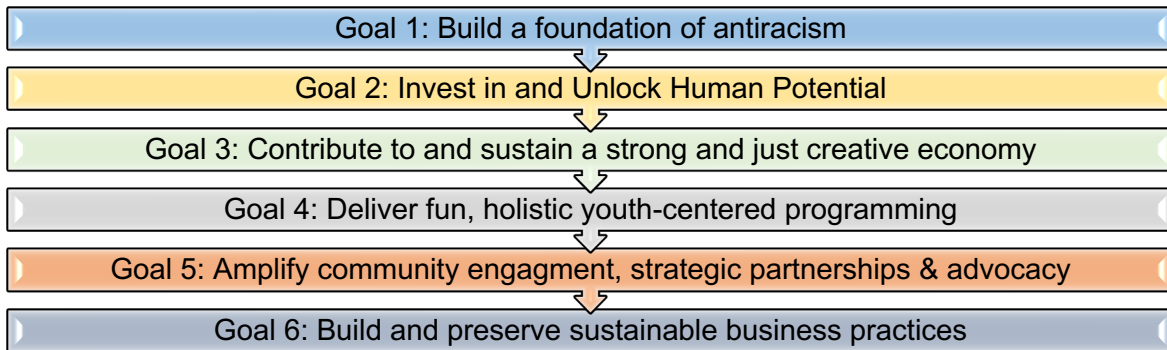| Goal 1: Build a foundation of antiracism |
| Goal 2: Invest in and Unlock Human Potential |
| Goal 3: Contribute to and sustain a strong and just creative economy |
| Goal 4: Deliver fun, holistic youth-centered programming |
| Goal 5: Amplify community engagment, strategic partnerships & advocacy |
| Goal 6: Build and preserve sustainable business practices |

Figure 2 Spy Hop Strategic Goals

Problem of Practice

Context

      After-school programs play a pivotal role in supplementing formal learning experiences. Research confirms that after-school programs positively impact academic achievement, social and behavioral development, and influence broader life outcomes like building coping strategies and positive attitudes and outlooks (Durlak et al., 2010; Mahoney et al., 2005a; Park et al., 2015; Shernoff & Vandell, 2007). However, knowledge gaps exist in how cultural elements impact participation rates in after-school programs.

      Understanding and embracing cultural factors in after-school programs is essential for boosting participation among diverse youth populations, which in turn can lead to individual and community success. Programs can significantly improve academic, social, and behavioral outcomes for students especially programs that are culturally responsive. For instance, when after-school programs include culturally relevant techniques that honor the students' traditions, participation increases, as students find a familiar and respectful space that acknowledges their cultural norms (Ratliffe, 2011). Moreover, research demonstrated that culturally tailored programs can lead to significant improvements in behavior and academic performance, as seen in Bass & Coleman's (1997) study on Black male sixth graders.

      Cultural inclusivity enriches not only the individuals involved but also their wider communities. Studies have shown that students involved in extracurricular activities

tend to achieve higher grade-point averages, indicating that engagement leads to better academic performance (Eccles & Barber, 1999). Additionally, culturally resonant programs are well-attended and valued in communities that emphasize educational attainment, such as in some Asian-American communities, leading to higher participation rates (Zhou & Kim, 2006). These outcomes contribute to the social and economic vitality of their broader communities.

The participation in after-school programs is influenced by a myriad of factors, with cultural relevance playing a significant role. Western educational models often clash with non-Western cultural values, leading to reduced engagement in programs that do not accommodate diverse communication styles, collective approaches to success, and broader definitions of learning and development (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Rogoff, 2003). After-school programs that adapt to these cultural differences, as well as those that provide multilingual resources and orientation for immigrant families, can bridge participation gaps (Hill & Torres, 2010; Smith, 2007). By prioritizing cultural sensitivity and inclusion, after-school programs can become a critical catalyst for enhancing educational equity and community advancement.

Problem of Practice

Minoritized youth in Salt Lake County participate in Spy Hop's after-school programs at significantly lower rates than majority youth. If this problem continues, we expect continued decline in graduation rates and college acceptance. We know this because of the published research on the correlation between youth mentoring and academic success. After-school programs positively impact youth across key domains like emotions, attitudes, behavioral adaptation, and academic performance, demonstrating their effectiveness.

Studies found that children attending after-school programs tend to earn higher grades and achievement test scores than nonparticipants (Shernoff, 2010). Some of these programs provide academic enrichment activities such as hands-on science projects and educational computer use, which particularly enhance achievement. Jenner and Jenner's study on 21st Century Community Learning Centers in Louisiana showed that at-risk students participating in after-school programs demonstrated significant academic growth in core subjects like reading and mathematics.

After-school programs, from a social and behavioral standpoint, significantly enhance students' social competence and emotional intelligence. Grogan et al. (2014) underline the importance of regular attendance and high engagement in activities such as arts, music, sports, and STEM for achieving these benefits. Moreover, these programs offer collaborative projects and mentorship opportunities that foster

interpersonal skills and teamwork. Highlighting another aspect of effectiveness, Albright and colleagues (2017) along with Shernoff and Vandell (2007) demonstrated that program quality significantly impacts academic outcomes, more so than the frequency and quantity of interactions. This multifaceted learning approach therefore plays a crucial role in students' comprehensive development. Recognizing the implications of participation is key to developing effective strategies for engaging minority students in programs like Spy Hop's, thereby enhancing their educational experience and outcomes.

Engaging minority youth demands a comprehensive consideration of the diverse needs within each minoritized communities. Recognizing and addressing these distinct needs ensures that programs are accessible and culturally relevant, fostering a sense of belonging and amplifying underrepresented voices. More importantly, it enables minority communities to inform engagement practices throughout the engagement lifecycle. This user-centered design approach ensures that the minority culture is heard, considered, and honored in line with spy hop's core beliefs. It further solidifies Spy Hop's position as a viable partner in actualizing minority youth academic and professional aspirations through culturally relevant and competent programming. To this end, this research focused on the Pacific Islander community in Salt Lake County.

The Pacific Islander Community

In 2021, the United States Census Bureau reported that 1.5 million Americans identified as Pacific Islanders, constituting 0.46% of the total U.S. population. These individuals primarily originate from three regions: Polynesia, Micronesia, and Melanesia. The majority are concentrated in Hawaii, California, and Washington(Bureau, n.d.).

The State of Utah is home to a quarter of the country's Pacific Islanders accounting for 1.6% of Utah's population. This ranks Utah third for Pacific Islanders as a percentage of state population and fifth by number (Bureau, n.d.). According to the University of Utah's Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, between 2010 and 2020, The Pacific Islander population increased by 50% compared to 18% statewide for all races.
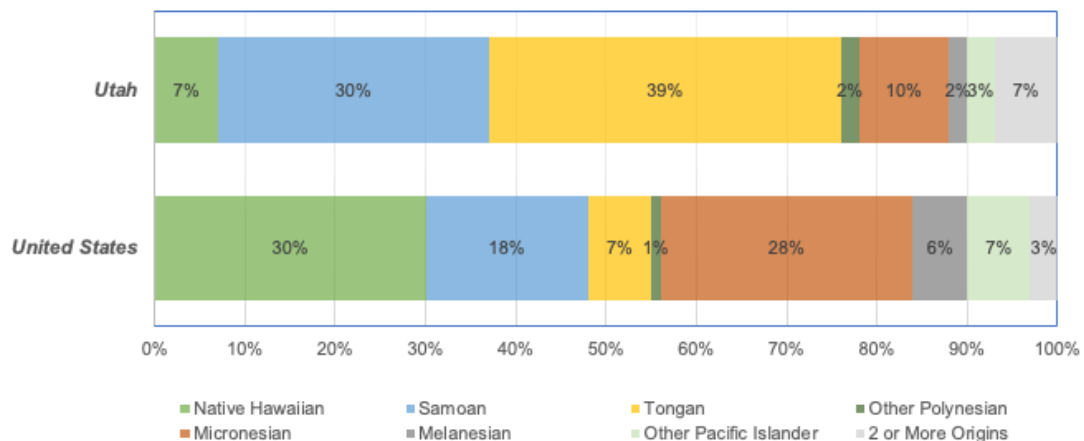

Figure 3| United States and Utah Pacific Islander Population Proportions by Origins (2016-2020)

Tongans compose 39% of the Pacific Islanders in Utah, compared to 7% nationwide, making them the largest Pacific Islander group. Utah is proudly the home of the 4th largest Samoan population in the United States. Samoans represent Utah's

second largest Pacific Islander group at 30% of the State's Pacific Islander population. The remaining population is uniquely diverse representing Melanesian, Micronesian, Native Hawaiian among other groups. Salt Lake county of the majority of Pacific Islanders(Bureau, n.d.).

Pacific Islanders graduate from college at a lower rate than the national average. 24% of Pacific Islander adults have a bachelors' degree, compared to 32% nationwide. The rate is even lower for Samoan Americans, graduating at less than 20% rate. Furthermore, approximately 17% of Pacific Islanders live in poverty, which is nearly 5% higher than the US population's rate. Numbers also indicate that Samoan Americans and Micronesian Americans face the highest poverty rate among Pacific Islanders in the United States. Accordingly, the rate of homelessness for Pacific Islanders is 7 times greater than the national average. This data begs a sense of urgency to mitigate these risks earlier early(*AAPI Demographics*, n.d.; *The Economic State of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in the United States - The Economic State of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in the United States - United States Joint Economic Committee*, n.d.).

Pacific Islander students represented 1.6% of students enrolled in k-12 Utah schools in 2023-2024 per information published by the Utah State Auditor and Utah State Board of Education. 51% of the State's Pacific Islander k-12 student population are enrolled in Salt Lake county's school districts. Historical Utah high school graduation

rates stayed consistently at 88% between 2020 and 2022. Among minority groups, Pacific Islander students had poorer academic performance, surpassing only their Native American peers.
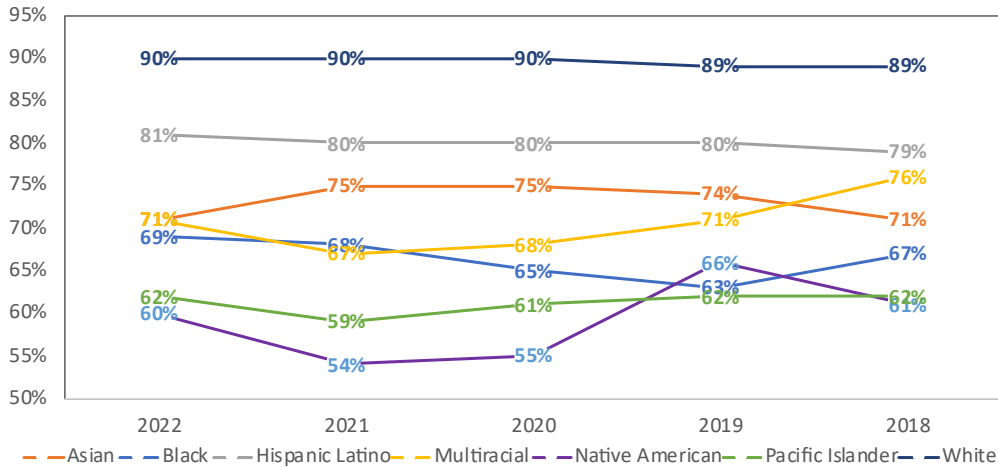
Figure 4 Historical Utah Hight School Graduation Rates by Ethnicity

Between 2018 and 2022, an average of 60% of Pacific Islander students graduated high school. Another concerning trend is the high school dropout rate. Pacific Islanders are the only ethnic group where high school dropout rate consistently increased for the last five years, from 8% in 2018 to 12% in 2022. Moreover, students from socioeconomically disadvantaged households graduated at an even lower rate. The graduation rates dropping from 80% to 77%, in 2020 and 2022 respectively raising a deeper concern for this group.

