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Youth Community Organizing Groups Fostering Sociopolitical Wellbeing: Three Healing-Oriented Values to Support Activism

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Abstract: Young organizers are increasingly calling for social movements to center healing alongside activism as they build political power. Campaigns that solely focus on policy wins or base-building can lead to burnout and frustration. Sociopolitical action is more likely to be sustained if accompanied by experiences of care, belonging, and mutual support. Such an approach makes *sociopolitical wellbeing* central to organizing. Although the research literature has offered conceptualizations of healing, and compelling evidence of health-related outcomes, we still lack empirical examples of what it looks like for youth community organizing (YCO) groups to weave a commitment to healing into sustained collective action. Drawing on qualitative data from the *Powerful Youth, Powerful Communities International Study on Youth Organizing*, we define and demonstrate three interconnected healing-oriented values that foster what we characterize as *sociopolitical wellbeing*. The three values, which we illustrate via fieldnotes and interview excerpts, are *collectivized care*, *spiritual activism*, and *freedom dreaming*. YCO holds promising implications for supporting youth engagement in democratic movements for education, racial, gender, economic, and environmental justice.

Keywords: youth; sociopolitical development; healing; wellbeing; community organizing; activism



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1. Introduction

Kendall (pseudonym), a young organizer who was the leader of the march that took place in May, stood up to speak about their own experience. They spoke in a firm voice and said, “I was born in [name of city]. In 2004 my dad, who is a chef, got a job in [name of town] and we moved to [suburb]. I had no friends throughout the course of my primary education, but I always looked bubbly. My only friend was my dog, and this drove me to feeling depressed and lonely. Last year, in August, I joined EE (Equal Education) and that’s where I saw other people like me. I felt welcomed and seeing fellow learners like me who had a passion for the same things as I had made me feel at home. I regained myself after joining EE. The message that I have for you is that do not ever feel alone because EE is there for you. We are a family of like-minded people here, and we therefore take each other’s burden as our own. Trust me, whatever challenges that you are facing, someone feels the same way as you. Spread your wings!”—Equal Education (EE), Fieldnote

Kendall’s testimony, given in a speech to their comrades in EE (Equal Education), communicates their struggle with depression after their family relocated to a town in a South African province for their father’s job. Kendall says, “I had no friends” and felt “depressed.” Yet there is a turning point to their story: they found solace and purpose with EE, a member-based education justice movement in South Africa. As Kendall notes, EE engages “people like me” and it is within this context that Kendall reflects, “I regained myself after joining EE”.

Kendall recounts how the community organization offered a space to experience personal and collective wellbeing. Although it is possible that this was complemented by mental health resources Kendall also received, the approach they described centered on their personal agency and community support. Indeed, for Kendall to experience a form of healing or to have their state of wellbeing restored, they took the active step to join EE. In turn, members of EE greeted them by making them feel welcomed and included, or what many young organizers described as feeling “at home.” Together, as Kendall poignantly states, young organizers “take each other’s burden as our own.” This powerful statement of solidarity echoes the philosophy of *ubuntu*, generally attributed to the languages of the Bantu peoples of Africa, which can be translated as “I am because you are” [1,2]. One can also discern similarities to the precept In Lak’ech, originating in the Mayan peoples of Mesoamerica, which translates roughly as, “*Tu eres mi otro yo*—you are my other me” [3] (p. 1). Kendall’s reference to building solidarity with “like-minded people” speaks to the broader purpose that united “fellow learners” in EE, which was their effort to demand accountability and dignity from their elected government.

We start with Kendall’s story here because of what it communicates about the possibilities for *wellbeing* that come with participation in movements for justice, rights, and dignity. Although anchored in historically and culturally specific practices in South Africa, EE is an example of a form of youth civic engagement that exists around the world [4]. In the United States, it is called *youth community organizing* (YCO), with roots in the civil rights movement, community organizing, and positive youth development. In YCO, young people identify common interests, mobilize their peers, and work collectively to address issues that impact their quality of life in schools, communities, and society [5,6]. Young organizers, like Kendall, are demanding accountability from schools, health centers, institutions, and local governments. The calls by youth for equity and quality education reverberate for students who are struggling with social, economic, and environmental crises, which in turn have an impact on their health and overall wellbeing. Youth demand living with dignity and the right to be included in decisions that affect their lives, especially in education [7,8]. This holds implications for their individual and collective wellbeing, thereby offering some possibilities for the cultivation of healing as well.

In South Africa, young people fight for affordable higher education and minimum norms and standards for primary education [4,9,10]. In Ireland and Northern Ireland, young organizers mobilized in response to these struggles as well, often in relation to LGBTQ rights [11]. Similarly, in the United States, activism and organizing among youth on issues of racialized policing and immigrant rights have been front and center. Growing up in different countries, youth across these settings nevertheless experience similar challenges tied to a global economy that has diminished the safety net, increased the cost of education, reduced opportunities for employment, and raised environmental and climate change concerns [12]. The transnational examples we briefly offer demonstrate how young organizers are building movements with support and guidance from community organizations to transform conditions of oppression that directly impact their health and wellbeing. YCO facilitates young organizers’ political action with the potential to cultivate personal and collective sociopolitical wellbeing.

Until recently, much of the research literature about YCO has focused on outcomes related to youth leadership development or political change. It has been less common for scholars to focus explicitly on the relationship between activism and mental health or emotional wellbeing [13,14]. As Ballard and Ozer [15], for example, write, “there has been surprisingly little systematic research on the role of activism for youth health and wellbeing” (p. 226). Scholarship about the relationship between activism and wellbeing suggests complex patterns of harm, trauma, and healing [2]. For instance, there is ample evidence of profound experiences of hope, solidarity, power, and insight gained through activism [15–18]. Several studies show how activism is associated with heightened political efficacy, wellbeing, and psychological empowerment [13,14,19–21]. For many young people,

YCO, activism, and movement-building spaces offer contexts to experience care, joy, and radical hope associated with wellbeing.

On the other hand, and less well documented, activism can lead to additional stress, isolation, and anxiety, not to mention physical danger [22]. Discussions of experiences of discrimination or racism, central to critical social analysis, can heighten feelings of vulnerability and trauma [23]. In the United States, students of color report racial battle fatigue when combating racism in predominantly white universities [24]. Activist burnout among young people is exacerbated by a lack of understanding as to how to best support youth and sustain political action amidst racial and gender violence, economic precarity, and environmental climate crises. These complex dynamics call for research that examines qualities of YCO that support young people's wellbeing, and that counter the stressors that can accompany activism. The justice-centered work that is characteristic of YCO political action, while challenging, holds potential for restoring wellness at the individual, collective, and societal levels—yet empirical evidence that demonstrates this in practice is needed.

Our conceptual paper aims to contribute to these gaps by offering empirical examples of the varied ways that YCO around the world fostered youth wellbeing alongside political action. A key goal of this paper is to bridge sociopolitical development (SPD) with wellbeing via a healing-centered engagement (HCE) framework [25–27] and recent perspectives on community healing and psychopolitical wellbeing [28–33], which stem from lineages of healing justice and abolition feminisms [2]. We are thus guided to address the following questions:

1. What healing-oriented values sustain young organizers in their political action?
2. How are these healing-oriented values enacted, embodied, and expressed among young organizers to support their sociopolitical wellbeing?

