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Building a Digital Family: Examining Social Media and Social Support in the Development of Youth “At-Risk”

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Building a Digital Family

Examining Social Media and Social Support in the Development of Youth "At-Risk"

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Information Studies

by

Jennifer Pierre

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Building a Digital Family

Examining Social Media and Social Support in the Development of Youth "At-Risk"

by

Jennifer Pierre

Doctor of Philosophy in Information Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor Gregory H. Leazer, Chair

This dissertation explores the role of social media use in the social development of "at-risk" youth in Los Angeles, CA and Lafayette, IN, with a major goal of identifying beneficial ways to address the social support needs of youth and adolescents to aid in their successful assimilation into adulthood. This study employs ethnographic methods of semi-structured interviews and participant observation, using 9-15 year old members of the Santa Monica and Lafayette Boys & Girls Clubs (BGC) as a sample of designated "at-risk" or marginalized youth in the U.S. A central focus of this dissertation is the potential use of knowledge around Boys & Girls Clubs members' social media use to supplement or inform Club activities and enhance social support. These outcomes are especially significant in after-school settings where gaps in education or family based social resources are identified. Findings reveal a distinct socio-technical system of social support exchange that is enabled through the intersection of youth development program

participation and social media use, characterized through four identified major patterns of engagement: constructed combined social support, negotiated allowances, social media emotional management, and unique mentorships. This system and the important intersection of the BGC and social media enable positive, purposeful, and agency-driven social support exchange for this youth group and address key social support needs. These findings inform appropriate integration of digital and social media in youth development spaces, and strike an important balance in sources of social support for an increasingly younger population of social media users. The findings may be of particular interest to areas of computer-mediated communication, human-computer interaction, social psychology of interpersonal relationships, and developmental psychology, with additional potential implications for youth service development and policy and research at the intersection of technology and health or well-being. The notion of "at-risk" is critically examined as part of this research.

The dissertation of Jennifer Pierre is approved.

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Table of Contents

One of the key themes in this dissertation is the importance of community. There are several communities that were an invaluable part of the completion of this dissertation. I would like to thank my family, especially my parents, for their tireless encouragement and support not only during my time in graduate school, but throughout my entire life. They have always set the most inspiring example of perseverance, unconditional love, and determination on the path to achieving success. I owe so much of my accomplishments to them, and I acknowledge all of the privileges they have fought hard for me to attain. I would like to thank my sister for the same crucial support and for always lending an ear when I needed it most. I thank my fiancé for his deeply valuable and unwavering encouragement, understanding, companionship, feedback, and so much more. I truly could not have completed this journey without you.

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has for the youth at each club. Thank you for your warm welcomes, your kind words, your passion, and your work. I hope that my research can help highlight the importance of youth development organizations and communities everywhere, and especially help support them in a way that integrates positively with the use of digital and social media spaces. I dedicate this dissertation to all of the crucial contributors to supportive communities, and to all those in need of them.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction, Literature Review, & Research Questions

1. Introduction & Statement of Research Problem

"The way we engage with social media is like fire. You can use it to keep yourself warm and nourished or you can burn down the barn. It all depends on your intentions, expectations, and reality checking skills."

- Brene Brown

In May 2018, over 21,000 health advocates signed and circulated a petition calling on Facebook CEO Mark Zukerberg to end development on a new project, Messenger Kids (Gibbs, 2018). The application is specifically designed to cater to users under the age of 13, which is the required age for singing up to use a Facebook or Instagram account. Despite the public outcry, development and implementation of the platform continued, and Facebook officials responded that they would continue to take family input into account in continued iterations of the app. They argued that through the features on Messenger Kids that allow for greater parental control and security, the platform would actually help create a safer space for younger kids to communicate online. This exchange reveals an important point of contention around the use of social media by youth at increasingly younger ages, and reflects the need for more nuanced research on the use of social media platforms among vulnerable groups like youth (Barbovschi, Macháčková, & Ólafsson, 2015; Coughlan, 2016; Crouch, 2014). In addition to concerns around the vulnerability of youth more broadly, concerns about youth social media use and its impacts become increasingly important when involving youth considered to be "at-risk."

A significant body of research in education, developmental and social psychology, sociology, and related fields has analyzed and assessed the attributes of 'at -risk' youth, a term used to describe adolescents predicted to face sizable difficulty in successful assimilation into adulthood (Placier, 1993). Factors that influence the condition of such populations are primarily socioeconomic, with youth in low-income households, urban settings, and youth of color often

facing higher risk. Despite the well -intentioned work toward implementing developmental programs to support and aid at-risk youths, substantial literature in relevant fields such as social psychology and sociology employs a comparative experimental approach, a method that often ultimately focuses on the negative outcomes of urban minority lifestyles in comparison to others, rather than assessing practices within the communities themselves and using such knowledge to properly address relevant issues (Washington et al., 2015). Additionally, the collection of federal services and activities available to underserved children and adolescents have not yet formed a cohesive system of support, another barrier to the success of such initiatives (Fernandes, 2007).

The current challenges around appropriately and adequately providing resources and services for at-risk or marginalized youth reveals a prime area for continued research and policy development. In line with Washington et al.'s (2015) argument for focusing such efforts on development within communities as opposed to a broader comparative approach, an important first step in this process is identifying the needs, desires, and gaps in resources among youth in high risk environments. Many of these needs, desires, and gaps in resources relate to the concept of social support, a well-established concept in social and developmental psychology referring to the feelings of self-esteem, love, and community belonging established and maintained throughout childhood and adolescence (Cobb, 1976). Communication is a key component of such factors, which provides the starting point for focusing on gaps and needs in the communication portion of social support present in this dissertation.

Thus, this research investigates in part the problem posed by the current gaps in adequate development and evaluation of after-school youth development programs for at-risk youth, especially in regards to the way the youth are framed, and the way in which arenas for social support are or are not considered. In particular, this work addresses the lack of concrete

guidelines, initiatives, or thorough understanding present for incorporating digital media – which stands to contribute to the building and maintenance of social support among youth and is used heavily among this group – into such programs. This intersection of digital media and youth development programs continues to pose a challenge for fully accommodating and addressing the social needs of youth participants, which reveals an entry point for this research. This project is presented as an ethnography of social support and social media use, within the context of after-school programming for at-risk youth.

One approach for assessing the social support needs of at-risk youth especially around communication is an assessment of their social networking patterns, in particular through an analysis of their online social networking activities. Social networking has been identified as a primary form of communication-based connection among children and teens, and minority and poor youth have been identified as groups in even greater need of strong systems of social support such as social networking (Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, & Espinoza, 2008). Online social networking has increasingly become the preferred mode of interaction and relationship building among youth, with 92% of teens reporting daily online activity, 71% identifying as active Facebook users, and 50% identifying as active Instagram users (A. Lenhart et al., 2015). As described in the example at the start of this chapter, social networking sites are increasingly being used by and tailored to younger children and pre-adolescent audiences as well.

Considering these significant amounts of recreational social media use among youth, identifying an approach for bridging the gap between recreational youth social media use and the specific broader networking and social support needs of at-risk youth is a crucial task for educators, researchers, and policy makers alike. Addressing this gap will help facilitate the success of these vulnerable populations in assimilating into adulthood and becoming empowered

and capable members of society. Building a knowledge base around why and how at-risk youth use different forms of social media has significant potential implications for designing resources to support them throughout their development, especially in less structured after-school environments. Using the youth populations of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Santa Monica and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Lafayette as a sample group, this project investigates the current patterns of social media use among urban and rural at-risk youth, identifies specific social networking needs, and assesses ways to pair current practices with successful developmental support programs and activities. These two sites represent two varied and well-established implementations of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

As discussed in the findings and discussion sections, the findings from this dissertation reveal and detail a distinct socio-technical system of social support that emerges at the intersection of the BGC and social media platforms. This system and the crucial intersection between these two spaces are what enable positive, purposeful, and agency-driven social support exchange among this youth group, and address specific social support needs. The depictions of this system included throughout this dissertation provide important examples in how to appropriately and successfully integrate digital and social media into these spaces to address youth's social support needs. They can be used to inform the process of striking a crucial balance between allowing flexibility and agency in social media use and providing an appropriately controlled encompassing and supportive youth development environment. This balance becomes especially important considering the younger age bracket of many of the users described who are increasingly targeted, and the accompanying new rhetoric of concern around addictive and negative uses of social media among children and adolescents.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

This dissertation proposal relies on three main theories in the work of Washington et al. (2015), Bowen and Chapman (1996), and boyd (2014) to construct its theoretical grounding. The need for structural solutions to youth development programs posed by Washington, the theory of social support as a "protective factor" against issues facing at-risk populations proposed by Bowen and Chapman, and the theory of "networked publics" introduced by boyd all enable a solid articulation of the research problem this dissertation responds to, and in turn justify the approach employed. Ultimately, these theories collectively craft a starting point for this research informed by relevant literature, and set the groundwork needed to support the research design. Additionally, these theories can be seen as articulating the few key assumptions the research begins with as part of its placement in a research trajectory, arrived at through the analysis of previous findings and themes. In light of this representation, each of these theories will be referred to in relation to the key assumption they promote. Though these findings and theories are described in more detail throughout the introduction and literature review, this section serves to tie these key theories together to form a firm theoretical basis for the proposed research design and aims.

1.1.1. The "Structural Solution" Assumption

The work of Washington et al. (2015) provides an entry point for discussing the trends of comparative approaches in the study of minority and other at-risk populations, which reveal a gap in adequate intervention plans like youth development programs. In their discussion of family health research particularly around African American communities, the authors relay:

"Despite the considerable number of studies targeting African American children, the trend has been research focused on the pervasiveness of problematic behavior and negative risk factors associated with their development… Research has also largely ignored the relevance of racial, ethnic, and cultural nuances and competencies, particularly as protective mechanisms, and their influence on the development of resilience and strengths among African American children (APA 2008). As a consequence, there is a dearth of culturally relevant and effective preventive and treatment interventions addressing problem behaviors and limited culturally relevant assessment and evaluative tools for children and families of color" (Washington et al., 2015, p. 821).

Such revelations aid in articulating the first segment of the research problem this dissertation aims to address, the idea that current intervention programs in place for aiding at-risk communities could benefit from community-based and culturally relevant programming and resources. This theme in the authors' work enables the identification of at-risk youth development programs as a significant setting to investigate, one with a potential current gap in providing the most beneficial service. Though the scope of this work will not include a full-fledged intervention implementation, the knowledge gained will ideally help inform and benefit such intervention efforts.

1.1.2. The "Protective Factor" Assumption

Bowen and Chapman's (1996) theory on social support as a protective factor against detrimental environmental elements known to be present in at-risk youths' environments justifies the particular focus on social support within the community-based assessment proposed in this

work. As described in greater detail in the literature review, the authors promote the significance of social support among youth in combating and negating some of the negative circumstantial elements of at-risk populations as a major finding in their research. This established claim allows this research to begin with the assumption and knowledge that social support is a substantial and influential factor of youth development. The work conducted here aligns itself within this particular body of psychological scholarship.

1.1.3. The "Networked Publics" Assumption

Lastly, boyd's (2014) work on networked publics, a term she coins to describe the fusion of online and offline family and friend communication and relationship building that she finds young people currently employ, motivates the particular focus on social media as a crucial space for social support building. boyd's theory presents the offline and online worlds of youth and increasingly other populations as ubiquitously merged, and thus suggests the claim that technology plays a role in nearly all facets of social development. This dissertation uses this theory to tie the previous two theories together to create a cohesive narrative behind the research problem identified and the path to solutions sought. Starting with the issue of a gap in most beneficial implementation of youth development programs, the concept of social support is introduced as a key element to focus on in youth assimilation into adulthood, thus justifying the investigation of participants' social support practices for this work. Technology plays a major role in both current youth development program planning and social support building, which then bounds the approach together through a concentration on social media use for social support purposes in a youth development program setting.

2. Literature Review

Considering the exploratory nature of the research being undertaken as described in the following section, a most appropriate organization of the review of relevant literature is one grouped around the central ideas to be conceptualized and operationalized for the successful conducting of this study. Thus, this study will draw from and base its design primarily on previous literature around three central ideas involving youth development: at-risk, social support, and social media. Other related ideas and themes will be included in the discussion of these primary concepts. A final section of the literature review will discuss previous work in the area of youth digital media use, and will identify key findings that will be applicable to this study. This last section will also articulate the particular contribution this work will have in relation to the previous lineage. Grounding the study in previous scholarly work in youth development, computer-mediated communication, and other areas that have discussed the themes at hand is essential to establishing an appropriate direction for assessing the social media patterns of use and emergent social support needs among the Boys & Girls Clubs youth development program participants. This grounding further enables the future process of ultimately matching those findings to particular intervention methods.

2.1. Conceptualizing At-risk Youth

As described in the introduction, the term at-risk is generally considered to be a term describing constraints against successful assimilation into adulthood, which in turn is conceptualized as completing mandatory schooling, avoiding criminalization and conflicts with the law, and other such tenets associated with good citizenship (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995). In her detailed orientation of the term and description of its progression over time in the state of

Arizona, Placier (1993) notes its significant rise to popular usage in 1983 when used metaphorically in *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, the 1983 report of American President Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education. The term influenced several subsequent reports primarily describing student populations who were predicted to face difficulty completing their high school degree programs. This situates the origin of the term as within the realm of education, but it has expanded since to describe a variety of intersectional contexts and facets of youth and adolescent development.

Through a combination of semi-structured interviews and document analysis, Placier (1993) describes the consensus Arizona legislators reached in 1988 when coining "at risk" to describe the populations of K-3 students predicted to face difficulties of illiteracy, lack of job training and other issues. These problems were addressed primarily due to their identified negative impact on the state government and economy, and a posed solution was an intervention model implemented early on in childhood schooling (Placier, 1993). She additionally traces the term back to its origin in the field of epidemiology, where "it is associated with identification of populations with a higher probability of medical conditions and prevention of those conditions through targeted interventions (Lilienfeld & Lilienfeld, 1980)" (Placier, 1993, p. 385). The identification of this term as not original to the field of education and education policy lends support for its expansion into various related and overlapping disciplines and contexts. Placier corroborates this, by examining the parallel application of the term in epidemiological and educational contexts, where both areas share the framing of certain background elements as risk factors. In the educational context, these elements are thought to make students susceptible to non-completion of school, criminal activity, and similar outcomes (Placier, 1993).

Bowen & Chapman (1996) discuss in more detail some of these background elements, of which they highlight poverty as one of the most detrimental due to its complex reach of additional effects. They explain:

"Many adolescents face conditions in their social environment that are less than optimum for social development and the type of risk taking and experimentation that fosters social competency and identity formation (New York & Yankelovich Partners, 1995). Of these conditions, poverty is perhaps the most pernicious because of its association with a host of other social conditions, such as teenage child bearing, broken and dysfunctional families, school failure, unemployment, and crime – conditions that provide a poor context for individual development (Bowen, Desimone, & McKay, 1994; Garbarino, 1995)" (p. 641 – 642).

Each of these outcomes can significantly affect the three measures of individual adaptation the authors identify: physical health, psychological well-being, and personal adjustment, all factors that if negatively affected, could moderately or severely stunt successful assimilation into adulthood. Bowen & Chapman (1996) additionally claim that social support, which they identify as a "protective factor" in youth and adolescents lives, can combat the risk factors present in at-risk populations by providing the resources and opportunities necessary for meeting physical and psychological needs, especially in consideration of the demands of the environment. The identification of social support as a key factor in aiding at-risk youth in overcoming their adversities to successful assimilation into adulthood has influenced the singling out of social support as a major theme and central concept in this study, as described in more detail in the next section. Ultimately the authors found that the availability of social support,

especially from parents, influenced youth more than reports of perceptions of various neighborhood dangers. In cases where familial support is not as readily available, community resources like the Boys & Girls Clubs become all the more significant as spaces providing necessary social support. Additionally assessing potential non-face-to-face areas of social support, i.e. social media and online communities, remains an area ripe for further exploration.

A number of government reports on the concept of at-risk have further solidified the term and discussed specific risk factors as they relate to the development of youth programs. In particular, relatively recent reports have begun to more closely address issues related to race in addition to previously discussed factors of poverty and psychological dysfunction as indicators of risk. In the 2011 US Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families report on Research and Resources to Support At-Risk Youth, they specifically mention minority youth as facing potential risk factors and barriers to successful assimilation into adulthood, in addition to other factors including poverty, family dysfunction, residential mobility, and exposure to violence (Youth.gov, 2013). Specifically, they note the particular barriers African American and Latino youth may face in achieving adult self-sufficiency:

"Racial discrimination can hinder job opportunities and can magnify the consequences of negative behaviors. Furthermore, because of ongoing residential segregation, African American and Latino youth are much more likely to live in neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty and to attend low performing schools than are white youth…these neighborhoods often lack to the resources that can help youth overcome other risk factors" (Youth.gov, 2013, p. 6).

The 2014 Children, Youth, and Families At-Risk (CYAR) Annual Report reviewing community-based programs funded by the CYAR branch of the USDA similarly notes a specific minority focus in several of the individual program reports, mentioning African-American and Latino youth as particular groups in need of such programs (USDA.gov, 2014). Psychologist Ricardo Salazar attributes this identification of higher risk among minority youth as a product of differences in socialization of those groups, citing a dearth in mainstream psychology in acknowledging "those societal forces that make minority socialization distinct from that of middle-class Euro-American children and youths" (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 2). Salazar notes increased institutional support and opportunities for the development of social capital as significant solutions to the historic neglect of particular socialization processes present among minority youth. The programs presented in the USDA and Department of Human Health Services reports are viable sources for the institutional support and social capital Salazar calls for, and the focus in this study on Boys & Girls Clubs represents one local reflection of the greater network of developing resources.

It is important to note also that though the works discussed in this section provide detailed historical and conceptual grounding for defining the concept of at-risk youth, they do not adequately elaborate on the structural conditions contributing to the tendencies of certain populations to remain at-risk, referring back to the issue of scholarship in this area focusing on comparative descriptions rather than structural solutions (Washington et al., 2015). In consideration of this issue, this work uses the established conceptual definitions around the concept of at-risk youth for clarity and focus, but also provides substantial discussion of the structural issues surrounding high-risk indicators to properly frame its use (Harris, 1993; Harvey, 2007; Omi & Winant, 2014; Schiller, 1996). Additionally, the focus on analyzing patterns within

the community and using the knowledge for institutional interventions, in this case in the space of the Boys & Girls Clubs youth development program, will help resist prior detrimental uses of this concept.

2.2. Conceptualizing Social Support

Social support is in many ways the most difficult and intangible concept to define for this study, but it is also the most important and most central to this work. Cobb (1976) first coined the term in an academic setting, defining it as "information leading the subject to believe that he or she is cared for and loved, that he/she is esteemed and valued, and he/she belongs to a network of communication and mutual obligation" (p. 300). Rigby (2000) provides a continued explanation of social support and the complexities it entails through his description of the term as a multifaceted concept. He draws on the work of Kahn & Antonucci (1980), explaining, "It can include the provision of material assistance, as in taking actions to further one's goals; cognitive aspects, as in helping one to think through a problem; and an emotional or affective element, as in demonstrating a liking or acceptance of another (Kahn and Antonucci, 1980)" (Rigby, 2000, p. 58). After administering questionnaires to 845 South Australian secondary school children of similar socio-economic status, Rigby (2000) found that in line with his original hypothesis, the mental health and well being of adolescents is related to both the level of victimization they face regularly, as well as their perceived level of social support, i.e. how confident they that friends, family, school caretakers, or others will provide them with help and support when needed. Cohen & Wills (1985) broaden the discussion of social support's role in youth and adolescent well being through their discussion of the "buffer hypothesis," which suggests that individuals who are more frequently or severely victimized are likely to benefit more from sources of social

support than those who are not. This finding in particular speaks to the importance of providing social support resources to the individuals being addressed in this study, youth that are consistently victimized through various circumstances and conditions of their daily lives as revealed in the discussion of at-risk conceptualization.

Four main types of social support are identified in the work of Cutrona: concrete, emotional, advice, and esteem (C. E. Cutrona, Russell, Hessling, Brown, & Murry, 2000; Carolyn E. Cutrona & Russell, 1990; Carolyn E. Cutrona et al., 2003). The first area of concrete social support describes basic practical assistance. The second area of emotional support centers on expressions of empathy, and generally being present for someone when needed. The third area of advice support describes the act of giving advice, but also the sense of reassurance that accompanies such giving of advice. Finally, the fourth area of esteem support details the various ways in which one's self-worth is defined and relayed by others within their personal network. Each of these can vary depending on the particular context of the support exchange, but they ultimately constitute the overall fundamental feelings of self-esteem and being loved and cared for as described in the original definition. The distinction of these areas of social support enables a more nuanced approach to categorizing and conceptualizing the concept of social support throughout the data collection and coding process.

There is significant correlation drawn in a body of developmental psychology literature between perception of social support, adjustment, and mental health (Rubin & Asendorpf, 2013; Sharp, 1995; Rigby, 1997). Though Sharp (1995) & Rigby (1997) focus more particularly on the setting of school bullying as a source of victimization and psychological stress, much of their discussion and framing of victimization and stress can carry over from bullying to other examples. Olweus (1984) provides more of an overview of potential social maladjustment

outcomes, identifying two broad forms of social maladjustment that he defines as “aggressive, disruptive, or acting out behavior,” or “withdrawn, anxious, and inhibited reaction patterns” (Olweus, 1984, p. 115). In identifying a variety of factors contributing to victimization through interview and survey methods of a random sample of 76 boys around age 13, Olweus (1984) ultimately found a series of variables in familial and personality based contexts, for example poor identification with father or characteristic timidity, that both contributed to and resulted from continued victimization. These findings point toward the perception of social support as an important factor in combating social maladjustment through victimization. As shown in Rigby (2000), perception of social support plays a significant role in the wellbeing of adolescents, which Olweus (1984) in turn connects with social personality development.

Both wellbeing and personality development are subject to extra constraints among at-risk individuals, making the perception and presence of social support of great importance in those communities for ensuring successful development and assimilation into adulthood (Bowen & Chapman, 1996). Bowen & Chapman (1996) further operationalize the concept of social support into four categories of neighborhood, teacher, parent, and friend support, with each associated with four specific sub-categories that assess degree of cohesion, encouragement, and support that students perceived and recorded through a series of Likert scales.

The authors additionally discuss the broader perspective researchers can and should take when examining issues of social support in terms of validating group or organization based analysis, rather than the traditional sole focus on social support as a one to one individual process. They explain, “At some points social networks and social support almost certainly involves systems-level processes. That is, support predictably occurs within and between organized groups, social structures, and informal social systems as well as between individuals

within such systems" (Felton & Shinn, 1992, p. 103). The authors provide three substantial ways to better incorporate group level analysis into social support research: expanding notions of social support to encompass social integration (p. 108), examining the role of groups and settings as social network members (p. 109), and exploring social network characteristics as independent and dependent measures (p. 110) (Felton & Shinn, 1992). Of particular interest in this work is the authors' discussion of social networks and social support as intricately related, forming a base level of inquiry into the area of digital social networks and their potential role in social support as investigated in this study.

The area of social support remains a highly referenced and significant concept across a number of disciplines. In particular, a growing amount of recent literature has begun to delve deeper into discussions of the intersection of social support and marginalization as it relates to differences in race (McMahon, Felix, & Nagarajan, 2010), economic status (Paulsen & Berg, 2016), sexuality, (McConnell, Birkett, & Mustanski, 2016), and other related factors (Barman-Adhikari, Bowen, Bender, Brown, & Rice, 2016; McGrath, Brennan, Dolan, & Barnett, 2014). Such studies provide additional grounding and an entry point for the proposed dissertation study, which will contribute to such intersectional examinations of the presence or lack and extent of social support among marginalized youth. Many of these studies have generally found low levels of social support among the studied populations as a result of their marginalization, which reveals an opening for this work to examine practices of supplementing and gaining social support through alternative measures potentially not inherent to the social situation of at-risk youth, specifically through digital media use. Though the levels of social support among such groups might normally be low, the participation in an after-school program and the use of social media as an alternative means toward social support may offset other barriers in gaining it. This

recent body of work additionally continues to validate the use and significance of the concept of social support, which further justifies its major role in this study.

The work of Louis Leung (Cheng, Y. et al., 2015; Leung, 2007, 2011; Leung & Lee, 2005) examines the particular question of how online participation might be used as an alternative means for social support, and highlights the intersection between Internet use and social support. In a study examining how individuals use the Internet to manage stressful situations, he found substantial Internet use among teens and adolescents for the purposes of mood management addressing feelings of social deficiency, subsequently aiding in their management of social support (Leung, 2007). He describes a particular perception of the Internet as indicating a constant accessibility to social support as a major factor in these practices. Another major theme in this work is the reassurance of social support as a significant and crucial factor in health and wellbeing. The proposed dissertation study seeks to enter into conversation with this body of work, in particular through a more qualitative and case based examination of these issues to contribute nuanced contextual information to the more general correlations made. This study enables greater subtlety in the discussion of socio-economic factors, as well as specific areas of Internet use, which ideally contributes to and builds on the general finding of connection between Internet use and social support observed here.

McGrath et al. (2014) expand on the discussion of importance of context and social support in their analysis of several cross-cultural studies on the topic. They ultimately claim that "while there is a general acceptance that social support and well-being among youth are correlated, as also evident in our research, it is important from a policy and practice perspective to be attuned to the nuances around which supports are valued or become apparent" (McGrath et al., 2014, p. 243), and explain that their results reveal that the need for social support spikes in

particular during moments of specialized need. This revelation is insightful for the particular context of at-risk youth being worked with in this research, and their context and the status of their needs are closely analyzed to allow for a nuanced discussion of their spectrums of social support.

2.3. Conceptualizing Social Media

A distinct definition of social media is difficult considering the rapidly changing nature of its moving parts, but marketing scholars Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) offer a broad but applicable definition of social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (p. 61). Such foundations include public accessibility, creativity, and creation outside of professional routines (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). They established this definition in the same time frame as an initial peak in Facebook's popularity, which tailored the definition as applicable to the increasingly new understanding of social networking sites moving beyond the previous age of Myspace and microblogging. Murthy (2013) highlights the continued expansion and broadening of the term, offering a definition of social media as referring to "the many relatively inexpensive and widely accessibly electronic tools that enable anyone to publish and access information, collaborate on a common effort, or build relationships" (Murthy, 2013, pp. 7-8). Social media consists of social networking sites, broadly defined as web-based applications where users construct public personal profiles and make and list connections with other users (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). For the purposes of this study, the expansive list of potential social media platforms is acknowledged, but the main focus aligns with the most popularly used venues among youth adolescents based on official reports: Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, &

Instagram (A. Lenhart et al., 2015). TikTok, a short mobile video social networking platform, was added to this list after its extensive popularity, particularly among members in the selected age range of 9-15, was revealed through repeated references and observed uses over the observation period.

Though less established in terms of volume of literature and theoretical backing, scholars in the fields of human-computer interaction, computer-mediated communication, social informatics and social psychology have examined the potential of general Internet activity, including participation in social media and online communities, as sources of social support. After analyzing the results of face to face structured questionnaire interviews, Leung & Lee (2005) found positive correlations between sociability based Internet activities and various dimensions of social support, which they define as emotional and informational support, affection, and positive social interaction. In their literature review, they describe a substantial list of findings that have linked Internet use to various forms of social support:

"Extensive qualitative and quantitative evidences also supported the Internet's potential that home Internet access enabled the informationally disadvantaged or low-income families to experience powerful emotional and psychological transformations in identity (self-perception), self-esteem, personal empowerment, a new sense of confidence, and social standing or development of personal relationships on the Internet (Anderson & Tracey, 2001; Bier, Gallo, Nucklos, Sherblom, & Pennick, 1997; Henderson, 2001)" (p. 166).

Though such claims may now read as overly optimistic, to a more bounded and subtler extent researchers continue to provide evidence supporting a connection between Internet and technology use and establishment of various elements of social support.

More recently, among information science literature that has found positive psychological outcomes from social media use (Brownlie & Shaw, 2019; Cigna, 2018; Common Sense Media, 2018; Burke, Marlow, & Lento, 2010; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Kim, Yoo-Lee, & Joanna Sin, 2011; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009; Valkenburg & Peter, 2008), some have identified number of friends as a primary source of social support (danah boyd, 2006; Oh, Ozkaya, & LaRose, 2014), and have further identified social support as a main reason for online social networking (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). Through momentary sampling and diary keeping methods, Oh et al. (2014) found positive correlations between supportive interaction on social networking sites and positive affect after the interaction, which was in turn positively associated with perceived companionship support, appraisal support, and life satisfaction, all factions of the general concept of social support. Oh et al.'s study in particular demonstrates the beneficial opportunities of social media use, and highlights the potential of bridging the positive affect resulting from social media use through integration or influence of activities and resources available in after-school development organizations like the Boys & Girls Clubs. Though this dissertation work operates under a similar set of assumptions as the works above in terms of belief in the ability of online social networks to provide forms of social support, it is acknowledged that such works often lean towards a much more technophilic or technodeterministic affiliation in their conclusions which this work attempts to keep awareness of and resist throughout the research process.

2.4. Research in Youth Use of Digital Media

The following section reviews a selected portion of work in the area of youth use in digital media, particularly focusing on those works most influential to the framing and approach of this research. Many of the findings of these researchers lay the groundwork for this dissertation, through the overview of general categories of child and teen use of digital media, as well as posed questions and areas for future work and development. The first subsection highlights ethnographies on the topic in particular, to note influential pieces in the realm of qualitative study that have focused on the intersection of youth and digital media. A following subsection will highlight works of other methodological approaches and in particular rhetoric around concern and risk in the area, and will reveal particular findings and perspectives around youth digital media use that has shaped different avenues of public narrative on the topic. A final subsection will discuss work at the intersection of digital media use and youth development programs. The way in which this topic is communicated presents a variety of options for discussing the phenomena of youth digital media use.

2.4.1. Ethnographies in Youth Use of Digital Media

Particularly in the last decade, a few seminal ethnographic pieces have been written on the topic of youth use of new media, aiming at establishing a body of knowledge exploring why, where, how, and when children and teens use and engage with digital media. Most share a particular focus as well on youth use of new media for forming and maintaining relationships of various kinds. Each of these major works cover a wide range of aspects related to youth use of new media, with focuses ranging from relationships and community to learning, privacy, addiction, gaming, inequality, and more.

Jenkins (2006, 2018) and Turkle (1995, 2011, 2015) employ ethnographic approaches to produce a detailed view of the many individualized uses of digital media for friendship and personal growth. Turkle's work was one of the earliest to focus on this particular topic, and provides a detailed account of Internet use for communicative purposes, personal connection, personality development, and self-expression observed throughout her interviews and observation. Exploring the early instantiations of the virtual world through MUDs, forums, early artificial life, and a variety of other spaces, Turkle provides an in depth view of the emotional and thoughtful expressions of early adopters to digital interaction and engagement. Her later books build on this first ethnographic study, adding nuance to her previous findings but also beginning to cast doubt on their idealism. Her 2011 work argues that use of mobile technologies has driven people further away from fundamental components of empathetic communication. This argument continues in her 2015 work but is paired with the overarching call to redesign technologies in a way that allows for more balanced use and more conscious intentions. This particular overarching call aligned with earlier findings of beneficial youth digital media use helps inform a balanced analysis in this dissertation research.

Jenkins (2006) offers an insightful perspective on what individuals and communities stand to gain from the changing tide of new media use, covering the changing ideologies from the dot com crash to Web 2.0, to the growing area of participatory culture. This latter area is more of interest to this dissertation, in regards to the descriptions Jenkins provides of the various skill sharing and learning capabilities present in emerging online communities. In examining the virtual fan-base of Harry Potter, Jenkins notes that the space creates a unique opportunity for the development of writing among youth. He describes an unexpected leniency of grammatical errors in fan fiction submissions in favor of encouragement and development, and prescribes this

and other observations to something more particular to the whole online community process: "In participatory culture, the whole community takes on some responsibility for helping newbies find their way" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 178). Jenkins' most recent work continues to depict the possibilities and beneficial potential of participatory culture, more specifically through the lens of digital and social media use for political participation among teens and young adults (Jenkins, 2018). The unique social opportunities Jenkins observes in these types of spaces align with Turkle's optimistic outlook on the potential of new media to serve the social needs of youth, and form an important basis for this lineage of work.

Emphasis on the complex social practices that are employed by youth online have also been relayed in this area especially in distinction from studies claiming particular priority or preferential uses of digital media among youth, such as political activism or entertainment. In her study of social media use among Chinese youth, Wang (2013) found that youth were participating in online communities for reasons distinct from actions like entertainment or political action, an assumption that has taken hold in previous research (Herold & Marolt, 2013; Liu, 2013). Instead, her findings demonstrate that youth are "going online to socialize with people they do not know…seek[ing] online spaces where they can express themselves to strangers within online communities organized around lightweight subjects, not political topics" (Wang, 2013, p. 25). Such styles of online use point to some of the particular styles of interest to this study, where social media networks might be used by youth to fill gaps in social support within their face-to-face networks by purposefully forging new relationships online.

A next set of ethnographies in this area begins to delve more deeply into the motivations and processes of youth engagement with digital spaces. Building on previous work, these pieces detail a shift in the idea of virtual spaces as totally separate with unique and particular needs and

practices, to viewing them as a supplementary set of platforms that feed into and address the social needs of youth more generally. This viewpoint helps frame the approach being taken in this ethnographic study. A major concept that arises from boyd's work is the idea of networked publics, which she describes as "publics that are restructured by networked technologies…simultaneously the space constructed through networked technologies and the imagined community that emerges as the result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice" (boyd, 2014, p. 8). This notion guides the rest of her work, ultimately weaving the many divided discussions on particular aspects of social media use to point to an overarching theme that social media is used among teens to address the fact that they aren't able to meet up or connect with their friends as often or as freely as they wish. This networked public represents their freely constructed space to turn to when needed, and is paired with specific layered social media engagement practices especially in low-SES communities (boyd, 2017, Marwick et al., 2017). Ito et al. (2009) echo this sentiment, where they find in the discussion of a synthesis of works conducted around high school students' new media use that friendship-driven practices play a stronger and more important role in the structuring of new media use than interest-driven practices. They describe sites like MySpace and Facebook as part of a genre of digital platforms that cater to such friendship-driven needs, where the opportunities for relationship building, popularity, and status are significant priorities. The contrast between friendship and interest-driven needs and the presence of both as crucial motivating factors for use continues in Ito's later work (Ito, 2018). The concept of social support being applied in this dissertation is an integral piece of the friendship-driven needs described in boyd and Ito's work.

In an overview of works discussing the intersection of social media use and social and academic development among children and teens, Ahn (2011) identifies several themes in past

years' work that help carve a particular space for contribution for this study (Ito et al., 2009; Livingstone, 2006; Livingstone, Valkenburg, 2006; Pascoe, 2011; Valkenburg & Peter, 2008). In terms of aspects of digital inequality and new media use, Ahn sites authors such as Hargittai (2001, 2007) and Jenkins (2006) who have contributed significantly to a discussion of sub-groups of the population that are not able to engage with digital technologies as easily as others, particularly poor minority communities, but notes that their framing is often still situated in a digital divide centered discussion. New works that discuss more than access are still needed, and this study will serve to contribute to that growing body of work. Similarly, even newer works like boyd's discussed above relay the understanding that providing access to technology is not the solution to social disparity, but do not yet dive more deeply into identifying particular needs of marginalized groups in relation to new media use like this study aims to do. Ahn (2011) additionally notes the current lack of and need for more detailed qualitative descriptions of the varied components of youth Internet use, which provides a significant opportunity for ethnographies on the subject to contribute to the current body of knowledge. She notes that many previous studies have treated Internet use as a one-dimensional activity, explaining:

"Binary specifications of whether a teenager uses a particular technology or not will likely prove to be an inconclusive predictor of self-esteem and well-being. Instead, media scholars are now moving towards finer definitions of the technological environment, activities within that environment, and theoretical specifications about why those interactions would affect social and psychological outcomes" (Ahn, 2011, p. 1441).