Figure 5| Historical Utah High School Dropout Rates by Ethnicity

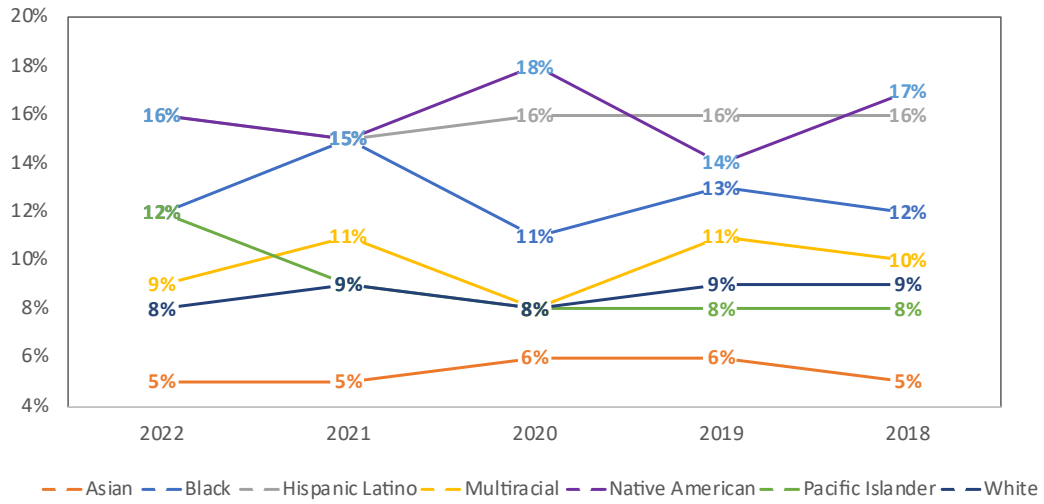Heeding personal stories and experiences of Pacific Islander youth provides a glimpse of their unique challenges. A report produced by the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center reported that Asian American and Pacific Islanders experience high rates of bullying. They also reported "feelings of cultural invisibility in school"(Asian American and Pacific Islander Youth Face Bullying, Lack Visibility, Report Finds, 2019). Many students also experienced intergenerational educational challenges as their parents didn't graduate college and some didn't graduate high school. Students reported receiving no encouragement or guidance from teachers or counselors. These experiences were aggravated by assumptions that these kids didn't need help. With limited or no support at home and no support at school, students didn't fit anywhere and were left to fend for themselves. They either made it or simply slipped through the cracks.

Literature Review

The following literature review investigates the development of after-school programs and their contributions to educational advancement, as well as social and behavioral improvements. It highlight the types and effectiveness of programs providing academic support and enrichment activities. The review also uncovers factors influencing youth engagement in these programs. Furthermore, it addresses the complex challenges that minority groups encounter, such as socioeconomic constraints and systemic biases, and assesses how gender dynamics influence after-school participation.

The emergence and impact of after-school programs

According to Halpern (2000) and MacLeod (1983), the history of organized out-of-school activities for low-income children traces back to the 1870s with the establishment of decentralized boys' clubs in urban areas. Staffed by volunteers and based in churches or vacant buildings, these clubs evolved to include girls by the turn of the century. They transformed from basic drop-in centers to more structured environments offering classes and organized activities like carpentry, printing, and cobbling. Settlements added new elements such as art, music, and photography classes. Additionally, day nurseries provided some after-school care. From 1900 to 1910, public schools began setting up recreation centers and "vacation schools" offering a variety of activities. By the 1920s, schools in many cities had become hubs for after-school and evening social activities.

The early proponents of these programs had various motives, from safeguarding children against street dangers to enriching their experiences and preventing delinquency. Notably, Jane Addams of Hull House sought to foster children's imagination and independent social relationships. However, children often preferred the freedom of the streets over structured programs. The development of these after-school activities continued, with significant growth between World War I and the late 1920s but experienced a setback during the Depression years. The post-World War II era saw a temporary revival in funding, followed by modest growth in the 1950s amidst urban racial transitions. The 1960s saw a focus on early childhood and youth programs, with after-school programs receiving more attention in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in suburban areas. This renewed interest was largely in response to the increase in maternal employment, with funding primarily coming from private sources and government grants (Halpern, 2000).

Since the 1980s, funding for after-school programs in the United States has seen considerable evolution, reflecting the growing recognition of their importance for youth development. In the early 1980s, after-school initiatives often relied on a patchwork of funding sources, including local government budgets, private donations, and community fundraising efforts. The landscape began to change significantly in the mid-1990s with the advent of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) initiative, established under the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (Rep. Kildee, 1994).

This program marked a substantial federal investment in after-school activities, providing grants to rural and inner-city public schools to support after-school and summer programs (Afterschool Alliance, n.d.-a). Over the years, funding has expanded with bipartisan support, recognizing that such programs are not only custodial but also crucial for aiding academic achievement, social development, and providing safe spaces for students outside school hours. Despite occasional threats of budget cuts, advocacy and demonstrated effectiveness have led to sustained, albeit sometimes fluctuating, federal support. Today, after-school program funding encompasses a mix of federal, state, and private funding streams, with programs like the 21st CCLC continuing to play a significant role alongside initiatives like the Child Care and Development Fund and state-specific grants, reflecting an ongoing commitment to the educational and developmental needs of children and adolescents post the regular school hours (Afterschool Alliance, n.d.-a).

After-school programs provide diverse structured activities and supplementary learning experiences. Some programs focus primarily on academic support, others on enrichment activities, and some provide both. Academically-focused programs offer tutoring and homework assistance to enhance students' understanding of core subjects. Indeed, research consistently confirms that relevant programs improve academic outcomes among youth including those at risk (Pelcher, 2016; Mahoney et al., 2005; Park et al., 2015; Shernoff, 2010). Youth participating in after-school programs demonstrate significantly higher reading achievement and greater expectancies of

success compared to other care patterns (Mahoney et al., 2005a). Grogan et al. (2014) assign higher realized academic benefit to students who both attend regularly and are highly engaged in specific types of activities.

Enrichment focused programs offer development through disciplines such as arts, music, sports, and STEM (Afterschool Activities | Youth.Gov, n.d.). Through collaborative projects, group activities, and mentorship opportunities, these programs foster interpersonal skills, teamwork, and emotional intelligence (Pelcher, 2016; Hanoln et al., 2009). Albright and colleagues (2017) echoed Shernoff and Vandell's (2007) finding that program quality holds greater impact on academic outcomes than the frequency and quantity of interactions. A meta-analysis conducted by Duralak et al. (2010) found after-school programs significantly and positively influenced participating youth across three key domains: emotions and attitudes, markers of behavioral adaptation, and academic performance. This serves as evidence of the effectiveness of after-school programs and the ongoing demand for them.

Scholars extensively reported the impacts of after-school programs in diverse environments. The impact of after-school programs on academic, social, and behavioral achievements is multifaceted, particularly for urban youth. In academic terms, after-school programs as discussed by Woodland et al. (2009) and Fashola (2003, 2005) provide vital educational support through tutoring and homework help, which can directly enhance classroom performance. For instance, Bass & Coleman (1997) found that Black male sixth graders in a culturally focused after-school program exhibited

significant behavioral and academic improvements both at school and at home. Similarly, Eccles & Barber (1999) reported that participation in extracurricular activities was positively correlated with higher grade-point averages, suggesting that such programs can indirectly boost educational achievement by keeping students engaged in intellectual activities beyond school hours.

After-school programs also play a crucial role in supporting social and behavioral development. These programs provide safe environments where young individuals can engage in meaningful activities and positive social interactions. A study by Posner and Vandell (1994) found that consistently attending after-school programs was linked to better conduct in school, enhanced peer relationships, and greater emotional adjustment in addition to improved academic performance. This aligns with the work of Woodland (2014), who suggested that after-school programs foster resilience particularly among young Black males and other urban youth facing adversity. Moreover, a study by Vandell et al. (2007) found that students participating in after-school programs were more likely to exhibit positive social behaviors, such as cooperation and conflict resolution skills, compared to their peers who did not participate in such programs. Lastly, Shernoff (2010) concluded that engagement in after-school activities was a predictor of social competence in adolescents. The study found that students who actively participated in after-school programs reported higher levels of challenge, skill usage, and overall positive experiences, contributing to their social and emotional development.

After-school program often provide crucial health and nutritional benefits, especially in communities where access to healthy meals may be limited. They can serve as a source of nutritious snacks or meals, ensuring children receive essential nourishment that is vital for their overall health and well-being (Weisman & Gottfredson, 2001). Additionally, after-school programs offer physical activities and sports, promoting fitness and helping to combat issues like childhood obesity (Mahoney et al., 2005a). Furthermore, these programs often serve as a gateway to arts and cultural enrichment, exposing children to various creative disciplines such as music, art, and drama, which can foster cultural awareness and artistic expression. This exposure not only enhances cultural competence but also contributes to the development of a well-rounded personality (Halpern, 2002). These aspects highlight the multifaceted nature of after-school programs, demonstrating their role in nurturing healthier, more culturally enriched, and well-balanced individuals.

Lastly, after-school programs are instrumental in fostering life skills and resilience, essential for long-term success and well-being. For example, they provide opportunities for youth to develop leadership and teamwork skills, as they often engage in group activities and projects that require collaboration and responsibility (Roth et al., 2010). Furthermore, after-school programs can serve as a crucial foundation for career readiness by introducing young people to various vocational skills and interests, potentially guiding their future educational and career paths (Vandell et al., 2007). They also play a pivotal role in instilling a sense of community involvement and civic

engagement, as many programs include community service activities, teaching the value of giving back and contributing to societal well-being (Lerner et al., 2003). These outcomes illustrate the comprehensive impact of after-school programs, shaping individuals who are not only academically inclined but also socially responsible, career-ready, and actively engaged in their communities.

Program participation and engagement

Many factors influence participation in after-school programs. Financial and economic constraints, content and quality of the program, and cultural factors can prevent participation and thereby limiting accessibility and thereby benefit of joining these programs. Socioeconomic status is a fundamental factor, as families with more resources are better positioned to access and support their children after-school involvement (Pierce et al., 2010). The geographic location and availability of programs also play a role, with urban areas often having more options compared to rural areas where programs may be scarce (Afterschool Alliance, n.d.-b).

The content and quality of the programs are equally critical. Programs that offer diverse and engaging activities that align with students' interests are more likely to encourage sustained participation (Lerner & Steinberg, 2009). The staff's qualifications and their ability to create a positive and supportive environment are important predictors of student engagement and retention in after-school programs (Shernoff, 2010). Furthermore, family engagement is crucial; parents' and caregivers' attitudes towards these programs and their involvement can significantly influence children's participation.

When families are actively involved, and the programs effectively communicate their benefits, children's attendance and engagement tend to increase (Hill & Torres, 2010).

Cultural factors are particularly influential in determining participation in after-school programs. Programs that are culturally responsive and that honor and integrate the students' cultural backgrounds tend to be more successful in attracting and retaining participants from those backgrounds (Gay, 2018). On the contrary, a lack of cultural inclusivity can result in lower participation rates among minority students. It's imperative for after-school programs to adapt to the cultural needs of their communities to ensure that all students have the opportunity to benefit from their resources (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

In sum, participation in after-school programs is not just a matter of availability but also one of accessibility, relevance, and cultural competency. A comprehensive approach that addresses these factors is essential to ensure that all children, regardless of their socioeconomic or cultural background, can benefit from the full spectrum of opportunities that after-school programs can provide. The efforts of this research endeavor will focus solely on the cultural factors influencing participation in after-school programs.

Cultural inclusivity remains a significant challenge within education systems globally, affecting the effectiveness and reach of after-school programs. The integration challenges faced by the Ethiopian community in Israel serve as an instructive example of the need for culturally responsive strategies to facilitate inclusion in after-school

settings (Krivosh, 2022). A similar situation arises in China, where minority women confront systemic and cultural obstacles in higher education that parallel the challenges seen in after-school program participation (Zhao, 2011). These instances illustrate the broader issue of systemic barriers that marginalized communities encounter, underscoring the urgency for educational practices that are culturally informed and equitable. Additionally, research by Vaishali and Thakur (2023) suggests that without such practices, educational systems may inadvertently perpetuate existing disparities.

