



## Module 5: Positive Social Norms Research Review

All groups of people, from small groups of family or friends to larger groups of classmates or community members, develop social norms. These norms are expectations for behavior communicated among group members to help create a shared culture and organize group behavior (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lapinski & Rimal, 2005; Siu, Cheng, & Leung, 2006). Social norms often become deeply entrenched within group behavior and beliefs; they are repeatedly reinforced, and members who deviate from the norms are commonly punished or met with disapproval (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Tseng & Seidman, 2007). There are several categories of norms that can be distinguished. First, norms can be either collective or perceived. Collective norms provide guides for acceptable behavior at the group level while perceived norms indicate an individual's perception of the collective norms, and these can be markedly different (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005). Second, norms can be injunctive or descriptive. Injunctive norms are related to individuals' beliefs about what people should do and what should happen when norms are broken while descriptive norms are related to individuals' beliefs about what people actually do and what sanctions they commonly receive when they break norms (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005; Perkins, Craig, & Perkins, 2011). Finally, norms can reflect a group's beliefs about moral behavior, or they can be more casual expectations for everyday interactions (Siu et al., 2006).

### **How Are Norms Conveyed?**

Social norms can be conveyed through a wide variety of sources. Among youth, norms are commonly communicated through peers (e.g., friends, romantic partners, acquaintances), parents, teachers, media (e.g., television, music, advertisements), community members, and others (Collins et al., 2004; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Kirby, 2001; Prinstein, Meade, & Cohen, 2003). Particularly well-studied among youth is the influence of peers' social norms on youth beliefs and behavior, especially the norms of peers that may encourage youth to deviate from positive social norms (Beckmeyer & Weybright, 2016; Fletcher, 2007; Maxwell, 2002). However, it is important to remember that youth's peers do not promote only negative social norms but encourage many positive norm behaviors as well (Choukas-Bradley, Giletta, Cohen, & Prinstein, 2015; Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

### **Factors Influencing Norms**

The desire to enact behavior that is consistent with social norms may be strengthened or weakened depending on a number of situational and individual difference factors (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). First, youth may be particularly likely to conform to peer social norms. As youth mature, they spend increasingly more time with peers. They also work toward becoming independent from their parents and forming their own identities, especially during adolescence. Therefore, youth tend to place an exceptionally high value on peers' perceptions of them and on peers' social norms (Beckmeyer & Weybright, 2016; Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011; Fletcher, 2007; Maxwell, 2002). High-status sources of norm information may also be more influential in youth's decisions to follow social norms. For instance, youth are more likely to express positive beliefs about helping and volunteering when those norms are conveyed by high-status (i.e., popular and likeable) peers rather than low-status peers (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2015). Youth similarly express more agreement with aggressive norms and display more exclusion behavior when those norms are conveyed by high-status youth (Cohen & Prinstein, 2006). Finally, the

more connected youth are to the source of norm information, the more likely they are to abide by the social norms conveyed (Kirby, 2001). For example, the closer youth are with their families, the less likely they are to engage in substance use or early sexual initiation when families convey norms against those risk behaviors (Kirby, 2001; Sale, Sambrano, Springer, & Turner, 2003). In fact, when examining the success of programs aimed at reducing sexual risk taking among youth, Kirby (2001) concluded that the most important factors determining success of the programs were the social norms expressed and youth's connectedness to program leaders expressing the positive norms.