In relation to the role of social media in the development of social support, Ahn notes that much of the psychological work on youth new media use has been interested in psychological well being and self-esteem, but does not mention any specific focuses on the parallel concept of social support. Based on this review of previous literature on the topic, this study brings a unique and desired contribution to the field through its ethnographic method and subsequent detailed qualitative findings, its particular focus on social support within the greater realm of psychological well being, and the specific focus on at-risk youth beyond a discussion of digital divide and access related concerns.

2.4.2. Concerns and Roles in Youth Digital Media Use

Past work in the area of youth use of digital media has sought detailed information on the nuanced differences of digital use among teens across different platforms, particularly between mobile and other device based Internet use (Grinter, Palen, & Eldridge, 2006; Lenhart, Am, Ling, Campbell, & Purcell, 2010; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). An interesting thread that has emerged from such work has also focused on the idea of parental concern, and how parents and other authority figures should regulate or mediate youth media use to prevent exposure to risk. Such discussions can often form a source of tension around the discussion of social media use among children and teens. Studies in this area have ranged in findings, from discussions of teen emancipation from parental authority through mobile phone use (Ling, 2005), to predicted disagreements between parents and children about Internet use dependent on parenting styles (Byrne & Lee, 2011). These findings build on work that manifests the concerns around overuse of technology among youth, present in studies like Van de Bulck (2003)and Lenhart (2010) who identified social web participation as component of family and school disruption, respectively.

Van Den Bulck's study reports that teens are often woken up in the middle of the night due to phone and Internet notifications, with older teens being twice as susceptible to such disruptions than younger teens, while Lenhart et al.'s work reports 65% of high school students bringing mobile phones to school even where they are banned, with 43% of those students texting in class one or more times per day.

Though certainly legitimately raised and worth addressing, the notes of concern depicted in this body of work do represent a certain narrative of concern and adult centered understandings of technology use among youth that this dissertation seeks to avoid. In a brief overview of various methods of new media research and their associated challenges, Pascoe (2011) warns against "the projection of adult use of new media onto young people's practices and orientations" (p. 80), describing the issue as a tendency to assume that youth use technology in the same ways as adults or in a way that is completely aligned with designers' intents. Additionally, she notes the tendency as demonstrated by Richman (2007) of adults to view the Internet as dangerous, building on the ideas of moral panic discussed earlier. Both of these concerns represent significant challenges to maintain awareness of while trying gain an accurate depiction of youth practices, perceptions, and concerns around social media. The constant comparative method approach taken as part of this study ideally helps address such concerns through the practiced suspension of presumption during the data collection process. Additionally, the approach for this study heeds Wilson's (2006) caution for scholars working at the intersection of youth social development and Internet use that "The subcultural lives of many Internet-using young people should not be understood as virtual *or* real because the online and offline experiences of youth are oftentimes continuous and interconnected" (p. 317). Maintaining a strong affirmation and understanding around this sense of interconnectedness can aid in

offsetting embedded concerns or panic through a more grounded view of digital spaces as simultaneously existing with offline ones, rather than as a wholly other and unique space.

This narrative of concern additionally connects to an extensive rhetoric of concern expressed in other more traditional forms of mainstream media, and additionally plays a role in the construction of school and after-school program infrastructures. In her extensive work on the intersection of youth and media representation, Kelly (2006) points to alternatives to mainstream media spaces, such as social networks, as especially needed in an age of increasing conformity. She describes much of the negative public narratives woven around adolescent social development as a result of widespread "moral panics over youth" (p. 30), and identifies ways in which reporters and traditional news entities frame discussions of youth "in ways that marginalize explanations and information that might contradict the mainstream media's larger framework of trouble and troubling youth" (p. 30). A powerful point from Kelly's piece connects the narratives and stereotypes presented about marginalized youth to the ideological interests and policies that enable increased policing, surveillance and profiling in schools and related institutions. Her analysis points to the broader importance of reforming and questioning the ideological goals and assumptions present in schools and after-school programs like those selected for this study, in order to more appropriately guide and construct them with youth interests in mind. She supports participation in alternative media sources as a form of self-representation, which she promotes as a crucial part of youth civic participation and accommodating youth interests. This study seeks to build on such connections by identifying ways that youth self-representation is sought as a part of the process of social support, which can in turn affect the design and implementation of after-school programming.

Mayer (2001) discusses the impact that the marginalization and stereotyping Kelly describes may even have on youth participation in ethnography. Though she calls on scholars to treat youth as knowledgeable and integral parts of the research process, she also notes the way in which interviews with youth may be "sharply influenced by the social roles that young people expect to occupy around adults, especially adults from different cultural, class, or ethnic backgrounds" (Mayer, 2001, p. 310). She advocates for an equal amount of attention paid toward nonverbal cues and other components of communication to address this challenge. The participant observation portions of this dissertation as well as the particular focus on at-risk youth ideally necessitate a higher level of sensitivity to such issues of power dynamic and cultural specificities that may be present throughout the research process. Mayer additionally promotes a framing of media ethnographies to create work not just about but also for and with subjects, which this work additionally aims to do.

In addition to particular methodological adjustments, one way of addressing and resisting falling into a particular narrative of risk and concern centered views of youth technology use expressed in scholarly work is connecting findings to tangible interventions and policy outcomes. Through a set of in depth interviews with 9-16 year olds in 9 countries, EU Kids Online found some startling statistics around the risks of online youth participation, including that those interviewed are 13-20% more likely to be exposed to hate messages, 7-11% more likely to be exposed to self-harm sites, and 7 – 12% more likely to be exposed to cyberbullying since 2010 (EU Kids Online, 2014). Between 11-16 year olds, 63% of those surveyed reported visiting a social networking profile as an online activity they engage in on a daily basis, the highest reported percentage out of the reported activities (EU Kids Online, 2014). As a result of these and many more findings, the organization has put forth a number of evidence-based

policies for various sectors, including families, educators and media representatives, and government and industry. Their recommendations for government and industry, the portions most relevant to the context of this study, focus most on the promotion and assurance of safety and privacy for children online, as well as digital inclusion of marginalized groups. Findings from this dissertation add to these evaluations by informing a set of recommendations relating to the formation and maintenance of social resources and programs that exist in tandem with online spaces to serve and address the needs that youth fulfill online.

Whereas Sonia Livingstone's EU Kids Online report tends to highlight risks of digital media use among youth especially in relation to privacy and bullying, O'Keefe et al. (2011) and the UCLA Mental Health Center lay out a more evenly distributed discussion of benefits and disadvantages. O'Keefe finds the areas of socialization and communication, enhanced learning opportunities, and accessing health information as benefits, with cyberbullying and harassment, sexting, and depression as potential risks, also noting the concerns of advertising and privacy as ones that should be discussed and made clear between parents and children in a conversation about online participation. From the perspective of the role of such benefits and risks to health development and status, O'Keefe ultimately advocates for the role of pediatricians to aid parents in discussing issues present in digital media use with their children, and facilitating education and understanding in the area for both parties.

The role of staff at after-school settings can be viewed somewhat similarly, where their understanding and awareness of youth participation in online networks can help facilitate important conversations with youth about the risks and benefits of their use, and potentially affect the structure and style of education and activities in the program. UCLA Mental Health Center similarly places parents and educators in the role of instructing youth on the safest and

most beneficial ways to use the Internet, based on the development of their own knowledge on its benefits and disadvantages. Many of the advantages they highlight center on the positive opportunities for self-esteem building, identity formation, and social connection that digital media use can bring, while bullying and lower self-esteem through comparison are listed as drawbacks (UCLA Mental Health Center, n.d.). Overviews like these are helpful in promoting a communicative approach to dealing with the increasing parental concerns reported over lack of knowledge regarding children's use of technology (Duggan, Am, Lenhart, Lampe, & Ellison, 2015). Balanced discussion and overviews are especially important considering the new trend in media and research based concerns around youth social media use, which increasingly center on highlighting the potential correlations between anxiety, depression, and social media use (Shakya & Christakis, 2017; Twenge, Joiner, Rogers, & Martin, 2017; Vannucci, Flannery, & Ohannessian, 2017). This dissertation resists aligning too much with either pushing advantages or disadvantages of digital media use as discussed here, and instead focuses on the spectrum of social ramifications that arise from social media use, more in line with the works of boyd and Ito. This study additionally focuses consciously on representing youth voices and perspectives to help highlight their found and demonstrated resilience in uses of online spaces (McHugh, Wisniewski, Rosson, Xu, & Carroll, 2017).

2.4.3. Digital Media Use in Youth Development Programs

Research in the area of digital media use in after-school programs has been somewhat disjointed, reflective of the status of after-school youth development programs more generally. In their review of digital media use in after school settings, Herr-Stephenson et al. (2011) note that "the field of organizations that serve young people is less coherent than other more established

organizational fields (McLaughlin & Pitcock, 2009)" (p. 4) especially across institutional levels, which makes a concrete study of such spaces harder to grasp. They ultimately find two major themes of progressive education and youth development that drive the majority of these organizations and note the intersection of digital media and after-school programs through these themes, claiming, "as with youth programs young people appear to move between media and spaces for media, and appear to develop knowledge and skills through participation with media" (Herr-Stephenson et al., 2011, p. 10). The authors highlight challenges around providing technological infrastructure and supporting youth enabled digital media practices as barriers to manifesting the connection between digital media and youth development programs, but subsequently discuss a variety of examples of after-school programs that have employed digital media into their structures despite pre-existing difficulties.

The examples provide insight into ways to use digital media to establish responsibility and maturity in extended learning environments through youth-driven care for technological supplies, learning by design and mentorship through optional use of digital media in enriched learning environments, and using digital media to connect to the lived realities of youth in intentional learning and programming, the last of which is most relevant to the setting and framing of this study (Herr-Stephenson et al., 2011). In the last area in particular, digital media were used to empower youth to discuss issues that were important to them, and incorporate them in their after-school settings. Though to some such uses of digital media might signal a replacement of youth services in favor of online engagement, the authors argue that it may actually facilitate a better distribution of work as a substantial set of tools for organizing and facilitating youth development (Herr-Stephenson et al., 2011). They then demonstrate the role of digital media as one of facilitating communication and production through their discussion of

digital media technology as an outreach method and a hook for ultimately assembling a learning ecology of after-school programs. As they state in their conclusion:

"Through this review, it is evident that digital media and technology present great opportunities and challenges to youth organizations. Indeed, digital media can offer opportunities for both self-directed and collaborative learning, can open access to information that might not otherwise be accessible, and can allow for creative expression in new formats. However, in each of the organizational types surveyed in this report, we have seen the nontechnical aspects of youth problems – the location and context, the staff and peers – are essential to the function and success of youth organizations, even in the land of digital natives and the age of cyberlearning."

This dissertation study seeks to contribute to this understanding of the role of digital media, specifically social media, in understanding youth needs and social practices and subsequently better serving existing youth services. The work sees the two spaces as co-existing and having the potential to shape each other to contribute to a better learning ecology for at-risk youth. It seeks to answer the call of the authors stated in their conclusion to aim to fill the gap in methodologically sound empirical work examining the use of digital media "within, between, and beyond" youth programs (Herr-Stephenson et al., 2011, p. 67). Barron et al. (2014) continue to build on Herr-Stephenson et al.'s understanding of the significant intersection between digital and social media and youth development spaces by calling for additional hybrid approaches for digital integration that span both areas. The idea of hybrid approaches is another that this study seeks to corroborate.

McLaughlin and Pitcock (2009) additionally point to the significance of research in the area of after-school programs more generally apart from their connection to digital media, which they reveal has been described as an emerging field as recently as 2003 (Noam, Biancarosa, & Dechausay, 2002). This classification explains the tension still present around key stakeholders and discourse regarding what such programs should look like. An emphasis on continued traditional education to push for academic improvement in these spaces has been recently gaining consistent backing and funding (Hull & Hernandez, 2008), but clashes with ideologies that frame the after-school program space as one of exploration and social development. Additionally the authors offer another sub-categorization of after-school programs in the areas of extended, enriched, and interest-driven learning. This dissertation and the structure of the selected after-school program of the Boys & Girls Clubs aligns with the latter area of "progressive era" (McLaughlin et al., 2009) framing, and seeks to utilize findings on social media use among participants to serve those aims. The Boys & Girls Clubs of America additionally combines elements of enriched and intentional learning and programming. The identification of after-school programming as a continually growing area of research presents a significant opportunity for the context of this dissertation work.

3. Research Questions

Underlying questions driving this research involve a combination of descriptive and inferential research goals. Broadly, this study addresses one piece of a larger body of research inquiries investigating and identifying ways in which to bridge the online and face-to-face social support needs of youth and adolescents. In light of this overarching goal, the following research

questions aim to initially describe and identify social media use among at-risk youth in after-school settings. These first two driving questions reflect the descriptive pursuits of the project.

RQ1: In what ways are at-risk youth using social media for social support?

Sub-question 1: Do they view online social networks as a constant source of social support as some literature suggests?

Sub-question 2: How do these uses compare or contrast from the "rhetoric of concern" around youth use of technology established over recent years?

RQ2: What, if any, specific social support needs arise for this population as informed by their use of social media?

Sub-question 1: What do these needs reveal about the function of social media in their development?

Sub-question 2: How do these needs inform the current scope of understanding around youth social participation online?

A second set of questions reflects more inferential research goals, and moves toward more action oriented and intervention based inquiry that will be developed and explored in reaction to the findings from the preliminary questions. These questions, though important to the overall significance and framing of this work, are not answered within the scope of this particular project, and are instead included as directions for future extensions of the current research.

RQ3: How can this information about youth social media use inform the current scope and set of approaches for designing and implementing at-risk youth programs and activities?
RQ4: In what ways can the youths involved in such programs play a more direct role in their development and improvement?

As demonstrated through the primary research questions listed above, this project begins as a more exploratory venture, with some descriptive aims as well. Considering the lack of concrete knowledge surrounding social media use and social support needs for this specific sample and the greater population of at-risk youth, a deeper understanding of the inner workings of the groups' participants needs to be established before moving on toward fully descriptive or explanatory stages. These questions match the desired goals of this research project stated at the end of the introduction to understand and assess social media use among at-risk youth and its potential role in the development and maintenance of social support.

The significance of these questions lies in the potential growth of knowledge and awareness they can bring to youth about their own social support needs and patterns of social media use, as well as to educators, counselors, and other staff members working in the realm of youth development. Investigating these questions further may affect the future technological and other social habits of the participants observed and interviewed, and will ideally positively influence the growth of Boys & Girls Clubs youth development programs and other similar programs. Contributing to the knowledge base and development of such organizations may also have potential influence on policy and structural regulations around the support and aid of at-risk youth. This line of inquiry reflects an entry into a noted gap discussed in the literature review and introduction of nuanced and localized research on the intersection of digital communication

technologies and social support in after-school programs, particularly through a community based approach and taking socio-economic specificities into consideration. As Babbie (2013) notes, areas with a dearth of substantial and concrete knowledge can benefit from exploratory studies before attempting to move into descriptive and explanatory phases. Finally, these questions additionally match well with the chosen methods of ethnography and participatory action through both their associated research aims and their open-ended nature suitable for qualitative field research.

3.1. Central and Periphery Assumptions

The central assumption of this work is that most, if not all, at-risk youth are using a variety of social media platforms for specific social support needs that are not entirely fulfilled in their non-digital day to day lives. Assessing and articulating what these needs are will enable programs like the Boys & Girls Clubs of Santa Monica and Lafayette to better design and enhance their programs to meet these needs and serve their participants. This assumption is informed through the findings of previous ethnographic work in this area that claim that social networking sites are being used to address ongoing social relationship needs that might not be adequately fulfilled in non-digital spaces, and builds on the findings of at-risk populations in even greater need of such desires to be filled in order to overcome barriers to self-sufficiency.

While the central assumption refers mainly to the aims of the primary two research questions, the sub-questions for each primary question are in reference to several sub-assumptions embedded within the general one. The first sub-question challenges the findings of much of the recent digital media and social support literature (Leung, 2007; Leung, 2011; Leung, 2015; Leung & Lee, 2005) that finds that the accessibility and availability of the Internet presents

it as a constant source of social support. This work estimates that the findings of this study will align with more of a middle ground regarding the extent to which digital media is perceived as a source of social support, in particular due to the narrower focus on social media platforms rather than the Internet as a whole, and the specificity of the sample group. The second sub-question addresses the overarching tone of concern and fear (EU Kids Online, 2014; Lenhart, 2010; Ling, 2005) that surrounds a significant body of literature on youth use of technology, focusing on issues of privacy and bullying as primary elements of such engagement. The responding sub-assumption is that these concerns will have some place in the youths' experiences, but will not comprise the majority of their experiences and will not outweigh the benefits received.

The second two sub-questions are aimed at the findings of Ito (2009), boyd (2014) and others who view social media as fundamentally serving as an unstructured and always accessible network for teens to turn to, in particular to fill the gaps of communication and bonding time with already established groups of friends. The assumption put forth in response is that the social support needs expressed by the youths interviewed and observed may support these findings, but may also contain another dimension of filling gaps of identity formation and self esteem through interaction with less close friends and groups that share similar experiences in addition to close friends. These questions also respond to the work of Jenkins (2006) and others with the aim of adding further nuance to descriptions of and assertions around youth participation online, especially for particular subsets of the greater US youth population. In line with the constant comparative method approach being employed in this study, these assumptions, both central and periphery, were not considered immutable or of particular authority for dictating the course of the research. Rather, they served as potential areas for contribution of this work, and contributed to interview planning and observation in terms of how interesting findings may be structured.

CHAPTER 2: Research Design

4. Methodology

The following sections will discuss various aspects of the research design for this work, which primarily consists of an ethnographic field study. As described in the research questions section, this study can primarily be classified as qualitative exploratory and descriptive research, since the employed methodology and data analysis is non-numerical or computational, and substantial information on the subject area being explored must be assessed before attempting explanatory work (Babbie, 2013). Considering the small sample of this study, the results primarily provide an idiographic rather than a nomothetic explanation, through an in depth report of the online and offline social activities solely of Lafayette and Santa Monica Boys & Girls Clubs participants, rather than a broader finding about a set of behaviors that might be generalized to the greater population, though many of the major takeaways may arguably positively influence other similar groups (Babbie, 2013). The style of ethnography employed for this research uses the constant comparative method approach, a type of ethnographic data collection and analysis that employs a constant comparative method to produce "an action/interaction oriented method of theory building" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The next sections will discuss in greater detail how the particular aspects of constant comparative method will be applied in this study.

4.1. Informants

This study used non-probability purposive sampling of the participants in the Boys & Girls Clubs of Santa Monica and members of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Lafayette. Information

on available participants was obtained through the registered members database of each Boys and Girls Club location, which was accessible from the program director with proper permission from the director and the participants' parents or guardians. The units of analysis in this study are primarily the individual youth participants, but interviews were conducted with willing program staff members as well. All units of analysis are at the individual level.

The primary informants for this study are the 9-15 year old participants of the Boys & Girls Clubs programs. Though the program serves children and adolescents ages 6 – 18, the minimum age required to create an account on each of the four social media networks being examined in this study is 13, which justifies capping the age of informants at or around that age. However, numerous reports have been released discussing that children under the age 13, particularly between ages 10-12, ignore the age requirement and sign up for accounts (Barbovschi, Macháčková, & Ólafsson, 2015; Coughlan, 2016; Crouch, 2014). To attempt to address these findings, the typical 13-17 age range of study present in previous ethnographic works in the area will be shifted slightly to cover the 9-15 age range. Additionally, the 9-15 age range will allow for two different developmental perspectives through bridging the frequent developmental distinctions made between school age children of 1-12 years and adolescents of 13-17 years. The 9-15 range also aligns well with the 10 -14 age range selected as a standard demographic group in governmental demographic surveys, so there is at least some precedent for this age categorization (National Instutite of Health, 2012).

Other potential considered informants were parents, legal guardians, and/or primary caretakers of the participants. Primary teachers particularly for elementary school were also considered, along with the program director of both groups, and any other primary staff members that interact regularly with the program participants. Unfortunately due to constraints in parent

and teacher availability and willingness, only program staff and directors could be interviewed. Though using a purposive sample places a limitation on the external validity of the study, it aligns well with the general attempt of participatory action and other intervention based research to serve and work with specific local community members in order to bring about tangible and meaningful change for a specific population (Babbie, 2013).

4.2. The Sites

The primary sites for observation were the Boys & Girls Clubs of Lafayette, IN and Santa Monica, CA. The Boys & Girls Clubs of America indentifies itself as the national organization of local branches of after-school and summer programs that "promote and enhance the development of boys and girls by instilling a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging, and influence" especially to those who need it most (Boys & Girls Clubs of America, n.d.). Both the Lafayette and Santa Monica branches echo this mission, and offer programs ranging from topics of character and leadership, education and career, health and life skills, the arts, and sports, recreation and fitness to provide a safe space for youth to develop meaningful relationships and reach their full potential. The dedication of the organization to empowering youth and guiding their intellectual and social development provides ample support for the selection of two branches of this organization as appropriate sites for analyzing the formation and development of social support, and represents a uniquely isolated situation between school and home.

Though the national Boys and Girls Clubs of America sets general regulations for state, county, and city level programming, the specifics of programming often differ based on the resources available in each geographic area. Differences in demographic make-up may also affect the dynamic of each local program. Two Boys & Girls Clubs sites were chosen to aid in

addressing these concerns within the time constraints of this research. The Santa Monica and Lafayette Boys & Girls Clubs contrast significantly in geographic placement and demographic makeup, which offers a beneficial comparison point in the overall discussion of major findings. Despite the differences, however, both sites offer similarly structured afterschool and summer programs, which offer consistency in institutional management and regulation between them. The researcher additionally has substantial past experience with youth development programs, specifically 4-H, as well as personal connections to each of these geographic areas, which aided with recruitment and gaining entry into the community. Considering the similarity in structure between the after-school programs and summer programs in the Boys & Girls Clubs and the 4-H programs the researcher previously worked with, the staff aide skills needed for volunteer work translated well across the two organizations. Additionally, the consistent meeting times and central locations of the Boys & Girls Clubs make it a more feasible setting for continued research and ongoing data collection.

The Boys and Girls Club of America provides community based after-school and summer programs for children ranging ages 6 – 18 at multiple sites in cities across the nation. The services vary based on location, but center on major concepts of academic success, good character and citizenship, and healthy lifestyles. Membership is typically $10 for one child or $20 for a family per year, though some branches offer sliding scale payment based on income. The organization additionally emphasizes the Clubs' roles as spaces that protect the safety and well-being of children, both physically through the use of the sites as spaces for growth, development, and play after school, and mentally/psychologically through a curriculum that aims to lower high school drop out rates and provide youth with active and dedicated role models (Boys & Girls Clubs of America, n.d.). Participants in the after-school programs follow a

designated Boys & Girls Clubs curriculum each day, consisting of daily lessons in leadership and healthy life choices like the SMART moves, Keystone Club, and Triple Play programs, arts & crafts, science projects, reading and homework time, sports, and free time, with an emphasis on hands-on learning. This structure is repeated during the summer program. The after-school and summer programs were the sectors of interest to this project.

4.2.1. Gaining Entry

Establishing a plan for "getting in" and gaining acceptance among the group being studied often poses great difficulty as a starting point for ethnographic research. However, various methods such as selecting a site where the researcher is already a participant, utilizing connections to certain potential sites, and/or developing clear and concise accounts of the proposed research to share with potential sites have all been suggested as possible ways to more easily facilitate the entry process (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). In the case of this study, the researcher has been extensively involved with a very similar organization in the past, having served as a 4-H after school and summer program counselor and educator for three years, and have maintained connections with staff members within the organization. So though I was initially a relative outsider to Boys & Girls Clubs, my connections to the relayed 4-H youth development network more easily facilitated entry as a researcher. A strong and succinct account of the details and significance of the research project were developed and sent out to the program directors at each site, with an attached request to set up an initial interview to discuss the possibility of conducting research at the site. The connection as a staff member at another youth development organization also helped further establish credibility, trustworthiness, and dedication to the Boys and Girls Clubs of America organization as a whole. I also volunteered

my time to help as a staff aide for the program, which helped additionally with the establishment of credibility and dedication, and also served as a key point for developing meaningful relationships with the informants and gradually gaining acceptance among the community.

4.2.2. Relation to Setting

Considering the fact that I needed to gain permission from parents and program coordinators prior to beginning my research, and because the sites were closed settings, I was a known researcher (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). As mentioned in the preceding section, I began initially as an outside researcher to these sites, but through my volunteer work I eventually became a participant researcher over the course of the time spent at each site. As a participant researcher I essentially filled the position of my previous experience as an aide/volunteer counselor, helping out the program participants throughout the usual activities of the day, including reading/homework, outdoor time, themed activities, and free time. Full-time staff are often quite minimal and overworked, so volunteer staff aides are frequently enthusiastically welcomed to help with supervision and facilitation of daily activities. This reality placed me in a prime position to be welcomed into the community and to receive general agreement to my research proposal. Though in many ways my status as a participant researcher represented ongoing tangible benefits brought to the two communities, as Lofland & Lofland (1995) reveal, it should still be taken into consideration that over time, especially as a participant researcher, the research subjects may not have always remembered that I am was researcher, which brought the need for an even more careful consideration of ethical concerns of deception.

4.3. Primary Method: Ethnography

As previously mentioned at the start of the Research Design section, this study is primarily a qualitative field study. This method is situated within the field research paradigm of naturalistic field research, but specifically employs methods of ethnography, seeking to provide a thoroughly descriptive and accurate report on the social life of the participants of Boys & Girls Clubs youth development program participants (Babbie, 2013). In line with this primary goal, this method in particular employs practices of participant observation through establishing and sustaining a long-term relationship with the participants in their natural setting, and intensive interviewing, where the informants, or Boys & Girls Clubs participants, relay their experiences of day to day life in the Boys & Girls Clubs and elsewhere, their regular social media use, their feelings of social support in various contexts, and any and all other relevant pieces of information (Lofland & Lofland, 1995).

4.3.1. Ethnography in IS & Epistemological Framing

In a detailed description of various epistemological turns in the history of Library & Information Science, Cronin (2008) asserts that the field of IS "routinely interacts with and draws liberally upon other subject fields for intellectual enlightenment" (p. 466). He demonstrates this through his discussion of a variety of scholarly shifts in the field including linguistic, user, cognitive, and spatial turns, among others. Ultimately he concludes that after reviewing many of the pieces and scholars that have now become a more substantial part of the IS canon, it seems that the field has always been receptive to sociological thinking, thus promoting the element of the social as a central theme throughout the progression and development of the scholarly tradition. Zandonade (2004) and Fallis (2008) echo these

sentiments, in particular discussing Jesse Shera's seminal work in the area of social epistemology, initially inquiring into the social effects of reading and forming a basis for inquiry of social information use and engagement that continues today. Zandonade (2004) additionally describes social epistemology as fundamentally interdisciplinary, dependent upon a variety of fields including sociology, anthropology, psychology, and information theory.

From these epistemological bases the use of ethnography in connection to the fields of sociology and anthropology arose as a method for pursuing certain paths of inquiry directed throughout the field. This segment of IS contrasts from the more positivist segments of the field, which often consist of experimental user studies (Hjorland, 2005). Hjorland (2005) contrasts this approach with a more interpretivist research paradigm, one that has bridged a connection to IS through sociology, anthropology, education and other fields through the influences of such practices as grounded theory and thick description in ethnography. In recent years many styles of ethnography have been incorporated into IS scholarship including the renowned grounded theory based work of Leigh Star in the area of infrastructure and science and technology studies (Neumann & Star, 1996; L. Star & Bowker, 1999; S. L. Star & Ruhleder, 1996), work in the area of data studies and practices (C. L. Borgman, Wallis, & Enyedy, 2007; C. Borgman, Wallis, & Enyedy, 2006; A. L. Washington, 2015), inquiries at the intersection of information and cultural studies (Srinivasan, 2007; Verran, 2002), potential adoption of ethnographic practices in archives (Gilliland & McKemmish, 2015; Trace, 2006), information systems research (Myers & others, 1997), and a variety of studies in media and technology practices as described in Coleman (2010), among others. Coleman (2010) articulates the significance and particularity of ideology that ethnography can bring to such studies, through the use of the term "provincializing" as borrowed from postcolonial theorist Dipesh Chakrabarty. She states,

"To provincialize digital media is not to deny their scale and global reach…rather, it allows us to consider the way these media have become central to the articulation of cherished beliefs, ritual practices, and modes of being in the world; the fact that digital media culturally matters is undeniable but showing how, where, and why it matters is necessary to push against peculiarly narrow presumptions about the universality of digital experience" (Coleman, 2010, p. 498).

Though Coleman is speaking more directly about the media technology focused area of information studies, this statement could arguably be applied to a variety of focuses within the field. The use of ethnography and the associated practice of provincializing experiences of social interaction with and through technology bring about a fundamentally different understanding and approach to the study of information. It allows for a more localized narrative around certain social patterns and interactions that may be then mapped back out to a broader landscape. This dissertation is situated within this realm of interpretivist ethnographic information inquiry.

4.3.2. Constant Comparative Method

To reflect the exploratory and descriptive aims in this study and the ultimate goals of moving toward explanatory findings, this work draws from the research paradigm of grounded theory to inform its data collection and analysis. First formally introduced by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anslem Strauss in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), the authors put forth the idea of grounded theory as a paradigm for conducting qualitative research that requires inductive data analysis through a "constant comparative method" (p.103) that generates a theory of social life throughout the research process rather than as an a priori hypothesis or assumption.

Glaser & Holton (2004) define grounded theory as distinct from a more positivist qualitative approach of naturalistic inquiry, which they describe as "wish[ing] accurate description of the action regarding knowing" as contrasted with "want[ing] conceptualization of fundamental latent patterns occurring in the action" as part of grounded theory (p. 6). This constant comparative method takes form most simplistically through the practices of three different types of coding, open, axial, and selective (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open and axial coding were employed most prominently for this study as a starting point to focus on theme analysis and concept development, with selective coding reserved for more explanatory theory building which does not yet emerge from the findings of this study. In line with the general protocol for constant comparative method as inspired by grounded theory work, these processes of coding occurred in tandem with the recording of descriptive and reflexive notes, in order to capture descriptive elements of observed phenomena while also conceptualizing the data and structuring categories within it.

4.3.3. Data Collection

I worked and observe in this capacity starting at each site for approximately six months. Spending approximately six months at each site allowed for consistency between the two sites in relation to time spent in the after-school and summer programs, enabled observations between two different Boys & Girls Clubs programs with similar structures, and allowed for adequate overall time allotted for collection and subsequent analysis in the previously set dissertation completion timeline. When planning for appropriate recruitment and data analysis periods, six months presented the most appropriate timeline for keeping consistency between the two sites in a two-year period for research and writing. In my past work with 4-H, I normally spent about

four months with the group from the months of May – August, and I found I was able to develop quite meaningful relationships with the each new group of participants. Based on the feedback I received from them, it was also clear that they accepted and trusted me as a part of their community, thus validating the six-month period as an appropriate one for authentic relationship building and data collection.

During each daily observation session, in addition to assisting with various tasks I took jotted notes, and then developed them into more detailed field notes at the end of each session, which lasted approximately 2-3 hours per day. These notes were on various aspects of the Boys & Girls Clubs participants' social activities, including how individuals interact with one another, the perceived maturity level of peer interaction and peer to mentor interaction, the content of conversations, reprimanding or guiding occurrences, reading level, clothing, self-expression, language skills, social adaptation, and other noteworthy attributes that arose during observation. Each of these areas of observation were identified as concepts and further conceptualized as categories through the constant comparative methods of open and axial coding, which will be explained in further detail below (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Broadly, the daily observations were carried out according to the underlying theme of immersion as described by Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw (2011), a process where the researcher "sees from the inside how people lead their lives, how they carry out their daily rounds of activities, what they find meaningful, and how they do so" (p. 2). As the authors suggest, the specific pattern of note taking did morph over time depending on the daily context of observation and the amount of time that had passed doing fieldwork. After a certain amount of adjustment to the setting, a shift from less intrusive or explicit note taking throughout the day to a greater focus on particular changes or new concepts became more appropriate and relevant (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011).

Though the units of analysis are the individuals, based on the types of occurrences I was be looking for, my units of observation are primarily person-based and social-relations based practices, though some observation of social types did also occur (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). These units of observation all center on the primary concepts of social support and social media use. The field notes taken during each observation session align with typical ethnographic field notes protocol, which include basic information about the time, date, location, and duration of the session, followed by two columns for descriptive and reflective notes and a bottom column for any additional information noted. These notes were analyzed using line-by-line analysis and logic diagrams as well (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

As Bogdan and Biklen (1998) describe, "Field notes consist of 2 kinds of materials: The first is *descriptive* – the concern is to provide a word-picture of the setting, people, actions, and conversations observed. The other is *reflective* – the part that captures more of the observer's frame of mind, ideas, and concerns" (p. 121). Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) additionally acknowledge this distinction of field note types. This particular breakdown of information recorded during each observation session enabled a more systematic process for coding and pattern forming during the data analysis phase, which is described in further detail below. A similar protocol format was used for note taking and recording for each interview. In line with Lofland & Lofland (1995)'s description of intensive interviewing, however, the protocol did not include "a tightly structured set of questions to be asked verbatim as written," but rather "a list of things to be sure to ask about when talking to the person being interviewed" (p. 85). Babbie (2013) echoes this process as characteristic of interviewing in qualitative research, contrasting it from survey interviewing as "based on a set of topics to be discussed in depth rather than based on the use of standardized questions" (p. 317). To reflect the more exploratory nature of this

inquiry, resisting a strict enclosure of questions to be asked and topics to be discussed was more beneficial for a rich and in-depth understanding of the participants and their interactions, by allowing them to expand on topics of particular interest or direct the conversations in ways that differ from what I as an interviewer may have preconceived. A sample of both the observation and interview protocols are included below as Appendix A & B.

After about two months, when deemed appropriate in cooperation with the group coordinator, I began interviewing the program participants and staff during or after the sessions. Considering the relatively young ages of some of the program participants, interviews lasted between 15 and 30 minutes, depending on the age level and perceived attention level of the interviewee. Each interviewee was interviewed up to three times over the course of the six months, in order to record variations in social media use and feelings of social support between time periods. 9-12 year olds were interviewed for closer to 15 minutes, 13-15 year olds for between 20-30 minutes, and program staff for about 30 minutes, with exceptions based on the willingness of the interviewee to continue the interview or their desire to end earlier. In total, 54 interviews were collected across the span of just over six months at each location, totaling approximately 480 hours of observation.

4.3.3.1. Open Coding

Strauss & Corbin (1990) define open coding as "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (p. 63). They emphasize the importance of constantly asking questions about the phenomena being observed in order to successfully facilitate this process. Open coding involves separating data into distinct concepts, dimensions, and properties by first labeling categories through questions asked about

phenomena. The authors stress that though this process may start with more specifically descriptive note taking, the labeling of categories should result in more conceptual words and phrases. In the context of this dissertation, certain categories I observed each day during my observations included information passing, monitoring, information sharing, and ignoring, among others. After several categories were established, the properties and dimensions of each were then assessed by sub-categories such as intensity, extent, duration, or manner in order to further create a map of the phenomena being observed. Strauss & Corbin (1990) suggest several different ways for physically carrying out the process of open coding, including line-by-line, sentence or phrase, or entire document analysis. They suggest line-by-line analysis as a helpful approach for the outset of a study considering its generative nature, so this study used line-by-line open coding to establish categories and concepts.

4.3.3.2. Axial Coding

Axial coding builds on open coding through the continued assessment of categories, this time through the assessment of relationships between categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This particular aspect of constant comparative method emphasizes the action/interactional portion of the method through the revelation of causal conditions, consequences, and context. In the case of the category of information sharing discussed in the preceding section, a causal condition included a new program activity beginning, or a phone notification among others. The properties of that causal condition included the presence of a certain sensation around the condition, a certain number of times the condition has taken place, or the condition being directed by a certain person in the room. This style of analysis enabled further formation of sub-categories of information sharing. Strauss and Corbin (1990) both stress that this process requires consistent fluid shifting between inductive and deductive reasoning. The process for recording axial codes

for this study was logic diagrams, which aided in articulating observed relationships, properties, and dimensional ranges over the course of each observation period (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). With both open and axial coding, the categories, sub-categories, dimensions, properties, and causal conditions heavily depended on the real-time interpretation of the observed phenomena and interview review, and came into much clearer focus during repeated sessions.