After-school programs that align with the cultural backgrounds of students have been shown to enhance engagement. Micronesian students, for example, benefit from storytelling approaches that honor their oral traditions, leading to increased participation in settings where their cultural norms of communication are respected rather than misinterpreted as disengagement (Ratliffe, 2011). Furthermore, bilingual programs that integrate Spanish and Hispanic cultural elements can significantly boost engagement among Latino students, affirming the value of linguistic and cultural representation in educational content (Zhou & Kim, 2006).

Moreover, family perceptions of education greatly influence support for after-school programs. In some Asian-American communities, for instance, academic enrichment programs are highly sought after due to a cultural emphasis on educational attainment (Zhou & Kim, 2006). Conversely, in cultures where collective family activities are prized, programs that include family participation tend to see higher engagement (Coll et al., 2000). Recognizing and accommodating these cultural variations is essential

for developing after-school programs that are both appealing and supportive of diverse families.

The ability of parents and caregivers in understanding and navigating educational systems is pivotal for student participation in after-school programs. Immigrant families, in particular, may find the structure of these programs unfamiliar and daunting. Providing multilingual resources and staff from similar cultural backgrounds can empower these families to make informed decisions and take full advantage of after-school opportunities (Hill & Torres, 2010). For example, after-school programs that offer orientation sessions for refugee families have reported increased attendance as these sessions help demystify the educational system for them (Smith, 2007). Programs employing Native American staff have observed greater participation from Native American students, attributing this to the staff's cultural insight and navigational skills within their communities (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Conceptual dissonances between Western educational paradigms and other cultural norms present a profound challenge to participation in after-school programs. The Western emphasis on individual achievement and competition can be at odds with cultures that prioritize collective success and group harmony. In many Asian cultures, for instance, the concept of "face," which governs social interactions and the maintenance of communal harmony, might not align with the competitive individualism encouraged by Western educational practices (Ho, 1976). This divergence can make participation in competitive after-school activities uncomfortable for students from such backgrounds.

Lastly, the Western model of explicit and direct communication in classrooms and after-school programs can be at odds with cultures. For example, western cultures rely on direct communication whilst others might use indirect communication styles and nonverbal cues to convey meaning. This difference can lead to misunderstandings and discomfort for students accustomed to more subtle forms of communication, impacting their willingness to engage in after-school activities (Kraehe et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ratliffe, 2011).

These conceptual dissonances highlight the need for culturally responsive after-school programs that are sensitive to the varied worldviews and cultural norms of the diverse student population they aim to serve. Bridging these gaps is crucial for ensuring that all students can participate fully and benefit from the enrichment opportunities that after-school programs offer.

The national center for Education Statistics (NCES) report on after-school Programs for academic year 2022-2023 found that 56% of public school in the United States offer after-school programs for students who need academic assistance, and 43% of public schools offer academic enrichment (Press Release - The Majority of K-12 Public Schools Offer Academically Focused Summer and After-school Programs - November 8, 2023, n.d.). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, nearly half of these programs averaged 4-5 hours per week engagement per student (2023). Despite these offering, the Afterschool Alliance reported severe deficiency in

available after-school programs with 24.6 million children waiting to get into an after-school program when compared to 18.4 million in 2009 (A. Alliance, n.d.).

After-school programs also serve as a nexus for community engagement, involving parents, local organizations, and volunteers (Kane et al., 2021). In support of this, Kim et al. (2021) evaluated how after-school club characteristics in an Advocacy-based Physical Activity Program are associated with changes in physical activity, nutrition, and attitudes among students of color with a focus on the influence of community partnerships. Results revealed that non-school-based programs with community partners demonstrated the highest positive impact on youth's "optimism for change," "assertiveness," and "decision-making" related to after-school activities. Kim et al further found that partner supported out of school programs build a sense of community and shared responsibility for students' well-being and success. This can only be achieved through deeper understanding of unique individual and specific subcommunities challenges.

Minorities' experiences

A host of socio-economic and demographic characteristics including age, gender, race, parents' education and employment status, income, housing unit type, vehicle ownership, and household composition (family structure, number of children) significantly influence children's After-school engagement. This is true in Hispanic/ Chicano, migrant Hispanic, African American and Pacific Islander communities (Baker et al., 2021; Case, 2020; Sener et al., 2008). Availability of transportation to and from

programs, limited discretionary funds for program fees, or limited time due to work demand as well as other resources constraints may also impact participation by youth and caregivers.

African American caregivers have the highest youth engagement in after-school programs (Case, 2020; Leos-Urbel, 2015). African American youth also enroll at a much higher rate in these programs than any other race (N. Y. for A. Alliance, n.d.; Case, 2020). The higher enrollment rates, according to Case, can be explained by the higher percentage of youth living in homes headed by single working mothers and in high-risk communities. After-school programs provide safe spaces for teens while mothers are at work and providing social support to counteract the discriminatory treatment experienced in school. The discrimination is not unique.

Societal stereotypes and discriminatory practices also play a role in deterring participation among other marginalized groups. Research confirms that Chicano/Latino males and Hawaiian / Pacific Islander males encounter negative assumptions and biased treatment within the educational system (Baker et al., 2021; Kremer et al., 2015; Martinez & Castellanos, 2018). These practices lead to youth disengagement from after-school activities. Stereotypes related to gang affiliations and truancy can further perpetuate a lack of safety, support and inclusivity (Brand et al., 2021; Sjogren & Melton, 2021).

Caregivers of racially and economically marginalized students are rarely considered collaborative partners in their children's success. These caregivers are often

viewed by school personnel as problems to be fixed (Case, 2020) despite evidence to the contrary and calls challenging standards that are not culturally relevant. For example, Case (2020) and the After-school Alliance both report that family engagement is ranked as the most important element of an After-school program. Additionally, researchers challenged the western education constructed concept of family engagement as it can't be universally and unproblematically applied in Pacific contexts (Baker et al., 2021).

Clashes of educational cultures can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the students' behaviors and academic performances by educators unfamiliar with unique cultural norms. Micronesian students, for example, face challenges in adapting to the American-style educational system, which often contrasts starkly with their home cultures where student's quietness in class or avoiding direct eye contact with teachers, signs of respect in many Micronesian cultures, was misinterpreted as disengagement or lack of understanding by American teachers (Ratliffe, 2011). Similarly, Maori and Pasifika students struggled to gain the academic support needed as staff viewed the proposed support as preferential treatment (Nakhid, 2006). Ratliff also points out that American view can misinterpret the communication style and priorities as lack of engagement or commitment. For example, Indirect way of communicating disagreement or request help can be easily misunderstood in the American classroom context where direct communication is expected.

Perhaps the largest western constructed concept that fails to appreciate cultural uniqueness is western individualism. Western cultures, particularly those in North America and parts of Europe, often emphasize individual achievement, self-expression, and personal autonomy. This individualistic viewpoint fosters a sense of independence and personal responsibility, where success and failure are typically viewed as results of individual actions and choices. In contrast, many Asian, African, and Indigenous cultures prioritize community responsibility and collective well-being over individual achievements. In these societies, the needs, and goals of the group—be it a family, tribe, or community—often take precedence over personal desires. Decisions are made with a keen awareness of their impact on the collective, fostering a deep sense of interconnectedness and communal support. Prioritizing family responsibilities and care over school attendance is interpreted as lack of commitment in western society(Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ratliffe, 2011).

Anderson (2023) reported similar dissonance among African students in physical education classes reporting feeling stereotyped based on racial assumptions. Teachers and peers expected the students to naturally excel in sports due to their African heritage. This expectation created a two-fold pressure: firstly, it disregarded the individual interests and abilities of the students, pigeonholing them into specific sports regardless of their personal preferences or talents in other areas. Secondly, for those not excelling in sports, it led to a sense of inadequacy and alienation, as they felt they were not living up to the stereotypical expectations associated with their racial identity.

Gender and culturally specific participation themes

It is worthy to note the limited availability of research exploring gender influence on after-school program participation. An ecological analysis of disadvantaged children in after-school program shows that female youth enjoyed higher motivational attributes such as higher expectancies of success and higher motivation than their male counterparts (Mahoney et al., 2005b). The authors attributed this to the male feedback experience where public negative direct feedback is common and thus decreasing motivational attributes. A separate analysis of the types of activities presented a distinct pattern, but it did not provide any additional insights. Male youth predominantly participated in structured sports activities, whereas female youth show a preference for unstructured socialization and academic pursuits (Sener et al., 2008).

Additionally, increasing the impact of community supported after-school programs requires mindful acknowledgement of individual and social identities to increase inclusion and equity. Children often have to bridge the language gap between school and parents leaving the children in a position to filter information based on their preferences inadvertently hindering their development (Cornelli Sanderson & Richards, 2010; Kane et al., 2021; Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020). Research confirms that ethnic identity development facilitates future success and career development in Hispanic youth (Perry & Calhoun-Butts, 2012). The findings mirror findings by Ma and Yeh (2010) in a study conducted on Chinese immigrant youth. Children of ethnic minority bear more responsibilities than their white counterparts and as such engagement is limited (Serido

et al., 2014). African American and Pacific Islander youth are no exception as discussed

earlier in this review. Individual, social and community identities must be developed,

honored, and supported.

Parents, educators, and communities must successfully navigate increasing

cultural diversity to create supportive inclusive environments. Youth need essential skills

to navigate multicultural environments and promoting positive attitudes toward those

who are(Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020; Priest et al., 2014). This includes effective

strategies to promote positive attitudes, counter negative ones, and respond to

interpersonal, environmental, institution and cultural racism (Brondolo et al., 2009;

Priest et al., 2014). The efforts must be mindful to not inadvertently neglect groups or

fall victim to strategic erasure attempts (Waymer & Health, 2014; Waymer & Heath,

2019). There's a need to build capabilities and capacities to mindfully develop an

understanding of our communities and their members; recognizing that this

understanding is in a continual state of evolution.

Conceptual Framework

The literature review revealed the intricate dynamics of after-school programs and their essential role in advancing educational equity and achievement. It identified the diverse factors affecting youth engagement, such as socioeconomic status, cultural backgrounds, and family dynamics. It also highlighted disparities in access and outcomes, especially among minority groups. As such the study required a theoretical framework that can explain the diverse factors affecting participation and the complexity of their interactions.

I relied on Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to frame my investigation. The theory provided a robust framework for understanding the multifaceted influences on individual development within the context of their environments. The theory suggests that an individual's development is influenced by a dynamic interplay of multiple systems, ranging from the immediate microsystem with insights to individual interactions to the broader macrosystem insights in cultural context (Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, 2022). This framework recognizes the importance of considering the diverse layers ensuring a holistic approach that aligns with the unique needs and experiences of minority youth.

