Black youth have been exposed to acts of racial violence and injustices throughout history, but there is also a history of social and political movements rooted in creating social change or in opposition to one. Previous research has discussed the development of youths' political attitudes and identities (Stewart and Healy, 1986; 1989) where youths who have a political identity at a young age will lead them to become more politically engaged in adulthood. Sociopolitical development, as a process, changes from generation to generation, but current youths may not know or understand the implications of how past historical movements have impacted their own sociopolitical ideologies. Existing research on sociopolitical developmental and activism has focused largely on college students and emerging adults; but studying *youths'* sociopolitical development is important in understanding how social injustices are impacting and showing up in the lives of Black youth. Framed by Sociopolitical Development Theory (SPD) and making use of focus group data, the current study is exploratory and will use a qualitative inductive analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to explore how youth understand advocacy and social injustices. The current study is an extension of the Race Talk project, a mixed-methods study that was designed to give Black middle and high school youth a voice to share their experiences of racism and discrimination. SPD focuses on youths' ability to recognize systems that are contributing to systemic inequities leading youth to activism through four components--*social analysis, opportunity structure, agency, and societal involvement (*Watts and Flanagan, 2007; Watts et al., 2003). In addition, this study will examine how and in what ways youth are bringing awareness and acting to create social change for the issues they face. The findings are organized to reflect youths' perspectives of social injustices and the ways they are addressing it:

1) *Identification and Awareness of Injustice*, 2) *Experiences and Impact*, 3) *Teaching and Educating*, 4) *Emotional Reactions to Injustices*, 5) *Accountability*, and 6) *Types of Involvement.*

EXAMINING SOCIOPOLITICAL ATTITUDES: BLACK YOUTHS' RESPONSES TO

SOCIAL INJUSTICES

by

Sydney A. Revell

A Thesis
Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

Greensboro

2023

Approved by

_____
Dr. Stephanie Irby Coard
Committee Co-Chair

_____
Dr. Jennifer L. Coffman
Committee Co-Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis written by Sydney A. Revell has been approved by the following committee
of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Co-Chair

Dr. Stephanie Irby Coard

Committee Co-Chair

Dr. Jennifer L. Coffman

Committee Member

Dr. Andrea Hunter

April 26, 2023

Date of Acceptance by Committee

March 27, 2023

Date of Final Oral Examination

ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is an important developmental period where youth are developing their own sense of self. Previous research on sociopolitical development and activism have primarily centered on college students and emerging adults, with few studies consisting of adolescent samples, and even fewer of middle school age. Although there have been samples of high schoolers, they have typically been combined with college students and emerging adults, so rarely were the unique perspectives of adolescents centered. There are also few studies that have talked explicitly with youth about how they understand social justice (Bañales et al., 2021). More recently, youth and adolescents are leading important, current social movements. Given the current sociopolitical climate in the United States, there has been a shift where we are witnessing youth become more involved in activism to address social injustices, specifically in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the murder of George Floyd.

For the current study, youths' understanding of what social injustices and the ways they involved in society was explored using Sociopolitical Development Theory (SPD). For the purposes of the study, social justice is defined using the John Lewis Institute for Social Justice definition. In three parts, social justice is created through a community effort where individuals are trying to make a fair and just society. It should bring people together to end systemic issues and other systems of oppression. Lastly, social justice should encourage others to come together and support human and civil rights. This definition focuses on the *thinking* aspect and how an individual feels while also hinting at the *doing* and action required to achieve justice Central Connecticut State University, 2023). Using this definition will help frame what social injustices are and how youths act to create social change, aligning with the SPD framework. This study, while exploratory, will use focus groups to explore how Black and African American youth

understand and encounter social injustices, while also examining why and how youth become

engaged.

CHAPTER II: THEORECTICAL FRAMEWORK

Sociopolitical Development Theory

For the current exploratory study, sociopolitical development (SPD) will be used as the theoretical guide. SPD is the process in which an individual engages as they are aware of the inequalities that exist in society and challenge systems of oppression. More specifically, experiences of racism and discrimination impact youth and how they begin to understand differences in society. Sociopolitical development theory is comprised of four distinct components (Figure 1): social analysis, agency, opportunity structure, and societal involvement (Watts and Flanagan, 2007).

Social analysis involves critical consciousness, coined by Brazilian activist, Fiere, in which an individual starts to identify oppressive systems within society thus leading them to activism involvement (Fiere, 1993). Currently, youth are experiencing acts of injustice in the world and talking with youth about events of injustice can help them to make connections to societal inequities. *Agency* refers to youth believing that they can create social change. This step in the process is important for youth to see and understand the connection they have when feeling the need to act when injustices occur. In the current study, youth can express their view on where their role is in addressing these issues and how they orient themselves to get to that point. The third component, *opportunity structure*, focuses on where youth can engage in these activist behaviors and have their voice heard.

Considering the role of social media and the impact it has had to shed light on racialized events, youth have opportunities to interact online and spread their knowledge on social platforms, but it is important to note that there are other outlets that youth have such as having conversations with family or peers. If youths feel that they can turn to specific individuals and

feel encouraged by them, then they may become more comfortable in speaking out more. Lastly, youth and their *societal involvement* focuses on their intent to address inequities (Watts and Flanagan, 2007; Watts et al., 2003).

The components of this theory are all important to how youth begin developing their sociopolitical understanding, but social analysis and societal involvement appear to be factors that emphasize youths' commitment to do the work (Anyiwo et al., 2018; Clark & Seider, 2020; Watts et al., 2003). Sociopolitical Development Theory (SPD) aligns with the study aims in examining the ways in which youth think and act towards issues of social injustice and activism. The processes outlined in Sociopolitical Development Theory are captured throughout this study allowing youths to voice their concerns and viewpoints about specific issues and topics related to injustice. When encountering inequities, this may encourage them to become more of an agent to initiate social change.

Figure 1. Theoretical Model
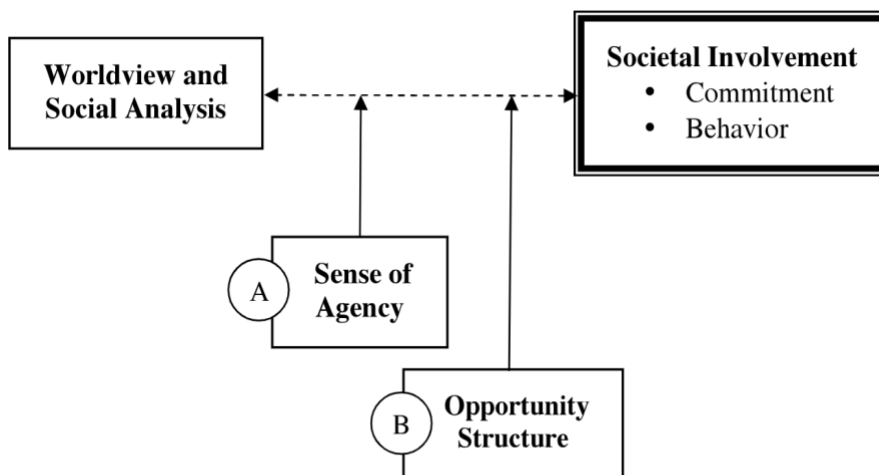
Figure 1. Potential moderators in a theory of sociopolitical development.

Table 1. Sociopolitical Development Theory

Sociopolitical Development Theory		
Term/Component	**Definition**	**Example**
Sociopolitical Development	Acknowledging factors contributing to systemic inequality that engage youth in activism	Ex: Discrimination
Social Analysis	Individual identifies oppressive systems within society which lead them to activism involvement	Recognition of embedded laws/systems within society that uphold White supremacy preventing those who are minoritized/marginalized to progress
Opportunity Structure	The ways in which individuals can engage in activist behaviors, as well as resources and opportunities	Youth might join a youth-organization where this is a topic of discussion Youth may have individuals (peers, parents, etc) to engage in conversation about this topic and discuss how they could address this issue
Agency	Individual believes they can create social change	Youth believe they can create change; may see how their voice is important
Societal Involvement	Intentionally acting on issues to address social change	Youth is actively engaging (i.e., through protest, petitions, speaking at community events

CHAPTER III: LITERATURE REVIEW

History and Psychological Change

Social movements have been rooted throughout history. Whether these events were focused on social, political, or cultural changes, individuals and groups have been fighting for change and justice in society. Specifically, some of these major events have happened in the 20th century involving Black and African Americans (i.e., World War II, Civil Rights Movement, Black Lives Matter; Hunter & Stewart, 2015). Psychologists have worked to explain how history has impacted psychological change (Hunter & Stewart, 2015). History, through the lens of scholars, is how an individual connects with these historical events. Historical injustices have shaped our current social structures within society. For example, the history of the United States and slavery impact identities of oneself, and the institutions we have today because it is embedded in society (Streich, 2002). Hunter and Stewart (2015) highlight the ways in which the connection between psychology and history are important – as this process happens through emotions, personal and collective memory, identity and self-representations, social representations, and social justice attitudes. More specifically, collective memory, identity and self-representations, and social justice attitudes stick out as being essential to identifying and processing issues of injustices.

An individuals' identity is shaped from social and historical events, and responding to injustices through activism is central to identity development in Black youth. Ginwright argued that Black youth in community-based settings work to create change which builds their "critical consciousness, racial identity, and political acts and expectations of community change" (2007). In his study, youths developed a collective racial and political identity within their community that would better help them to address social and community issues. This identity allowed youths

to connect with political issues that were present. Duke and colleagues (2009) also found that youths who were connected with a community (i.e., family, friends, neighborhood), they were more politically involved. Certain contexts that adolescents felt connected to predicted how engaged youth would be in either civic and political behaviors or volunteer and community services throughout their young adulthood. Youths being able to identify with a community issue they are facing seemed to encourage youth to adopt a political identity to address social and political issues. Social movements are not new to society, even though youth today may feel as if they are participating in something new. This could be a consequence of past historical injustices not being fully addressed which are present in society (Pearlman et al., 2015). This may have caused gaps in youths' understanding of the role and depth of social movements.