We are drawn to these inquiries in recognition that justice-centered work characterized as political action can be significantly taxing—emotionally, psychologically, and physically—especially among youth [8,14,24]. To address these questions, we draw on data from the *Powerful Youth, Powerful Communities Study*, which involved seven international YCO settings—South Africa, Ireland, Northern Ireland, and the United States [34]. Through an analysis of young organizer's YCO experiences, we aim to understand the healing-oriented values that may contribute to or sustain youth sociopolitical wellbeing, especially in movements for liberation.

2. Sociopolitical Development

Sociopolitical development (SPD) contends that youth are agents of change and active participants in shaping their social contexts toward conditions where liberation is possible [35–37]. When provided with the necessary support and resources, youth develop their capacities and skills to recognize, name, and engage with systems of power or oppressive forces that impact their lives. As conceptualized by Rod Watts and colleagues [36,37] at the turn of the 20th century, SPD involves five interconnected stages: acritical, adaptive, precritical, critical, and liberatory. One after another, these steps describe a trajectory youth may follow when provided with the support, resources, and opportunities for critical social analysis and leadership through political action. In the liberatory stage, transformation from conditions of oppression brings about freedom, dignity, and justice; the person therefore has both a critical consciousness and the political efficacy to transform their social condition. In a related conceptualization, Watts and Hipolito-Delgado [38] cite the work of Hopper [39] who proposed that SPD is a process of “learning to think critically about accepted ways of thinking and feeling, discerning the hidden interests in underlying assumptions and framing notions” (p. 13). These definitions describe SPD dimensions of critical thinking and learning, civic engagement, and leadership, as well as socioemotional awareness, which is essential to wellbeing. SPD acknowledges the value of collective processes for learning and action that reinforce critical consciousness [40,41]. In this communal way, SPD unfolds in relationships with others by being a part of a like-minded community where shared values of freedom and liberation are understood and actively pursued.

Key elements of SPD that continue to hold relevance even three decades after the framework was introduced to describe the processes of critical consciousness and liberatory aspirations among African American youth [36] are reflexivity, dialogue, and action. Socioculturally and contextually situated, reflection, dialogue, and action can yield deep and new forms of praxis. Among youth, it can mean coming to a deep understanding or a recognition of how the mundane particularities of everyday life are situated within systems and structures of race/ethnicity, class, gender, and other markers of positionality. SPD can also consider how history, culture, and context shape structures of equity and access.

Several scholars who have studied SPD among members of YCO, or movement building spaces, purport that people equipped with a critical consciousness will enact their political efficacy to exert agency and action toward just change. Govan et al. [42], for example, in their study of YCO in four U.S. cities, South Africa, Dublin, and Belfast, report “critical social analysis” as a key outcome for young organizers. These results were particularly noted in relation to active campaigns “to build political power and hold public officials accountable to their constituents” (p. 95). In a study of alumni within an organizing group of Latinx youth, Christens et al. [43] analyzed interviews with 19 organizers and identified a complementarity between critical consciousness and psychological empowerment. Newer YCO members tended to make individualized attributions for social issues, whereas veterans articulated reasoning that interrogated the fairness of societal systems and sought ways to build power to create systemic change. Across several studies, scholars have documented evidence that participation in YCO is associated with opportunities to deliberate about issues of fairness and equity in their everyday lives [44–46]. Over time, youth develop analyses of the root causes of inequality and inequity, as well as the skills and capacities to challenge or transform unjust systems [47,48]. Within YCO settings, young organizers can mobilize individually and collectively to transform their circumstances. Provided with adequate support, resources, and care, young organizers can redirect their experiences of indignation toward inequities and develop a deep understanding of social issues, their root causes, and how to bring about systemic change.

Given the necessity to support young people’s healthy development and leadership, SPD must be theorized beyond the domains of critical thinking to include other forms of learning or awareness that can account for socioemotional and political wellbeing. Sánchez and colleagues [33], for example, argue that SPD can cultivate diverse forms of knowledge and wisdom that can help communities heal from intergenerational trauma rooted in colonial violence. When SPD is anchored in a plurality of experiences—or a diversity in ways of knowing and being that honor sociocultural wisdoms, traditions, relational ethics, and experiential knowledge—state wellbeing is possible. Naming systems of power that create conditions of oppression, identifying the root causes of inequities, and committing to work to transform conditions of injustice are features of SPD. Similarly, seeing one’s struggle as shared or interconnected with others’ struggles is another aspect of SPD. Together, these experiences hold significance for supporting practices and values for sociopolitical wellbeing.

We describe sociopolitical wellbeing as young organizer’s embodied experiences of sustained wellness as a form of political self and collective care in relation to the critical social analysis, leadership development, and sense of belonging that characterize YCO. Sustaining political action is essential to liberation because it has the potential to change systems and structures in society by problematizing what is considered the norm and reimagining what could be through reflexive inquiry, dialogues, and actions. For these reasons, it is often common to note SPD being applied or engaged by various groups in a range of contexts with the goal of supporting communities. Creating opportunities for system-impacted groups to understand the root causes of social issues, having them identify and name the issues that compromise the quality of their lives, and seeing these through a critical social analysis is the hallmark of SPD.

3. Healing Centered Frameworks

Healing centered engagement (HCE) is a humanistic framework that takes a holistic approach to supporting youth impacted by systems of power and oppression. It is an approach that urges communities and organizations that are youth-centered to understand and enact values and principles of relational ethics with the intent of restoring or transforming settings where youth can thrive. According to Ginwright [25–27], a HCE framework for addressing trauma requires different questions that move beyond “what happened to you” to “what is right with you” and views those exposed to oppressions, violence, and trauma as agents of change with the capacity to exert power in the transformation of their situation toward their wellbeing. It acknowledges traumatic events yet shifts from positioning people as passive victims of trauma. In this way, HCE fosters a critical, reflexive understanding of our interconnectedness and relationality. That is, a feeling of “human-ness” through a sense of belonging along with shared forms of collective engagement, solidarity, and support for and with others—values that are oriented toward the betterment of ourselves and society [49]. An asset-driven approach that is characteristic of HCE underscores that people are situated within contexts that have reproduced multiple and varied forms of harm and violence. Therefore, the solutions will have to be inter-cross-sectional, systemic, and relationally approached through reflections, dialogues, and actions consistent with SPD.

Expanding on the value of a HCE framework, recent psychology literature has offered a radical healing framework. Proposed by Neville and colleagues [32], a radical healing approach purports that healing is a process of developing strategies to address the root causes of trauma and building upon the strengths of individuals and communities to heal themselves through cultural practices that affirm collective resilience. Some of the practices offered within a radical healing framework include community healing circles, storytelling, intergenerational dialogues, and advocacy work. These practices are rooted in the work of decolonial and critical race theory scholars such as Comas-Díaz et al. [50], French et al. [29,30], and Mosley et al. [31]. According to French et al. [29] “radical healing is grounded in health-promoting practices and transformation that integrate elements of liberation psychology, Black psychology, and intersectionality while drawing on Comas-Díaz’s [51] ethnopological psychology” (p. 16). Rooted in liberation, radical healing, like HCE, involves developing the attitude, or disposition, as well as the capacities to see healing as a possibility that is individual and collective, personal and political, historic and present. A HCE framework purports that systems-impacted communities can create conditions to transform oppressive forces into liberatory futures despite the overwhelming odds.