4.4. Key Concepts and Conceptualizations

Identifying key concepts has been identified as an essential part of the scientific fieldwork process, especially as a first component of coding and a precursor to hypothesis formation (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Key concepts that are central to this dissertation are social media use, participation in the Boys & Girls Clubs youth development program, social support, and successful assimilation into adulthood. To review the conceptualizations provided in the literature review section of this paper, social media is defined as a collection of social networking sites, or web applications that include the creation of personal shareable profiles and connections with other users, social support is information that enables an individual to feel that they are cared for, loved, esteemed, valued, and belong to a network of communication and mutual obligation, and successful assimilation into adulthood is defined as completing mandatory schooling, becoming financially stable through the acquisition of a stable occupation, avoiding legal conflict and incarceration, and other related elements associated with good citizenship.

Based on these initial conceptualizations, a more detailed definition of these concepts is offered to further establish the conceptualization. These concepts also represent areas that were present and subsequently categorized in observation and interview sessions. As many of these

are “borrowed concepts,” as Strauss and Corbin (1990) refer to them, it is imperative to heed their warning of using concepts from literature carefully and with purposeful precision around their meanings. While findings in this study add to these meanings to some extent, they were used as a base level conceptualization for the purposes of a clear and compact framing for beginning the fieldwork. Participation in the Boys & Girls Clubs youth development program is defined through the inclusion of informants’ in the list of Boys & Girls Clubs attendees, confirming that they attend the after-school program. Participants are considered those who attend at least three out of the three times the program is offered per week, to ensure adequate exposure to and assimilation into the social dynamic of the Santa Monica and Lafayette groups. Next, as noted in the literature review, for the purposes of this study social media is identified as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok, and Instagram, and social media use is defined based on the frequency of use the participants report using each of the platforms. This only identifies frequency of use; varying styles and types of use were reported in interviews, for example for relieving stress, for chatting with friends about serious topics, for chatting with friends about non-serious topics, for sharing images, etc.

Social support is defined in terms of categories of closeness, where participants report during their interviews the degree to which they perceive social support from various family members, friends, and other caretakers on and offline. The categories that arise around the concepts of closeness and social support inform the parameters for subsequent interview questions, where the questions asked relate to various familial and friendship based contexts. These questions sometimes asked about particular general scenarios that could happen with friends and family, or just aimed for an overall expression of support on the part of the interviewee in relation to a particular friend or family member. For example, interviewees

reported on how supported they feel generally by a particular friend or family member, how supported they feel at different times of the day or in different locations, or how supported they feel or would feel if any number of hypothetical scenarios were to occur. To appropriately investigate the more complex intricacies of social support, categories based on various aspects of social support such as feelings of affection and belonging were also referred to in interview sessions. Lastly, successful assimilation into adulthood heavily connects to previous literatures' assessment of social support as a key element in successful adulthood assimilation, since a definitive assessment of the latter is impossible with the conductance of a longitudinal study with the participants. This conceptualization works under the presumption that establishing strong networks of social support will serve as essential stepping stones and necessary groundwork for overcoming associated at-risk adversities, as informed by previous bodies of research that suggest this.

4.5. Advantages and Limitations of Proposed Research Design

As Babbie (2013) describes, as a qualitative field research method, this study fares relatively well in terms of validity, but does not hold up in reliability quite as well, which is addressed in the discussion section of this dissertation. In terms of internal validity, or having the study accurately measure feelings of social support and frequency and types of social media use, the ethnographic method employed provides relatively accurate measures. This is in part due to the naturalistic setting of the study, where it has been shown that research subjects are more candid and honest in relaying their experiences or acting as they normally would especially in comparison to other experimental or quasi-experimental studies, where subjects may feel overly aware of the fact that they are being studied (Babbie, 2013). However, conducting face-to-face

interviews poses a slight limitation to internal validity despite its strengths, due to the possibility of interviewees trying to answer questions the way they think the interviewer would like them to answer. This limitation was ideally counter-balanced through the participant observation methods as well as the fact that I was an immersed participant researcher rather than an outside observer.

External validity and reliability are more difficult to sustain using this method, considering the small and specific sample and the personal nature of qualitative field research (Babbie, 2013). Though the descriptions provided of the social lives of the Santa Monica and Lafayette Boys & Girls Clubs Los Angeles Youth Development Program participants are fairly accurate, the patterns observed in this group of youth participants cannot be easily generalized to the wider population of at-risk youth, though as intervention model produced from this work may serve as a potential example to be implemented in other Boys & Girls Clubs groups. Working with two Boys & Girls Clubs communities rather than one also helps expand the sample size and to some extent the generalizability while still ensuring an in-depth enough period of interaction with the participants. Future extensions of this work that include the same pattern of participant observation and intensive interviewing with Boys & Girls Clubs groups across the country as well as other similar youth support service organizations will aid in bolstering the external validity of the study through a larger sample size.

An additional factor of external validity is the U.S. centric nature of this study. Though some of the literature reviewed here tries to draw from a few non-US contexts for breadth of perspective, the overall focus of the proposed dissertation is on U.S. youth particularly to bound the scope of research within the already dissimilar proposed research sites, and also to avoid complications of global comparative analysis due to non-U.S. cultural norms that may affect

observations. Similar studies in non-U.S. contexts represent a promising path for future research agendas. Reliability is more difficult to try and improve, since the personal nature of field notes makes the method and subsequent interpretations fairly difficult to replicate (Babbie, 2013). Ultimately, the weakness in reliability is a trade off for strong internal validity and the ability for future participatory action and concrete intervention within this specific community of Boys & Girls Clubs youth.

4.6. Ethical Concerns & Human Subjects Protection

As Lofland and Lofland (1995) highlight, some specific ethical concerns regarding this type of qualitative field research involve talking to people when they might not know their words are being recorded, being in a setting or situation but not committing wholeheartedly to it, being strategic with one's relations, taking or not taking sides, or forming allies, to name a few. Each of these relates to the sensitive situation subjects are put in for researchers to conduct such personal and long-term research. This study in particular requires even greater sensitivity to ethical concerns and research participant sensitivities, due to the fact that most of the primary subjects will be minors, and many will be minority youth or marginalized in other ways related to socioeconomic status. To address these concerns and to ensure that I appropriately uphold the IRB principals of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice ("The Belmont Report," 2010), I ensured throughout my stay that I communicated my role as a researcher as clearly as was deemed appropriate so as not to mislead anyone, I participated fully in all activities to the best of my ability to bring positive outcomes and aid through my presence, and I continually assured that all Boys & Girls Clubs participants, staff, and guardians knew that interaction with me in any way was completely and wholly voluntary. Additionally, I was continually aware of the

various sensitivities the population I was working with might be privy to, and to the best of my ability tried to cater to their needs and wishes throughout my time as a researcher with them to ensure a continual atmosphere of respect and acknowledgement. I also completely avoided engaging in any practices of deception throughout the research process. Though I unfortunately cannot assure anonymity due to the nature of my relationship to the work and participants, I am actively ensuring the confidentiality of any information collected about participants, through the changing of names and personally identifiable information wherever appropriate, and by not sharing any individuals' personal information with any other individuals (Babbie, 2013).

5. Data Analysis and Assessment

In line with Lofland and Lofland (1995), as a qualitative field study my analysis was conceived as "an emergent product of a process of gradual induction" through a "derivative ordering of the data" (p.181). This method of induction primarily took the form of the constant comparative method as discussed in the constant comparative method portion of the methodology section. Part of the data analysis of these field notes included being open to patterns that arose over the course of reading them over and inducing certain themes and general observations to eventually form a greater theory or set of theories that fit the patterns observed. Strauss and Glaser (1967) describe the process of comparative method as an option that lies in between other qualitative data analysis approaches of either coding all of the collected data first and then assessing patterns that form from it, or foregoing the act of coding in favor of formulating theory through the consultation of memos and jotted notes. The authors pose the comparative method as a way of potentially combining these two approaches through frequent

comparison of the field notes and theoretical analysis in order to systematically identify emergent properties and patterns from observation data. As the authors explain,

"The purpose of the constant comparative method of joint coding and analysis is to generate theory more systematically than allowed by the second approach, *by using explicit coding and analytic procedures*…This method of comparative analysis is to be used jointly with theoretical sampling, whether for collective new data or on previously collected or compiled qualitative data" (p. 102).

The theoretical conceptualizing of the key topics of at-risk, social support, and social media central to this study played an important role in this process. They offered a basis for the types of theory needed for comparison against the field notes collected, and were often supplemented or surpassed by emergent new theories found through this data analysis process. It is also worth noting that the effect of the research on participants will also be considered. Besides the traditional scholarly assessment of validity and reliability, another measure of success being considered is how helpful, useful, or informative the research subjects judge the findings to be, in terms of how they might affect or alter their lives in the future.

5.1. Themes of Social Support and Social Media Use at the Boys and Girls Clubs

The next two chapters will provide in depth evidence for the role of social media and after-school communities like the Lyn Treece and Santa Monica Boys and Girls Clubs as significant vessels for social support in members' lives, through a detailed look at a number of examples of various themes related to this phenomena. This section provides an initial overview

of these four major themes, which were used as key concepts for coding and organizing the various communications, interactions, and other instances observed and discussed at each site. As mentioned earlier in this section, constant comparative method was employed as the overarching method for data analysis, which involved moving frequently between direct field notes and the construction and development of broader theories that help organize the notes. Open and axial coding were core pieces of this process, where open codes were developed to categorize various phenomena observed each day, and axial codes emerged to describe the layered relationships between phenomena and describe overall takeaways from the community observed.

The four major themes described below served as the overarching axial codes for data analysis. They build on the initial open codes constructed throughout the observation period and describe the relationships and significance of the phenomena observed. Open codes that were initially incorporated into the coding data analysis process were at-risk behavior, general technology use, instances of social support, instances of conflict, and general notable interactions. At-risk behavior builds on the definitions discussed in the literature relating to elevated presence of violent tendencies or violence, lack of consistent access to food or in tact clothing, and other attributes indicating a high-risk environment. Instances of social support describes displays of affection, motivation and extending help across individuals and groups to relay feelings of love and community belonging. Technology use indicates any instance of phone, tablet, computer, or digital device usage. Conflict refers to periods of fighting both verbally and physically across individuals and groups. General notable interactions are other instances noted in observations or interviews that were interesting and/or noteworthy but did not seem to fit into a pattern or relate to issues of social support and social media use, i.e. out of the

study's scope. These codes were administered through processes of line-by-line analysis of observation and interview documents, and axial codes were developed through constant comparative method and logic diagramming conducted throughout the observation period. Both groups of codes were heavily influenced by the assessment of core concepts conducted as part of the literature as discussed earlier in the research design sections. The final four themes presented and discussed throughout this section are a final result of this layered and detailed coding process. The codes and their progression are outlined in Figure 1.

Data Analysis Coding Schema

Open Codes	**Axial Codes**	**Final Themes**
Technology Use • Includes all phone, tablet, and computer use	• Emotional management • Technology-based friendship building • Setting communal boundaries using technology	Social media emotional management
At-risk behavior • Includes instances of violence, hunger or other evidence of poorer quality of life	• Rule negotiation • Rule applying • Punishment development	Negotiated allowances
Conflict • Includes all occurrences of conflict and conflict resolution		
Social support • Includes all displays of affection, motivation, and aid	• Social support across social media and BGC • Relationship management using technology • Communal boundary setting	• Constructed combined social support • Unique mentorships
General notable interactions • Includes all observed phenomena that do not		

fall into the previous
categories

Figure 1. Data analysis coding schema

Theme 1, Constructed Combined Social Support: A first key emergent theme in the pattern of social media use and the construction of social support among marginalized youth attending after-school youth development programs is the blending of such programs and use of social networking sites to form a blended source of social support. Many of the youth interviewed noted that both the Boys and Girls Club and their personal social media platforms aid in filling different gaps in communication among friend groups. The Club serves as a consistent space for uninterrupted face-to-face bonding with close friends, and this process continues seamlessly after leaving the Club and during school breaks through the use of social networking sites such as TikTok and Snapchat to continue conversation and information sharing digitally. Youth members describe this cycle of communication as an important part of the friendship maintenance process.

Theme 2, Negotiated Allowances: A second key emergent theme is the concept of allowances, both technologically and otherwise, and how it connects to the youths' perceived maturity, readiness for adulthood, and sense of social support. Youth consistently reported parental agreements that required them to reach a certain age before being allowed to create a social media account, with some even reporting an agreed upon surveillance of social media posts. This aligns with the clear delineation between 'big' and 'little' kids observed in interactions between staff and youth members, which dictates expectations around proper conversations, rule following, and general autonomy while at the BGC. Younger youth expressed interest and

enthusiasm regarding reaching the appropriate age to crossover into the territory of more mature treatment both at the Club and online. Many of the rule exchanges in this category relate to a top down staff or parental figure display of social support for youth members.

Theme 3, Social Media Emotional Management: A third preliminary emergent theme relates back to the unbroken stream of communication social media provides to ensure consistent opportunities for relationship maintenance when not at school or at the BGC. Observations revealed multiple shifts in individual moods and perceptions of friendships from week to week or even within individual days, and youth reported in interviews that such shifts are revealed subtly and actively addressed through conversations and behaviors on social networking platforms. This affordance becomes particularly significant to certain members of to this group due to their reported more volatile home lives. Through these practices, youth members alleviate emotional concerns by using social media to seek social support.

Theme 4, Unique Mentorships: A final preliminary emergent theme expands on the types of relationships being consistently maintained as described in theme three. This is one of the more unique findings of this study; the observation of a unique type of relationship sustained through the alignment of social and digital media use with participation in the BGC. Many of the youth observed and interviewed reported relationships with other club members older or younger than them to be among the most important in their social circles currently, despite the inability to see them consistently outside of the club. The age gaps in these friendships ranged from one to four years, and were often sustained during times outside of the club through social media chatting

features on Snapchat, TikTok, or Instagram. These relationships are significant for this particular group of youth in that they break the boundaries of traditional same school age friendships, and offer unique opportunities for mentorship that can alleviate the lack of traditional role models. The flattening effect of these relationships in relation to age barriers imposed on friendships also motivates maturity and social support-based acceptance that ideally acts as an important progression towards adult friendships and other social activities.

6. A Note on the Use of At-Risk & a Structural Approach

I acknowledge as part of this work that there are alternatives to the use of the term at-risk, and that there are significant connotations associated with the concept of youth being at-risk. Establishing an awareness of the history of the term and the way its use can affect the framing of the youth involved in this project is especially significant considering the aim of this dissertation of taking a systemic approach to analyzing social support and social media use among youth development program members. However, after identifying alternatives to the use of at-risk and considering them in relation to the structural elements of the Boys and Girls Club, the term at-risk still emerged as the most appropriate term to utilize in this context. The term is still one of the most widely used across the organization at large as well as within its specific branches. It is more widely used than many of the synonyms that have come to replace it over time, including terms like marginalized, minoritized, and underserved, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Part of taking the systemic approach that Washington et al. calls for includes examining the inner workings of the social support and social media use processes from the community outward, rather than a top down approach of examining these two field sites as compared to

other communities perceived as having fewer deficits. In remaining consistent with this approach, part of the process of considering words other than at-risk that might describe these communities involved analyzing the observation and interview data for ways in which the youth described themselves. Ultimately, there was no mention of any categorical term similar to at-risk generated by the youth. Though they expressed awareness of difficult family situations and occasionally acknowledged challenging financial occurrences, they generally did not compare their situations to one another's, and thus did not have a word that or phrasing they would use that reflected their socio-economic status and associated challenges.

Based on this finding, another option I considered was to cut the reference to at-risk, marginalized, or another such term altogether, because the youth do not seem to factor that in significantly to their identities and their friendship and communication needs more broadly. However, the challenges around various risk factors in their lives still remain, and arguably need to be articulated and acknowledged. Thus, the terminology that most heavily influenced their programming and their day-to-day activities at the Boys and Girls Club, at-risk, was selected as the most reflective of the way they are perceived and the motivations behind the programming and resources they are given.

The term at-risk began to be critiqued nearly as early as it was introduced, with educational psychologist Anthony Pelligrini articulating the potential implications that could be associated with the term (Pelligrini, 1991). Specifically, he argued that using at-risk could imply that there was something wrong with the child, their environment, or their caretakers, which could unfairly place blame on individuals who in many cases had little to no control over their particular circumstances. The critiques have continued into recent years, with Lizbet Simmons (2017) claiming that the implications and uses of at-risk over the last decades have introduced an

"at-risk youth industry," where low-income and minority youth are channeled into particularly strict correctional environments throughout schooling and beyond. Simmons argues that the industry embeds a sense of distrust, distinct punitive measures, and intense scrutiny against these groups of youth, under the guise of preventing future crime and other unlawful activity. Though these potential consequences of the term at-risk are recognized and acknowledged, this dissertation still seeks to grapple with the ongoing presence and use of the term as a substantial one to the Boys and Girls Club and general youth development program missions. Additionally, as shown in the findings, the punitive and suspicion-based disciplinary action and social control that Lizbet describes is not particularly present at either club to varying degrees, providing the possibility for a separation of the consequences of at-risk framing from usage of the term especially outside of traditional school contexts. Pelligrini acknowledges the possibility of using the term without an attachment of its potential implications. By drawing on the term's epidemiological origins, he describes that it was initially intentioned to describe and call attention to the potential risk factors present in a child or adolescent's life. He argues that how the term is used to justify various behaviors and how it exists functionally within policies and organizations is where the issue lies and the detrimental implications begin. The use of at-risk here acknowledges the potential detrimental implications but seeks to keep a distinct distance from them, instead using them as a way of calling attention to the risk factors which the youth do not verbalize, but are articulated in certain ways throughout youth development organizational language and policy.

In examining other potential alternative terms, it also became clear that many were too specific or too broad for the processes being examined and the approach this dissertation is taking. Underserved as a term widely varies, but tends to refer to specific neighborhoods with

low-to-moderate incomes and high rates of minority families (Quercia et al., 2000). This term focuses on the specific status of the youth as low-income and minority youth similar to the term at-risk, but lacks the specificity in defining what the substantial consequence of belonging to these groups is. Marginalized youth are defined as "poor and working class youth and/or youth of color, who experience socioeconomic or racialized forms of domination and marginalization" (Garcia Coll et al., 1996; Young, 1990). This term begins better encapsulates consequences, but still focuses on categorizing youth in relation to their low-income and minority status and in turn focuses on the negative outcomes of domination and marginalization that arise from it. Benitez's (2010) use of minoritized finally calls into question the process of assigning such categories and the effects of that labeling as crucial to identity making. It also importantly includes as part of the definition the acknowledgement of minorities as a social construction.

However, though this term describes the process of categorization and labeling very well, it does not reflect the process of intervention, policy, and organization-based outcomes that are based on predictions associated with the minoritization process. Though at-risk can and has been used detrimentally with biased prediction, when understood and used with its original intent it encapsulates the most focused articulation of the importance of understanding the challenges facing low-income and minority communities. As demonstrated in the differences in application of the term at the two sites, the use of at-risk as used by the Boys and Girls Club can be interpreted in a variety of ways, and not all are associated with strict social control or biased prediction.

When searching through the Boys and Girls Clubs of America website, at-risk returns the largest number of results, varying in content produced by the club administrators themselves as well as content included from partners, specific branches, and staff bloggers. At-risk is the only

term associated with a specific official organization endorsed integrated web-page, titled 'Kids At Risk', which describes a variety of general statistics that validate the need for after-school youth development programs, including violent crime increases after school hours, lack of access to summer learning programs among low-income youth, and barriers to high school graduation. The subtitle of this page, "America's Youth in Crisis," unfortunately plays into the familiar narrative around youth moral panic and the rhetoric of concern that Simmons reveals to be a legitimization of constant punitive disciplinary action. The other high profile page including the term at-risk is for a partnership with Survey Monkey, which "help[s] increase the opportunity for at-risk youth to have a great future through their participation at Boys & Girls Clubs." There is a certain tension between the references of at-risk here and their possible implications versus the mission statement and organizational vision which pledges to "enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential" and "assures success is within reach of every young person" (Boys and Girls Clubs of America, 2018). The simplicity of referring to young people who need it most as opposed to at-risk reflects the room for flexibility and interpretation that specific branches can take when deciding how to carry out the club mission and vision and engage with its members.

Searching underserved returns one page discussing specific hard to reach communities such as Native reservations, military bases, and public housing units, reflecting a specific physical location based understanding of the term, and searching marginalized brings up a blog post by a Boys and Girls Club teen member. On the individual Santa Monica and Lyn Treece sites, there are no returns for marginalized or underserved, but one for at-risk associated with an organizational partner. Minoritized did not appear on any of the sites. Understanding the terminology used by these organizations is key to understanding how the youth are perceived

which in turn affects how they perceive themselves. The relationships youth form with each other but also importantly staff at these locations are incredibly strong, and are influenced greatly by the overall framing of purpose and consequences of the club activities and structure. Each location is reflecting the mission and vision of the national BGC organization, and though there is room for interpretation as shown by the lack of specific language in the mission and vision, it is still heavily influenced by the history of at-risk terminology. State funding sources like the funding for snacks at Lyn Treece also use at-risk in their title, as do funding sources for other youth development programs like 4H.

Though the motivations and consequences of the use of the term are mixed throughout the BGC branches, the use here in this dissertation reflects the presence, consequence, and significance of its use while also maintaining a certain distance from and acknowledgement of the detrimental categorization and predictive implications with which it may be associated. This distance is especially and actively informed by an understanding of the historical influences that led to and continue to influence the status of many low-income and minority communities in the US, including the continued processes of racialization, historical disparities in legal treatment based on race, and long-standing governmental policies that resist acknowledging the detrimental effects of such racialization processes and allow the effects to be ongoing (Harris, 1993; Harvey, 2007; Omi & Winant, 2014; Schiller, 199). In service of the structural approach and drawing analysis and overarching themes and conclusions from the community itself, this work acknowledges the potential detrimental influence of the at-risk terminology and framing within the community, despite its embedded-ness and subtle influence especially among youth members' personal perceptions.

CHAPTER 3: Findings Part One: Connecting Social Media and Social Support in Lafayette, Indiana

I think being able to connect with the kids and talk to them even during free time, I think that could be a really good... a really big part. Or even during snack, 'cause they're... they'll tell you about their day. Every day, some kid has a story to tell you. But I guess just the interaction is probably the key part with playing with them... You can learn something from each kid in just the different area that they're in, whether it be them doing homework, they'll talk about something in class they did that made them sad or something. But you learn about them, and you can communicate with them a little bit better. And once you build that bond with a kid, then they'll know that they talked to you about that, and then you guys can talk about more.

- Christian, BGC staff

3.1. Introduction

The clock strikes three o'clock pm on a late April afternoon in Lafayette, Indiana. Spring has arrived, and the sun illuminates the bright blue sky outside, revealing a long stretch of farmland and a flat horizon just beyond the residential area surrounding a wide brick building with a colorful blue and white sign in the front. Directly adjacent to the building on either side are a row of varied two story houses, a few with front porches where residents frequently sit to enjoy the quiet afternoon. At the end of the street across the road is a small cemetery, adding to the relative gentleness of the area. Directly across from the building is a moderately sized grassy field leading up to a small community garden, complete with a "gaga" pit in the corner, an octagon shaped wooden pit for playing the popular kids game gaga ball. A twenty-passenger bus pulls up to the building as the clock strikes, and about twenty kids pour out, hustling up the stairs to line up outside the door.

A staff member in a bright blue Boys and Girls Club shirt with the organization's handshake logo on it opens the set of double doors at the top of the stairs for them, and greets them each with a smile, a hello, or often a high five. As they bustle inside, two other staff

members sitting at the front desk remind them to carefully walk in a circular fashion around the back of the set of tables to line up along the other wall, where they wait for their names to be called. As each name is called, they are sent off to the gym to set their backpacks down and line back up to get a snack in the small kitchen area in between the art room and the front desk. In those few minutes, the once quiet room slowly fills with the sounds of children's laughter and chatter, and continues as more groups are dropped off by the bus at the front door. The kids talk to each other animatedly as they eat their snack of string cheese and fruit juice boxes regardless of whom they are sitting next to.

They are assigned a seat in whatever order they arrive for snack, so their sitting partners could change based on the day. Conversations range from things that happened at school, to upcoming field trips, to what they might want to play in the game room later. Many of the kids chat with the staff as they clean up after them and set up new snack spots for the next round of kids, asking what they are going to play later in Triple Play or a range of other random questions about their lives. Occasionally, two children pass by the kitchen area from the gym on their way to the front to get an ice pack from the refrigerator and take a break from the ongoing Triple Play session in the gym. Typically one kid is actually hurt, while the other is walking up with them to help get ice. They sit together in the homework area, where volunteers work with kids one on one with their homework for the day. As they finish, each kid excitedly stuffs their papers into their backpacks and scampers off to the gym.

In the gym, where the first game of Triple Play, Capture The Flag, is underway, a staff member yells out "Go!" and the kids run and squeal frantically as they try to not get tagged. When they do, they take a seat on the bleachers and chat with other friends until another round is started. After two more games, the gym staff leader yells, "Bleachers!" and they all run to sit

down as it is time to transition to free time. During free time, the bleachers are still filled with varied groups of two to five kids, but they are scattered and engaged in different activities. Some are chatting and drawing, some scroll through their phones together, some are playing iPad games, and others are talking with the staff that are supervising the rest of the gym. In the game room, members gather in different corners of the room playing foosball, watching Mario kart competitions, or playing cards or Jenga at the table. One staff member converses earnestly with a young boy at the table over a game of cards on how to stay more focused at school when the boy starts a conversation about what he wants to be when he grows up. The boy listens intently before responding.

Outside the gym in the art room, kids are hard at work on tye dye shirts to take home the next day. Throughout the day, the front desk staff sends a message to the staff in various rooms over a set of walkie talkies when parents arrive to take a kid home. Almost every kid at the club has a nickname, so often that nickname is what staff yell out when announcing it is time for someone to go home. When their name is called, the kid runs out from whatever corner of the club they are playing in, exchanges goodbyes and perhaps hugs with their favorite staff, and goes over to meet their parent. As they pass by the front desk to head back through the double doors, the staff at the front desk wave goodbye until tomorrow. For those walking home, this happens only after the staff confirm that the kids are walking straight home, and often comes accompanied with a snack to take home for certain members. As six o'clock draws near, the younger kids line up to leave, and the regular group of teens arrive on their own to play basketball with two staff members. Other teens take the place of the younger kids on the bleachers to chat with other staff and watch the games unfold.

The above description is a typical day at the Lyn Treece Boys and Girls Club, often fondly referred to simply as, the Club. Each corner of the club fills with varied energy throughout different points of the day, often filled with laughter and chatter, but sometimes intermittent tears too. On just my first day, I helped a young 1st grader with her homework, received hugs and hair pats from a gaggle of young girls, consoled a crying 4th grader, and learned a lot about a whole batch of gym games I had never played before. That first day too, I saw a wide variety of phone and technology use, fatefully capped by a 25-minute conversation with a young middle schooler about the drama, the fun, and the in betweens of her social life interwoven with Snaps, TikTok videos, and Insta shots. Over a period of approximately six months I followed the ups and downs and ins and outs of the on average 60-100 6-18 year old youth who attend the club each day. I found that each room had a purpose, each child had a nickname, and each staff member had their quirks. I saw that while these kids are like many others in their use of phones, tablets, and tech, there are specific communal aspects of their use and practices of relationship and friendship maintenance that are unique to their needs and their use of such devices within the context of the Club. In the same way that the Club was a place of love and support, so were their online spaces, but the ways in which the two intersect make all the difference in how positively or beneficially they influence their lives.

Through a series of over 25 interviews with youth and staff and six months of three – four hour daily observations, a series of unique relationships unfolded that were often maintained, simplified, and simultaneously made complex through use of the digital and social media. The role of after-school communities like the Lyn Treece Boys and Girls Club and digital and social media as vessels for social support are apparent, and the specifics of how each space fulfills this role is important for understanding how to continue to design and promote these

resources most beneficially to the youth that use them. This chapter aims to provide a body of evidence for both of these phenomena: the presence of both social media and the Boys and Girls Club as significant vessels for social support, and how they both as individual and intersected spaces achieve that goal. The rest of this chapter will include a more detailed description of the research site and its significance, a quick review of the major research themes related to social support and social media use gleaned from data analysis, and a breakdown of each of these themes with evidence of them at work at the research site, before concluding with final remarks on the overall significance of these observations and findings.

3.2. The N 10th Street Lyn Treece Boys and Girls Club

The 10th Street Lyn Treece Boys and Girls Club is a Lafayette, IN location of the Boys and Girls Club of America and one of two club sites in the small city of about 70,000. Though I toured both the Beck Lane and N 10th Street locations, I volunteered at the latter, which was home to a large indoor basketball court and gym with a game room attached to the back end, a teen room, a movie space, a main homework room, four staff offices, a salon room, an art room, and a kitchen and eating space. The site was founded in 1972, but has undergone significant transformations since then, especially after a site-wide change in management and an influx in community donations within the last five years. Successful fundraising has yielded the teen room, equipped with various video game consoles, a ping-pong table, several beanbag chairs, a small side room featuring a hairdresser sink and counter and a nail salon desk and kit, and a brand new front door sign, among other improvements.

The Club serves about 60 – 100 kids from Monday to Friday from 3 pm – 8 pm, with daily activities and duties administered primarily by two administrative staff and three youth

development staff. From 3-6 pm all youth between 6 and 18 years of age are welcome, but at 6 pm all youth 4th grade and under must leave, with the remaining hours reserved for middle and high school aged members. The demographic is varied but majority Caucasian, with 52% of members in this category, 17% Black or African American, 17% Latino/a, and 1% Asian. Most members are of a low-income bracket for the area, with 83% qualifying for free or reduced school lunch programs. The group is slightly skewed toward girls, with a 54% to 46% girl to boy balance. 7% of members are age 6, 28% are ages 7-8, 39% are ages 9-11, 20% are ages 12-14, and 6% are ages 15-18, making the 3rd to 5th grade bracket the largest. The staff is entirely Caucasian, but a significant mix of gender, with three men and three women present in the primary daily staff. Two of the development staff members are Purdue students, though all of them work the full number of hours available each week. The administrative staff are both full-time employees, and are Purdue graduates as well.

The Club follows a fairly consistent routine each day, with the first batch of K-4th grade members arriving shortly before 3 pm, the rest of the elementary school kids arriving shortly after 3 pm, and the middle school kids arriving around 3:30 pm. After arriving, members receive a snack, which is administered by staff and funded by a statewide program. Daily snacks vary, ranging from hard-boiled eggs, to string cheese, to graham crackers. Volunteers or staff help those arriving with homework from 3 – 3:30 pm or whenever help is no longer needed, while those without homework engage in a program called Triple Play, consisting of three different types of 30 minutes of physical activity. Following Triple Play, members are given the option to participate in tournaments run by staff and occasionally volunteers, an art project, or just enjoy free time engaging in their choice of hanging out on the bleachers, playing in the gym, or playing board games in the game room with friends.

Phone and tablet/computer use is allowed only during this period or if it is needed for homework. Wifi passwords are only given for homework related phone and tablet use. On Tuesdays and Thursdays the staff run a "Survivor" where members engage in a challenge of the day, which could range from planking to hula hooping, and the last one remaining is deemed the winner. The winner of these challenges and all tournaments for the week are awarded certificates and prizes on "Fabulous Friday", which is the prize ceremony that occurs every Friday before free time. Many of these extra events like Survivor and Fabulous Friday were developed by administrative staff. Following Fabulous Friday events, the schedule slightly changes on this day where only the gym and the movie room are open, and members have the option to choose between watching a staff selected movie or playing dodgeball.

3.3. Themes of Social Support and Social Media Use at Lyn Treece

The next several sections of this chapter will provide in depth evidence for the role of social media and after-school communities like the Lyn Treece Boys and Girls Club as significant vessels for social support in members' lives, through a detailed look at a number of examples of various themes related to this phenomena. As described in the data analysis section, the four emergent themes that comprise the major sections of this chapter are constructed combined social support, negotiated allowances, social media emotional management, and unique mentorships. These themes were developed through the processes of axial and open coding of the interview and observation data, and demonstrated consistent patterns and major takeaways around social media use and social support building at Lyn Treece.

To help provide a foundation for understanding the landscape of devices and social media platforms used among this group, Figures 2 and 3 depict the general factors that comprise the

technological infrastructure of club members' social interactions and the primary social media platforms they use, respectively. These devices and platforms will be referenced throughout this chapter and the following one, and provide a preliminary overview of how technology ownership, use, and access for club members intersects with their socio-economic backgrounds, age brackets, daily schedules, and more. Developing a deeper understanding of this infrastructure and the various points of analysis that can be applied to this structure are also points of interest for future work.

Technological Infrastructure at the BGC

Type of Technology	**Access Source**	**Condition**	**Funding Source**	**Key Uses**	**Frequency of Use** (Very low, low, medium, high, very high)
Mobile smart phone	• Parents • Siblings • Other family members (ex, grandparents, aunts/uncles)	• New • Used	• Family finances (current or past)	• Social media • Camera Texting • Games	Very High
Tablet (personal)	• Parents • Siblings • Other family members	• New • Used	• Family finances (current or past)	• Social media • Camera Texting • Games	Very Low
Tablet (school provided)	• School	• New • Used	• School funds	• Homework • Games	Medium
iPod	• Parents • Siblings • Other family members	• New • Used	• Family finances (current or past)	• Social media • Games	Low

Figure 2. Technological Infrastructure at the BGC

Social Media Sites Used

Name	Preferred Access Device	Website	Frequency of Use (Very low, low, medium, high, very high)
Facebook	Mobile, Tablet	https://www.facebook.com/	Very Low
Instagram	Mobile	https://www.instagram.com/?hl=en	High
TikTok	Mobile	https://www.tiktok.com/en/	Very High
Snapchat	Mobile	https://www.snapchat.com/	High
YouTube	Mobile, Tablet	https://www.youtube.com/	High

Figure 3. Social Media Sites Used

3.4. Constructed Combined Social Support

I mean, as a staff, we wear many different hats. And it takes a lot of work to get money through the door, and that's a lot of work and that's important, but I still think it all comes down to being here for the kids.

-Kristina, BGC staff

Everyone that I have on my thing [Snapchat] know Boys and Girls Club…me and Rowan are friends on Musical.ly and so is Jessica, so we usually text on Musical.ly and I have their phone numbers, and we talk here at Boys and Girls Club.

- Lily, BGC member

On any given day at the club, the bleachers are a site of frequent social interaction. They serve as a hang out spot during free time, a place of silence while being reprimanded or given time outs, a place of transition in between games and daily routine activities, and a place of observation and participation on Fabulous Friday. This space too, is where much of the individual and group use of technology occurs, and is thus the space where technology use and opportunities for social support most commonly overlap. All of the technology use that occurs on the bleachers is using personal devices, whether used by one individual or shared among many.

Though there are five desktop computers located in the front main homework room, they are never used recreationally, and quite rarely used for other purposes. This is due to a combination of factors: time spent in the homework room is almost exclusively spent doing homework on personal tablets and worksheets distributed by the school, leaving no need for use of club computers; the geographical setting of the computers as distinctly separate from the gym and art room where most daily activities take place promotes a lack of awareness of the possibility of their use during free time; many of the youth who opt for technology use during free time already own personal devices that they prefer, or have access to personal devices through friends. The computers are left off, and many older club members choose to sit at the chairs in front of the unused computers to engage in private reading assigned for school. Since the computers are at three long tables facing the walls on the left and right side of the homework room, they are more private spaces where they are less likely to be disturbed in comparison to the circular shared tables with attached group benches used primarily for members who require volunteer or staff help with their work. The computers were finally incorporated into daily club use through the implementation of the technology education program, which I founded and led for several weeks toward the end of my stay at the club.