Another strength of this theory is its emphasis on cultural sensitivity within the macrosystem. Engaging with the cultural context and recognizing the significance of cultural factors in minority youth participation is crucial. By acknowledging the cultural nuances within this broader system, after-school programs can tailor their activities to

resonate with the diverse backgrounds of participants, fostering an environment where cultural identities are valued and affirmed. This approach goes beyond a one-size-fits-all model, promoting inclusivity and relevance in program design.
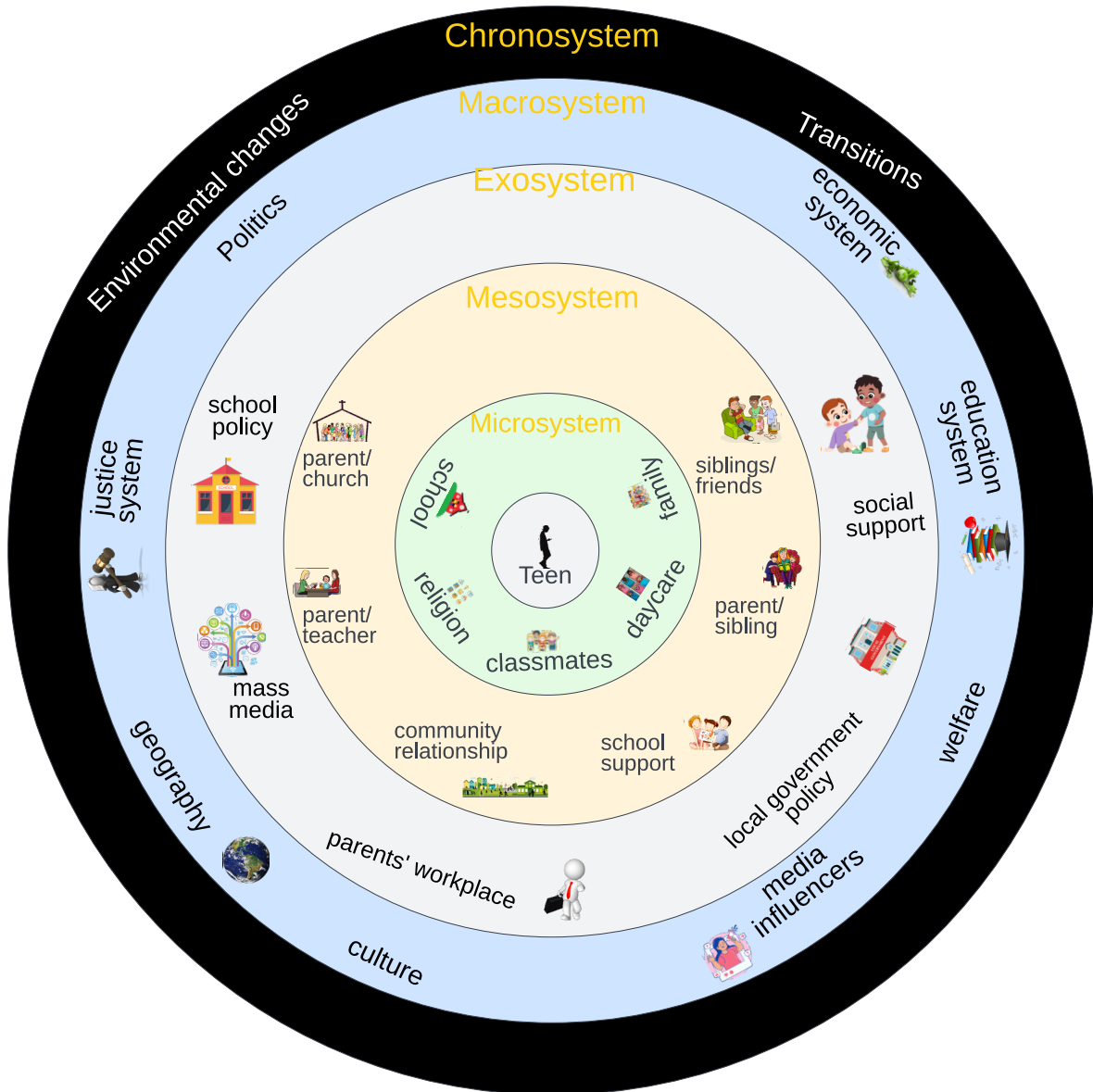

Figure 6: Ecological Systems Theory

Furthermore, the ecological systems theory highlights the interconnectedness of systems, emphasizing the need for community engagement. By understanding the exosystem, which includes community structures and institutions, after-school programs can actively involve minority communities in the program development process. This engagement builds trust, facilitates collaboration, and ensures that the program aligns with the cultural values and expectations of the community. In essence, the ecological systems theory provides a dynamic framework that not only recognizes the complexity of individual development but also encourages after-school programs to be responsive to the broader societal and cultural contexts within which minority youth are situated.

I augmented this framework with Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality concept to consider how multiple social identities (such as race, gender, class, and more) intersect and interact, leading to unique experiences of oppression or privilege (Kimberle W. Crenshaw, n.d.; What Is Intersectionality, n.d.). Applying this theory to the context of after-school programs for Pacific Islander youth can lead to a deeper understanding and more effective solutions in several ways:

First, understanding the role of the immediate environment (the microsystem) that individuals interact with, such as family, school, and peer groups. For Pacific Islander youth, this might involve understanding how their family values, cultural practices, and immediate social circles influence their engagement in after-school programs. For instance, if family obligations or cultural practices are significant in their lives, after-school programs might need to adapt their scheduling or content to better

align with these values. This deeper understanding can lead to more culturally sensitive program designs that are more effective in engaging these youth.

Second, exploring community (the exosystem) and societal influences (macrosystem) can provide insights relative to how the Pacific Islander community views the support or hinderances from their broader environments. The exosystem involves broader community influences, such as the educational system and community resources, while the macrosystem encompasses overarching cultural and societal norms. For Pacific Islander youth, understanding how community factors impact their participation is crucial. Such factors could be availability of resources, community support for education, and prevalent cultural attitudes towards after-school activities. For example, if there is a cultural emphasis on communal activities, after-school programs could incorporate more group-based, culturally relevant activities. Additionally, understanding societal attitudes and potential systemic barriers can inform the development of programs that are not only more inclusive but also advocate for broader systemic changes to support these youth.

Uniquely interesting is gaining insights to the chronosystem or integrating intersectional identities (Chronosystem). Bronfenbrenner's later addition of the chronosystem recognizes the role of transitions and shifts over time in an individual's life. These major shifts are critical especially for second and third generation Pacific Islander Americans with little or no connection to the islands and no ancestorial way of life experience. These insights coupled with Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of

intersectionality provided a window on how multiple social identities (like race, gender, citizenship, and socioeconomic status) intersect over time to create unique experiences. Applying this to after-school programs means acknowledging that the experiences and needs of Pacific Islander youth can change as they grow and as their social contexts evolve. For example, a program that is effective for younger children might need to adapt as these children enter adolescence, considering the changing dynamics of peer influence, identity formation, and increasing academic pressures.

By applying the Ecological Systems Theory to after-school programs for Pacific Islander youth, a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of their needs and challenges can be achieved. This, in turn, enables the development of more effective, culturally tailored, and adaptive solutions that address the specific contexts and evolving needs of these youth.

Research Questions
Research Question 1

Among low/moderate income Pacific Islander teenagers, what cultural factors influence participation in after-school programs in Salt Lake County?

The research question focused on exploring the cultural factors influencing the participation of low/moderate-income Pacific Islander teenagers in after-school programs in Salt Lake County. This inquiry delves into the intricacies of how cultural dynamics within the microsystem and exosystem affect engagement with after-school activities.

A key element in this exploration is understanding the role of family structure and dynamics within the Pacific Islander community. For example, the Samoan concept of 'Fa'asamoa', emphasizing family obligations and community service, may lead teenagers to prioritize familial responsibilities over after-school programs. This indicates the necessity for after-school programs to consider flexible scheduling or family-inclusive activities to accommodate such cultural nuances.

Educational background and perceptions within the Pacific Islander community also significantly influence attitudes toward after-school programs. Historical experiences with formal education systems, which may have been culturally insensitive or marginalizing, could impact the community's trust and willingness to engage with

these programs. Therefore, it's crucial for after-school programs to demonstrate cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in their curriculum and approach.

Furthermore, community values and traditions, such as the Tongan 'Anga Fakatonga', which involves respecting elders and upholding community traditions, play a vital role in shaping teenagers' participation. After-school programs that incorporate traditional arts, cultural practices, or elder involvement might witness enhanced engagement from Tongan youth.

Religious and spiritual beliefs are integral in many Pacific Islander cultures. Programs that respect these beliefs, for instance, by adjusting schedules around religious observances or integrating spiritual elements, may be more appealing and culturally resonant with Pacific Islander families. Additionally, gender roles and expectations may also impact participation. In some Pacific Islander cultures, distinct gender expectations may influence involvement in certain after-school activities. Programs that offer gender-specific activities or are sensitive to cultural norms around gender interactions could attract a more diverse group of Pacific Islander youth.

The question is unrestricting by design. The goal was to support the research explore cultural elements, family dynamics, community values, traditions, educational backgrounds, religious beliefs, and gender roles. The exploration informed the impact various factors have on participation across the different ecosystems.

V

Research Question 2

How do gender-specific cultural factors influence participation in after-school programs?

This question specifically addressed how gender-specific cultural factors influence youth participation in after-school programs. Building on the ecological systems theory, this inquiry aims to dissect the intricate relationship between gender-specific cultural factors and their role in shaping engagement within both the microsystem and exosystem.

Unlike the broader cultural exploration in Research Question 1, this question focused on the nuances of gender-specific expectations and norms. The study examined how cultural constructs of gender within families and communities influence the type of after-school programs in which boys and girls participate. This included investigating if and how traditional gender roles limit or encourage participation in certain activities. For example, cultural norms in some communities encourage boys towards sports and outdoor activities while girls are directed towards arts and indoor activities, revealing how these norms influence the choice of after-school programs. The question explored the extent to which these cultural expectations affect the participation and preferences of boys and girls in different types of after-school activities.

This question also explored community-specific views on gender-appropriate behaviors and how these perceptions shape program offerings and accessibility for different genders. In certain cultures, for example, girls may have traditional caregiving

roles, which could impact their participation in after-school programs. This question supported the research by exploring the appeal of programs supporting these roles and how such gender-defined roles shape enrollment in various programs.

Extending the concept of intersectionality introduced in Research Question 1, this question examined how gender intersects with other cultural identities, such as ethnicity and socioeconomic status, to influence engagement in after-school programs. This objective sought to uncover how multiple identity factors combine to create unique experiences and challenges in accessing and benefiting from these programs. An example of these challenges may be transportation issues or the need for part-time work, affecting their participation in these programs. Through this detailed exploration, the research aimed to provide insights of how cultural as well as gender-specific cultural factors influence the engagement of youth in after-school program**.**

Research Design

      I adopted a mixed-methods approach, which was effective for delving into the complex tapestry of human experiences and actions. This approach linked measurable insights gained from quantitative methods with the nuanced, contextual richness that qualitative research provides. Through quantitative data, I identified overarching patterns and distributions, such as the prevalence of participation or demographic variables, laying a groundwork for the research.

      Qualitative data, on the other hand, peeled back the layers of individual stories, uncovering the motives and perspectives breathing life into the statistics. This dual-faceted strategy offered a more holistic grasp of the research questions, bolstering both the relevance and reliability of the study. Furthermore, it allowed for triangulation, where findings from data was cross-referenced with narrative evidence, lending weight and depth to the conclusions drawn.

      The versatility of the mixed-methods approach acted as a strategic safety net in my research, especially as I engaged with communities where the optimal data collection strategies were not immediately clear. This method supported a dynamic process of exploration, enabling me to initiate data collection with a broad lens and refine my approach as initial results come to light. Should certain data collection methods fall short or certain avenues fail to deliver the anticipated richness, I was prepared to adjust my strategy and explore alternative paths. This adaptive quality not only fortified the research's credibility but also underscored my commitment to honor the

voices and feedback from the community. In essence, the research was designed to be

fluid, evolving alongside the engagement of participants, and emerging insights, thereby

enhancing the chances of arriving at thorough and meaningful conclusions.

Data collection

The research questions guided the selection of the data collection method. The preliminary interviews further informed and refined the collection methods and their protocols. Participants pool included Pacific Islander community members 18 and older. The focus was anchored by insights gained in interviews with members of the Pacific Islander community on decision making as a collective family and even communal affair. Accordingly, participants 'pool provided richer insights representing parents, caregivers, school administrators and even recent high school graduates.

Spy Hop's leadership concerns around inadvertently offending or crossing culturally appropriate boundaries refined the participants pool to exclude existing partners, mainly the Mana Academy administrators, staff and educators. As such, data collection methods were not stakeholder group specific but rather a general inquiry to the community. That is, no data was collected on whether the participant is an educator, a parent or caregiver, or government official. Data was collected from participants of Pacific Islander descent, living in Salt Lake County and are 18 or older.