Understanding the power of being in community with others who are similarly yet differently situated in struggles for liberation, Neville et al. [32,52] name five interconnected skills that people can leverage to cultivate radical healing. These include developing a critical consciousness of the root causes of social issues; refusing to reproduce colonial logics by instead learning histories of cultural communities, including one’s own to build self-knowledge and cultural pride; building communities or relationships of authentic care and socioemotional support; engaging in cultural practices, traditions, or social experiences that bring joy and pleasure, even amidst the challenges of life; and fostering radical hope, which is the belief that transformation from inequities and oppression is possible beyond mere envisioning. Together, these skills demonstrate Chioneso et al.’s [53] model of community healing, where people impacted by oppression come together to strengthen themselves, foster resilience, and develop a critical consciousness. A radical understanding of root causes of issues, along with a radical hope and vision for liberation, are key ingredients to fostering sociopolitical wellbeing.

YCO settings that build in practices for sustaining political action, such as leading campaigns and movements that are attentive to equity in education, for example, can help create opportunities for youth to heal and develop sociopolitical wellbeing. We use the term sociopolitical wellbeing because it brings together elements of critical reflexivity

and political action with sustained practices for self and relational care, which are often associated with healing. Because healing is a broader concept that encompasses personal, interpersonal, and collective, as well as intergenerational processes of uprooting and addressing trauma, we opt for the term sociopolitical wellbeing. Wellbeing among young organizers in YCO settings is a social and political process that may involve youth mobilizing or leading efforts for liberation. For example, young organizers may build campaigns to gain equity in education access, resources, and inclusive curriculum, as well as foster a culture of dignity in schools. YCO settings with a focus on SPD and collective action are spaces where healing-oriented values may unfold. These settings can provide youth with the appropriate forms of care, support, and resources to foster a sense of belonging, which is central to a HCE framework [49,54]. Sociopolitical wellbeing, supported by YCO practices of collectivized care, spiritual activism, and freedom dreaming, has much to offer to our understanding of healing in relation to activism, organizing, and political action.

4. Methods

4.1. Study Background and Research Sites

From 2012 through 2015, we conducted qualitative research about the practices and learning trajectories of YCO in seven cities listed in Table 1. Each had a history of sustainability as an organization, a commitment to marginalized youth, and significant successes in their work. They all recruited young people to be active participants in creating better worlds for themselves and their communities through civic and political engagement. History and culture shaped the varying forms of marginalization young people experienced, but a common feature across all seven YCO settings was that young people sought a greater voice in their democracies and the institutions that affected them. We observed that organizations used the category of “youth” in different ways across regions. Age was not the only consideration in determining role and status. In the U.S., the term “youth” referred to those under 21, but status as a college student often affected their role in the YCO. The upper range of age for “youth” was higher in South Africa, Ireland, and Northern Ireland, where it could go well into the twenties. We highlight this diversity to show the wide range of creative and successful methods available but not widely recognized across national boundaries.

Table 1. Participating Organizations.

City	Organization
Belfast, Northern Ireland	Where Is My Public Servant? (WIMPS)
Cape Town, South Africa	Equal Education (EE)
Chicago, USA	Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO)
Denver, USA	Padres & Jóvenes Unidos (PJU)
Dublin, Ireland	FamiliBase (Base)
New Orleans, USA	VAYLA New Orleans (VAYLA)
San Francisco, USA	Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth (Coleman Advocates)

South Africa. Equal Education (EE) in South Africa started out in the Western Cape, focusing primarily on organizing young people in Khayelitsha. Since these origins, EE has expanded to work on national issues and has active membership in multiple provinces across South Africa. The organization focuses on changing systemic inequities in the education system originating from Apartheid’s legacy. The core members of the multigenerational organization are its high school *equalizers*. EE’s focus during the study was to hold the government accountable to provide minimum norms and standards for schools [9].

Northern Ireland and Ireland. In Belfast, Northern Ireland, and Dublin, Ireland, the youth context for organizing was quite different. Neither organization described themselves as “organizing” groups in the same way we used this term for the US and South African organizations. Their primary aims were youth civic learning and engagement (Belfast) and youth wellness and leadership development (Dublin). In Belfast, “Where is My Public

Servant” (WIMPS), used new media to foster communication and accountability between youth and policymakers. Young people worked in teams to identify public problems, study them, and raise awareness or act using media tools and participation in policy settings. Youth were organized in chapters drawn from young people in Protestant and Catholic communities in Belfast neighborhoods and other cities in Northern Ireland. WIMPS was a project of its parent organization in Belfast, Public Achievement.

In Dublin, Ireland, the participating organization, called the Base at the start of the study, was a multi-service youth center located in a working-class suburb. The center offers a range of programs and services to young people, including support groups for young mothers and fathers, opportunities to perform and record music, and support for mental health and wellness. The emphasis on youth voice and leadership at the base created multiple opportunities for youth groups to form and be sustained through work on community issues or participation in political forums. In 2014, the Base merged with a family services organization and became Familibase, with a mission to serve families, young mothers, and arts-related activities. Despite the different local context and terminology, we sought to include Belfast and Dublin groups in the study because they shared with the other groups an emphasis on youth participation and voice.

United States. The four research sites in the US work directly with marginalized youth in urban settings. Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO) works primarily with low-income, working-class African American youth and families and is regarded as a multi-generational organization. Youth work in KOCO focuses on training and developing youth leaders by actively involving them in campaigns, meetings, and organizing work that centers on eradicating the criminalization of youth and the school-to-prison pipeline. KOCO also offers direct services to youth and families. The organization has had great success in its organizing campaigns, such as increasing youth employment opportunities in Chicago. Similarly oriented toward supporting youth economic opportunities, Padres & Jóvenes Unidos (PJU) in Denver has been leading a multi-generational, multi-racial, member-led organization. Through this intergenerational model, PJU is committed to racial justice, immigrant rights, healthcare access, and educational excellence for all people. Specific campaign issues addressed by youth include ending the school-to-jail track and immigrant student rights. The organization has experienced significant policy wins in these areas at the city and state level and has garnered national attention for its efforts.

In New Orleans, VAYLA is regarded as a progressive, youth-led, multi-issue, multi-racial community-based organization whose organizing efforts have focused on education equity, language access, and environmental justice. The organization provides youth with tools, skills, and resources to build their power. The organization also provides support services for youth and their families and has garnered national attention for its educational advocacy in post-Katrina New Orleans. Unlike the other sites in San Francisco, Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth has been organizing for more than forty years at the time of this fieldwork. Coleman Advocates is a multi-racial, member-led community organization characterized by a bottom-up approach toward social change that involves linking community activism with policy advocacy and leadership development. The organization engages youth in adult partnerships and intergenerational advocacy, focusing on education, racial and economic justice, and broad civic engagement. The organization has gained national recognition for much of its work, including recent work to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline. This effort has been led by the youth group within Coleman Advocates referred to as Youth Making a Change (YMAC).

