

Digital Media and Relationship-Building in Community-Based Youth Programming:
Countering Dominant Narratives and Building Identity in Marginalized Youth
Populations

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Abstract

In “Digital Media and Relationship-Building in Community-Based Youth Programming: Countering Dominant Narratives and Building Identity in Marginalized Populations,” a project that combines experiential research and cultural theory, I underline the significance of digital media projects and relationship-building in community-based youth programming. Framing this project, I contextualize the black/white disparities evident today in Dane County, Wisconsin. Then, offering a greater context for such disparities through cultural theory--specifically through Foucault’s texts *The History of Sexuality* and *Discipline and Punish*--I examine and explore the historic roots of the racialized disadvantages that saturate the economic, judicial, and educational realms of 21st century America.

Both of these frameworks indicate the gravity of black/white disparities for today’s youth populations and, as such, invite in this project a conversation of what might be done to address such disparities. Thus comes the most substantial portion of the project: an evaluation of two community-based youth organizations in Dane County--Simpson Street Free Press, the county’s ‘Teen Newspaper,’ and Neighborhood Intervention Program, a branch of the county’s juvenile justice system. Detailing the missions of these organizations and my work with them over the past 18 months, I seek to address the question: in what ways can co-creation of digital media projects confront dominant cultural narratives (like ones exposed in the 2013 Race to Equity Report), work to challenge or push against these narratives, and fundamentally enable youth participants to build relationships and foster self-expression?

Investigating this question, I look intimately at the functions of both programs and their efficacy, respectively. Through critical self-reflection, incorporating contemporary cultural theory and social research, I aim to provide evaluative feedback to community-based program directors, faculty, and staff. Ultimately, I hope this interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research not only informs other, university-level service learning experiences but also stakes out a direction the Wisconsin Idea might take in the 21st century.

Chapter I: Introduction

This project began as anything but a report on the use of digital media and relationship building in community based youth programming, as its title now suggests. In fact, when I first began to think about my senior thesis nearly two years ago, I figured I might write about Victorian literature. I had just completed Professor Caroline Levine's *English 216: British and Anglophone Literature from 1750 to the Present* course at the University of Wisconsin - Madison. I had read both *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* before, but Professor Levine's course brought these texts and many others like them alive for me. I was inspired: I wanted to craft a project in which I would explore texts like these and offer brilliant close readings of them. Yet, following the course's end, time passed and motivation faded. Without a vibrant professor and equally provocative T.A. to discuss these works with, I ultimately realized that researching and writing about them for the scope of an entire academic year might not suit me.

Consequently, I began to consider what else I might do with my senior thesis. I have always been fascinated with the relationship between human and computer, and I thought this might be a fine topic. But, the more I sought out this idea, the more I realized that I did not necessarily have anything to add to the research that so intrigued me. Around this time, I began volunteering two afternoons a week at Simpson Street Free Press (SSFP), 'Dane County's Teen Newspaper,' a small non-profit organization on Madison's southside. Here, students aged seven-18, mostly of color and from low income backgrounds, receive small stipends to work as student reporters and produce short articles during after-school hours. Passionate about children, writing, and social justice, I

immediately fell in love with the Free Press and its mission: to bridge the educational achievement gap one word at a time.

After a short time, I was offered a part-time assistant editor position at the Free Press, which I accepted without hesitation. As the amount of time I spent in the Free Press' newsroom increased, so too did my curiosities about the disparity-ridden education system my students were a part of in the Madison Metropolitan School District.

Encouraged by my boss, Simpson Street Free Press executive director and founder Jim Kramer, to pursue these curiosities, I began to look into and follow closely any and all current data I could find on the state of education for students of color in Dane County, Wisconsin. What I found--the degree of disparity I unearthed--deeply concerned me. The educational achievement gap was not anything new and neither was my awareness of it, but I suppose I had not previously understood the gravity of its implications until I began building personal relationships with those whom it affected the most, on a day-to-day basis.

Thus began to emerge the possibility of a new direction for my thesis. Under the guidance of my thesis advisor, Professor and UW - Madison Design Lab Director Jon McKenzie, I began to stake out what this direction might look like. Based on my interests, Professor McKenzie suggested I enroll in Professor Nancy Buenger's course *Library & Information Studies 820: Topics in Community Engagement* during the fall semester of the 2014-2015 academic year. In this service-learning course, I began to work with more of Madison's youth: those involved in Dane County's juvenile justice system through Neighborhood Intervention Program (N.I.P.), a unit of the Children,

Youth, and Families Division of the Dane County Department of Human Services.

Informed by my experiences with these youths and the Free Press students, I ultimately determined the scope of my thesis: an evaluative report on community-based youth programming in Dane County, including an examination of the efficacy of these programs and the educational models and theories of learning they use to increase this efficacy.

The combination of original, design-based research and cultural theory that this project has become, to cloak it in the language of The Design-Based Research Collective's mode of educational inquiry, marks only the beginning of my academic exploration into our nation's astounding educational achievement gap. In this report, that is, I highlight the role of digital media and relationship-building at Simpson Street Free Press and Neighborhood Intervention Program, two models of community-based youth programming in Dane County. Further, I assert that digital media project-based learning and the building of relationships that this kind of learning inspires is not only notable but also crucial to the success of these programs, as success is defined by these programs respectively.

Simply put, this project only begins to explore what might be done to combat the vast disparities evident in our nation's educational and juvenile judicial realms. Placing my evaluations within theoretical and socio-historical contexts, I suggest both the importance of and the need for such research. I present this research in the four chapters subsequent to this one. Specifically, in Chapter II, I expose the racialized disparities that pervade both Dane County and our nation. In Chapter III, I situate the context provided in

Chapter II in cultural theory. Within my fourth and penultimate chapter, I combine this cultural theory--and the racialized disparities it, in essence, explains--with my original, experiential research at Dane County's Simpson Street Free Press and Neighborhood Intervention Program. Finally, in Chapter IV--the conclusion to this project--I offer the implications of my research and, as such, offer suggestions for increasing the efficacy of community-based youth programming.

Chapter II: Context - Exposing Black/White Disparities in Dane County, WI

Home to the state's capitol--the City of Madison, Dane County has received various accolades throughout the twenty-first century. In fact, in the past few years, Madison has seemingly been the token Mid-western city on every 'best-of' list. Ranked the "most-liveable [sic] small- to mid-size city in the U.S." by the Livability Group in the fall of 2014 ("2015 Top 100 Places to Live"), "the most secure U.S. community among large metropolitan areas" by Farmers Insurance Group in 2010 ("Seventh Annual Farmers Insurance Study"), and "the best place to live in America" by Business Insider in September of 2014 (Adwar), Madison and Dane County alike have established a prestigious, even lusted-after reputation. Real estate, insurance, and other business groups cite Madison's "hip college town...affordable housing, great schools, excellent health care, and a wide range of recreational activities and entertainment options" in addition to a variety of other factors as reasons for this city's placement atop of many lists ("2015 Top 100").

Despite this outstanding reputation, however, recent--and much less circulated--research indicates that Dane County's history and current reality is much more complex, strained, and even sullied. In 2013, the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, located in the heart of Madison, sought to expose and explode Dane County's 'best-of' reputation. To do this, the council formed the Race to Equity Project team, directed by Erica Nelson. Inspired by the few studies from the 2000's intimating that Dane County indeed hosts "stunningly wide black/white disparities on several significant outcome measures," studies that severely contrast the "common perception of

Dane County as a place of positive opportunity and well-being for children and families,” the team collected and analyzed data from Dane County communities throughout 2011 and 2012 (*Race to Equity Baseline Report*, 3). Publishing their findings in the 2013 Race to Equity Baseline Report, the team wrote:

The desire to understand the seeming paradox between reputation and reality was an important motive behind the creation of the Race to Equity project. Could a place as prosperous, resourceful, and progressive as Dane County also be home to some of the most profound, pervasive, and persistent racial disparities in the country? *Race to Equity*, 4

Ultimately, the Race to Equity report revealed that Dane County, where 6.5% of the total population self-identifies as African American, is, in fact, home not only to the widest black/white disparities in the state but also to those in the nation. It is of particular importance to note, here, that the 2013 Race to Equity project represents only black/white disparities. In their report, the Race to Equity Project team recognizes this limited research scope and its implications:

At the outset of our planning for this project, we envisioned putting together an initial report that encompassed all the major racial and ethnic groups in the county. An initial evaluation of the quality and completeness of available statistics, however, persuaded us that we should begin our data collection and analysis with a primary focus on African Americans, and on how that group’s numbers contrasted with those of the county’s white majority. We recognized, of course, that significant disparities (with

whites) also exist for other communities of color: Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans. And we fully realize the equal importance of addressing the equity challenges that each of these other groups face. Nonetheless, several practical considerations argued for beginning with the county's African American population. *Race to Equity*, 4

Specifically, these disparities or "equity challenges"--ones existing for all of Madison's communities of color and especially for African Americans in Madison--are evident and easily quantifiable in three areas (*Race to Equity*, 7): the economic, education, and judicial disciplines.

The first of these areas or patterns of major disparity--the economic realm--is extraordinary in the sheerness of its magnitude. Indeed, not a single status indicator analyzed by the Race to Equity project team suggests that Madison's African Americans are on par economically with the city's white population. Socio-economic indicators examined by the team include but are not limited to unemployment rate, percentage of children living below the national poverty line, and percentage of general population living below the national poverty line. Specifically, the report states that in 2011, the official unemployment rate for whites in Dane County was only 4.8%, compared to 25.2% for blacks (*Race to Equity*, 7). Simply put, African Americans living in Dane County are nearly 5.5 times more likely to be unemployed than their white counterparts are. Significantly, in the same year, the unemployment rate for African Americans throughout the nation averaged only slightly more than double that for white Americans (see Figure 1.1).

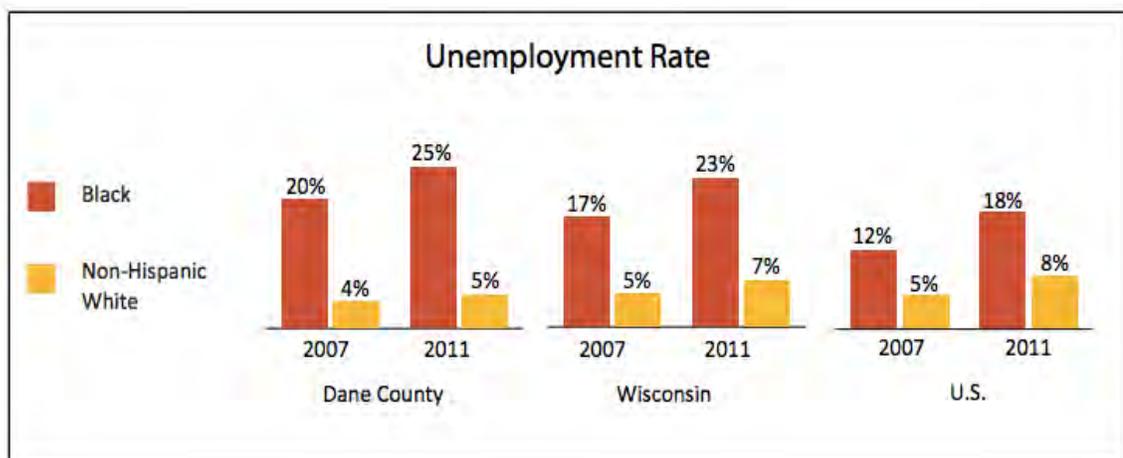


Figure 1.1

Unemployment rates indubitably account, at least in part, for the black/white poverty rate gap in Dane County, a gap that is wider not only than the troubling disparities in employment but also than the national black/white poverty rate gap is (*Race to Equity*, 8). In fact, the Race to Equity project team suggests in their report that in 2011, more than 54% of Dane County's African American residents were living below the national poverty line, while only 8.7% of Dane County's white population resided under the same line (*Race to Equity*, 8). In other words, blacks living in Dane County are inclined over six times more than whites to be living under the federal poverty line. Comparatively, the nation's African Americans as a whole were 2.5 times more likely than whites in 2011 to be living in poverty (*Race to Equity*, 8).

Starker still are Dane County's rates of child poverty and the disparities evident in them, as seen in Figure 1.2. In their report, the Race to Equity project team estimates that in 2011, over 74% of black children living in Dane County were living in poverty, compared to 5.5% of the county's white children (*Race to Equity*, 8). More generally, white kids in Dane County were more than 13 times less likely to grow up poor than

black kids in Dane County were (*Race to Equity*, 8). Of this disparity, the Race to Equity project team asserted: “Our research suggests that this 13 to 1 disparity ratio may constitute one of the widest black/white child poverty gaps that the Census Surveys reported for any jurisdiction in the nation” (*Race to Equity*, 8).

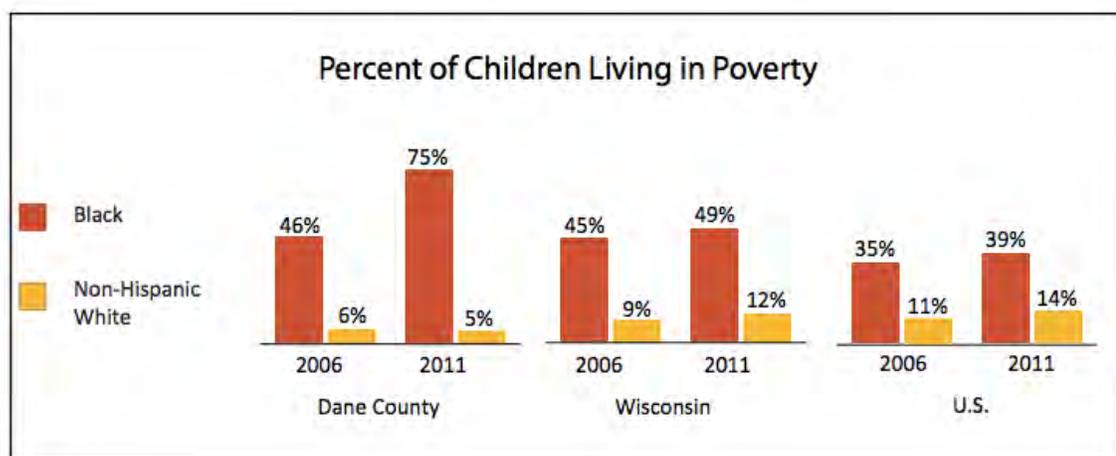


Figure 1.2

These astoundingly wide black/white disparities in Dane County’s economic arena parallel similarly worrisome and vast patterns of disparity in the county’s public educational systems. In 2011, for example, Dane County’s white third grade students were 4.5 times more likely to meet reading proficiency standards, as determined by Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD), than their black counterparts were (*Race to Equity*, 9). This gap is significantly larger not only than gaps between white and black third graders statewide but also between white and black third graders nationwide (*Race to Equity*, 9).