Additionally, insights gained from Mr. Fisilau managed survey response rate expectations. He advised that since word of mouth is the primary mean of communication among the community, surveys are not likely to organically spread across the community. As such, we expected to gain some valuable, though non-generalizable, insights and themes that could guide focus group protocol or corroborate

focus group findings. Lastly, the survey served as a mean to collect information on respondents interested in participating in the focus groups.

Based on the insights gained from the preliminary interviews, the following table was constructed to logically map how various data needed to answer the research questions will be collected:

Research questions	Data needed	Collection method(s)	
Among low/moderate income Pacific Islander teenagers, what cultural factors influence participation in after-school programs in Salt Lake County?	Demographic information		Survey
	Participation trends & program types		Survey
	Financial constraints impact	Focus group	Survey
	Family role impact	Focus group	Survey
	Cultural norms and values	Focus group	
	Perception of after-school programs	Focus group	
	Participation decision making process	Focus group	Survey
How do gender-specific cultural factors influence participation in after-school programs?	Demographic information (gender)		Survey
	Program preferences by gender	Focus group	Survey
	Gender specific barriers to participation	Focus group	

Table 1: Required data & collection methods

The initial phase of the research, preliminary interviews, was dedicated to understanding how to best engage the Pacific Islander community in the research process. This phase was crucial for establishing a foundation of trust and cultural sensitivity, which is essential for the successful participation of the community in the study. To accomplish this, I relied on community partners and business contacts for insights serving two unique perspectives: the Pacific Islander and non- pacific islander.

These preliminary interviews were designed to lay a foundation for the research, ensuring that all subsequent phases are conducted in a manner that is culturally

respectful, informed, and conducive to active participation from the Pacific Islander community. This phase aided in building trust and significantly contributed to the effectiveness and authenticity of the overall research process including the design of the survey protocol.

A Qualtrics mobile survey was designed and shared. The survey served gathering quantitative dimension to the research. This allowed for the collection of data from a potentially larger sample. The method was geared towards identifying patterns or trends indicative of the broader population's experiences and perceptions. Additionally, it served to inform focus groups probing questions and examples' development.

The survey was limited to participants of Pacific Islander decent having direct or indirect experience with after-school programs. This essentially included parents, caregivers, teachers, siblings, and anyone who have engaged in anyway with after-school program. This design invited more perspectives to the study.

The survey included questions informed by the insights gathered from the preliminary interviews, ensuring that it is closely aligned with the research questions. This phase was crucial for quantifying the prevalence of certain attitudes and experiences among the wider population. The survey was designed to provide the following sets of data:

1. Demographic information including pacific islander origin, age, and gender to provide insights to specific communities' trends and sentiments.

2. Experience with after-school program to provide data on whether the participant and others they know have participated in after-school programs. This section also collected information on program types, i.e., academic, sports, arts …etc.

3. General sentiment on the level of impact familial, gender and economic factors have on participation to inform possible decision making and prioritization process and possible mitigation strategies.

4. Collect information on respondents wiling to engage in focus group discussions.

The final phase of this mixed-methods research employed focus groups to delve into the cultural and gender-specific factors influencing Pacific Islander youths' participation in after-school programs. This phase was strategically designed to engage deeply with the themes and issues that preliminary interviews and surveys have brought to light, offering a dynamic and interactive setting to extract richer, collective insights. Focus groups are grounded in their proven effectiveness in generating dynamic, interactive discussions that can reveal complex social and cultural dynamics. Through these discussions, participants collaboratively built on each other's experiences, providing a depth of understanding that quantitative data alone could not offer. This qualitative approach was vital for unpacking the layers of cultural, familial, and gender-specific influences in a way that aligns with the study's objectives and enriches the findings with nuanced, context-specific knowledge. Participants were able to share and

reflect on their individual and communal experiences with after-school programs, thus allowing the study to examine the role of cultural and family expectations (Research Question 1) and gender dynamics within the community and their influence on program participation (Research Question 2).

Three focus groups discussions were held with 6-10 participants in each focus group. Participants for the focus groups were recruited from the pool of survey respondents who indicated a willingness to engage further. Additional participants attended the focus groups organically. Before participating, individuals were informed of the focus group's purpose, the confidentiality of the discussions, and their right to withdraw at any time. Written consents were also obtained, reinforcing the study's commitment to ethical research practices.

I facilitated the focus groups with at least 1 community partner present. I walked through the focus group protocol with the community partner to ensure that I would conduct conversations respectfully and effectively, ensuring a safe space for all participants. For further details, please see the focus group protocol.

Data analysis

The data collected through this mixed-methods research was analyzed in a multi-step process corresponding with each phase of data collection –interviews, surveys, and focus groups. This plan ensured the integration of both qualitative and quantitative data to address the research questions.

Preliminary Interviews

Preliminary interviews were conducted in the form of meetings, discussions and brainstorming sessions exploring the problem of practice. Five ad-hoc meetings and discussion engaged Pacific Islander community members as well as seven monthly meetings with community partners, namely Spy Hop leadership team. The goal was to gain insights on how to effectively engage with the community in conducting this study and learn from successes and challenges in engaging with the community based on partner feedback.

Non-Pacific Islander / community partner perspective

Monthly meetings were held with Spy Hop leadership team members either in person or via zoom between September 2023 and April 2024. The meetings were intended to align on the research objectives, progress and plans to gain feedback and direction based on the historical organizational knowledge in working with the pacific islander community. Throughout the meetings, Spy Hop leadership continued to raise awareness on the herculean efforts invested to forge and solidify the relationship with the Pacific Islander community, mainly the Mana Academy. Equally raised, is the

concern for any culturally offensive actions or efforts whilst conducting this research that may inadvertently jeopardize the partnership.

The insights gained here emphasized that relationships are the critical bridge that we must build to conduct this study and gain long term support for efforts implementing solutions. In response to the reservations expressed by Spy Hop's leadership about the potential for this study to unintentionally strain current community partnerships, I recalibrated my approach as previously outlined. My revised strategy placed a strong emphasis on respecting and actively safeguarding these essential relationships. It's a priority for me to proceed with sensitivity and care, ensuring that our research efforts fortify rather than compromise the bonds built within the community. As such, I relied heavily on my personal and professional network to progress the research focus on a common goal: the prosperity of Pacific Islander youth.

Pacific Islander perspective

I gained significant insights from six established Pacific Islander personal and professional contacts. The insights shared highlighted family and community values, the honored role and status of women, and collective, rather than individual, concept of success. These insights helped frame terms of success, availability, priorities within the context of what is collectively beneficial rather than individual desired.

In line with the community orientation, I learned the importance of community clubs or meetings as central points to share ideas, solve problems, resolve conflicts, and solidify relationships. Fono, public meetings, in Samoan culture and faikava or

kalapu, kava clubs, in Tongan culture were identified as possible data collection channels and gaining endorsement from the Matai, chief or leaders can signal the community that engaging in the research is acceptable thereby increasing participation.

These community members inform what is important, why it's important and how that importance is demonstrated. Simply put, they helped uncover cultural dos and don'ts that are vital for respectful and effective engagement. Direct input from community members ensured that the research approach is grounded in the lived experiences and cultural norms of the Pacific Islander community. This firsthand knowledge was invaluable in creating an environment where participants feel safe, understood, and respected.

The community insights also guided my research approach to allow the data to narrate its own story, cautioning against the influence of personal biases or a Western perspective. This advice was instrumental in refining the research design and data collection methods, ensuring an analytical stance free from assumptions and rooted in the participants' actual experiences and perspectives.

Survey Data

A QR code for a Qualtrics mobile survey was distributed to two community members with intent of having recipients and respondents forward the survey to their contacts. The response was notably minimal, garnering only 15 responses. This confirmed an earlier expectation of low response rates. As such, survey responses

provided directional data insights to guide or corroborate later focus group findings. The survey data couldn't be generalized.

All respondents were 18 or older and all of Pacific Islander descent. Of these respondents, 67% identified as Tongan, while 20% reported being Samoan, and the remaining 13% indicated a mixed Tongan/Samoan heritage. The breakdown is expected as 70% of Utah Pacific Islander population is either Samoan or Tongan (Bureau, n.d.). Only 13% or two respondents, identified as female while 87% or13 respondents identified as male. None of the respondents identified as non-binary.

When asked about experience with after-school programs, only two respondents representing 13%, stated that they have no experience with after-school programs. 73% of respondents stated that they personally participated in after-school programs while 13% stated that either they or someone they know participated in such programs. 85% of respondents with direct or indirect experience with after-school programs participated in both sports as well as art programs. Only 46% reported participating in academic after-school programs. Again, whilst response rates were low, the collected data hints at prevalence of after-school programs among the Pacific Islander community. Responses might also signal leanings towards sports and art based programs.

Additionally, the survey examined the impact of three main factors that influence participation. On the importance of cultural representation in the programs, nine of the 15 participants indicated that when considering after-school programs, it's moderately to extremely important that the program incorporates culture.

When considering an after school program, how important that the program incorporates your culture?

■ Male ■ Female

Extremely important
Very important
Moderately important
Slightly important
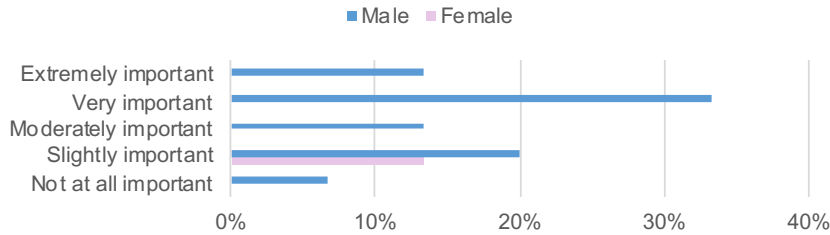Not at all important

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%

Figure 7: Survey results - Culture incorporation

On the level of influence the family has on the decision to participate in after-school programs, 67% of the respondents indicated that families play a moderate to extreme influence in the decision making process.

How much influence does family have on the decision of participating in an after school program?

■ Male ■ Female

Extreme influence
High influence
moderate influence
Slight influence
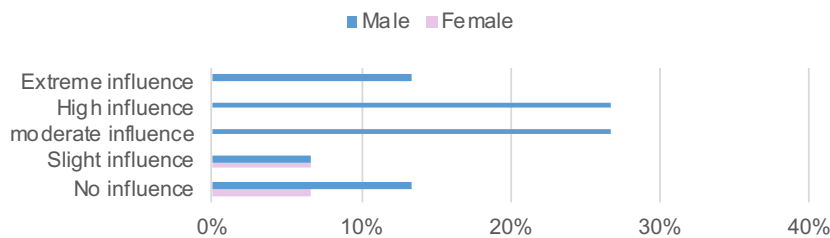No influence

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%

Figure 8: Survey results - family influence on decision making

Finally, on the level of the influence financial factors have on the decision to participate in after-school programs, 73% of respondents indicated that finances have a moderate to high influence on the decision making process.

How much influence do financial factors have on the decision of participating in an after school program?
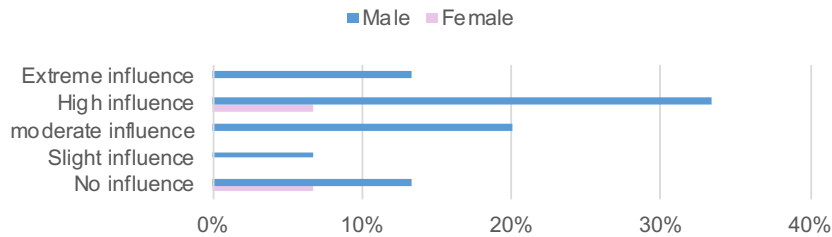
■Male ■Female

Figure 9: Survey results - financial factors impact

The collected survey data, despite a lower response rate, offers a high-level perspective on the Pacific Islander community's interaction with after-school programs, supporting the role of cultural, familial, and financial factors in shaping participation choices.