4.2. Data Collection and Analysis

Local ethnographers, who lived in each city, observed meetings and public events related to each organization’s campaign. Ethnographers built relationships with program staff and youth members, which fostered the trust needed to gain access to and observe nearly all organizational routines and practices. A summary of the data collection activities is provided in Table 2. Our data analysis procedure was informed by our fieldwork and

immersive engagement with the literature on community organizing, youth development, SPD, and critical literacy/learning ecologies. Analysis of data began while ethnographers were collecting data. Ethnographers participated in regular video calls to discuss what they were seeing, provide explanations of the local political context, and discuss dilemmas or challenges arising in fieldwork. These reflective discussions during fieldwork represented our first efforts to discern patterns in our data and identify emergent themes across sites. For example, one theme that we discussed pertained to the mobility of youth participants at several sites, which became a framework for describing cycles of learning and accelerated leadership.

Table 2. Data Sources.

Method	Description
Fieldwork: Observations	Observations included internal trainings, meetings, and external interactions with public officials and community members, leading to 203 sets of typed fieldnotes and more than 300 h of observations, which took place over 18–24 months.
Fieldwork: Interviews	Local ethnographers interviewed youth about their experiences in the organization and what they felt they had learned through their participation. A total of 102 interviews were completed, yielding approximately 75 h of interview audio recordings.
Media	Photographs, press releases, news articles, and reports from the participating organizations were gathered over the course of the duration of the project. We estimate that hundreds of items were collected.

Thematic coding procedure. After about one year of fieldwork, the research team developed a code book (see Table 3) over multiple iterations and group discussions based on both our theoretical perspectives and emergent patterns. The code book included three superordinate categories: activities, outcome talk, and organizational culture, each with multiple subordinate categories. Coding was generally conducted by two teams of two individuals, each focusing on a different set of codes. This reduced the cognitive load that any coder or team endured and divided data sources across certain teams. Activities/practices team looked only at fieldnotes. Talk/topics team looked at fieldnotes and interviews because they were interested in coding dialogue or speech. Coding teams initially double-coded a certain number of fieldnotes or interviews. If there were discrepancies, the coding teams met to discuss and revise their decision rules. As a team, we all utilized the Dedoose “test” function to check for inter-rater agreement and further refine codes that were especially low in inter-rater agreement. In some cases, research team members double coded the same data sets to ensure comprehensiveness and the inclusion of false positives rather than the exclusion of false negatives.

Table 3. Codebook.

Theme	Definition
Collectivized Care	Characterized by practices of young organizers and staff expressing forms of support, compassion, and encouragement; young organizers caring for themselves through caring for others; and seeing themselves as members of a supportive and connected community where health, wellbeing, and relationships are fostered, nurtured, and sustained.
Spiritual Activism	Characterized as sustained engagement in opportunities to connect critical consciousness with socioemotional, embodied, and sensory awareness; combining social activism with a spiritual vision; recognizing people’s struggles as interconnected with something greater than the self; and building positive, sustainable, and transformative relationships with others and the environment.
Freedom Dreaming	Characterized by the active process of imagining alternatives to oppressive circumstances; cultivating hope alongside the persistence of freedom, change, and justice; reinvisioning conditions of oppression toward possibilities for justice and liberation; and affirming that change is possible.

5. Results and Discussion

For many young organizers, activism and movement-building spaces are contexts to experience care, joy, and radical hope, which are associated with wellbeing. Despite its challenges, YCO can help restore or foster wellbeing among youth; however, more empirical scholarship is necessary to support or better understand these links. In this paper, we offer a conceptualization of SPD in relation to wellbeing. In analyzing interview and fieldnote data, we discerned three healing-oriented values: collectivized care, spiritual activism, and freedom dreaming, which we discuss in relation to sociopolitical wellbeing.

5.1. Collectivized Care

Collectivized care has its roots in queer, women of color, and Black feminist organizing, specifically the Combahee River Collective, as well as disability rights movements. Unlike other forms of care, collectivized care is relational and centered on fostering a sense of belonging. Black feminist scholar Audre Lorde [55], for example, is most notably known for her writings on radical (self) care, noting that “caring for myself is not an act of self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare” (p. 132). While Lorde names this in relation to the “self,” she understands herself as being in joint accountability with many others and views care as a set of relational ethics that work to resist oppression through collaboration, solidarity, and communality. In this way, the burden of responsibility and labor does not fall on the shoulders of one person alone, but rather, as scholar-activists Reynolds and Polanco [56] note: “Our work is profoundly collaborative: We do this work on the shoulders of others, and we shoulder others up” (p. 22). Within YCO, collectivized care was a healing-oriented value young organizers saw as important to supporting their sociopolitical wellbeing in relation to their political action.

Collectivized care within YCO settings was characterized by the practices of young organizers and staff expressing forms of support, compassion, and encouragement. Young organizers, for example, described caring for themselves through caring for others and seeing themselves as members of a supportive community, in this case, a YCO. Among young organizers, wellbeing was seen as being connected to their health as individuals and as part of a collective. Two quotes from interviews with young organizers at the Base and at VAYLA, for example, demonstrate the significance of collectivized care. Specifically, collectivized care contributed to fostering a family-like environment for some youth, and this was viewed by some as essential to their wellbeing.

We’ve grown into a whole little family [and] it’s amazing that we hang around with each other outside, inside and go away together, go on holidays or exchanges that the Base pays for. [...] Obviously things are gonna arise, but it never stopped one to say: well, I’m not going because she’s going’ or I’m not talking to him’—They know that they might be annoyed at each other but would still be there for one another. [...] It probably gives an awful lot of security. It gives you a lot of happiness as well. You know that you can count on people, and they know they can count on you. You don’t have to watch your back and who’s gonna turn on you. You know who you are; you know who you can trust.
—Base, Interview

I go to VAYLA almost every day so that’s my family now. I can’t go without seeing my family for weeks. . . It’s beautiful in the way it’s run. I’ve never been in a place where so many are passionate about the same thing.—VAYLA, Interview

Supportive YCO settings that create a welcoming, affirming, and encouraging space for young organizers foster collectivized care. In turn, this reinforces young organizers’ activism or political action, especially their desire to learn more about YCO, and share what they learn with others, especially those who may be new to the movement or campaign. Moreover, relationships of care and support help young organizers learn to discern meaning from what they are feeling and to express or engage their emotions in relation to their organizing work.

Within YCO, seasoned organizers who have learned to engage their socioemotional awareness purposefully model and support young organizers in learning these important skills. The relational socioemotional skills that are facilitated within YCO that uphold the value of collectivized care support young organizers' wellbeing. This is evidenced in a quote from a young organizer at EE who explains the value of friendship for sustaining political action.