### **Positive Social Norms in Youth Programs**

Overall, social norms are group processes and expectations that can have a strong impact on an individual's behavior, including youth's behavior. Social norms can strongly influence both positive and negative behaviors among youth, and fostering positive social norms is often a primary goal in positive youth development research and programs (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004; Kirby, 2001; Payton et al., 2000). Within youth programs, positive social norms are defined as standards or expectations for youth's attitudes and behaviors that are considered socially and culturally appropriate and desirable. These positive social norms often promote behaviors viewed as safe, healthy, and morally or ethically valued (e.g., volunteering, school attendance) and discourage unhealthy, risky, or deviant behaviors (e.g., substance use, violence, risky sexual behavior) among youth program participants (Catalano et al., 2004; Cheng, Siu, & Leung, 2006; Mahoney, Eccles, & Larson, 2004; Siu et al., 2006). Youth programs promote positive social norms in many ways. For example, some programs provide activities that allow youth to make positive contributions to their communities and build healthy relationships with adult role models and peers (Cheng et al., 2006). Many programs also communicate clear expectations for positive behavior that aligns with the group's norms (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Some programs even include activities or curricula to help youth identify and understand societal norms, sanctions for breaking norms, and reasoning behind the norms, including moral reasoning (Siu et al., 2006).

Positive youth development theories suggest that positive social norms are a vital piece of youth programs. Programs provide an ideal setting for youth to interact with peers and youth workers who communicate positive social norm information. Youth programs also allow youth to engage in activities that strengthen and reinforce positive social norms (Barber, Stone, Hunt, & Eccles, 2005; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Mahoney et al., 2004). In fact, participants in a youth-directed community program identified established social norms and behavioral expectations as an important factor in maintaining a well-functioning program. One youth explained that having reasonable expectations and consequences for breaking norms allowed the program to provide a safe, accepting place for youth to engage in positive youth development activities (Borden & Serido, 2009). The inclusion of positive social norms in youth programs is also important for program success and youth outcomes. Fostering positive social norms is one of the most important content categories addressed in youth programs with significant research support (Catalano et al., 2004). In reviews of positive youth development programs aimed at promoting adolescent sexual health and programs aimed at preventing violence, the majority of the most successful programs incorporated clearly communicated expectations for behavior and a focus on positive social norms (Gavin, Catalano, David-Ferdon, Gloppen, & Markham, 2010; Gavine, Donnelly, & Williams, 2016).

Despite theory and research suggesting the value of fostering positive social norms in youth programs, relatively few programs actually emphasize fostering positive social norms in practice. Most programs that include positive social norms components provide youth with behavioral expectations only and do not include other activities aimed at promoting and developing positive social norms (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). In a large review of youth development programs, only 13% of programs included activities meant to impact youth and community social norm beliefs and behaviors, and most programs instead focused narrowly on skill-building (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Only approximately one third of both youth programs aimed at promoting adolescent sexual health and programs aimed at preventing violence included a focus on fostering positive social norms (Gavin et al., 2010; Gavine et al., 2016). Certain types of youth programs do tend to have a greater emphasis on fostering positive social norms than others. Youth in faith-based and service programs report experiencing more opportunities to build positive prosocial norms than youth in other types of programs (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003). However, the lack of emphasis on positive social norms in youth programs as a whole is unfortunate given research that fostering positive social norms can also benefit other areas of youth development, including building a range of skills and competencies (e.g., relational skills, problem-solving skills, responsibility; Cheng et al., 2006; Schwartz et al., 2010). In summary, within all types of youth programs, fostering positive social norms is an essential and valuable component of youth programs.

### **Theoretical Foundations of Positive Social Norms**

#### **Theories of Social Influence**

Both early seminal studies and current research suggest that individuals look to others to evaluate their own behaviors and attitudes through social comparison as well as to provide normative information about how to act in particular situations (Asch, 1956; Festinger, 1954; Lapinski & Rimal, 2005; Maxwell, 2002; Perkins et al., 2011; Sherif, 1937). For example, when individuals respond to unclear circumstances and stimuli alone and then in a group setting, they tend to shift their initial answers closer to others' answers to match the group's beliefs and behaviors (Sherif, 1936, 1937). Even when circumstances and stimuli are very clear, people often still shift their answers to an obviously incorrect group answer to match the group more closely (Asch, 1956). Individuals may conform to group norms for a variety of reasons. Festinger (1954) posits that all people have an innate drive to evaluate their own opinions and behaviors, and their evaluation relies heavily on information received from others. People may also conform to group norms to avoid social sanctions or to feel positive affect related to being connected to and part of a group identity (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005). Over time, individuals come into contact with others' attitudes and behaviors, and they often conform to social norms. They may begin to internalize those norms as their own values and morals and as an important part of their identity. This can motivate them to continue to conform to social norms even when they are alone or with groups who hold different norms (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lapinski & Rimal, 2005; Sherif, 1936). In the context of youth programs, it is particularly important that youth internalize the positive social norms fostered in the program in order to apply them in other contexts (e.g., with peers, at home, in school).