Focus Groups

Three focus groups were conducted with participants representing Tongan, Samoan, Fijian and Hawaiian pacific islander groups. An additional ad-hoc focus group was conducted with another smaller group. The groups included 37 participants residing in the Glendale, Taylorsville and West Valley City areas. 80% of participants identified as male and 20% as female. Participants age ranged from 25-45.

Focus groups were conducted both in person and via Zoom meetings. The zoom-generated transcription was used for data analysis. First, the transcript was manually reviewed for accuracy, correcting any misinterpretations caused by slang language or local jargon. Second, participant names were replaced with pseudonyms for anonymity. Following this, the software NVivo was used to systematically identify

themes within the transcripts, providing a structured approach to data analysis. Additionally, a further manual review of the transcripts to highlight any discussions on gender-specific factors affecting participation Finally, the identified themes were manually grouped to align with the ecological systems theory and intersectionality framework. The analysis revealed major themes across different ecological levels that collectively shape engagement in educational programs as follows:

At the microsystem level, or the individual level, family dynamics and educational aspirations profoundly shape Pacific Islander teenagers' participation in after-school programs. Within the family unit, parental influence and cultural values play a significant role in determining whether teens engage in these activities. Moreover, the individual's educational aspirations, often influenced by familial expectations and cultural emphasis on academic success, impact their motivation to participate in programs aimed at academic enrichment.

The interactions between microsystems, the mesosystem, particularly peer influence and community connections, significantly impact participation in after-school programs. Peer groups serve as important sources of support and validation for teens, influencing their decisions to participate. Additionally, community connections, such as involvement in cultural gatherings or events, provide avenues for program promotion and access to information, highlighting the interconnectedness between individual experiences and broader community dynamics.

External factors, such as financial constraints and language barriers, operate at the exosystem level to influence participation in after-school programs. Economic challenges, including the inability to afford program fees or access transportation, can pose significant barriers to participation. Moreover, language barriers may hinder access to information about available programs, emphasizing the importance of culturally sensitive communication strategies to address these external obstacles.

Cultural identity, preserved within program activities, and broader cultural norms significantly influence participation preferences at the macrosystem level. Programs that incorporate Pacific Islander cultural elements foster a sense of belonging and pride among participants, enhancing engagement and retention. Furthermore, cultural norms regarding education and success shape perceptions of after-school programs, highlighting the impact of cultural context on participation decisions.

Generational differences or temporal dimensions, the chronosystem, within Pacific Islander communities can shape attitudes and behaviors towards after-school programs over time. For example, older generations hold traditional beliefs about education and community involvement that differ from those of younger generations. These generational shifts influence the ways in which after-school programs are perceived and valued within the community. Younger generations are more receptive to innovative program approaches or may prioritize different aspects of program participation compared to their elders.

By examining these insights through the lens of the ecological systems theory, we gained a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between individual experiences, social interactions, and broader cultural factors in influencing participation in after-school programs illuminating the study's findings.

Findings

      The data analysis revealed findings that are deeply rooted in the Pacific Islander identity. Cultural and familial obligations often prioritize communal responsibilities, impacting individual participation, while the trust placed in community leaders and financial accessibility significantly influences engagement levels. Additionally, there's a clear desire for programs that respect and integrate cultural heritage ensuring cultural continuity. Generational shifts reveal a growing openness among younger Pacific Islanders towards diverse after-school activities, suggesting an evolving recognition of these programs' value in fostering holistic development. Girls are free to participate in diverse activities and programs like their male counterparts. Here are the details of the study's findings.

Research questions	Finding
Question 1: Among low/moderate income Pacific Islander teenagers, what cultural factors influence participation in after-school programs in Salt Lake County?	Family expectations and responsibilities highly influence activity prioritization and participation decisions.
	Community endorsement of programs increases trust in program efficacy.
	Financial constraints automatically rule out programs as options.
	The desire to preserve and transmit cultural heritage is vital to the community's continuity.
	There's growing recognition of the benefits of diverse after-school programs among second and third-generation American Pacific Islanders.
Question 2: How do gender-specific cultural factors influence participation in after-school programs?	The community values cultural identity, skills, and involvement over gender-specific roles.

Table 2: Findings

Question 1

Among low/moderate income Pacific Islander teenagers, what cultural factors influence participation in after-school programs in Salt Lake County?

Finding 1: Family expectations and responsibilities highly influence activity prioritization and participation decisions.

"It take the village to raise children and in most Polynesian homes,

it's not just the parents and children. You also have the

grandparents, and if you're lucky you have the great grandparents.

And the approval from everyone in the household is very much

needed for the little ones." – harmony

"Our people were raised to be very humble. And we're taught that

you know, we're always supposed to take care of each other. And

so how that translates over into decision making processes you

know, it's hard to choose things for yourself, because you've been

brought up, always taking care of everybody else." – brilliant1

The Pacific Islander community's profound emphasis on family and cultural values significantly shapes its youth's participation in after-school programs. This community is characterized by a deep-rooted respect and authority attributed to parental guidance, underscoring a family-centric approach pivotal in the educational

engagement of Pacific Islander youth. The collective decision-making and prioritization of familial obligations over individual pursuits stand as cultural hallmarks, influencing both educational opportunities and extracurricular engagement.

Focus group findings illuminate the influential role of family expectations on youth participation in after-school activities. For instance, Tea, a male participant articulated the community's deference to parental authority, stating, "Everybody here kind of has the same understanding of when Mom and Dad speak, everybody listens." This underscores the significant role parents play within the Pacific Islander community. Harmony, a female participant's reflections further reveal the responsibilities often placed on elder siblings, "If you are the oldest sibling, you have to come home and watch the kids. So, you didn't really have time for after-school programs." These insights from community members highlight how family structures and expectations directly impact Pacific Islander youth's engagement with after-school programs.

Supporting these community observations, the literature underscores the importance of family involvement and support in youth educational activities. Studies by Halpern (2000) and MacLeod (1983) emphasize the crucial role of familial consent in the educational decision-making process, demonstrating the collective family values' influence on educational pursuits. Additionally, Pelcher (2016) and Mahoney et al. (2005) discuss the impact of family obligations on participation in extracurricular

activities. This suggests that to improve accessibility and engagement among Pacific Islander youth, after-school programs must carefully consider these family dynamics.

In brief, the Pacific Islander community's emphasis on family and cultural values plays a crucial role in shaping youth participation in after-school programs. The authoritative role of parents, coupled with the significant responsibilities often shouldered by elder siblings, presents unique challenges and considerations for after-school program engagement. The insights from focus groups, supported by literature, advocate for after-school programs to employ culturally responsive approaches that respect and integrate the family-centric values of the Pacific Islander community. By doing so, after-school programs can enhance their accessibility and relevance, fostering greater participation and engagement among Pacific Islander youth, ensuring that programs not only accommodate but actively support the intricate balance of educational aspirations and familial obligations within this community.

Finding 2: Community endorsement of programs increases trust in program efficacy.

"Information travels faster in those smaller communities than it does on social media" – Sec

"Especially in the Polynesian community cause trust is a big thing. So, us to give trust like we trust somebody, we are going to believe what they say." – Chief

"… go into little league practices or a junior jazz practice. And I

think when parents see … somebody that's gonna run after-school

program there, they're gonna you know, feel like, oh, like this

person actually cares to be here, and actually, you know, push this

message that they're trying to do [good] for my kid." – Tea

The trust Pacific Islander families place in community leaders and trusted figures plays a pivotal role in guiding their engagement with after-school programs, demonstrating a cultural reliance on established community networks for validation and endorsement of educational opportunities; an insight shared during preliminary interviews. This dynamic is underscored by the sentiments expressed by community members during focus group discussions, which highlight the significant influence that coaches and other respected figures wield in the decision-making processes of Pacific Islander families regarding after-school participation.

Tea, for instance, emphasizes the deference given to coaches' recommendations, stating, "Parents listen to coaches; they're like, 'Oh, yeah, coach said to do it.'" This observation points to the weight of community endorsement in fostering trust and participation in after-school programs. Harmony echoes this sentiment, advocating for outreach to coaches as a strategic approach to engage Pacific Islander youth, "if you also reach out to coaches... Because, if you think about it, this is Polynesians, we have cousins that don't play, but they want to do other stuff".

Similarly, reaching out to church leadership is equally effective as shared by Sec, a male participant shared "that's the 3 places you, I promise you, catch a lot of Polynesian that home, church, or work for the most part, that's what you'll catch out of them". Lastly, Brilliant1 summarized it by "You need to first go to the community leaders, whoever that is, whether that's a bishop. Or you know, if there is a program that the Polynesian community has set up going to whoever, you know, is the head of that program, and having them spread the message to the parents, who can then be more open to it because it's coming from the mouth of their community."

These reflections reveal the integral role of trusted community figures in promoting and validating after-school programs within the Pacific Islander community.

The literature further supports these findings, emphasizing the critical role of community leaders and trusted figures in promoting educational opportunities within Pacific Islander communities. The Afterschool Alliance (2021) highlights the importance of engaging community leaders in outreach efforts to effectively attract Pacific Islander youth to after-school programs. Similarly, Shernoff (2010) underscores the significance of building trust and rapport within these communities to foster meaningful engagement. Studies by Kane et al. (2021) and the Afterschool Alliance (n.d.-a) also suggest that programs that effectively involve community leaders in their initiatives are more likely to succeed in drawing the interest and participation of youth, underlining the pivotal role of community endorsement in educational engagement efforts.

In summary, the trust and respect Pacific Islander families have for community leaders and trusted figures plays an important role in their decision-making process regarding after-school program participation. The recommendations of coaches and other respected community members serve as vital endorsements that can significantly influence parental decisions. By leveraging these community networks and building trust through respected figures, after-school programs can enhance their outreach and engagement.

Finding 3: Financial constraints automatically rule out programs as options.

> "I wanna play sport but I couldn't play because it was $300. I'm not
>
> gonna go ahead and tell my parents that work 2 jobs I want to play
>
> football. I come home, see my dad knocked out in the car from the
>
> second job. He hasn't even got out of the car yet. His door open,
>
> foot out. Haven't even made it to the house? So, with me, looking at
>
> that, I'm like. No, I'm not gonna ask my parents to pay for my sport.
>
> What I'm gonna do is I'm gonna help them out" – Chief

In the Pacific Islander community, financial considerations are often a decisive factor in determining whether children can participate in after-school programs. Chief poignantly shares the financial reality many families face: "Yeah, finance had to do a big role in it... We grew up poor. My parents, they're working two jobs". This economic hardship is a common thread in the community, influencing the accessibility of educational resources. Similarly, Brilliant1 speaks to the enduring impact of economic

scarcity, "growing up with the poverty mindset... you're wasting gas when we can, you know, do it this way", which reflects how financial prudence is instilled from a young age due to economic constraints. The lived experience empowered youth to decide in support of their families by opting out of an activity due to financial constraints.

The literature supports these testimonials, shedding light on the economic hurdles that Pacific Islander families encounter. Studies have shown that financial barriers significantly limit the participation of these youth in after-school programs (Afterschool Alliance, n.d.-b). Pelcher (2016) emphasizes the need for affordable and inclusive educational opportunities, suggesting that fiscal burdens can prevent meaningful engagement in these programs. Further research by Mahoney et al. (2005) and Shernoff (2010) indicates that strategies such as financial aid and reduced program costs can substantially improve access to after-school activities, highlighting the critical role that economic support plays in leveling the educational playing field.

In summary, financial barriers are a significant challenge for Pacific Islander families wishing to engage their children in after-school programs. The testimonies from the community, reinforced by scholarly research, advocate for the development of financial structures and support systems that are sensitive to the economic realities of Pacific Islander families. Addressing these financial challenges is not only a matter of providing educational opportunities but is also crucial for supporting the overall wellbeing and future prospects of Pacific Islander youth within the community.

Finding 4: The desire to preserve and transmit cultural heritage is vital to the community's continuity.