I formed a closer relationship, especially with the equalizers. I've formed a close relationship. Because now I'm able to interact with them. [...] Now I'm on the same level as them. We are talking as brothers, sisters. Even though we're not the same age, I'm their friend. "Friends, okay, this is what is happening." I'm not being that person who says, "Okay, I'm a leader. You should listen to what I say. I won't listen to what you say." We can interact. I admit when I make a mistake. I say, "Okay, I made a mistake." We're on the same level. We are friends. We can work together. I'm able to assist them where they want me to. We are basically friends, and it's another family. It's a second family, because now we are working together. We are helping each other. We all have the same goal. We basically wanna see everything going well in terms of our education. We assist each other where we can. We spend most of the time together, knowing each other. We know each other, basically, from up to down, because we spend much time together each day. It's a second family, as I said.—EE, Interview

Although YCO fosters a "family feel" or having a "second home" [57,58], it is worth noting that YCO takes on a particularly political tone that amplifies the significance of care and commitment to the collective. Deep and intentional relationships focused on building a sense of belonging, solidarity, engendered trust, and friendship, or a feeling of being among family, when paired with commitment and actions to transform systems of oppression, encourage young organizers to remain involved or to participate in political efforts. Indeed, youth described family/community relational experiences that helped them stay involved in YCO. The behaviors, practices, and interactions that helped advance their movements and activism were also related to their process of healing from experiences of oppression.

Collectivized care provides young organizers with avenues for learning and growth, as well as the courage and vulnerability to ask for support. Strong and supportive relationships valued by young organizers gave them the will and capacity to be vulnerable or courageous in speaking the truth to power. Relatedly, YCO settings that incorporated moments of reflection with fun in caring, nurturing, and lighthearted joyful ways, reinforced a sense of belonging and trust that organizers were there for each other. Among young organizers at KOCO, for example, retreats, icebreakers, and community-building activities were key to fostering trust and playfulness that over time reinforced collectivized care, as the interview excerpt illustrates.

You have to build that connection first before you try to push them into a world, they're not used to. ... We did a lot of things called ice breakers to get us on common ground with each other. ... go on retreats just to get to know each other. It's just a lot of fun. What I see now in a lot of organizations they try to put too much on youth, which turns them off. You need to build that bond before you even try to bring [political work] into the conversation.—KOCO, Interview

Collectivized care promoted young organizers' sociopolitical wellbeing toward action by showing up for youth and looking out for them as friends who become a chosen family. Emphasizing this point, abolitionist activist-scholar Mariame Kaba [59], explains that collectivized care means seeing the wellbeing and health of one's members and others as a shared responsibility of the collective group. Similarly, other young organizers at Coleman Advocates described the importance of having fun, experiencing joy, and fostering connectivity through shared activities. Expressions of friendship and family-like relationships were named among several YCOs. These remarks were often along the lines of the following:

They're [YCO staff] connected to us; they get involved with us. They ask us how we're doing every single day. They ask us how our weekends been. They ask us how we've been doing and everything. They're pretty much concerned about us. C'ause sometimes when I go to school, the teachers, they're concerned about you, but they're not as concerned as [Coleman Advocates]. They're like, "You okay?" They see you mad. They're like, "You okay? You sure?"—Coleman Advocates, Interview

Community-building activities, similar to check-in questions and sharing about their lives, were useful for getting to know other members as well as creating an affirming environment of support. By supporting and encouraging young organizers, YCO challenged disempowering perceptions of youth and refused to reproduce patronizing relationships or power hierarchies. Recognizing power and fostering a collective culture of support reflect Kaba's notion of collectivized care.

When asked to further describe what collectivized care is, Kaba offers a series of questions: "I believe in collective care, collectivizing our care, and thinking more about how we can help each other. How can we collectivize the care of children so that more people can feel like they can have their kids but also live in the world and contribute and participate in various ways? How do we do that? How do we collectivize care so that when we're sick and we're not feeling ourselves, we've got a crew of people who are not just our prayer warriors but our action warriors who are thinking through with us?" Some of these questions are best answered through evidence of the relationships and interactions documented among young organizers. As these examples demonstrate, healing-oriented value of collectivized care underscores that political action will require all people—those who are impacted and/or bearing witness—to take a stand. Collectivized care, as Saidiya Hartman [60] notes, is the antidote to violence because it exists outside of capitalist structures and markets of profitability that center around product-consumer relations that are far from the pursuit of liberation. To address the interlocking systems of oppression that compromise collective wellbeing, YCO must be attentive to the ethics of mutual accountability and relationality to build solidarities despite differences in age, status, or positionality. YCO, characterized by an intergenerational model of organizing where families are a foundation and an integral part of the organizational culture, was most beneficial to sustaining sociopolitical wellbeing among young organizers. Based on evidence from our study, collectivized care was a building block for sustaining young organizers' political action.

5.2. Spiritual Activism

Spiritual activism, a concept developed by Gloria E. Anzaldúa [61], means cultivating an inner wisdom, or *conocimiento*, that overcomes dualities, such as between self and other, emotion and cognition, personal and political. As Anzaldúa [61] describes it, spiritual activism is an "epistemology that tries to encompass all the dimensions of life, both inner—mental, emotional, epistemological, imaginable, spiritual, bodily realism—and outer—social, political, lived experiences" (p. 177). Spiritual activism is about transforming for the better one's relationship to oneself and relatedly engaging in efforts to be in the right relationship with other people as well as the environment. To be in the "right relationship" means to be both attentive and intentional about one's actions and how these are in alignment with one's values or ethical principles, because actions have consequences in our lives and relationships [62]. Informed by this definition, spiritual activism, the second healing-oriented value, is the persistence to strive toward an understanding of interconnectedness and, through this process, work together to achieve a common goal. Among young organizers, this goal may be aligned with the values of freedom and liberation.

Spiritual activism combines social activism with a spiritual vision [63]. It recognizes that people's struggles are interconnected with something greater than them. Critical ethical reflexivity, for example, supports young organizers in developing an inner and collective awareness or wisdom that, in turn, helps them work to create the world they wish to see and exist in. Bringing that awareness of connectivity into their activism can

help sustain organizers in challenging times, as evidenced in the opening vignette featuring Kendall's experience.

At Coleman Advocates, young organizers were encouraged to participate in community-building activities that sought to foster self-love and community. Spiritual activism is characterized as sustained engagement in opportunities to connect critical consciousness with socioemotional, embodied, and sensory awareness. Although we were not using this specific term, we observed organizers engaging youth in reflection that deepened their self-awareness. This was consistent with elements of collectivized care, such as a sense of belonging and developing love for oneself and others, as the fieldnote demonstrates:

A young organizer began with a community activity where statements were read and we had to step across the line or not. Statements included: "I love myself." "I'm beautiful." "I am in a relationship." After the activity, [young organizer] asked how we felt about it. One youth shared, "Before you love others, you gotta love yourself!" This led one youth to agree, and another youth to explain: "Others can make you feel loved."—Coleman Advocates, Fieldnote

This excerpt illustrates spiritual activism's emphasis on socioemotional, embodied, and self-awareness. Developing a loving orientation toward themselves and an awareness of what or who makes them feel loved and cared for are vital for youth development. This understanding was similarly expressed by a young organizer at PJU, who, in the context of an interview, offered the following reflection:

The [YCO] environment is friendly and informative. Sometimes it's a bit intense because of all the work we must do to be able to achieve something. ... I guess it's really understanding how it's not always going to be easy. Like, we must work for something [to change], and there's emotion or passion.—PJU, Interview

Young organizers are often faced with challenging, even hostile, situations that may make them feel unloved or cared for, yet they must develop the personal and collective affirmation that they are valued and add value to the movement. Further theorizing on spiritual activism notes that it is a praxis of syncretically coming to terms with contradictory or oppositional experiences, which are combined to create something new. Young organizers at both Coleman Advocates and PJU note "others can make you feel loved" and "we have to work for something ... there's emotion." The process of enacting transformation by shifting the focus away from the self, toward the collective, public, and political is a form of embodying spiritual activism.