Thus personal technology use, including social media use, occurs almost primarily on the bleachers during free time, with occasional use also occurring in the game room during free time. In observing the youth use of technology in these spaces, it became apparent that devices and social media spaces within them were used both for individual social support through connection to individuals outside of the club, but also for communal social support through group use of the devices. The latter was significantly more frequently observed and became a substantial occurrence throughout the observation period, which motivates the categorization of these

occurrences as constructed combined social support. Through these instances both the club space and the social environment it provided to members as well as club members' own technology and social media spaces were used in tandem to create sources of social support.

3.4.1. Communal Technology Media Use & Navigating Structure

Group gatherings on the bleachers were an almost daily occurrence, with groups of two or more members sitting around one to two devices on the top row of the bleachers, giggling, gasping, or just quietly swiping together. The content viewed varied depending on the group, with younger members between seven and nine often playing games on tablets or phones together, and older members between nine and thirteen often viewing YouTube videos, swiping through Instagram, or taking photos and videos on Musical.ly or Snapchat, in addition to playing games already stored on their devices. There were 14 group digital media use instances observed over the six months at Lyn Treece out of 22 instances in the constructed combined social support category, meaning 63% of all social support instances that utilized digital or social media were in a group setting. Out of 38 recorded instances of group technology use more generally, the 14 social support based group uses comprised 36%. Instances categorized as social support based were ones with explicit displays of affection, trust, and expressions of communal belonging, as opposed to just the implicit friendship that general technology use together indicates.

Many of the clearest displays of the connection between social media use and social connection were observed over the summer session at the club. During free time one afternoon about a week into summer session, I watched friends 10-year-old Lily and 12-year-old Rachel take several videos on TikTok together, with other members of the friend group joining in and out throughout the process. The display of affection toward each other was clear, with the two

girls making funny faces at each other and jumping on one another's backs to get particularly active shots. This display came in stark contrast to Lily's displeasure with the club just earlier that day during a planned group activity, where she complained that she did not want to be there and did not like it at the club, but had to stay because her parents worked and she could not be home alone. During this time club members were being rotated through different stations around the building in groups for planned activities, going from physical activity in the gym to an art project in the art room to a racetrack building competition in the front room, which is where Lily was complaining. At this point phone use was not allowed, but perhaps the bigger issue was that she was assigned a group for the activity to promote mentorship between older and younger club members, and so she was not paired with her exact friend group. Though she settled into the project eventually, she was much more agreeable later on during free time, when she had the autonomy to engage in carefree activities with Rachel.

Issues with regimented schedules may be a larger issue for Lily, who at the time of her interview was grounded and was only allowed to use her phone when she "changed her attitude." This self-admittance to an attitude problem was reflected in numerous clashes with staff during planned activities, but also made the softer side of her that emerged in freeform social settings all the more revealing. While we had a rather unpleasant discussion about her not wanting to be at the club earlier that afternoon, after spending time with Rachel playing on TikTok in the gym, Lily voluntarily came into the game room to show me some of their videos. I observed her and her friends call staff over to watch them perform self-choreographed dances at various points over the summer as well, exposing a tension between resisting the daily structure that staff facilitate, and seeking the attention and affection they provide. Though free time with friends may be the most important overall component of social support for club members, the structure

surrounding that time still holds some significance to them even when they resist it. In these instances members' social media sites are used as a tool for facilitating communal and social activity on the member friendship level, which then creates a product or topic for sharing with components of the greater club structure, like the staff. Importantly, the parts of this social activity online can be carefully selected and shared with staff if desired, while the rest remains private to just members' friends.

3.4.2. Safety & Protection

The sense of safety and protection the club provides also comes into play in relation to the significance of structure, though it is revealed more explicitly when discussing technology. Lily, who relayed in her interview that she uses her phone primarily for calling family and friends, playing games, and using TikTok and Snapchat, very straightforwardly expressed that her Mom is friends with her on the social media site in order to watch what she posts, and that she accepts this and keeps her account private so that "no one can call her, like a weird guy or something." This sentiment of knowing about the dangers online and accepting parental surveillance as a result was widespread among members interviewed, and further influences the tension many of the them feel between wanting to do things on their own but still accepting the structure in their lives as something necessary for their protection. Though at points social media eases this tension by creating something to share with those creating that structure, it is also used to escape it. Lily revealed that she regularly uses the chat function on Snapchat with other friends from the club to vent about the rules or particular things that she didn't appreciate going on at the club that day. She shared,

"Everyone that I have on my thing [Snapchat] know Boys and Girls Club…Me and Rowan are friends on Musical.ly and so is Jessica, so we usually text on Musical.ly and I have their phone numbers, and we talk here at Boys and Girls Club."

She also has a group chat on TikTok with her two best friends Rachel and Jessica, who are both members of the club. She explains that that these chats serve as spaces to talk about issues she is having without saying them out loud where others can hear her and to help her feel better. These spaces are ones not shared with parents or other authority figures, and so create a layer of social support that is a "just friends" level and is kept private. The importance of this separate and friend only space as a significant attribute of social media is expressed in boyd's (2014) interviewees as well. They describe social media spaces as ones that can help offset a sense of lack of freedom to speak with friends as frequently as desired, which is matched in these instances in club members' enthusiasm about free time and the freedom to use personal digital devices during it.

The connection of laughter to social media use at the club also suggests both spaces representing a safe and supportive environment. The club itself is one relaxed enough for members to laugh freely and frequently in, and is filled with people that are deemed okay to laugh with and in front of by club members. Friends 13 year old Diana and 14 year old Peter were laughing heartily in the corner of the game room one afternoon, with Peter sometimes falling over from laughing so hard as they took Snapchats of themselves throwing cards around and making silly voices. They went unbothered there in that corner, safe to freely express themselves and bond over their videos while also being able to share them with friends outside of the club. Lily and Rachel were laughing throughout their Musical.ly creating, and Riley and Irene sat on the bleachers and laughed as they took selfies with each other using an ipad together a few weeks later. Riley, who has been coming to the club for over a year and also uses Snapchat

and Musicall.ly to continue communication in and out of the club, shared what she thought the club offered in terms of safety for her brother. When asked how she thought the club made a difference in her life, she responded, “Just because it helps my brother. Like he used to be super attached to me... he's not so shy anymore cause he knows this place.” The two often take Snapchats or TikTok together, at the club or at home, using both spaces as areas for expression and growth in friendship.

Despite the worry about isolation often present in the rhetoric of concern regarding youth and adolescent use of social media, club members displayed significant communal social and digital media use that was central to the way they constructed social support at the club. A particularly revealing moment was watching Kelsey and Anna using their own personal phones navigating between games, social media, and taking pictures with each other. Though it was one of the rarer moments observed where each had their own phone rather than sharing one, there were still concrete conversations occurring with each other, with more explicit group activities such as taking pictures or pointing out things on each others’ phones interwoven into personal phone use. Even when they moved between areas of the gym they moved together, regardless of whether they were in conversation or doing something individually on their phone at the time. The sense of support in this scenario comes from each of them knowing that they are going to stick together throughout their time at the club, and have a friend that welcomes them to interact together or do something individually depending on how they are feeling at the time. This mix of interacting via social media but also in person, and further using social media to facilitate in person hangouts, seemed to be an important piece of maintaining social support for the members at the club. When explaining why she liked TikTok the most of her social media apps, Riley answered,

"…because I get to see what they're [my friends] doing and everything. And when they post new photos, where they're at, and what they're doing. And they can make a post to [TikTok] like Riley, call me or something. Riley, who wants to stay the night with me and... Like it's really cool,"

Here Riley is hinting at the important connection of making plans on social media to meet up. Similarly, Marsha uses Instagram most to get in touch with two friends she sees frequently at the club. She explains her preference for Instagram, explaining,

"I talk to certain people about certain things, and if I need to get a hold of Fiona or something, or if I need to get ahold of Joshua or something, and I don't have their number, I can get a hold of them on there."

Marsha and Riley, like other club members, use social media and their time spent at the club to facilitate more hang out time.

3.4.3. Levels of Access

A sense of support and belonging also comes from members knowing they have access to another person's phone or tablet at the club, especially for those who don't have their own. Members often used their devices to reinforce perceptions of friendship and trust. The use of devices in this way also reveals the limits of friend groups and which social combinations are possible. Throughout the fall, especially as some members did not come as consistently due to extra curricular activities and school obligations, the usual friend combinations changed, and digital devices were used to promote these combinations. On a quiet late fall day, when 11-year-old Elizabeth found herself without her usual friend group at the club, she asked 11 year old Jamie to play on her iPad together and she accepted. Though I had never seen them hang out

together before, they laughed and squealed together while taking pictures and chose to bond using Jamie's iPad rather than any of the many games available in the game room where they sat.

11-year-old Riley's digital device was also at some point used as the centerpiece of a new social combination, when Riley and Elizabeth laid together on beanbag chairs in the game room and watched Snapchat stories and played games together a few weeks prior. Riley, who doesn't own a phone but uses her iPod for social media, calling, messaging, and other phone features, relayed in her interview that her time at the club is one of the few times per day she actually gets to use social media and talk to her friends that way. She explained that her after school schedule gets busy with having to run home to drop things off and then usually going to her stepdad's house, where she often doesn't have as much time to use TikTok and Snapchat and so doesn't interact with them as much while there. This time and outlet is especially important in her case since she moved early on in childhood, and still uses Snapchat calling features and TikTok texting features to communicate with friends in her old town, while still seeing them in person when possible.

Sarah, a 10 year old who was one of two club members that seemed most attached to her phone, told me she only lets trusted friends use it. This was displayed in action when she carefully handed it over to her 9-year-old friend Taylor and allowed her to use it, while exclaiming, "don't touch my phone!" at others who tried to. After explaining that she only lets Taylor use it, Taylor chimed in proudly that yes she was the only one allowed, and loudly asked Sarah later if she could add in a contact. Though Taylor had told me the first day that she owned a phone and used it often at home, it was still an important source of pride and marker of friendship that she was allowed to use Sarah's. Sarah was not one of the best friends that Taylor mentioned in her interview, but the fact that she is allowed to use her phone makes her a close

club friend and offers her support in this space when her school friends, the two best friends she did mention, are not around. She mentioned also having a busy after school schedule with gynmastics and other activities, which precludes a lot of after-school social time with her best friends. She utilizes Snapchat and TikTok to keep in touch with friends despite her busy school schedule, explaining:

> "Whenever I have the chance to, I'll talk to them on there [Insta and Snap]. Most of the time I don't really talk to Marisol that much because I see her a lot, even though she lives closer to the school,"

adding that she probably uses the apps to keep up with friends "probably like 10 times [per day]." While waiting in line to go to the bathroom before heading to the park one day, Megan's friend handed over her phone very deliberately in a similar way to Sasha, claiming loudly and with a smile that Megan could hold her phone while she went. Megan immediately took the phone and began to play a game.

A time when the use of technology negatively exposed and exacerbated the boundaries of friendships and access occurred during a summer movie day, when Ally and Naomi asked to play with Naomi's tablet in the back of the room, and became annoyed when others asked to play. Though there were still some new social combinations occurring at first with them expanding the tablet use to others not usually in their friend group, a few girls asked that they deemed were decisively not their friends and so were not allowed to use the tablet. This caused significant tension, and was only diffused when I promised the girls that were rejected that they could use my phone after the movie ended. While Ally and Naomi extending the opportunity to play with the tablet to two girls not usually in their friend group served as an expression of social support toward them and a welcoming into their group, in this case the opposite was expressed

toward three others who were left feeling unwelcomed. However, my role in the situation helped alleviate this, as they were immediately appeased by the offering of using my phone after the movie, and giggled happily as they played with it on Snapchat together afterwards.

3.4.4. Staff Mediation

The instance of exercising my role as a staff aide to help alleviate the tension with Ally and Naomi is an important display of how social and digital media and the club space come together in a constructed and combined source of social support for club members. My role as a staff member in that situation was to ensure that the members' sense of social support at the club was not eroded due to Ally and Naiomi's exclusion, and to offer a replacement for the shared technology that they were deprived. After that instance one of the girls, Jackie, showed even more affection toward me than before, with the incident having created a sense of trust between us. The other staff members recognize this role as well, and in the same way that they are not hesitant with regards to disciplining when necessary, they also often go above and beyond to ensure that the kids feel safe, welcomed, and loved at the club. Administrators Christina and Nellie explicitly told the kids throughout the year that they loved them, even when giving speeches about how certain attitudes needed to change. As staff member Christian expressed, his biggest hope for the club members is that they leave at the end of each day "feeling satisfied with what they did and know[ing] that they have people there for them." He noted being able to connect to the kids as the most important part of the job.

Staff member Christian noted that one of his major concerns about the kids was an increased need for gratification in the form of acceptance, which he feels is only amplified through social media because of the nature of putting everything about one's life online. He

expressed being grateful that a place like the club exists where social media isn't at the forefront, and where kids can return to games like tag with each other in a low pressure way. This lack of pressure present at the club is a significant piece of what it offers as a social space: it provides a unique in between from school and home that enables a playful and free environment. Members have a chance to navigate the authority figures they interact with each day in a way that suits their social development. As the next sections will show, the use of social and digital media spaces and the club as social support sources makes way for additional beneficial uses of their after-school time including for emotional management and unique mentorships. The next section will describe more about the structure these instances and social engagements exist within, through a discussion of the theme of negotiated allowances between staff and club members.

3.5. Negotiated Allowances

I think it's just making sure that our kids have everything that they need to do what they need to do while they're here, and making sure that every kid is getting everything that they possibly can out of being here, whether that be, they're eating 'cause that's the only meal they're gonna get, or they get the emotional support that they don't get at home. They get the physical activity that they might not get, or just being able to have the social interactions that they wouldn't have if they weren't here. I think it's just really important to me that everything is set up in a way that they all get what they need individually out of being at the Boys and Girls Club.

- **Nellie, BGC staff**

And my accounts have always been private, just in case if there's somebody that... It could be a 35-year-old man wanting to follow me, and I'll be like, you can't follow m'...so I always made 'em private. All my accounts that I have ever made are all private.

- **Marsha, BGC member**

A few weeks before the end of my stay at Lyn Treece, I came into the front room from the gym to find seven year old Daniel in a clearly unhappy state as he sat in one of the chairs

next to the computers. His small hands were balled tightly into fists held at his sides, his eyebrows were heavily furrowed, and he was consciously facing away from the front desk. There the two administrators, Christina and Nellie, stood looking very seriously at him. I could sense a twinge of pain and disappointment but also concern in the room. I continued on my path to one of the other computers and witnessed a few minutes later when Daniel's older brother came up from the gym to take him home. As he walked up, Daniel expressed a few suppressed shouts and clenched his fists harder, the tension building. Christina looked continually pained and quietly asked Daniel to gather his things and let his brother take him home. When he started to let out more yells and labored breaths and continued to face away from them, Christina calmly and quietly but more sternly said again that it was time for him to go home. This continued uncomfortably for a few minutes until Kevin went to get Daniel's backpack and coat, put it on him and started to lightly pull him up. Daniel finally gave in when Nellie relayed, "If you don't get up now it's going to be two days that you're gone instead of just one."

After they left, I found out that Daniel had unfortunately committed what was considered the most serious transgression at the club: striking another child. The standard protocol for such an incident is for the club director to call both sets of parents, the parents of the child who was hit and the one who did the hitting, and ask the child who hit someone else to leave the club for the rest of the day and for the following day as well. These are sometimes referred to as "vacation days" among the staff and also occur when a child has consistently demonstrated an unwillingness to follow club rules, a blatant disrespect of staff members or other club members, or a general uncooperative attitude over the span of several days or weeks. If a pattern of disruptive behavior and constant reprimanding is noted, the parent of the child or children is notified that their child must take a vacation day. This last resort disciplinary tactic is avoided

when possible, but has to be put immediately into effect when a child is hit. Any day in which this type of incident occurs is seen as "a very bad day" for the staff, as the administrators especially are very strained during the disciplinary process that follows. During the several club announcements about club rules I observed that preceded this incident, the hitting of another child was often held as an example of why the rules are in place, to avoid this most serious consequence of loss of control at the club.

3.5.1. Connecting Risk and Rules

The circumstances that surround such incidents also often relate in some way to traditional "at-risk" characteristics, such as a troublesome home life or lack of access to appropriate and stable role models for club members involved in violence. As a reminder, over two thirds of club members qualify for school lunch based on income, and several members are raised in single parent households, have family members in jail, or are being raised by family members other than their biological parents. The after-school snacks provided at the club are funded and administered by the Indiana At-Risk Youth Snack Program, further confirming the categorization of many members' home lives as being high risk. Being aware of these circumstances, the staff at Lyn Treece engage in a series of negotiated allowances where they delicately balance allowing club members to autonomously navigate their activities and identities at the club, but allow this freedom within a framework of set rules and boundaries that cannot be crossed in order to maintain stability and a safe environment.

The challenges faced in establishing and maintaining this balance are a crucial part of members' growth and their perceptions of their own maturity and abilities on their path toward adulthood. Watching the ways in which rule applying and exceptions are navigated in relation to

age, personal circumstance, and previously demonstrated patterns of behavior all factor into the sense of support, autonomy, and growth club members experience at Lyn Treece. Club members revealed in interviews that this process of negotiated allowances was mirrored with parents and family members in relation to their rules and views on social media and technology use, where many of the same factors were used to dictate the parameters for such use. This section will describe various instances of these negotiated allowances at work, and will articulate the effects such instances can have on club members' paths toward adulthood.

3.5.2. Rule Applying Based on Age

A first concrete divider that indicated different outcomes in the negotiated allowances process is age. Certain customs related to club activity were enforced on all members, but were put in place and enforced more heavily in order to create structure and balance for younger club members. A basic example included an instance I observed my first day at the club and saw almost every day thereafter, where a staff member called "bleachers!" in between each triple play activity which signaled to members to run back to the bleachers and await instructions for the next game. This process makes sense as a reset mechanism to ensure smooth transitions from activity to activity, but is also clearly more necessary for the younger members than the older ones. The younger members, ranging from ages 6-9 or so, often have many questions about what next activity is or complaints about the current game, so the bleachers transition period gives them an opportunity to ask these questions and also prevent overstimulation during any one game.

Another practice put in place that is particularly designed with the younger members in mind is the clap system, where a staff member will say "If you can hear me clap once" and club

members will clap once in response which signals that everyone should be quiet in order to hear next steps or directions. If there is still noisiness after one clap the staff member will continue this process, raising the number of claps until silence is reached. Reaching 10 claps automatically requires all club members to "write sentences," a punishment applied both individually and collectively in various disciplinary situations. Staff often announce a warning when 10 claps have almost been reached. This usually elicits silence from the group, though claps are clearly less enthusiastic from older members.

Older members ages 10 and up, who almost all prefer free time over triple play, feel that they don't need this transition period or clap system and would in fact rather skip over it in order to finish up the required minimum three games. Whereas the younger members ask often about what game is next or air complaints about someone playing unfairly, the most common question among the older kids is what number game they are on, in order to decipher how close they are to free time and tournaments. For example, after finishing up her homework with me, 4th grader Elaine came back with flashcards she wanted to work on for fun rather than go to the gym before free time. This instance occurred more than once with different members. During free time is when older members are no longer held in the same way to the same overarching rules where everyone must participate simultaneously in the same activities. While they are expected to follow the same top-level rules such as keeping ones hands to oneself and respecting staff and the building, these rules are enforced in a way that doesn't so closely tie them to simplistic rule applying associated with younger members. This perceived difference allows them to express their sense of maturity and identity during this period at the club.

One of the clearest confirmations of this is the fact that the oldest club members, those in high school, consistently arrive just before 6 pm. At 6 is when all members 4th grade and under

are required to leave, and all more formally structured activities have ceased. Post 6 pm is essentially an extension of free time, where often a group of male teens gather to play basketball until the club closes at 8 pm. The two male staff members, Christian and Colin, often join them. Outside of the club, these two staff coach a few of the teens on an intramural basketball team, which Christian started about three years ago. Twice to three times per week the team holds practices at the club in the gym, while playing for fun and generally hanging out the other days. The team has brought the staff and the teens quite close over the years, as the staff regularly attends their games on Tuesday evenings. This level of friendship further breaks down the formal barrier between staff and member and creates an even more relaxed peer or colleague like environment at the club after 6 pm. The teens respond well to this shift and consistently come to the club during this time as a place to relax and continue to feel as free as they would outside of the club with the absence of an enforced set structure. They are recognized as having reached the age and maturity level to allow for this type of environment, as also indicated by consistent respectful behavior that merited the continuation of these standards. Many staff members have indicated thankfulness for the teens being there and feeling relaxed at the club rather than "getting into trouble" out on the streets as others had.

Fiona, a 15 year old club member and one of the few females that regularly attends the teen only hours at the club, also experiences her own version of heightened peer level friendship and communication with the staff. While not a part of the basketball team, she is friends with many of the team members and also hangs out with a few of the middle school girls before they leave. She had an especially mixed age friend group in the summer. While much of the basketball team was close with staff members Christian and Colin, Fiona developed a close relationship with the club director Nellie, which Nellie explained grew even closer after she

accepted the director position. Whereas during full club hours members are reprimanded for coming up to the front desk without permission, Fiona was regularly invited to hang out there and chat with Nellie and Christina. Nellie would normally say hello when Fiona came in and ask "how's life?" and they would discuss a wide range of things from her day at school to her love life to her family life. Nellie would also often offer that if Fiona got bored in the gym she could always come up front. She was mostly quiet especially with other people – she would often sit quietly on the bleachers watching other members play tag before 6 pm or watching the basketball team practice after even when there was no one else around.

If I asked if she wanted to join in on tag or another activity however, she would reply no thank you with a smile and continue watching, sometimes eventually going up front to chat more with Nellie or help her decorate the bulletin boards or cut out materials for the next day's art project. She seemed content with her role at the club, and came in and left of her own volition each day walking from her nearby home, which signaled a level of comfort and autonomy there that had been adequately served. She used her phone from time to time to text friends or look through memes while watching the practices, but never for very long unless she was looking with friends on the bleachers. Fiona, the basketball team, and the other teens who voluntarily come to the club each day on their own (as opposed to the necessity of being there due to lack of other childcare services) are strong examples of negotiated allowances and their positive consequences. The negotiated rule applying during teen hours offers them a more relaxed environment based on their age and demonstrated maturity at the club, which constitutes a space of social support that aids in their assimilation into adulthood by providing the opportunity to have adults as peers, and to be treated more like adults themselves. This type of treatment is what

many of the middle school age club members aspire to, and the negotiations to arrive at this level of trust begin early on in club relationship building.

During another portion of my first day, as I was playing in the toy area with Valerie and Jolene I witnessed a group of the older members leave the gym temporarily. Valerie and Jolene immediately complained that the "big kids" were allowed to do more fun things while the "little kids" had to stay in the gym. They referred to them as the "Sunny Siders," which I came to understand referred to the middle school kids who all attended Sunny Side Middle School across town. Though the Sunny Siders are not offered quite as un-constrained an environment as the high school age members, there were still multiple occasions where they were separated to do more free form activities than the usual programming. This occurred usually when a guest group came to do activities at the club. Throughout the summer, a group of nurses from a local university came to speak and host activities with the members about physical and mental health. They typically made rotation stations around the building and club members were separated into groups of roughly ten kids and were matched with a staff member who would take them from station to station. As the activities and lectures were often simple in order to be understood by the youngest members, Sunny Siders were given a choice to stay and complete the activities or go to the teen room for free time together. Once they made a decision however, they were not permitted to switch.

3.5.3. Navigating the Middle Ground

Despite this caveat, Sunny Siders often proudly lined up at the gym door to go to the teen room before the start of guest group activities, having reached a level of maturity high enough to merit getting a bit of extra flexibility in their time at the club that day. When they arrived at the

teen room, whichever staff member was watching them that day would often announce that they were expected to be on their best behavior throughout the afternoon. A breach of this agreement would mean that they would be sent out to do the activities "like everyone else." This threat carried particular weight with the middle schoolers, who were often quite well behaved in these circumstances and were careful not to risk getting demoted a bracket of allowances to where they had to strictly follow the club structure even on guest days.

Occasionally a few of the kids would choose to do the activity since some involved making food or other fun products, but the importance of the situation was in the ability to choose to do it rather than having to. These periods of negotiation help groom Sunny Siders for eventually being permitted to stay during teen only hours, where they are expected to have reached a level of maturity to continue to benefit from the relaxed nature of that environment. These instances of negotiation can be seen as testing grounds for transitioning from more formal staff member social support to peer level social support as seen with the relationship between the staff and the teens. These allowances are even extended from time to time to younger groups. During the summer, all of the club members were given a chance to answer a questionnaire providing their thoughts on the week's activities, and some who especially succeeded in certain projects were asked to help the groups after them.

3.5.4. Age, Technology Use, & Youth Agreement

Just as age and demonstrated maturity play a large role in determining the level of rule applying and disciplinary action taken during club activities, these factors also seem to play a large role in determining phone and technology use both at the club and at home. Many members relayed in interviews that an agreement was set with their parents where they must reach a

certain age before being permitted to sign up for a social media account. The age was usually 13. It is interesting to note that these members already have phones and were not required to reach a certain age to own a device (at least four of those interviewed were age six when they received their first phone), but the use of social media on that device requires them to move into a higher bracket of age and maturity. At the club when members were having particular days or weeks with disciplinary issues, Christina and Nellie would often gather everyone on the bleachers and sit on the floor in front of them to have a talk about the rules and the issues members were facing with following them. During these talks Christina would often emphasize being at the Boys and Girls Club as a privilege that they should be grateful for, since they did not have to be allowed to be there. Similarly, members relayed in interviews that parents and other caretakers viewed phone usage and particularly social media use as a privilege to be earned and that could not be handled before reaching a certain age. The same similar phrasing was used among many members in their interviews, including Catherine's explanation that "[She] looks at what her mom looks at, she won't let [her] download anything else," Marsha's clarification about how she got rid of her Facebook because "[her] Mom would post things on there that [her] grandpa didn't want [her] getting into so he didn't let [her] have it anymore," and Petra's simple, "My parents won't let me" answer to why she doesn't use her phone for texting friends.

A surprising finding regarding the connection of maturity level, age, and other factors of negotiated allowances and social media use is that many club members expressed that they were in agreement with their parents' assessment that they were not ready to engage with the world of social media. Members' interviewed ranging from ages nine to eleven responded that they shared the concerns of their parents around the "stranger danger" theory of social life online and thus were fine with waiting until they reached an appropriate age to interact in that way or were okay

with agreed upon parental supervision of posts. Ally, a nine year old club member who owns an iPad but not yet a phone, noted that she uses her iPad often for watching YouTube videos but never likes or comments, only watches. She limits her use of this platform and also does not own any social media accounts. When asked why she did not, she first answered "because my parents won't let me," but then added that "it's because they're afraid there are bad people out there who can come to your house" when asked why her parents believed that. She responded yes when asked if she shared those concerns, and used that affirmation as an answer to why she claimed she did not want social media accounts at the moment and could not see herself using them currently.

Fellow nine-year-old club member Carter echoed Ally's concerns. Though he relayed that he would eventually want to have social media accounts on the phone he currently uses that is owned by his primary caretaker aunt, especially because his friends have accounts, he understands why his aunt does not think he is ready yet. He relayed that though older members of his family have Facebook, they are careful not to share any pictures of him or his sister Deandra on their accounts, and added immediately, "which is a good thing." When I asked why that was, he responded "because [he] won't have to deal with people getting the phone number to get here," alluding again to malicious strangers who might be trying to get information about him. Considering that he and his sister have had difficult family circumstances that warranted their aunt serving as their primary caretaker, the insistence on thorough protection of them against exposure online may relate to familial factors that put them at-risk of ending up in an unsafe situation. His sister, 4th grader Deandra, recently received a phone from her aunt and can use the phone at specified times. Though she echoed Ally's sentiments about not wanting to like or comment on YouTube videos, she did express that she would want to connect to her other

friends who have TikTok and other social media accounts if her aunt allowed her to. There is frequently a distinction made among members between liking and commenting on YouTube videos and participating in other social media sites. As will be evidenced later, the act of liking and commenting on YouTube is perceived as more of an exposure to potential unknowns than the perceived trustworthy and friend only environment of places like TikTok and Snapchat.

Nine year old Annabelle explained that she first received a phone a few years ago, but was not able to use it for more than emergencies until she was able " to show [her] mom that [she] was responsible," which she explained she eventually demonstrated by keeping her phone around her at all times and showing that she could keep it safe especially following a prior incident of leaving it accidentally at the laundry mat. Now her phone has games, a Musically, and a Snapchat and she is free to use it as she wishes. Getting to a level of maturity where her mother allowed her to use her phone in this way is a sign of growth and a step toward adulthood, where she has passed the testing period of handling responsibility and can control the challenges of technology ownership, including social media account ownership. Ally, Jamie, Lily, Annabelle, and many others admitted to having broken or dropped their devices in the past, which also encourages a certain level of trust in the parental guidance of their technology use in line with their own admittance of non-responsible physical phone use.

Though she uses TikTok and Snapchat regularly, Annabelle still makes a distinction between those sites and others she still does not consider herself mature enough for, in particular Facebook. When asked why she has a Snapchat and TikTok but not Facebook, she responded that she "didn't think [she] really should have one," and even more interestingly that "all the stuff that does go on on Facebook, [she] [doesn't] really want to be part of that crowd." When pressed to explain further, she relayed that on her mom's phone she sees that people are posting

negative things and that her mom tells her about friends and family that get into fights over things or post "dumb" or inappropriate things on the site, which she does not think is right for her to be around. In this circumstance there is an even finer layer of negotiation between her perceived and demonstrated maturity level and what sorts of technology use matches it, similar to the agreement Lily has made with her mom where they are friends on TikTok and Snapchat so that she may demonstrate that she is not posting inappropriate content. This concern around seeing inappropriate content is echoed among club staff. Both Anabelle and Lily expressed a level of trust that they have in TikTok and Snapchat which they describe as online spaces where their only interactions are with close friends and family. In return they are not concerned about being exposed to negative material or strangers that they have not approved to be in their online spaces. Anabelle emphasized, "With TikTok it's just my friends and family. I have Ashley on there, and like, those people." Nine-year-old member Patty agreed, supporting her trust of TikTok over other sites by explaining that her account was private and she only chatted with friends. Unlike some of her fellow members, Patty only halfheartedly agreed with her parent's rule that she must reach 16 before using other social media sites. However, she was still conscious of the need to maintain privacy and keep non-friends out her online space. Patty's older sister and fellow club member Riley summed up these apprehensions and the TikTok exception quite well:

"I like [social media], but it's just kinda scary sometimes. And like people could do bad stuff and... now TikTok you can't really do bad stuff…like my account is private so if they try to follow me, I'll see who's trying to follow me and I can accept their request and everything. So I only have the people that I know."

As Riley's quote reveals, even when there wasn't an explicit connection to parental desires for not owning a social media account, some club members expressed apprehension around its benefits in their lives that seemed to relate to the issue of trust. 11-year-old club member Mary originally had some social media accounts on her phone, but deleted them because "she gets shy on the internet." Nine-year-old Rowan similarly noted her lack of social media ownership as due to her own individual fear or anxiety around using the app rather than parental opposition. When asked why she was not interested in using them she replied that she was too scared to and "didn't know how to do that stuff" even though her older sister posts things on her own accounts "and everybody likes them." Fellow nine-year-old Michael, who has a Snapchat but says in general that he does not want to put time into it, explained that he only has a Snapchat because his brother said that "[he] needed to start growing up," and proceeded to set one up for him and added his brothers. He continued to use it after spending time talking to his brothers on the site and soon after friending Riley, a fellow club member. Michael's situation is one of the most explicit acknowledgements of social media use as aligned with a certain level of maturity and coming of age, where a readiness to use the site indicates an amount of growth and responsibility.

3.5.5. Personal & Familial Circumstance Exceptions

One final factor that plays into negotiated allowances at the club in addition to age and demonstrated maturity levels is personal and familial circumstance. There were a few individual cases at the club of members who were occasionally exempt from the main club activity structure that did not necessarily fit into a neat explanation based on age or maturity level. These cases related the most to perceived at-risk attributes among club members, which were rarely

explicitly discussed but were reflected in treatment of certain members. Those who were personally shy or had clear symptoms of developmental disorders like Alyssa, Trevor, and Alison were allowed to play in the toy area during triple play, which is usually a time of day when full participation is extra emphasized. In these circumstances however, their difficulty with effectively engaging with the other members warranted this exception.

One of the more interesting cases however was nine-year-old Carter, who was allowed to play in the toy area at this time despite being older and not having a developmental or social disorder. This practice was allowed in addition too to the fact that he was frequently being disciplined for behavioral issues. Eventually it was revealed that he came from a rather unstable home life, and this circumstance motivated the administrators to allow for a bit of extra lenience in his case. Similarly, though the standard protocol is that members are only allowed snack during snack time at the beginning of the afternoon, a few different families, one of which was Daniel's family, were allowed an extra snack to take home at the end of the day because of an awareness of the families' financial circumstances. These circumstances are part of what made the fight that Daniel was involved in so painful for staff, since his tendency toward violence may be in part a result of a tough familial environment.

As demonstrated in the previous section, there are still layers of friend level exclusivity desired by members which aligns well with boyd's (2014) findings about online spaces used to fill friend level gaps. However, this section reveals the urgent need for trust and safety in these spaces that allows for more accepted negotiation with parents and other authority figures around technology use and ways to build a network of friends. The rhetoric of concern here is present both among authority figures but also to some extent among the youth themselves, and is alleviated through trusting in the process of reaching a level of maturity that can guarantee safety

and stability. The next section will describe the ways in which social media spaces are used after they are established and trusted to manage emotions that these negotiated allowance and constructed combined social support processes elicit.

3.6. Social Media Emotional Management

I try to make it known. If someone's having a bad day... Like certain days, Josh will come in and he's just being Josh…And I'm like, "He's having a day." Like, "Do you need something?" Or Riley will have a day, and I'm like, "What can I do?"...so I feel I help with the kids, like letting them know, "Hey, if you need something, let me know. Like generally if someone's upset about something, I'll ask. If they don't wanna talk about it, they don't wanna talk about it. But at least they know like, "Hey, I cant help you unless you talk to me about it, and I'm here." So that's kind of nice. And then I do what I normally do with the Club, with art and everything else.
- Mallory, BGC staff

I probably SnapChat her the most…Like, when I'm bored. [chuckle] I need somebody to talk to. Feel lonely…or like... Oh, like when I'm sad. Sometimes I get sad because I get in trouble, so I SnapChat her and just talk to her and she calms me down.
- Annabelle, BGC member

4th grader Taylor was having a tough week on my first day at the club. She had gotten into a huge fight with a close friend at school, which culminated with the friend "blocking [her] on all her social media accounts, Facebook, Insta, Snapchat, everything." This was a pretty egregious offense, and was causing a lot of stress for Taylor. She chatted with me on the bleachers about how she wanted to delete the friend that blocked her in retaliation, but couldn't bring herself to do it yet in hopes that they might still make up. They eventually did and the social media account friendships were restored, but the fight still took its toll, causing a rocky few days before the dust settled. Though there were also offline aspects to the fight including a pushing incident at recess, Taylor seemed particularly fixated during our conversation that day on the aspects of the fight that happened online, where the evening following the playground

incident she was dismayed to find that the friend had blocked her on all her accounts. This conversation revealed to me a process I had not considered before, where the status of friendships could be revealed just as clearly online as in person.

This section will describe various instances where emotional exchanges on social media intersect with club members' lives elsewhere and affect overall friendships. Though some relate to fights as in the instance with Taylor, many members also report using social media to connect to family and friends that are far away, which provides a space for technology facilitated emotional connection that feeds a need for that and helps further establish friend and family social support in members' lives. In both cases social media is used as a tool for managing emotions and fulfilling emotional needs, whether to express things that cannot as easily be said in person, or to fill gaps in face-to-face communication with loved ones that helps maintain a bond and alleviate the sadness of missing a friend or family member. The number of instances observed within this theme were the least in number of all categories, but still represented an important revelation about the way members use their technological devices and online spaces to navigate emotions and thus contribute to establishing social support. Members' descriptions of social media use for emotional management also further revealed very particular individual methods and techniques for controlling the role of social media in their day to day lives, building on the concept of social media use intersecting with aspects of growth and maturity in social development.