Development of Social Identities and Political Attitudes

Sociohistorical events help individuals to develop social identities and political attitudes but how are these identities and attitudes shaping development throughout one's life span? Stewart and Healy (1986) conducted an illustrative case study on an individual in which they examined how social and political events (i.e., World War II) in early childhood shaped ideological beliefs leading one to social action and behaviors in later adulthood. In reference to Erikson's identity development, the authors discussed a commitment to set values which is where political attitude formation is an important part of identity. This can impact life decisions and future expectations (Stewart & Healy, 1986). Similarly, Stewart and Healy (1989) explored how social change influences development. The authors covered previous studies that examined the influence of social changes and events on the lives of individuals, looking specifically at personal development and timing in association with political activism. Their model linking social events and individual development suggested that youth with a political identity during

childhood and early adolescence were more likely to become more engaged in activism through

later adulthood (Stewart & Healy, 1989). This model showed how social attitudes would change

over time and suggested that socio-historical events that young children face are broader views

formed during their childhood. For example, young children are likely to be influenced by the

views of their parents, but as they get older, they are exposed to new experiences and

opportunities leading them to make their own decisions and create an identity for themselves.

For youth to adopt a sociopolitical lens, it is necessary for them to understand the history

of injustices and sociohistorical contexts. Researchers have discussed why youth become

engaged in society over time and their social responsibility (Wray-Lake, 2019; Wray-Lake et al.,

2016; Wray-Lake & Syvertsen, 2011). From a developmental science view, social responsibility

encourages youth to be prosocial giving them a foundation in early childhood and adolescence

for what they value and the ways they can seek justice (Wray-Lake & Syvertsen, 2011). As

youths begin to understand their values, they can learn how to be more political and which

environments it is safest for them to do so (Wray-Lake, 2019). In their review, Wray-Lake and

colleagues (2016) focused on the framing of sociohistorical contexts and their importance for

how youths might respond to their political development and the influencing agents around them.

Youth-centered spaces, and family and community contexts are essential to youth political

development. While most research tends to focus on college students and emerging adults'

political development, research is beginning to center adolescents.

Youth Sociopolitical Development and Activism

Research has found that youth involvement (i.e., civic engagement/activism) is essential

for youth positive development, primarily in youth from minoritized communities (Pancer et al.,

2007). For this study, activism is defined as actions of individuals working together to address

social, political, or community concerns that lead to social change. Youth political attitudes have been studied in recent research using sociopolitical development theory (SPD) while activism has mainly been studied in college students and emerging adults. Little research has focused specifically on adolescents (middle and high school) and their perspective on these topics (Bañales et al., 2021).

Hope and Jagers (2014) examined youth sociopolitical attitudes and their level of civic education and its association with civic engagement behaviors in Black youth. Focusing on the social analysis piece of the SPD model, they looked at measures of perceived institutional discrimination, political efficacy and civic education and their relation to activities of civic engagement; furthermore, they found that these three components were associated with youth civic engagement. Because the authors frame their study around social analysis in SPD, the results are in line with what the SPD theory suggests-- youth are being led into activism by identifying systems of inequalities. Discrimination experiences and political efficacy are where youths should begin to see that process because they are likely to have encountered an experience where they were made to feel different and believed they could make a change.

Exploring additional reasons behind youths' political identity development, Clark and Seider (2020) examined how youths' curiosity motivated their sociopolitical development and future involvement in society. The authors asked youths their awareness of racism, commitment to activism and responsibility to better society, and questions that assessed their level of curiosity. Still emphasizing the role of social analysis and societal involvement, where youths can take action and address oppression and inequities, they looked at a sample of Black and Latinx youth across high school. Across time, initial curiosity levels and social analysis rarely

changed as they progressed through high school, but their involvement in society did grow over time.

Additionally, the initial levels of curiosity, social analysis, and societal involvement were associated with each other, meaning that if youths expressed a high level of social analysis (or other variables), then they will likely be high in other areas. If youths are going through one component or process associated with SPD, then it could be said that they are potentially curious about the other aspects. It may be important in future work to develop measures that get at their (un)awareness of certain historical or social events to assess how they are developing politically.

Youth activism has primarily been studied in college students and emerging adults. Black and Latino college students' participation in Black Lives Matter (BLM) and advocacy for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) was examined to see political change college students seek (Hope et al., 2016). Research has shown that Black youth and youth of color may avoid participating in traditional tactics of advocacy out of fear of government and power and being marginalized in the past (Ekman & Amna, 2012; Diemer & Li, 2011). Currently, youths from minoritized and marginalized groups are taking charge to advocate and be present in seeking political change. Constantly facing systematic issues, youths are discovering ways to be more involved.

Social group and movements are ways that youths can identify with a social issue they care about. Standing alongside other individuals with similar passions and ideals is a safe way for youths to begin their participation. Hope and colleagues (2016) examined advocacy and participation in BLM and DACA and found overall that being heavily involved in BLM or DACA led to higher levels of political activism for BLM. Aside from involvement and overall political activism, the authors also looked at what may predict involvement in these two

movements. Consistent with Stewart and Healy (1986) where social events impact individual development, Black college students, who participated in activism as a high schooler, would later predict their political activism for BLM. For Latino students, experiences of past racial encounters in high school (i.e., microaggressions), and political efficacy influenced their involvement in DACA. These studies are important in understanding the motivation behind youths' involvement in society and future steps needed to initiate these conversations for younger children.

The literature shows how youths have been exposed and involved in social movements through various contexts, but there are few studies examining how youth understand social injustice and engage in activism, particularly with adolescent and middle school samples. The importance of youths needing to understand and have conversations about social injustice is that if can identify it, then they can be given the skills to confront it. Similar with activism, given the sociopolitical climate that started in 2020, acts of injustice occurred in minoritized and marginalized populations, but specifically for Black people, racialized events related to police brutality started becoming more publicized. During Covid-19, these events were witnessed on social media and news outlets and at the height of the pandemic when George Floyd was murdered, youths were speaking on these events and starting these discussions.

The Current Study

The current study is an exploratory, qualitative inductive analysis and extension of the Race Talk project, a mixed-methods study designed to understand how Black youth experience racism. The youth are given a voice to express their own experiences with race, racism, discrimination in focus groups. As this study is an extension, the existing focus group data were analyzed through using Sociopolitical Development (SPD) from the researcher and how youth

discussed their understanding of advocacy and social injustice. Additionally, it focused on the

ways in which youths bring awareness to issues of injustice. This framing is important as it adds

to the literature on social justice, and it includes a sample who are often left out of the

conversation on these topics. This approach allowed the youth to share their experiences and

benefit researchers to better understand youths' thoughts. The research questions addressed in

this study are:

      Research Question 1: How are Black youth defining social injustice?

      Research Question 2: What social processes help Black youth understand the

connection between societal inequities and their involvement in society?

      Research Question 3: In what ways are Black youth responding to injustices?

CHAPTER IV: METHODS

Participants and Focus Groups

With approval from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) Internal Review Board and Guilford County Public Schools (GCS) Research Review Board, participants were recruited from middle (6th-8th grade) and high schools (11th- 12th grades) in Greensboro and surrounding areas that started with HBCUs and then schools with at least a 35% Black/African-American population. There were nine total focus groups and across them, 122 students were recruited but only 94 participated with the majority of the sample being girls (75.5%). Four were conducted at an all-girl HBCU Early College (n= 35 females, M_{age}= 16.6 years), three public schools: School 1 (n= 11; females= 8, males=3, M_{age}= 12.2 years); School 2 (n=13; females= 8, males= 5, M_{age}= 16.8 years); School 3 (n= 14; females=9, males=5, M_{age}= 11.7 years), one charter school (n= 8; females=7, males=1, M_{age}= 17 years) and a virtual group with students from various schools who did not know each other (n= 13; females=4, males=9).

Procedures

Focus group data were drawn from the Race Talk project, a mixed-methods study designed to give voice to how Black youth experience racism and discrimination. Data collection occurred from Fall 2020 to Fall 2022. Principals and administrative teams at the targeted schools were contacted via email and telephone asking for participation in a virtual or in-person focus group about youths' understanding and experiences with race, racism, discrimination. Recruitment flyers were also posted on social media. If the schools agreed to participate, then parents were asked and sent a consent form. If the parent agreed, then the student would be asked if they wanted to participate, and they would complete the child assent form. Students were

eligible to participate if they self-identified as Black/African-American, with some participants self-identifying as Hispanic/Latinx, from the HBCU early college. There were no exclusion criteria on youth sex or gender.

In the original study, once all forms were signed and completed, students would be assigned an ID number to complete a 15-minute Qualtrics pre-survey that assessed youth demographics, Black racial identity, racial and ethnic socialization, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. The current study did not utilize any of the pre-survey or post-survey information collected here. After completing the pre-survey, the youth were either emailed a Zoom link to the email address they provided , or they were emailed details about where to meet in-person at a specified date and time. The focus groups lasted 90 minutes and were led by a Black research team (Principal Investigator, undergraduate, and graduate students). The sessions were audio-recorded and later transcribed by a member of the research team. The team member ensured participant names were deidentified during the transcription process. Focus groups that were completed via Zoom asked group facilitators to keep their cameras on while the youth had the option to be on or off camera to allow comfort as they share their experiences. Focus groups completed in-person had an administrator that was in contact with the Principal Investigator to set up a room in the school where the focus group would be held. Once the focus group session ended, youths were emailed a post-survey about satisfaction with the focus group session and questions related to future activism. For participation in the study, youths were compensated a $10 e-gift card. A facilitator guide with the questions asked in the focus group is presented in Appendix A.