Young organizers, in addition to attending to their emotions in a loving and relational way, learn to work in solidarity with peers who may have different life experiences or worldviews. In some cases, young organizers may also learn to reconcile tensions or competing interests to remain engaged in political action. The capacity to shift or move in-between personal and private struggles across the social, political, and collective to develop *conocimiento*, or an inner wisdom, is characteristic of spiritual activism. As Anzaldúa [61] explains, spiritual activism is a "critical turning point of transformation, you shift realities, develop an ethical, compassionate strategy with which to negotiate conflict and differences within self and between others ... finding common ground by forming holistic alliances ... enacting spiritual activism" (p. 545). YCO offers meaningful opportunities for young organizers to engage in spiritual activism that helps them cope with the challenges of organizing. For example, in an interview with a young organizer at VAYLA they shared that organizing "is a lot. That's a lot to take on. But [organizing] calms me down." A similar understanding was expressed by another young organizer at KOCO, who shared: "you are forced to become a leader—You have to lead people, groups of people all the time. Like, you learn to be a leader in the process. You must be open to learning to be a leader". Confidence and self-affirmation characterize a form of spiritual activism because it encourages young organizers to develop their power while also fostering their wellbeing.

Seeing themselves as leaders while embracing a worldview of solidarity and connectivity, young organizers supported each other in building their confidence to lead. This is best demonstrated in a statement offered by a young organizer at EE, who shared:

When we went to my first youth group, I was so fascinated by the facilitators—the way they educate us. . . . I felt that I’m part of this [movement]. The facilitators support us. There’s a support system that is happening around you—these people are supporting me, and they are encouraging me to speak out wherever I feel like.—EE, Interview

Anzaldúa’s [61] spiritual activism offers a visionary epistemology, where “our spirituality does not come from outside ourselves. It emerges when we listen to the ‘small voice’ within us which can empower us to create actual change in the world” (p. 195). Spiritual activism is spirituality for social change; it posits a relational worldview that insists that by transforming oneself and our relationships with one another, we are transforming our worlds. It is about seeing the spiritual or divine not in dogma, religion, or an institutionalized notion of beliefs or faith, but rather in seeing oneself as situated in relation to all beings and non-beings.

As a process, spiritual activism notes that we can learn from the most mundane, or apparently meaningless, events of life, for these quotidian encounters can offer moments of reflection, learning, and introspection that can inform world views, collective agency, and power. One quote from an interview with a young organizer at Coleman Advocates that illustrates the value of cultivating opportunities to foster young organizers’ understanding of themselves in relation to their inner wisdom, often via joyful, fun, and pleasurable activities, is the following:

I gained a lot more confidence within myself in telling myself, “You can do it. You’re the one in charge right now. You’ve got to keep pushing for you to get there,” you know? It’s like Frederick Douglass said, I feel that if there is no struggle, there is no progress. You know, I just had to keep going, because it’d be better—it would benefit not just myself, but the people around me and the people who surround my community. I learned how to love myself and, like—because if I can’t love myself, then I won’t be able to love others. I gained a lot more love for myself, so I could put it towards that.—Coleman Advocates, Interview

Like an ecosystem that relies on each member for a balanced existence, spiritual activism works towards erasing hierarchical separations and allows for deep reflection on interdependence and mutuality that moves away from binary either/or ways of thinking that can strain wellbeing and sustained engagement in political action. The reference to Frederick Douglas [64] aligns with Anzaldúa’s [61] theory of spiritual activism. In particular, spiritual activism facilitates the development of new tactics for survival, resistance, and transformation on all levels that align with what feminist abolitionist scholar Adrienne Maree Brown describes as “pleasure activism”. Noting the connections between activism and wellbeing, Brown states that “pleasure gets lost under the weight of oppression, and it is liberatory work to reclaim it” [62]. Therefore, YCO must be keen on facilitating opportunities for young organizers to experience joy or pleasure in relation to their organizing and activism.

YCO, which supports young organizers’ actions, also fosters their spiritual activism. Action and spiritual values rooted in hope are central to youth’s sociopolitical wellbeing. When young people can recognize the value of self-acceptance, or self-love, as tied to their organizing work that is part of a greater cause or movement beyond their individual selves, there is a greater depth of expressed solidarity and leadership. Young organizers can see themselves as part of something greater that is beyond them, and this fuels their tenacity to remain committed to the work of organizing, even when challenges arise. Spiritual activism is thus a healing-oriented value that supports young organizers’ sociopolitical wellbeing as well as actions within and beyond their campaigns or movements. Taking many forms and expressed in a variety of ways, from more intimate or personal fulfillment, such as love, to more public or social fulfillment, such as pleasure, spiritual activism relies

on a shared expression of joy that is amplified by the outcomes of big and small victories within a campaign. Collectivized care, rooted in the love and joy of coming together and being there for each other through the ebbs and flows of organizing, is essential to ensuring individual and collective healing, and thus sociopolitical wellbeing.

5.3. Freedom Dreaming

Freedom is anchored in the cultivation of hope and people exercising their freedom to challenge oppression. To envision possibilities for freedom is to acknowledge and affirm that change is possible and that both hope and action must go hand in hand to make just change a reality. Imagining and therefore working to create a future where all people can heal and thrive beyond mere survival characterizes the third healing-oriented value, which is freedom dreaming. Robin D. G. Kelley [65] describes “freedom dreaming” as imagining alternatives to oppressive conditions of inequity, violence, and trauma. Freedom dreaming can help youth harness their skills, capacities, and tools to move toward actualizing change [66]. To support political action, young organizers must practice envisioning the future and reimagining the present. For example, asking young organizers to reconsider what a school environment without police and policing could be; instead of having police or security officers in schools, they have access to counselors, mentors, and healing-centered practitioners. Asking youth to question the way things are is in alignment with freedom dreaming.