3.6.1. Handling Family Difficulties & Setting Boundaries of Use

The concept of social media and device use for emotional management was not solely initiated by the members themselves, as at least one parent relayed that sending their child in

with their phone one day would help depreciate their behavioral issues. Unfortunately, the child was even more disruptive than usual on the day he was sent in with his phone. On the other end, at least one club member relayed an intentional decrease in phone and social media use because of difficult family changes happening at home. For 10-year-old Riley, though she "used to love going on [her] phone and all that," she hardly used it for a few months before our second interview because she had been pouring herself into her racing and bonding with her younger brother in order to cope with her parent's recent separation. As we discussed her changing habits further it became clear that other factors were coming into play in this shift in use as well, including the fact that she was seeing friends from school more since the year had started, and went straight from there to socialize with friends at the club followed by watching her younger brother at home for an hour afterwards.

She noted that this busy schedule kept her from using social media as much, combined too with the fact that according to her "there was nothing to do there anymore" that she was interested in. Additionally, her mom had made her nervous by telling her a story she had heard about a person going around online asking for information from young children on social media sites like Tumblr. The rhetoric of concern around the potential dangers or detriments of social media use especially for emotional connection influenced a decrease in use in this case. However, though I was not able to discuss explicitly how her social media use changed and fluctuated further in the following months, I observed that Riley's use of her social media accounts did rise again once she was regularly spending time with her close friends at the club. I especially noted a spike in communal social media use with friends, as noted in the constructed combined social support section. In this case her use of social media in a communal sense may have positively affected her ability to cope with her parents' separation.

Nine year old Ellen does not have issues with using social media and uses her TikTok regularly, but noted that she logs out often especially when she is going out somewhere because she "doesn't want it to disturb [her]," especially in class. Ellen's careful consideration of the various consequences of social media use is not necessarily tied her to emotions explicitly, but is certainly related in its tie to the personal management of her daily life. Fellow nine-year old Patty has similarly formed a concrete philosophy on her own technology and social media use that is informed by her interpretation of her needs and desires but also by her interpretation of the rhetoric of concern. When asked about why she had only a TikTok and not some of the other accounts her friends at school had, she explained:

> "My account is private. So only the people that I want to see my musical.ly and stuff, I actually check out their musical.lys before I do it to see if I know them. And then if I know them, I let them watch my musical.lys. I have my sister, I have some of my friends and stuff. Basically, just people that I know. 'Cause if I don't know them, I'm not going to allow them to see it… They could hack me. They could stalk me or anything."

She added that she kept her number of friends on Musically at a strict maximum of 100 unlike her older sister who has "almost like 2,000." This cutoff helps her to further carefully enforce her protocols of checking identification before friending and keeping her account as private as possible. My conversation with her illuminated again the personal awareness members have around how they best use digital and social media in their lives. Whether they come to individual decisions or negotiate with parents, they craft their own views on and subsequent practices for digital and social media use that make most sense for their needs and behaviors. For example as Lilly noted, though she negotiated an understanding with her mother where she can watch her public posts on TikTok for her safety, she still uses the private chat function to air grievances privately with friends and help manage her self-identified attitude issues. Of those

members who regularly use social media, many like Lilly explained that they use their accounts to speak to friends throughout the day about whatever thoughts they might have going through their minds at the time. They in general described using chat functions on the sites to send silly pictures, videos, and texts to each other that help brighten each other's days. Members' descriptions of general YouTube use in particular revealed a tendency toward watching funny videos to utilize technology in their lives for positive entertainment.

3.6.2. Staying in Touch with Friends & Family

A common thread especially among regular digital and social media users was using social media accounts in combination with regular texting and calling to stay in touch with friends and family that are currently far away from them, which helps them regulate and alleviate the feeling of missing loved ones that no longer live with or near them. Michael, whose brother set up his Snapchat account for him, describes his use of it as focused specifically on talking with his older brothers who no longer live with him. He described that after his older brother closest in age set him up with one, the first three people he added were his two older brothers and his younger brother Simon. They spent the whole night after he first created his account messaging back and forth. Michael originally received his phone to keep in contact with his father and brother and confirmed that he texted his brother the most, explaining, "he's 20 but I don't live with him so we always talk." The addition of Snapchat to his communication resources just added another tool for fulfilling his desire to keep in frequent contact with close family. I was surprised to find that one of the brothers lives just next door with Michael with his "other mom" and stepdad. They actually do keep up frequent face-to-face interaction, but speaking via text and Snapchat keeps the conversation even more constant. Michael's father lives in Indianapolis just

over an hour away, which still allows for face-to-face interaction as well but also motivates frequent phone calls and texts to fill the gap of not living together. He also uses the app to talk to his best friend Arnold, a fellow club member, who he "keeps in touch with a lot." His brother Simon similarly noted that the messaging feature on Snapchat heavily influenced his use of the app, since he is able to use it to quickly connect to his brothers and friends. He relayed that his social media apps Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat are the only ones he does not delete from his phone, since he uses them to stay up to date on his friends' and family members' lives. He uses Facebook in particular to stay in touch with his extended family like his cousins.

12-year-old club member Billy uses Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat to talk to a variety of friends and family, and has relayed that he often uses it to start new conversations when he is bored. When asked which accounts he used most and why, he responded Facebook and Instagram "because there's more activity on those" adding that more people chat with him on those sites and he generally sees more going on that he can interact with than on Twitter. Like Lily, he noted that he sometimes uses these accounts to talk about events at the Club or at school with friends, and also uses the sites to keep in consistent contact with his best friends Armand and Diana while not at the club, though he mostly chats with them in person there.

His younger brother, 10-year old Kyle, also uses Facebook regularly. The pair were one of very few members who used Facebook regularly, and both mentioned that part of why they use it is because they were introduced to the idea by their mom. When asked why he only had a Facebook and not any other accounts, Kyle explicitly offered that he did in part because his mom is on there and it provides a space for them to talk easily when they are not in the same place. He mentioned later that he is closest in his family with his mom, especially because his father is in prison and his brother has a different father with whom he stays on some weekends. Kyle's

affinity toward Facebook as influenced by his mom's presence there adds to the pattern of club member's using social media to consistently connect even to family members that are around them often. On the other end, Kyle described his desire to stay in touch with friends from school that he would not see much after transferring out as another key reason for having a Facebook, again adding to the pattern of member use of social media sites for connecting to close family and friends that are far away. Kyle also offered his own understanding of the rhetoric of concern, when discussing a friend who did not like Facebook because he "thinks that weird people can friend you on there and learn where you live and crap." Kyle did not deny that this happens, but countered that he just does not give anyone his address, having come to his own conclusion on the matter.

Nine-year-old Annabelle also uses her social media accounts to keep in touch with close family and friends who live farther away. Her 20-year-old sister lives in the area but not with her, and she uses her favorite social media account Snapchat to send her random updates about her daily life. When asked what she typically sends, she replied she Snaps her sister when she is bored, needs someone to talk to, or is feeling lonely. She explained that the Snaps could be as simple as a picture of her new shoes to start a conversation when no one is at home. She also often sends out group messages on the app to her extended family, the majority of whom live two hours away in Chicago. They send her back supportive messages like "Stay true to yourself. Be you," and her close friend in Chicago and her will often send Snaps back and forth when they are both bored. Annabelle's social media experience, like many of her fellow club members, utilizes these spaces as a sort of reassurance that their loved ones are there to turn to whenever they need, and can help them navigate feelings of missing others too. These practices clearly

demonstrate the use of social media as a tool for seeking, giving, and gaining emotional social support.

3.6.3. Setting Personal Rules & Practices

Like those members who had specific rules around times and number of people involved in social media use, others had particular thought out uses for each account they had and how it related to their own social needs. 9-year old Taylor, who had revealed the subtleties of online fighting to me, explained the following philosophy she had for using her social media accounts:

> "I use TikTok for doing up lip sync videos, and I use Instagram for uploading cute pictures, and then Twitter just to talk to other people, and then Snapchat is just because I like the filters."

She went on to explain the various types of people she follows on each as well, where Snapchat and Instagram provide a space for her to follow famous YouTube slime makers and other online celebrities that she watches to learn new skills and add to the ones she loves. She makes slime every week, and uses the videos she sees posted by her favorite online celebrities to guide her. 11-year old Marsha has a similar specific system in place, explaining that she has "Instagram things" that she talks to certain friend groups about on the app like certain pages that her friends follow. She likes to share inspirational quotes in her account there, and uses Snapchat and TikTok less and only engages with a smaller group of very close friends there.

Like Taylor, 11-year-old Mary uses her limited engagement with social media to gain inspiration from other artists on YouTube and uses it to influence her own art. Though she describes herself as "shy on the internet" and deleted many of her more traditional social media accounts like Instagram and TikTok, she started a YouTube account to promote her own art and

regularly interacts with personal friends and other artists on the site who she says have become friends. Mary is one of the only members who explicitly mentioned liking and commenting regularly on YouTube, but also belongs to a specific community in that space that she describes as inspiring. When asked if she felt inspired by the people she interacted with on the site, she described emphatically, “Mhmmm. A lot,” and added proudly that she had 30 subscribers. She describes receiving positive feedback from others on the site and sharing positive feedback with others as an important part of her social practices, since she aspires to be an artist one day and appreciates this way of sharing and learning.

3.7. Unique Mentorships

At first, I was questioning it, I was like, "I don't know if I can do this. It's like 80 kids here. I don't even have my own kids…but yeah, once I started actually connecting to them and knowing their names and knowing who they are, that's what I would say would draw me now. If I could tell anybody else, it's the connection. And when I do leave to actually go to my career, that's gonna be the hardest part is leaving them. I keep telling myself I'm gonna come back, but stuff does happen, but yeah, it's gonna be the hardest thing, is leaving them.
- Colin, BGC staff

So, I would say my best friend would be Faith because we get along, we... I don't think we have ever fought... I have fought with every single one of my friends but her.
- Marsha, BGC member

On any given afternoon at Lyn Treece, an 11-year-old facing off a seven-year-old in Connect Four is a likely sight. As described in the negotiated allowances section, major activities like Triple Play and the art projects are done with all club members together regardless of age. The daily tournaments are no exception, where members are signed up first come first serve once the tournament is announced, and each pair is selected by reading the next two names on the sign up sheet. While this can provide challenges around non-matching skill sets, it also fosters a

unique amount of cross-age collaboration that instills a sense of equal opportunity for club members. Older club members are encouraged to serve as mentors and aids when paired with younger members for activities, and often rise to the challenge. Younger members gain an extra sense of pride when succeeding at various tournaments and activities even when faced against a much older or more skilled adversary.

In turn, the establishment of these cross-age social interaction opportunities creates a sense of normalcy around friendships between members of different ages and grades. This section will describe the unique mentorship patterns built at the club, and will in particular assess the potential benefit of these relationships for addressing a specific mentorship oriented social support need and gap in consistent familial mentorship. This particular offering of social support begins to prepare members for the many mentoring relationships they will have in the future, and thus represents another step in preparation for adulthood. These mentorships and unique cross-age friendships are frequently maintained and/or better established through continued communication in online social spaces.

3.7.1. Caretaking Personalities

Over the course of my observations at the club, I noted both personalities that tended towards mentorship as well as unexpected friendships that blossomed across age gaps. One of the personalities that tended toward mentorship was Annabelle, a nine-year-old 4th grader who was often at the center of many social circles at the club. Despite her soft and high-pitched voice, she was often outspoken about her dislike of certain activities and did not hesitate to raise her voice in defense of a friend. She is a regular at the club, attending nearly every day like about a third to half of her club mates, and thus has become quite comfortable with the staff and other

club members over the years. Like Fiona, she is fairly close with Nellie and often hangs out in the front area to help with various administrative tasks, especially when she is trying to avoid the gym. She has an outgoing and positive demeanor, which attracts friendships with many different members at the club.

Within the first week of observations, I saw Annabelle console two club members on two separate occasions. During one, one of the youngest members, six-year-old Kelly, ran up to Annabelle with tears in her eyes and arms outstretched for a hug, which Annabelle enthusiastically returned. Kelly was upset that one of the older girls had declined an offer to play cards with her older sister, and was concerned that she would not be able to find a partner. Though they had not been talking before that point that day, she seemed to know that Annabelle would be available to console her, running over shortly after beginning to cry. Annabelle reacted immediately to the situation and took on a very caretaker oriented role, hugging Kelly and talking softly to her explaining that things would be okay until Kelly calmed down. This was not the first or last time Annabelle stepped up to a caretaker role, and her successes in these contexts earned her a reputation among club members as someone trustworthy to turn to and speak with about various issues. Her willingness and conscious acceptance of this role demonstrates another way that club members show social support for one another, by certain members establishing themselves as unofficial peer mentors to help their fellow club members in times of strife.

Many staff members echoed this personality type in their interviews. When asked how they thought club members showed support for one another, three out of five staff members mentioned the way in which certain members go above what is expected of them in order to help others when they see that another member is hurt. As staff member Christian explained,

“There's a few they will show support, but if somebody gets hurt, they'll go up to 'em. They're always wanting to be the person to take 'em up front.”

This pattern comes through most frequently when members volunteer to take others down to the front desk to get ice if they have been injured during a game or activity. Though a staff member or volunteer would typically bring the child up themselves following an injury, many of the older members ask to bring younger injured members up to get them ice, and that request is often granted so long as the injury is not too serious. Members seem to feel a sense of importance when doing so, and volunteer almost every time there is an injury. Staff members Nellie and Colin elaborated on this process and how it ties into a larger process of social support:

“…To see all the kids run after [one another], or somebody's sad and other kids will immediately crowd around them or come running to us to tell us what's going on, without a heartbeat, or help them. It's really cute to see some of the third and fourth graders bringing up a little kindergartener who needs to get ice and stuff like that. Or one of our fourth graders helping a first grader with their homework, or when we used to do power pages and stuff like that.”

- *Nellie*

“… When they get hurt and stuff like that, a lot of kids are willing to take them up here to help them. Like I think they... You know they do fight and stuff, it's like a family, if someone gets hurt, they'll take care of them, if some new kid's getting picked on and stuff, they look out and stuff like that. I've noticed a lot of stuff like that. They have their own little groups that... But, no, overall, yeah, I mean they're happy. When we're all together and doing stuff, I think they show support and are always there for each other.”

- *Colin*

This process demonstrates one non-social circle specific example of engaging in mentorship, but also ties into the process of negotiated allowances and testing the ability to claim certain roles and responsibilities during different stages of club membership. Staff member Christian relayed that it is a delicate balance between showing appreciation for their willingness to help, especially those that “aren’t always the best.” Another issue to work through is realizing

that some of them may not be able to help in all of the ways they wish to even because of physical limits like not being able to reach the fridge where the ice is located. He notes that he is often pleasantly surprised with how much members want to step into these roles and responsibilities even when they have consistent disciplinary issues, and wants to continue to instill that sense of responsibility as a major goal of the club. The administrative staff reflects this goal in their decision to pair older and younger kids for various activities throughout the school year and summer, and through the daily inter-age mixing in tournaments, snack time, and more.

3.7.2. Structure-Influenced Mentorship

In many cases younger members and older members responded well to being paired with one another, and actively engaged in the mentor/mentee relationship. During several specially planned summer activities, older members accepted their role as mentors and teachers helping explain the activity to younger members, and younger members relied on their paired mentors to settle into the activities and complete them successfully. Staff members also showed flexibility in how members were paired, taking into consideration certain cross age friendships already in place if relevant. In one such case, Nellie allowed an interruption of her current on the spot member pairing for a summer activity to allow Diana to sit with her self- proclaimed "children" Britney and Finn. The three of them had been playing around together in the game room all afternoon, with 12-year-old Diana pretending to be six and eight year old Britney and Finn's mom. They laughed heartily as they explained the situation to Nellie and presented it as justification for them needing to sit together for the activity, which Nellie amusedly allowed. Most surprising about this situation was Diana's patience in playing games and hanging out with

them as peers throughout the day, choosing to spend time with just them despite their differences in cognitive development and maturity. Diana did not seem to mind the bit of extra patience it took to make the relationship work.

She, like Annabelle, has many friendships with younger members of the club, often settling down to play something in the game room with them just as she would with any other member of her age group. Fiona and Catherine, two teen girls at the club, similarly formed long term friendships with various members more than four years younger than them. Fiona and Annabelle have a close bond, and will often spend time together in the short window between when Fiona arrives and Annabelle leaves. Catherine formed a solid friendship with younger girls Jillian and Marisa, often hanging out at the bleachers together during free time and playing games or looking at social media on each other's phones. One day when Catherine arrived late to the club, Jillian and Marisa rushed to finish their coloring contest submissions in order to follow her into the gym after looking up and smiling as she walked in. 12-year-old Rachel exercised significant patience within the mentorship context through her personal and completely voluntary summer long dance project, where she gathered interested club members, many of whom were younger, to choreograph and perform a dance together. Despite the frequent loss of focus and slower uptake of the moves among project participants, Rachel proudly assumed the role of head choreographer each week, honing skills in teaching, disciplining, and mentoring along the way.

Two of the oldest teens at the club during the summer, 17-year-old Andy and 14-year-old Jack, consistently signed up for Wii tournaments and stayed in the tournament area to help younger members learn how to play and set up their devices. Their willingness to help unsurprisingly did not preclude opportunities for annoyance or loss of patience, but overall they

were able to positively teach younger members about the various Wii tournaments. In these roles members give and receive social support especially in the areas of concrete, emotional, and advice support and gain maturity and responsibility in a variety of ways. Both parties need to demonstrate patience and respect in truly listening to each other to work together, and so they each need to ensure that both parties are heard. Older members gain the responsibility of teaching and guiding younger members, and younger members both feel supported by being taught, and give support by demonstrating appreciation for the mentorship. These relationships and opportunities then normalize cross-age communication and interaction, which encourages younger members to demonstrate the type of maturity and responsibility that fits being paired with an older member. As younger members began to familiarize themselves with various Wii tournaments, they began to branch out of their own age groups when pairing up for different rounds of the competition. By the end of the summer pairings were transcending age groups and cliques entirely, focusing instead on finding an appropriate partner for having fun playing the games.

3.7.3. Staff & Member Friendships

As discussed in the negotiated allowances section, another category of unique mentorships is the one between staff and members. Instances of true friendship were observed among the Lyn Treece group, where members are treated as peers and develop a broader and stronger sense of responsibility from that treatment. In the same way that their friendships with younger club members serve as mentorships to them, the staff to older member friendships provide an opportunity for older members to be mentored too, and balance the work of learning to be mentored and being one. I myself experienced this balance in being selected as the one

person with whom Ally wanted to share some troublesome feelings one day. After relaying how much better she felt after opening up, she ran off to release a bit more steam by playing soccer with Caleb, a 15-year-old teen who frequented the club in the late evenings. Despite the six-year difference between them, the two often played soccer together, having formed a friendship and bond over their mutual love of the sport after many years of attending the club together. Despite our major age difference too, Ally sought me out as a person to share her inner thoughts and worries with, and expressed her appreciation at her ability to do so.

Especially following their interviews, many of the youth at the club seemed much more eager to open up to me, which reveals a desire for this type of mentorship and space for airing out thoughts and feelings as they grow. Ally's worries in particular revolved around anxiousness about transitioning into adulthood and the teenage years in between, which we talked through to end on a hopeful note about her future. Future experiences and growth were also the topic of many of staff member Colin and nine-year-old member Michael's heart to hearts. Michael would frequently come to sit across from Colin as he supervised the game room, asking questions ranging from his opinions on sports to what sort of career he wanted and why. Colin answered these questions truthfully and asked a few of his own, often using Michael's answers to encourage him to not misbehave and to focus in school in order to achieve his future goals. When Michael relayed that he wanted to go on to play professional football, Colin encouraged this dream but also calmly reminded him of how important a role succeeding in school would play in gaining a college scholarship to eventually get drafted. Michael listened attentively, and pondered what Colin explained that he needed to work on to push for that goal. For many of the club members, they will be the first in their families to consider college and specialized career opportunities, which presents a need for a wider variety of role models and mentors to help

navigate and consider the new experiences that may be available to them. Starting with teen and pre-teen mentors at the club, these relationships help guide them into the years ahead with a greater network of support and stability. Colin stated that the relationships formed with club members are the most important and most rewarding pieces of the job, and it is through these relationships that members' concerns, hopes, and goals can best be reached. He described his way of showing support for them as "try[ing] to inspire them" and "be[ing] a role model."

3.7.4. Shared Interests, Getting Along & Tying in Social Media

Like the bond formed between Ally and Caleb over their shared love of soccer, Ariel and Annabelle's bond formed over their similar silly sense of humor. One afternoon when one finished the made up lyrics of a silly song started by the other, Ariel exclaimed with pride, "See, she gets me!" Annabelle immediately answered, "Yea, I get her and she gets me!" Such proud exclamations reveal the central way in which unique mentorships formed at the club help instill a sense of maturity and provide social support to members at the club. The grade difference between Annabelle and Ariel does not prohibit them from seeing their similarities and truly treating each other as peers. They build their friendship on those similarities rather than focusing on the strict category of grade or age, which presents the club as a space that transcends predetermined cliques based on age or grade to provide support from many even unexpected sources.

Of the 30 club members interviewed, nearly one third (10) named a member distinctly out of their age group and grade as the friend with whom they were currently closest. The reasons given for these friends being their closest were simple, ranging from they get along well and don't fight, to they've known each other for a long time, to they help calm them down when

they're feeling upset, to they just have fun together and enjoy playing at the club. None of the members seemed phased by the age difference in their interviews, instead focusing on the reasons for their friendship and how the dynamic fit into their larger social circles. Though many of these friendships were strengthened by time spent at the club, they often extended beyond that space through hangout time outside of the club and sustained conversation via social media. When asked about the older friends she had at the club and why, Marsha confirmed that she felt as close to them as her school friends and elaborated:

"**…** Faith is like a sister to me, and...Javi can be like a brother to me sometimes...and Rickie's like a sister to me. Then a couple of girls at school, they're like sisters to me. I can relate to a lot of people here and at school because we all like the same things, we all do the same things, we all like the same people, we all hang out with the same people. So, we all know the same people. If my best friend knows one person that I don't know, they'll be like, "Hey, here's... This is this person, this is this person, you guys should talk." And then we all become best friends and it's this one big, huge circle that I have here and at school."

Club member Billy named similar reasons for his friendships with older club members being most important to him, explaining:

"…Because me and him don't really get in fights a lot. We play basketball together all the time, and a little bit of soccer most of the time... And we just... we really like each other."

With the exception of staff/member relationships and mentorships, members use social media as a tool for maintaining conversation and further building cross-age friendships made at the club. Among those who listed an older or younger club member as their closest friend, tools like Messenger, Snapchat, or TikTok are used to continue conversations started at the club, begin new ones, or make plans to spend time together in the near future. Lily regularly uses a TikTok message group with her two best friends, one older and one younger, to air grievances, talk about

what has happened throughout the day, send silly images, and make plans to meet up. Marsha similarly uses messaging features on her accounts, primarily Instagram, to continue conversations and keep in contact with older high school friends Fiona and Josh when outside of the club. Annabelle, as mentioned in the social media emotional management section, will often use her social media accounts to contact any number of friends when feeling bored and unable to hang out with friends at the moment. Michael echoes this kind of use.

For those who did not use social media to contact friends outside of their classes and age group, many still used digital media to connect with them through playing online games. Sharing YouTube videos was another way of communicating using social and digital media for those without accounts. Both social media and online games were also used for bonding when spending time together face to face. Members watch videos together, play games, and take Snapchats or TikTok videos face to face at the club in addition to playing tag or board games, and can then seamlessly continue the use of digital media once they are apart for the day. Having these spaces available for continued connection becomes especially important with these cross-age mentorships and friendships, where the ability to see each other consistently throughout the day in classes is removed. The strength of these relationships as some club members' closest friendships in spite of the availability of other friends seen more consistently throughout the day denotes their importance, and suggests that they fill a special and significant role in members' lives. The important role social media plays in enabling the continuation and consistency in these relationships additionally denotes its important function in the social support and friendship process.

3.7.5. Exercising Maturity & Bridging the BGC with Outside Life

There is a certain honor to being able to maintain a meaningful friendship across age barriers and a certain maturity that it requires. This maturity carries over to the continued conversation and information sharing occurring on social media when face-to-face interaction is not possible, to ensure that the relationship persists. This specific use of social media can be categorized as an example of boyd's distributed networks, as it is used to bridge relationship development between face-to-face interactions. However, this particular use is bridging not just a traditional peer relationship but one that signals and requires the maturity of transcending age barriers, and fills a need and desire for clear and stable mentorship and support from older or younger peers. These relationships serve as points of guidance and support in both directions, and are unique pieces of social development in the social circles of club members as they transition into adulthood. Both advice and esteem support are particularly relevant in these relationships. Perhaps it is due to the different perspectives they need to be sensitive to in a friendship of different ages, but many members find their relationships with older or younger peers to be calmer and more relaxed, as unexpected as it may seem. Billy, Marsha, and Annabelle all noted when interviewed that they appreciated these friendships in particular because they don't get into fights, and just "get each other." As Marsha importantly notes about her friend Fiona, four years her senior, "I've fought with every single one of my friends but her."

This section in particular emphasizes the significance of the BGC and social media as specifically combined sources of social support for club members. Without the delicate balance of the two, members would not have the opportunities described here to form these meaningful cross-age and mentorship based relationships and maintain and grow them into long term mutual friendships. The significance these observations reveal about this combination point to the role

that this knowledge can play for youth development programs more generally, as related to technology use, standards, and protocols at places like the BGC.

For many at the Lyn Treece Boys and Girls Club, age is but a number when it comes to forming friendships. In the midst of everyday stressors, family troubles, and the wide-open future, more important than shared age or grade are common interests, lack of drama, and just getting along in the best sense of the phrase. The unique mentorship experiences club members find in their friendships with older and younger youth at the club push them to be the most mature versions of themselves. Whether it's assuming the responsibility of mentoring, teaching, or hanging out with someone younger, or demonstrating the ability to responsibly spend time with someone older, these relationships fill the desire for varied role models, for someone to support and care for, and for someone to support and care for them. These relationships begin through the practice of opening up opportunities for cross-age bonding and collaboration, as promoted by designed club activities that utilize member pairing and aid.

The friendships that build from these collaborations are then threaded together into members' broader social circles through social and digital media, which provides the means for communicating in between face-to-face moments and ensures continued conversation and bonding even without the usual means of daily classes and school time together. This whole process of developing and maintaining unique mentorships at the club and the role that social and digital media plays in their sustained development presents both of these spaces combined as a significant and unique source of social support for club members. These spaces together provide a specific source of consistent support and motivation for successful transitions into adolescence and adulthood, by motivating new social experiences and opportunities and melding perspectives that will help guide members as they grow.

3.8. Summary

From gatherings on the bleachers to all night Snapchat fests, the youth and adolescent members of the Lyn Treece Boys and Girls Club exercise a wide variety of social interaction and communication tactics. As demonstrated through the various shared examples above, various types of social support run through each of these tactics, and both digital spaces and the Boys and Girls Club are utilized to establish it. The specific practices revealed to me through observations and interviews at this site offered new takes on what it means to be a group "at-risk," what it means to construct personal forms of social support, and what it means to infuse technology use into social development.

In the first section, I described the foundational process that youth at Lyn Treece employ around blending social and digital media use and their social systems and processes at the BGC to form a full network of social support. Like boyd finds, their use of technology can be seen as distributed across various facets of their lives, but additionally I highlight the importance of collective participation in that process of distribution. This focus and tendency toward communal technology use suggests the importance of and need for community as a key social support need for this group. Whether online or at the club, Lyn Treece members long to feel loved and cared for and seek it out not just individually but through collective practices. The next section discusses the intricate system of negotiated allowances that both club staff and club members' families implement to navigate members' social development, through specific measures around roles and rules at the club and on social and digital media sites.

The responses to these allowances are in some ways expected and in some ways surprising, with some members finding ways to circumvent strict provisions on phone use and

rule applying at the club, but also just as frequently agreeing with and catering to those allowances. The concepts of trust and maturity come into play heavily here, where the youths' need for trust especially in consideration of other unstable environmental factors encourages them to trust the judgment of superiors and want to earn the ability for more flexible allowances.

Their active engagement with and in this process is reflected in the following section, where they reveal various individually and consciously constructed practices for using social and digital media along with the BGC to help navigate feelings of loneliness and frustration along with happiness and excitement. The particular uses of digital tools and the contexts of use they articulate reflect an active and conscious participation with these systems. Lastly, elements from each of these sections are highlighted in a discussion of the unique cross-age mentorships that are built throughout members' daily time spent at the club and sustained through social media. To many club members, these relationships are important because they offer different elements of communication and fill different social needs than their other more traditional friendships. They fill a need for social support through mentorship, and feeling loved and connected through the process of being needed by someone and needing someone who offers their time, love and advice to someone younger or older.

CHAPTER 4: Connecting Social Media and Social Support in Santa Monica, California

I definitely think [the Boys and Girls Club] plays a role in character development. They spend a lot of their time here, like half their day, after being in school for so long. A lot of them find what they love to do here, as far as technology, science, anything that we do here, sports, they end up really loving it and they spend a lot their time doing it here. I feel like it's not something every place could provide, like school.

- Kim, BGC staff

4.1. Introduction

Just a few blocks from the ocean, the Boys and Girls Club of Santa Monica Main Branch sits nestled in the middle a long row of commercial buildings both adjacent to across from it. Two blocks down in either direction is a major street; either Santa Monica Boulevard on one side or Wilshire Boulevard on the other, and the constant stream of cars on each is easily heard from outside the building. Directly adjacent to the club is the associated Boys and Girls Club office building, a small one story building with three offices and a handful of cubicles within. Directly across the street is a dance clothing store and an old motel. In between the office building and the main building is a large blacktop area, which is filled with kids of all ages playing basketball later in the afternoons. A small van with the Boys and Girls Club logo on it pulls up to the club around two-thirty pm to drop off the first load of kids, a cycle that continues for the next hour.

Once inside, club members walk past a small hip height swinging metal gate to get to the front desk, where they are greeted by the front desk staff and scan their member IDs before meandering over to whatever rooms are open at the moment. The front desk staff waves hello and asks, “How are you?” to every group of kids, while most respond with a nod or smile and a wave. Most of the rooms are closed at this time, so the few early kids bide their time sitting in the chairs at the front of the game room watching the slideshow on the TV there, or by playing air hockey or pool. Some sit on the couch in the back corner of the game room and scroll through their phones together. Every few minutes, one of the younger boys runs up the stairs at the back left of the game room to check if the door at the top, which leads to the Tech Center, is open. After about half an hour, he runs back down and announces, “The Tech Center is open!” which causes a flurry of members to sprint up the stairs and into the room. Up in the Tech Center, that room’s staff leader sits at a big desk at the front and prepares his headset, as the other kids

scamper over to various computer stations around the room. They all set up Fortnite and begin playing, and soon yelling fills the room as they shout plans to one another and to the staff member. Downstairs, the Tween Room, the gym, and the Learning Center open up and the usual groups of kids enter each: a group of eight or so middle school girls enter the Tween Room, a group of the youngest kids enter the Learning Center, and a mixed group runs off to the gym. In the tween room, the girls chat animatedly with the staff members at the desk there, and alternately make TikTok and Snapchat videos with each other and play with slime. In the Learning Center, volunteers sporadically help with homework, while kids finished with their assignments play with building blocks in the corner or also ask to play with slime at the tables.

Throughout the evening, teens arrive and go straight up to the Teen Center, where they spread out across the room laying on couches, scrolling through their phones together, sitting on bean bag chairs and playing video games, or singing loudly together to the music videos being displayed on the large TV at the center of the room. The front desk person makes announcements over the speaker system throughout the evening as parents arrive to take their kids home. Parents typically wait just beyond the little gate as their kids run over to join them. At six o'clock, an announcement comes over the speaker system asking all kids to wash their hands and prepare to go to dinner. They pour out of each of the rooms to wash their hands and then line up in the cafeteria, where they are served ravioli and sit down in any spot, typically with their closest friends, to eat and chat before resuming their previous activities. Just before seven pm the front desk staff sends a final announcement that the club will be closing for the day, and also shares announcements for upcoming family and member events, like the Friday after hours family movie night, and the winter basketball season sign ups. Up until the last few moments before each room closes down for the night, members bounce back and forth from room to room,

holding hands, laughing, and running up to certain staff for hugs or to share specific stories or images on their phones.

By the time I first entered the Boys and Girls Club of Santa Monica I had already been in conversation with numerous different personnel there for over a year. I left the Lyn Treece Club at Lafayette with a specific vision of the Boys and Girls Club, one of an intimate family-like community space, with many of the same challenges and affordances that went with it. Upon first look the Boys and Girls Club of Santa Monica seemed quite the opposite. The Santa Monica club is comprised of five branches spanning the length of the Santa Monica area, with multiple sites specifically located within schools and apartment complexes, and a whole administrative personnel office dedicated to overseeing funding and grants, outreach events, and day to day operations. The main branch, where I eventually settled in, was experiencing extensive administrative turnover at the time, which only amplified the complexity of the administrative system at this location and contributed to a long and drawn out process of becoming a volunteer. For several months beyond the initial email introduction, I was passed along from staff person to staff person at various levels of administrative control to schedule my first day.

I mention this stark difference in my initial assimilation to the Santa Monica site because it reflected a major shit in the site's social organization, which in turn influenced the opportunities for youth interaction, programming, and technology use. When my first day finally arrived, I observed a fairly different envisioning of how the Boys and Girls Club could be run, and in relation a very different envisioning of the role of digital and social media both at the club and in members' lives more generally. One of the areas of starkest difference, which will be discussed in more detail in the following sections, was the process of negotiated allowances. On the first day as I watched students slowly trickle in, one of my first glimpses of life at the Santa

Monica main branch was a young boy sitting on the couch in the game room swiping through his phone alone, only to be joined by friends who chatted and swiped together a few moments later. This group of friends was one of many who cheered loudly later when it was announced that as part of the annual BGC week events, the club would be holding a Fortnite competition upstairs in the Tech Center. A hectic dash to line up at the bottom of the stairs for first access into the Tech Center immediately followed the end of announcements.

The large-scale bureaucracy of the site and the more fragmented style of programming and staff leadership at the Santa Monica branch allows for greatly increased agency and choice among youth members in daily activities and beyond. This in turn brought their own preferred methods for digital and social media use for social support and self-expression to the forefront of club infrastructure in more explicit ways than I had observed before. As demonstrated within just the first hour of spending time in this new club space, technology, and particularly digital and social media, was a consistent and built in part of the environment at this site. The consistency and presence of social media revealed new articulated needs around agency, vulnerability, emotional management, and other processes within social support exchange that continued to build on what youth at Lyn Treece had expressed.

Over the following six months of daily observations and interviews at this site with staff and youth members, I eventually found a certain niche at the Santa Monica Boys and Girls Club Main Branch that included some of the site's heaviest social media users and most beloved staff. From the first few weeks of struggling to find a concrete role to the last few weeks of exchanging excited backstage high fives with the tween friend group during a successful winter play, the dynamic of the Santa Monica site unfolded to reveal a number of cliques, roles, stories, and resources that make the site run and ultimately provide social support. The significance of the

intersection of the Boys and Girls Club and social media revealed itself as a major factor in the process of gaining, receiving, and maintaining social support once again at this site. In addition, the same core themes still emerge, though with different emphases and variations within each that align with the differences in the Santa Monica structure and location. Many of these differences begin to reveal potential shifts in needs, expectations, and motivations present in these two geographically and culturally disparate areas.

This chapter builds on the previous one by confirming and validating many of the findings from the Lyn Treece observations and interviews. It additionally moves beyond this validation stage by providing important nuance, layers, and introducing new challenges and questions through describing and analyzing the significant differences in the social media use and social support processes present at this site. Though the use of social media for social support in the areas of constructed combined social support, negotiated allowances, emotional management, and unique mentorships still ring true, the shifts in emphasis and importance within those themes raise important questions about how the changing factors in youth development practices and community environments have influenced these processes. The remainder of this chapter will provide more insight into the inner works of the Santa Monica Boys and Girls Club Main Branch, through a breakdown of how each of the themes in the previous chapter manifested at this site. Like the previous one, this chapter will close by emphasizing the greater significance these findings pose in understanding the role of social media in social support maintenance and exchange within the lives of youth development program members.

