WILEY, KEADIJA C. PhD Talking the Talk, Walking the Walk: Black Children's Understanding of Race and Racism. (2023)
Directed by Drs. Stephanie Irby Coard and Jennifer L. Coffman. 96 pp.

Children in the United States live in a highly racialized society and, as a result, acquire an awareness of race at an early age, eventually developing an understanding of racism (Quintana, 2008). Understanding race and racism is especially relevant for Black children, given their marginalized status in the U.S. and the likelihood that they will encounter racial discrimination before the age of ten (Brody et al., 2006; Johnson, 2022). Traditionally, parents have been viewed as the primary socializers for the knowledge that Black children gain around issues of race (Hughes et al., 2006); however, the U.S.'s long history with racism, the current socio-political context, and other socializing forces (e.g., peers, other adults, media) are undoubtedly contributing to Black children's understanding of race and racism. Therefore, this study aimed to explore Black children's understanding of race and racism, how other socializing agents contribute to this understanding, and the ways in which this understanding may show up when faced with a scenario that describes a potentially discriminatory experience. Qualitative data were collected from a sample of ten Black children (M=10.9 years) and one of their parents using semi-structured interviews and an observational task. In the interviews, children were queried about topics such as how they define race and racism, what these mean to them, how they have engaged in conversations with others, and their media exposure around issues of race. The observational task aimed to capture children's understanding of race and racism from five-minute discussions with their parent after hearing two scenarios of discrimination experiences that were described in contexts such as school or a grocery store. Using a modified grounded theory approach to data analysis, findings highlighted the various understandings of race and racism that Black children have and how different socializing agents, especially media

(television and social media), have contributed to this understanding. This knowledge, which varied among children, ranged from a quite limited to a more complex and nuanced understanding; and children reported this knowledge base was developed based primarily on conversations with parents and peers, but notably, also due to exposure from social media sites such as TikTok and YouTube. Further, findings highlighted the observed differences in Black children's knowledge of racism when presented with covert versus overt racial discrimination scenarios. These findings spoke to potential age-related cognitive differences among the children in the sample. Taken together, these findings suggest a contextually relevant framework for Black children's understanding of race and racism. Insight into Black children's knowledge around race and racism offer valuable information to practitioners and policymakers during a time when knowledge of race and racism in children has become highly politicized.

TALKING THE TALK, WALKING THE WALK: BLACK CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING OF RACE AND RACISM

by

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A Dissertation
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
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro

2023

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DEDICATION

To my mother. Your unwavering love, support, and prayers have gotten me where I am today. For that, I thank you. I love you.

APPROVAL PAGE

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout my graduate career, I have received support from many individuals. I would like to express my gratitude to these individuals and their role in getting me to this accomplishment. First, I would like to thank my advisors, Dr. Stephanie Irby Coard and Dr. Jennifer L. Coffman. Dr. Coard, thank you for teaching me to always be confident in my work as a scholar. Dr. Coffman, since I was an undergraduate student in your lab, you have pushed me to follow my dreams to reach this accomplishment, and for that, I thank you. I am immensely grateful for the guidance you both have offered to my development as a scholar. Thank you for all your time, encouragement, and invaluable feedback throughout this process. To my committee members, Drs. Andrea Hunter and Gabriela Livas Stein, thank you for your constant support and for pushing my thinking as a scholar. I would not be where I am today without you all as my advisors and committee members!

I would also like to thank the many friends I have made within the program. Thank you for the constant encouragement, laughs, and venting sessions over the past 5 years. A special thank you to my cohort, Ashley, Olivia, and Savannah. Words cannot explain how grateful I am to have gone on this journey with you all. I am thankful to be able to consider you colleagues and friends for life.

Thank you to the community and families who participated in my study to make this work possible. Thank you for helping with recruitment, for all the kind words, and for being invested in my work. I hope to continue to be an advocate for Black families and use my work to amplify our lived experiences.

In addition, I would like to thank my family and friends. Your support has meant everything to me and has gotten me through the past 5 years. To my mama, granny, and pa,

thank you for the strong foundation you provided me. Thank you for the guidance you have always provided me and for being my biggest cheerleaders. Thank you for always encouraging me and praying for me. The love and support that you have shown me fueled the ambition inside of me to complete this journey, and I have strived to make you proud over the past 5 years. Words can't describe how proud I am to be your daughter and granddaughter. I love you all so much. To my extended family and friends, thank you for the support and for always cheering me on. I am thankful for the many phone calls and texts that have uplifted me and kept me going during this journey. To my partner, Brian, thank you for always inspiring me and believing in me. Words cannot describe how much I appreciate your endless love, support, and patience as I worked to complete this milestone. I love you.

Last, I would like to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Without you, none of this would be possible.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Children in the United States develop notions of race at an early age (Park, 2011; Quintana, 2008). Race is a social category that places individuals into groups based on phenotype and assumes that certain groups are inferior (Bonilla-Silva, 2009). Despite research that supports the claim that children acquire an awareness of race early (Quintana, 2008), it has been assumed historically that race carries little to no meaning in children's lives (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). This is evidenced by adults' misjudgment of children's ability to reason and process race (Sullivan et al., 2021). However, given that children inhabit a social world in which they are exposed to many different forms of socialization, or ways of learning, it should be no surprise that they begin to develop these understandings at a young age. This is especially true considering U.S.-born children are born into a highly racialized society, one in which exposure to racialized systems and structures cannot be escaped. As children grow older, this understanding likely evolves into one that expands to an understanding of racism (Quintana, 1994). Racism, which operates in different forms, is an institution system of oppression that devalues and disempowers groups of people based on their race or ethnicity (Constantine, 2006; Priest & Williams, 2017).

Although all children eventually develop an understanding of race and racism, this process is particularly critical, impactful, and necessary for Black youth in the United States., given the history of their marginalized status in the U.S. (Anyiwo et al., 2018). Whereas White youth are often socialized to adopt a colorblind approach and avoid issues of race and racism (Sullivan et al., 2021), Black youth are unable to ignore race and racism given many of the challenges they face are around experiences of racism and discrimination. As a result, they must be socialized to the myriad of racial encounters they will likely experience. This process of youth

being socialized, often by their parents, about their racial background, what it means for their position in the larger context of society, and how to navigate and cope with racial encounters, such as racism and discrimination, is called racial socialization (Coard & Sellers, 2005). Racial socialization is crucial for Black youth because, no matter the age, they are not immune to racism and discrimination and will almost certainly experience unfair treatment due to their race. Research has shown consistently that racism and discrimination can negatively impact Black youth's psychological health, physical health, and academic outcomes (Walker et al., 2022). Given this, racial socialization can act as a protective factor, by equipping Black youth with the tools to identify racist behaviors and navigate inter-and intra-racial relationships (Coard et al., 2007; Coard & Sellers, 2005). When Black parents engage in this process, Black youth can develop an understanding of the meaning and significance of race and racism.