Analysis

14

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stage thematic analysis was used to identify common themes among adolescents in the focus groups. The transcripts were analyzed by the researcher and a secondary coder, who was another graduate student. To begin the coding process, a rereading of the transcripts took take place. The researcher took note of general themes and codes that would be used in the larger coding process. The current study analyzed the focus group data through the lens of SPD to pull out relevant information to answer the research questions. Additionally, added to the analysis process was youths' level of understanding. *No Understanding* showed that the youth did not understand the terms and concepts around social justice and activism, and likely needed them to be explained. *Limited Understanding* showed that the youth might know and can identify the terms and concepts around social justice and activism, but they are unable to make connections to relevant experiences. Lastly, *Full Understanding* showed that the youth were clear about the terms and concepts and were able to make connections to relevant experiences by providing solutions and having their own activist lens; however, the analysis process for Race Talk did not use this approach.

While the transcripts were reread, initial codes were created in the early stages covering both Phases one, *familiarizing yourself with the data* and two, *generate initial codes*, of the thematic coding analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Microsoft Word was used for the initial generation of codes and later ATLAS.ti 23 was used to manage the data. The researcher and the graduate student doubled coded the transcripts using the same process and both coders came together to discuss the codes created and whether new ones emerged. This was an ongoing process, and any differing codes were discussed until an agreement was met.

For Phase three in the analysis, *searching for themes*, the initial codes were used to create main themes or subthemes based on the information from the transcripts. Creating these initial

codes were based on the topics represented in the focus groups, and more specifically addressed the Sociopolitical framing of social injustice that came out in the conversations. Next, the researcher began Phase four, *reviewing the themes,* where they grouped the categories together based on whether the codes and themes are similar or different from one another. Based on Braun and Clarke (2006), the researcher organized the themes and categories to create a "thematic map" to ensure the themes are clear and fit with the data.

The last phases of the analysis, focused on *refining the themes* to create even fewer main themes that explained what each theme was about. Within the broad main themes, sub-themes were added to them. Quotations from the focus groups were identified so they could be used as examples of each of the themes and subthemes. Finally, once the data process was complete, a write up on the results began. The report of the results helped to tell the story from the participants in the focus groups and adds an interpretative layer of the data.

Positionality Statement

Black Americans have a history of facing injustices throughout history, and the current study idea developed due to the past and current sociopolitical and racial climate in the United States. My first experience with fully understanding the racial tension and seeing people protest (i.e., Black Lives Matter) was the death of Trayvon Martin in 2012. While various acts of injustice have happened between then and now, I noticed how severe these events were becoming during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Race-related deaths which seemed to happen back-to-back: Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, led people to protest. George Floyd's murder was publicized on all media outlets including social media. While there were already petitions being signed and protests happening for previous events of racial injustice, I saw an increase of Black youth leading these protests and sharing information on social media which

surprised me. I have my own experiences of being involved in protests and demonstrations mainly with adults doing the organizing but seeing those younger than me organize the events changed my thoughts on how youth take initiative.

Before conducting my analysis, I assisted the graduate student (who coded with me) with their dissertation coding of adolescent interviews which focused on conversations on race and how they understand race. While I and my secondary coder are Black, we are not adolescents, which was the population of interest. Due to my beliefs and interests, some of the questions in the facilitator guide were crafted, in later focus groups, to get at youths' thought around race-related deaths and their role in advocating for social justice. Even though I am not an adolescent, I am close in age with the older participants and view myself as also having a responsibility in addressing social injustices.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS

The purpose of the current study was to explore youths' understanding of social injustices and the ways in which they bring awareness to issues of injustice through their own sociopolitical development. The findings below represent the perspectives of Black youth that speak to the three research questions in the study. The findings are organized into six main themes with subthemes as they relate to the research questions: 1) *Identification and Awareness of Injustice*, 2) *Experiences and Impact*, 3) *Teaching and Educating*, 4) *Emotional Reactions to Injustices*, 5) *Accountability*, and 6) *Types of Involvement.* Each of the themes and subthemes from the analysis is associated with one of the specific research questions (See Table 2).

Table 2. Main Themes and Subthemes

Main and Subthemes

Main Theme	Subthemes	Research Question to Answer
Identification	*Sociopolitical Climate*	Research Question 1
Awareness	*Structural and Systemic Levels* *Mistreatment and (White) Privilege* *Injustices by Police Violence*	Research Question 1
Experience and Impact	*Activism and Injustices on Social Media*	Research Question 2
Reactions to Injustices	*Disengagement/Avoiding Desensitized* *Fear of Police*	Research Question 2
Teaching and Educating	*Conversations with Peers and Parents* *Learning from Parents*	Research Question 2

	Educating Oneself *Teaching Others* *Early Teachings*	Research Question 3
Accountability	*Individual Responsibility* *Community Responsibility* *Responsibility of Others*	Research Question 3
Types of Involvement	*Signing Petitions* *Calling on Political Officials* *Speaking Up and Starting* *Conversations*	Research Question 3

Figure 2. Thematic Map Research Question 1
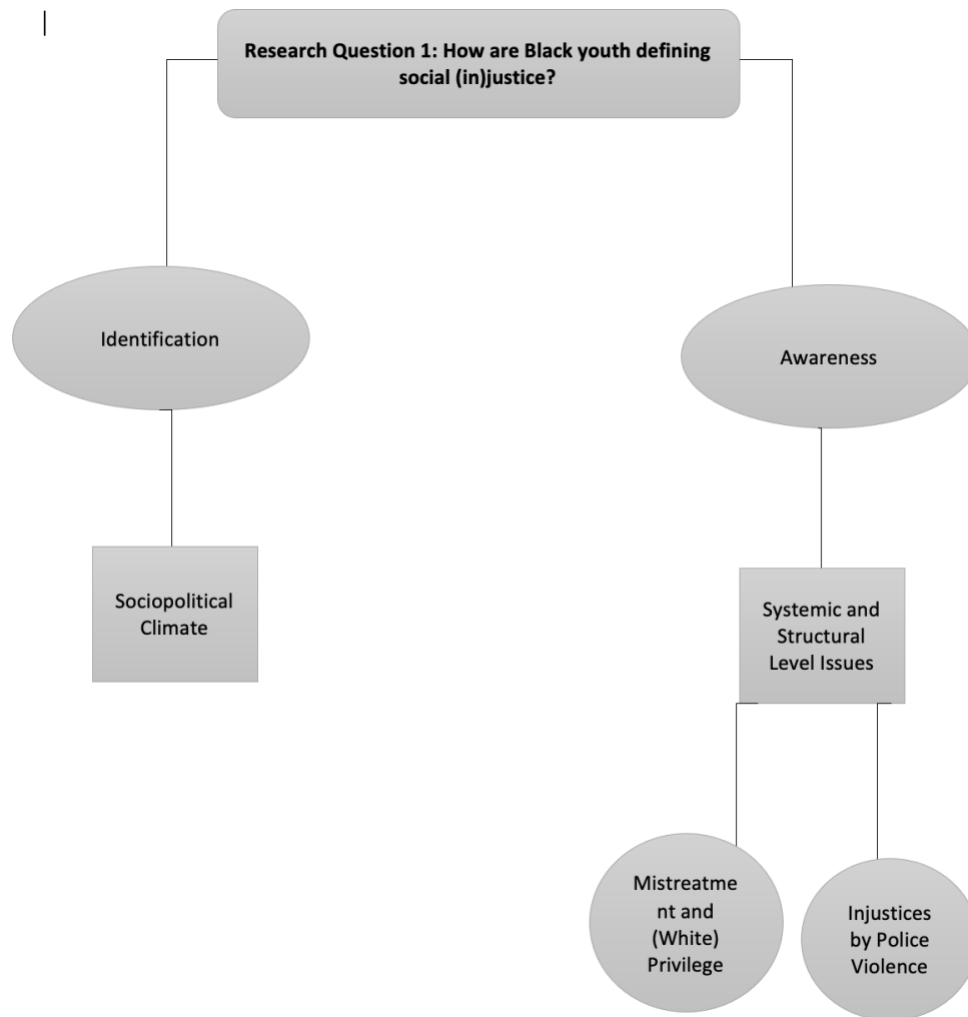
Research Question 1: How are Black youth defining social injustices?

Identification and Awareness of Injustice

Sociopolitical Climate

For research question one, youths' understanding of social injustices were through the current sociopolitical climate (See Figure 2). The youth could relate their personal experiences that helped them identify these experiences. One student encountered a group of individuals at

their place of work where they would come and share their political views. The student

expressed that these conversations were not always positive, and they felt mistreated by these

individuals: "*I work at a grocery store… and um before and after the current election we would

have a lot of Trump Supporters coming in and out the store and um I would notice the looks I

would get or um just how they treated me in general… and [some would] engage um their

political views while I'm serving them or bagging them and sometimes it would turn into a little

negative…"* (Female, High School). The student does not explicitly mention social injustices, but

they drew on their understanding of how the sociopolitical climate brought out certain views of

individuals.

Similarly, another student felt as if we were in a "*divided nation"*, and everyone is not on

the same side: "*I feel like, that, it's like a divided nation right now, like we're just against each

other…I feel like we're going against each other, rather than trying to build each other up."* The

last student speaks on the year 2020 and how everyone was forced to sit and watch events of

police violence that were happening: *"I feel like its been at a all-time I don't know if it's been a

all time high like 2020 or just everybody is sitting in the house they're more paying attention to

the news and things like that they're starting to bring more attention to it"*(Female, High

School). Students understanding of the sociopolitical climate allowed them to associate their

views of what social injustices are.