Political action within YCO settings was most sustained when freedom dreaming was a part of their organizing strategies. For example, young organizers described their motivations for joining a campaign, as the following excerpts from EE and PJU illustrate:

Well, my participation with EE is helping me pursue my dreams. It makes me pursue my dreams in a way that EE is fighting for equal education. . . . For example, if I don't have enough money to go to university, they say: "You can talk to us. What can we do for you to go to university?"—EE, Interview

At a PJU "accountability meeting" with the school district, youth participated by introducing themselves using the same general phrase: "My name is [name], I'm in [grade in school], and I'm pre-college. Not pre-prison!"—PJU, Fieldnote

The process of transformation often begins with asking for help or seeking resources to pursue one's dream, as well as changing or challenging the dominant, often oppressive scripts. This is consistent with Gutiérrez's [67] notion of “social dreaming”, or engineering social design experiments with alternatives [68]. In other words, it relates to holding dreams for a collective or on behalf of a broader set of social others, a community, or a group of people. These personal dreams are fundamental to fostering collective dreams. Within YCO, young organizers are encouraged to dream as individuals, and then supported in seeing these individual dreams as threaded together toward the collective dreams, which is in line with Kelley's [65] process of imagining alternatives. Freedom dreaming therefore involves questioning and addressing the inequities within people's environments, their own lives and relationships, or the settings and contexts wherein communities are situated. Collectively visualizing a campaign victory, strategizing how to make that possible, and identifying who the power players are what stories, testimonies, and actions will be most compelling to leverage change are all elements of freedom dreaming in practice.

As a healing-oriented value, freedom dreaming is oriented toward transformation instead of repair or reform. In this regard, communities impacted by inequities are involved in re-imagining and enacting change as they wish to see it in their lives. For example, reconsidering the culture of schooling to be more affirming of students' experiential knowledge and seeing students and their communities flourishing are examples of freedom dreaming that many young organizers voiced. The following interview quotes by two young organizers with Coleman Advocates demonstrate this point:

We've been trying to speak and get people angry about stuff. I feel like anger is the fire to start it all up to make them passionate about something. Because if they're not passionate

about something, then it'll just—like, the flame will just burn out, right? But if you're really, if you're heated and you're like, "Wow, that's an injustice! This is happening. Wow! I can't believe that. I want to make this change, because I don't want to see my children go through this. I don't want to see the next generation go through this. I'm tired of going through this, myself." I think that's where it all starts, so yeah.—Coleman Advocates, Interview

I guess that little spark could just explode into being something awesome. You know, like a little bud blooming into becoming a flower. Probably doing rallies at schools and—just spreading the word throughout the city and getting youth organized would probably increase the numbers of people coming to [Coleman Advocates], yeah. And probably not just having YMAC [Youth Making a Change, Coleman Advocates] based here, like, after school—probably have more offices around the city or the school even, you know? Have them have their own classroom at every school in the San Francisco Unified School District.—Coleman Advocates, Interview

Young organizers' dreams are not naïve or utopic by any means. Instead, their dreams are anchored in their experiences as young organizers who firmly believe they deserve better; they deserve equity, freedom, dignity, and liberation. These dreams are possible to actualize if people in positions of power were activated to care for or recognize the root causes of the inequities, which YCO supports through sustained political action.

Freedom dreaming, consistent with spiritual activism, is about building a critical consciousness to take the necessary actions toward change. Reflecting on the words of poet Jayne Cortez, "somewhere in advance of nowhere", Kelly purports, "Without new visions, we don't know what to build, only what to knock down. We not only end up confused, rudderless, and cynical, but we forget that making a revolution is not a series of clever maneuvers and tactics but a process that can and must transform us" [65] (preface xii). Political action, when approached through the healing-oriented value of freedom dreaming, can help young organizers develop a deep understanding of the mechanisms of power and oppression as well as their sociopolitical wellbeing to sustain themselves emotionally, mentally, and even physically in their organizing, as one young organizer notes in their interview:

Well, I think I've never been a very tolerant person. Every time someone comes to me with a problem, I'm able to sit down and listen, even though I'll cry, (I think that some of them think I'm a very emotional person). Now I'm able to listen to people and give advice that they use, because some of them would report back that, "You know what, I've used—I've taken your advice on what you said the other day, and the result of that came out to be like this." [...] Yeah, I can now analyze stuff and listen because I've been equipped—I'm more tolerant. I think, again, the scenario at our school of not having teachers, I was then, at the time, forced, because we didn't want to be radical about this whole issue of forcing the government to bring back our teachers. Then I was forced to think of the things that I want to see happen to me and my peers if we don't have teachers and then we are happy about that. At first, I didn't take this seriously, that we don't have teachers. It was fine at first. Then, I realized that I came to school to study. Now, if there are no teachers at school, then why am I coming to school? That was, in some way, negative, because it was going to go on and go on and go on, and then maybe I would end up saying, "I will not go to school."—EE, Interview

Understanding oppression, much like dreaming alone, is not enough to bring about change, which is needed for healing. Both a critical consciousness of root causes must be facilitated alongside the avenues to engage actions that can allow for dreams to take shape in the real world.

YCO created a range of activities that contributed to young organizers' freedom to dream by, for example, role-playing different scenarios of how they would express their needs and demands in front of leaders. Through reflections, discussions, trainings, and workshops, as well as skits, reading circles, and artistic expression, youth cultivated their

envisioning of what political actions they would engage and what they desired to see actualized. The following demonstrates these moments among young organizers at EE:

Well, the only message that I would like to get across, is the fact that when one puts oneself in the shoes of the other and feels the pain that others are going through and is able to help, I think it is the uniqueness of one's journey that gives one the potential to contribute so much. . . . Because at the end of the day South Africa will not perish. It will have leaders. It will have people who are willing to do this [organizing]. It will have lawyers. It will have people who have confidence in themselves because of these youth programs. You find that 80 percent—okay, you find that maybe, 60 percent of the learners in schools do not want to hold themselves in such programs. I don't know why they feel like that, but they just don't want them. You find that those who involve themselves in such [YCO] programs, find it easier to think outside of the box. They have confidence and they are go-getters. They're willing to fight for what they want. . . . Equal Education is grooming us to be leaders. It's grooming us to be people who have knowledge. If you lack knowledge, you perish.—EE, Interview

Young organizers learned about topics relevant to their everyday lives for the purpose of asking questions about them, crafting solutions, and taking action to see those solutions realized. Such opportunities were often facilitated through activities to help young organizers envision what is possible when change happens. Activities that fostered their imagination were valuable moments for learning in community with others. At times, the activities included youth engaging difficult emotions, such as anger, nervousness, and vulnerability, as well as courage, joy, and hope.

Young organizers saw the relevance of their activities to their lives and those of their peers, and this helped frame their campaigning strategies. The relevance of the issues in youth lives motivated them to continue their actions and organizing. It also helped them foster radical hope and persistence to remain engaged in political action in a way that was sustainable to their wellbeing, as the dialogue among young organizers at Coleman Advocates demonstrates:

Each youth was seated around the couches, and each one responded by stating their name and their response to the prompt. Among some of the responses were: organizing for a "better future," "for change," "to be a leader," to "show [others] we can be somebody," "struggle for change," turning "anger into action." One young organizer talked about organizing as an outlet, that she was tired of getting angry and started to organize as a way to get that anger out and channeling it into to action to make something happen. Additional responses included organizing to address: "oppression," "change inequalities," "taking action instead of waiting around to see things happen," "family" [. . .] "wanting to make a change," and "the government isn't gonna care [for us/people]." Once some of these responses were gathered, Tina transitioned into the icebreaker and mentioned that some of the reasons for why we organized are tied to who we are and the lives we live "struggles we go through." And another young organizer added "the next best thing to freedom is a struggle for justice."—Coleman Advocates, Fieldnote

As this fieldnote demonstrates, young organizers' agency and voice were fostered through activities that called them to reflect on why they organize as well as what their hopes or dreams are. Furthermore, the range of learning and leadership roles young organizers often took on within YCO settings supported their development as spiritual activists and freedom dreamers. YCO settings provided supportive and collaborative environments where healing-oriented values of collectivized care, spiritual activism, and freedom dreaming were possible.