## **The Theory of Misperceived Norms**

The majority of research on youth and social norms is based upon participants' perceptions of group norms rather than groups' actual attitudes and behaviors related to social norms (Beckmeyer & Weybright, 2016; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Kinsman, Romer, Furstenberg, & Schwarz, 1998; Santelli et al., 2004). However, youth's perceived norms often differ significantly from actual group norms, particularly from norms of peers. Early research found that college students' perceptions of peer norms regarding alcohol use were much more extreme than peers' actual attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (e.g., students believed peers condoned and were consuming much higher rates of alcohol than in reality; Perkins & Berkowitz, 1986). Additional research found that this overestimation of peers' engagement in problem behavior also applies to younger children and adolescents and to a variety of other behaviors, including peer rejection and aggression, bullying, smoking, and unhealthy eating (Ellickson, Bird, Orlando, Klein, & McCaffrey, 2003; Lally, Bartle, & Wardle, 2011; Perkins et al., 2011; Prinstein & Wang, 2005). In general, youth tend to hold more positive social norms than the norms they perceive their peers hold (Perkins, 2003; Perkins et al., 2011).

Perkins' theory of misperceived norms articulates three reasons for the discrepancy between youth's perceived and actual peer norms. First, people generally believe that the way others act when they are observed is how they usually act, even when not observed. Since youth problem behaviors often occur in social settings, youth may perceive peers' problem behaviors as the way that peers behave the majority of the time. Second, people tend to talk about more extreme behavior, which is noticeable and memorable, over mundane behavior (e.g., talking more about a youth becoming extremely intoxicated rather than a youth having a single drink). Third, culture and the media spend a disproportionate amount of time discussing extremes and sometimes exaggerate overall attitudes and behaviors. For these reasons, youth may believe that positive social norms are less common and problem behavior is more common among their peers than in actuality (Perkins, 2003; Perkins et al., 2011). The theory of misperceived norms explains two consequences of individuals' skewed view of norms: first, individuals try to conform to what they falsely believe are the group norms, and second, individuals are less likely to stand up to problem behavior because they believe their attitudes and behaviors are in the minority compared to others (Perkins, 2003; Perkins et al., 2011). Therefore, it is important for youth programs to address and correct youth's misperceived peer norm information in order to promote positive social norms.

## **Social-Cognitive Theory**

Social-cognitive theory provides several additional factors to consider when examining how social norms may influence attitudes and behaviors. Social-cognitive theory states that individuals can learn new attitudes and behaviors from others through modeling. For instance, when youth see a youth worker engaging in helping behavior, this can increase their own likelihood of helping others. Youth then learn practical ways to enact the behavior. They may also form outcome expectations about the consequences of helping. If a youth worker receives thanks for helping, youth may conclude that helping is likely to be met with desirable consequences. Finally, youth form expectations about their own self-efficacy. If a youth worker is successful in being able to help someone, youth may conclude that their own helping efforts will be successful. Overall, social-cognitive theory proposes that an individuals' information and ability, expectations about consequences, and beliefs about their own self-efficacy

influence their goals and eventual behaviors (Bandura, 1989; Luszczynska & Schwarzer, 2005; Simons-Morton, 2002). Each of these factors should be incorporated into youth programs aimed at fostering positive social norms.