Other academic indicators, or “key schooling measures” examined by the Race to Equity project team include high school graduation rates, percentage of students taking the ACT exam--a national examination required for college admissions that consists of

four subject tests in English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science--and ACT exam scores (*Race to Equity*, 9). The report reveals that regarding the first of these measures, high school graduation rates, African American students in Madison Public School District high schools in 2011-2012 had only a 50% on-time graduation rate, while 85% of their white counterparts graduated on time (*Race to Equity*, 9).

In their 2013-2014 district-wide collection of data from MMSD high schools, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (“Percent of Students in ACT College Readiness Categories, by Race”) reported vast black/white disparities in ACT performance, too. The report, analyzing exam results from 203 black high school students and 798 white high school students, indicated that only 20% of black students--in contrast to 84% of white students--demonstrated “college-ready” aptitude in the English subject test (“Percent of Students”). While 62% of the white students achieved “college-ready” scores in the Science subject test, only 7% of black students exhibited this proficiency (“Percent of Students”). Similar gaps were evident across the third and fourth subject tests, Mathematics and Reading (“Percent of Students”). The Race to Equity Report project connects these gaps in performance--quantified by DPI--with percentages of students actually taking the ACT (see Figure 1.3). In fact, data from the report indicates that white 12th graders enrolled in MMSD schools in the 2011-2012 academic year were twice as likely than black 12th graders were to take the exam (*Race to Equity*, 9).

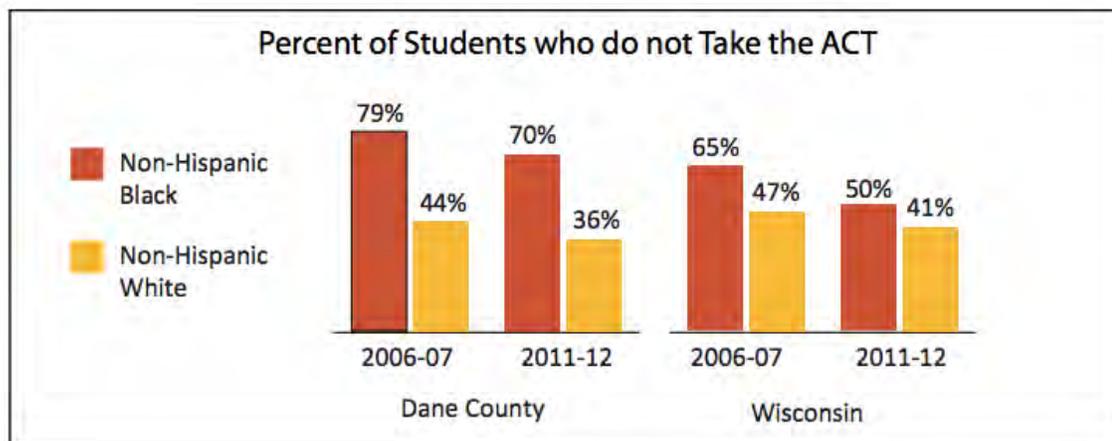


Figure 1.3

These astounding black/white disparities in the economic and educational arenas are significant not only in themselves but also because of their larger, tangential implications. Specifically, according to the Race to Equity report, these “disparities in graduation rates and college attendance prospects are doubtlessly related to earlier and even wider disparity rates in school attendance and suspension rates” (*Race to Equity*, 9). Crucial to note here is the connection between graduation rates and school suspension rates. As the Race to Equity project team asserts, patterns of disparity in the economic and educational realms “clearly contribute to a pipeline of accumulating risk factors that show up even more acutely in many of the measures of racial disproportionality in the...juvenile justice and the adult correctional systems” (*Race to Equity*, 10).

How, exactly, do economic and educational gaps lead to racial disparities in the modern justice system? Professor and teaching artist Rachel Marie Crane-Williams makes this pipeline clear through her 2011 zine series, *The School to Prison Pipeline*, a comic arts project created in collaboration with the Jane Adams Hull House’s “Unfinished Business - Juvenile Justice” initiative. Specifically, through a series of

images (see Appendix Figures 2.1-2.4), she illuminates the systemic pieces--including poverty and academic achievement gaps--that frequently result in the incarceration of young black and brown-bodies. The Race to Equity report, like these images and Crane-Williams' *The School to Prison Pipeline* in whole, makes this systemic pipeline clear: while Dane County's public schools reported the suspensions of 3,198 black students in 2011, only 1,130 white students were suspended in the same year (*Race to Equity*, 9). In other words, "Dane County public schools were 15 times more likely to involve a black student [in prolonged academic discipline] than a white student" (*Race to Equity*, 9).

Far too often, as evidenced especially in Crane-Williams' zine series, suspended students of color are placed on the fast track into state correctional facilities. Data represented in the Race to Equity report underscores this correlation between academic discipline and Wisconsin's juvenile justice system:

In 2011, a Dane County African American youth was 15 times more likely to spend time in the county's secure detention program than a white youth. Statistics from the same year suggest that Dane County black youths were 25 times more likely to be sent to the state's secure facility at Lincoln Hills than whites. The striking result of these disparities is that African American adolescents, while constituting less than 9% of the county's youth population, made up almost 80% of all the local kids sentenced to the state's juvenile correctional facility in 2011. (See Figure 1.4) (*Race to Equity*, 11)

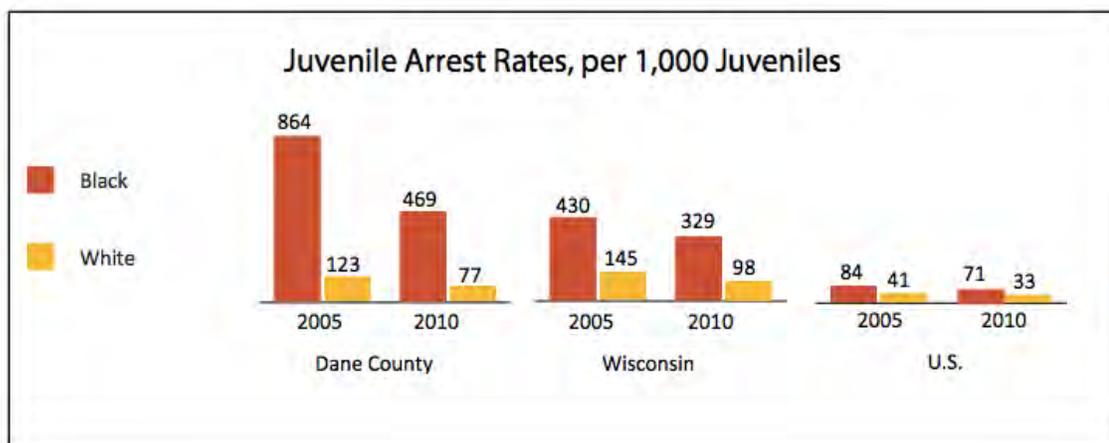


Figure 1.4

It is important to note, here, that in a separate report, the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families suggested that fewer than five percent of these youths arrested have even committed violent or serious offenses (“The State of Juvenile Justice in Wisconsin: What do we Really Know,” 3). Further, according to New York Times’ reporter Lizette Alvarez, “juvenile judges were among the first to express alarm over the jump in the number of students appearing in court on misdemeanors, an increase they said is tied to the proliferation of school police officers” (Alvarez). Perhaps the most worrisome ‘side-effect’ of gaps in the economic and educational realms, though, beyond the clear association of these gaps to the juvenile justice system, is the “carry over from the juvenile justice to the adult systems,” as illustrated in Figure 1.5 (*Race to Equity*, 11). Indeed, in 2012, Dane County reports indicated that black adults were arrested more than eight times the rate at which white adults were arrested (*Race to Equity*, 11). Further in the same year, while only 4.8% of Dane County’s male population identified as black, this same group accounted for over 43% of the year’s new, adult prison placements (*Race to Equity*, 11).

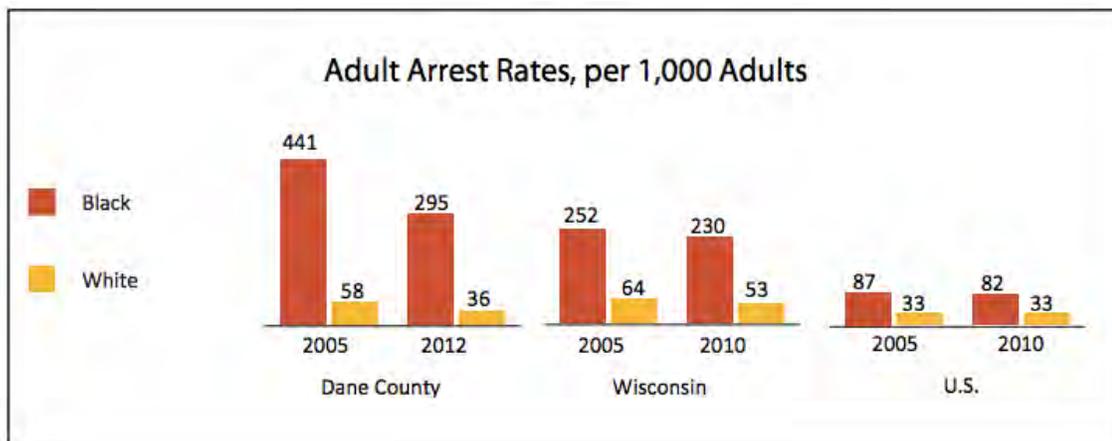


Figure 1.5

Clearly, evidence suggests that Dane County is far from the “best-of.”

Commenting on the results of their multiple-year data collection, the Race to Equity project team wrote of the paradoxical separation between Madison’s reputation and reality:

The one inescapable and pivotal finding that arises from all the numbers we have collected is the extraordinary degree to which poverty and “disadvantage” in Dane County have become correlated with color -- or, to put it in even more stark terms, the extent to which...deprivation has become profoundly racialized. (*Race to Equity*, 15)

In the conclusion of their report, the Race to Equity project team calls its audience, coupled with the greater Dane County community, to action. ‘Racialized deprivation’ disadvantages not only blacks in Dane County but also the county’s entire population, the team suggests. While black/white disparities in Dane County are quantifiable in specific arenas--like the economic, educational, and judicial ones--they are also pervasive and encompassing. To be sure, such disparities ultimately threaten the livelihood and

well-being of all who live in a place that is saturated by them. Of the ubiquity of Dane County's racialized disparities, the team writes:

The status quo is toxic for the future of the African American population and, by extension, for other communities of color in Dane County. But it is also poisonous for the county as a whole...perhaps most importantly, the continued marginalization of communities of color will undermine the region's cultural vitality, economic competitiveness, and overall quality of life in a world that increasingly values and demands racial and ethnic diversity and inclusion. (*Race to Equity*, 15)

Chapter III: Context - Examining Systems of Knowledge and Power through Cultural Theory

While the Race to Equity team states in their report's conclusion that "conscious racism and color prejudice may not have been the primary cause of this extreme racialization of [the] disadvantage[s]" evident on federal, state, and local levels, I challenge this conclusion (*Race to Equity*, 15). To offer both cultural and theoretical contexts for my argument--that racism, albeit sub-conscious or conscious, is indeed at the root of the black/white disparities evident in Dane County today--I turn to multiple works of French philosopher Michel Foucault. In his texts *The History of Sexuality* and *Discipline and Punish*, specifically, Foucault proposes a theoretical paradigm of subject formation and, as such, conceptualizes the human through a history of the relationship between power, body, and knowledge. Positing his theory of bio-politics, Foucault suggests that human subjects are indeed formed out of and regulated by historical and anatomic-political disciplines of power.

However, as Foucault also asserts, the importance of such research lies not in understanding the past but in understanding the "history of the present" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 31). Thus, in this chapter, I will attempt to use Foucault's proposed bio-political conditions of existence to frame and define the modern juridical subject. Further, I will trace the history of punishment in relation to the body, one vested in and controlled by anatomic-political constitutions of power, and highlight the loss of spectacle in this history. Enveloping Dane County's 21st century inequities in this Foucauldian lens, I will illuminate the systemically rooted, problematic racial disparities within the judicial system of today's Western society [1]. Ultimately, by writing--or

palimpsestually re-writing--the narrative of Wisconsin's present, I hope to unveil and bring consciousness to the many faceless, juvenile juridical subjects of Dane County who are certainly defined and limited by these pervasive disparities.

To situate and discuss the specific implications of the modern, juvenile juridical subject within its historical context, it is first necessary to examine this context. How, why, and to what end is the juridical subject interpellated by and in anatomic-political disciplines of power? In the fifth section of *The History of Sexuality*, "Right of Death and Power over Life," and the first section of *Discipline and Punish*, "The Body of the Condemned," Foucault develops this very question, which he frames through the dynamic relationship between sovereign, power, and death. Indeed, in *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault chronicles the most notable shift in this dynamic and credits it to the eighteenth century:

In the passage from this [old] world to the other [modern one], death was the manner in which a terrestrial sovereignty was relieved by another, singularly more powerful sovereignty...Now it is over life, throughout its unfolding, that power establishes its dominion. (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 138)

That is, whereas governing bodies once ruled their subjects with the threat of death, the modern sovereignty regulates not one's death but one's life and the quality of one's existence. Foucault further asserts that this transition from power over death to "power over life" spurred and "evolved in" a focus in the penal system "on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological

processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary” (*The History of Sexuality*, 139). Simply put, the sovereign’s power to control a subject’s conditions of existence allows, too, for the “supervision” of populations based on “*regulatory controls...biopolitics*” (*The History of Sexuality*, 139).