The unfair treatment that prompts Black parents to engage in racial socialization can occur early for Black youth. Unfortunately, research has indicated that Black youth may experience unfair treatment due to their race as early as preschool, through school suspension, which is higher for Black children than White children (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2014). As Black youth become older and enter early adolescence (around age 10), these race-related experiences become more nuanced and complex. This is partly due to the numerous changes that Black early adolescents undergo during this developmental period. As they are transitioning from elementary school to middle school, they are also experiencing cognitive, emotional, and physical changes. Cognitively, Black youth are beginning to move from concrete thinking to more abstract thinking (Jones et al., 2020; Piaget, 1970) and exploring their social values (Hope & Banales, 2019). Emotionally, they are experiencing intense and unstable feelings that may leave them to have an increased worry about race-related events

Dunbar et al., 2022). Physically, during early adolescence, Black youth are starting puberty, which often occurs at a rate faster than their White peers, (Kumar & Kelly, 2017) and is what contributes to them being viewed as older than they are and less childlike (Goff et al., 2014). All these changes that Black early adolescents are simultaneously experiencing impact their relationship with other individuals. Therefore, it is essential to understanding how Black youth are making meaning around these experiences in a way that influences how they understand race and racism. However, much of the research that has explored Black youth's understanding of race and racism has focused on early childhood and later adolescence, with little research focusing on early adolescents.

In addition to these experiences that Black youth are navigating and receiving racial socialization messages from parents, they are also being socialized by other individuals. This could include other adults that they may interact with, such as extended family, and peers (Ruck et al., 2021). This is especially true for early adolescents as they may begin to experience change in peer groups and increased time spent with peers (Marraccini et al., 2021). Furthermore, the increased prevalence and exposure of media in youth's development adds an additional context from which Black youth receive information on race and racism (Adams-Bass et al., 2014). Together, this exposure to racism and discrimination, race-related messages and exposure to media provide Black youth with access to various sources to obtain information about race and racism, some of which may be conflicting. Through these different interactions, they form an understanding of what race and racism are and what that means for them as Black youth. However, just as little research has examined racial understanding among Black early adolescents, little research has considered the various socializing agents that may contribute to this understanding.

Racism in the United States: Historical Significance

The long history that the U.S. has with racism is one that has led it to be embedded within every aspect of life for Black Americans. This pervasiveness of racism in the U.S. has caused Black Americans to be subject to vast inequities due to discriminatory laws and policies that are the foundation of structural racism (Coard et al., 2021). It is an issue that the U.S. has yet to come to terms with or attempt to solve. Because racism and discrimination are so entrenched within America's history and way of life, it is essential to consider this history when exploring Black youth's understanding of race and racism.

Countless occurrences in U.S. history have showcased the racist behaviors and harsh treatment that Black people have faced, along with their constant fight for social justice. From slavery to the Civil War, to Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Movement, and other events, these past histories are meaningful and have a significant legacy that has traveled across generations of Black people (Pearlman et al., 2015). Specifically, these histories are integral in Black people's identities and their narratives of what it means to be Black in the U.S. (Hunter & Stewart, 2015; Pearlman et al., 2015). These narratives, passed from generation to generation, likely have been integral to the messages Black parents provide their youth and how Black youth perceive and understand their race.

Although there are countless examples that display how racism is embedded within U.S. society based on the historical context of systematic oppression which has been passed down from generation to generation (Harrell, 2000), some think of the U.S. as a post-racial society. With historical moments such as the abolishment of slavery, integration, and laws such as the Voting Rights Act of 1965, some have belied that Black people have equal rights and that racism is no longer an issue in the U.S. The belief was further supported when the first Black president

of the U.S. was elected in 2008. However, Bonilla-Silva (2009) argued that these more overt forms of racism have been replaced by color-blind racism, which operates in different frames. With color-blind racism, ideas of equal opportunity and individualism are used to explain racial matters, ignoring its institutional role (Bonilla-Silva, 2009). Despite color-blind racism, recent data has suggested that 93% of Black Americans are the target of racial discrimination (Jones et al., 2020; National Public Radio, 2017), dispelling the myth that U.S. is a post-racial society that no longer deals with racism.

Racism in the United States: Current Socio-Political Context

The historical context of racism has continued to show up in more contemporary examples of injustice against Black people, highlighting the continued significance of racism in the U.S. For instance, the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin caused a media frenzy and much debate due to the belief that the shooting was racially motivated and the not-guilty verdict that followed in the case of George Zimmerman, who shot and killed Trayvon Martin. Trayvon Martin was a 17-year-old Black boy who was shot by George Zimmerman in 2012, after an altercation that occurred after Zimmerman followed Martin due to his reported belief that Martin was suspicious. The unfortunate killing of Trayvon Martin was the catalyst that started the Black Lives Matter Movement. It was considered a vicarious cataclysmic event, witnessing a meaningful event characterized as racism or violence against one's racial group (Helms et al., 2010). Seventy-eight percent of Black Americans felt that Trayvon Martin's death raised relevant race issues that needed to be discussed (2013, Pew Research). Today's Black parents, who were likely raised with the context of knowledge of historical events such as slavery, segregation, and the Civil Rights Movement, now have the added context from the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin. "Don't walk around with a hoodie on." "Keep your hands out of your

pockets." "Try not to look suspicious." Although Black early adolescents in the U.S. today were not born or infants when this event occurred, they have likely heard these messages, which have had implications for how they think about themselves in a racialized America.

In addition to Black youth's understanding of race being influenced by the messages they have received from their parents; they also develop a knowledge of race through their personal experiences with other contexts in which they live. Like adults, youth are also "aware, knowledgeable, and have critical insights about racialized sociopolitical contexts in which they live, study, play, and grow" (p. 2, Johnson, 2022). Much of America's current social context continues to center around racism, especially as police brutality has become more publicized (Johnson, 2022; Anderson, 2022c). For many Black youth who are early adolescents, the murder of George Floyd that occurred in May 2020 was likely one of their first, if not their first, collective memories of an event that exposed them to racial injustice/violence and piqued their curiosity about what racism is. George Floyd was a 46-year-old Black man, who was brutally murdered in Minneapolis, MN, by Derek Chauvin, a 44-year-old White police officer. Chauvin held his knee on Floyd's neck for 9 minutes and 29 seconds, obstructing his airway and trapping him to the ground. Three additional officers were present, including two who assisted Chauvin in holding Floyd's body to the ground and another who kept bystanders away. As this horrific event occurred, a crowd of onlookers stood watching. Video of the incident was captured via cell phone and shared on social media, instantly going viral. Immediately following George Floyd's death, massive protests occurred worldwide, making it the largest movement in U.S. history (Buchanan et al., 2020).

For Black youth, part of what makes the murder of George Floyd unique is the role of media, particularly viewing racial violence on social media (Anderson et al., 2022a, 2022c).

Although social media may be the focus of the current cultural context, witnessing racial violence and communicating about this violence has always been a piece of Black people's history. Enslaved people were forced to observe other enslaved people being beaten and tortured. Lynchings during the Jim Crow era were public, and photographs would be taken of those murdered to disseminate to others (Wood, 2018). Even when not witnessing racial violence through forms of media, generations of Black people have historically circulated instances of racial violence through word of mouth to communicate the various learnings and understandings of matters related to race. (Alexander, 1994). However, today's youth are easily exposed to content centering issues of race, especially racial violence. Given how quickly videos of racial violence like that of George Floyd's murder can go viral, coupled with the intensity of news outlets reporting such instances (Anderson et al., 2022a), this exposure also isn't always voluntary. The rise in technology and social media has given youth access to view and discuss issues of race in ways that previous generations have been unable to (Carney, 2016). For instance, racialized events can now be streamed live or re-watched within seconds. As media has become a critical role in the current social context, along with the witnessing of injustice against Black people such as police brutality, a critical question to consider is how it has played a role in influencing how Black youth view and understand race, especially Black early adolescents who are highly impressionable (Hope & Banales, 2019).