### **The Theories of Reasoned Action and Planned Behavior**

Similar to social-cognitive theory, the theories of reasoned action and planned behavior offer a framework for explaining how social norms influence individuals' behavior, and several recent studies of social norms in youth have used these as theoretical bases (Perkins et al., 2011; Prinstein et al., 2003; Simons-Morton, 2002). The theory of reasoned action states that individuals' behaviors can be predicted by their beliefs about norms and their own personal attitudes. It suggests that the more a behavior aligns with an individual's attitudes and with the individual's perceived norms of others, the more likely that individual is to intend to perform and to actually enact that behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1973, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). The construct of perceived control, or a person's ability to control their own behavior and behavioral consequences, was later added to the theory, and it was renamed the theory of planned behavior. The addition acknowledges that perceived control is another factor that individuals consider when deciding whether to enact a behavior, including behaviors consistent or inconsistent with social norms (Ajzen, 2002, 2005).

### **Problem Behavior Theory**

Finally, problem behavior theory offers a psychosocial view of specific ways social norms may impact youth problem behavior. This theory holds that youth problem behaviors (e.g., substance use, risky sexual behaviors) are enacted because these behaviors are functional and instrumental in helping youth meet needs or goals. It suggests that problem behaviors are shaped by norms and expectations of a youth's environment and larger culture. Problem behavior theory states that associating with others who engage in problem behavior and hold supportive attitudes toward problem behavior increases the likelihood of a youth engaging in the behavior by increasing 1) tolerance, 2) acceptance, and 3) attractiveness of the behavior (Jessor, 1987; Simons-Morton, 2002). Overall, these theoretical frameworks provide an important basis for our understanding of how youth may develop and enact behaviors from social norms, including within the context of youth programs.

### **Social Norms and Youth Outcomes**

Social norms, whether conveyed by peers, family members, the media, or another source, greatly influence the attitudes and behaviors of youth. Youth programs provide an opportune setting in which to foster positive social norms. However, the majority of social norms research has focused on negative or unhealthy youth behaviors, and studies are often conducted in the school context. Additional research is needed to supplement the sparse literature examining positive social norms and the effects of social norms in youth programs. The following section offers a brief overview of research that has shown the effects of youth social norms on the behavior of young people. The topics reviewed below were identified as providing relevant information related to social norms that would be useful to those conducting youth programs.



## **Substance Use**

Social norms may strongly influence youth's attitudes and behaviors surrounding substance use. For several substances, including marijuana, alcohol, cigarettes, and chewing tobacco, greater use among youth's friends predicts a greater likelihood (almost two times greater on average) of the youth's own use approximately one year later (Maxwell, 2002). In addition to others' actual behavior, youth's perceptions of others' social norms about substance use have a strong impact on youth. For instance, youth who perceive that a large number of their friends use alcohol are over ten times more likely to use alcohol themselves than those who perceive that few friends use alcohol (Beckmeyer & Weybright, 2016). Similarly, youth who perceive a high prevalence of cigarette smoking among their peers are at greater risk of beginning to smoke, particularly when they are highly connected with their peers (Simons-Morton, 2002). The influences of peer and parent social norms about substance use can often conflict. How connected youth are with each source of norm information impacts the likelihood of youth substance use (Sale et al., 2003). Youth who are more connected to their families, especially when families have strong norms against substance use and actively supervise youth, are less likely to use substances while youth who are more connected to peers who use substances are also more likely to use themselves (Kosterman, Hawkins, Guo, Catalano, & Abbott, 2000; Sale et al., 2003).

## **Risky Sexual Behavior**

A number of youth programs aim to reduce risky sexual behavior among youth, and the most effective programs explicitly emphasize positive social norms (Gavin et al., 2010). In a two-year youth intervention program to reduce HIV risk, social norms were consistently one of the strongest factors in predicting early sexual initiation among participants (Santelli et al., 2004). Ample research suggests that peer norms promoting risky sexual behavior (e.g., early sexual initiation, no condom or birth control use, multiple partners) are associated with a greater likelihood of risky sexual behavior among youth (Fletcher, 2007; Prinstein et al., 2003; Whitaker & Miller, 2000). In fact, the more sexual activity occurring in a high school, the higher the likelihood that a youth attending that school will engage in early sexual activity (Fletcher, 2007). Beliefs that the majority of peers engage in sex, initiate sex at young ages, and receive increased status or respect for engaging in sex are associated with youth being more likely to initiate sex earlier and have more partners (Kinsman et al., 1998; Whitaker & Miller, 2000). Similarly, youth who perceive peers dislike and do not use condoms are less likely to use them, while youth who perceive that friends use condoms are more likely to use them (Whitaker & Miller, 2000). Social norms portrayed on television may also influence youth's risky sexual behavior. The more exposure youth have to sexual content on television, the more likely they are to initiate sex within the next year (Collins et al., 2004).