"I think they don't see us at all. For the most part, we are on the

sideline at least" – Sea

"many programs are not catered to Polynesian kids. They just see

us, and they see sports" – Stoic

The cultural preservation and transmission within Pacific Islander communities are not merely aspects of educational engagement but are foundational to the identity and continuity of these communities. Tea's insight, "I think for us, it's about making sure that whatever program our kids are involved in, it respects our culture and maybe even helps transmit it," illustrates a profound respect and necessity for cultural relevance in programs involving their youth. This emphasis on culturally respectful programming is echoed in the community's broader aspirations, as Harmony adds, "It's not just about academic success; it's about our kids knowing who they are and where they come from". These perspectives underscore the community's desire for educational experiences that affirm and reinforce their cultural identity. That is especially critical according to Chief, for "Polynesians in general [where] a lot of our ancestors didn't keep history books. They didn't write it. So, the way they told stories, or these were passed down by word of mouth".

Incorporating cultural elements in after-school programs is a crucial strategy for enhancing student participation and engagement. The research conducted by Shernoff (2010) and supported by the Afterschool Alliance (2021) indicates that culturally responsive programming significantly contributes to the involvement of Pacific Islander youth in educational activities. Furthermore, Pelcher (2016) and Mahoney et al. (2005) underscore the role of after-school programs in promoting a sense of belonging and cultural pride, suggesting that a robust cultural education component is vital for the efficacy of such programs.

Indeed, the integration of cultural education within after-school programs can serve as a powerful tool for cultural preservation. As such, programs designed for Pacific Islander communities must not only accommodate but actively celebrate and teach the rich traditions and practices of these cultures. By doing so, they not only honor the cultural heritage of the participants but also foster a nurturing environment where cultural pride and educational pursuits go hand in hand.

Finding 5: There's growing recognition of the benefits of diverse after-school programs among second and third-generation American Pacific Islanders Generational Perspectives.

Within the Pacific Islander community, generational perspectives significantly influence attitudes towards after-school program participation, highlighting a complex interplay between shifting cultural values and the perceived importance of these educational opportunities. Observations from community members like Sea and Stoic

reveal a nuanced evolution from traditional to more inclusive viewpoints regarding educational and developmental opportunities outside the classroom. Sea's comment, "For us to actually go through the school system here we actually see what opportunity I think actually, for me more, we're more open to problem. Whatever interest our kids, you know, whether it's something that we like or don't like. If it sparks … the interest of our kids, and they want to do it. They have our full support" (Sea), exemplifies this progressive shift. This transition mirrors broader trends of cultural adaptation among immigrant families, characterized by a gradual integration of host culture aspects alongside traditional values (Halpern, 2000; MacLeod, 1983).

The appreciation among younger Pacific Islanders for the broad benefits of after-school activities is further emphasized by Stoic's observation: "They see us, and they see sports ". This awareness contrasts starkly with older generations' perceptions, which may prioritize conventional educational routes or regard after-school activities as less critical. This evolution in perception underscores a recognition of after-school programs' potential to cater to cultural strengths and personal interests, aligning with research that highlights the value of these programs in offering substantial learning and development opportunities (Pelcher, 2016; Mahoney et al., 2005).

Moreover, the changing views on education and skill acquisition across generations within the Pacific Islander community, as highlighted by Brilliant1's remarks, indicate a growing acknowledgment of the educational system's role in addressing diverse student needs. Brilliant1's insight, "I feel like education system has become

better at it throughout time. To include programs that are needed more towards the diverse groups" reflects an optimistic view that educational programs are increasingly accommodating the diverse needs of Pacific Islander students. This evolving perspective suggests a shift from earlier experiences with a more limited or culturally insensitive educational landscape, resonating with findings from the Afterschool Alliance (2021) on the importance of evolving inclusivity in educational offerings.

In conclusion, the shift in generational perspectives within the Pacific Islander community towards after-school programs signifies a move towards more inclusive and adaptive educational experiences. This evolution reflects broader trends of cultural adaptation, with younger generations showing a readiness to merge traditional values with new opportunities for growth. Recognizing and addressing the varied needs and expectations across generations is crucial for the success of after-school programs targeting Pacific Islander youth. Such efforts ensure these programs are culturally responsive and supportive of the community's diverse aspirations, fostering a conducive environment for educational engagement and cultural enrichment.

Question 2

How do gender-specific cultural factors influence participation in after-school programs?

Finding 6: The community values cultural identity, skills, and involvement over gender-specific roles.

We are unable to conclude the existence of gender-specific cultural factors influencing participation in after-school programs directly or indirectly. Neither the preliminary interviews nor the focus groups mentions such factors either explicitly or implicitly. There are, however, indications of broader societal expectations which could potentially impact participation differently based on gender.

Stereotyping, particularly within educational settings, significantly impacts minority communities, including Pacific Islanders. The literature reveals how these stereotypes can shape perceptions and opportunities for youth. For instance, Baker et al. (2021) discuss how societal stereotypes and discriminatory practices deter participation among marginalized groups, including Pacific Islander males and females, in various educational activities. This stereotyping can lead to assumptions about the roles and interests of Pacific Islander youth, often constraining them to certain sports or activities deemed culturally or socially appropriate based on their gender.

Moreover, stereotypes related to academic abilities and interests can further complicate the engagement of Pacific Islander girls in after-school programs. Research

indicates that minority students, including Pacific Islanders, face biases that can limit their access to and participation in a range of extracurricular activities, including those focused on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields (Case, 2020; Sener et al., 2008). These biases not only restrict opportunities for individual growth but also reinforce gendered expectations about the types of activities deemed suitable for boys versus girls.

Contrary to common stereotypes that might narrowly associate sports participation with boys, inherent physical prowess of both male and female Pacific Islanders engagement in sport activities is not exclusive to one gender. Focus group participants shared a broader cultural appreciation for physical activities that transcends gender distinctions. For instance, Stoic's remark, "They see us, and they see sports" does not specify boys or girls, implying that sports are a unifying interest within the community, irrespective of gender. Brilliant1 echoed Stoic's gender neutral view explaining "we're already physically blessed people… so, it comes really easy to us." And "a lot of us grew up religious. And so, we already grew up, singing … so, it's easy to translate into those programs." This inclusive perspective on sports participation among Pacific Islander youth underscores a collective cultural identity that values skills and community involvement over individual gender roles. Hence, youth may face challenges when attempting to engage in different programs facing the prevalent wider societal stereotypes.

Despite these challenges, there is a notable openness among Pacific Islander communities, particularly among girls, to explore and participate in after-school programs beyond traditionally accepted norms. The focus group transcript illustrates a shift towards more inclusive attitudes regarding girls' involvement in a variety of activities. For example, Harmony's mention of children's participation in STEM and choir indicates a broader acceptance and support for girls engaging in diverse educational experiences. This reflects a departure from strictly adhering to previously prevalent go-to after-school program. It also demonstrates an expanded view of community's perspective on the benefits of after-school programs in educational and extracurricular pursuits. As such, initiatives that specifically target the interests and needs of Pacific Islander individuals, gender aside, can help break down barriers to participation, encouraging a wider range of activities that reflect their diverse talents and aspirations.

In summary, addressing stereotyping and promoting openness to non-traditional programs for girls within Pacific Islander communities are crucial steps towards ensuring equitable access to after-school programs. By challenging societal stereotypes and fostering an environment that values diversity and inclusion, Pacific Islander communities can support the holistic development of their youth, enabling both boys and girls to explore a broad spectrum of interests and opportunities.

Recommendations

The findings emphasize the influence of family expectations, community endorsement, financial considerations, cultural preservation, and generational perspectives on program participation. Recognizing these factors as both potential barriers and catalysts for involvement, I propose actionable steps that honor and leverage the community's rich cultural heritage and values. By engaging trusted community leaders, addressing decision-making processes, and establishing robust community feedback mechanisms, I aim to foster a more inclusive, responsive, and supportive environment. The recommendations are designed to address the immediate gaps identified and to lay the groundwork for a sustainable model of community engagement that resonates with the community's unique needs and aspirations.

Engage trusted community leaders regularly

Identifying trusted community leaders plays a pivotal role in successfully engaging Pacific Islander youth in after-school programs. The cultural reliance on established community networks for validation and endorsement of educational opportunities cannot be overstated. As Chief noted, "Especially in the Pacific Islander community … trust is a big thing. So, us to give trust like we trust somebody, we are going to believe what they say." This sentiment underscores the profound impact that respected community figures can have on the decision-making processes of families regarding after-school participation. Tea's suggestion to "go into little league practices or

a junior jazz practice" and engage with the community there reflects a practical approach to identifying leaders who already hold the community's trust. These strategies are echoed in the literature, which emphasizes the importance of involving community leaders in outreach efforts to effectively attract youth to after-school programs (Shernoff, 2010)

The strategy of delving into smaller communities and initiating conversations represents a grassroots approach to understanding and meeting the specific needs of Pacific Islander families. This method allows for the discovery of what Sec describes as the faster travel of information through smaller communities than social media. By engaging directly with these communities, program organizers can identify the individuals who are naturally looked up to and whose opinions are valued. This approach not only ensures that the voices of the community are heard but also fosters a sense of ownership and partnership in the development and implementation of after-school programs. The literature supports this localized engagement strategy, noting that culturally responsive programming significantly contributes to the involvement of Pacific Islander youth in educational activities, as it respects and integrates students' cultural backgrounds (Mahoney et al., 2005b; Pelcher & Rajan, 2016).

Inviting these community-defined leaders to broader discussions is a critical step towards gaining their buy-in and, by extension, the community's trust in after-school programs. As Tea and Chief suggest, the presence and endorsement of trusted figures

at program events or informational sessions can dramatically increase parental confidence in the safety and value of these programs for their children. Furthermore, these leverages established channels of communication and influence within Pacific Islander communities.

Engaging with leaders in this way not only ensures that programs are tailored to meet the community's needs but also leverages the existing social infrastructure to maximize outreach and impact, aligning with strategies suggested by the literature for engaging minority communities in after-school programs (A. Alliance, n.d.; Kane et al., 2021) This collaborative approach ensures that after-school programs are not only accessible but also culturally relevant and supported by the very fabric of the community they aim to serve.

Mitigate gaps along the decision making process

Mitigating informational gaps in the decision-making process (see the appendix for decision making process chart) for after-school programs necessitates clear, accessible communication tailored to the Pacific Islander community's specific needs and concerns. Chief's reflection on the economic hardships faced by many families in the community, "Yeah, finance had to do a big role in it... We grew up poor. My parents, they're working two jobs," underscores the importance of straightforward messaging about program costs and available financial support to deal with these challenges. Several studies highlight the significant barriers financial constraints pose to after-school program participation (Afterschool Alliance, n.d.-a; Pelcher & Rajan, 2016) The

literature suggests that transparent communication about program costs and available financial assistance can significantly alleviate these barriers. This aligns with findings by Mahoney et al. (2005) and Shernoff (2010), which advocate for the inclusion of targeted financial aid information in outreach efforts to enhance access and equity in after-school program participation.

Utilizing simple and easily understandable language to explain the costs associated with participation, alongside information about scholarships, grants, or sliding scale fees, can demystify the financial obligations for families. This approach ensures that the economic barriers to participation are addressed upfront, allowing families to make informed decisions without the fear of unforeseen expenses.

The critical role of sibling care responsibilities within Pacific Islander families, as highlighted by Harmony's reflections, reflects broader research findings on the impact of family obligations on youth engagement in extracurricular activities (Halpern, 2000; MacLeod, 1983). Addressing these obligations by providing clear information about sibling-friendly programs and transportation logistics directly responds to the identified needs within this community. This approach is supported by literature emphasizing the importance of family engagement and the alignment of program offerings with family responsibilities to increase participation rates (Mahoney et al., 2005b; Pelcher & Rajan, 2016).