Awareness of Structural and Systemic Level Issues

Mistreatment and (White) Privilege

Given that the students in the study were aware of the sociopolitical climate, youths also

expressed their understanding and awareness of structural and systemic level issues that

contribute to inequities (See Figure 2). At various points in the focus groups, they all commonly

21

brought up how Black people are mistreated, and face inequalities compared to white people due to privileges. Students talked about privileges in terms of what Black people are not allowed to do compared to white people: *"as soon as I saw that [January 6ᵗʰ invasion] I was like if that was a bunch of black people they wouldn't have even gotten into the building. And shots would have been fired as soon as they went up there"* (Female, Middle School). Black youth expressed wanting to protest and speak out against injustices, but they made the connection that Black people would have faced consequences for storming the Capitol. Considering the sociopolitical and racial climate, a student brought up that when Black people were protesting for George Floyd and they were caught outside after the curfew he saw *"Black people just lined up on a fence, with uhm, ti- like ties on their arm getting ready to go to jail, so I'm like, "Why do I only see Black people? Why don't I see white people?"* (Female, High School).

Injustices by Police Violence

Police violence and injustices were mentioned by youths in reference to Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. Students had negative views about the police when recalling how Black people have died at the hands of the police. When asked how these events made them feel, one student said, *"it showed to me how some people are mistreated because of their skin color or what they look like"* (Female, Middle School). When having encounters with police, Black people might be likely to face mistreatment because of their skin color. Generally, another student explained how as an officer their job is not to cause harm people, so the officer should

not have put his knee on George Floyd: *"his knee was still on his neck he said he couldn't breathe 28 times. So he should off his neck by then because when you cop you not supposed to do that stuff"* (Male, Middle School).

Figure 3. Thematic Map Research Question 2
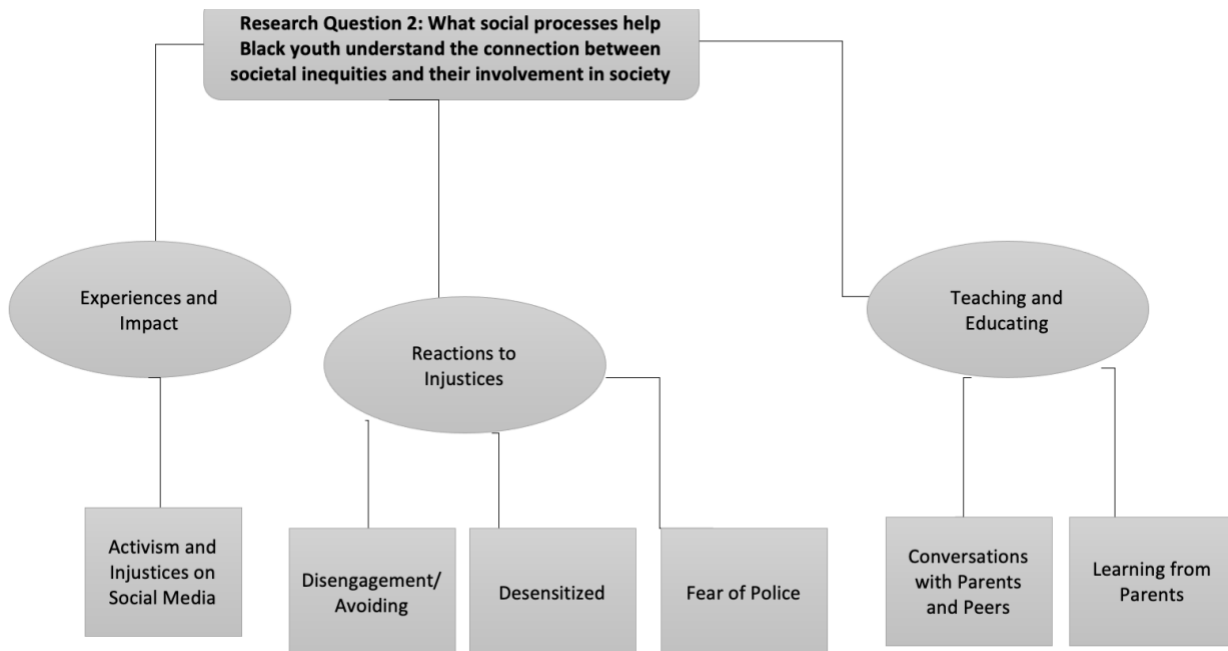
Research Question 2: What social processes help Black youth understand the connection between societal inequities and their involvement in society?

Experiences and Impact

Activism and Injustices on Social Media

Social media played a role for Black youth. They were exposed to injustices through their personal experiences and by witnessing it happen to their peers, but their experience with social media was another way that exposed them to social injustices. The main theme that came out was "experiences and impact," followed by one subtheme of *Activism and injustices on social*

media (See Figure 3). One student mentioned how social media made a difference when talking about George Floyd and the different ways to help spread awareness to make a difference:

> *I feel like us posting on social media made a bigger difference because like the whole George Floyd thing after, I didn't see much about it on the news as much as I seen it on social media but then when things started getting big on social media that's when people started putting it on the news and telling us ways to help out. I didn't know about the petition until social media and later on on the news they told us about we can help change it by posting on social media and it's really helping make a difference"* (Female, High School).

This student shared their appreciation of social media and how it made a change in getting information out about how people could help and make a change for George Floyd. Two students expressed even though we have social media, it is hard to get involved because some individuals were more performative in their help*:*

> *I feel like with social media, now that everybody's trying to, uhm, hop on the Black Lives Ma-Matter movement, it's hard to believe who's really for it and who's not… I see lots of people on social media saying "Black Lives Matter", but some of them, their actions don't meet up to what they say* (Female, High School).

They noticed that acts of injustice do not mean people want to support the cause. They might talk about it and post about it, but they do not put action behind their words. As one student said, *"they don't really do it for the the justice part"* (Female, High School).

Emotional Reactions to Injustices

Disengagement/Avoiding

Students discussed how they interacted with social media to see racial events (i.e., George Floyd), and they also explained how that constant exposure led them to respond not only as an activist, but through emotions. Due to this recurring topic, students were having emotional reactions to racialized events, and specifically they began to *disengage* with media and events, they became *desensitized* over time, and they were *fearful of police officers* (See Figure 3). One student had used social media but due to the events they were seeing posted, *"I had like deleted social media… because it was becoming too much for me like seeing all those shootings and like the actual video of the person getting shot it just became a lot on me. And like seeing that stuff I'm sensitive so seeing that stuff actually like makes me cry"* (Female, High School). In another situation, a different student discussed how they were in D.C. with their parent during the Capitol invasion. Because of the events, they *"left DC and stayed at a hotel and decided to stay away from the drama"* (Female, Middle School).

Desensitized

Students who saw these events on social media or other outlets expressed those were their sources for seeing that content but talking about them made them feel 'numb.' For one student this meant that when having conversations with friends, they felt that it was just another topic: *"…I feel like we've become kinda numb to it or not numb but like you're so used to hearing about it that when it is talked about it's just like another topic"* (Female, High School). When talking about these events, this student felt it normal and it did not have the same emotional response as it did before. Another student saw themselves as an activist, but being 'numb' for this student made them feel defeated:

...and it made me feel numb... I've been an advocate and like, someone who always (stuttering) doing research, and I was like "this is my moment, this is the time I shine" to really be advocating the hardest and putting out all this information but, it felt like a lot of emotions bottled up. And I just felt like I can't do this (Female, High School).

Even for someone who regularly advocated, taking on that role can be draining especially when experiencing multiple events at one time. The student had the information to share but they suppressed their emotions and felt like giving up.

Fear of Police

Police are usually seen as figures who are meant to "protect and serve" but when youths saw videos of police officers being unjust to Black people, this created fear in them. One student was afraid of cops after everything that had gone on, they *"would like to go in a different room from them because when I seen that* [George Floyd video] *I change how I think about cops because it changed the way I felt"* (Male, Middle School). Still in reference to the George Floyd video, a student shared similar feelings about the police. Seeing the video of George Floyd affected this student and their feelings about police: *"... it affected how I felt about cops I didn't really like cops anymore because I just feel like they did it to one person why won't they do it to another"* (Male, Middle School). Both students felt there was uncertainty about whether a police officer would do the same to them, so they found it best to avoid the police when possible.

Teaching and Educating

Conversations with Peers and Parents

Teaching and educating appeared in two of the research questions as a main theme but in this question, it centered on the conversations that the youth engaged in with their *peers*, and what they *learn from their parents* (See Figure 3). A few students expressed how they used to

not talk about the topics of racism and injustice with their peers (instead, talking mainly with family) but specific moments, such as the election prompted these conversations more:

> *I feel like before the election, me and my friends we didn't really talk about it, but like it was something that we briefly discussed. But we started getting more comfortable talking about it, and talking about it deeper after the election had started and we seen how everything was playing out* (Female, High School).

After the election, this student and their friends felt more comfortable having deeper conversations about the election and racism because they saw how the events were coming out.

Learning from Parents

When students mentioned asking their parents questions and learning from them, the importance of parent support also came out of those conversations. When having conversations about the political and racial climate, a student was learning from their mom about what was happening in the world and *"*[there'll] *probably gonna be more encounters like that. That if I felt some type of way about it that I would always have her or somebody else to talk to"* *(*Female, High School). The student's parent helped them to understand the state of the world and how they would likely have more experiences, but if needed, they could come and talk with them. Another student felt that it was important for parents to teach their youth about history and how it impacts society currently. While they were "learning" in school, once they felt comfortable enough to talk with their parents, they *"didn't start learning about* [their] *history until high school"* (Female, High School). Students felt supported by their parents and thought that it was important for parents to prompt conversations with them.

Research Question 3: In what ways are Black youth responding to injustices?