Black youth's understanding of race and racism plays an integral role in how they navigate America's racialized society. It is Black parents and other socializing agents that contribute to the development of this racial understanding. Having this understanding of race and racism and the developmental process of attaining it is especially important for Black early adolescents who are navigating other transitions and changes at the same time. Given the U.S.'s

current socio-political context, this study seeks to explore Black early adolescents' understanding of race and racism. Adding to the limited existing literature, that has focused on parents as the primary socializer, this current study also seeks to consider how other socializing agents such as peers, other adults, and media contribute to this understanding for Black early adolescents. Finally, this study seeks to observe how Black early adolescents' understanding of race and racism may show up when faced with scenarios of potential discrimination experiences. This will likely be evidenced in how the youth speak of race and racism and describe navigating these potential experiences.

CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For decades scholars have examined youth's awareness and understanding of race and racism, especially Black children. This scholarship has been in the service of understanding how Black children view themselves, as well as their understanding of societal values, within the context of their marginalized status in a racialized society (Spencer, 1984). Despite many contributions that have offered a greater understanding of how Black children understand race interpersonally and structurally, one noticeable difference within the literature are the various theoretical approaches that have been taken to studying this phenomenon among Black children. Some of the early foundational research on how Black children understand race and racism was grounded in the theoretical perspectives of scholars such as George Mead (1934) and G.W. Allport (1937) (see Swanson et al., 2009 for review). However, some scholars viewed some of the early foundational work as being atheoretical, which they suggested was problematic. It was believed that this work created difficulties in interpreting the theoretical significance of empirical findings and often focused on pathological processes for how Black children viewed themselves in comparison to White children (Quintana, 1994, Spencer, 1984). Other scholars have taken an approach aligned with Piaget's theory of cognitive development, suggesting that children's understanding of race reflects how they view the world. However, Spencer (1982) argued that a Piagetian approach to exploring Black children's understanding of race ignored the cognitive structures that influence their racial awareness and attitudes across developmental periods and assumed concrete operational thinking in younger children. As a result, Spencer's early work took on a cognitive developmental approach, which explored children's social and racial cognition as a developmental process (Spencer, 1982, 1984). Quintana (1994) also argued that earlier work failed to acknowledge the role of children's cognition and took a social perspective-

taking ability approach (Selman, 1980), that considers children's view of racial attitudes in reference to their social cognition while also considering developmental changes in this social cognition. Hirschfeld (1995) also studied children's thinking about race but used a cognitive perspective of essentialism rooted in biology, which revolved around the belief that individuals from differing racial groups hold stable, unchangeable qualities. However, Roberts and Gelman (2017) disproved this perspective, arguing that as children understand race, they do not always consider it to be stable.

As research on Black children and families evolved, many scholars and developmentalists critically analyzed previous models and theories that were used, many of which were deficit approaches. Scholars argued that existing theories pathologized Blackness and did not consider the complete contextual picture of how race and other social factors contribute to Black children's development (Boykins & Toms, 1985; Ogbu, 1981; Peters, 1983). Through these critiques and theorizing of race, scholars brought to the forefront theories and models that provided a more accurate depiction of Black children (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Ogbu, 1981; García Coll et al., 1996). Spencer's (1995) Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) is a framework that evolved to examine the relationship between context and identity formation for Black children. Given that PVEST "utilizes an identity-focused cultural-ecological perspective which integrates issues of social, political, and cultural context with normative developmental processes (Swanson et al., 2003, p. 748)," it is an appropriate framework to use in the framing of this study.

Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST)

Spencer's PVEST (1995) is a framework that integrates a phenomenological approach to Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological systems theory. Through this integration, PVEST is a

framework that emphasizes the importance of context, meaning-making processes, and perception (Anderson et al., 2021; Spencer, 1995). This integration was important during its development as a framework, as many traditional developmental theories were considered to be limited in their application to studying marginalized populations. Spencer (2006) highlighted that these more traditional theories often viewed marginalized populations negatively and failed to consider contextual factors that offer an understanding of the developmental perspectives of racial-ethnic minority children. These contextual factors are a key aspect of the PVEST framework, because they acknowledge risk factors such as race and broader sociohistorical factors such as racism and their critical role in exposing marginalized youth to challenges (Anderson et al., 2021; Spencer, 2003). In addition to risks, Spencer's PVEST also considers protective factors which may offset these risks. This emphasis on context and its influence on marginalized youth is crucial in the study of Black children's understanding of race and racism. As Black children navigate various contexts, given the extent to which racism is embedded within the United States, they are bound to encounter the risks associated with racism. In addition to these risks, Black children's interactions and experiences with individuals such as parents, peers, or other adult figures, may act as a protective factor against risks such as negative racialized encounters (Coard et al., 2007; Coard & Sellers, 2005).

Another key component of PVEST is net stress engagement and an individual's coping methods. This net stress engagement is described as youth's engagement with stressful experiences that may influence their identity and well-being and reactive coping methods which are influenced by normative cognitive development (Spencer, 1995; Swanson, 2003). For Black children, these stressful experiences may be daily experiences with discrimination from peers or other individuals. These stressful experiences can also be described as the content that Black

children are exposed to via media, especially police violence. Anderson and colleagues (2022) argue that because technology and media, especially social media, are now considered relevant factors in youth experiences, they should be included in frameworks such as PVEST. Although social media was not a relevant factor in youth development when many developmental theories were developed, PVEST's framework makes it suitable for its inclusion (Anderson et al., 2022). In the context of the current study, as Black children engage with parents and other individuals, as well as with media, they are making meaning of these encounters, that go on to influence how they think about and understand race and racism. Furthermore, youth's coping responses influence their solutions to stressful experiences (Swanson et al., 2003; Spencer, 1995). Given that research has described developmental differences based on children's age and cognitive maturity (Hughes et al., 2006; Quintana, 2008), Spencer's (1995) PVEST highlights the possibility that in addition to contextual factors, Black children's understanding of race and racism may also be influenced by individual-level factors.

The current study utilizes PVEST as a framework to explore Black early adolescents understanding of race and racism and how various socializing agents may influence this understanding. Black youth begin developing an awareness of race at an early age, which evolves into an understanding of racism as they get older (Quintana, 2008). As youth are developing an understanding of race and racism, they are being influenced by many factors, including the socio-historical context that they live in, parents and other individuals, and media (Ruck et al., 2021). With consideration given to each of these, PVEST is an appropriate framework for the current study. Earlier foundational work that explored Black children's understanding of race and racism did not adopt an integrated phenomenological and cultural-ecological approach such as PVEST. Therefore, this study adds to the literature by considering

the socio-political and contextual factors in Black early adolescents' understanding of race and racism.