However, Foucault continues in *The History of Sexuality*, this “power whose task is to take charge of life” has distinct and severe implications for different subjects: the sovereign who is responsible for regulating life must naturally determine, then, a “domain of value and utility” for his subjects (*The History of Sexuality*, 144). That is, to manage life, the sovereign must consider and calculate subjects economically, in terms of their conditions and what they can and cannot do or hold the potential to do. In this way, the subject becomes embedded in and indistinguishable from his economic and production value. Foucault exposes the consequences of this modern relationship between sovereign, power, and subject: “Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize, rather than display itself in its murderous splendor; it [unlike past sovereign power] does not have to draw the line that separates the enemies of the sovereign from his disobedient subjects” (*The History of Sexuality*, 144). Surely, this power dynamic creates space for the reflection of biological existence within the political realm. The “rapid development of various disciplines—universities, secondary schools, barracks, workshops” see too, then, “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of “biopower””

(*The History of Sexuality*, 140). Indeed, the transformation of sovereign power into mastery of life offers the sovereign unique access to and control over even the body.

Certainly, this centering of power on life, on the body, infiltrates all extensions of the sovereign, including institutions. Once rooted in economic processes, these institutions begin to act, then, “as factors of segregation and social hierarchization...guaranteeing relation of domination and effects of hegemony” (*The History of Sexuality*, 141). As a result, institutions echo, emulate, and perpetuate the sovereign’s determination of value and utility for all life forms. Foucault thus posits that the “outcome of a technology of power centered on life,” coupled with the appraisal and ranking of this life, produces a “normalizing society” (*The History of Sexuality*, 144). Living subjects outside of the norm are, subsequently, those determined valueless by those with disciplines of power over life.

In the first section of *Discipline and Punish*, “The Body of the Condemned,” Foucault explores and deepens the implications of this power-knowledge theory by explicitly putting it into conversation with the history of one specific institution: the modern, Western judicial system. Indeed, in this text, Foucault uses the dynamic relationship between power, sovereign, subject, and anatomo-politics as a lens for understanding the development of the modern prison. He writes:

[*Discipline and Punish*] is intended as a correlative history...of a new power to judge; a genealogy of the present scientifico-legal complex from which the power to punish derives its bases, justifications, and rules.

(*Discipline and Punish*, 23)

He contends early in this text that the shift from sovereign power over death to power over life—the very one he outlines in *The History of Sexuality*—occurred, however, not for the sake of the prisoner but for those spectating punishment:

It was as if the punishment was thought to equal, if not to exceed, in savagery the crime itself, to accustom the spectators to a ferocity from which one wished to divert them, to show them the frequency of the crime, to make the executioner resemble a criminal, judges murderers, to reverse roles at the last moment, to make the tortured criminal an object of pity or admiration.” (*Discipline and Punish*, 9)

Yet, Foucault continues, the modernization of the justice system resulted not only in significantly fewer public executions and the subsequent loss of spectacle but also in a “slackening of the [sovereign’s] hold on the body” (*Discipline and Punish*, 10). Echoing arguments developed in *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault indicates that without the totalitarian authority to regulate death and, therefore, have the ultimate say over subjects’ bodies, the sovereign instead gained new methods of punishment and new power deriving from the subjects’ very conditions of existence. In the context of the modern, Western judicial system, however, the sovereign’s ability to manage and judge a subject’s conditions of existence—to “qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize” has severe implications (*The History of Sexuality*, 144). In fact, rather than simply passing judgment on one’s crime, then, the modern sovereign, and the institutions by which he circulates and perpetuates his rule, employs his power in consideration of a juridical subject’s “passions, instincts, anomalies, infirmities, maladjustments, effects of environment or

heredity” (*Discipline and Punish*, 17). Indeed, the modern justice system and those holding positions of power within it judge individuals not only on their offenses, their crimes, but also on “what they are, will be, [and] may be” (*Discipline and Punish*, 18). In this way, all factors that comprise the judicial subject—his environment, motivations, desires, ancestral background, and otherwise—stand trial, too. Thus, the modern judicial system is and serves as nothing other than a scientifico-juridical complex, one entirely founded on creating hierarchy.

Yet, what is at stake if this “scientifico-legal complex” bases its judgments on these conditions of existence, conditions that those in positions of power have the ability to determine the value and utility of and ultimately rank or hierarchize (*Discipline and Punish*, 23)? Addressing this question and its ramifications, Foucault indicates that out of this legal process stems a new power-knowledge dynamic. To be sure, deriving power from the conditions surrounding the body, a body “with its elements, its resources and its forces” rather than just the physical body creates a new sort of theoretical subject: “the ‘body politic’” (*Discipline and Punish*, 28). Undermining and founding this body politic is “a set of material elements and techniques that serve as weapons, relays, communication routes and supports for the power and knowledge relations that invest human bodies” (*Discipline and Punish*, 28). Therefore, the modern juridical subject reflects and takes on punishment and penal system processes that are not only steeped in legal theory but also are a consequence of anatomo-politics. Punishment hence becomes not just a response to a subject’s crime but “a political tactic,” a means of enforcing the norms, the knowledge and perspectives, regarded optimal within a certain society

(*Discipline and Punish*, 23). Ultimately, then, the history of the penal system and the history of human existence—subjects as beings wedded to conditions and thus inherently enveloped in political implications—reflect each other closely and stem, even, “from a single process of ‘epistemologico-juridical’ formation” (*Discipline and Punish*, 23). Simply put, while processes of power perhaps humanize the penal system in creating juridical subjects out of mere physical bodies, technologies of power render new knowledge, too, that casts some subjects more valuable than others and others yet sub-norm, sub-human.

Early in the first section of *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault contends that the loss of public, penal spectacle “has been attributed too readily and too emphatically to a process of ‘humanization,’ thus dispensing with the need for further analysis” (*Discipline and Punish*, 7). Yet, in the closing of this same section, his evaluation of the modern penal system, in its transition from regarding juridical subjects as bodies, mere physical entities, to beings with conditions of existence, does indeed suggest that modern punitive processes “humanize” their subjects (*Discipline and Punish*, 23). Thus, while Foucault’s assessment of a single, shared history for human existence and the penal system—the combination of which results in a body politic, an anatmo-political realm—certainly seems plausible, even valid, I question his evaluation of the modern penal system as one that “humaniz[es]” (*Discipline and Punish*, 23). In fact, I argue that it is the very birth of the modern prison and the end of old, highly-visible punishment that creates space for certain juridical subjects to be regarded as sub-human, “faceless voices, impalpable entities” (*Discipline and Punish*, 17). Indeed, due to “the disappearance of torture as

public spectacle,” society today tends “to ignore” punishment, punitive systems, and those directly involved in them altogether. I argue not that old punitive means, including torture, were more humanizing (or humanizing at all) in comparison with modern prisons; yet, I contest that—in Foucault’s language—“further analysis” of the consequences of modern punishment and the power-knowledge dynamic it upholds and perpetuates must be done (*Discipline and Punish*, 7). For, if the modern penal system renders its subjects “faceless,” what kind of knowledge can and will a greater, non-incarcerated public have of these subjects? What narratives surrounding these subjects persist and, if steeped in hierarchy, who among these subjects, if any, maintain value? Further, if modern punishment is simply “a political tactic,” what agendas have those in positions of power been justified in executing (*Discipline and Punish*, 23)?

If such disparities exist across various measurable fields, then, how and why has 21st century Madison gained such an exemplary reputation? Why is the narrative of Dane County—and of the nation that this county represents on a micro-cosmic scale—more commonly understood by the general public as a ‘best-of’ city rather than one whose history and institutions are saturated by racial divides? Who, or what, is to account for this mediation between reputation and reality? Foucault’s assertion that, within the penal system, power and knowledge stem from one and the same root certainly provides insight into these questions. Foucault writes, “there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (*Discipline and Punish*, 27). Thus, power relations and the knowledge that couples them—the knowledge that is, too, circulated and

perpetuated as common truth—is “not [just] localized in the relations between state and citizens” (*Discipline and Punish*, 27). Rather, knowledge and the passing of it as norms becomes like a tool, a mechanism. Indeed, similar to the sovereign’s use of punishment as political tactic, those in the majority, those holding power, can impose upon those who fall outside of social norms certain knowledge of which they become the “objects,” who “must,” therefore, “be regarded as...[the] effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations” (*Discipline and Punish*, 28).

To render the stakes of my theoretical research in graphic terms, consider the notion of the ‘super-predator’ that exploded among socio-historical researchers and those studying modern punitive systems in the mid-late 1990’s and early 2000’s. In their 1996 article “Body Count: Moral Poverty...and How to Win America’s War Against Crime and Drugs,” Bennett, Walters, and Dilulio Jr. make a bold (and what has now, two decades later, been declared an entirely erroneous [2]) claim:

America is now home to thickening ranks of juvenile “super-predators”—radically impulsive, brutally remorseless youngsters, including ever more preteenage boys, who murder, assault, rape, rob, burglarize, deal deadly drugs, join gun-toting gangs, and create serious communal disorders...To these mean-street youngsters, the words “right”

and “wrong” have no fixed moral meaning. (Bennett, Walters, and Dilulio Jr., 27)

Bennett, Walters, and Dilulio Jr. support the assertion that this ‘super-predator’ is a “thickening,” exponentially growing problem with graphs, like Figure 1.6, that elucidate the increasing population of juvenile-aged boy and offer 20-year projections for this population. Yet, this graph does more than highlight an increasing population trend: it also breaks down this census information by race. Contrasting the figures of increasing white, black, and Latino preteenage boys, the chart produces—or perhaps hopes to produce—implicit knowledge, too: while the projected increase for the white male preteenage population is only 8%, the black preteenage male population is expected to increase by 26% and, even more substantially, the Latino male preteenage population is projected to increase by 71% (Bennett, Walters, and Dilulio Jr., 26). Clearly, while there is no explicit mention of race in this report, its race-based implications are clear.

TABLE 2-1. U.S. JUVENILE POPULATION, 1990 AND PROJECTED 2010

| | Population | | Increase | |
|----------------------|------------|------------|-----------|---------|
| | 1990 | 2010 | Number | Percent |
| <i>All juveniles</i> | 64,185,000 | 73,617,000 | 9,432,000 | 15 |
| Ages 0–4 | 18,874,000 | 20,017,000 | 1,143,000 | 6 |
| Ages 5–9 | 18,064,000 | 19,722,000 | 1,658,000 | 9 |
| Ages 10–14 | 17,191,000 | 20,724,000 | 3,533,000 | 21 |
| Ages 15–17 | 10,056,000 | 13,154,000 | 3,098,000 | 31 |
| <i>White</i> | 51,336,000 | 55,280,000 | 3,944,000 | 8 |
| <i>Black</i> | 9,896,000 | 12,475,000 | 2,579,000 | 26 |
| <i>Latino</i> | 7,886,000 | 13,543,000 | 5,657,000 | 71 |

Source: Bureau of the Census, 1993, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1995.

Figure 1.6

Calling their audience to attention, and no doubt using manipulative rhetoric and fear-tactics to do so, Bennett, Walters, and Dilulio Jr. further suggest that these ‘super-predators’ are born out of a “criminogenic environment...that seems almost consciously designed to produce vicious, unrepentant predatory street criminals” (Bennett, Walters, and Dilulio Jr., 13). Putting these assumed, racialized preteenage bodies in terms of animals, labeling them “the youngest, biggest, and baddest generation any society has ever known,” a generation of whom “even mothers...[and] grandmothers are scared,” it is thus no doubt that the ‘super-predator’ myth took hold of and rocked those involved in and in control of the nation’s justice system (Bennett, Walters, and Dilulio Jr., 26).

In fact, in their report *The State of Juvenile Justice in Wisconsin: What Do We Really Know?*, the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families suggests that the spread of this myth, the circulation of this knowledge, albeit false, indeed “drove policy decisions” and dominated criminal and juvenile justice teachings and practices for years (“The State of Juvenile Justice,” 3). Many feared that the turn of the century would bring with it an exponential rise in crime-committing youth--of color--who, in contrast to juvenile delinquents of the past, would be a bigger, stronger, less afraid, and more dangerous "new breed" (Bennett, Walters, and Dilulio Jr., 26). The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families credits the ‘super-predator’ myth and those who perpetuated it for one of “the worst public policy decisions in the last twenty years--lowering the age of adult court jurisdiction to 17” (“The State of Juvenile Justice,” 3). Surely, as the aforementioned Williams’ *The School to Prison Pipeline* evidences, this decree cemented

the place of thousands of black and brown, anatomic-politically charged juvenile bodies into the adult legal system before they even had the opportunity to graduate high school.

Not only was this myth ultimately proved erroneous as time passed (see Figure 1.7), but the very language used to define and defend it exposes the systemic prejudices founding it--prejudices that indubitably stem from notions of biopower and biopolitics that, according to Foucault, define 'knowledge' and, as such, pervade the institutions and systems that perpetuate common 'truths.' Note, for example, Bennett, Walters, and Dilulio Jr.'s likening of youths to "predator[s]" that "breed": the word predator" is most typically understood in terms of ferocious species and "breed" is commonly contextualized in reference to animals, or species considered less than human (Bennett, Walters, and Dilulio Jr., 26). This dehumanizing rhetoric unveils, perpetuates, and enables the fear of the masses' in that which is unfamiliar to them--here, marginalized youth populations.