Figure 4. Thematic Map Research Question 3
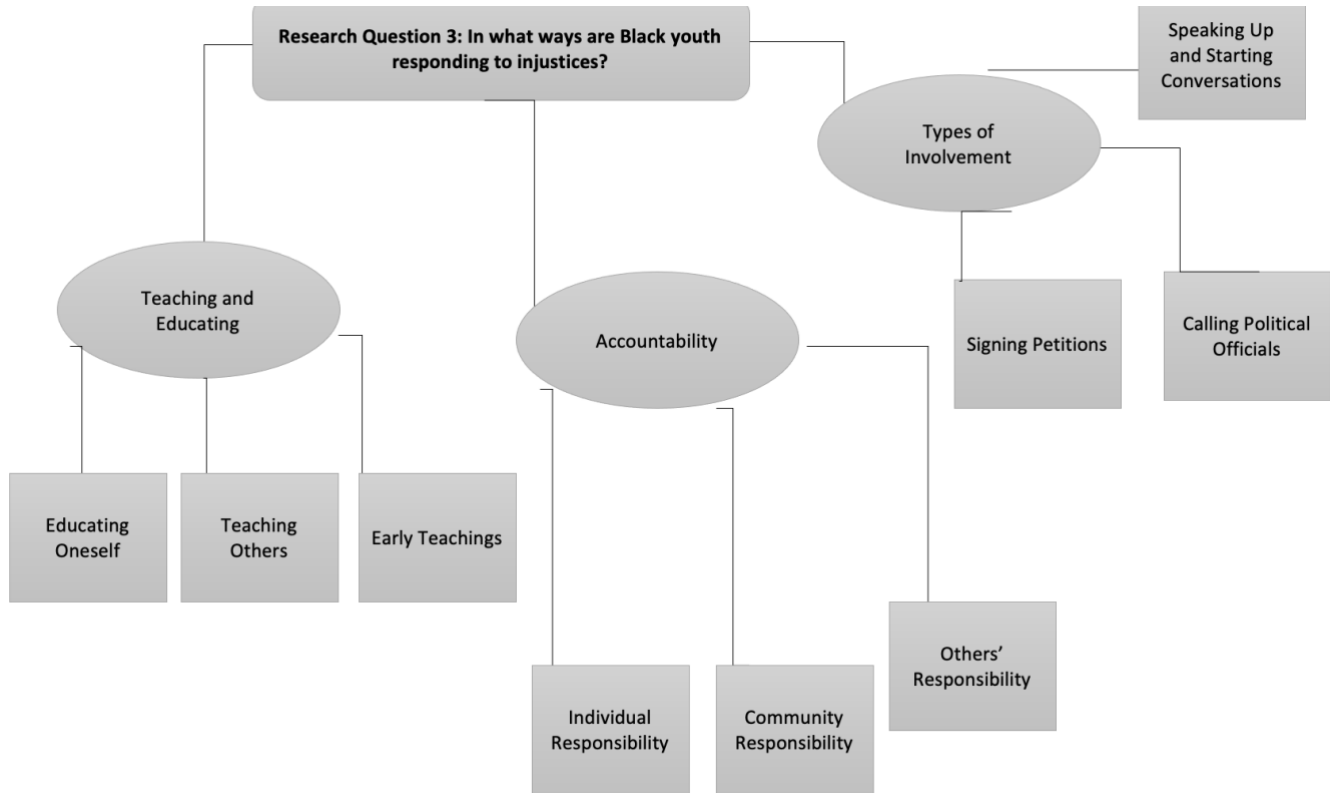
Teaching and Educating

Educating Oneself

During the focus groups, the youth were asked about advice or solutions they had to address racism and social injustice, and the roles they have in addressing injustices. Across the groups most responded with an overall theme of teaching or educating. This led to subthemes of: *Educating Oneself, Teaching Individuals and White Peers,* and *Early Teachings* (See Figure 4). In one of the groups, a student mentioned:

> *I also think that we need to be research, research, research, because I feel like, already the school systems don't teach us enough about our history. So, uhm, I*

28

feel like with all the resources and the internet, it shouldn't really be an excuse

that we don't know who we are as people (Female, High School).

According to this student, everyone should be doing their own research about history because schools do not teach enough about history or provide the information that people should know. They also discussed how few resources are available. Similarly, a student from another group shared the importance of self-education to help with an understanding of what is happening in society:

Yeah, like folks before me have said, I feel like educating yourself is very important and

like because, like when you educate yourself, when you understand what's going on and it

helps prevent you from adding on to the stress or added on to was causing society to be

going in a negative way (Male, High School).

The two students believed educating themselves was important because it allowed them to know more about what has happened in history that is not always shared in schools, as well as gave an understanding of the factors that contribute to the negative impact on society. One student recognized that school is a structure where information is limited so they must do the work for themselves by using resources such as the internet to be more knowledgeable of [Black] history. The other student acknowledged that society is "negatively" impacted and being able to know the causes behind why that might be happening gives you an awareness.

Teaching Others

Another subtheme that developed during the analysis was the students teaching their friends how to handle experiences of injustice and speaking up to administrators about Black history not being taught in schools. More specifically, students across the groups discussed the importance of wanting their White peers to understand the harm they cause to them by using

racial slurs or ignoring the social and racial issues happening the world. They also discuss the need for their White peers to use their voices and speak out on these events. One student recalls an event where a friend was called a slur by a White peer and instead of letting the friend react negatively, this student gave an alternative way for them to address the event:

... and I was like, "No you just need to do this, this, and this, and then it'll handle the situation". So I have to teach them as they're growing up, and help them understand that when somebody calls out your race, you just don't go argue or make a problem, you have to learn how to deal with it in a calmer manner (Female, High School).

This student had a friend who was called a racial slur, and the student provided them with an alternative way to address the situation versus their friend responding in a negative way. Students stepped up and supported each other when they had negative encounters with White peers.

Early Teachings

Finally, across the groups, many students felt that conversations about racism and solutions to those problems should be taught at younger ages: *"I think it's important to start having those conversations about racism at a younger age, because at a young age, because it starts happening around that age.* While these conversations are wanted at early ages, students also expressed how they should be taught in schools due to school being an important place where some of their experiences are occurring:

...so I agree with them but I also think that if we talked about more in schools and it shouldn't just be brushed off like especially in like um like little grades like kindergarten that's where you should really be teaching it because you know racism is taught right and you should be teaching them at a young age that this is not right so if you see something

like that happens you can speak up about it and then especially in high school in middle

school and high school you're going into the real world especially now with us you

should they should teach us how we should react to it you know how to help spread

awareness, how we can fix it and if you can't fix it then we could at least do something

small because the little things matter it makes a difference (Female, High School).

This student mentions how middle and high school are places where students are going into the

real world and students should be taught the ways they should address injustices and how to

spread awareness about them. They understand that there may not be a major fix to these

problems but doing something small might lead to change. Lastly, another student talks about

how Black children must learn about history, injustices, and racism at home and other peers have

the privilege of not having these discussions. They see school as being as important place for

everyone to learn:

I really do feel like it should be taught in schools… It really needs to be taught because

it's not fair that Black children are being taught at home and being taught in schools

about things that are depressing and and put you down basically in a sense, um it might

not be meant to put you down learning about your history but it still does it does it sits

with you and makes you feel some type of way and…. Kids of other races they don't have

to see that or understand that they just get to go about their business like all that type of

stuff they can act the way they act (Female, High School).

Teaching was a popular theme that appeared across the groups. The youth in the study

emphasized how teachers and parents should have these conversations earlier with young

children. Many students felt that children even as young as kindergarteners should begin learning

about injustice and racism.

Accountability

Individual Responsibility

Overall, the youth expressed that everyone (i.e., themselves, their community, and other peers/adults) held some sort of accountability in conversations that they have had with their peers and the ways in which everyone can solve societal problems. This led to subthemes of *Individual Responsibility, Community Responsibility, and Others' Responsibility* (See Figure 4). The youth felt they had a role in addressing racial and social issues. Specifically, they felt that as teenagers, they should pave the way for the next generation and they should put an end to acts of injustice: "*Uhm, I feel like, as teenagers we all have a responsibility to get it right and get it over with, because I don't want another generation of, uhm racism, so we need to fix it before…*" (Female, High School) Another student felt a sense of obligation to fight for social change: "*Yeah, I feel like if I want to see a change, then it's my obligation to fight for that change*" (Female, High School). Youth view themselves as having some responsibility in social justice and activism, especially with needing to be on the front lines and having their voices heard: "*…In order for us to see the results, we have to be on the front lines trying to get our voices heard so that we can make the change happen*" (Female, High School). The youth believed that everyone had an individual role in creating social change and some felt obligated to make a difference. If they want to see change, then their voices need to be heard.

Community Responsibility

Although youths saw individual responsibility in themselves, they also felt that the Black community had a sense of community responsibility:

...the racism that is happening, is, our own fault. It's because we allow ourselves to be oppressed by the system, and we follow it without really, uhm, taking initiative with taking a step for- uhm, forward...Because I normally see that a lot, that we blame the White man, we blame the White people. And then when it comes to holdin- like if someone addresses the wrongs that we did ourselves, we don't want to hold accountability for it (Female, High School).

This student brings attention to systemic oppression of Black people, but suggests that Black people should be doing more to overcome it. They also mention how Black people blame "the White man" but fail to address the wrongs that Black people did to themselves. Interestingly with this student, they mention the community responsibility that Black people have and we should not blame white people for our struggles; yet the student failed to understand and mention the impact of oppressive systems within society.