CHAPTER III: LITERATURE REVIEW

For Black youth, understanding race and racism and being taught coping skills equips them with the necessary tools to navigate a racialized society (Coard et al., 2007; Coard & Sellers, 2005). The literature on Black children's racial understanding began with exploring their awareness of race and early behaviors related to race (Clark & Clark 1939, 1950). Much of the earlier work was characterized by Black children's White-choice behaviors and identity studies that often-compared Black children to White children (Spencer, 1984). As this work has evolved, it has provided us with knowledge of Black children's understanding of race and racism and its implications for them as an individual navigating various context. Much of what cultivates an understanding of race and racism for Black children is socialization from parents and other individuals or elements that they interact with (Ruck et a., 2021). However, much of the research has overwhelmingly focused on the influence of parents and their racial socialization messages on children's thinking about race and racism (Ruck et al., 2021). Given the complexity of the current socio-historical context of the U.S. it is important to consider Black children's understanding of race and racism and the various factors that influence this understanding.

This review of literature first addresses conceptual issues within the early literature, followed by a brief background on the work of earlier scholars. Next, an overview of Black youth's understanding of race and racism is provided. Finally, a review of literature on how Black youth are socialized around race and racism is provided.

Black Children's Understanding of Race

Conceptual Issues

When exploring the long history of research on Black children's understanding of race and racism, one noticeable element from the literature is the varying terminology that scholars

have used to describe Black children's thinking and understanding of race and racism. Acknowledging the use of this different terminology is essential because it highlights how scholars have not only differentially labeled children's understanding of race and racism but also created distinct ways of conceptualizing this phenomenon. For instance, in the literature, scholars have utilized construct labels such as racial awareness, racial attitudes, social cognition, racial cognition, and racial identity. More recent research has begun to consider children's awareness of inequality. Although I do not believe these construct labels hold the same meaning, I recognize there are times when scholars have used them interchangeably within and across works of literature. For the purposes of this review, I will use the terms that are used within the empirical literature.

Early Empirical Work

Research on children's understanding of race and racism has explored different developmental periods, racial groups, and theoretical perspectives. Some of the earliest works are those of Horowitz (1939), Allport (1937), Mead (1934), and Clark and Clark (1939). Together these scholars have provided a foundation for ongoing research that aimed to explore children's understanding of race and racism. Despite the contributions of these scholars, many consider the work of Clark and Clark (1939) to be seminal because it brought to the forefront research on racial awareness and self-identification (Cristol & Gimbert, 2008). Clark and Clark's work was especially foundational for the progression of research on Black children's way of thinking about race. The initial work of Clark and Clark (1939) examined the early development of race consciousness (consciousness of belonging to a group different from others based on physical characteristics) in a sample of Black preschool children. Clark and Clark (1939) argued that race consciousness and identification reflected self-consciousness. Findings from this work

suggested that Black preschool boys develop the ability to delineate the self as a member of a distinct racial group before age five and laid the foundation for later work which Clark and Clark (1947, 1950) conducted. This later work is widely known as the "Doll Tests." This research examined young children's knowledge of racial differences (knowledge of the difference between White and Black), racial self-identification (knowledge of self as Black or White), and racial preferences (preference for White or Black). Findings indicated that children's understanding of racial differences developed over time and, Black preschool children held a negative attitude towards being Black.

Although Clark and Clark's work was foundational to the literature on Black children's understanding of race and racism, other scholars critiqued their work and refuted claims made from their findings. Spencer (1982), for instance, examined children's social and cultural cognition from a cognitive developmental approach and found that Black children's social cognition (decentering ability) predicted their cultural cognition (race awareness), and racial stereotypes were unrelated to Black children's social cognition. Spencer's (1982) findings refuted the claim made by Clark and Clark's (1947, 1950) work which suggested that Black preschool children held negative attitudes toward being Black. Instead, findings from her work suggested that Black children's racial awareness was related to more general functioning related to social learning experiences, not a negative internalization of one's identity.

Black Children's Understanding of Race and Racism

The literature on Black children's understanding of race and racism has expanded across various developmental periods from infancy to young adulthood (Cristol & Gimbert, 2008; Winkler, 2009). Scholars have focused on each developmental stage to grasp children's early signs of being aware of race and racism to the implications of their more complex cognitively

mature understanding of race and racism. Although much of the research has centered around early childhood and mid to late adolescence (Quintana, 1994), it is also critical to explore Black children's perceptions and understanding of race and racism at all developmental periods, including during the transition from middle childhood into early adolescence. This developmental period can be considered a unique time in children's development of understanding of race and racism, given they are making the transition from elementary school to middle school. During this time, children begin to experience a deepened cognitive capacity and changes in peer groups, which may lead to experiences that influence their understanding of race and racism (Marraccini et al., 2021; Quintana, 1998).

During early developmental stages, much of children's perception and understanding of race is only just beginning to develop and is based on physical characteristics (Quintana, 2008; Cristol & Gimbert, 2008). Quintana (2008) described this understanding as being egocentric. However, as children become older, their understanding of race becomes increasingly complex as well as more contextual, based on experiences from their everyday lives (Aboud & Amato, 2001; Derman-Sparks et al., 2011). For instance, in one of the few studies that have used qualitative interview questions to examine children's perceptions of race and racism, Quintana (1994) conducted a detailed study in a sample of 6-18-year-olds. Results from this study indicated that as Black and other racial-ethnic children near later childhood, they begin to reason and understand the social component of race because of inferences from their social interactions. More specifically, children begin to realize that racial status has unobservable implications. For instance, during this stage, a child may describe his or her race in relation to the food one eats or the language one speaks. However, as children transition into early adolescence, they begin to gain an introspective understanding of race, where they start to view the self as others may view

them and think about the common perspectives that may be present among a group of individuals. Quintana (2008) describes this as transitioning from the understanding race from a social perspective to more of a group consciousness perspective.

The process of children's maturing cognitively and gaining a more complex understanding of race can arguably be more challenging for Black children as they are navigating being a marginalized individual. Having a marginalized identity and encountering everyday experiences with racism and discrimination may influence Black children's perception and understanding of race during a time when they are also navigating other transitions. Dulin-Keita et al. (2011) examined racial awareness in a sample of children ages 7 to 12. Findings supported previous research and revealed that children understand race early on. However, non-Hispanic Black children could more accurately conceptualize race compared to children from other racial-ethnic groups. Non-Hispanic White children, on the other hand, could not accurately conceptualize race compared to children from other groups. This highlights the importance of expanding the literature on Black children's perception and understanding of race and racism. It also allows for understanding to be expanded beyond understanding what and in what order children understand race to understand the meaning-making that children engage in to process how they conceptualize race (Johnson, 2022). More recent research has supported Dulin-Keita et al.'s (2011) findings that Black children can more accurately conceptualize race compared to other racial-ethnic groups. In a more recent study, Wray-Lake and colleagues (2023) explored children's awareness of inequalities related to race, when compared to their other racial-ethnic minority peers, Black children were more aware of race-related inequalities in the sixth grade and showed more rapid growth of awareness. These findings are evidence of Black children's

increased understanding of race-related issues, highlighting the importance of examining Black children's understanding of race and racism, especially during the transition to middle school.