Freedom dreaming as a healing-oriented value that young organizers develop within YCO settings has long been put into practice by communities of color or people who are impacted by systemic inequities. Abolitionists who lead emancipatory struggles and civil rights efforts, for example, engaged in freedom dreaming as part of their movement [69,70]. Youth and women of color on the frontlines of these efforts were perhaps fueled by an

unwavering radical hope for liberation for themselves and future generations. Forward thinking, anchored in a recognition of the present struggle with a critical reflexive understanding of the past, enables people to bridge healing with political action. In this way, it describes what Miller and Powers' [71] note as the restoring of wellbeing, whereby the activation of a just future fosters a meaning or purpose in life in relationship with others who share that dream. The anticipation of a just, free, and liberatory life suggests that healing happens when hope in action is activated and supported.

Recent scholarship purports that developing a radical vision of possibilities is necessary for restoring individual and community wellbeing [72]. Relatedly, having a practical vision of possibilities can help, and it can even increase collective action among communities of color. To support the political action of youth, Ginwright [25,27,73] asserts that settings must align their values or practices with healing. Furthermore, issues of power, history, identity, culture, and collective memory must be integrated into settings where learning, health, and wellness can and must be fostered. Freedom dreaming involves looking back and forward while attending to the urgencies of redressing systems of power and oppression that produce inequities in the present and infusing political action with radical hope. As Kelley [65] describes, freedom dreaming is "making visible a new society, a peaceful, cooperative, loving world without poverty and oppression" (p. 196), one that is unbounded and limitless to imagination.

6. Conclusions

YCO supports political action among young organizers by providing them with opportunities to develop, experience, engage, and practice values associated with wellbeing. We describe these as healing-oriented values of collective care, spiritual activism, and freedom dreaming. We demonstrate how these values provided young organizers with meaningful moments for reflection on their concerns and needs, alongside opportunities for political action. The facilitated opportunities for shared reflection, dialogue, and action within YCO can help cultivate young organizers' leadership and capacities for sustained sociopolitical wellbeing. The three healing-oriented values we illustrated via our data show how YCO practices can support youth sociopolitical wellbeing in relation to political action for liberation. We believe that the pursuit of liberation is, or can be, in and of itself, a pathway toward healing. Justice-centered work is founded upon building a better world for ourselves, others, and those to come, as well as the environment—a point that Kendall's vignette made clear and several other organizers also expressed. In effect, Kendall underscores the importance of belonging, specifically of building solidarity and connecting with others for the greater good. In turn, this experience, or interconnected practices of collective care, spiritual activism, and freedom dreaming, held implications for their developing sociopolitical wellbeing and ongoing process of healing.

Personal and collective wellbeing for youth can be fostered through varied activities and sources of support. Participation in YCO, however, is not to be understood as a substitute for forms of mental health support, such as therapy or medication, which may be right for a youth in need of resources. What the examples from our study show is how organizing can be a support for young organizers' wellbeing, specifically by exercising agency to address institutional and systemic harms. In providing opportunities for experiencing and enacting collectivized care, spiritual activism, and freedom dreaming, YCO settings became important spaces to build learning communities for the development of sociopolitical wellbeing, which is essential to sustain action for just change. YCO offered scaffolding to less experienced young organizers, which enabled them to participate, even if they were initially nervous or shy. Because of the culture of care, the acknowledgement of the work as rooted in something greater than the individual—freedom dreaming—and the deep desire for change or an otherwise more just world, which is in resonance with spiritual activism, young organizers' sociopolitical wellbeing was fostered. When young organizers take the mic, as speakers at a rally or stakeholder meeting, for example, they often use a script or notecards, and over time they develop their confidence in public speaking and

leverage their experiences, emotions, and support system to sustain their political action alongside their wellbeing. These links are key to nourishing a relational process of healing and the transformation of oppressive conditions of inequity and violence [2].

YCO settings that practice healing-oriented values can help youth overcome the challenges that come with activism and movement-building. When provided with support, youth can lead organizing efforts and campaigns that further reinforce collectivized care, spiritual activism, and freedom dreaming. Participating YCO groups demonstrated relational practices that affirmed the dignity and humanity of oppressed youth and their communities. Trust, intergenerational relationships, and mutual support contributed to sustained youth participation over time. These qualities provided a safe, intellectual space for dialogue on ideas, debate, and reflection. One common practice was to try to apply a more egalitarian or democratic set of norms related to power differences based on age. As young organizers, they tended to be intentional about the relevance of age as a social category and how age should be considered for organizational decision-making. YCO used terms such as intergenerational, youth-adult partnership-oriented, or youth-centered, each with slightly different meanings, to characterize their approach. Young organizers' experience of voice and power often contrasted with their experiences in school, a point that Kendall expressed in the opening vignette. These examples, along with the healing-oriented values we observed, were anchored in a YCO culture of belonging, forming friendships and family-like relationships, self and collective love, and an affirmation that what they experienced was shared among other members of their organizing group or movement. Most importantly, within YCO settings, freedom dreams of radical hopes for change, sustained by collectivized care, and spiritual activism were intertwined.

Participating in YCO offered learning environments that enabled young organizers to translate reflection, research, and dialogue into political action. Young organizers like Kendall, among others whose voices we featured engaged in YCO, developed a critical understanding and analysis of their social context and core skills for leadership, community engagement, and democratic participation. These findings are consistent with prior research on the impact of community organizing and civic engagement experiences [36,74–76]. Additionally, there was diversity in strategies for engaging and mobilizing youth at varied sites, particularly across nations. The international scope of our research study was a strength, and it attests to the value of this work. This diversity is important because it can contribute to new strategies for YCO to use. To further explain, certain educational practices in EE that helped young organizers like Kendall learn about their connection to historical struggles and building a national movement may be of interest to youth and YCO outside of South Africa. Similarly, the ability of YCOs such as PJU and Coleman Advocates to achieve new state and city legislation dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline is important for groups that wish to make institutional impact and systemic policy change [77].

Our study's findings underscore the importance of healing-oriented values in YCO settings that help foster opportunities to facilitate youth political action, activism, and voice, alongside sociopolitical wellbeing. Participation in movements for justice, rights, and dignity, while certainly presenting challenges to young organizers, like burnout, can also offer meaningful opportunities for them to develop the capacities, skills, interpersonal/introspective insights, and relational networks to prevent burnout—or at the very least, recognize it and seek out support before it compromises one's health. We have offered this paper as an invitation to ongoing dialogue and theoretical and empirical research on the intersections of youth sociopolitical development, YCO, and wellbeing. The three interconnected healing-centered values we offered, which young organizers put into practice, show how young organizers engage these to support political action. Moreover, these values also help cultivate young organizers' socioemotional awareness, which is needed for long-term engagement in justice-centered work.

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