4.2. The Main Branch Santa Monica Boys and Girls Club

The Santa Monica Boys and Girls Club Lincoln Branch, also often referred to as the Main Branch, is a Santa Monica, CA location of the Boys and Girls Clubs of America. It is one of five Santa Monica Boys and Girls Clubs sites in the Santa Monica area, a large city of approximately 92,000 directly adjacent to the major metropolitan area of Los Angeles, a city of 4 million. The main branch is the largest and most well established location of all of the Santa Monica BGC sites, which include the Mar Vista Gardens Branch, the John Adams Middle School Branch, the St. Anne School Branch, and the Olympic High School Branch. As indicated by the names, many of the other sites are directly affiliated with nearby schools and apartment complexes and are open to area youth based on proximity to the site. The main branch is open to all interested youth members in the Santa Monica area and nearby neighborhoods including Northridge, Bellflower, West Covina, and Inglewood. Across the total number of sites, the Santa Monica BGC serves over 4,000 youth each year ages 6-18 from Santa Monica and the Greater Los Angeles area. The club was founded in 1944.

The administrative service center, located directly adjacent to the Main Branch in a separate building, is the office for 12 full time staff members that oversee a variety of administrative processes including grants, resource development, volunteer coordination, transportation, membership, and finances. 11 full-time staff members and one part-time staff member run the daily programming for the club, and are advised by the interim Club Director. The interim Club Director was in place for the duration of my observation period, as they were not yet able to find a permanent replacement amidst other substantial administrative personnel shifts.

The Main Branch itself includes a number of rooms and amenities. The structural organization of the site contrasts from Lyn Treece in that rooms are organized primarily by age group in addition to several rooms being organized by programming and main activities. The rooms and amenities include:

- A large open game room located directly beyond the main entrance with multiple pool tables, an air hockey table, multiple ping pong tables, a shuffle board set, and a full size Dance Dance Revolution set
- Several administrative offices
- A full kitchen and cafeteria
- A gym equipped with several basketball courts and bleachers
- An outside picnic area and playground
- An outside blacktop area with basketball hoops and a shed containing varied sports equipment
- A Learning Center with a small library, a toy area, an attached back room with couches and whiteboards for a tween weekly program called Torch Club, a "critter corner" with a turtle and several fish, a Smartboard, and several computers
- A tween room with a TV and Xbox, an additional critter corner including guinea pigs, spiders, and other creatures
- A Tech Center featuring over twenty computers, a projector, and several iPads for general use
- A music studio with two rooms equipped with several guitars, a soundboard, an iMac with recording software, and multiple other assorted instruments,

- A Teen Center with two large TVs, a side room with more computers, two Xboxes, and assorted furniture

Within the group of staff, each has a specific set of programs that fall under their jurisdiction and are located in a specific room associated with that programming and/or a specific age group. The full time cook prepares and serves dinner in the kitchen and cafeteria each day with the help of other staff. Two staff members rotate between running sports programming in the gym and outside on either the playground, in the picnic area, or the blacktop. Another staff member is in charge of the game room and tween room and runs cooking club, arts club, drama club, and SMART girls, a club for young tween girls that discusses and works on activities related to the challenges of pre-adolescence. One staff member is in charge of the front desk duties including announcing when a member's parent has arrived over the speaker system, while another leads the Learning Center and guides members through daily power hours where members complete their homework assignments with the help of volunteers, participate in a volunteer-led book club and STEM club, and can participate in Torch Club, a leadership training program for tweens. The Tech Center is led by a full-time staff member who leads tech club members through weekly activities in computing and information technology, including building circuits, learning video editing, and often, playing Fortnite and other games. Lastly, staff members in the Teen Center direct and implement teen center programming which involves a teen version of SMART girls and Torch Club, teen run open mic nights, and College Bound, a program that ensures members are prepared for college and achieve high school graduation by providing application assistance, essay help, test prep, and college tours, among a number of other impromptu activities. Seasonal activities like the summer talent show, monthly teen nights,

winter basketball and summer soccer teams, monthly family movie nights, and other events also take place throughout the year.

The club serves 80-100 kids between ages 6-18 per day, with attendance consistently reaching 100 or more during the summer months, during which programming is provided from 7 am to 6:30 pm. During the school year, the club is open to all members regardless of age from 2 pm – 7 pm, with many members arriving via the BGC bus from school around 3:30 pm. Teens typically arrive to the club on their own and go directly up to the Teen Center. The demographic of the club is varied but the majority of members are non-white, with a breakdown of 13% Caucasian, 22% Black, 49% Latino/a, 6% Asian, 1% Native American, and 7% mixed race or other. 44% of members are female and 56% are male. The age range break down is 10% 5-7 year olds, 32% 8-10 year olds, 30% 11-13 year olds, 20% 14-16 year olds, and 8% 17-18 year olds. This diversity is reflected in the staff, where all but two program staff members are Latino/a or Black, and over half are women. Similar to the Lyn Treece Boys and Girls Club, the economic status of members skews heavily toward the lower end, with 80% of club members residing in low-income households.

Upon arrival, members scan their membership cards at the front desk and typically sit in the waiting area near the front desk chatting, using their phones or doing homework, or play games in the game room area until the rest of the rooms officially open. Members trickle in small groups of 5-10 via the official BGC bus, on the Santa Monica public transit Big Blue Bus system with a designated staff member, or arrive on their own. At about 3:30 pm all members are called to eat snack either outside in the picnic area or in the cafeteria, and announcements are made about daily programs and upcoming events or awards like Youth of the Month. At the end of snack, members who have homework to do line up behind the Learning Center staff member,

and all others are free to go to whichever rooms they please throughout the remainder of the day. They are encouraged to participate in the weekly programs consistently from week to week, but are free to roam throughout the space otherwise. At 6 pm all members are served a hot dinner in the cafeteria often varying between a rice and beans-based or pasta-based dish, and then resume free time until the end of the day. Phone use is allowed virtually at any time throughout the day, as there are no explicit rules against use except for during snack time announcements and special events like the drama club play.

4.3. Themes of Social Support and Social Media Use at Lyn Treece

The next several sections of this chapter will provide further in depth evidence for the role of social media and the Boys and Girls Clubs as significant vessels for social support in members' lives, through a detailed look at a number of themes and examples that emerged in relation to this phenomenon. As a review, the emergent themes that reveal the intricate processes of social media use for social support for these youth are constructed combined social support, negotiated allowances, social media emotional management, and unique mentorships. As noted in the introduction, though these themes still remained consistent for youth at the Santa Monica BGC, they did so to significantly different extents. Social media emotional management was one of the strongest themes at this site as revealed in both observations and interviews, while it was one of the weakest at Lyn Treece. Constructed combined social support and negotiated allowances remained strong across both sites, but while unique mentorships played a major role at Lyn Treece, their presence was much sparser at the Santa Monica Main Branch. The broader significance section of this chapter will begin to discuss the questions that arise and the potential factors that might have influenced this shift in importance across these various themes.

4.4. Constructed Combined Social Support

Since my mom had it, and everyone else in my family had it… I decided to put Instagram instead of apps [on my phone] because Instagram is a little bit more interesting…you get to see people, what they do and you get to know them more.

- **Grace, BGC member**

I would say a lot of them communicate in groups if that makes sense. Not to say that they're not individually thinking, but they are…a lot of them like to make pacts…like a lot of them like to make their Tik Tok videos together. I always have kids in my room, just making Tik Tok videos and planning out what they're going to do and stuff.

- **Kim, BGC staff**

In great contrast with the Lyn Treece Boys and Girls Club, the Santa Monica Main Branch does not have a formal centralized space, which reflects its structure of decentralized programming. Besides brief announcements in either the cafeteria or the picnic area, club members are mostly dispersed according to their will and interest throughout the day. As a result members often fall into particular routines of club interaction, engaging mostly with a small subset of other kids and staff. This was a stark and immediately noticeable shift from the organizational structure at the Lyn Treece club. There the entirety of the club's youth were gathered together on the bleachers at several different points in the day, and with the exception of free time were engaging in activities for the most part together as a group regardless of age. This observation raised several questions and concerns regarding how this major structural difference might alter the way in which the club is perceived as a public communal space for youth members. Rather than interacting with all club members during some phase of the day, the club could easily become more of an extension of a school routine, where members engaged mostly with their daytime classmates and did not necessarily expand their social circle, thus potentially missing out on new sources of social support from club friends and staff. However,

this concern was allayed as the observation period unfolded. It became clear that though these stark differences remained, they did not impede genuine and consistent exchanges of social support at the club from and between several member groups. There were admittedly more clique-based engagements in the daily routine, but these were maintained in tandem with consistent displays of social support at the club. Many of these displays of social support were again frequently supported and/or assisted by social media use. Within those instances, some members also used digital and/or social media to extend opportunities for sharing and receiving social support.

4.4.1. Collective Technology Use

One of the clearest similarities in the combination of the club and social media serving as sources of social support for youth members at both the Lafayette and Santa Monica locations is the prevalence of group based digital and social media use within friendships at the club. The preference toward collective digital engagement remains strong at the Santa Monica Main Branch. Though the constant distribution of members throughout different spaces in the building makes the extent of this practice initially hard to gauge, a deeper analysis into the dynamics of digital and social media use across the various spaces and internal programs reveals a rich system of group use and collective social support exchange. The tendency of group media and technology use in social support exchanges is reflected in the basic descriptive statistics at the main branch as well. 32% of overall tech use observed was spent in groups, and a substantial 93% of observed instances of constructed combined social support were instances of group technology use, specifically group social media use.

In the tween room, where I ultimately spent the majority of my time after assuming the role of assistant director for the drama club, youth members can be very frequently seen taking photos and videos on Tik Tok, Snapchat, or Instagram together when not participating in optional programs. When not actually creating content together, the middle-schoolers can often be found cuddling together on a couch while scrolling through content or excitedly chatting and giggling while passing around the phone to share and view content together. This group and others often view shared social media content on their phones together during the initial arrival period as well. Upstairs in the Tech Center, the emphasis is placed much more on digital rather than social media. The activity of choice there is multi-player video gaming, but the focus on collective engagement with other club members by using technology with a specific communicative component remains the same.

Similar to the Tech Center, in the Learning Center members are often found playing games together on computers and iPads or referring to content together on their phones in between bouts of playing with slime after finishing their homework. In each of these exchanges, the invitation to participate in the exchange, the consistent affectionate physical and verbal communication, and other similar attributes associated with the exchange signify the outcome of giving and receiving social support. At the main branch, the clique-based nature of these engagements, where members often choose to go to the same rooms each day and interact with some of the same friend groups each day, adds another layer or sense of social support to the process. The sense of belonging in these instances that stems from being a part of the routine with the same group day after day provides an important sense of worth and support that is consistently reaffirmed.

The club itself provides a physical space and social structure for re-affirming these friend groups and providing opportunities for support exchange, and the extension of those friendships into members' virtual spaces is symbolic of the strength and value of that friendship in that it is worthy of being publicly shared with others. Staff member Kim described the tendency toward group interaction and social media use as a key part of members' communication in and outside of the club. When asked how youth members communicated, she explained:

"I would say a lot of them communicate in groups if that makes sense, not to say that they're not individually thinking, but they are, a lot of them like to make pacts, like if one kid thinks something or one kid wants to do something else, then everyone wants to do it. They never wanna do something by themselves, they never wanna go somewhere by themselves. They communicate on social media, like a lot of them like to make their Tik Tok videos together. I always have kids in my room like, just making Tik Tok videos and planning out what they're going to do and stuff."

Kim's statement reflects the group-based mentality of members in both online and offline settings throughout the club. It also importantly reflects the intersection of the Boys and Girls Club and social media as a blended source of social support for members through the way in which both spaces are used to enact group engagement and embrace the validation of various groups and their boundaries.

4.4.2. Exercising Autonomy

A key concept in this process that is reflected in the intersection of club and social media engagement is autonomy, and the ability for club members to give and receive social support through the process of choosing whom to allow into their club network and by extension their virtual networks. While the key concepts of safety and trust that emerged at Lyn Treece in the assessment of constructed combined social support are still important factors at the Santa Monica

club, the concept of autonomy and choice seem to rise about the rest in both this area and others. A clear physical example of this involves the clique that I worked with for the majority of the observation period. They will be referred to here as the tween clique, a group of eight sixth and seventh grade girls who were very close to one another, very close to the tween room and Learning Center staff members, and engaged in frequent daily social media use at the club. The group had a tendency to show social media content to only a select number of staff in addition to each other. Members are permitted to use their phones during dinner, and so often this group of friends would choose to sit next to the staff members that ran the Tween Room and the Learning Center as well as drama club and torch club, of which they were all a part. Beyond sitting with them and demonstrating that sense of physical closeness, these staff were the only two adults at the club with whom the group would voluntarily share social media content. After taking pictures or sharing videos amongst themselves at the dinner table, they would often pass one of their phones or run over with one of their phones to the staff members to show them.

Though I had been working with them every day as part of the drama club for several months, it was not until nearly the very end of my observation period that someone from the group voluntarily showed me a video on their phone, which was prompted by discussing their social media use in their interview. In their protectiveness of their group and their social media content, the group places significant value in sharing club time and social media content with others, and thus the process of sharing becomes an act of social support. This process communicates acceptance, confirmation, and validation of group belonging, and indicates a certain level of trust has been reached. This careful process of sharing and acceptance also reflects the importance of social media to this group in the vulnerability they perceive to be present on social media. By inviting others into their virtual spaces they in turn invite them to see

and know more of themselves, which enters into a deeper arena of potential social support exchange.

9-year-old club member Grace described this idea explicitly when explaining why she chose to get an Instagram in favor of other applications including various phone games she enjoys playing. She explained that she found Instagram more interesting than those other options particularly because you "get to know [people] more." For this reason Grace is very strict with whom she allows to be her friend on Instagram, and limits herself to just that platform. She is only friends with a handful of people on the site, mostly family members, and posts mostly pictures and videos of her cat. Grace explained that people follow her to find out more about her life especially in relation to her cat, and she follows some other people for the same content. When describing one of the accounts she frequently checks, she explained:

"One of my friends in Instagram is Susanna, my cousin, because I've known her for a long time but she also has a cat, and we gave it to her, and we... I friended her because we really... I really wanna know what happens to her cat named Princess."

Grace's description reveals her understanding that she will likely learn and hear more about her cousin Susanna's cat through Instagram rather than in person, but also refers to the concepts of autonomy, trust, and vulnerability that play a role in how she chooses who is allowed into her virtual space. She mentions that she Susanna is a friend on Instagram because she has known her for a long time and presumably trusts her as a result.

11-year-old Sandy echoed these sentiments of social media opening others up to seeing more details of one's life and the inner workings of one's day. When asked why she had her social media accounts, which included TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram, she answered,

"Well for fun and also I can contact my friends and just, I don't know, show them what I'm doing, and…and then for Snapchat….you can text people, you can call people, FaceTime people on there, you can show them the new outfit you got or different reasons."

Here Sandy describes both the ease with which she can contact the people she is closest with through Snapchat, and how that connects to the minute details of her life she can share with them, like a new outfit she might have just purchased. These minute details are often what are included in snaps to get to a "Snapchat Streak" with a close friend, which Sandy has going with a close friend at the club, Emily. She described the satisfaction of achieving a streak with her friend, where you receive a small symbol next to the person's name that you have a streak going with to symbolize your unbroken stream of communication with each other. The messages that comprise these streaks occur both at the club and outside of it, and continuously represent Emily and Sandy's friendship, the active choice that went into forming and maintaining it, and the sense of social support that arises from it.

Club members Kailey and Laura also describe a consistent exchange of social support that spans both the club and social media. In her interview, Kailey named Laura as her most talked to friend on social media, noting though that often she hears from Laura when she is nagging her to delete her photos. In one of the most unique findings in this group, Laura has strong feelings about people her age sharing too much of themselves online, and accordingly often encourages her friends to share less and keep their accounts more carefully curated. This often means sharing less of the minor details in favor of major events. Surprisingly though, despite this stance Laura does often still participate in the crafting of TikTok videos that the rest of the group partakes in at the club, often documenting silly scenes in various rooms of short dances, zoom ins of silly faces, and similar scenes. Perhaps this suggests that the social support

gained from participating in the social media interactions at the club with the rest of the friend group outweighs other concerns.

4.4.3. Expressing Vulnerability

The idea of vulnerability and its connection to social support additionally comes to play when examining the intersected social support and social media patterns of members in the Teen Center. Members 13 and older are allowed to spend time there, and often all high school age members choose to remain in the upstairs Teen Center for the majority of club hours, with the exception of dinner time and the circumstances of a few teens who have had long standing relationships with staff as youth. The latter group occasionally spends time with those staff that they are close with in their other rooms. The dynamic of the Teen Center members is much less clique based, with seemingly all teen members regularly engaging with one another in daily activities including formal programming, informal sports, and planning teen run and teen specific programs like the monthly teen open mic night. Group use of technology plays an important role here as in other rooms, but in a way that encompasses an even larger group rather than specific subsets.

Though there may be groups of two or three teens looking at phones, scrolling through social media, or conversing with one another, there is typically also a central communal experience they are participating in, including watching a sports game together, playing a group video game, watching a movie, or frequently, watching, dancing, and singing along to music videos. The teens seemed much more conscious of taking advantage of the space to interact as a large communal group, and were careful to conduct communal conversations and activities even while engaging with social media or other content on personal devices. This often gave way to a

shared moment where everyone would set aside their phones to participate. During several visits to the Teen Center I witnessed the whole room break out in song and dance to a favorite new music video, and teens across different grades and social groups would set aside their virtual and in-person subgroups to join together. It seemed they were all connected via social media across subgroups as well, as they used those platforms to publicize and organize group activities like the open mic nights.

In this way the teens seem to understand and recognize the vulnerability of sharing and providing access to their online platforms and networks at the club, but react in a different way than the tween group by being choosing to be vulnerable with each other and establishing wider sources and networks of social support exchange. A sense of belonging in the teen group was established fairly evenly for all members, and everyone excitedly contributed and participated in the enhancement of the group together as a result. I attended one open mic night toward the end of my observations, and found a very heartening scene of support throughout the night, with members loudly and enthusiastically cheering for each one of their peers, and excitedly recording and sharing the moments. This display and difference between the age groups indicates an interesting possible trend toward re-identifying the role of the club and social media for social support as members grow and adopt new roles both in and out of the club.

4.5. Negotiated Allowances

My mom and my grandma says Snapchat…it's inappropriate and bad, and I don't... I'm not allowed to have Facebook because I don't need Facebook.

- **Joan, BGC member**

I think it's okay for maybe middle schoolers to have it, but parents need to... They don't watch their kids, they don't even follow their kids, they don't have their passwords.... There's no control over it.

- **Aileen, BGC staff**

Though each room at the Santa Monica Main Branch has a specific overarching function, in day-to-day practice most of the rooms are fairly multipurpose. Some of this multipurpose nature has to do with the duplicate technologies in each space, while in other ways it is more a factor of the generally flexible nature of the main branch more generally. The Teen Center, the tween room, the game room, the Learning Center, and the Tech Center all have video game capabilities through Xbox or another system, and thus all have TVs and/or projectors. Those same rooms with the exception of the game room have access to iPads, and the Learning Center, Teen Center, and Tech Center additionally have several computers available for use. These functional affordances motivate simultaneous use of the rooms for several different activities.

Though the tween room is used for arts and crafts from 4-5 pm on Tuesdays, other members might also use the iPads in different ends of the room or use the space to complete their homework. In the Learning Center, one might find an even greater mix of activities: tweens hanging out in the Torch Club room taking videos on Snapchat, younger members completing their homework with the help of volunteers, others using the computers lining the walls to play games together, and still others watching a movie on the projector or playing with Legos and board games on top of the carpet play structure in the back corner. In the Tech Center, there is consistently a divide between the group playing a two-person fighting game on the projector in the front center area of the room, the group of usually younger teens and older tweens hanging out around the front desk with the Tech Center staff member, and the members scattered throughout the rest of the room at individual computer stations playing Fortnite. In the Tech Center the clash between these groups and uses is especially apparent, between the noise of Fortnite players yelling directions at each other, to the group playing the projector game yelling

about who was next or directing the current players on what to do, to the group of teens and tweens chatting animatedly with the staff member and others. Even in the gym, though the majority of the members played basketball or another sport, many still hung out on the bleachers and chatted or looked at their phones together while taking breaks.

4.5.1. Organizational Flexibility

The multipurpose nature of these rooms and by extension of the club more generally depicts a type of flexibility and autonomy at the club that was in stark contrast to the structural nature of Lyn Treece. At Lyn Treece each room had a fairly singular function, with typically one activity going on per time, and most time throughout the day was spent in either the gym or the game room. Members were expected to ask to go to the bathroom, and leaving a room without any mention was frowned upon and reprimanded except when moving between the game room and gym during free time. At the Main Branch, it was surprising at first to see the ease with which members quite frequently shifted from room to room throughout the day, bouncing around from option to option as they became bored or disinterested with one, or just wanted to see what was happening in another space. This less structured approach to navigating the space became apparent from the very first day, when the students essentially ran in different directions to their room of choice following the announcements. The only time this pattern shifted somewhat significantly was during the summer session and only in relation to a very particular context. During this period access to the Tech Center became more restricted due to its popularity. Members of varying age groups were assigned specific times periods throughout the day when they were allowed to use the space, and were required to line up at the bottom of the stairs to be let in as the groups switched places.

This new sense of flexibility in organizational and functional structure adapted at the Main Branch and especially the way it contrasts from the Lyn Treece organizational structure is significant. It informs the set of expectations and standards for behavior throughout the space, as well as the roles it normalizes for youth members at the club. At Lyn Treece, the more formalized structure set the expectation of concrete authority among staff members. It in turn helped normalize rules like cell phone use only being permitted during free time and mandatory participation in club wide daily activities like Triple Play and Survivor, even though there was push back against it from time to time. At the Santa Monica site, the relative freedom to participate in activities optionally and move from room to room normalized frequent use of this privilege, and in turn normalized fairly constant cell phone use throughout the day. In relation to negotiated allowances, these differences spurred questions around how this might affect the boundaries, parameters, and allowances for technology, and specifically social media usage. This more generalized technology usage and allowance at the club influenced the initial assumption that the flexibility would lead to more relaxed approaches to social media use both personally among members and on a parental level.

This assumption was informed especially by the finding that the negotiated allowances at Lyn Treece tended to align with the system of negotiated allowances put in place among parents, which ultimately influenced the sense of concern and need for negotiated boundary setting and awareness among members both regarding technology and beyond. Surprisingly however, despite these structural differences in the club environment, all of the members interviewed relayed several of the same concerns about interacting with strangers and establishing privacy online that Lyn Treece members did. Santa Monica club members additionally both generally agreed with parental restrictions on use and enacted their own negotiated allowances processes

accordingly. This consistency likely relates to the balance between the sense of trust and safety established at the club across both sites and the wariness of spaces outside of it. These feelings enable more autonomy within the club space but encourage more restricted negotiated allowances in virtual networks.

4.5.2. Navigating Trust & Comfort

In the same way that trust and safety plays a role in the ways Lyn Treece and Santa Monica members participate in constructed combined social support exchanges, the idea of trust and the associated feelings of comfort are demonstrated in how youth members relate to the more unstructured format of club programming. In line with this mode of programming, club staff are relatively slow to discipline, and especially discipline harshly. Typical collective disciplinary tactics like assigning "sentences" or requiring moments of silence before transitioning to a new activity were not used at the Santa Monica site. Avoiding these practices in tandem with the flexible programming structure allowed for a sort of break down between youth member and staff member to a certain extent as well, where more room opened up for peer interaction vs. an authoritative relationship. Though this breakdown in authority potentially encouraged greater vulnerability and openness among members, it also sometimes led to half-hearted participation in activities in favor of social media use or a similar interest. During an early fall session of cooking club, most of the tween friend group left half-way through to build and record a scavenger hunt for the cooking club leader and tween room staff member, Kim. They used Facetime to connect Kim to youth members in other rooms who were giving her clues about where to send group members to look for items to bring back, and additionally recorded the process.

Though Kim thought the scavenger hunt they had put together for her was creative and sweet, she still expressed annoyance at them for abandoning the cooking club activity to do it. At Lyn Treece, members were required to finish whatever activity they had committed to, or they were not allowed to do a formal activity like arts and crafts the next day. This was an effective overall measure for reducing activity dropout as depicted in the cooking club incident, which unfortunately happened rather consistently in other activities that followed throughout the next few months. However, despite consistent difficulties especially related to losing attention or focus during drama club activities, gradually the trust and respect the youth members had built for Kim shone through as they practiced extra intently for the last few weeks and pulled off an excellent show. This display of extra dedication and focus was especially significant in that it was definitely of their own volition rather than in response to specific disciplinary tactics. The differences in negotiated allowance approaches and outcomes between the two sites reveals a tension between the affordances and disadvantages of each.

At both sites however, the process of negotiated allowances regarding social media use is heavily related to parental supervision and enforcement, and in both cases it is rather strict. Despite becoming comfortable with autonomy in phone use and general social participation at the club, members generally accept and agree with the rules laid out for them by their parents around social media use. Like the Lyn Treece youth members, they also have specific reasons for why they agree with the set rules as well as specific ways of enacting and enforcing those parameters on their own. In this way, their exercised autonomy is clearly reflected in their practice.

Nine-year-old Grace seemed to agree with the parameters placed on her phone and social media use because she recognizes the privilege she has of having one at that age, and recognizes

that she still had the choice of downloading the app to begin with so that she was not left out of family sharing. When asked if her closest friend had an Instagram account, she answered solemnly, “No. She said that I’m very lucky because she wanted an Instagram story,” sagely acknowledging her gain in this social realm. As a result, she describes her restricted friending policy as follows:

> “Well, I decide who I'm friends with because... I only friend people that I know because they're in my family…I don't tell anyone at my mom's work 'cause they might want to Instagram me.”

Grace has accepted the parameters of only friending family, and goes a step further to exercising a personal layer of autonomy on the parameters by drawing a boundary at her mom’s work friends. Twelve-year-old Kailey echoes this sentiment of ownership and privilege when discussing her reasoning for using Instagram. She explained that she uses Instagram for her own entertainment mostly. When asked how that the entertainment offered through Instagram was different than what might be offered on TV, she responded, “Well, my phone is my phone. It officially belongs to me.” This answer reveals a key connection again to the autonomy gained through negotiated allowances at the club and autonomy still gained in these permitted patterns of social media use. By framing her use through the lens of ownership, she is the ultimate owner of the device and the accounts, even if they are regulated by parental rules. Like Grace, Kailey also employs a particular set of personal allowances for social media engagement that seem to be informed by a rhetoric of concern around exposure to potential strangers online.

When asked about her multiple Instagram accounts, she explained, “I have an aesthetic account. And so it doesn't show my face. So, that's public.” Her second account however, is separate “because it’s with them,” referring to the rest of her tween group at the club. This concern around privacy and not showing ones face or personal details to others outside of the

immediate friend group reflects on a particular rhetoric of concern in this group that does not tie into ideas of cyberbullying or many of those traditional fears around social media use, but more so around the idea of vulnerability to strangers and even known entities outside of the friend group as referenced in the previous section. The lack of concern around cyberbullying paired with the present concern about potential strangers links strongly with Lyn Treece members' thoughts.

4.5.3. Concerns, Controls, & Agreements

Similar to Lyn Treece staff, Santa Monica staff members also generally expressed concerns and desires for concrete controls put in place around youth use of social media. Though traditional fears like cyberbullying were not mentioned explicitly, the concern was still present as it was selected as the topic of a spring drama club play specifically performed by the tween group. Even more intently than cyberbullying, staff reported potential distraction from meaningful face-to-face interaction and exposure to inappropriate ideas or experiences as key concerns. These concerns still reflect the presence of a certain adult-based rhetoric of concern even among the acceptance of a more flexible youth technology use policy. Staff member Aileen expressed firm concern about the increasingly younger age groups that were using phones and social media, and claimed that "elementary schoolers should definitely not have one [social media account]." When asked to elaborate, she explained:

"They're introduced to things that they shouldn't be introduced to so early. It's okay for them to know certain aspects but not all of it to be slammed into their faces at the same time and they just grow up with the wrong information too because not everything is accurate on social media."

Aileen described her concerns as distinctly related to her worry that there are not adequate parental controls and limitations being placed on youth social media and greater technology use, both with regards to age and amount of time spent on various devices and platforms. Staff member Heather echoed these concerns and the call for limitations, relaying:

"A kid can be on, playing games, doing things on their phones, where there's not a check. I wish there was something that would give them alert every hour, so [they hear], "You actually used technology for this period of time today. Maybe you should do something else." And like an alert, just kind of showing them that, "Today, you've been on the phone for five hours," and I don't know, that's just my take on it…I worry about this... Not just kids here. I just generally, I … I feel like there's gotta be limitations, and I worry about them getting... Being over dependent on this form of technology...What are going to be the effects of this?"

Kim additionally spoke about the worrisome nature of spending too much time on social media platforms without realizing it:

"I think it can be useful…but sometimes it can be very overwhelming, and take over a lot of your time without realizing it because the time passes by so quickly…"

Heather specifically mentioned hoping for the opportunity to integrate a sort of checks and balances system into the club, where the club would designate a set amount of time per day when members were asked not to use their phones and instead engage in present face-to-face interaction. Her suggestion reflects some of the rules already in place at Lyn Treece, again calling attention to the same general motivation for negotiated allowances in a way that is fueled by concern-related social support even as it functionally takes different forms at each site. As described in the previous chapter, these systems of negotiated allowances can be viewed as a form of social support exchanged from guardians and caretakers to youth. In these contexts, rules are put in place around social and digital media use that are informed by certain concerns but

also fueled by love for the youth involved. The investment in their wellbeing and the negotiation of use that follows communicates that the youth are loved and cared about.

Also similar to Lyn Treece members' responses, a few Santa Monica club members were more explicit about how they agreed with their parents' assessments of certain or all social media sites being inappropriate for them. Ten-year-old Megan's mom uses a basic measure for deciding when Megan can get a TikTok account: when she turns 13, since that is the site's required age limit. Though Megan expressed in her interview that she agrees with her mom's decision, she encouraged them to settle for a compromise where she can make videos and still participate in the process of using fun filters with her friends but cannot post them, which is a possibility within the app without an account. Though Sandy's parents do allow her to use multiple social media sites, they have an agreement where they have to be friends with her on all accounts to monitor her use, which she expressed in her interview that she is fully ok with. She even described the idea as both her and her parents' idea, and emphasized that she is fine with the arrangement because "[she doesn't] post anything bad." Like many other members, Sandy still finds ways to assert her autonomy in this process through mutually agreeing to monitoring. She too expressed hesitance with public accounts and even public online engagement through posting on YouTube accounts because she finds it uncomfortable.

Eleven-year-old Joan also agreed with her mom and grandma's assessments that she doesn't need certain social media sites. They are both in agreement that she does not need a Facebook especially, though she is permitted to use Tik Tok. When asked why she agreed that she does not need a Facebook, she responded,

" It's pointless, yeah. It just makes you rage about politics, that's all it does…I kinda don't want it either because it's meant for inappropriate things."

Joan expressed one of the more cynical views about social media more generally, describing Tik Tok, a site she does enjoy using regularly, as "stupid people doing stupid things." This notion of understanding the inappropriate behavior occurring on Facebook aligned exactly with opinions expressed by Lyn Treece members in this area. Her overall assessment of social media reflected a conscious and careful awareness of her use and its goals, going even a step further from other members' awareness of specific personal patterns of use and boundaries. In addition, her and other's definite acceptance of the rules surrounding their online engagement and social media use and especially their explicit willingness and agreement around the terms reflect an understanding of the rules as emerging from a place of care. This suggests that the youth may in fact even perceive these rule setting practices as social support sources, particularly if they are negotiated in a way that still allows for autonomy and involvement in the process.

4.6. Social Media Emotional Management

[I use social media] just for letting people know that I'm not alone...everyone says they're just on it for their friends but they're not they're just trying to be popular.

- **Laura, BGC member**

So, these likes and I guess on their social media…I think its Instagram, is what they use a lot now. So all this sense of liking I think is their kind of, it supports them in whatever they are posting to kind of give legitimacy and give them confidence. So I think that that's how they get their support. It's a new kind of support system that they get.

- **Heather, BGC staff**

As described in the previous section, the flexible nature of programming at the Santa Monica Main Branch on occasion made it difficult to keep the ongoing attention of club members. Phones, and particularly the lure of social media, were often key distractions in these cases. One

example of this phenomenon was the role of cell phone and social media distraction in the weekly rehearsals for the drama club. For the first few weeks of the fall, rehearsals were held every Friday from 5-6 pm. Despite the relatively low commitment this activity posed, in the first few weeks little was accomplished and only a few scenes were completed during each rehearsal because members were talking, laughing, and diverting their attention to scrolling through their phones together anytime there was a small change of direction in the rehearsal or when they were not actively delivering a line. Kim would frequently respond to these distractions by asking them to stay in the scene and be present so they could learn their staging and transitions. However, though they would listen and put their phones away for a few minutes, typically they would slip back into phone use soon after.

By the fourth less than ideally productive rehearsal, a frustrated Kim finally required that all of the drama club members had to place their phones in a basket that she passed around, in one of the more surprisingly strict displays of negotiated allowances observed throughout the observation period. In subsequent rehearsals, especially as the date of the play grew nearer, members were much more conscious of their phone use and much more focused on memorizing their lines and staging for the play. One outlier was Laura, who remained resistant after complaining that she did not have enough lines, a real role, or anything to do in the play since she was an ensemble cast member. This caused many arguments between her and Kim, who Laura otherwise seemed to greatly respect and admire. She often responded to this stress and annoyance by immediately slumping down on a nearby couch or chair and beginning to scroll through Instagram on her phone. This instance was one of the clearest displays of social media emotional management observed at either site, and this type of social media use for letting off steam in emotional situations was also expressed in Laura's interview. Though they did not

report using social media for emotional purposes in the same way as Laura, many other Santa Monica club members reported using social media for addressing some sort of emotion at any given time throughout the day. Like the youth at Lyn Treece, youth members at the Santa Monica club use social media in certain ways to address emotional needs and seek out social support from others that might not be with them face-to-face as part of that process.

4.6.1. Dealing with Boredom

Boredom and feelings of missing friends or family members that live far away from them were the two top reasons youth at the Santa Monica club reported for using social media to address emotional needs, which directly aligns with the top needs expressed by Lyn Treece members. A stark difference between the two groups' uses in this category, however, is the extent to which each group sought and initiated this type of use. While this category had the smallest number of incidents at Lyn Treece, social media emotional management had the largest number of incidents coded at the Santa Monica Main Branch, and most were explicitly expressed in interviews. This heightened need for emotional management aligns well with the heightened awareness of vulnerability expressed among this group, as discussed in the constructed combined social support section. This group's sensitivity toward vulnerability may connect to a greater use of social media for navigating varied emotional expression from day to day.

Members at Lyn Treece often discussed using social media to address boredom by relaying their appreciation of social media as a source of entertainment. Though she definitely would not describe the content as anything of high caliber or educational value, when asked why she enjoys using her TikTok account Joan plainly affirmed, "Because I like making videos and I like entertaining myself with stupid videos." Even with the confirmation of her perception of the

videos as "stupid," they are still an antidote for Joan's boredom, and she often turns to using it at the club during down time between activities or when her closest club friend Megan has left for the day. Kailey echoes these sentiments, also bringing attention to the entertainment aspect that social media has to offer to her. When asked what social media accounts she owns and why she uses them, she replied confidently, "For my amusement," later clarifying, "something I can watch that entertains me." Kailey primarily uses TikTok for that reason, describing Instagram as not having enough of the entertaining qualities as TikTok: "Instagram is just…I find it more boring. There's not much to do on it. Just not as amusing."