Methodological Challenges

As scholars have explored Black children's understanding of race and racism, they have used numerous methodological approaches to capture children's understanding. Although these methodological approaches have been useful in understanding Black children's understanding of race and racism, there are some challenges to previously taken approaches, specifically forced-choice tasks. Forced-choice tasks are an approach that has been taken by earlier scholars (Clark & Clark, 1939; Hirschfield, 1995). These forced-choice tasks attempt to capture children understanding of race and racism by forcing them to select certain stimuli in response to a question. For example, in Clark and Clark's (1939) doll study, children were presented with a Black doll and a White doll and asked a series of questions about the dolls. Upon hearing each of the questions, children were instructed to pick a doll that best reflected how they felt. Similar to Clark and Clark (1939), Hirschfeld (1995) utilized a similar task. However, instead of dolls they presented children with images of Black or White children and instructed them to choose an image to respond to a question. Given the goals of these tasks, the stimuli are Black and White, which is not ideal because children do not live in a solely Black and White world.

During the 80's and 90's, as new theoretical approaches emerged for studying Black children and scholars began to explore the racial socialization of Black children, other methodological approaches were taken. Some scholars resorted to interviews with parents to understand what Black messages Black parents were relaying to their children about race (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Peters, 1983; Demo & Hughes, 1990). With the development of new measurement tools, scholars also increasingly used Likert-type scales that rely on self-report

responses and have continued to use similar tools to capture Black children's understanding of race, as well as parents' racial socialization behaviors (Sullivan et al., 2018; Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2020). Although useful, self-report measures may present challenges, such as constructs accurately reflecting respondents understanding and the inability to capture important contextual factors (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). As the study of racial socialization and children's responses to discrimination continued, scholars aimed to create new qualitative approaches through observational methods. These approaches were aimed at capturing the bidirectional aspect of racial socialization, how parents communicated specific messages, and how young children cope with potential discrimination encounters (Coard & Wallace, 2001; Johnson, 2005; Smith-Bynum et al., 2016; Osborne et al., 2022). Few scholars have adopted this approach despite observational methods allowing processes to be captured firsthand. This may be due to the significant time and effort required to develop valid and reliable coding systems and train coders (Lindahl et al., 2019).

When it comes to exploring Black youth's understanding of race and racism, Connolly has suggested that qualitative methods may be appropriate for capturing youth's understanding. Despite previous scholars using interviews to explore parents' racial socialization messages, similar methods are also needed to explore children's racial understanding, which few scholars have done. Similarly, whereas observational approaches have typically been used to examine the bidirectional process of racial socialization and how youth cope, it may also be appropriate to explore Black youth's understanding of actual potential discrimination experiences. Improved methodological approaches such as these may offer a more contextualized understanding of Black youth's understanding of race and racism.

Influence of Parents

Much of the previous literature examining children's perception and understanding of race has placed the primary focus on the child, with little attention to what factors and mechanisms may contribute to the development of this racial awareness. Although some scholars took theoretical approaches that only considered the development of children's racial understanding, other theoretical perspectives do consider these other contributing factors. For instance, parental racial socialization is one of the most common processes that scholars have examined contributing to children's racial awareness (Ruck et al., 2021). Parents' racial socialization messages play an important role in how children understand race and racism.

Parents have traditionally been viewed as the primary socializing agents for children (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001). For Black parents, they engage in the racial socialization process, providing their children with messages that teach them about their racial background, the implications of this for their position in the larger societal context, and how to navigate and cope with racism and discrimination (Coard & Sellers, 2005). Black parents are aware that their children will ultimately encounter negative racialized experiences and engage in racial socialization as an integral role in their children's development. For Black children, these messages and their experiences allow them to make meaning and understanding about race and racism, leading these messages to act as a protective factor against negative racialized encounters (Coard & Sellers, 2005).

Whereas earlier foundational scholars' central focus was Black children's understanding of race and racism with little to no consideration of socializing agents, more contemporary scholars have explored the influence of parents. Much of this research has considered parents' racial socialization messages influence on Black children's racial identity and their beliefs about

race as it relates to self (Lee & Ahn, 2013). Neblett and colleagues (2013) examined the influence of Black parents' racial socialization on children's racial identity. However, this examination was in a sample of Black young adults. Findings revealed that those individuals who received more racial pride messages from their parents were more likely to have positive feelings about their race. Tang and colleagues (2016) also explored the influence of Black parents' racial socialization messages on a sample of Black middle school adolescents' racial identity. Among a sample of 8th-grade youth, results were like those of Neblett and colleagues (2013), such that parents' racial socialization messages were a significant predictor of children's racial identity, especially among families in which parents reported high levels of communication of messages. A recent meta-analysis that examined recent research on how parents' racial socialization influenced children's racial identity highlighted that much of the current research found positive relationships between parental messages and children's racial identity or thinking of race as it related to the self (see Huguley et al., 2019 for review). These findings confirm the protective nature of parents' racialized messages when it comes to how Black children understand race.

Influence of Other Socializing Agents

Although research has explored the critical role that parents' racial socialization messages have on children's understanding of race and racism, there are other sources of socialization that youth come in contact with. For instance, as children shift into early adolescence, they begin to be influenced by other individuals and sources that are not their parents (Ruck et al., 2022). This is especially true given the socio-political context which influences how children make sense of their experiences and the increased role of media in children's everyday experiences (Anderson et al., 2022a; Wray-Lake et al., 2022). Given this, the

role that other socializing agents such as peers, other adults, and media should all be factors that are considered as influencing children's understanding of race and racism.

Peers

As children enter adolescence, they begin to spend more time away from home and engage with peers more. These interactions with peers are an integral part of development, as scholars have posited that peers play an important role in development during childhood and adolescence (Abrams et al., 2015). With this comes the opportunity for children to spend more time with a racially diverse group of peers, depending on the racial makeup of their neighborhood and school (Rivas-Drake et al., 2017). Given Stevenson's (1995) proposition that racial awareness is needed to form a racial identity, little research has examined children's perceptions of race and how peers may contribute to this, especially during early adolescence (Santos et al., 2017). Much research has instead focused on racial identification and racial preferences during early childhood and racial identity development during late adolescence. This leaves a gap in the attention given to early adolescents, especially considering that as children move into early adolescence, they gain a more nuanced view of race and racism, which allows them to think more complexly about interactions with their peers (Santos et al., 2017). Additionally, previous research has indicated that peer groups are similar regarding behavior, attitudes, and beliefs (Brechwald & Prinstein as cited in Rivas-Drake et al., 2017). For instance, results from Hamm's (2000) examination of adolescents' friendship selection indicated that African American children were more likely to select friends who were similar in their feelings about their racial group. Given this, it may be that peers also influence Black children's understanding of race and racism.

The existing literature that has explored the influence of peers on children's racial understanding is limited. Although the existing research that has explored peers is limited, there are recent qualitative studies that have shed light onto peers' influence. These qualitative studies consist of ethnographies, observation of peer interactions, and interviews. For instance, Sladek et al. (2022) explored the influence of various intersecting contexts on adolescents' racial awareness and racial identity. Results indicated that the children learned about race from each other through culture-centered school events and outside of school in community settings. Research has also suggested that peers can influence children's racial awareness in the wake of racism and discrimination. For instance, results from Sladek et al. (2022) revealed that adolescents became more racially aware through negative peer comments that imitate discrimination.