Others' Responsibility

The youth expressed how responsibility also falls into the hands of others, more specifically mentioning their white peers and the need for them to use their voice because *"they* [white people] *definitely have a lot more power than us. So, if they can use their voice to help us out, that would mean a lot"* (Female, High School). White peers are seen as having power, and people may respect what say more than Black youth. The students express that having support from their white peers would be meaningful. Also, white peers are noted as having "*this weird, unconscious, racist bias* [and] *like they'll like say some things and they'll think it's okay, and then they find out that it's, that's actually kind of racist, and I feel like, there's, there's like a big issue with that*" (Female, High School). Black youth are seeing that their white peers will make racist remarks and will not realize it is racist until later, which is an issue because it can be

hurtful to students. These students focus on holding people accountable in the present and using their voice, but one student mentions that this is relevant to the past. They encourage students to heal from the wrongs that have occurred in the past but that *"...its okay to hold people responsible to what's been done to like our ancestor but at some point you have to try to heal and move forward but I don't think that you should forget it as well"* (Female, High School).

Types of Involvement

Signing Petitions

The youth discussed things they have done to address and speak out about social injustices. This theme turned into a focus on levels of engagement, and the subthemes that emerged were *signing petitions, speaking up and starting conversations, and calling on political officials* emerged (See Figure 4). A student felt that signing petitions they saw online was the best option to see change and ensure that people face the consequences of their actions: *"the best thing to do is sign petitions for example I forgot his name, but George Floyd's killer, he would had never got that time if we didn't sign petitions like be honest, he would've been right right back at work by the end of the day like nothing happened"* (Female, High School). In reference to George Floyd, people signed and shared the petition about him online. This resulted in the police officer responsible for his death to be brought to trial and serve time instead of it being brushed off and him going back to work.

Calling on Political Officials

Along with signing petitions, students felt calling on government and congress members about issues would encourage them to listen and create pressure on them to take action*: "calling people if no this dude needs to go to jail and yall need to yall need to put him on trial or something and that helps because racism never gonna stop it's sad but it's never gonna stop"*

(Female, High School). Another student did not mention calling officials to put pressure on them but simply because they saw it on social media and there were instructions for how to do it: *"I would sign petitions and would try to call like there will be numbers on social media telling you to call and telling you what to say and stuff like that there's people out there telling you what to do, and I would get out my own phone and get out my Facebook you know"* (Female, High School)

Speaking Up and Starting Discussions

Several students mentioned they should speak up and have conversations about social injustices. The students discussed how younger people are supposed to "keep quiet:"

> *I feel like a lot of the time when you're younger um people try to keep you your mouth closed about a lot of things and their always like you know you're young so sit down and be quiet this isn't your conversation. Genuinely speak up about it don't let anybody keep you quiet because you might be speaking up for somebody else who isn't brave enough"* (Female, High School).

This student is aware of how adults might shut youth down because they are young and certain conversations do not involve them, but they want to see a change in that. They are encouraging youths to speak out more because they might be speaking up for someone else who is too afraid. Another student wanted to share that youths should not be afraid to start conversations, but the fear of backlash might keep Black people from doing so:

> *...don't be afraid to like start like the conversation, or to like light somebody up when they're wrong. I feel like we may hear a lot of things, and like we see it, but it's like, in general it's a lot to speak up and say something or do like the right thing... you don't want to receive like backlash from trying to do the right thing, and I feel as if that stops a*

35

lot of Black people. So I would say like an advice, if you like see racism, or you like

experience it, like just speak up about it, and like talk about it, and like don't be afraid of

that, 'cause2 like I wish someone would have told me that, honestly (Female, High

School).

Starting conversations as a Black youth can cause fear—that this student believes prevents Black

people from doing. They share that if you experience or see racism, that youth should speak up

about it because no one ever gave them that advice. For younger generations, current youth

wanted to set an example and they believed that younger generations needed to see *"more people*

like us who can speak up for themselves" (Female, High School).

Summary of Findings

The findings were presented through six broad themes with subthemes created for each.

The themes and subthemes were related to the research questions and included common

responses among the youth from the focus groups. Research question one explored how youth

understood social injustices through the context of the sociopolitical climate and youths'

awareness of systemic level issues that cause injustices (i.e., police brutality, mistreatment, and

privilege). Research question two explored the ways in which social injustices showed up in the

lives of Black youth. This occurred through processes such as social media, peer and parent

conversations, and the emotional responses from the youth. Finally, research question three

focused on youths' actions when addressing social injustices. The youth engaged through various

activities such as petition signing, which they felt to be important for spreading awareness;

calling on political officials, and them being the ones to start the conversations around activism

and social injustice.

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

The current study explored youths' political identity development through their understanding of social injustices and activism. This study is important to the field because most research that has examined political attitudes and activism behaviors but it has not included a sample of youth, especially those in middle school. This study allowed youth to guide the conversation on their own sociopolitical development and the approaches they would use to act against social injustice.

Research Question 1: Defining Social Injustices

The first research question focused on how the youth defined social injustices. While the youth were not specifically asked about how they were aware of social injustices and its meaning to them, their responses to defining social injustices were situated in the context of the sociopolitical climate. As part of the sociopolitical context, youths were also aware of how systemic and structural level issues contributed to social and racial inequality. Personal experiences with white individuals, exposure to publicized events of police brutality and injustice (i.e., George Floyd), and awareness of "White Privilege" were pivotal for Black youths' understanding experiences of injustice for Black people in the world.

Research Question 2: The Ways Social Injustices Show Up

The purpose of the second research question was to see the ways in which social injustices showed up in the lives of Black youth and whether they understood how the role of social inequalities might lead them to become societally involved. When youths discussed how these injustices occurred, they referenced social media being the main outlet where they saw these events. The youth were able to use social media in positive ways that encouraged them to advocate for justice. This question specifically prompted youth to discuss the impact of George

Floyd's murder and they shared how social media made a difference in youths using their voices. Some youths noticed how non-Black individuals were more performative in their approach to speaking out against injustice and this impacted their willingness to get involved. Interestingly, youth mentioned their emotional responses to witnessing injustices through social media. These responses ranged from them feeling nothing (as these events were becoming normal) to expressing fear of police officers. The youth were overwhelmed constantly seeing this content. Lastly, teaching and educating were important for youths. They expressed having little conversation about racism with peers, but they wanted to learn more from their parents about understanding racial and social issues through history and currently.

Research Question 3: How Youth are Responding to Injustice

Continuing youths' thoughts around teaching and educating, the third research question focused on how youths were taking action against injustices. Educating as a response referred to the youth taking the initiative and researching history for themselves because the school system is limited in what they will teach. Also, educating others, but more specifically white peers, on how to use their voice to advocate and the importance of those peers understanding the sociopolitical issues Black people face in the world. Youths pushed for conversations and early teachings for young children. It was mentioned that because racist encounters occurred at younger ages for Black youth, then conversations on how to respond to those events need to start then.

Accountability and responsibility were about the role everyone had when it came to injustice. The youth felt an individualized responsibility when it came to addressing social and racial issues. The youth described a sense of obligation to the younger generation to address racism and prevent them from experiencing it as they got older. The youth noted that the Black

community had a responsibility to address oppressive systems but also needed to address historical events where Black people followed the "system" and wronged other Black people. Lastly, Black youth felt that other individuals, who were not Black, had a role in addressing injustices. They mainly discussed how white peers have more power so they should use their voice for people to listen as well as needing white peers to hold themselves accountable for upholding racist ideals and biases.

The youth were involved in activism through several activities. When youths discussed their experiences on social media when they viewed racialized content, they also found social media to be an outlet for them to sign petitions, share information on getting government officials involved, and use their voices and speak out. When signing petitions, the youth saw this as a way for individuals to be responsible for their actions, and similar with calling on political figures, they felt this would pressure them to act. For some youths, it was a way for them to be exposed to activism. Youths wanted more opportunities for conversations and to use their voices instead of being shut down by adults. They recognized that these conversations involved them because they could be supporting a peer who is afraid to speak up. The youth saw themselves as leaders and if they do the work now, then future generations will have less to do.

Connection to Theory

Sociopolitical Development Theory (SPD) is a process that helps an individual acquire skills to address systems of oppression that are comprised of four components—*social analysis, opportunity structure, agency, and societal involvement*. In connection to Sociopolitical Development Theory (SPD), the first research question had the youth going through the process of *social analysis*, where they can identify systems contributing to inequality and the action they should take to address them (Watts and Flannagan, 2007; Watts, 2003). The identification of

39

systemic and structural level issues allowed the youth to process and understand how systems created inequality in society. They noticed privilege between them and their white counterparts when it came to protesting or interacting with police officers, where Black people were not granted the same advantages to protest. Specifically, related to the January 6th Capitol invasion, youths knew that if Black people attempted to 'protest' in that way, there would have been more casualties for them, and more people would have been arrested.

The second research question included the component of *opportunity structure*—spaces where youth have the resources and opportunities to engage in activism behavior (Watts and Flannagan, 2007; Watts, 2003). Youths' experiences and interactions on social media were where they were learning and engaging in activism, but they also wanted to learn more from their parents and have more conversations. Realizing that schools would be unable to provide them with the information they wanted to know, being able to rely on the media and their parents were important opportunities for the youth to connect with people who were seeing the same issues as them.

Finally, research question three had the components of *agency*—youth believing they can create change, and *societal involvement*—youth intentionally acting to create change (Watts and Flannagan, 2007; Watts, 2003). Youths were agents in creating change. They believed education and accountability were important for themselves and others. These were suggestions to how youth should respond to injustices that were occurring. Reiterating that school was an environment where they did not learn enough about history, the youth felt they needed to do their own research to see change happen, but they also talked about the Black community needed to come together and be a voice. Finally, in terms of youths taking action, they discussed signing

petitions and calling government officials, which allowed them to engage in low-risk and political activist behaviors (Corning & Myers 2002; Hope et al., 2019).