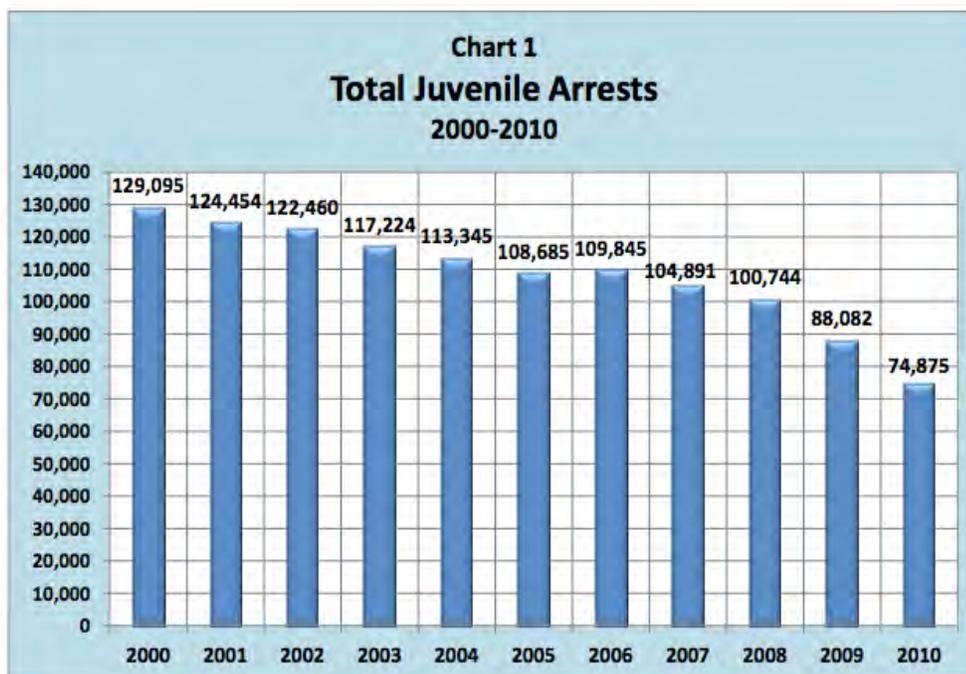


Figure 1.7

Though the super-predator concept has been proven misguided, the kind of fear, prejudice, stigma, and ignorance that it and other myths or false narratives like it justified and spurred are as prevalent as they were 100 years ago: the local, state, and nation-wide black/white disparities evidenced by the 2013 Race to Equity Report, for example, make this clear. Certainly, while the notion of the ‘super-predator’ was ultimately proved a myth, it affirms Foucault’s suggestion that juridical subjects are nothing more than the objects of knowledge, the sort of knowledge that is no doubt created as a mechanism, a political tactic, by and along with those in power. Calling their audience to recognize the biopolitical bases of such power-knowledge dynamics, the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families noted, too, the ease with which ‘knowledge’ and that passed off as truth by the norm can “believe the common perception” (“The State of Juvenile Justice,” 3). Further, in the conclusion of their report on Wisconsin’s juvenile justice system, they wrote: “We are often easily swayed by sensational stories in the media. After all, serious offenses and the tragedies they bring to those affected make for compelling headlines” (“The State of Juvenile Justice,” 15).

Ultimately, then, understanding Foucauldian paradigms of power and knowledge--and their historic and storied relationship to the body as a politically implicative entity--sheds an eerie light on 21st century Dane County, Wisconsin. As scholar and civil rights advocate Michelle Alexander wrote in her 2012 essay “The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness,” the changing relationship between governing body, power, and knowledge--and the implications of this transforming relationship for today’s black bodies--“has less to do with the basic

structure of our society than with the language we use to justify it” (Alexander, 2). Indeed, today--while it is no longer socially acceptable to use race or ethnicity as an explicit justification for exclusion, prejudice, or discrimination--systemic regimes of power make it easy to execute the exact same racism, only under the guise of the ‘justice system.’ Of this masking, Alexander writes:

Rather than rely on race, we use our criminal justice system to label people of color “criminals” and then engage in all the practices we supposedly left behind. Today it is perfectly legal to discriminate against criminals in nearly all the way that it was once legal to discriminate against African Americans. Once you’re labeled a felon, the old forms of discrimination--employment discrimination, housing discrimination, denial of the right to vote, denial of educational opportunity, denial of food stamps and other public benefits, and exclusion from jury service--are suddenly legal. As a criminal, you scarcely have more rights, and arguably less respect, than a black man living in Alabama at the height of Jim Crow. We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesignated it. (Alexander, 2)

To be sure, in their 2013 report, the Race to Equity project team outlines the astounding degree to which Alexander’s “new racial caste system” has exacerbated, or perhaps even spurred, black/white disparities today (Alexander, 3). Alexander continues:

When someone is convicted of a crime today, their “debt to society” is never paid. The “cruel hand” that Frederick Douglass spoke of more than

150 years ago has appeared once again. In this new system of control, like the last, many black men “hold up [their] heads, if at all, against the withering influence of a nation’s scorn and contempt.” (Alexander, 163)

Certainly, it is not just the physical structure imposed on and around those convicted of crimes that limits and shackles their bodies. Perhaps even more encumbering are the ‘truths’ perpetuated by a strategic, racialized criminal system. Indeed, it is the normalized and socialized knowledge of what it means to be criminal in America and what it means to be black in America that have allowed for the two definitions to become seemingly inseparable.

[1] My analysis of the ‘modern penal system’ in this essay refers only to practices instituted by and within Western society. I do not have knowledge of modern, Eastern punitive practices or their history, and thus will not attempt to globalize my arguments by accounting for this history.

[2] The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families report titled, *The State of Juvenile Justice in Wisconsin: What Do We Really Know?*, which I have cited earlier in this essay, works to invalidate claims like these by proving suggested projections incorrect.

Chapter IV: Examining & Evaluating Community Youth Programming in Dane County, WI

Clearly, the relation between power and knowledge that Foucault writes of in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality* has led to inherently flawed, unjust institutions and systemic practices that value certain bodies and limit other ones, bodies of color, to certain spaces and confined narratives. Dane County's systems and institutions--and the knowledge they are built upon and also perpetuate--are evidence of this. Yet, within this city, certain community-based programs and initiatives work to challenge such injustice. Indeed, there are pockets of consciousness within the county that not only recognize the danger of Dane County's 'best-of' facade but also work to expose and push against it. Throughout the past 18 months, I have come to know two of these pockets: Simpson Street Free Press (SSFP), 'Dane County's Teen Newspaper,' and Neighborhood Intervention Program (N.I.P.), a unit of the Children, Youth and Families Division of the Dane County Department of Human Services. While both of these programs are small in scale and likely unknown to the general public, I argue that the strategies they employ successfully empower Dane County youth of color and, as such, re-write for these youth the narratives otherwise scripted for them by Dane County's disparity-ridden institutions. Specifically, using forms of digital media and fostering relationship-building to encourage self-expression, practical skill-building, and engagement with the greater community, these programs have created authentic, validating spaces within an otherwise disparaged picture.

While combining theoretical and cultural contexts with my original, experimental research in these two programs seems far-fetched or even forced, perhaps, I hope that by

doing so I can achieve or offer the very kind of “coherent methodology that bridges theoretical research and educational practice” that The Design-Based Research Collective and the American Educational Research Association advocate for in their aforementioned report, “Design Based Research: An Emerging Paradigm for Educational Inquiry” (4).

Thus, to present such a methodology in this chapter, to offer valuable work that addresses my research questions in real, practical applications, I will first recount my work with N.I.P. and Simpson Street Free Press and the missions of these programs (*Design Based Research*, 4). Then, I will offer an analysis of the tools and indicators--both quantitative and qualitative--used by these programs to gauge their efficacy. Evaluating these tools and indicators comprehensively, I hope to provide feedback for community-based youth programming in Dane County. Further, I hope to highlight the place of digital media and relationship-building in these community and project-based learning programs.

Ultimately, I argue that utilizing forms of digital media within youth-focused community-based programming not only enhances the efficacy of these programs but also provides a platform for relationship-building, a crucial component of such programming.

Simpson Street Free Press, the first of the programs I consider in the scope of this project, is a non-profit model organization “built on ideas and innovation” (Kramer, “SSFP: About SSFP”). Created and founded in 1992 by Executive Director James Kramer, a lifetime Madisonian, the Free Press has maintained its base newsroom directly

in the heart of Madison's south side for 23 years (see Figure 1.8). This neighborhood especially is fraught with the educational disparities illuminated in the 2013 Race to Equity report. Of the organization's mission, start, purpose, and placement in Madison, Kramer wrote:

From humble beginnings as a small neighborhood newspaper and after-school academic program based in south Madison, the Free Press has grown into an impressive example of innovative non-profit strategies at work. We published our first issue in April of 1992. The first print run was 1,000 copies. In those days it was a dozen kids, a few sharp pencils, and one computer in the back room of the Broadway-Simpson Neighborhood Center. But it was quickly evident that our brand of academic training was cool and fun. Local kids flocked to our newsroom and circulation soared.

("SSFP: About SSFP")

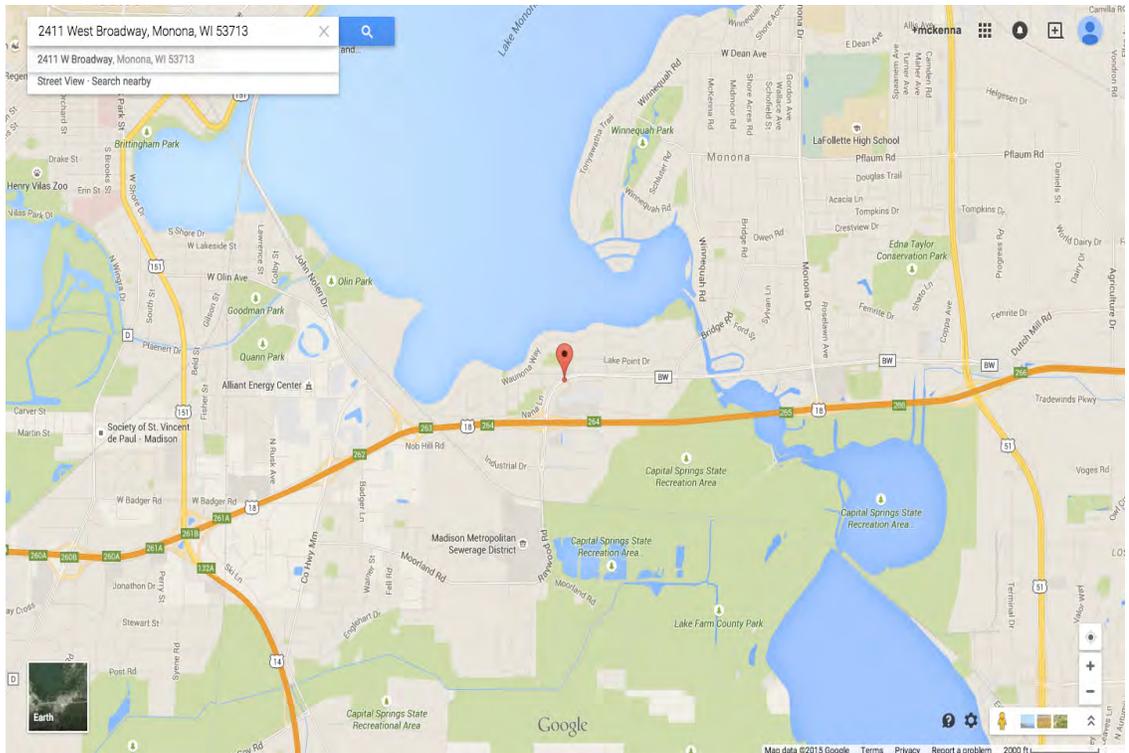


Figure 1.8

As the Free Press gained popularity among the Madison community--primarily through word-of-mouth, the organization hired increasing numbers of student reporters. Today, hundreds of local Madison students aged seven through 18 are employed at the Free Press and its four sub-publications: Falk Free Press, Glendale Free Press, Wright Free Press, and the 2014 multilingual Wisconsin Idea UW - Madison partnership initiative, La Prensa de Libre (see Figure 1.9). Each of these independent publications are funded in large part by private donors and big corporations like BMO Harris Bank, Summit Credit Union, the American Girl Foundation, and CUNA Mutual Group, and in small part by city and government funding. Free Press student writers are not recruited based on need or specific qualifications; rather, neighborhood kids grow up “knowing the SSFP brand and wanting to apply because their older brother, cousin, classmate, friend

already works here” (Kramer, "Evaluating Digital Media Use at Simpson Street Free Press"). Though recruitment is not targeted, approximately 80-90% of these student writers are a part of Madison Metropolitan School District’s free or reduced lunch program. Further, about 90% of the student writers are of color (“Evaluating Digital Media Use at Simpson Street Free Press”).



Figure 1.9

Kramer suggests that working at Simpson Street Free Press provides student writers with much more than academic support during after-school hours. Emphasizing this strongly, he said:

Our student reporters learn practical academic skills, which they can readily apply in the classroom. But much more is accomplished with every new stroke at their keyboard. Free Press writers are also authentic, local

role models. Their influential young voices resonate far beyond their south-side newsroom. Drugs and alcohol, school violence, and a minority achievement gap are part of life for many kids today. Free Press teens lead their peers in a different direction. Our reporters spread powerful messages of achievement and success, and they do so on a mass scale. There is no minority achievement gap at the Simpson Street Free Press. Achievement can be, and is, for all kids. From our south side newsroom, tomorrow's community leaders are spreading positive and timely messages today. ("SSFP: About SSFP")

Kramer also indicates that the core curriculum deployed at the Free Press--one he has developed for over twenty years and one he continues to amend based on the latest research around academic gaps--is largely accountable for the educational achievements of Free Press student writers. This mission behind this curriculum is two-fold: first, to "provide a challenging academic experience for our teen writing staff," and second, to "spread a positive message of youth achievement, academic success, and community service throughout the surrounding area" ("SSFP: About SSFP").

The second Dane County community-based program I consider in the scope of this project, Neighborhood Intervention Program, "offers innovation Community Supervision Services and Early Intervention Services to boys and girls ages 10-17 who

are delinquent or at risk for delinquency” (“Children, Youth and Families”). Here, I co-created, co-facilitated, and also participated in weekly workshops for teen girls colloquially labeled “guppies[1]” within the juvenile justice system. Based on the tenets of the “Balanced and Restorative Justice Model,” a nation-wide, research-backed implementation of preventative discipline and instruction strategies, N.I.P. aims to guide and redirect youth by holding them accountable for their behaviors, teaching them practical skills and competencies, and encouraging engagement with the community (“Children, Youth and Families: Delinquency Services”). Specifically, the Balanced and Restorative Justice Model encompasses three goals: first, “building in youth and families, the ability to do the kinds of things that are valued by the community and providing them the opportunity to do the[se things]”; second, “promoting restoration of the human and relational aspects disrupted by crime by having an offender understand and accept responsibility for the harm to others and taking steps to repay the obligation incurred through the harm”; and third, “responding in ways that promotes [sic] both short and long-term safety for the community” (“Children, Youth and Families: Delinquency Services”).

The Dane County Department of Human Services indicates that such strategies are effective. Of this efficacy, they write:

...many of the principles of Balanced and Restorative Justice are consistent with the best research and practices in preventing delinquent behavior.

Research has shown that prevention strategies work...Without going into semantics, Balanced and Restorative Justice prevention means creating or

changing the conditions that impact on the lives and behavior of others before an actual incident occurs. We already know that kids who feel connected to their neighborhood and community, have others who value them and value others, and have support and encouragement are at a much lower risk to become engaged in a multitude of risky behaviors, including delinquency. (“Children, Youth and Families: Delinquency Services”).