## **Violence and Aggression**

Violence, aggression, and bullying among youth are also influenced by social norms (Perkins et al., 2011). School classrooms with higher levels of aggression at the beginning of a school year have greater increases in aggression across the course of the year than classrooms with low aggression, potentially due to individual students' aggression levels increasing to match perceived norms (Mercer, McMillen, & DeRosier, 2009). Youth also show greater dislike for out-group members when they are told that peers have exclusionary norms versus inclusionary norms (e.g., excluding versus including youth of a different race or ethnicity from playing with the group; Nesdale, Maass, Durkin, & Griffiths, 2005). On

the other hand, positive social norms may be useful for programs and interventions to reduce violence, aggression, and bullying. In a review of youth violence prevention programs, those that utilized positive social norms regarding violence resulted in lower levels of violent attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Gavine et al., 2016). One school program aimed at reducing bullying evidenced particularly strong support for the use of positive social norms in violence prevention programs (Perkins et al., 2011). At baseline, students' perceptions of peer norms of bullying as acceptable or even promoted were more than two times higher than students' actual bullying beliefs, and bullying behaviors were highly related to students' perceptions of peer norms. Students' own reported bullying beliefs at baseline were used to create an anti-bullying poster campaign. Student belief messages (e.g., 9 out of 10 students believe students should not tease in a mean way) leveraged more accurate information about norms to change misperceived norms and reduce bullying. In four of the five schools, bullying rates were greatly reduced following the anti-bullying campaign. In addition, the more exposure students in a school had to the posters, the greater the reduction in bullying seen at that school. This study suggests that perceptions of peer norms about bullying strongly impact youth's beliefs and behaviors, and positive social norms can be useful in reducing bullying among youth (Perkins et al., 2011).

### **Eating Behaviors**

Youth's eating behaviors are partly influenced by social norms, and youth misperceive their peers' behaviors and beliefs about eating as well (Lally et al., 2011). Youth underestimate how many healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables, peers eat and overestimate how many unhealthy foods, such as snack foods, peers eat. Perceived peer norms of unhealthy eating, but not peers' actual behavior, predict how much healthy and unhealthy food youth eat themselves (Lally et al., 2011). In a study of middle school and high school girls, social norms were related to girls' use of unhealthy behaviors to control weight (e.g., diet pills, vomiting, laxatives). The greater the proportion of girls in school who were trying to lose weight and the more friends a girl had who were dieting, the more likely a girl was to use unhealthy behaviors to control their weight (Eisenberg, Neumark-Sztainer, Story, & Perry, 2005).

### **Attending College**

Finally, youth are influenced by others' social norms about attending college. Youth with more friends planning to attend college after high school graduation and more friends with norms promoting college attendance are more likely to attend college. Similarly, youth whose parents have norms promoting going to college are more likely to attend as well (Sokatch, 2006). Social norms held by individuals throughout high schools (e.g., guidance counselors, teachers, peers, alumni) play a role in youth's decisions to attend college. Youth who attend high schools with strong norms promoting college attendance, compared to those in schools with weak norms or norms discouraging college attendance, are significantly more likely to attend a four-year college and to attend more competitive or prestigious colleges (Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011).

## **Methodological Considerations**

There are several methodological issues to consider regarding positive social norms among youth and youth programs. First, very few social norms studies have been conducted in a youth program setting, with the majority of research based on school surveys of youth. In addition, little research has focused on positive social norms or the benefits of social norms. As is evident from the review of the literature, most studies focus on the negative influence of social norms regarding unhealthy, risky, or deviant youth behavior. Next, not all research clearly distinguishes between youth's perceptions of others' norms and others' actual normative beliefs and behaviors. This distinction is important given that these often do not align with one another (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Perkins, 2003).