Strengths and Limitations

There are strengths and limitations to this study that can lead to future directions. The current study used previously collected data from the Race Talk project that primarily focused on youths' perspectives on race and racism. A qualitative examination can explain how youth make sense of injustices and how they are involved in activism. Although the use of focus groups gave the youth a voice, conducting focus groups with more specific questions that ask them about their thoughts on social injustice and activism would have provided an opportunity to gain more specific insights from the youth. Having questions that are intentionally related to social injustice and activism can help youth focus more on the intent and action pieces of raising awareness of social injustice. In future work, the use of questions may include queries about what issues youth find to be the most pressing for Black youth, and this could extend further out from the focus on the sociopolitical climate. This will give an insight into other contexts that youth are in, such as school or their communities. Aside from other contexts, youth would also be able to express social issues that are important to them. Given that the original study had an emphasis on race and racism, we could further explore other intersections of youths' identity where other social issues might be important to them (i.e., LGBTQ+ Rights, healthcare, reproductive rights).

There was a diverse sample of schools in the study. The HBCU Early College, all-girl sample was unique to the study. Being that the Early College was located at an HBCU, these students seemed to already be having these conversations with their peers and administrators. Across the nine transcripts, the four that came out of this group were distinctly different from the

41

others in how the students responded throughout the session. In these transcripts, girls framed injustices through issues such as colorism and hair texture, while boys often discussed their experiences based on how they were perceived by others. A small point brought up by girls in the focus groups was that when it came to injustices related to police brutality, men and young boys became the face of the Black Lives Matter movement. Girls mentioned that they would rarely see people speak out about women and young girls who were victims of police brutality and felt in ways they were left out of the movement. Even with adolescent girls and boys having different framings and experiences of injustice, overall they still understood there was a need to address these events. They needed to find ways to make sure all voices and victims are being represented.

The focus groups were not specifically designed around the research questions and interestingly, youth still were able to discuss how they have witnessed and experienced social injustice, and how they participated in activism. It is important to note the historical relevance in Greensboro with the Greensboro Four sit-in protest, which could be an important conversation starter for how youth understand and discuss social movements with their peers or family members. Although data collection was conducted during Covid-19, which could be a limitation, is also a strength. Covid-19 was not only a health pandemic, but it also brought attention to systemic racism and police brutality. Youth were able to talk about these specific incidents in the focus groups, mainly around George Floyd, which seemed to be the pivotal moment that sparked their involvement in activism.

Implications and Future Directions

The findings suggest that youth understand their role in addressing social injustices and the ways in which they can be involved. These findings have future implications for policy.

Because focus groups were done in schools, youth brought up many examples of racism and injustices in their school environment. More work should examine youths' interactions with their teachers and peers. Incorporating these conversations into schools will be beneficial for teachers, parents, and youth to work together and explore injustices. Developing curriculums or interventions in schools can teach youth how to work towards social justice. These may encourage them to become more involved if they are hesitant or unsure of where to start. Examples of these could be workshops about what activism is and then leading up to the different ways youth can engage. Youth should know that activities such as reposting information on social media or signing petitions are just as important as protesting or calling on government officials to seek change. For parents, teachers, and community members who want to support youth, there could be an opportunity to create student positions, both in schools and the community, where youth could serve as a liaison and communicate what is needed.

Youth suggested they wanted and needed more opportunities, similar to the focus groups, to share and have their voices heard in these conversations. For youth to participate in activism, it is important for them to have spaces that they feel are safe. To start these conversations, creating community and youth-centered spaces may better support youth as they cope with sociopolitical unrest in society. Offering youth these spaces to voice their experiences provides insight into how Black youth can best be supported when faced with acts of injustice. The findings from this study can provide parents, teachers, and community members with skills that will assist youth in organizing and leading future protests.

Actions such as calling on political officials and signing petitions online show these findings will be beneficial for government and political figures as they can create positive relationships with youth and work to create a more just society. Their support would be crucial in

giving youth a platform to voice their thoughts on the events they are witnessing. More importantly, because youths might view officials as having an important role in serving individuals, they could lead them down a career path in politics and advocacy.

The current research addressed here explored social injustices that the youth experienced and how they were becoming involved in activism based on events of injustice in 2020. The findings suggested that the sociopolitical climate impacted their ability to understand injustice and racism for Black people and the various ways that they can use their voices to speak out about these problems. The theoretical lens of SPD helped to examine youths' development of social analysis. Youths are preparing themselves to be active agents in society by confronting racism and systems of oppression. Considering the spark of the year 2020, we have seen youths be the face of social movements and take action, whether that be through in-person protesting or online activism. Youths are becoming more exposed to racialized events at younger ages. It is important that our youth continue to be included in the conversation and that they have spaces to engage safely and talk about activism.

REFERENCES

Anyiwo, N., Bañales Josefina, Rowley, S. J., Watkins, D. C., & Richards-Schuster, K. (2018).

    Sociocultural influences on the sociopolitical development of African American

    youth. *Child Development Perspectives*, *12*(3), 165–170.

    https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12276

Bañales, J., Lozada, F. T., Channey, J., & Jagers, R. J. (2021). Relating through oppression:

    Longitudinal relations between parental racial socialization, school racial climate,

    oppressed minority ideology, and empathy in black male adolescents' prosocial

    development. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *68*(1-2), 88–99.

    https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12496

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in*

    Psychology, 3(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Central Connecticut State University. (2023, March). John Lewis Institute for Social Justice.

    https://www.ccsu.edu/johnlewisinstitute/

Clark, S., & Seider, S. (2020). The role of curiosity in the sociopolitical development of Black

    and Latinx adolescents. *Journal of Research on Adolescence : The Official Journal of the*

    Society for Research on Adolescence, *30*(1), 189–202. https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12511

Corning, A. F., & Myers, D. J. (2002). Individual orientation toward engagement in social

    action. *Political Psychology*, *23*(4), 703–729. https://doi.org/10.1111/0162-895X.00304

Diemer, M. A., & Li, C.-H. (2011). Critical consciousness development and political

    participation among marginalized youth. *Child Development, 82*(6), 1815–

    1833. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2011.01650.x

Duke, N. N., Skay, C. L., Pettingell, S. L., & Borowsky, I. W. (2009). From adolescent

connections to social capital: Predictors of civic engagement in young adulthood. *The*

Journal of Adolescent Health : Official Publication of the Society for Adolescent

Medicine, *44*(2), 161–168. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2008.07.007

Ekman, J. & Amnå, E. (2012). Political participation and civic engagement: Towards a new

typology. *Human Affairs*, *22*(3), 283-300. https://doi.org/10.2478/s13374-012-0024-1

Freire, P. (1993). Pedagogy of the oppressed. New York, NY: Continuum.

Ginwright, S. A. (2007). Black youth activism and the role of critical social capital in Black

community organizations. *American Behavioral Scientist, 51*(3), 403–

418. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764207306068

Hope, E. C., & Jagers, R. (2014). The role of sociopolitical attitudes and civic education in the

civic engagement of Black youth. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 24,* 460–470.

Hope, E. C., Keels, M., & Durkee, M. I. (2016). Participation in Black Lives Matter and

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals: Modern activism among Black and Latino

college students. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 9*(3), 203–

215. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000032

Hope, E. C., Pender, K. N., & Riddick, K. N. (2019). Development and validation of the black

community activism orientation scale. *Journal of Black Psychology*, *45*(3), 185–214.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798419865416

Hunter, A. G., & Stewart, A. J. (2015). Past as prologue: How history becomes psychologically

present. *Journal of Social Issues*, *71*(2), 219–228. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12106

Pancer, S. M., Pratt, M., Hunsberger, B., & Alisat, S. (2007). Community and political involvement in adolescence: What distinguishes the activists from the uninvolved? *Journal of Community Psychology*, *35*(6), 741–759.

Perlman, D., Hunter, A. G., & Stewart, A. J. (2015). Psychology, history, and social justice: Concluding reflections. Journal of Social Issues, 71(2), 402–413. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12118

Stewart, A. J., & Healy, J. M. (1986). The role of personality development and experience in shaping political commitment: an illustrative case. *Journal of Social Issues*, *42*(2), 11–31. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1986.tb00222.x

Stewart, A. J., & Healy, J. M. (1989). Linking individual development and social changes. *American Psychologist, 44*(1), 30–42. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.44.1.30

Streich, G. (2002). Is there a right to forget? Historical injustices, race, memory, and identity. *New Political Science*, *24*(4), 525–542.

Watts, R. J., & Flanagan, C. (2007). Pushing the envelope on youth civic engagement: A developmental and liberation psychology perspective. *Journal of Community Psychology, 35*(6), 779–792. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20178

Watts, R. J., Williams, N. C., & Jagers, R. J. (2003). Sociopolitical development. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *31*(1-2), 185–194. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1023091024140

Wray-Lake, L. (2019). How do young people become politically engaged? *Child Development Perspectives, 13*(2), 127-132. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12324

Wray-Lake, L., & Syvertsen, A. (2011). The developmental roots of social responsibility in

  childhood and adolescence. In C. Flanagan & B. Christens (Eds.), Youth development:

  Work at the cutting edge. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 134,*

  11-25. doi: 10.1002/cd.308

Wray-Lake, L., Syvertsen, A. K., & Flanagan, C. A. (2016). Developmental change in social

  responsibility during adolescence: An ecological perspective. *Developmental Psychology,*

  52(1), 130. https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000067

APPENDIX A: FACILITATOR GUIDE

1. Share how your **parent(s)/caregiver(s) communicate(d)** to you about your race and ethnic background. Cultural pride messages? Preparation for bias?
   a. What do you **feel is/was most helpful** about the racial and ethnic messages you received?