Portions of the youth involved in programming at NIP are required to participate in weekly workshops co-facilitated by the Madison Public Library (MPL), too. In collaboration with the University of Wisconsin - Madison’s School of Library and Information Studies, these workshops take place in the library’s “Bubbler makerspace.” *Makerspaces* envelope, as University of Nevada's Tod Colegrove wrote, "a continuum of activity that includes "co-working," "hackerspace," and "fab lab"; the common thread running through each is a focus on *making* rather than merely *consuming*" (Colegrove). Inside of libraries across the nation, these programs offer the general public free access to technology and multimedia equipment, information, technological support, and hands-on learning experiences that most people would otherwise not have. In his blog post "If Libraries did not Exist, It would be Necessary to Invent Them," author Alex Soojung-Kim Pang wrote, "today's libraries are incubators, collaboratories, the modern equivalent of the seventeenth-century coffeehouse: part information market, part knowledge warehouse, with some workshop thrown in for good measure” (Soojung-Kim Pang).

Indeed, the Madison Public Library Bubbler makerspace (see Figure 1.10) is evidence that in today's age, libraries have transformed entirely. No longer are they simply places to go and be silent. Rather, libraries of the 21st century have become program-intended spaces in which the general public collectively can create, in which the general public can become something other, something greater, something better. Of this idiosyncratic space and experience, Madison Public Library representatives wrote:

Whether offering the basics of animation, screen printing, music, clothing design, dance, or painting (to name a few), the Bubbler's hands-on pop-up workshops introduces [sic] participants to a variety of local experts who share their talents and physical resources. Our deep list of partners keeps the Bubbler experience current and dynamic, offering a wide range of lectures, demonstrations, performances, and make-and-take workshops in all nine library branches and at partner locations around the city. ("What is the Bubbler?")

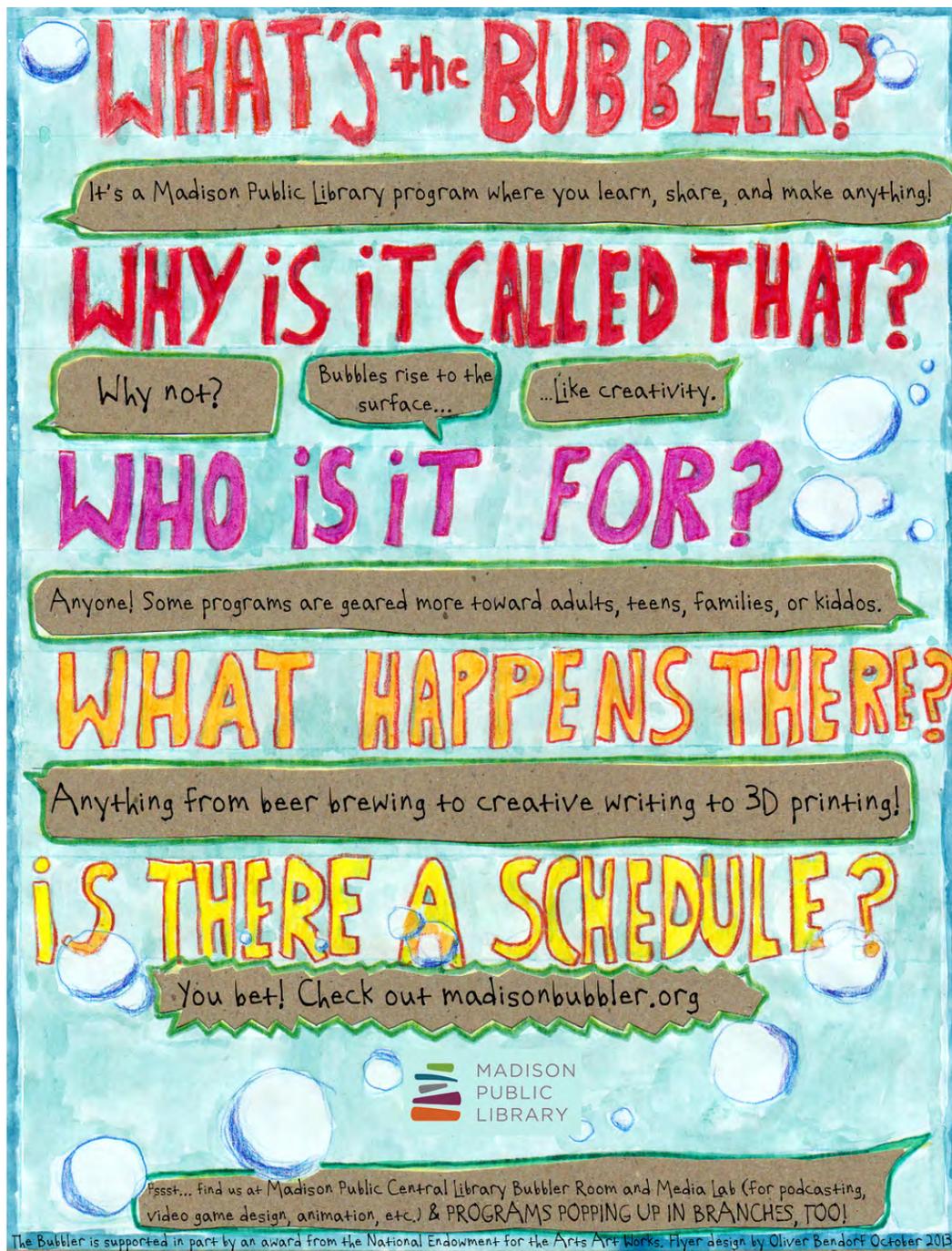


Figure 1.10

In the Madison Public Library's Bubbler makerspace, specifically, UW - Madison professors, UW - Madison undergraduate and graduate students, N.I.P. faculty and staff, community figures and leaders, and library staff come together to engage N.I.P. youth in

various new media and digital projects. These projects are constructed to foster self-expression, practical skill development, and community collaboration (Buenger). The Bubbler makerspace, a unique set of rooms developed to house hands-on projects like graphic and 3D art, photography, spoken word performance, and animation exercises, indubitably offers participants like the N.I.P. youths an atypical library experience.

Both Simpson Street Free Press and Neighborhood Intervention Program base their curriculums and missions loosely around theories of situated and *free-choice learning*, or the kind of learning “defined as any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge or skill...[in which those doing the learning] get to control what to learn, when to learn, where to learn, and with whom to learn” (Bilandzic, 1). Free-choice learning stems from research completed in the early 2000’s, which indicates that over 70 percent of the skills and knowledge people acquire throughout their lifetimes comes not from formal educational systems and programs but from free-choice learning activities (Bilandzic, 1). This approach to education also emphasizes the role of socializing and community within learning. Mark Bilandzic, author of the 2013 report “Connected Learning in the Library as a Product of Hacking, Making, Social Diversity and Messiness,” wrote:

Learning is a social process; people, whom we encounter or interact with in our everyday lives, shape our awareness and exposure to different ideas, interests, activities, hobbies and themes. In particular, through interaction with other, more knowledgeable people, we learn things that we would not be easily able to grasp on our own. (Bilandzic, 2)

In conjunction with the American Psychological Association, social anthropologist Jean Lave also recognizes the importance of community to learning in a chapter of her 1991 text, *Perspectives on Socially Shared Cognition*, titled “Situating Learning in Communities of Practice.” In this chapter, she questions her readers: “What would happen if a different eye, culturally and historically sensitized by an excursion through forms of apprenticeship in different parts of the world, were turned on specific contemporary cultural and historical features of learning processes as these are situated in communities of practice in the United States?” (Lave, 63). Ultimately, Lave posits, this view invites those doing the questioning not only to rethink the concept of learning but also to perceive the individual, cultural, historical, and social experiences as ones that comprise the world, certainly intersect with one another, and inform learning (Lave, 63). As such, Lave proposes that learning is not simply an individual’s intake of information but rather one’s “process of becoming a member of a sustained community of practice” (Lave, 65).

Lave further qualifies this theory of learning: she asserts that learners are more than members in certain communities. In fact, by co-learning and co-creating new knowledge in sustained communities, learners also participate in “the fashioning of

identity” (Lave, 72). Indeed, as members of such communities, individual learners are “subsume[d]” by knowledge and the creation of new skills or the assurance and re-invigoration of old ones to which this knowledge indubitably leads (Lave, 72). This is exactly the kind of free-choice learning--the kind in which members of certain communities of practice hone practical skills *and* foster their own identities, gain the ability to self-express, and grow their own voices through relationship-building--on which both Simpson Street Free Press and Neighborhood Intervention Program capitalize.

It is easy to write that both Simpson Street Free Press and Neighborhood Intervention Program employ certain models or pedagogies like free-choice learning and, as such, enable youth participants to form hands-on skills, build relationships, and stimulate self-expression. But how does this work? And what does it actually look like? Further, how can we know that these practices are in fact successful: what would or does this success look like, and how might we even measure it? In the remainder of this chapter, I will both examine and propose answers to these questions. To do so, I will draw on the original data I have collected and the experiences I have had with both programs and their respective youth participants over the past 18 months.

At Simpson Street Free Press, questions regarding the program’s efficacy and what this efficacy looks like are not hard to address. Indeed, the Free Press--despite its

small scale of operations and similarly small annual budget--is well-decorated and a renowned organization both state- and nation-wide. Designated “one of America’s best and most innovative youth programs,” the Free Press was recognized in 2008-2009 with the National Coming Up Taller Award by the President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Humanities, for example (“SSFP: About SSFP”). The Free Press also received accolades from the University of Wisconsin - Madison system after winning the prestigious Space Grant Awards for three consecutive years in 2008, 2009, and 2010 due to the program’s idiosyncratic approach to science learning (“Simpson Street Free Press”). Executive Director Kramer himself is a winner of the Martin J. Wolman Award, presented by the Wisconsin State Journal, the Joyce Erdman Award, endowed by The Capital Times, and the Local Soldier Award, given by the NAACP. Additionally, since its founding, the Free Press has been recognized for its outstanding youth programming by the Madison Kiwanis, the Madison Civics Club, and the Wisconsin Telemedia Institute.

Why has this home-grown, small grassroots organization received so much attention on both the local and national scale? What makes it different than other non-profit organizations or community-based youth programs? Simply put, the Simpson Street Free Press has an unprecedented record of success[2]. Indeed, over 92% of Free Press student writers complete high school within four years and are accepted into and attend four-year college programs the semester directly following high school graduation (“Evaluating Digital Media Use at Simpson Street Free Press”). For a youth organization in which 90% of the participants are of color, this percentage is unprecedented: in fact,

according to data from the 2013 Race to Equity Report, this figure is nearly more than double both state and national rates of college admission directly out of high school for students of color.

In addition to tracking student writers' rates of college acceptance, Kramer has tracked and evaluated the same quantifiable, qualitative data each year of the organization's 23-year history. Of his evaluative approach to after-school academic youth programming, Kramer said: "for 23 years, we've measured the same data: school attendance, report card grades, participation in book clubs, book reviews published, book trailers completed, high school graduation rates, and rates of college acceptance. What we measure never changes. And neither does our level of success"("Evaluating Digital Media Use at Simpson Street Free Press"). While research around the educational achievement gap and modes of educational inquiry and pedagogy have changed through the decades, Kramer is confident that these evaluative indicators will remain the same for the organization's foreseeable future. Further, Kramer and adult Free Press staff complete bi-annual in-house evaluations for each student writer. Performed at the end of each academic semester, these evaluations work on a point scale: school attendance and letter grades, for example, are converted into points, as seen in Figures 1.11 and 1.12. Tracking a student's points over time, from semester to semester, intimates the student's academic progress or lack thereof to Free Press staff. This individualized, one-on-one approach is key to each student's success, Kramer asserts.

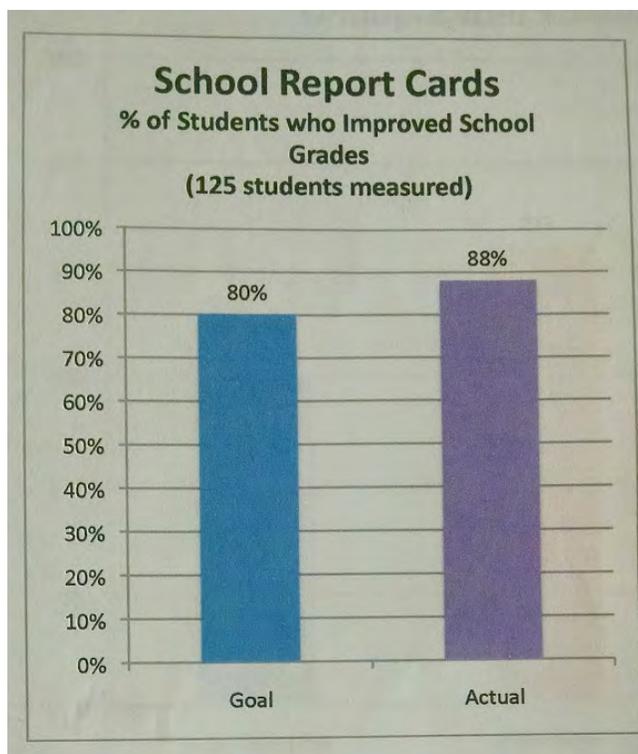


Figure 1.11

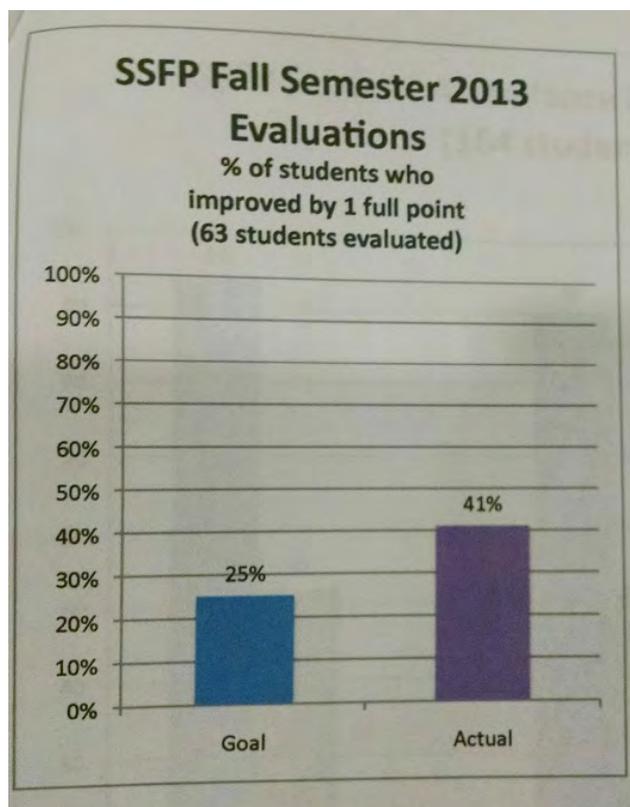


Figure 1.12

In fact, Kramer credits much of Free Press' students' success to the community-like atmosphere that is nurtured at the organization's southside newsroom. When I first began volunteering at the locally-renowned Simpson Street Free Press in the spring of 2014 (see Appendix Figure 2.5), I was surprised: the newsroom truly does feel like a community, even a family of sorts. Kramer consistently references how many of the student writers "treat...[him] like a dad" ("Evaluating Digital Media Use at Simpson Street Free Press"). He suggests, too, that a "tough love approach keeps our students in line. If they're in trouble at home or at school, we know. If they're having trouble at home or at school, we know that too. They piss off their mom? They know I'm waiting for them right here with my baseball bat," he often jokes ("Evaluating Digital Media Use at Simpson Street Free Press"). Like adult staff and teen editors (high school aged student reporters who have been promoted and, as such, have increased work loads and various administrative support tasks), Kramer works at a desk in the main newsroom, rather than one of the site's smaller back rooms. Working in open site to and close proximity with students and staff clearly exemplifies Kramer's attempts to encourage the newsroom's community-feel.