Another consideration is that the way youth view norms and use normative information changes across the course of development. As youth age and mature, they tend to incorporate normative information more in their decision-making and engage in more prosocial behavior and less problematic behavior although changes during puberty may make that developmental period an exception to the trend (Benenson, Pascoe, & Radmore, 2007; Cheng et al., 2006; Siu et al., 2006). Theory suggests that as moral reasoning develops, youth are increasingly able to think critically and consider social and personal responsibility, others' perspectives, meaning and intention of norms, and many other factors related to normative information (Payton et al., 2000; Siu et al., 2006). Therefore, it is important to consider youth's developmental levels when fostering positive social norms in youth programs.

Finally, individual demographic and cultural characteristics can influence social norms. Gender plays a role in how youth view positive social norms (Cheng et al., 2006). Likely due to differences in socialization, girls tend to have more positive norms about prosocial behavior while boys focus more on justice and fairness (Siu et al., 2006). Youth may be socialized with different norms across a number of different groups and cultures. Where individuals live and with whom they associate plays a large role in what social norms are valued (Cheng et al., 2006; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Siu et al., 2006). For instance, youth from different socioeconomic status levels may learn different social norms about giving or sharing. In a study where children ages four through nine were provided the option to give some of their stickers to youth without stickers, youth whose families had high socioeconomic status gave significantly more stickers than youth from low socioeconomic status backgrounds (Benenson et al., 2007). Future research on social norms among youth should include a greater emphasis on benefits of positive social norms and on implications for youth programs. Research must also take into consideration how perceived norms and actual attitudes and behavior are measured, how development may influence youth's views of social norms, and how social norms may vary between groups with different demographic and cultural characteristics.

## **Implications for Youth Programs**

Clearly, it is important for youth programs to foster positive social norms among youth. It is vital that positive social norms are both clearly communicated as behavioral expectations for the program and integrated into activities and discussions that encourage youth to internalize those norms (Gavin et al., 2010). When communicating positive social norms for the program, youth workers should clearly indicate the consequences of breaking program norms and expectations and give a rationale for why program norms and expectations are in place (Gavin et al., 2010).