Moreover, the literature underscores the value placed on academic and personal development opportunities within after-school programs (A. Alliance, n.d.; Shernoff, 2010). Emphasizing the multifaceted benefits of these programs, including cultural preservation, which is a significant consideration for Pacific Islander families, can enhance the attractiveness of after-school activities. The research indicates that programs that integrate cultural education and promote personal development alongside academic support are more likely to engage diverse student populations effectively (Mahoney et al., 2005b; Pelcher & Rajan, 2016).

By incorporating these elements into program messaging and ensuring that the benefits are communicated clearly and compellingly, after-school programs can better address the informational needs of Pacific Islander families, thereby facilitating informed decision-making and increasing program participation.

Create and manage community-wide feedback loops

Refocusing efforts to create and mitigate community feedback loops more directly towards individuals, families, and participants themselves offers a targeted approach to enhancing after-school program engagement within the Pacific Islander community. This method emphasizes the importance of capturing and addressing the nuanced feedback from those most intimately involved with or affected by these programs. As highlighted in the focus group discussions, Pacific Islander families value educational opportunities that respect and incorporate their cultural heritage, as well as address practical concerns such as sibling care and transportation.

The literature supports this personalized approach by suggesting that after-school programs which effectively communicate their benefits, costs, and logistical arrangements to families can significantly increase participation and engagement. According to Mahoney et al. (2005) and Pelcher (2016), transparent communication about program specifics, including available support for sibling care and transportation, can alleviate some of the barriers to participation. These studies advocate for the development of materials and outreach efforts that use simple, accessible language to inform parents and guardians about the full spectrum of program offerings, including academic and personal development benefits, thereby addressing informational gaps.

To implement this recommendation effectively, after-school programs could develop targeted communication strategies that include the distribution of informational brochures in community centers, schools, and churches, where they are easily accessible to families. These materials should highlight key program features that align with the expressed needs and preferences of Pacific Islander families, such as support for siblings, transportation options, and the emphasis on cultural preservation.

Additionally, establishing a feedback mechanism, such neighborhood centered focus groups or collecting feedback at youth sporting events, can provide ongoing opportunities for individual participants and families to share their experiences and suggestions.

Conclusion

The Pacific Islander community in Salt Lake County is at a crossroads. Between 2010 and 2020, the pacific islander population increased by 50%, compared to statewide increase of 18%. As population grows, so do challenges to ensure prosperity of current and future generations. The community experiences the highest high school dropout rates coupled with second lowest high school graduation rates. Only 20-25% move on to earn a bachelor's degree compared to 35% nationwide. All of which contribute to the high poverty rate among the community.

With deep appreciation for the research supported impact of after-school programs on the academic, personal and social development of youth, my partnership with Spy Hop production set to explore factors influencing participation in such program within this community. Heeding scholars' warnings of increasing disparities among minorities due to lack of culturally programs, the study focused on exploring cultural factors as well as gender-specific cultural factors that influence participation in after-school programs. Through the communities' prevalent channels of communications, word of mouth, face to face interaction and storytelling, the study gained insights that can be operationalized to foster deeper relationships and thereby improved youth and community engagement in after-school programs.

Establishing a robust and interconnected network of community leaders fosters the development of programs that resonate with the Pacific Islander youth and their broader community. Such collaboration ensures comprehensive outreach, relevant

program design, and sustained community support, effectively addressing challenges and optimizing the benefits of after-school engagements. Key to this approach is the upfront discussion of financial barriers, ensuring transparency around program costs and available support to enhance accessibility. Additionally, embedding cultural values and elements within these programs significantly boosts participation, aligning with the community's cultural identity and fostering its preservation.

Creating, maintain and nurturing ongoing and consistent feedback mechanisms is crucial for adapting to evolving community needs, perceptions, and values, particularly in response to generational shifts. Regular communication channels between program administrators and community members enable a dynamic understanding of the changing landscape of youth and family priorities. These feedback loops offer invaluable insights into the effectiveness of current programs and highlight areas for improvement or innovation. By closely monitoring these shifts, after-school programs can remain relevant and responsive, ensuring they continue to meet the community's needs effectively. This approach not only strengthens the programs' impact but also fosters a sense of ownership and engagement within the community, enhancing the overall success of youth engagement initiatives.

In conclusion, after-school programs serve as a critical lever for addressing the challenges faced by Pacific Islander youth in Salt Lake County. By integrating cultural sensitivity with strategic operational approaches, these programs can provide meaningful support to this community, enhancing educational opportunities and overall

well-being. Through concerted efforts to engage with the community, understand its

values, and provide tailored support, after-school programs can become a

transformative force in the lives of Pacific Islander youth, enabling them to achieve their

full potential amidst the challenges they face.

Limitations

- Survey Distribution Channels: The survey was only distributed through personal contacts, it is safe to conclude that it did not reach a broad and diverse section of the community, leading to a non-representative sample

- Sample Size and Representativeness: A low survey response rate may not be representative of the broader population. This significantly restricted the ability to generalize findings to the entire demographic of interest.

- Gender Disparity: A significant gender imbalance among respondents also limited the understanding of the experiences and needs of all genders within the community, potentially overlooking specific gender-related factors.

Ethical considerations

- **Cultural Sensitivity and Respect:** Given the focus on Pacific Islander community and the cultural nuances involved, the research was conducted with the utmost cultural sensitivity. It aimed to respect the traditions, languages, and social norms of the community. The research instruments and protocols were designed and reviewed in consultation with community partners to ensure they are culturally appropriate and non-intrusive. The study acknowledges the importance of cultural competence, not only as an ethical imperative but also as a critical component of research validity.

- **Informed Consent and Confidentiality:** The ethical foundation of this research is built upon ensuring informed consent and confidentiality for all participants except where authorization to disclose participant identify was provided in writing. Prior to engaging in interviews, surveys, or focus groups, participants were clearly informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. All responses were anonymized and used solely for the purposes of this research. Consent forms were provided and details on the use of the data, data storage were provided including measures in place to protect participant privacy.

- **Data Protection:** In compliance with data protection regulations and ethical research conduct, all collected data is stored securely and access restricted

to the researcher, Nadeya Al-Jabri. Digital data were encrypted, and paper forms kept in a locked file accessible only by Nadeya Al-Jabri.

- **Ethical Approval:** The research plan, including the data collection and analysis procedures, was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This step ensures that the research adheres to the highest ethical standards and receives the necessary oversight to protect the rights and well-being of the participants.

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Appendix

Focus Group protocol

Welcome and Introduction (5 minutes)

Mālō e lelei (Tongan)| Talofa (Samoan) | aloha everyone and thank you for joining us tonight. My name is Nadeya Al-Jabri, and I'll be guiding our discussion. I am humbled that you agreed to help this sister out with my doctoral capstone project. My project is rooted in giving back to the Pacific Islander community by helping other understand how we can have your back and your kids back in after-school programs. My role as a facilitator is to create a space where everyone feels comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences.

Your perspectives and insights are incredibly valuable and will contribute significantly to our understanding of how after-school programs can better serve and reflect the needs of the Pacific Islander community. Please know that your participation is voluntary, and all the information shared here will be kept confidential, your input will be shared anonymously unless you tell me you can use my name. Before we begin, I want to assure you that there are no right or wrong answers in this discussion. We are here to learn from your unique experiences and viewpoints. I'm looking forward to our conversation and to hearing all that you have to share. I am going to record this session so if you change your mind at any given point, feel free to walk away from the discussion.

Warm-Up Questions (10 minutes)

Describe the Pacific Islander community in one word?

- o Section 1: Cultural Influences and Expectations (20 minutes)
    - In what ways do you feel Pacific Islander cultural values are supported or challenged in after-school programs?
    - How do family expectations influence the decision to participate in these programs?
- o Section 2: Gender-Specific Considerations (20 minutes)
    - What are different cultural expectations for boys and girls?
    - what are after-school activities that are more popular among boys or girls in the community? Probing question: Why do you think that is?
- o Section 3: Economic Factors and Accessibility (15 minutes)
    - How do economic factors affect Pacific Islander teenagers' ability to participate in after-school programs? Probing question: elaborate on that.
- o Section 4: Community Engagement and Improvement (20 minutes)
    - What role do you think the community should play in shaping after-school programs?
    - If you could design the ideal after-school program for Pacific Islander teenagers, what elements would it include?

- Closing and Next Steps (5 minutes)

There are simply no words to express my gratitude for welcoming me and trusting me and sharing with me tonight. I am going to transcribe the recording and share this valuable information with organizations that hope to elevate our local communities. If you get bored and want something that helps you fall asleep I can provide a copy of my research paper. I can let [name] know when I will be presenting that information and to whom.
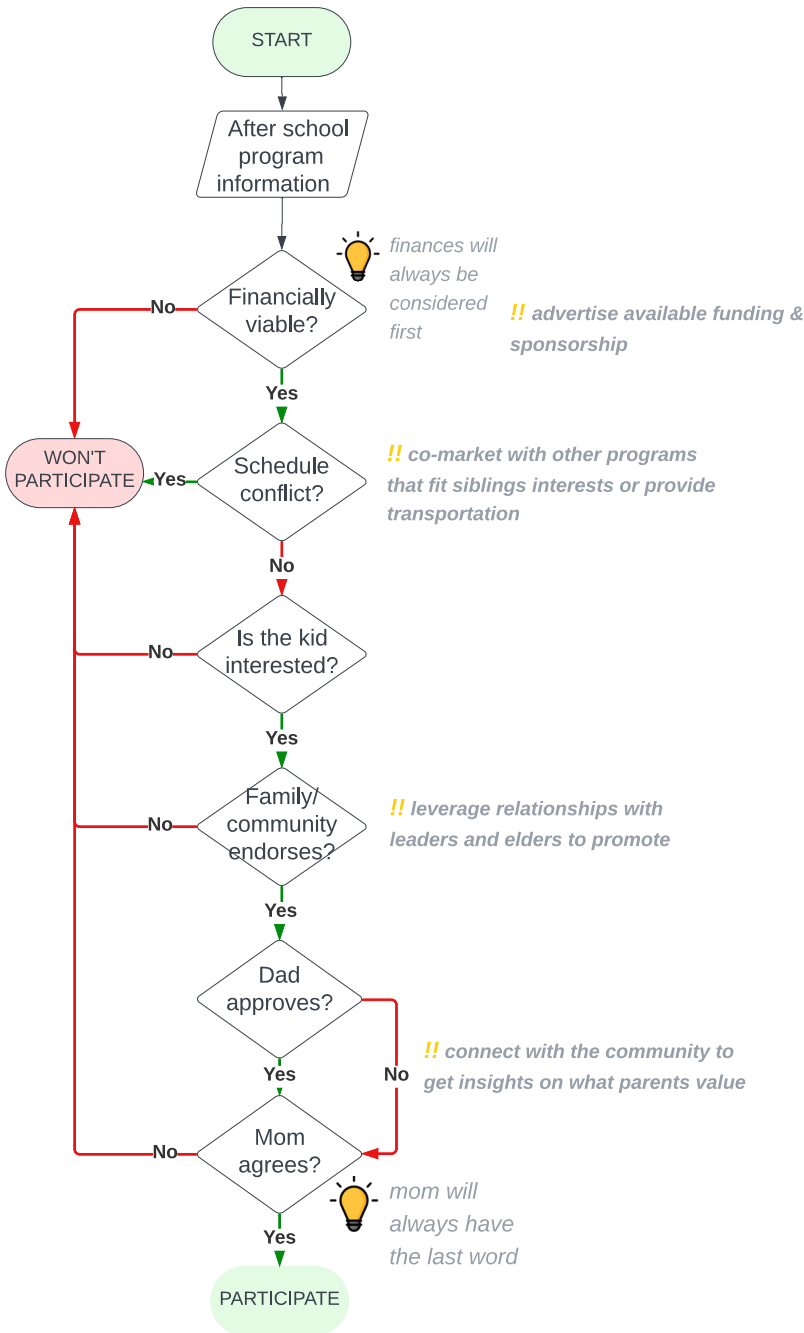
Decision making process map

Figure 10 : Decision making process