As children navigate these encounters based on interactions with peers, it has also been suggested that children are more likely to discuss stories of racial discrimination with peers when compared to parents (Syed & Juan, 2012). Therefore, positive and negative racial encounters with peers can influence Black children's perceptions of race. A recent quantitative multi-site study by Santos and colleagues (2017) explored peer influence on ethnic-racial identity in a diverse sample of early adolescents. Results from this study indicated that adolescents' ethnic-racial identity levels shifted to reflect their friends reported ethnic-racial identity levels. These findings were true across multiple sites. These research findings are evidence of peers' critical role in shifting the development of Black children's perception and understanding of race.

Other Adults

Much of the literature that has explored how various individuals may influence Black children's understanding of race and racism has focused on the racial socialization messages

offered by parents. A limited amount of research has been conducted considering socializing agents outside of parents. Although parents are the primary socializers for children, as they become older and engage in more activities outside of the home, there are other adults from whom children may receive messages or influence their perceptions of race or racism. This is especially true for Black children, whom many suggest "takes a village" to raise, highlighting the significance of close relatives, extended kin, and fictive kin in Black families (Anderson et al., 2022a). Additionally, other individuals outside of the family network can be socializing agents, influencing their perception of race, including teachers, mentors, coaches, or community leaders.

Anderson et al. (2022b) conducted a study among a sample of African American and Black Caribbean families with adolescents, which explored who the socializing agents were for adolescents. From this study, Anderson, and colleagues (2022b) reported on each ethnic group belonging to two racial socialization classes, including low socializers and high socializers. Adolescents receive frequent messages about race from their parents, relatives, and other adults for each of the high socializer groups. These findings speak to the role that individuals aside from parents play in socializing children to influence what they know about the race. Additional literature has also revealed that school acts as a socializing agent for children, whether explicitly from teachers through a predetermined curriculum or implicitly through the school structure and policies (Watford et al., 2021; Saleem & Byrd, 2021; Byrd & Hope, 2020). Considering the role that various other adults may contribute to children's perception and understanding of race, this is an area of research that scholars can work toward expanding.

Media

Media consists of social networking sites that enable individuals to communicate, create, share, and view content, as well as television. Social media includes sites such as Facebook,

Instagram, Tik Tok, YouTube, and Snap Chat. Television, news, and radio are also forms of media, which are used as a means of communication. Both sources of information may act as additional socializing agents that influence Black children's perception and understanding of racism. Over the decades, technology and social media use has increased (Kruse et al., 2017). With this increase has come a rise in children having access to the internet, having access to a Smartphone, and being major consumers of social media sites. For Black children specifically, compared to their peers of different racial/ethnic groups, they are also more likely to have access to a Smartphone, more likely to have access to the internet via a Smartphone, and spend more time on the internet and social media (Racz et al., 2017; Rideout et al., 2011). Given that Black children have increased access to Smartphones and the internet, it is essential to recognize that online spaces are also a common place where Black children encounter racial discrimination (English et al., 2020), leading to an increased likelihood that they will discuss these encounters with their peers.

Despite much of the socialization literature being parent-focused, there is a growing literature to support social media and television as influences on Black children's perception of race. This is especially relevant for Black children and families as the rise of social media has led to an increase in police brutality videos being shared, along with the continued display of Black stereotypes across media. Adams-Bass et al. (2014) conducted a study among a sample of Black children to develop a measure of Black media stereotypes, which could be used with Black adolescents. In addition to having children complete a Black Media Messages Questionnaire, they also completed measures of racial socialization, racial identity, Black History knowledge, body image, and self-esteem. Findings from this study suggested that positive media images of Black people were inversely correlated with Private Regard (positive or negative feelings about

being Black and Black people in general), and negative media images were positively correlated with Private Regard. A high Public Regard was correlated to the belief that society, in general, holds a positive view of Black people. Similarly, other studies have also yielded evidence of the role that social media and television play in how Black children's perceptions of race (Rogers et al., 2021; González-Velázquez et al., 2020; Chan, 2017). Given the increased display of police violence in media, scholars have also begun to explore how this witnessing of violence influences Black children's understanding of racism (Anderson et al., 2022a). However, this research has been focused on observing the influence on Black children's psychological well-being (Anderson et al., 2022a).

The Current Study

Prior research has provided an understanding of Black youth's understanding of race and racism, along with how various socializing agents influence this understanding. However, there are limitations within the literature such that studies have not always considered the current social context of the U.S. as contributing to youth's understanding of race and racism, and studies have not consistently considered various socializing agents. Additionally, many studies have focused on the early childhood period or later adolescence. Given the many transitions and changes that early adolescents experience, while they are also trying to make meaning and understand race and racism, it is a critical developmental period that should be given greater attention. Therefore, the current study sought to explore Black early adolescents' understanding of race and racism with consideration for the current socio-political context and the influence of various socializing agents. Furthermore, the current study sought to use a theoretical and methodological approach different from previous research to capture the full scope of Black

early adolescents' understanding of race and racism. More specifically, the current study aimed to answer the following research questions.:

1. Given the current socio-political context what is Black early adolescents' understanding of race and racism?

2. How do various socializing agents (e.g., parents, peers, other adults, social media, television) contribute to this understanding that Black early adolescents have?

3. How does Black early adolescents' understanding of race and racism show up when faced with potentially discriminatory experiences?

CHAPTER IV: METHOD

Methodological Approach

The goal of this study was to gain an understanding of Black youth's understanding of race and racism, and how various socializing agents (e.g., parents, peers, other adults, media) may contribute to this understanding - especially given the current racially conscious context of the United States. Additionally, this study aimed to explore indicators of children's understanding by asking them how they may navigate a set of potentially discriminating experiences – though the use of a Racial Socialization Observational Task (Caughy, unpublished manual; Smith-Bynum, 2005, 2017). In order to accomplish the goals of this study, child interview and parent-child observational data that aims to reflect children's understanding of race and racism were collected and analyzed. This project used separate, parent and child interviews; however, for the purposes of this study only data from child interviews and child responses from the RSOT were used. The study's use of child interviews was useful because it allowed for children to use their voice and provide context to their understanding of race and racism (Fassinger & Morrow, 2013; Yoshikawa, 2008). Furthermore, the use of the RSOT to capture parent-child observational data was useful because allowed for children's conversations about potential discrimination experiences to be captured firsthand (Lindahl et al., 2019). Together, connections can be made between the two pieces of data to observe if they complement one or another or if there are tensions between them. This offers a more contextualized understanding of Black children's understanding of race and racism. Taking a methodological approach that included the use of child interviews and the RSOT was instrumental in capturing the full scope of the specified aims of the study.