Seventh grader Leah see's Instagram as just the opposite, alleviating her boredom in the same way TikTok does for Kailey. The shift in focus of each site informs this difference in use and appreciation. While TikTok is a short mobile video site focused primarily on short clips of content and less on specific profiles, Instagram contains more of the traditional SNS format, where conversations and comments with others are emphasized in addition to comments through features like the Instagram story. Leah is more interested in addressing her boredom by talking to others and starting conversations through the platform, whereas Kailey likes the function of her TikTok account for more passive consumption similar to TV, at least in the context of her boredom when she is not actively creating content herself. This difference also reveals the logic in the way each of these youth members addresses their boredom through the use of Instagram and TikTok. Kailey shared that she passively scrolls through posts for entertaining ones. Leah, however, described a more involved way of connecting to others online. She specifically tied her use to a search for validation and an active process of seeking social support. When describing in detail the different ways she uses each of her social media accounts and for what reasons, Leah shared that she uses a certain one the most, explaining:

"Instagram because I'm bored. Whenever I get bored, I'm like, "yeah, we can go on Instagram or YouTube…If I post... Like, say like, 'Hit me up I'm bored.' On Snapchat and no one would answer. And [it] would take a long time so I thought I'll go somewhere else."

When asked how people would respond she explained that people would usually just start a conversation, asking "What's up?" or inquiring about how she is doing. The process Leah described here is fairly revealing. It reflects exactly the essence of seeking social support using social media by sending out a communication and hoping for a response to confirm that someone in your network is there for you. Leah's use of social media in this way aligns with one other member of Lyn Treece, Annabelle, who described often using Snapchat to send specific snaps to friends expressing that she was bored or asking "What's up?" to try and start a conversation.

4.6.2. Missing Family and Friends

A second major way that youth at the Santa Monica branch expressed using social media for emotional management was in communicating with loved ones outside of their geographic area. The prevalence of this type of social media use was again very similar to that of the Lyn Treece members. Sixth grader Elaine notes that she communicates with her cousins primarily through social media. When describing the process, she explained:

"…[Snapchat] helped me connect with my cousins 'cause I don't really text them. And they usually DM me on Instagram. They usually text me from there."

Elaine calling out this specific use of social media is especially significant in her case, because she emphasized throughout her interview that she does not use social media very much. In

contrast to many of her friends who were open about using various platforms for several hours per day, Elaine was insistent on the fact that was conscious about her social media use and did not log in very much. She described her use as once or twice per week. Elaine's use is fairly targeted, and using it to maintain her relationship with her cousins and address feelings of missing them constitutes a large part of her weekly usage. It is important to note however, that there is a large exception to her own perception of bi-weekly social media use: she described her habit of spending a few minutes each morning and night to keep up her Snap streaks with various club and school friends. Her use is still more targeted than the patterns of use many of her friends described, but ultimately still falls into the same daily use category overall.

Elaine's sister Kailey also referenced using some social media accounts for contacting family, in addition to her uses for entertainment. Kailey explicitly mentioned having a Facebook only to connect with family, explaining that she otherwise does not use it and would not have an account on the site. Megan similarly uses Facebook solely for keeping up with family. Though TikTok is the social media platform she truly desires and the one that best aligns with her social needs, Facebook is the account her mom allows her to have because she uses Messenger to speak with her cousins and friends in the Philippines. Megan spent the first few years of her life there, and thus still has an existing network of friends and family that she misses often. She reports using Messenger once a day to keep in touch with them, revealing how her use of the site is an expected part of her daily routine. This expectation was also reflected in her description of why she used Messenger:

"… I only have it, to communicate with my friends that are not in the country because I used to live in a country different from America. So very simple."

Depicting this reasoning as simple speaks to the ease with which Megan is able to identify her need to speak with her distant Phillippines family daily and utilize social media to address those emotional feelings of missing them. She described a wide variety of topics that they talked about, ranging from just short check-ins of saying hello and that they miss each other to longer chats on birthdays and holidays. Staff member Heather described additional ways in which members used social media to stay in touch with friends and family when no longer in close physical contact with them. She focused specifically on the huge impact such technologies have for those that are going off to college and will no longer be in the same space as some of their closest friends from the club:

"I feel like a lot of kids that I talk to, who are now in colleges, they keep study groups even on FaceTime...They FaceTime each other and they'll work through things together. So, yeah, there are some positives if you use it right… even just to stay connected with the people that have been the constant in your family, or like even family members because even though you're far away, you don't miss them as much if you can see them..."

Those smaller check-ins again speak to this process addressing social support needs, where the act of reaching out just to say hello validates the relationships and confirms that the person is loved and appreciated.

4.6.3. Feeling Lonely & Making "Relatable" Content

A last category reason for utilizing social media to address emotional management related social support needs was fairly unique to this Santa Monica group, and contributed to why this category had such a stronger overarching presence in this group. As mentioned earlier in this section, a few members of the Santa Monica club expressed using social media to address

feelings of loneliness or conflict. Within this discussion, members were more explicit about the ways in which they sought out social support on social media platforms in order to confirm their perceptions of their own self-worth and their friendships. Laura, who explained that she often openly encouraged her friends to delete certain photos and not have too much available on their social media accounts, was the most open about this topic. She first established during her interview that she only uses Instagram, as she believes it combines all of the best features of most other popular accounts into one. She also described Instagram as the one platform she is most comfortable using despite her expressed general distaste for a lot of social media more generally. When explaining why she did not use any other platforms, she offered the following breakdown:

"I don't like that stuff…It's so cringy…I don't know how to work Snapchat, I downloaded once and deleted it two seconds later."

Laura immediately used emotion-laden language when describing her reactions to certain social media sites with her attesting that it was "cringy." When pressed further for particular reasons as to why she so disliked it, especially Snapchat, she confirmed that it was a combination of the way that it was used and the design of it. She disliked the way some of her friends had a tendency to post every detail in their lives, and expressed that it was "too much" when they had more stories and photos on their page than number of followers. She relayed too that she picked up on a trend of people trying to claim that they were only on social media sites to connect and communicate with friends, but believed they were all truly just trying to collect as many followers as possible to prove to themselves and others that they were popular. Staff member

Aileen picked up on this particular motivation of social media as well. When asked how youth at the club typically use social media, she shared:

"They use it, some for entertainment, but for the most part, they kind of just wanna show what it is they have. They want to show others that, "Oh I have this. Look at how many friends I have", and it's not bad 'cause they're kind of in an age where they kinda wanna be like the 'top people'."

Despite this impressive conscious awareness of the conflicting nature of others' use, Laura too described some of her own desire and appreciation of online popularity in her use of Instagram and YouTube. Though she has a rigid set of personal standards and protocols for limiting the number of posts on her page and the details of her life that she shares, she still admitted that she uses the site primarily to show other people that she is not alone and is in fact often spending time with friends. She relayed the following strategy for posting content on her account:

"I only post on my story. [I post] Things that people be jealous of…I'm being honest here, maybe something about my friends so people know I have friends…"

This conversation and description had a unique meta-awareness to it, where Laura was conscious of her participation in the same processes that she critiqued other friends about. She did not seem concerned by the incommensurate nature of her processes though, and explained that she tries to remain very open with herself and with her friends about how she is feeling and what she is feeling, even when it means she sometimes gets emotional. She even touched on the idea of social media being a place where she can post and find content that brings to light the similarities between her, her friends, and others through a story about what and how she posts on YouTube:

"And for YouTube, I do comment, one time I commented and it got 500 likes and I was kind of shook, as the kids say… I just posted something relatable and everyone was like 'TRUE'"

Laura's description here of the power of relatable content describes her method of using social media to address emotional feelings of loneliness by both finding common ground with others and finding validation in others' appreciation of her contributions to the space. She animatedly spoke throughout the interview about her multiple Instagram accounts, one of which is a fake humorous page for fans of a specific YouTube series. Her close friend Kailey also has multiple accounts, one of which is an "aesthetic" public account where she posts interesting videos of the spaces around her, tricks, and other conceptual videos with specific filters and styling, in addition to her regular private page with friend posts. Staff member Kim was very aware of this particular practice. When asked how members use social media at the club, she noted:

"A lot of them like to use video editing…they really really really love making Tik Tok videos, Snapchat, Instagram. They love having multiple Instagram accounts, they have three different accounts, like spam accounts, meme accounts…"

Kim's comments beginning with the framing of members' social media use as practicing video editing relates strongly to the members' perceptions that they are utilizing specific skills and talents to provide content to others on the sites, especially when maintaining multiple accounts. In both Laura and Kailey's situations their social media use is seen as a contribution to the platform, by providing entertainment for others in addition to relatable content in Laura's case. Though Laura's case could be perceived as distressing due to the openness of her attraction to validation, the fact that she also pairs it with an awareness that was relatively unmatched by other members observed and interviewed helps alleviate the naturally arising concern. This was additionally supported by her time spent each day at the club displaying mutual affectionate

exchanges and healthy friendship behaviors with all of her close club members. Laura's pattern of use and expressed motivations can be understood as a healthy reminder of how these emotion-based social support needs can be worked on digitally in tandem with face-to-face interaction and social support exchange.

4.7. Unique Mentorships

Jordan is kind of close to my age, she's only a year older than me, but we still have the same interests.

- **Megan, BGC member**

Yeah, I would say some of them, cause they don't really have that, not that they don't have a guardian, but they don't have someone that's there for them at all times to explain to them what things are or to say, "This isn't okay, this is fine." Most of these kids that are here, they see us more than their actual families.

- **Aileen, BGC staff**

Though overall the youth at the Santa Monica Main branch tend to spend time with friends their own age and grade while at the club, there were a few exceptions. Amy and Daniel, two club members who had been coming fairly regularly for the past few years, seemed to intermingle with other age groups both older and younger than them with ease and frequency. Daniel's case was especially noticeable, as he was just old enough to spend time in the Teen Center, where the teens hang out fairly exclusively, but surprisingly chose to spend much of his time especially during the summer session down in the game room. I noticed after repeated observation that this was because he wanted to spend time with one of his younger friends, Norman, who was not old enough to spend time in the Teen Center but with whom he seemed significantly close. The two of them share a very similar sense of humor, and often pull pranks on each other and other club members, in addition to playing video games together.

Though this was one of only a small handful of friendships of this nature, it was telling that cross-age friendships and mentorship opportunities were still taking place at the Santa Monica location especially in light of the unstructured environment and resulting tendency toward spending time mostly with similar age groups. The fact that these cross-age friendships and unique mentorship opportunities were still sought out and actively maintained speak to a social support related need for mentorship that remains heightened in this group in addition to the Lyn Treece group. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this need relates most clearly to the detrimental environmental factors many youth at the Boys and Girls Clubs are facing. In addition to lack of consistent parental figures in many of the members' lives, the necessity of many members' parents and guardians to work multiple jobs or late hours additionally leads to members seeking out broad and supplemental opportunities for mentorship. Though at both sites the majority of the youth seem content and happy with their social lives, the opportunity for extra mentorship from both older members at the club and staff, as well as the opportunity to mentor others and maintain friendships outside of their traditional age group provides additional and more varied forms of support.

4.7.1. Filling Varied Roles

Beyond Daniel's friendship with Norman, he was also friends with several teens both his age and older, and could often be found up in the Teen Center playing video games with them especially on days when Norman was not around. Though ten-year-old Amy did not have set consistent hangout time with others outside of her age group, she was frequently seen chatting with various club members both older and younger than her throughout the club as she moved from room to room. She always made a point to call out hello to older members and exchange

hugs or high fives that were usually enthusiastically returned, an in turn hugged or in some way checked in with younger members throughout the day as well. This was Amy's way of establishing her sense of belonging at the club, by demonstrating and actively communicating her well connectedness throughout the club. Her role as a caretaker, mentor, and knowledgeable figure again aligns with other similar personalities Lyn Treece. In both cases this role is supported by the confidence, comfort, and support that members gain through several years of growth at the club which eventually transforms the space into a sort of second home for them.

Throughout my first few months of observation, two sets of friendships were observed that are similar to Norman and Daniel's and are in turn reminiscent of the unique mentorships observed at Lyn Treece. One was between Megan and seven year old club member, Alicia, who hung out every day together during the first few months of the observation period. Despite their almost three year age difference, particularly in a very developmentally rich range of years, Megan and Alicia were quite close and would engage in a wide range of activities together each day at the club including playing imaginary games outside in the playground, drawing, making up dance routines, and scrolling through TikTok and laughing at silly videos together. On the days Alicia was not present, I would arrive and shortly after Megan would complain about Alicia not being there, confirming the mutual investment in the friendship.

A second friendship was between middle school aged girl Ana and a group of younger elementary school girls. They hung out nearly every day throughout the course of the summer program. Ana is a fairly soft-spoken and smiley young girl, and seemed to enjoy the way the younger girls looked up to her and often tried to pull her from place to place to engage in different activities together. They would often consult her on what to do next during an imaginary game, or compliment her drawing and other skills, while she would generally help

direct their activities as a sort of junior staff mentor. Their relationship was very reminiscent of Catherine's mentorship of two younger girls at the Lyn Treece club during the summer months as well.

4.7.2. Friendship Beyond the BGC

Though it was not as drastic a cross-age friendship as these other examples and many of the ones at Lyn Treece, Megan and Joan's close friendship also technically falls into this category. They are just over a year apart, but are in different grades at different schools, making the official social distance between them wide enough to call attention to the slight age difference. Despite this gap, they are each other's closest friends at the club and are working on extending their friendship outside of the club as well. They mentioned specifically in their interviews that they have been asking their parents to set up hang out times for them outside of official club hours. Megan and Joan's friendship is the only cross-age one with confirmed interest in continuing outside of the club space, which places it more on par with those at Lyn Treece.

Additionally, they are the only cross-age friendship at the Santa Monica club within this sampled group where continued communication happens between them over the phone outside of the club. Megan in particular revealed in her interview that though she generally would list being the same age as a necessary criterion for friendship, her connection to Joan falls within the close friendship category because of how closely they share common interests:

"…And my friends at school, I hang out with them because they have the same interests as me and they're the same age and they're the only one who has the same interests as me in my class. And Jordan is kind of close to my age, she's only a year older than me, but we still have the same interests."

Megan's particular focus on similar interests and how she connected to Joan through them reflects again on the ability of the Boys and Girls Club to provide the overarching structure – and at Santa Monica specifically a beneficial amount of flexibility – to find and bond with others with shared interests even outside of your own grade or age group. In this way the flexibility provided at the Santa Monica Main Branch enables a wide range of responses to the concepts of vulnerability, trust, and other attributes addressed through social support exchange. While some groups like the close tween group choose to seek out social support and utilize the structure of the club to strengthen their own existing networks and school friendships, others like Megan, Joan, Daniel, and Norman use the structure to pursue friendships outside of their typical age range or comfort zone. Even within the tween group, there was a split in grades between sixth and seventh graders, which did not seem to affect the relatively even level of friendship across the group. Similar to the unique mentorships formed at Lyn Treece, these friendships offer opportunities for mentorship and filling potential gaps in guardianship in a more peer based way.

Joan is one of the club members who has confirmed an alternative home guardianship status. She and her sibling are cared for by their grandparents. I observed over the course of spending time with her that she displays a heightened level of maturity both in caring for her brother and in her interactions with friends, staff, and others. She may be drawn to the particular status of mentorship she shares with Megan due to her accelerated ability to mentor, as well as the particular feelings of social support she receives in exchange. Similar to Annabelle at Lyn Treece, throughout the observation period Joan was seen mentoring and caring for a number of younger children in various small ways. They both respond to their shared complex home situations through increasing their role as mentors and caretakers at the club.

4.7.3. Staff & Member Friendships

A final way in which unique mentorships take place at the Santa Monica location is through the relationship with staff and members. Similar to Lyn Treece, the relationship between many staff and club members is strong. Whether it is built on years of growing together at the club or just spending a few months or weeks engaging in activities together everyday, members and staff form a bond that reflects meaningful exchanges of mentorship-based social support. The major difference in this relationship between locations, as described earlier in the chapter, is the more localized nature of the connections at Santa Monica main branch. The staff that members bond with ties closely to the activities they are involved in each week and the rooms they spend the most time in. In some ways this allows the bonds to build even more strongly, as certain member groups' channel all of their affections into one or two staff personnel.

One of the most distinct ways in which this bond was demonstrated was through members choosing to spend time with staff over doing other activities, or at times even spending time with other peers. Multiple times over the summer, one of the teen members who had bonded closely with two staff members chose to stay and hang out with the staff over going to do a teen centered activity, which spoke to the benefit and value she perceived in the attention and genuine friendship she received from staff. This relates directly to Ito's argument that youth actually crave attention from adults they trust, contrary to the general argument that they always wish to distance themselves from adult figures and solely spend time in youth centered spaces. Throughout the summer and school year the tween group echoed these actions, frequently hanging out as a group but specifically around the tween center and drama club director Kim, animatedly including her in conversation, direction of TikTok videos, and other activities.

These mentorships and cross-age friendships help create a space at both clubs for unique social engagement, and help evolve the club from a standard community space to a home for many youth, as described by multiple staff members. Heather and Lola described the large role it plays for both youth and their parents, specifically calling attention to the issues of safety and trust that are addressed at the club:

"So it's kind of a safe haven for our kids who normally after school would probably be on the streets doing things that could possibly get them in trouble. So just even having this safe haven where they can just come after school, and hang out, do homework, feel safe, connect with the staff, I think that's already like a big plus here for them to know that there's a space for them after school. And for parents, I think it's amazing because for the workday is not... It doesn't end at 2:30 or 3:00, right? A lot of parents work either eight to four, or nine to five. And with the commutes around here, it takes a while. So in that way, just to have this facility, this... They use this place for them. I think for families, especially first-gen and low-income families, it's huge."

- **Heather, BGC staff member**

"…I feel like they're safe here. And that's mostly what I try to instill with our programs…and that's why I don't really make them do a lot of stuff because it's like, you just need to chill. This may be the only place where you can chill… I went to a Boys and Girls Club when I first moved here from Texas, and that was a really big transition for me and I came to the club for a year and literally the staff... All the staff there were connected with me, they were all nice to me and I felt like this is my home. So when I started working here, I just felt comfortable... I don't know how I'm gonna leave here because this is like family..."

- **Lola, BGC staff member**

Heather and Lola describe here the importance of the bond that youth members can make at the club both with staff and with each other so that it can actually become viable a second home for them. This idea of creating a safe haven is especially important in connecting to and addressing the social support related needs around vulnerability, agency, and trust expressed throughout this chapter. Staff member Aileen built on their thoughts by offering how her particular role fits into creating this space:

"…I would say if it wasn't for the club, that, I don't think many of them would have the opportunities they do now… I guess my biggest hope would be to help them improve and to show them their actual worth, and not what everyone thinks their worth should be. Cause a lot of these kids are titled as the bad kid at school and they're blamed for everything. So it's important for them to come here and just be like, "Well, she gets it, she knows what I'm going through." Just that they feel like they have somebody here."

Aileen's articulated position goals reflect exactly the type of social support these youth are in need of, and are informed by her understanding of the types of difficulties many of them are dealing with on a daily basis outside of the club. This understanding is reflected in the caring behavior displayed by all of the club staff across both locations. It is infused into the negotiated allowances, informs the opportunities for constructed combined social support and social media emotional management, and helps guide the creation of opportunities and encouragement of unique mentorships and cross-age friendships. At Santa Monica in particular, the flexible and widespread integration of social media and digital technology use more generally aids in providing the agency and autonomy with a safe space that youth members crave in order to pursue various forms of engagement, including mentorships like the ones described in this section.

4.8. Summary

This chapter has demonstrated the continued intersection of the Boys and Girls Club and social media as a unique mixture of youth development support and community building opportunities for youth at the Santa Monica location. This chapter has also compared the Santa Monica and Lafayette (Lyn Treece) sites, drawing attention to the overarching similarities in major themes of social media use for social support, but importantly calling attention to the specific departures from previous patterns of use present at the Santa Monica location. The

findings at this site depict the role of social media as it intersects with the Boys and Girls Club and other social facets of youth members' lives as a distinct socio-technical system of social support building.

The first section identifies a continued unique and impactful convergence of affordances of the Boys and Girls Club and social media for providing the necessary environment for social support seeking and giving. There is a continued cyclical nature in forming and maintaining friendships and sources of social support exchange at the club and continuing it via social media both in and out of the club. This idea is further developed through the discussion of negotiated allowances, where Santa Monica youth are shown to be even more accepting of personal and parental restrictions on social media use. This is surprising especially as this acceptance is paired with an unprecedented amount of agency provided at the club structurally through programming and other events which provides the opportunity for youth to personally and consciously strengthen their own networks and rules for engagement. The social media management section continues to develop the theme of heightened needs for addressing vulnerability and trust within this group, which are established through the negotiated allowances and constructed combined social support and addressed through social media emotional management.

Lastly, unique mentorships between peers and staff continue to surface and play significant roles in social support exchange. These mentorships and associated cross-age friendships additionally address more broadly perceived needs for relationship validation and expression of agency. The differences noted in social media and social support processes between the two sites and the particular needs for vulnerability and trust raised within this group reveal additional questions about how the geographic and cultural differences affect these needs and patterns. There is not sufficient evidence to make concrete claims about exactly why there

are such stark differences in organizational structure and resulting environments for social support exchange and social media use between the two sites. However, the descriptions in this chapter and the previous one provide an important foundation for examining the apparent relationship between the geographic and cultural environments and the styles of social support exchange and social media use they motivate.

CHAPTER 5: Discussion, Broader Significance, & Conclusion

The instances described in the previous two chapters and the many more observed and heard at each site display a set of social support processes that evolve and persist across various communication mediums, friend groups, and environments. The prevalence of social support instances among youth at both the Lyn Treece and Santa Monica clubs points to it as a significant need among this group, as the "protective factor" assumption from this dissertation's theoretical framework might suggest. While it might seem common sense that a youth development need would include a sense of belonging and a general sense of being loved, youth engagement at each site in establishing and maintaining social support both in person and online in multiple varied ways demonstrates a concerted effort to maintain its presence, which suggests a heightened importance. Similarly, staff awareness of the value of connecting to and being there for club members as a highly significant piece of their roles at the club suggests that providing social support is central to the needs of these youth. Though it takes slightly different forms and is motivated to different extents by various factors at each site, the need for social support and the process of seeking and giving it is a key part of their social expressions. Social media is revealed in each section to be an instrumental tool in engaging in social support exchange by providing a space for exercising agency in this process within a broader network of trust and

community that the BGC provides. At the intersection of these two spaces of the BGC and social media, a particular socio-technical system emerges that enables maximum social support exchange (Grint and Woolgar, 1997). The revelation of this socio-technical system, the detailed descriptions of the themes and patterns that characterize it, and the demonstration of the ways in which the system enables purposeful and positive social support exchange on the youth's own terms are the major contributions of this dissertation. This rich collection of data and the revelation of this key socio-technical system help reveal the specificities of social support for this group, and can inform ways to maintain and improve capabilities for positive social support exchange in youth development groups and community spaces more broadly.

5.1. Using Social Media for Social Support & Revealing Specific Social Support Needs

The combined use of technology, particularly social and digital media, and face-to-face communication for maintaining social support emerged to some extent in each of the findings sections. As seen in many of the examples in Chapter 3, even varied uses of technology for emotional management, venting, and expressing autonomy were connected to the continued establishment of social support and feeling cared for. Each of Kahn & Antonucci's (1980) examples of types of social support was observed, but the most prevalent was the emotional or affective element of demonstrating liking and acceptance of another person. This type also aligned well with Cutrona's (2000) category of emotional social support. An overview of the types of social support observed among this group is included in Figure 4 at the end of this section. The constant laughter shared between club members across mediums, the careful selection of specific groups or individuals with which to share technological devices, and the decision to share information with select members are members' ways of utilizing digital and

social media and other means to provide forms of social support to their friends. Staff, on the other hand, frequently provide emotional but also concrete, advice, and esteem support. Through their assurance of club members' value through stepping in to mediate arguments, dedicating physical time to them each day, and trying to anticipate the needs of members, they use their role to supplement and enhance the social support members give to one another in effective and transparent ways.

Similar to the Lyn Treece club members, members at the Santa Monica branch across several ages display a need especially for emotional social support, as expressed by the importance of using both the club and social media engagements as ways of solidifying friendships, articulating networks, and validating relationships. However, at the Santa Monica branch the need for esteem support also emerged quite strongly, as demonstrated through the importance of autonomy, choice, and vulnerability incorporated into the processes of allowing engagement in social media spaces and social interaction spaces within and out of the club. These processes of sharing online and offline space serve to validate self-worth as a valued and loved member of a friend group, and are combined with displays of affection and established trust with sharing minute details of daily life. Esteem support was also displayed at Lyn Treece, but more clearly through the staff to youth member relationships. The heightened need for esteem support and the specific manifestation of that support through actions like allowing friendship on a social media site or showing a friend at the BGC something on their account aligns well with the idea of social media being a space for possible constant social support, as Leung suggests. Like their Lyn Treece counterparts, Santa Monica club members again did not surface specific concerns about cyberbullying or online hate speech, except in reference to what they perceived to be involved with "adult" uses of certain social media platforms. This lack of

reference to cyberbullying persisted ironically despite that the fact that the drama club presented a play on cyberbullying within the first few months of the observation period. Even when discussing issues of loneliness that social media was occasionally used to confront as described in the social media emotional management section, Tik Tok, Instagram, and other sites were still framed by youth as places to demonstrate and strengthen their friendships, and enhance communication with their networks through bridging online and face-to-face mediums. The consistency in the lack of articulation of these adult uses of the sites validates the promotion of these youth voices and perspectives as a way to heed Pascoe's (2011) projection warnings.

This shift in importance of certain types of social support may be a reflection of the greater autonomy members are given at this club location as a result of the more unstructured environment, which in turn may relate to the more autonomous lives they lead as young people in an urban environment. More users at the Santa Monica site seem to own phones than at Lyn Treece, and considering the general similarity in family income status between the groups, phone ownership may be more tied to activities like walking to and from school and the club as well as engaging in social and other activities on their own. As described in the Chapter 4 negotiated allowances section, members at the main branch are just as wary of privacy concerns and not exposing themselves to strangers online as those at Lyn Treece, and perhaps more so. This is part of a very detailed set of personal rules each of them enacts around social media and technology use that again align with the youth at Lyn Treece, but are this time informed by the same sense of protectiveness of self and friend networks expressed in the Chapter 4 constructed combined social support section.

This sense of protectiveness adds a new layer to understanding the role of social media and social support in the lives of at-risk youth. boyd (2014) describes the use of social media for

establishing youth centered boundaries for communication and self-expression especially for keeping distance from parents and authority figures. These findings reveal a use of the club and social media engagement for drawing distinct boundaries around specific friend groups for the purposes of social support and belonging. These two spaces serve to create a safety net for expression and support exchange for both Lyn Treece and Santa Monica youth, but with slightly varied motivations and perceptions. The specificities of group boundaries even within larger club peer networks at Santa Monica reveals a specific need for stability and protection that builds on boyd's understanding of youth desire for autonomous public participation and calls attention to the differences in environment between Lyn Treece and Santa Monica that direct specific social media use.

These analyses reveal the uses of both the BGC and social media for establishing and maintaining various forms of social support as key needs among these youth, specifically highlighting the needs for emotional and esteem support. In these cases, social media is used in tandem with the club to establish opportunities to express affection while simultaneously setting and exercising boundaries. The differences in these processes between the sites and between the age groups in Santa Monica also expose the various ways this process can take place for the same end goal of social support exchange, as informed by varying needs. While they align with Ito's ideas on friendship driven needs, this analysis contributes to Ito, boyd, and similar literature by placing these social media use processes within the broader project of autonomous youth community building in its various forms at each site. Though the motivations are slightly different for these groups, the methods by which they reach their goals are the same, and their patterns of use are part of a socio-technical system of online and offline social support exchange that integrally involves existing institutional communal spaces like the Boys and Girls Club.

Types of Social Support Observed

Type	Author	Observed in This Group (Y/N)	Extent Observed (Strong, Medium, Weak)	Observation Category
Material Assistance	Kahn & Antonucci (1980)	Y	Weak	Constructed Combined Social Support
Cognitive Aspects	Kahn & Antonucci (1980)	Y	Weak	Social Media Emotional Management, Unique Mentorships
Emotional or Affective Elements	Kahn & Antonucci (1980)	Y	Strong	All Categories
Concrete	Cutrona et al. (1990, 2000, 2003)	Y	Medium	Constructed Combined Social Support
Emotional	Cutrona et al. (1990, 2000, 2003)	Y	Strong	Constructed Combined Social Support, Social Media Emotional Management, Unique Mentorships
Advice	Cutrona et al. (1990, 2000, 2003)	Y	Medium	Unique Mentorship, Negotiated Allowances
Esteem	Cutrona et al. (1990, 2000, 2003)	Y	Strong	All Categories

Figure 4. Types of Social Support Observed

5.2. Communal Use & Ownership

While the findings of Jenkins (2006; 2018), Turkle (1995, 2012), and to a certain extent even Ito (2009, 2018) and boyd (2014; 2017) reveal significant individual uses of computing devices for social support, the instances of technology use for this purpose observed at both Lyn

Treece and Santa Monica were very communal and collective. The collective uses at each site still align with previous literatures' findings of technology use for community participation and connection, but importantly reveal the prevalence and significance within this community of using technology in groups within the same space as well as sharing one or more computing devices to do so. This characteristic of youth technology use at each site but especially at Lyn Treece is consistent through each of the themes, and presents a unique contribution to previous ethnographies on youth technology engagement in addition to their use for maintaining mentorships and cross-age friendships. While the instances observed here do align with boyd's idea of distributed networks and the blurring of online and offline barriers, they also importantly reveal an offline collective practice of phone and tablet use that affects the perspective of friendship maintenance across digital and non-digital mediums. Additionally, the importance of this collective technology and social media practice specifically for social support exchange and friendship validation challenges Turkle's (2015) presentation of this idea as problematic through her argument that it precludes empathy building. Turkle's work is one of the few research projects focusing specifically on youth under the age of 15, which also validates the findings here as a crucial contribution to social media research on elementary and middle school aged youth. An overview of ways this dissertation's findings align, differ, and move beyond previous literature in this area is included at the end of this section in Figure 5.

Though Lyn Treece members' use of social and digital media do not directly clash with Jenkins' descriptions of participatory culture, Turkle's findings on online interaction, or Ito's results around the prevalence of friendship-driven practices, what is somewhat missing from these texts is the importance of how these online practices are discussed and used collectively through simultaneous face-to-face interaction and online engagement. The most frequent

instances of phone and tablet use at the club were not individual members engaging with each other from separate points of the room, but rather were the use of one or more devices and social and digital media spaces as the centerpiece of a communal social gathering on the bleachers or in various rooms. In contrast to Turkle's findings, these uses were often paired with affectionate exchanges and other typical face-to-face social behaviors. The relative novelty of this observation in comparison to other ethnographic works in this area may relate to the specific socio-economic status of this group, and how it affects the overall prevalence of cell phone and tablet use at a base level. The financial constraints to individual phone and account ownership in these instances are overcome through communal technology use practices.

Not every member at Lyn Treece owned a personal cell phone or tablet. However, almost all those interviewed had access to one through a family member or friend, and were able to participate in social and digital media use through those devices if they wished. These devices and digital spaces still play major roles in their social interactions and avenues for social support among friends, but this requires relying heavily on those others with access to these technologies to share them and participate with them communally. The BGC fills a special role in this process, providing specific space for that sharing and communal experience. This whole process of collective technology use is in its own way a form of the material assistance based social support Kahn and Antonucci describe, where the sharing of technology to provide inclusive participation in online spaces and simultaneous social interaction offline provides multifaceted social support for club members, and fills a specific need for social support that comes in spite of socioeconomic concerns that affect technology ownership.

The consistency of communal phone use and communal creation of social media content across both sites additionally speaks to the importance of the combination of the two spaces as

sources of social support. Every member of the Santa Monica group that was interviewed owned their own phone, and yet the communal use of one and/or the passing of multiple around for collective engagement remained. Whereas the economic difficulties in affording a phone and the resulting lack of phones among many members at Lyn Treece may have influenced the need for communal technology use, the need was not present here and the pattern of use persisted. This demonstrates the role of the club as providing a space for ongoing social support exchange that is supported by social media, and then continued via social media to maintain the sense of community and belonging outside of the club when members are apart. This overlap and the persistence of these communal activities addresses Her Stephenson et al.'s call for specific case studies demonstrating the potential of digital integration within these youth development spaces.

While there was not a significant divide observed around race and technology ownership, there were distinct economic divides around who could afford such devices and at what age. In the examples described where technology use privileges were bestowed on friends however, there did not seem to be an implication of judgment around non-ownership, but rather a confirmation of earned friendship, again revealing this process as its own form of social support. This finding, among others, can serve as a particularly useful piece of information with which to judge appropriate protocols for digital and social media use within youth development programs. Through displays of group digital device use, laughter and affection, and hierarchy and trust, members of the club use the club environment and use of social media to construct a combined source of social support that helps them establish and maintain friendships and consequently their place within their social circles. The way in which the club and digital and social media elements work together for social interaction is a prime example of boyds' distributed networks, but the focus here goes beyond individual management of distributed networks and exposes the

communal construction of them through an after-school youth development space. In these instances technology and specifically social media is but one of many tools used to establish social support, but the way it works in concert with club structure provides a space for private, autonomous, and free form construction of that support.

From Laila and Rachel's playful TikTok videos and Diana and Peter's laugh filled Snapchats to Sarah and Taylor's phone use agreement, members use their devices and the social media spaces within them for a form of group and communal expression that only they control, and that exists on their own within the greater structure of their social activities at the club and beyond. As Ito et. al. (2009) explain, friendship driven needs are central to the use of social media in these instances. For the many members balancing limited time between large distributed families, limited time after-school for socializing, and strict parental supervision, the club provides a significant space for friendship maintenance and the communal use of technology during free time represents a key autonomous space for more detailed and layered social bonding. This group construction of social support sources by combining elements of the club and use of their personal devices is aiding in their own perceptions of their abilities and maturity, and provides a space for growth within a safe and protective environment, with staff members ready to provide their own expressions of support and belonging.

Overarching Comparison of Findings and Previous Literature

Author	Central Idea	Comparison to Current Findings (Similar or Different?)	Explanation
boyd	Youth desire of autonomous public participation	Similar	Youth did use social media for public participation, but drew very tight boundaries around use and exercised more semi-public use as informed by shared parental concerns
	Use of technology for	Different	Youth relatively openly and

	emancipation		consistently shared parental concerns in tandem with certain uses of social media as a private "youth only" space
Ito	Friendship driven needs in media use	Similar	Friendship-driven needs did play a major role in social media use and arose more than interest driven uses, but were achieved through more communal technology use and with a more complex array of social support related needs
Jenkins	Participatory culture	Similar	Participatory culture was present but on less of an individualized scale
Leung	Internet as a constant source of social support	Similar	The Internet and specifically social media was seen as potential constant source of social support in tandem with articulated concerns
	Internet use for addressing social deficiency	Different	Youth moved beyond using social media for instant addressing of social deficiency into long term conscious plans for maximizing social support in response
Turkle	Social media use detracts from empathy building	Different	Social media use was consistently paired with empathetic displays of affection

Figure 5. Overarching Comparison of Findings and Previous Literature

5.3. Boundary Setting & Rhetoric of Concern

The instances of negotiated allowances described both at the club and online reveal a social support based need for trust and acceptance among club members from staff and other members. These processes also heavily reflect the issues of concern that surround both youth digital media use and youth development more generally, which additionally relate to concepts of youth being "at-risk." Concerns about potential risk factors in members' lives substantially dictate the relationship between staff and members and the roles members can hold as they navigate the club environment. Similar concerns arise on the part of members' parents and affect

what parameters of technology use and in particular social and digital media use they allow. The processes of negotiated allowances observed and discussed fall most appropriately into the categories of advice and esteem support, where rules and negotiations are used to build and gain trust within the process of advice giving, and also aid in establishing member self-worth in relation to the trust and protection they deserve and should perceive in their daily lives.