This collective atmosphere also informs the Free Press student writers' learning. Once assigned an article by an editor, a student works one-on-one with a teen editor or volunteer editor--often teachers in the community, retired journalists, or journalism professors at the University of Wisconsin - Madison--to close read his or her source. After completing a first draft, the student goes through multiple rounds of revision, in which he or she works one-on-one with adult staff members and volunteer editors until

the article is completed and headlined. Typically, each article sees eight to 12 rounds of edits within the allotted six-week turnaround period; in other words, each student writer has the chance to work on his or her reading, reading comprehension, writing, and critical thinking skills one-on-one at least eight times per article.

Though this article writing and revision process has remained the same since the organization's start, the actual Simpson Street Free Press publication looks much different today than it did in 1992, or even in 2005. Today, the Free Press is heavily involved in, focused around, and reliant on digital media, or digitized content like graphics, audio, video, and other forms of text that can be channeled through computers and internet networks. In fact, while the Free Press of the 1990's and early 2000's was entirely paper and pen based, the organization today no longer circulates tangible content or physical publications. Instead, new content is published weekly on the organization's webpage, simpsonstreetfreepress.org, which is also linked to sites for the Free Press' four sub-publications. Kramer credits this transition both to "the demands of digital age" as well as the high costs of publishing, printing, and circulating thousands of issues each month (Kramer).

Beyond its current status as an entirely online publication, Simpson Street Free Press is also unique among other after-school academic programs and publications alike because of the organization's involvement in Madison Public Library's "Book Trailers Project." All student writers are required to participate in this programming, during which representatives from the library partner with Free Press adult staff to guide quarterly workshops on digital animation. This digital book trailers project, lauded by Kramer who

is a staunch believer in both collective and “project-based learning” (“Evaluating Digital Media Use at Simpson Street Free Press”) stems from Madison Public Library’s mission to provide “literacy program[ming] that promotes high-quality books for children and teens throughout Wisconsin” (“Bubbler”). Using animation stations to create promotions for books they have read, elementary through high school aged students in the digital book trailer program are encouraged to “foster self-expression, skill development, and collaboration” (“Bubbler”).

After volunteering at Simpson Street Free Press for two months, I was hired by Kramer as an assistant editor and literacy specialist, a position I began in May of 2014 and still hold today. While serving in this position, I have spearheaded the digital book trailers project at the Free Press. Consequently, I have witnessed first-hand the many ways in which the organization’s strategic incorporation of digital media learning opportunities and collective learning pedagogies inform and increase the program’s efficacy. There is no doubt that youths who participate in projects like the book trailer one gain practical digital media skills and hone their abilities to self-express and collaborate with others: this is clear to any who watch the book trailers[3]. For example, consider Free Press student writer Ali Khan’s 2014 book trailer “Open Mic: Riffs on Life Between Cultures,” which reviews Mitali Perkins’ text *Open Mic: Riffs on Life Between Cultures in Ten Voices*. Khan, now a senior at Madison West High School, created and published this piece during Madison Public Library’s inaugural round of book trailers. In this approximately two minute piece, Khan reviews and details Perkins’ text using stop motion techniques. Introducing Perkins’ text, he states: “if you didn’t know already, race

can be a pretty heavy topic...but when you add in humor, it becomes pretty light” (Khan, “Open Mic: Riffs on Life Between Cultures”). Citing the text’s “comical and inspiring stories of overcoming cultural barriers,” Khan displays many of the practical skills the book trailer program’s curriculum intends to impart: stop animation, animation, voice overs, audio, and other digital devices.

However, when I spoke with Khan nearly a year after he created this trailer, he indicated that the practical, digital skills he gained by participating in the book trailers program are only one reason he recalls his project fondly. He said:

I always like learning that isn’t just the typical sit in a classroom and listen to a teacher talk type of thing...I really liked learning how to use the animation stations for the book trailer because I’ve never used them before. It was also cool to work with other kids on it. A lot of the time we just sit and do our own work, so it was a cool way to get to know some other kids at Simpson Street... also, I’m one of the only Pakistanis and Muslims at my school, so I’m really interested in social justice issues especially at my school...since my book talked a lot about race, it was a cool way to talk with other kids about what it’s like at their schools. It’s interesting to see how depending on where they go, everyone has a different experience. (Khan, “Efficacy of the Book Trailer Project”)

As Khan suggests in his book trailer’s audio, “living life between cultures can be filled with all kind of riffs, but it can also be eye-opening” (“Open Mic: Riffs on Life Between Cultures”). He thus credits the book trailer project, his participation in it, and the

discussions his trailer stimulated for effectively spurring his friendships with other Free Press writers. “I used to be really shy whenever I was...[at the Free Press], but working for a few days on the book trailer project with other kids helped me get to know them. I feel more comfortable and outgoing now, in case you couldn’t tell” (“Efficacy of the Book Trailer Project”).

I never knew a ‘shy Khan,’ but this confession still surprises me: today, he is seemingly one of the Free Press’ most extroverted and eloquent students. He is visibly confident asserting himself and expressing himself. Further, he does not hesitate to ask questions, provide tours, or speak to community guests during Free Press events. This self-proclaimed progress cannot be translated into points on the Free Press’ in-house evaluation scale, nor can it be stacked against rates, percentages, or statistics of youth of color nationwide. However, perhaps this speaks to the value of what Khan has gained from participating in digital media projects that encourage collective learning and relationship-building--aptitudes and capabilities of immeasurable value.

The tangible and intangible outcomes of digital media use at Simpson Street Free Press--particularly the collaborative and relationship-building skills student writers hone through digital media projects-- mirror the outcomes of the weekly workshops co-facilitated by UW - Madison faculty, N.I.P. program administrators, and Madison Public Library staff in which the N.I.P. teens participate at Madison Public Library’s

Bubbler Makerspace. As a student in the fall 2014 course “Library and Information Studies: Topics in Community Engagement,” taught by Professor Nancy Buenger through UW - Madison’s Library and Information Studies Department, I was able to co-create, co-facilitate, and also participate in these workshops. Funded from 2014-2016 through a Baldwin Wisconsin Idea Endowment, and granted in part by Madison’s Morgridge Center for Public Service, these workshops are part of a larger scale project[4] led by the UW - Madison School of Library & Information Studies (SLIS) and the Department of Curriculum & Instruction (C&I). According to the initial grant proposal, the two-year initiative aims to “narrow the educational opportunity gap for Dane County’s most marginalized youth, advancing the Wisconsin Idea that the university should improve people’s lives beyond the classroom” (*The Bubbler: Making Justice with Court-Involved Teens: 2014-16 Baldwin Wisconsin Idea Endowment & Morgridge Center for Public Service Grant Project*, 1). To achieve this goal, Buenger and others managing the project promote the following objective:

...[to] expand and institutionalize a pilot Bubbler program that will annually serve 200-250 court-involved teens--primarily low income youth of color--fostering self-expression, skill development, and community engagement. (*The Bubbler: Making Justice*, 1)

Further, the project is formatted around the positive youth development (PYD) model developed in *What Works, Wisconsin: What Science Tells Us about Cost-Effective Programs for Juvenile Delinquency Prevention*, a model published in 2005 (*The Bubbler: Making Justice*, 2). In accordance with the data and research presented in this model, the

Bubbler curriculum aims to achieve its objectives through youth participation in specified creative and media projects. Of this, the project's grant proposal states:

To promote self-expression, teens will create graphic and 3D art, photographic, spoken word, storytelling, performance and video projects documenting themselves, their communities, and the justice system. Skill development will include digitization and manipulation of images, audio, and text. The program will foster community engagement via peer-supported learning, collaborative projects, and neighborhood field trips. (*The Bubbler: Making Justice*, 2)

The project's grant proposal makes the project's objectives--to foster self-expression, skill development, and community engagement--clear, and it also illuminates the intentionality behind these objectives. Why might it be important for Madison's marginalized youth to gain these skills: what significance is there to these particular objectives? The proposal asserts: "the program will serve participants...[in] peer-supported learning projects that emphasize digital literacy...self-expression builds a sense of self-worth; skill development enhances a sense of independence and control over one's life; and community engagement fosters a sense of belonging" (*The Bubbler: Making Justice*, 3)

Certainly, program creators and directors assert, the use of digital media and digital media based-projects are key to achieving these outcomes and the greater, less tangible effects of said outcomes. Yet, measuring such intangibles is no easy feat. How might one determine if certain programming has fostered a youth's self-expression, for

example? Unlike the programming offered at Simpson Street Free Press, efficacy of Bubbler makerspace weekly digital project workshops cannot be easily translated into a point system, represented through quantitative graphs, or broken into percentages and statistics. The project's grant proposal addresses this challenge and further outlines evaluative strategies. The proposal states:

Program objectives will be evaluated according to three measures of effectiveness. Our first measure relates to the expansion and institutionalization of the 2013-2014 Bubbler pilot. We will consider the program effective if MPL is able to maintain its current program at JDC and Shelter and institute a new program at NIP. Our second measure relates to service learning. We will consider the program effective if it creates 6-10 new service learning opportunities for UW students and adds a proactive dimension to the courses *LIS 820: Topics in Community Engagement* and *LS 694: Criminal Justice Field Observation*. Our third measure relates to applying IMLS research to maximize learning opportunities for underserved youth. We will consider the program effective if it contributes to the design and evaluation of programs for underserved youth on a local and national level. Towards this end, we will leverage input from an IMLS advisory board of nationally recognized experts in makerspace learning that will meet two times per year over the course of the grant period. The advisory panel will help us to evaluate our progress, interface with other learning initiatives, and ensure that our work

is rigorous and relevant to programs nationwide. The Bubbler initiative will also inform a concurrent Madison Out-of-School Time initiative[5]—co-sponsored by the mayor’s office and the city school district—to address educational opportunity gaps by coordinating access to high-quality enrichment programs. (*The Bubbler: Making Justice*, 4-5)

This evaluative outline and its encompassed evaluative indicators are certainly comprehensive and researched. Yet, these evaluative measures do not specifically address the three intended objectives or outcomes named earlier in the proposal for the N.I.P. youths required to participate in weekly digital media workshops--to foster self-expression, encourage community engagement, and enable the development of practical digital media skills. Thus, in this chapter, I will break down two of the media projects I participated in with N.I.P. youths at critical times during the semester-long program. Additionally, I will report explicitly on their efficacy regarding the program’s three intended outcomes. Further, I will add one outcome that is highlighted in neither the program’s proposal nor its developed curriculum: to spur *relationship building* among project participants with one another and with adult program directors and facilitators. Indeed, throughout my time working and participating with the N.I.P. youths, the value of building relationships exposed itself as both crucial and necessary in achieving the program’s three intended outcomes. In fact, I argue that without the development of relationships between N.I.P. youths and between N.I.P. youths and program staff, relationships enabled through the co-creation of digital media projects, the program would likely see decreased efficacy in its three intended outcomes.

To show explicitly the need for relationship building in order to foster also self-expression, encourage community engagement, and enable practical skill development, the first project I will detail is the “Self-Branding” workshop, which occurred at Madison Public Library’s Bubbler makerspace and digital media lab in mid-October of 2014. The same six girls who I worked with at each workshop from August to December of 2014-- “Kendall,” “Alexa,” “Jaleah,” “Destiny,” and “Martiza,” and “Robin”[6]--were present for and completed this workshop. Prior to beginning the project, workshop facilitator Nancy Buenger presented those present with an example of self-branding that had been created during the previous year by a N.I.P. teen. Though this example, see Figure 1.13, came out of a slightly different project, it still modeled quite closely the objectives of the self-branding exercise. Specifically, for this workshop, Buenger asked participants first to craft a motto for themselves--a line, sentence, or phrase representative of who they are, what influences them, what motivates them, and what they aspire to be or become, like a product slogan. Next, Buenger asked that participants select an image of themselves--one they had previously taken and could access online, one they could take using available cameras and computers, one they could craft using Photoshop or other, similar computer applications, or one they could assemble on Photoshop by combining the first three methods. Using both their motto and images, participants then used Photoshop technologies to create a self-brand poster. Buenger indicated that the audiences of these posters were to be whomever the girls wanted them to be--she listed family, friends, schoolmates, themselves, and “the world” as viable options, for example (Buenger).



Anonymous Dane County Teen

Figure 1.13

Throughout this workshop, I assisted each girl in the creation of her respective poster. Each of the girls produced engaging and telling posters. Notable mottos included but were not limited to: “everyone goes mad sometimes,” crafted by “Robin,” and “cant [sic] face me then turn around,” authored by “Jaleah.” While the majority of the girls created their slogans with ease, “Destiny” struggled to do so. Of all the girls, this was typical: “Destiny” commonly had trouble completing the workshop’s projects or, at least, initially expressed a disinterest in most of them. Yet, with this project, her struggle had less to do with apathy and more to do with an earnest inability to figure out what message she wanted to convey--and inability to find her voice. Further, “Destiny” was unsure of whom she wanted to be her poster’s audience.