Participants

A total of 10 children participated in the study, all of whom participated with their mothers. This sample included five boys and five girls, of which four were 5th graders, four were 6th graders, and two were 7th graders. The children ranged from 10 to 12 years old (*M*=10.9 years old). Regarding school and neighborhood, participants were exposed to settings of various racial makeups. Of the sample, four lived in a predominantly Black neighborhood, two lived in a predominantly White neighborhood, and four lived in a mixed/diverse neighborhood.

Regarding the children's school setting, two attended a predominantly Black school, three attended a predominantly White school, four attended a mixed/diverse school, and one parent did not provide the racial makeup of the child's school setting. Despite the various school settings, all participants attended a public school. Table 1 provides brief demographics for each child.

Table 1. Child Descriptions

Pseudonym	Age	Grade	Gender	Neighborhood Setting	School Setting
Leah	10	5th	Female	Mixed/Diverse	Mixed/Diverse
Jayden	10	5th	Male	Mixed/Diverse	-
Kevin	10	5th	Males	Mixed/Diverse	Mixed/Diverse
Madison	10	5th	Female	Mixed/Diverse	Predominantly White
Brooklyn	11	6th	Female	Predominantly Black	Predominantly Black

Ryan	11	6th	Male	Predominantly Black	Predominantly White
Jackson	11	6th	Male	Predominantly White	Predominantly White
Riley	12	6th	Female	Predominantly Black	Predominantly Black
Jacob	12	7th	Male	Predominantly White	Mixed/Diverse
Mila	12	7th	Female	Predominantly Black	Mixed/Diverse

Procedures

Data from this study were collected from in Greensboro, NC from Fall 2022 and Spring 2023. Participants for this study were recruited from community organizations in predominantly Black neighborhoods and via social media. Flyers that aimed to capture the attention of Black families were emailed to various community organizations that served predominantly Black families and their youth, as well as hung up on community boards at neighborhood locations that Black families frequented. Flyers were also posted on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. If families were interested in participating, they were instructed to complete an interest survey via Qualtrics. Upon completing the interest survey, interested parents were contacted via phone to provide study details, confirm eligibility, and schedule a time for the interview and observational tasks to occur. To participate, an adult had to be the primary caregiver of a child in the 5th, 6th, or 7th grade (approximately 10-12 years old). It was also required that families identify as African American/Black. Families who identified as multiracial were excluded from participation. These families were excluded due to the larger study also exploring parents' racial socialization behaviors and research suggesting that racial-ethnic

socialization among multiracial families differs from that in Black families (Green et al., 2021; Seider et al., 2023). Given the difference in racial socialization in multiracial families, it is likely that multiracial children come to understand race and racism somewhat differently from Black children, justifying their exclusion from the study.

Data Collection

Family Demographic Form

Before completing the interview or observational task, the children's parents were asked to complete a family demographic form *(Coard, 2003)*. This form gathered demographic information on parents and children. Information gathered on parents included relationship to the child, age, gender, birthplace, marital status, education status, occupation, and gross household income. Information collected on the children included gender, age, type of school, and child grade. Parents also provided information on their current household composition, the racial makeup of their neighborhood, and the school the child attended.

Child Racial Understanding Interview (CRUI) Questions

During meetings with parent-child dyads, children were asked to participate in a brief interview to understand how they understand race and racism. The CRUI was comprised of interview questions adapted from Coard's (2004) Parental Interview of Racial Socialization and Tawa's (2018) interview on beliefs about race, and consistent with the literature on children's racial awareness and beliefs. Given that Coard's (2004) interview was developed for parents and Tawa's (2018) interview was developed for college students, questions were adapted to be appropriate for children who were early adolescents. The CRUI questions were examine youth's understanding of race and racism, as well as how various socializing agents have contributed to this understanding. The CRUI consist of nine questions that had multiple parts.

Each interview began with questions that were aimed at grounding and familiarizing the children with the topic. The first two questions (1 and 2) asked the children to both, share how they define the constructs race and racism and share what these constructs meant to them. These questions were aimed at allowing the youth to offer their perspectives on race and racism without predetermined definitions or forced-choice tasks that have been used by previous scholars (Sullivan et al., 2018). The next two interview questions (3 and 4) aimed to have the children describe their race in relation to self and what it meant for them, as well as to consider what they liked and disliked about their race. These questions allowed youth to discuss how they thought about and understood their race in relation to their racial group. The next three questions (5, 6, and 7) children were asked considered their context and aimed to capture if and how they engaged with various individuals and media and how this engagement may have influenced their racial knowledge. Interview question eight was reflective for the children and attempted to have them describe knowledge or experiences their parents may have been unaware of. Finally, the last interview question (9) asked the children to continue to reflect, but this time on the first time or any time they asked questions or had conversations with their parents about race or racism and the context of those conversations. This question aimed to delve into the complexity of how children understood race and racism based on initial conversations with their parents. The full list of child interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Racial Socialization Observational Task (RSOT)

Following completion of the interview, children were asked to complete the Racial Socialization Observation Task (RSOT; Caughy, unpublished manual; Smith-Bynum, 2005, 2017) with their parent. Given that the RSOT asked parent-child dyads to have conversations about race and racism, the RSOT was completed after the child interview. This was done so that

the discussions from the RSOT would not influence the children's responses during the child interview. During this task, the child and their parent were asked to listen to a recording of a youth faced with two different discrimination scenarios, *The School Counselor* and *The Store Clerk*. Dyads were then asked to imagine that they were the individual in the stories. After listening to each recording, parent-child dyads were instructed to talk with each other about ways to deal with the situation as if it had happened to their family. Families were given five minutes to discuss each scenario. This task generated naturally occurring conversations that captured the children having discussions with their parents about their thoughts on the scenario and how they would navigate a similar experience.

The RSOT asked families to discuss four discrimination scenarios adapted from previous scholars who developed and adapted the task (Caughy, unpublished manual; Smith-Bynum, 2005, 2017). These four discrimination scenarios included *The School Counselor*, *The Store Clerk*, *The Peer Interaction*, and *The Police Interaction*. *The School Counselor* scenario described a situation in which an academically talented Black youth is met with a discriminatory comment by a school counselor who has previously been identified as racist by other students. *The Store Clerk* scenario described a situation in which a Black youth overhears a store clerk making a discriminatory remark about them to another store clerk. *The Peer Interaction* scenario described a situation in which a Black youth is met with a discriminatory comment about their name from a peer. *The Police Interaction* scenario described a situation in which a Black youth and their friend are at a neighborhood park waiting on another friend to join and is approached by a White police officer. For the purposes of this study discussions from two of the discrimination scenarios were used to address the third research question. The two scenarios used included *The School Counselor* and *The Store Clerk*. These two scenarios were chosen due to

differences in the explicitness of racism evident in the descriptions provided. *The School Counselor* scenario stated explicitly that the perpetrator in the scenario was racist. In contrast, The *Store Clerk Scenario* did not state explicitly that the perpetrator was racist, but included subtle cues to imply that the clerk had a racist motivation. In line with the third research question, the goal of using these two scenarios was to examine the children's ability to identify a scenario as racially motivated when it was explicitly stated, as compared to when the motivation in a scenario was more implicit.

When the scenarios were presented to parent-child dyads, the gender of the youth in the scenario matched that of the child participating. Scenarios were also presented in a randomized order to prevent any order effects from occurring.