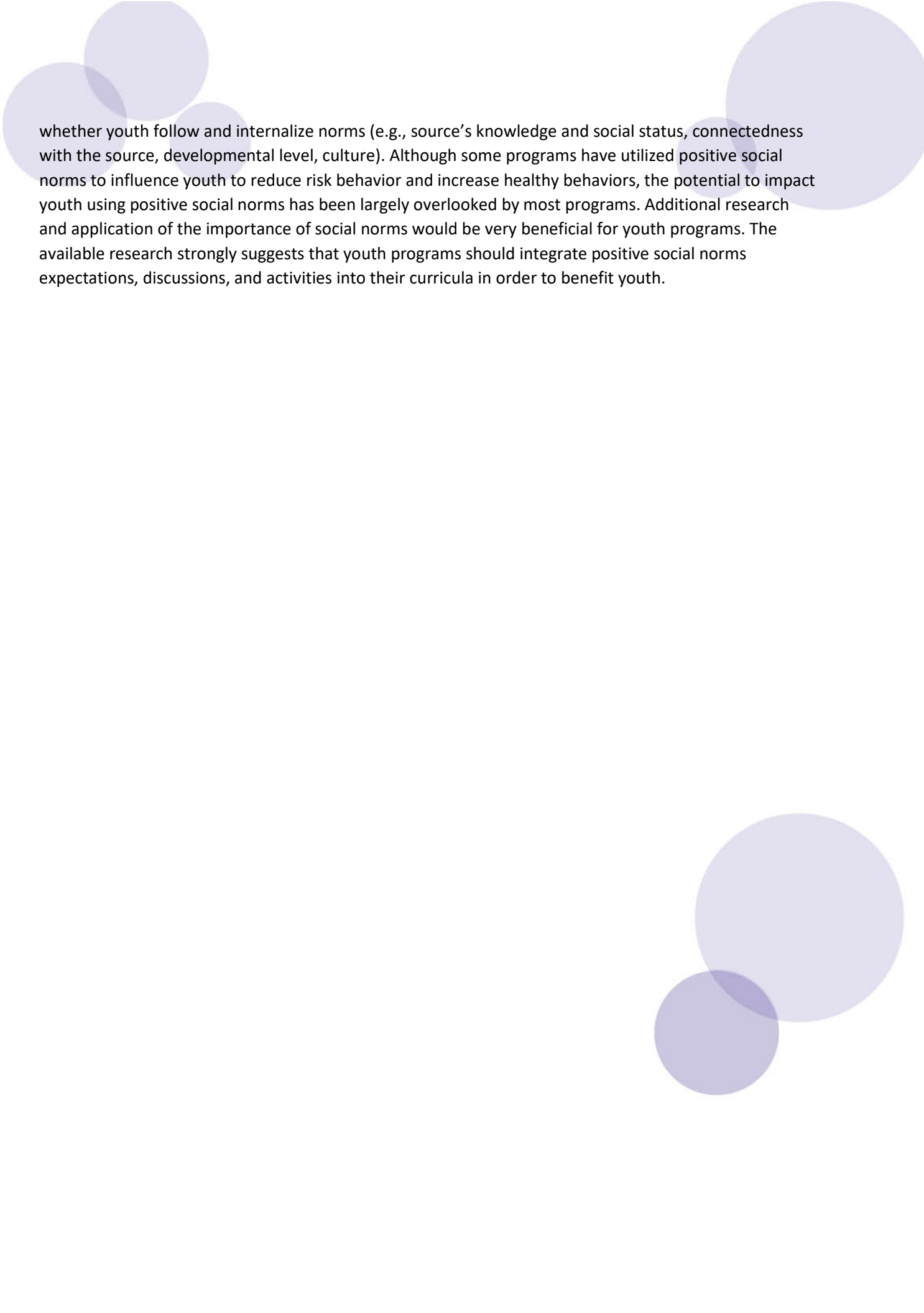
When planning activities and discussions aimed at fostering prosocial norms, several factors should be considered. First, youth should receive accurate information about peers' attitudes and behaviors regarding social norms of both positive (e.g., helping others, eating healthy) and negative (e.g., substance use, bullying) behaviors. This is useful because peers' actual beliefs and behaviors are almost always more positive than youth perceive, and providing accurate information will likely change youth's view of how acceptable and prevalent behaviors are (Perkins, 2003; Perkins et al., 2011). Indeed, Perkins (2003) suggests that programs attempting to change behavior by providing accurate social norms data should follow three steps: 1) collect baseline data on beliefs, behaviors, and misperceptions; 2) convey social norm messages based on those data; and 3) examine whether misperceptions of norms were reduced. Using normative data responses from program participants may make youth more confident that the data is relevant to them since it was collected from their point of reference group.

Who youth interact with during positive social norm activities and discussions is also important. Youth may be more likely to follow or internalize norms that are conveyed by others who are higher status. Therefore, programs may benefit from recruiting high-status youth to be leaders and mentors in positive social norms activities (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2015). Youth who are seen as particularly knowledgeable or having extra insight on a topic can be effective at guiding other youth in activities and discussions to promote positive social norms. For instance, Sokatch (2006) found it was effective to have older college-aged youth encourage high school students to attend college. It is also important for programs to avoid grouping youth with behavior problems together given that these youth may exacerbate problems by sharing more extreme or negative social norms (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Close adult supervision is important to guide youth during activities that foster positive social norms to ensure that healthy, accurate information is being conveyed (Mahoney et al., 2004). Because youth workers frequently convey positive social norms to youth and youth are more likely to follow and internalize norms that come from someone close to them, it is essential that youth workers build close relationships with youth participants (Kirby, 2001; Sale et al., 2003).