Pascoe's (2011) wariness of the tendency to project adult use of new media into youth technology use practices is certainly revealed through the technological negotiated allowances members shared with me, with ideas around strangers infiltrating members' online spaces, the potential of posts being interpreted inappropriately, and the potential exposure of members to negative and inappropriate material frequently arising as reasons for members not being allowed to start accounts or having to agree to parental monitoring of these accounts. The focus, through what members revealed to me, was much more on inappropriate adult interaction with members online, as opposed to inappropriate interactions between members. This feeds into the element of danger associated with the Internet and general moral panic around youth also discussed in the literature review. As seen in the cases of strict provisions or bans placed on member social media use where the members came from particularly tumultuous family backgrounds, this moral panic and sensitivity to online danger and the fragility of youth is substantially increased.

An interesting contribution to this discussion observed among Lyn Treece and Santa Monica members is the echoing of these sentiments around the potential dangers of online activity within the youth groups themselves. Though boyd and Ling's (2005) observed instances of technology and Internet use for emancipation from parents and authority figures still persists among club members within certain contexts, there is simultaneously an acceptance of the need for monitoring as a tradeoff for protection. Building on the idea that members of this group have

a particular social support based need for trust, they are willing to trust and reported trusting parental figures regarding why systems of parental surveillance and online negotiated allowances could be necessary to protect them from potentially negative outcomes. There seems to be a deep set understanding and acceptance of this fact especially among those coming from high risk environments and less stable familial situations, which may suggest that the rhetoric of concern is significantly present within youth in addition to adults when the youth involved are exposed to particularly dramatic and potentially traumatic life circumstances. The mindfulness members maintain in their social media use in relation to their socio-economic status is echoed in Marwick, Fontaine, and boyd's work (A. Marwick et al., 2017).

Still, despite this blending of ideas and opinions around the justification of concern shared between some club members and authoritative figures, it is integral overall as Kelly (2006) and others note to not let such an analysis simplify the advantages or disadvantages of social and digital media use. The youth observed arguably do not follow such a simplistic understanding either. Those who shared the concerns of their parents often still engaged in their own forms of autonomous online engagement, and/or expressed enthusiasm about a time when they could finally sign up for a social media account or use it without such heavy handed parental supervision and reservation. This finding provides an important contrast to Marwick et al.'s (2017) work, where members did not use the shared concerns over the dangers of online use to reduce or in some cases eradicate their social media use as the authors found. Sonia Livingstone's work around the prevalence of online bullying and other peer-to-peer negativity online only once surfaced in our conversations, and did not seem to be a major concern on members' minds. It is important to note though that this concern still presides within the BGC infrastructure, as shown by the choice of cyberbullying for the spring play. Additionally, there

were still concerns expressed around exposure to negative ideas from others online or compromised privacy, which may reflect the trend in more recent research to focus less on cyberbullying specifically and more on the overarching connection between social media use and anxiety and depression, presumably from exposure to negative environments or pressures online (Shakya & Christakis, 2017; Twenge, Joiner, Rogers, & Martin, 2017; Vannucci, Flannery, & Ohannessian, 2017). This study contributes to the debate by revealing this new framing of potential risk and rhetoric of concern around social media use and youth and assessing current youth responses to it. The current responses of youth to these concerns are particularly revealing considering the demonstrated ways in which they have internalized older rhetoric of concern related concepts expressed to them by their parents.

5.4. Personalized Social Media Use Practices

As demonstrated in the findings, many of the youth had surprisingly complex rules that they had already established for their online engagement, which may influence a lack of considerable concern around lengthened exposure to negative sources online. Like the constructed combined social support systems and their contribution to the system of negotiated allowances, club members exercise autonomy in crafting their social spaces and filling their social needs. Though of course not everything is within their control, what they can control is often well thought out and considered in a way that aligns with their needs and desires. The BGC again represents an important stakeholder in this process, providing a space that allows members to navigate the challenges and affordances of both face-to-face communication and digital social support building and friendship maintenance in a communal and collective way. The presence of the BGC as a supporting environment for engaging and implementing these online engagement

practices adds a new dimension to Marwick and boyd's findings of similar layered practices for social media use, and additionally aids in expanding their analysis beyond the realm of solely privacy related concerns (A. E. Marwick & boyd, 2014).

The process of negotiated allowances both at the club, online, and in the intersection of these spaces reflects fundamentally a process of assessment of readiness for adulthood and an extension of establishing social support. In layered and negotiated rule applying based on age and demonstrated maturity at the Lyn Treece club, club staff express their sense of trust in club members and affect members' perceptions of their current stage in the progression toward being treated as adults and full peers. Club staff recognize how important this sense of maturity and responsibility becomes especially during adolescence, and strive to establish a more peer based relationship with the Sunny Siders and especially the teens. These groups respond to that treatment by trying to consistently demonstrate their worthiness of that role. These groups are also all in the category of no longer requiring parental permission to interact with friends online, or are at least in stages where it is not prohibited, which is seen as a step toward gaining responsibility and establishing trust.

Both of these processes emphasize protection of the youth involved, both protection from getting hurt physically or mentally by other club members and getting placed in dangerous situations through inappropriate exposure online. Many club members express a need for this protection through an explicit need for trust before being able to participate online. Even those who report using social media regularly and are not scared away from use note the importance of knowing who they are interacting with and only having known friends in their online spaces. This need for trust and safe spaces to express themselves may relate to various levels of volatility and instability at home.

Similar to Lyn Treece, the processes for navigating negotiated allowances especially in the arena of social media use at Santa Monica reveal an exchange of social support related to establishing trust and caring through protection and supervision. Santa Monica club members, similar to Lyn Treece club members, respond overall amicably to this process, often endorsing agreed upon terms and expressing the same concerns as parents about the potential ramifications of being too public and exposed. The fear of exposure in this group of youth builds on the need for a tightened network expressed in the Chapter 4 constructed combined social support section, highlighting a specific relationship based esteem support need that is heightened in this group. Additionally, the assertion of autonomy in the negotiated allowances process in this group is crucial to its success, and is cultivated and strengthened through the relative autonomy they enjoy in the unstructured club environment. Though the groups at both sites eventually converge in holding the same overall concerns and drawing the same overall conclusions around the importance and acceptance of these negotiated allowances processes, they again approach the process differently, with motivations rife with slightly altered desires and key understandings.

5.5. Agency, Autonomy & Participatory Culture

The strong desire for and assertion of agency and autonomy expressed here aligns strongly with boyd's findings of autonomy and agency playing major roles in the construction of youth networked publics. However, the desire for the autonomy to participate in public spaces that boyd describes is complicated here, through the systems of trust and the navigations of vulnerability that make comfortable and freeing self-expression and social support exchange possible within the confines of the Boys and Girls Club. Youth at the Club yearn for autonomy in the sense of self-governing their friendship navigation to the strongest extent possible, but

within limits that they set in negotiation with authority figures. The particular social support needs and expressions of these youth point to a slightly more complex understanding of the yearning for public engagement and interaction, one that is more tightly bound within semi-public communal spaces. This gravitating toward semi-public and more constrained space also adds nuance to Jenkin's theories on participatory culture. While some members did express desire to contribute content more broadly to the youth social media sphere, for example Kailey's aesthetic account or Laura's conspiracy theory show spinoff account, there were still carefully articulated rules around how and why this type of participation could happen, and it still existed within the overarching ideas of keeping mostly within the known friend network. These specific uses and consciousness around how to navigate adult concerns about social media reveals a specific take on the rhetoric of concern.

Across both sites the findings offer a look at the personal concerns that youth hold and use for crafting their own systems of online engagement, and push against the frequent depiction of youth as unable to address personal concerns and make concrete decisions about their use and the dangers involved. Though they do not always articulate their concerns in the same way, youth express awareness of their comfort levels, engage in rational negotiations and agreements with their parents and other authority figures over use, and in most cases do not face the overarching concerns of cyberbulling and new related negative exposure concerns because of their personally implemented restrictions. This tempered approach to online engagement and social support building may also be a reflection of a continued process of resilient social support building in the face of heightened challenges in these particular groups' lives (McHugh, Wisniewski, Rosson, Xu, & Carroll, 2017).

Many of the last examples of Lyn Treece members' social media emotional management practices are examples of Jenkin's (2006, 2018) notion of participatory culture, where use of social and digital media allows club members to participate in a broader network of social interaction, learning, and development beyond their local friend groups. It is interesting to note that such exchanges and particular uses of digital and social media occur most among Lyn Treece members on YouTube, which many members declined to even perceive as a social media site. Though it is true that YouTube differs significantly from other social media sites in terms of the generally more passive and less socially active engagement its design and culture facilitates, its structure of liking, commenting, following, and uploading original content can still justify its inclusion in the broader category. Especially in the case of someone like Mary's use, it contains the basic characteristics of social media, and certainly fits within the broader categories of participatory culture and online participation.

5.6. Constant Support & Addressing Emotion

The revelation of Lyn Treece and Santa Monica members' use of social and digital media to manage emotional and other social support related needs like self-esteem and community belonging relate heavily to Leung's work connecting social support and Internet use as well as the larger body of work associating social media use with positive emotional outcomes (Cheng, Liang, & Leung, 2015; Leung, 2007, 2011). In relation to Leung's findings of individuals' perceptions of the Internet as constantly accessible spaces for mood management, this study compares favorably. Club members utilize online spaces as consistently available resources for friendship maintenance, emotional regulation, and personal expression of autonomy. In relation to emotional management, social media is frequently used among members as a space to reach

out to friends and family that they especially miss. This practice of using online spaces to reach those not available in person suggests their conception of the online space as an ever-ready medium for reaching them, in contrast to their lack of control over bringing friends and family to be with the face-to-face at any point. This particular use of social media aligns well with Leung's theory on perceptions of the Internet as being constantly available to turn to during emotional strife.

In relation to the Leung's finding around Internet use for addressing social deficiency, club members' social media practices reveals a more nuanced explanation. Rather than simply using the Internet and social media spaces to instantly address a perceived shortage of social interaction, club members participate in these spaces to consistently maximize opportunities to give and receive social support. Though instances like Annabelle's or Leah's include more traditional uses of turning to social media when lonely and desiring a quick boost of positive energy or a laugh from a friend, they also include a complex system of using certain sites for certain activities and needs. Each site or account provides opportunities for giving or receiving social support with specific friends or family members, and is used in different contexts. The revelation of many club members' specific and conscious systems of various social media account usage adds a more active element to the idea that they turn to these spaces to address social deficiency. Some of these spaces, like Tik Tok, are used to contact and engage with just their closest groups of friends, those that are seen often throughout the day and especially at the club. In these cases the motivation for online participation is not addressing social deficiency but rather individual and collective participation in social support building and friendship maintenance.

The BGC again plays a major role in this process, providing members with a daily space for interaction that forms a basis for friendship maintenance and to which social media use can build and extend. The three or more hours club members spend socializing with each other after-school each day may provide a stronger foundation for using social media, where the immediate need for addressing perceptions of social deficiency is lessened, and a more autonomous construction of online participation can occur. This study's contribution to this body of work is to highlight the more active role youth play in the process of using social media for emotional management and engagement. This dissertation research builds on previous findings in this area and importantly adds a balanced perspective to the frenzy around social media use for perceptions of social and personal deficiency increasingly discussed in both academic literature and in broader popular news. Like the rhetoric of concern around dangers of online participation, worries about the increase of depression and loneliness due to phone and digital media use are valid and well worth the current discussion and attention, but a too simplistic or too negatively clouded explanation of these processes can unhelpfully remove youth and adolescent agency from discussions. Club members demonstrated that they were individually identifying and articulating their needs, and particularly crafting patterns and methods of use to address them, with the help of other social resources like the BGC and their families.

Through their specific patterns of use and cultivated conversations, club members use various social media sites in combination with their time at the club to get and stay in touch with friends and family near and far. Members use these spaces importantly to continue to bond with family members that no longer live with them, and to be reassured that they can still turn to these family and friends when feeling lonely, anxious, happy, or even just bored. On the other hand, these applications are used to fill the same needs with friends and family that are close, just to

check in when not in the same place throughout the days or weeks. Many members report a positive use of these spaces for friendship maintenance and subsequent emotional navigation even with an acute awareness of the potential downsides. This balance is achieved, however, through deliberately constructing their own systems of use that serve specific purposes in their lives. These patterns amplify the positive influence of these spaces while diminishing uses that make them uncomfortable or concerned. The choices that members make in order to alleviate the tensions of separated families and friendships demonstrates another process that enables members to exercise their own autonomy and ideas on what friendship and family should be on their path to adulthood, and utilizes social media as a resource for building social support.

5.7. Loneliness & Self-esteem

The uses of social media for addressing emotional management needs among members of the Santa Monica Main Branch revealed a number of well articulated and established personal patterns of use and understanding of social needs. Many of these needs and their ways of being addressed aligned well across both sites, while the discussion of addressing loneliness or the need for validation demonstrate a continued enhancement and shift in emphasis in these categories that build on previous findings. Each of the emotional needs addressed in the previous two chapters are embedded within social support, and center on desire for validation, for knowing loved ones are available, and for gaining attention and connection. Specific esteem and emotion based social support needs continue to emerge for the Santa Monica members, and speaks to an even more nuanced understanding of these members' needs as marginalized members of an additionally demanding urban space. Members turn to social media in tandem with the club as a layered approach to seeking and giving social support for themselves and their

loved ones, and the prevalence of utilizing social media spaces in response to emotional shifts again validates Leung's claims about understanding digital spaces as opportunities for constant and consistent social support.

An important set of issues to address especially in relation to the increased expression of social media use for emotional management among Santa Monica members relates back to the rhetoric of concern. The idea of using digital spaces for addressing emotion is at the heart of many concerning narratives around detrimental youth uses of social media platforms, with a growing area of research and popular media focusing on the enhanced potential for suicidal activity, loneliness, and other related concerns stemming from increased time online (Shakya & Christakis, 2017; Twenge et al., 2017; Vannucci et al., 2017). It is important that the concept of loneliness is explicitly addressed here, but not in the way that it is referenced in some literature as an immediate cause for concern. Instead, it is introduced and articulated as a part of pre-adolescent and adolescent growth more generally, where social media is a platform that may display these concerns but is not necessarily the cause of it. Additionally the concept of loneliness is presented in this work with the observations of commonly using social media for confirming affection and belonging when loneliness is felt, as a way of gaining social support rather than taking away from it. These findings continue to resist identifying social media as the root cause of loneliness and associated issues, and instead perceive it as one piece of the larger developmental process as boyd and Ito express. This understanding is additionally validated through growing bodies of research finding that social media is not necessarily a sole predictor of loneliness (Cigna, 2018; Common Sense Media, 2018).

Though it is of course important not to discount the instances in which social media use does serve as a catalyst to negative thinking and more concerning behaviors, this was not a

prevalent behavior among this group, with youth users instead participating in what Brownlie and Shaw (2018) describe as flexible and agency driven expressions and exchanges of emotion and empathy (Brownlie & Shaw, 2019). A particularly significant part of the more positive nature of these youth's interactions is also their daily environment at the club, which emphasizes a combination of face-to-face and digital social interaction. All of the exercises and patterns of use members describe for emotional management are combined with daily affirmation of friendship and extended communication time at the Boys and Girls Club, which enables a more holistic addressing of social support needs. Especially considering the other risk factors in many of the youth's lives, this combination may strongly help strike a balance in fruitful, beneficial, and autonomous social media use that avoids the concerns expressed in recent literature.

5.8. Flexibility, Friendship, & Development

Seeing the successful blending of offline and online social interaction displayed at the club especially to blossom unique mentorships and cross-age friendships presents this theme as a substantial case study contribution to the work of Herr-Stephenson et al. (2011). Like they suggest in their evaluation of the intersection of digital media and after-school youth development programs, the BGC is no exception to the significant barriers faced in such programs for implementing creative and supportive technological infrastructure with which club members can engage. The five rarely used computers in the front room the Lyn Treece BGC were only brought to life when I was offered the opportunity to use my expertise in information science to lead a daily technology basics program.

It was heartening to see their enthusiasm for bringing in the effort and knowledge base needed, but also saddening to know that it would likely fade upon the completion of my time

there. However, the use of formal technological infrastructure at the club is not the only beneficial mode of technology use. Through the allowance of social and digital media use during free time, club staff provide members with the opportunity to craft their own personal systems and practices of technology use while using the BGC as a backdrop for broader social interaction, stimulation, and growth. Barron et al. (2014) additionally highlight the value and importance of the particular blending of offline and online settings within a community building and development space as the BGC strives to do. They emphasize the need for what they term "hybrid approaches" for enabling adequate digital integration and learning for youth, especially those without consistent access.

In contrast to many of the case examples Her-Stephenson et al. cite as successful implementations of digital media in youth development programs which focus on formally developed systems, this case centers on the value of freedom and creative agency as ways to allow for personal blending of online and offline interaction. The use of social media in the examples described in Chapters 3 and 4 to maintain cross-age relationships formed at the club are still solid examples of Herr-Stephenson et al.'s findings that youth in these settings can gain substantial knowledge and skills through participation with media. Though neither BGC site has the funds or the knowledge base to form a club based robotics team, the youth there are formulating strong and valuable skills in communication and relationship building through their blended interfacing with older and younger members, and are growing in maturity and responsibility through these processes. The youth interviewed on their cross-age relationships revealed perceptions of being supported, cared for, and loved, tying this system and blending of the BGC and social and digital media use again to a solid demonstration of social support.

The persistence of youth interest in cross-age friendships and mentorship opportunities both with other youth members and with staff across both locations connects to a specific mix of emotion and esteem based social support needs among these youth groups. The success of these friendships and the value placed in them by youth continues to demonstrate the affordances of the club as a community building space that enables fruitful, creative, and autonomous and agency-driven social engagement, friendship building, and maintenance. Though social media and phone use played a rather insignificant role in this category for Santa Monica youth in contrast with Lyn Treece youth, the consistency in the presence of this category across both groups is still a reflection of shared social support needs. Like the fulfillment of the other categories, Santa Monica members are simply taking a different approach to addressing these needs and in this case, pursued mentorship at the club itself more than outside of it.

These examples continue to enhance the arguments of boyd, Ito, Jenkins and others around the central components and driving factors of youth and adolescent digital media use. Though the overarching goal is still related to ideas of public engagement, friendship driven interests, and participatory engagement, for this group in particular we see a more nuanced construction of how to reach these goals, with the intention of seeking social support as a crucial component of these processes. Within the mix of searching for space for strengthening and expressing one's network, we also see youth members striving for ways to address vulnerability, establish trust, and validate networks and friendships. Mentorship and cross-age friendship is a strong example of pursuing these needs especially in reaction to difficult and complex familial structures and home lives.

5.9. New Dimensions of the Youth and Media Relationship

The ways in which these youth use social media in and outside of the club, as well as their motivations for doing so, make visible the processes of expressing, building, and navigating vulnerability, trust, and personal systems of social engagement that are core to successful social support exchange. These specific needs further nuance the understanding of social support processes, in terms of how and why it is gained and received for this particular population. Many of the examples described do fit well into the traditional break down of various sub-groups of social support in its original connotation. However, the core motivations and consequences of social support exchange depicted in this dissertation help further articulate the specific understandings and importance of social support to these youth groups perceived to be "at-risk." The varying circumstances surrounding their home lives and various environments motivate a specific set of social support related needs that add nuance to a more general understanding of the term.

In the same way, the findings and especially the overlap between the Santa Monica and Lyn Treece findings challenge the general understanding of youth media use promoted in previous work from boyd, Ito, Jenkins, and other in this subfield of youth media use. Though they recognize the diversity of the youth experience, their descriptions of youth circumstances still contribute to a certain generalization of the relationship between digital media and youth, where digital media serve mostly to illuminate and enhance current practices of social engagement. The overarching needs of young people are framed within the need and desire for friendship or for public participation. These needs and motivations are certainly present in the Lyn Treece and Santa Monica youth groups, but these findings also reveal more than this overarching narrative.

In the same way that the youth are striving for autonomous friendship maintenance and communication and are using social media to do so, they are still quite wary of the concerns surrounding technology use and are welcoming of parental negotiation and supervision of those spaces to certain extents. Their circumstances motivate a heightened awareness around issues of trust and vulnerability, which affects their social relationships in a variety of ways, including the way those relationships are expressed, communicated, and legitimized online. For these youth groups, youth are using social media as platforms and paths toward broader public participation, but also as tools for personal evaluation, tools of connection, tools of engagement, and tools of expression. The way they use these tools are especially informed by their life circumstances, and though they do not articulate it in this way, this toolset is being used arguably to address systemic social issues on personal and agency-driven terms through the pursuit of social support. These findings provide broader support for use of social media that is informed and situated within broader infrastructural opportunities for and practices of social support building, which the Boys and Girls Club provides.

5.10. The Importance of Social Media and the Boys & Girls Clubs

On a broader level, the discovery of these processes and media practices and their articulation and analysis in this study fulfill its original intended contribution, where this knowledge is being used to highlight particularly successful instances of social and digital media participation for creating a safe, supportive, and positive learning and growing environment for members of youth development programs. Importantly, this dissertation depicts some of the ways in which these successful instances occur, through highlighting the socio-technical system and associated intersecting spaces that enable it. This study highlights previous literatures' points

about digital and social media not replacing traditional modes of social interaction, but rather enriching and distributing it. These findings thus better enable the process of striking an important balance between integrating social and digital media into youth development programs in flexible and autonomy friendly ways and establishing a supportive and concrete encompassing space for these interactions to take place. A next step for the use of this knowledge and findings is to assess and articulate more concrete ways to incorporate it into standards and protocols for technology use within youth development spaces. For the Boys and Girls Clubs of Lafayette and Santa Monica, their flexibility around technology use matched with their negotiated allowances and recognition of the particular social networks and relationships it supports is an excellent start.

My hope is that this knowledge contributes beneficially to the youths' own understandings of themselves, and equally importantly contributes to staff, parental, and other authority figures' understandings of these youth as well. A solid understanding is to an extent already present, but ideally these findings can enhance their understandings in a way that promotes even more conscious use and social interaction. There are complex practices of social interaction at play among the youth at the Lyn Treece and Santa Monica Boys and Girls Clubs, and opportunities for online participation provide key opportunities for supporting those interactions. The needs and desires of the youth identified, and the paths they construct to meet them are integral pieces of knowledge that demonstrate not only how they strive to better themselves through social growth on the path to adulthood, but also how the spaces they use allow a most beneficial and supportive path there.

Besides contributing to a larger understanding of the youth at both sites and their particular practices, this dissertation also serves as a testament to the powerful intersection of

spaces like the Boys and Girls Club and digital platforms for online interaction and engagement. As shown through the excerpts of life at the Club in the previous two chapters, it is a space of community, growth, protection, hope, dedication, and deep love. Though thousands of miles apart, staff at both sites expressed some of the same goals and dreams for the youth they support, and the trust and bonds between staff and members carried through in very similar ways. The Club is a space members can go to feel truly understood, welcomed, and supported, where staff understand and cater to their unique situations and needs. Many of the freedoms and vulnerabilities youth expressed both on and offline at the club were enabled by the environment that is actively cultivated there. I personally felt the power of these spaces, as the connections I formed at each site with both members and staff rapidly became deep, meaningful, and long-term connections as I was further welcomed into the BGC family over time. This dissertation strongly advocates for the continued presence of and public and institutionalized investment in youth development programs and communities like the Boys and Girls Club, in a way that is informed by continued understanding of appropriate integration of digital media into those spaces to continue to fully meet youth members' needs. The intersection of these two spaces is a crucial one for these particular youth communities.

5.11. Recommendations & Next Steps

Next steps for this work involve articulating concrete recommendations that emerge from these findings for youth, youth development programmers and staff, parents, social media designers, and other stakeholders. These recommendations should essentially be paired with applied policies and protocols in youth development programs or in youth use of social media more generally. Youth themselves should be an active part of the process of designing and

developing these protocols, which motivates the use of participatory design and participatory action research as an ideal method for next stages. Such methods will ideally promote collective and agency-driven enhancement of youth development programs in ways that accurately reflect youth needs and current social support exchange practices. The recognition of the multiple and varied stakeholders involved in this area of research also highlights this area as one that requires further development as a project and analysis that builds from the present research findings. Though the application of these findings to youth development programming and the articulation of recommendations is envisioned here as a next step for continuing this dissertation work, a few key takeaways that will influence specific recommendations are clear from the findings and discussion presented in this dissertation.

First, the overarching finding of social media as an important source of social support and a significant influence in youth's lives leads to the recommendation of embracing and encouraging integration of social and digital media into youth development spaces in some form. As noted in the discussion, the two sites observed in this dissertation employ differing degrees of control over social and digital media use during club hours, and are on different ends of the spectrum between banning technology use altogether at the BGC and allowing use at any time. This recommendation of integration in some form advocates for avoiding the possibility of a total ban on digital and social media use and encourages striking an informed balance in regulation. The second major recommendation involves allowing for significant flexibility in navigation of club activities, including digital and social media use during those activities. As demonstrated in the findings, flexibility in social media use is substantially tied to forms of autonomous expression and agency among this youth group. Catering to those needs allows for

expressions of vulnerability and building of trusting relationships that enable positive social support exchange.

A third overarching recommendation centers on communication and transparency. Youth development programmers and staff should encourage and facilitate open communication about club policies, including digital and social media use, to enable youth to feel that they can participate in these spaces in a fully supported way. One of the biggest personal surprises in this ethnographic journey was the way in which club members bonded so rapidly and strongly with me especially after their interviews. The ability to be heard and express themselves in a transparent and free form way was invaluable, and should be built into programming when appropriate and possible. These recommendation ideas provide the foundation for a longer and more in depth set of recommendations for each stakeholder group. They will be paired with concrete examples and suggestions for activities and planning as informed by the case examples of each BGC site discussed in this dissertation. These next steps will serve as the basis for extended work on this project.

5.12. The Bigger Picture: Broader Significance & Conclusion

This dissertation displays the use of social media as an instrumental factor in youth club members' social support exchanges, by articulating and revealing the socio-technical system of social support exchange at the intersection of social media use and BGC engagement that enables positive social support for youth. In line with boyd, Ito, Turkle, and others, this work reveals social media use as a near ubiquitous practice of social exchange among youth, beginning at increasingly younger ages. This dissertation offers a particular focus on the role of social media use in the lives of elementary and middle school age youth, a growing social media demographic

and one with its own particular uses and motivations. In addition, these findings display the continued widespread use of these platforms even within this particular population of youth considered to be "at-risk." The roles of social media for social support for these particular groups will be of increasing necessary focus as new platforms that cater to these groups continue to be released, and the new rhetoric around youth social media use continues to develop. Importantly, the examples of youth social support exchange included here and the depiction of their social development are not presented in comparison to other communities against which they are deemed to have a deficit. Instead, the focus here is placed on the varied and agency-driven uses of social media for social support exchange present among this population that occur as part of their varied identities and environmental circumstances. This focus reflects both the youth's perceptions of themselves and the club staff's perception of them, and continues to reveal the importance of spaces like the BGC for youth.

In line with Washington et al.'s call, the term at-risk, though used, was not ultimately an important signifier for the group with the shifted focus on community based social exchanges. As a label it affects these youth's lives, but is not a part of their self-perceptions and thus is not presented as such. Despite some barriers to individual device ownership, BGC members employ methods of communal use and shared familial technologies to gain consistent access to social media spaces. This persistence in using various tactics emphasizes the importance of social media in these youth's lives. The multidimensional role of social media in social support exchange is revealed in the particularities of its daily use. The key themes of constructed combined social support, negotiated allowances, social media emotional management, and unique mentorships reveal the role of social media as a central part of the social support process

by bringing together sources of social support and key exchanges between youth, their families, and club staff that help initiate and maintain it.

The findings discussed and shared in this dissertation display the BGC youths' continued perception of social media as a potential constant source of social support in the way it is used to validate and maintain friendships and friend groups, carve space for self-expression, and gain self-assurance. However, this perception is complicated through the consciousness youth express about potential detrimental uses of these spaces, which they offset by sharing concerns with their parents, establishing mutual agreements over use, and exercising autonomy in assembling personal rules and practices around appropriate use. The findings additionally highlight emotion and esteem support as particularly important needs to this community, but build on the understanding of these support needs through examining the various motivating factors of vulnerability, trust, autonomy, and agency that drive these needs.

Social media is revealed as a space for navigating these factors through social support exchange. Importantly, this dissertation reveals the immense significance of participating in a space for agency-driven community building like the Boys and Girls Club as an encompassing and influential environment for this social support exchange process. The club and social media are importantly intertwined in a unique socio-technical system of social support exchange, and allow for appropriate processing and expression that accommodate the needs of this particular population. Ultimately, this dissertation reveals the value in enabling this intersection of formal organizational communal support exchange and agency-driven social media use as a part of social development that is implemented to different extents at both sites. This work provides a foundation of descriptive knowledge for appropriately and beneficially addressing youth social support needs through enhanced understanding of the current and potential uses of social media

as well as the paths for integration into youth development spaces. In addition, the case examples of successful social support exchange portrayed here present a number of helpful case examples for other youth development groups. Though the scope of this work is limited in its focus on two specific and local BGC sites, it sets a path for continued similar analyses through collaboration with countless other local sites to eventually create a growing network of rich data on this topic. It will additionally lead naturally to more club based collaboration in this line of inquiry through participatory action research to integrate findings with direct club programming. This work supports a continued blending of digital and face-to-face community building spaces to ensure fully supported social engagement and development for youth on their journey to adulthood.

Appendices

Appendix A: Field Notes Observation Protocol

Date: _____
Time: _____
Length of activity: ____ minutes
Location: _____
Participant(s): _____

Descriptive Notes	**Reflective Notes**
(Notes on the people, actions, and conversations observed)	*(Researcher ideas and concerns)*
Additional jotted notes	*Additional jotted notes*

Appendix B: Interview Protocol (Minor)

Date: _____
Time: _____
Length of activity: ____ minutes
Location: _____
Interviewee(s): _____

Opening Statement: Hi! How are you today? First, thank you so much for agreeing to chat with me today. If it's ok with you, I am going to ask you a few questions about your social media use, your friends, and other similar things. Please answer each question as honestly as you can. This should last about 20 minutes. Do you have any questions for me? If you do have any at any point, just let me know. Also, if you want to stop or take a break or anything like at some point, that's fine, just let me know.

Questions:

Background Information:

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. What grade are you in?

Topical Questions:

1. Do you own any social media accounts?
2. What sorts of social media sites do you use?
3. Which ones do you use most? Why?
4. Who are you closest with in your family? Why?
5. Who is your closest friend? Why?
6. Do you have any friends online that you've never met in person?
7. How many times per day do you talk to new friends online?
8. Do you ever use social media (or your phone more generally) to help you deal with problems?
9. Have you ever gotten into a fight with one of your friends or a family member?
10. How did you deal with that situation?
11. Do you tell your friends that you love them?
12. Do you tell your family that you love them?
13. How do you show your friends and family that you love them?
14. Do you ever use social media to show that you care about your family or friends? How?
15. Do your family and friends ever use social media to show that they care about you? How?

*Note: Following the form of intensive interviewing, other questions will arise based on the flow of conversation, and the sequence of questions may be rearranged.

Notes & Reflections:

Appendix C: Interview Protocol (Adult)

Date: _____
Time: _____
Length of activity: ____ minutes
Location: _____
Interviewee(s): _____

Opening Statement: Hello and thank you so much for volunteering to be a part of this research study. I will be asking you a series of questions about your child(s) or student(s) social media use, your relationships, and other related topics. Please answer each question as honestly as possible and to the best of your ability. This interview should last approximately 30 minutes. I would like to remind you that participation in this research study is completely voluntary, and you are free to discontinue at any point if you wish.

Questions:

Background Information:

1. What is your name?
2. What is your occupation?
3. What is your relation to the participants of the Boys & Girls Clubs?

Topical Questions:

4. Do you own any social media accounts?
5. What sorts of social media sites do you use?
6. What do you know about how the participants of the Boys & Girls Clubs use social media?
7. How do they use technology more generally?
8. How do you feel about their use of technology?
9. How do you feel about their use of social media?
10. What role would you say social media should play in their lives, if any?
11. Do you have concerns about the participants of the Boys & Girls Clubs? What are they?
12. How do you show support for your child(s) or student(s)?
13. What role do you think the Boys & Girls Clubs plays in their lives?
14. How do the participants of the Boys & Girls Clubs communicate with each other?
15. How do they show support for one another?

*Note: Following the form of intensive interviewing, other questions will arise based on the flow of conversation, and the sequence of questions may be rearranged.

Other:

Notes & Reflections:

Appendix D: Minimal Risk Assent Form (Minor)

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Using Social Media

Jennifer Pierre, one of your staff aides, is interested in using your help for a research project.

Besides working at the Boys & Girls Clubs, Jennifer is a graduate student at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and is interested in how young people like you use social media and digital technologies more generally.

You were chosen to help because you attend the Boys & Girls Clubs of Santa Monica. You can participate in this project if you would like, but you don't have to.

What is this project about?

For this project, I want to know more about how you use social media.

What will happen if I participate?

If you volunteer to participate, I will ask you to:
- Answer questions for about about 15-20 minutes about how you use social media.
- Work with me doing regular Boys & Girls Clubs activities.

How long will this take?

This project will take in total about six months, with the question asking periods happening at random times after month two, three times for about 15 minutes as described under the last question.

Is there anything I should be worried about if I say yes?

- No, there are not any risks in participating.

Will I get anything from participating?

You might learn something new!

Will you tell anyone what I tell you?

No, only I will know what you say.

What else should I know before deciding?

- You can choose whether or not you want to participate, and you can stop at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no punishment of any kind.
- You can choose to answer some questions and not other questions, but still participate.

Who should I talk to if I have questions?

- **The research team:**
  If you have any questions you can call or text:

  Jennifer Pierre, 973-617-6927 **or** jp639@g.ucla.edu
  Gregory Leazer, 310-720-2415 **or** leazer@ucla.edu

- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**
  If you have any other questions about the study and don't want to ask me, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program
11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

You will get a copy of this sheet to keep.

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

_____
Name of Participant

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING ASSENT

_____ _____
Name of Person Obtaining Assent Contact Number

_____ _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Assent Date

Appendix E: <u>Minimal Risk Assent Form (Adult)</u>

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Analyzing Social Media Use Among Youth Technology Users

Jennifer Pierre, a volunteer at the Santa Monica Boys and Girls Club, is conducting a research project and would like your help.

Besides volunteering at the Santa Monica BGC, Jennifer is a PhD student in the Department of Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and has research experience and extensive interest in the area of computer-mediated communication, specifically youth use of social media.

Jennifer would like to interview you as part of her research project on youth social media use with participants of the Santa Monica Boys & Girls Clubs club. This setting was chosen in part because of Jennifer's substantial experience working with youth development organizations; she worked as a staff aide for 4-H for 3 summers, and is currently working as a volunteer staff aide for the Boys & Girls Clubs.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are part of the youth development or management staff at the Santa Monica BGC. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

This study will explore the frequency and importance of social media use in children and adolescent development. Findings from this work will ideally help enhance current youth development services like the Boys & Girls Clubs.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you to:

- Participate in one interview up to 20 minutes long where you will be asked to answer questions about your social media use, the social media use of children in the Boys & Girls Clubs, and other related topics.

How long will I be in the research study?

Your participation in the whole project will take approximately 20 minutes.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts you can expect from this study.

Are there any potential benefits to participating?

You may benefit from the study through the outcomes of the interviews and observations and how it may affect your understanding of your social media practices, as well as through the larger contributions to knowledge and understanding the study may produce.

The results of the research may contribute to social psychological knowledge on social media use in youth and adolescents and general youth development program policy.

Will information about my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of storing any data on a personal computer with encrypted and password protected security, and it will not be shared with anyone outside of the principal investigator and research assistant.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your permission and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

- **The research team:**
  If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact:

  Jennifer Pierre, 973-617-6927 **or** jp639@g.ucla.edu
  Gregory Leazer, 310-720-2415 **or** leazer@ucla.edu

- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**
  If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:

  UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program
  11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694
  Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

Name of Participant	
Signature of Participant	Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

Name of Person Obtaining Consent	Contact Number
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent	Date

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