2. Have you **experienced racism** (mistreatment, exclusion, discrimination)? What was/were the experience(s) and how did you handle it?
   a. How do you think racism (physical appearance) **effects your life/academic opportunities** and outcomes?

3. How do think adolescent **girls and boys** experience racism differently (in community, school, work, society, etc.)?

4. Share what your **friends/peer group(s) say about racism**. What do they talk about?

5. How do you see racism playing out **online and on social media**?

6. Do you think that racial discrimination occurs **within African American and Black adolescents**?
   a. How does **skin tone (lightness, darkness)** influence how one is treated? What messages have your received about your skin tone, facial features, hair?

7. Share how you have experienced the **COVID pandemic.** Can you share how COVID has impacted you and other Black adolescents?

8. Share how you have experienced **race related deaths** that have taken place during the COVID pandemic (Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and others). How have these experiences impacted you?

9. What are your thoughts about the **January 6th invasion of the capital**? How do your friends and peers talk about this incident?

10. What role do you think Black adolescents should play in **activism, social justice, and social responsibility**? Combating racism? Fostering group cohesion? Inclusivity of other marginalized groups?
    a. What have you done or what are you actively doing, visible to others or behind the scenes, to respond to activism, social justice, and social responsibility? Do you think the ways that Black adolescents do/should respond to social justice and social responsibility is genuine or more performative?

11. What **solutions or advice** about race, racism, social justice and social responsibility do you have for other adolescents? What do you wish you were told about racism and now want to share with others?

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

TO: <u>School Name</u> Parents

<u>School Name</u> students will have an opportunity to participate in an exciting UNCG-funded project that focuses on giving voice to high school youth on topics of social significance such as prejudice, discrimination, and racism. With parental permission, it will involve your child participating in a virtual or in-person focus group, where students will have a safe space to discuss racial issues. The focus group will be led by Dr. Stephanie Irby Coard, a faculty member at UNCG who studies the influence of race, ethnicity, and culture on youth development and families. Dr. Coard and her research team of graduate students are trained on how to handle such difficult conversations. The focus group will last approximately 1.5 hours. **Your child's participation is completely voluntary**. If you are interested in learning more about this opportunity, please contact Ms./Mr._____ and she/he/they will forward your name to Dr. Coard and her team.

Thank you!

TO: _____ Middle/Highschool Students and Parents

<u>Insert school name</u> students have an opportunity to participate in an exciting UNCG-funded project that focuses on giving voice to high school youth on topics of social significance such as prejudice, discrimination, and racism. It will involve participating in virtual or in-person focus groups, where students will have a safe space to discuss racial issues. The focus group will be led by Dr. Stephanie Irby Coard, a faculty member at UNCG who studies the influence of race, ethnicity, and culture on youth development and families. Dr. Coard and her research team of graduate students are trained on how to handle such difficult conversations. **Your participation is completely voluntary**. If you are interested in learning more about this opportunity, please contact Ms./Mr._____ and she/he/they will forward your name to Dr. Coard and her team.

Thank you!

**THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO
CONSENT FOR A MINOR TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT**

RACE TALK- PARENT CONSENT

Principal Investigator: **Dr. Stephanie Irby Coard**

Participant's Name: _____

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

Your child is being asked to take part in a research study. Your child's participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose for your child not to join, or you may withdraw your consent for him/her to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to your child from being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose for your child not to be in the study or you choose for your child to leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship or your child's relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about your child being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, you should ask the researchers named in this consent form. Their contact information is below.

What is the reason for this study?

Race Talk is a focus group discussion based on the topic of prejudice, discrimination, and racism. Youth need direct support in engaging in conversations about race. This focus group will help that by providing a safe space for your child to talk about race issues. This is a research project. Your child's participation in this project is voluntary.

Are there any benefits to society due to your child participating in this research?

Your child may engage in important conversations regarding racism that may help with the process of coping with these issues. The conversations may also inform society about the effects of racism on adolescents. **How long will this study take?**

The Race Talk session with last between 1.5 hours and 2 hours. The pre and post-survey will take about 15-20 minutes in total to complete.

What will happen if your child is in the study?

The session will take place virtually via Zoom or in-person and will last 1.5- 2 hours. The session will include a group discussion where questions about racial climate and your child's views on it will be asked. There will be a pre-survey given before the discussion that will ask questions pertaining to the messages about race they received growing up. The students will be provided an e-gift card for their time in study. Once the discussion is over, students will fill out a brief survey regarding satisfaction.

What are the possible risks of being in this study?

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

It is possible that being in this study may cause embarrassment or anxiety about answering questions. Your child may choose not to answer a question or be in a certain aspect of the study. Due to the nature of some of the questions, counseling may be recommended. Your child has the right to leave the study at any time and have any personal information destroyed and not included in the study.

It is also important to know the research staff is required by law to tell the appropriate authorities if they find out (1) any physical injury to a child was caused by other than accidental means or (2) if child neglect, abuse, or serious physical harm is suspected.

How will your child's privacy be protected?

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. Survey responses will be anonymous. Electronic data will be password protected and securely stored via BOX which will also include password-protected links to be assessed by members of the research team only. Only research assistants in the research study will have access to the BOX data folder. Youth will not be identified in any reports of this study and their privacy will be maintained during the focus group using assigned ID numbers. Youth will use these ID numbers when connecting to Zoom (not their names). Video cameras will also be disabled. The master list linking the participant's name to their ID will be stored in BOX in a separate folder from the data. The PI will provide an introduction at the beginning of the focus group requesting that responses to questions shared during the focus not be shared outside the focus group setting.

Absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. Please be sure to close your browser when finished so no one will be able to see what you have been doing.

Any hard copies of records will be stored in a locked file cabinet in Dr. Coard's office at UNCG.

Is there any audio/video recording of my child?

There will be video/audio recorded via Zoom software for transcription purposes. Audio recorders will be used to record in-person groups. Because your child's face and voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears or sees the tape, confidentiality for things said on the tape or your child's face cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described above.

Will my child's de-identified data be used in future studies?

Your child's de-identified data will be kept indefinitely and may be used for future research without your additional consent or your child's additional consent.

Will they get anything for being in this study?

The students will be provided with a $10 e-gift card.

Will it cost you anything to be in this study?

There are no costs to you as a result of your child's participation in this study. It will only cost your child time to participate.

What if my child wants to leave the study?

Your child has the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If your child does withdraw, it will not affect them in any way. If they choose to withdraw, they may request that any of their data that has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop their participation at any time. This could be because they have had an unexpected reaction, have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

What if you have questions about this study?

You have the right to ask and have answered, any questions you have about this study at any time. If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or

complaints about this project, or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at [information withheld]. If you have questions about the study, you should contact Dr. Stephanie Irby Coard at [information withheld] or [information withheld].

Participant's Agreement:

By signing this consent form, you are agreeing that you have read it or it has been read to you, you fully understand the contents of this document, and consent to your child taking part in this study. All your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are the legal parent or guardian of the child who wishes to participate in this study described to you by

_____
Child's Printed Name

_____   _____
Participant's Parent/Legal Guardian's Printed Name   Date

I agree_____ or I disagree_____

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO
CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT

RACE TALK- CHILD ASSENT

Principal Investigator: Dr. Stephanie Irby Coard

Participant's Name:

Why am I here?
We want to tell you about a research study we are doing. Research studies are done to find better ways of helping and understanding people or to get information about how things work. In this study, we want to find out more about your thoughts on topics surroundings prejudices, discrimination, and racism. You are being asked to be in the study because you are an adolescent, and we want to hear your views on these topics. In a research study, only people who want to take part can do so.

How long will I be in the research study?
You will be in this study for 1.5- 2 hours. The pre and post-survey will take about 15-20 minutes to complete.

What will happen if you are in the study?

If it is okay with you and you agree to join this study, you will be asked to participate in a group discussion virtually via Zoom or in person. The group will last 1.5- 2 hours. The session will include a group discussion where questions will be asked pertaining to our racial climate and your views on it. There will be a pre-survey given before the discussion that will ask questions pertaining to the messages you received about race growing up. You will be provided an e-gift card for your time in the study. Once the discussion is over, you will fill out a brief survey regarding satisfaction.

Can anything bad happen to me?
Sometimes the questions we ask you might seem strange and make you feel uncomfortable/sad. You have the right to leave the study at any time and have any personal information destroyed and not included in the study.

If anything hurts or you are uncomfortable with some of the questions, please let us know and we will stop or do whatever we can to make you feel better.

Can anything good happen to me in this research study?

We do not know if you will be helped by being in this project. However, we may learn something that will help other children discuss/process race in the future.

What if I do not want to be in this research study?
You do not have to be part of this project. It is up to you. You can even say okay now but change your mind later. All you have to do is tell us. No one will be mad at you if you change your mind.

What about my confidentiality?
We will do everything possible to make sure that your data and or records are kept confidential.

Unless required by law, only the study team can look at your records.   They are required to keep your personal information confidential.

Is there any audio/video recording of me?

You will be recorded via Zoom software for transcription purposes. Audio recorders will be used in in-person groups. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, confidentiality for things said on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described above.

Will my de-identified data be used in future studies?

Your de-identified data will be kept indefinitely and may be used for future research without your additional consent.

Will I be paid for being in the research study?
You will be paid with a $10 e-gift card.

Do my parents know about this research study?
This study has been explained to your parent/parents/guardian and they have given permission for you to be in it.

What if I want to leave the study?
You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data that has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

What about new information/changes in the study?
If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

What if you have questions about this study?

You can ask Dr. Stephanie Irby Coard at [information withheld] or [information withheld] for anything about the study. You may also call the Director in the Office of Research Integrity at or [information withheld].

Assent:
This study has been explained to me and I am willing to be in it.

_____
Printed Name

I agree_____ or I disagree_____   _____
                                                              Date