Finally, how a positive social norm message is conveyed is important to how youth will respond. Programs aimed at decreasing unhealthy, risky, or deviant behavior should not only convey norms about the targeted behavior but also convey positive social norms to encourage other, more healthy behaviors (Eisenberg et al., 2005). For instance, programs that aim to reduce unhealthy dieting behaviors can promote positive social norms surrounding healthy eating and exercise in addition to giving accurate information about potentially misperceived unhealthy dieting norms (Eisenberg et al., 2005). In addition, it is necessary for youth to get as much exposure as possible to positive social norms being conveyed in programs in order for them to be effective (Perkins et al., 2011). Overall, the literature on positive social norms among youth, while lacking research based in youth program settings, offers several useful suggestions for youth program applications (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2015; Kirby, 2001; Perkins, 2003; Perkins et al., 2011; Sale et al., 2003; Sokatch, 2006).

## **Conclusions**

In summary, social norms strongly influence youth's attitudes and behaviors. The influence of social norms spans a wide range of behaviors, including substance use, sexual behavior, violence and aggression, eating behaviors, and college attendance. Social norms can also be conveyed via a number of sources, such as parents, peers, teachers, and the media. In addition, several factors can influence



whether youth follow and internalize norms (e.g., source's knowledge and social status, connectedness with the source, developmental level, culture). Although some programs have utilized positive social norms to influence youth to reduce risk behavior and increase healthy behaviors, the potential to impact youth using positive social norms has been largely overlooked by most programs. Additional research and application of the importance of social norms would be very beneficial for youth programs. The available research strongly suggests that youth programs should integrate positive social norms expectations, discussions, and activities into their curricula in order to benefit youth.

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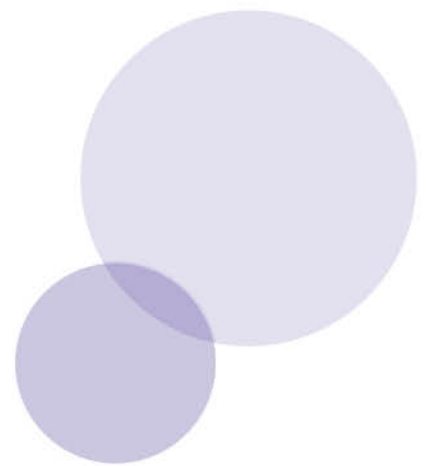

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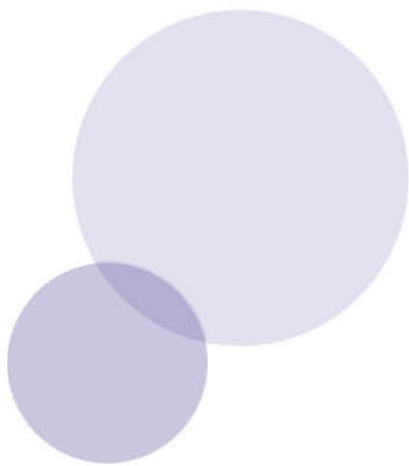
## Appendix A

### Glossary of Terms

**Positive youth development:** a strengths-based, holistic approach to studying and working with youth that focuses on promoting healthy development. Positive youth development research and practice tends to emphasize environmental rather than internal influences on development, altering systems that may foster positive and healthy youth development. In research and practice, the term “positive youth development” may refer to a developmental process, an approach to youth programming, or a specific program or organization.

**Youth programs:** programs that foster youth’s personal development (e.g., social, ethical, emotional, physical, and cognitive competencies), participation, and empowerment while fostering relationships between supportive adults and young people. Youth programs are diverse in their structure, goals, and the youth they serve. These programs may be referred to as after-school, out-of-school, and/or youth programs; throughout this report the term “youth program” refers to any of these programs.

**Youth workers:** volunteers and paid staff, including administrators and individuals engaged in direct service, who engage in youth development work in a variety of settings and programs outside the regular school day. Similar terms include youth development professionals, after-school providers, and youth leaders. For the purpose of this paper, the term "youth worker" will be used to describe all professionals who work in youth programs.



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