Luckily, I had gotten to know “Destiny” well over the month and a half leading up to this workshop. Admittedly, this was not easy. Though I have extensive experience

working with children and teens--both at Simpson Street Free Press and as a four-time summer camp counselor at YMCA Camp Minikani--the teens at N.I.P. are tough in comparison to most of the young people with whom I have worked. Most of them have troubles trusting authority figures or, rather, anyone older than they are. Additionally, most of them have lived experiences that would of course redefine the ways in which one perceives the world, common values, and the systems around them, especially growing up in a place ridden by racialized disparities like Dane County, Wisconsin. "Kendall," for example, lives with her grandmother because both of her parents are in prison. "Alexa" can name multiple close relatives of hers who have lost their lives to gang-related involvement and violence. Some of the girls have past experiences with alcohol and substance abuse. About half of them are responsible for providing child-care for multiple younger siblings. Most of them live in households where the income is far below the federal poverty line. All of them are in some way hurting following difficult childhoods. Consequently, these girls are tough and mistrusting and sometimes uncooperative and angry. Why would they not be? Oftentimes, the girls do not know how to express or act upon their hurt and anger in ways deemed 'appropriate' by conventional society. Thus, their eventual placement in Dane County's juvenile justice system and Neighborhood Intervention Program.

Accordingly, I had to work hard to initiate even the smallest of bonds with the girls. Throughout the five months during which I got to know and spend time with them, I found that my biggest strength in this challenge was my youth. Indubitably, this proved to be the greatest point of access I had into their lives, into their lived experiences and

stories: while I did not always know the latest slang, I could rely on my knowledge of popular culture and contemporary media--knowledge that is, no doubt, an inherent byproduct of my place as a young adult in this digital age--to build relationships with the girls. In fact, by participating in and understanding the narratives of popular culture--the language shared by most youth--I could enter and work to understand the narratives of Madison's marginalized teen population. That is, knowing television, music, and other bits of popular digital culture was crucial to and important in my ability to access and build personal relationships with the N.I.P. teens.

Consequently, when "Destiny" expressed her frustration to me around her uncertainty with the self-branding poster exercise, I knew to meet her irritation not as an authority but as a friend, another young person who could understand her and empathize with her situation. As I worked one-on-one with "Destiny," we were able to utilize Photoshop in a way that allowed her to express herself as she saw fit. Deciding that the audience of her poster was herself--a decision wholly indicative of her want for self-determination and journey for self-validation--"Destiny" ultimately constructed the simple yet poignant motto, "keep it together," as seen in Figure 1.14[7].



Figure 1.14

In the process of creating this digital self-brand, “Destiny” surely learned practical skills--for she, like all of the girls excepting “Robin,” had never used Photoshop technologies before. The physical representation of her digital project, Figure 1.13, serves as a quantifiable measurement of this learning. But she also had and accepted the opportunity to practice less tangible yet perhaps more significant skills: self-expression and engagement with others. Certainly, then, this workshop met its intended outcomes, as outlined in the overarching project’s proposal. However, none of these outcomes would have been met had “Destiny” failed to move beyond her

apprehensions, had she let her uncertainties prevent her from attempting the exercise. But, because I had taken the time and had the appropriate contexts in which to establish a relationship with her, I was able to help her transition from uncertainty and apathy to interest and engagement.

Similarly, the efficacy of a workshop we completed one month later in mid-November of 2014 relied heavily on collaborative efforts and relationship building. Led by Buenger and UW - Madison Professor, community figure, and distinguished artist and photographer Faisal Abdu'allah, this workshop sought to explore identity--both individual and collective--and the presentation of it--both self-determined and communally-determined--through photography. After explaining his own work and personal interests in photography, identity, and community, Abu'allah taught us how to take photographs of one another using both the university's polaroid cameras and Abu'allah's own various advanced photographic-technologies. First, we took standard still photographs. Once developed, which Abu'allah enabled to happen within minutes, the girls cut and placed images of themselves with each other's images. Specifically, as seen in Figure 1.15, an image of the work completed by "Jaleah," the girls combined certain pieces of their own respective images to create singular faces. The symbolism of physically creating a singular image out of many was not lost on the girls: this project inspired and informed a discussion about identity, body, collectivism, and individuality.



Figure 1.15

Similar discussions occurred following Abu'allah's second assignment for us: double exposure photography. Pairing the girls up with one another, Abu'allah guided them through the composition and subject positioning necessary to create a proper double exposure photograph. Ultimately, this exercise resulted in an image that overlaid the partners' likenesses on top of one another, as seen in "Martiza's" completed project in Figure 1.16. Reflecting on their combined images and the processes of directing and creating them, the girls and I began to discuss the figures and events in our lives that had shaped our lived experiences, who we are, and how we identify. Further, we talked about the various ways in which we choose to represent ourselves--what we include and what we omit--when facing the audience that is the larger society.

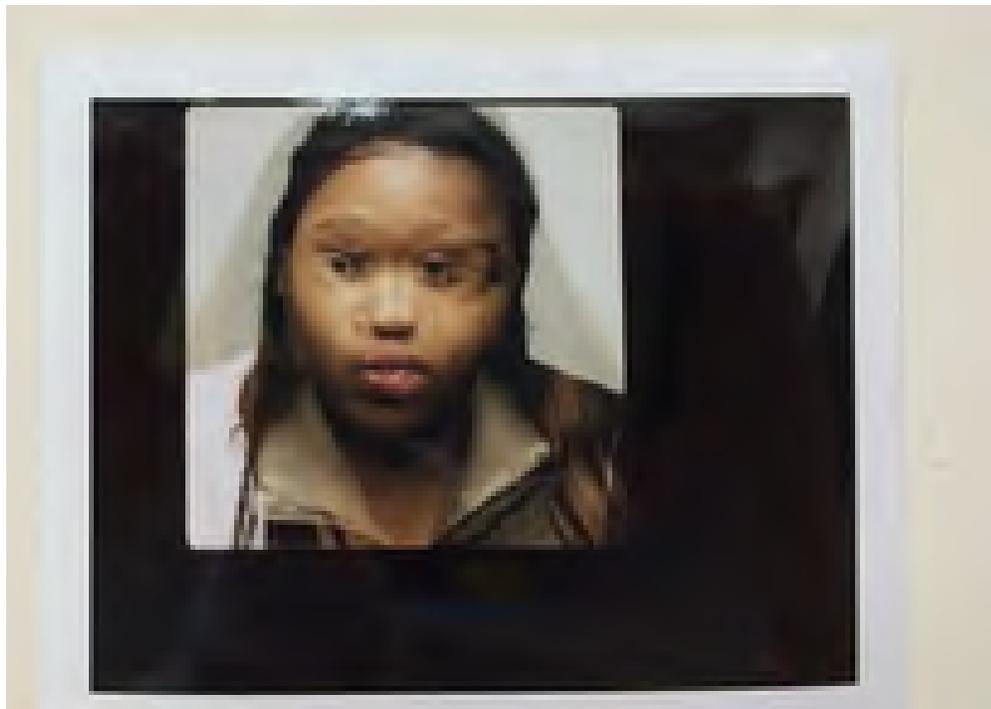


Figure 1.16

Like with the self-branding poster project, this workshop and Abu'allah's facilitation of it fostered practical skills within the girls. The majority of them had never before received formal instruction around photography; thus, they learned much about composition, lighting, timing, and other miscellaneous concepts important to photography. Yet, again perhaps more important were the intangible capabilities produced in this workshop. When we completed Abu'allah's photography projects, a little over a month had passed since the self-branding poster exercise. In this time, the space created within the group had begun to feel like a safer, much more trusting one. Indeed, in our conversations directly following the photography exercise, the girls were much more willing to share about their own lived experiences and engage in the lived experiences of others than they had been only a month before. For instance, during this

conversation, “Kendall” shared with our group that her parents were both in prison--a fact I had before only known in confidence through Buenger.

In moments like this--moments that I never would have expected at the start of the program in August, yet ones I had become accustomed to by the program's end in December--both the impact and the importance of Lave's situated learning, of learning within community and, as such, working to co-construct new knowledge with other members of one's 'community of practice,' became obvious. Together, over the scope of five months, the girls began to understand how to claim, or reclaim rather, a voice for themselves that they had perhaps never had or, at least, had never known before. In a county that had defined for them their narratives decades before they were even born--narratives that scripted and cemented their places in institutions and systems that would only ever disadvantage them--the girls learned to take back their stories. Enabled by a series of digital media projects, ones that allowed for the tedious, careful process of safe relationship-building, the girls found their voices. Qualitative data simply cannot measure the intangible, unquantifiable kind of learning these girls achieved: collectively, they forged new, unencumbered narratives for themselves that in no way resemble the scripts limited to them by dominant culture. As “Destiny” said in our final workshop only three weeks following the photography session with Abu'allah, “I feel like I know how to express myself and my emotions more clearly, like I know what I want and I know me, and I know how to tell people that” (“Destiny,” “Reflections on Experiences at N.I.P.”).

[1] Within N.I.P. and other juvenile justice programs nation-wide, youth delinquents are categorized as “guppies” or “sharks,” based on the crimes they have been charged with,

respectively. “Guppies” are placed in programming because they have displayed ‘at risk behaviors,’ committed misdemeanors, or perpetrated low-level felonies. “Sharks” are placed in programming because they have committed medium- to high-level felonies.

[2] I define “success” here as the achieved outcomes Simpson Street Free Press outlines for its students in the program’s mission statement. Specifically, as aforementioned, the Free Press aims to bridge the national, racialized educational achievement gap and spread positive messages of youth achievement throughout Madison and Dane County’s south side.

[3] These trailers can be viewed on Madison Public Library’s Bubbler makerspace book trailer webpage. Access the page here: madisonbubbler.org/book-trailers/.

[4] This “larger scale project” includes not only the Madison Public Library, the Dane County Juvenile Court Program, and Neighborhood Intervention Program but also Community Partnerships, Inc. and the University of Wisconsin – Madison Center for Law, Society and Justice. Ultimately, the overarching project aims to: “1) expand and institutionalize a pilot Bubbler program that will annually serve 200-250 court involved-teens—primarily low income youth of color—fostering self-expression, skill development, and community engagement; 2) create 6-10 related service-learning opportunities for UW students in *Library and Information Studies 820: Topics in Community Engagement* and *Legal Studies 694: Criminal Justice Field Observation*, transforming opportunities to facilitate the criminal justice system into opportunities to proactively “make” change; and 3) apply research from a proposed Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) project to enhance the Bubbler program, contributing to the design and evaluation of programs for underserved youth on a local and national level” (*The Bubbler: Making Justice*, 1).

[5] Simpson Street Free Press is also part of the city’s ‘Madison Out-of-School Time’ (MOST) initiative, a city-funded group that works to define and address socio-economic and racial inequities in Madison Metropolitan School District schools, provide research and support for Madison-area academic and non-academic youth programming, and increase public awareness and community engagement in Madison around national, state, and local academic achievement gaps.

[6] In order to protect the identity of these youths, I have assigned each of them a pseudonym. I use these same pseudonyms consistently throughout the portions of this project that detail my experiences with the minors at N.I.P.

[7] I have altered Figure 1.13 slightly to protect the identity of “Destiny,” its creator. In the original digital image, “Destiny” included her name directly above her slogan, “keep it together,” where blur marks are now visible.

Chapter V: Conclusion & Implications

Over the past six months, the political climate in Dane County, Wisconsin has been especially bleak. The disproportionate murders of young black and brown bodies at the hands of white police officers across the nation have sparked rising tensions in our country and in our city. Following the failure of a St. Louis County grand jury to indict the white officer who killed Ferguson's Michael Brown, a black 18-year-old, this past August, movements paralleling those across the nation sprang up in Madison, too. Seeking to spread the message that black lives matter and racialized police brutality--one symptom of unjust systems and institutions--cannot be tolerated, students and community members alike marched, protested, and demonstrated peacefully (see Figure 1.17). These demonstrations met mixed reactions in the larger Madison community: while some supported and joined the movement, others--mostly the city's white population--failed to understand its relevance and importance. The March 7th fatal shooting of Madison's Tony Robinson, a black 19-year-old, by a white police officer confirmed that which the city's black and brown residents already knew and exposed that which many of its white residents, perhaps unknowingly, fail to acknowledge: Dane County is far from the 'best-of.'



Figure 1.17

In the wake of Robinson's death, I was shocked to discover how few of my white friends and acquaintances in Madison--mostly students at the University of Wisconsin - Madison--were familiar with our country and our country's racialized inequities. I was equally shocked to realize how many of them did not consider their whiteness a privilege. I suppose I should not have been so shocked, however. Our nation's history--or the history that is represented by and told in dominant cultural narratives, at least--scripts people of color as criminals. In a society that likens whiteness with power and whiteness with rightness, it is no wonder then that many in the white majority, good students of what they have been taught, buy into this 'knowledge.'

How is it that in 2015--the same year in which scientists have determined how to make videos out of human memories, engineers have begun to develop transparent cars, space scientists have discovered an unprecedented number of planets, and software developers have designed an application that translates language in real time--racial inequities that have existed since the beginning of language still exist[1]? As made explicitly clear in the 2013 Race to Equity Report, for example, the 21st century is only paradoxically progressive. There is much to be done and much progress to be made in order for our society to become a truly equitable one. This kind of progress starts, perhaps, in community based youth organizations like Simpson Street Free Press and Neighborhood Intervention Program.

In these spaces, conscious program organizers and directors have tapped into a strategy that is effective: spreading digital media skills, fostering collective learning, and enabling relationship-building competencies in young people of color. As such, these

young people have demonstrated their success in achieving desired program outcomes including but not limited to self-expression, practical skill development, and community engagement. Capitalizing on research and honing their respective curriculums, these programs have proved their worth. Be their outcomes quantifiable or not, their consequences are clear. The Simpson Street Free Press model works. The Neighborhood Intervention Program, University of Wisconsin - Madison, and Madison Public Library Bubbler makerspace partnership works. Youths in these programs learn to examine and defy the scripts offered them by dominant cultural narratives.

As stated earlier, I argue that these programs achieve their impressive levels of efficacy because of their focus on relationship-building and, further, on fostering these relationships through the co-creation of digital media projects. Indeed, I assert that if other, similarly-oriented community-based youth programs were to emulate this focus within their own curriculums, they would likely see success paralleling the noted effects of Simpson Street Free Press and Neighborhood Intervention Program. Specifically, for other community-based youth programs, I offer the following recommendations: enable youth participants access to digital media; guide youth participants through co-creation of projects that utilize digital media and, in doing so, encourage self-expression and foster individual growth; and, perhaps most importantly, allow youth participants to create these projects in community with one another, with program facilitators, and with community figures. Working in situated communities that advance practical learning and spur the development of tangible skills, youth participants will establish powerful voices, ones that defy the roles limited to them by dominant cultural narratives. Further, youth

participants will gain relationships and relationship-building skills that will ultimately prove invaluable and key to desired outcomes and success.

Youths of color in Madison, in programs like Simpson Street Free Press and Neighborhood Intervention Program, have spoken and asked for change (see Figure 1.18). It is time for Dane County to listen. It is time for our nation to unlearn and rewrite the dominant cultural narratives that confine these young black and brown bodies--like Michael Brown, like Tony Robinson--to a single role: criminal.

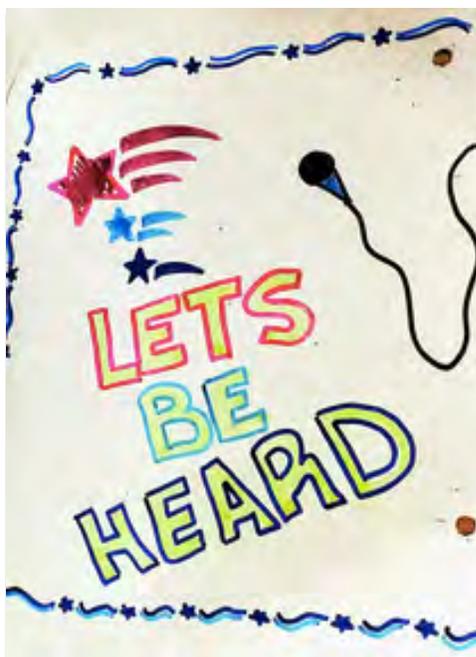


Figure 1.18

[1] I assert here that racial inequities “have existed since the beginning of language” based on philosopher and writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s assertion in his essay *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* that the beginning of language resulted in the development of specialized skills, which in turn ultimately spurred the creation of permanent settlements, thus enabling the construction of human categorization, or hierarchy (Rousseau).

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Appendix

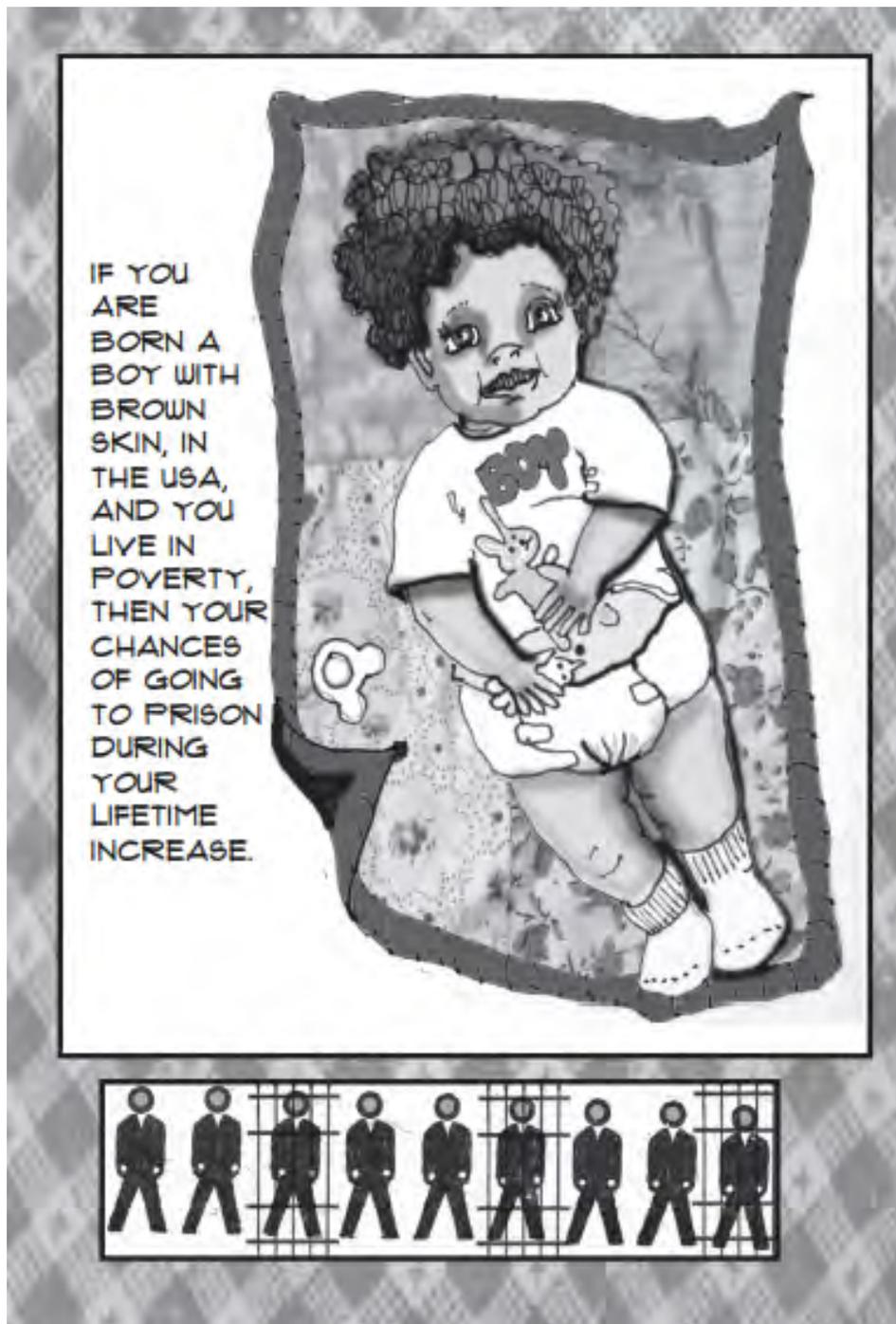


Figure 2.1

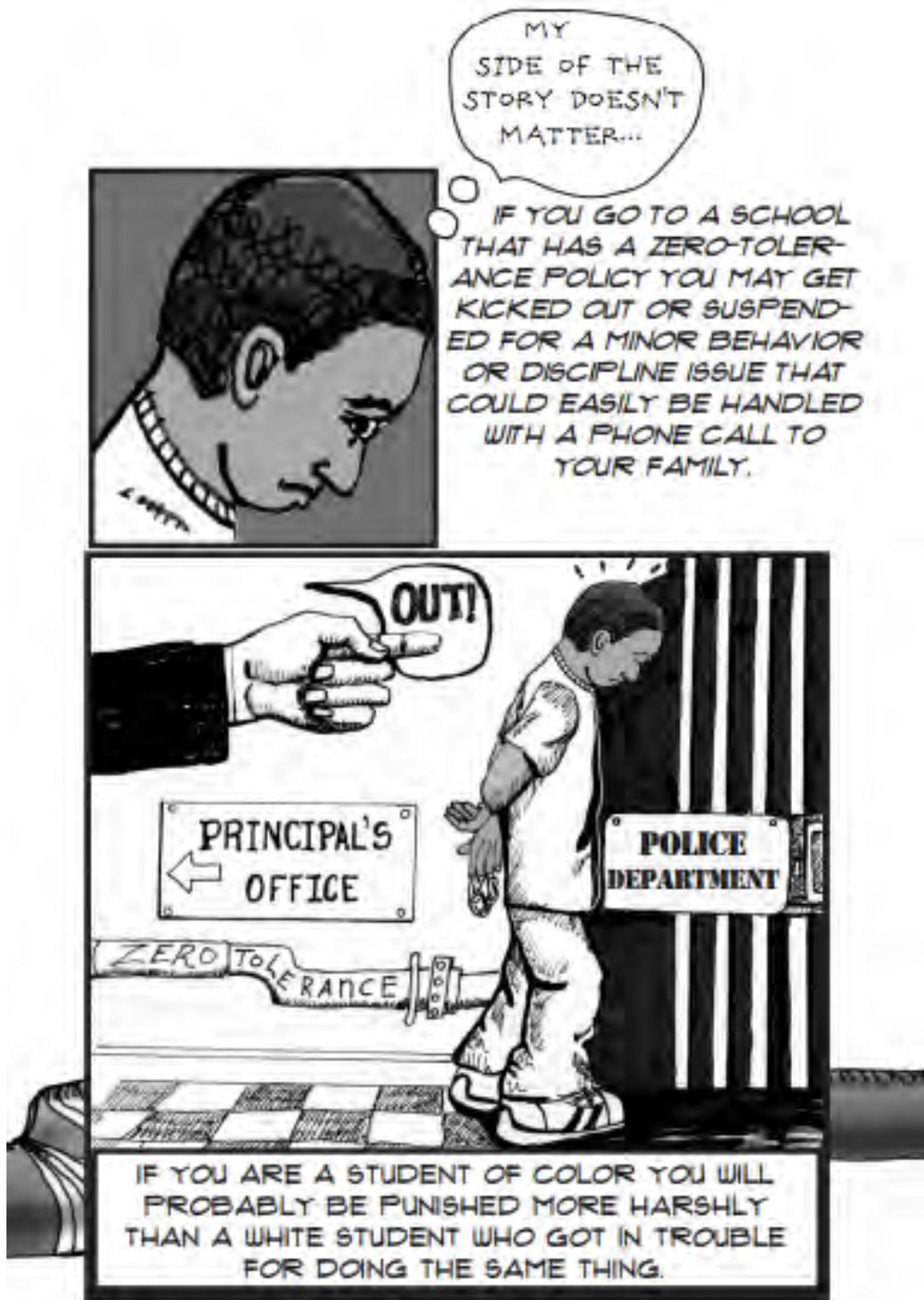


Figure 2.2

YOU MAY END UP IN A JUVENILE COURT. IF YOU ARE WHITE THERE IS A GOOD CHANCE THAT THE JUDGE WILL GIVE YOU PROBATION OR FINE YOU AND REQUIRE YOU TO DO COMMUNITY SERVICE.



IF YOU ARE BLACK OR LATINO/A YOU HAVE A BETTER CHANCE OF BEING SENT TO A JUVENILE CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION OR PUNISHED MORE SEVERELY.

Figure 2.3

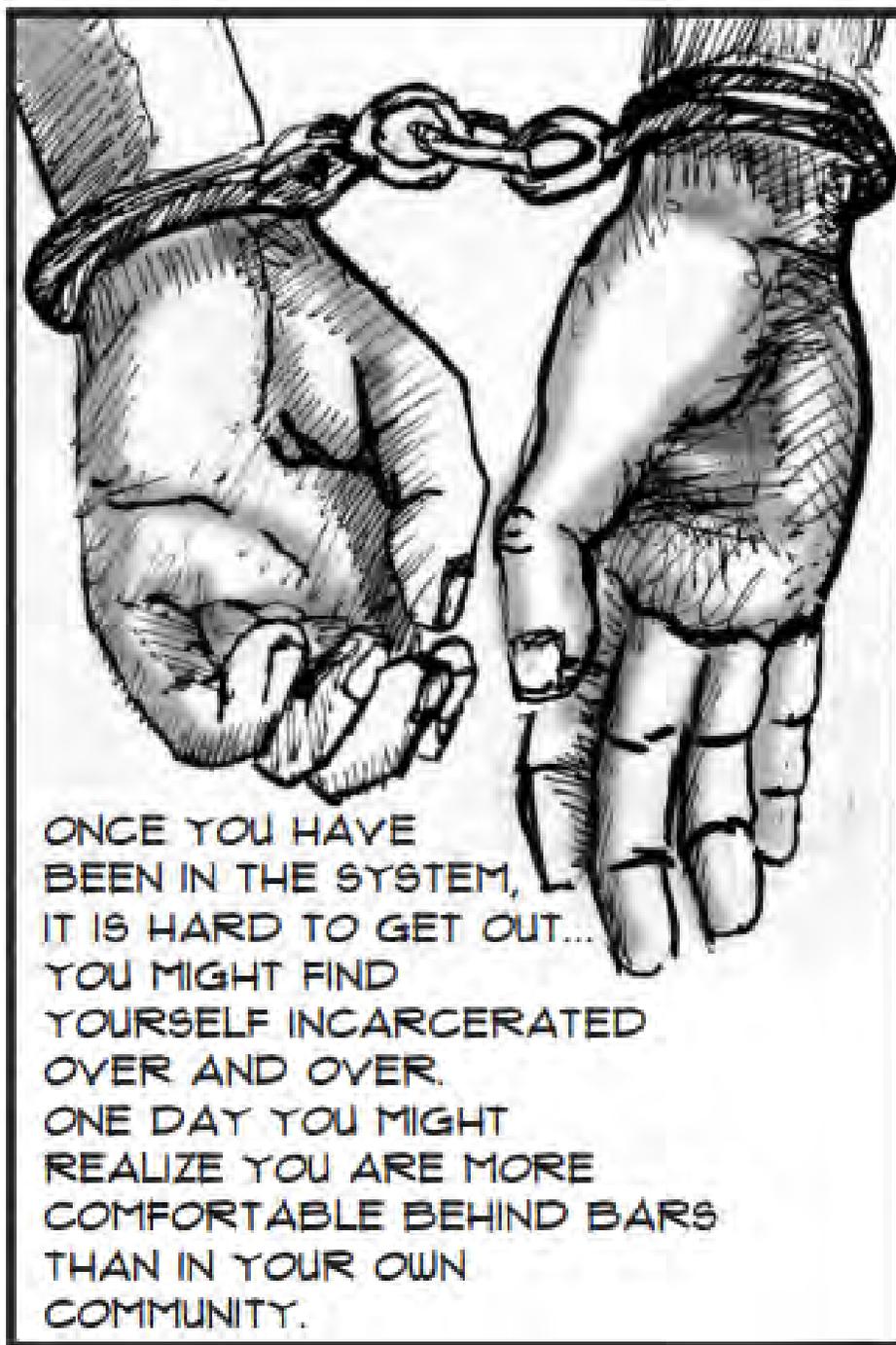


Figure 2.4



Figure 2.5