Data Preparation and Analysis

All child interviews and the RSOT data were video- and audio-recorded using Zoom. Zoom produced transcripts of each meeting, and transcripts were then reviewed so that changes could be made to have all words and utterances included. For confidentiality purposes, all participants were given a pseudonym.

To explore RQ1 and RQ2, a modified grounded theory approach was taken to analyze the child interviews. This approach aims to construct a substantive theory that helps explain various phenomena (Daly, 2007). Taking a modified grounded theory approach led to the use of a three-step coding process. This first wave of coding consisted of open coding, during which each transcript was read line by line. During the reading of each transcript, the goal was to identify and give codes to relevant segments of data that were meaningful to the study's aims. Following open coding, the second wave of coding was axial coding. During this process, codes from wave one were used to form categories. These codes and categories were compared to examine the

relationship within and between children. This enabled me to explore similarities and differences among the children's understanding of race and racism and the various factors that contributed to it. The third and last wave of coding was selective coding. This step involved integrating categories into core categories that best explained the children's understanding of race and racism while considering the influence of various socializing agents. In order to ensure accuracy of the interpretive analysis of the data, a second coder was identified (African American female graduate student) to code all of the child interviews. During the coding process, we held regular meetings to debrief about all interviews while also reflecting on our personal experiences and perceptions of Black children and their understanding of racism. This graduate student has a knowledge of Black adolescents' development of critical consciousness and awareness of social injustice. Therefore, it was insightful for me to code and reflect with her, given her knowledge of a similar phenomenon but in older Black youth. All transcripts were coded in ATLAS.ti, a software used for qualitative data analysis.

To explore RQ3, a coding scheme was adapted from an existing coding scheme developed by scholars who adapted the RSOT (Caughy, unpublished manual; Smith-Bynum, 2005, 2017). Unlike the previous coding scheme, the current coding scheme was designed/developed with a focus on child responses not parent and child verbiage. The adapted coding scheme considered two broad aspects of the children's responses during the discussions. These included their reaction to the scenarios and their strategy for navigating and coping with the scenario. The first step to coding the children's reaction to the discrimination scenarios was to consider if the child identified the presence of racial bias, prejudice, discrimination, or racism (*Yes or No*) and if one was identified, then it was coded as either spontaneous-identification or a result of prompting from their parent. The next step to coding the children's reaction to the

scenarios was split into four categories which included the children's 1) description of the scenario in relation to racial bias, prejudice, discrimination, or racism, 2) description of the scenario in relation to injustice or unfairness, 3) identification and rejection of stereotypes about their racial group, and 4) description of the scenario in relation to egalitarianism. Next, the children's strategy for navigating and coping with the scenario was coded. This consisted of identifying if the child offered a solution to the scenario (*Yes or No*) if the child willingly offered a solution or were prompted by their parent and the given solution that the child offered. Ratings in the coding scheme were based on a Likert-type scale with ratings of *not present*, *low*, *moderate*, or *high*. *Low* ratings were characterized by identification without expansion, *moderate* ratings were characterized by identification with expansion but still a level of disassociation, and *high* ratings were characterized as identification and a level of understanding based on examples or experiences. Ratings were provided to all categories that did not require a *Yes* or *No* rating. To ensure accuracy and reliability, all scenarios were double-coded with a second coder (African American female undergraduate student). Any discrepancies were resolved through discussions of the scenario.

Positionality and Reflexivity

In an attempt to be transparent and in alignment with my belief that research is not objective but influenced by our personal experiences, I think it is important that I acknowledge the position from which I strive to conduct this work and think about how my positionality influences it. I approach my work with the belief that various factors influence an individual's development, not just individual characteristics. For me, many of these factors include history, individuals' interactions with others, and the context in which individuals live. This approach

also allows me to recognize that my personal experiences have and continue to influence my work.

As a researcher and graduate student researching issues of race and racism, I am led to think of my experiences growing up and how they have influenced my work. I identify as a Black woman who was raised in a small rural town in the South. During my formative years, church, family, and education were three things that my mother and grandparents always stressed as important. They always had high academic expectations of me. As a result, it was never a question of whether I'd go to college but rather what college I would go to. This town that I grew up in is one that is highly under-resourced. However, my mother always advocated for me in every way possible to ensure I had a myriad of opportunities available to me.

When it came to issues of race and racism growing up, I can recall my mother and my grandfather providing me with messages about race. These were mainly cultural prides messages and messages about how to carry myself as Black teen girl/young adult. When I went to college, it felt as if conversations around race and racism increased. However, during that time, numerous racialized events took place – the killing of Trayvon Martin, being old enough to vote for an African American president, and nonstop protests about White supremacists on campus and around the country. Looking back, it was all influential to the continued development of my understanding of racism and how it operates. Although this all happened during my time as a young adult, it has often left me to think about how today's children think about and understand race, given the current socio-political context. That is much of what has led me to ask these questions.

Through my personal experiences of coming to understand race and racism, as well as my graduate training, I think that today's youth are growing up during a unique time. I think that

much of what makes it unique is social media and technology's relevancy to youth's everyday experiences. This became apparent as I conducted interviews with these children. I began to see just how much media and the socio-political climate have influenced today's youth. It also led me to reflect on my time as an adolescent and my engagement with media during that developmental period. My experience is very different from the children who completed these interviews. Throughout the process, I continued to be reflexive, thinking about my personal experiences, but also aimed to be conscious of how my experiences may have influenced this process.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS

The aim of the current study was to explore Black early adolescents' understanding of race and racism given the current social context around injustices towards Black people in the U.S., as well as how various socializing agents, including parents, peers, other adults (e.g., extended family), and media may influence this understanding. In addition, the current study aimed to explore how indicators of Black early adolescents' understanding of race and racism may be revealed when they are asked to navigate two potential discriminatory experiences. The findings presented below begin with details from the youth's discussions during the Child Racial Understanding Interview (CRUI). These findings begin by describing the youths' understanding of race and racism based on how they described these constructs and what they meant to them. Next, findings describe the youths' detailed accounts of how various socializing agents (e.g., parents, peers, other adults, media) have or have not influenced their understanding of race and racism. Finally, findings from the Racial Socialization Observational Task (RSOT) are presented, describing how the youth discussed two potential discriminatory experiences with their parents. These descriptions are representative of the youths' reactions to the scenarios and are likely indicators of how their understanding of race and racism are displayed when put into action.

Talking the Talk: Child Interview Results

The following analysis presents findings on how the youth understood race and racism. This examination of how the youth understood race and racism was based on how they defined race and racism and their descriptions of what these constructs meant to them. The findings presented also detail youth's perspective of how different socializing agents have contributed to their understanding of race and racism.

Black Early Adolescents' Understanding of Race

"It's just the color of your skin": Understanding Race as a Phenotype Characteristic

Youth first described their definitions of race, followed by what race meant to them. When asked to describe how they defined race, most of the youth (6) shared a similar way of thinking. For these youth, racial phenotype, or skin color, was a marker of race that they understood. This understanding that youth held was not necessarily about Blackness but physical attributes that signified race to them. However, based on their descriptions, they had not assigned a structural meaning to it but instead recognized that individuals who varied in skin tone were a part of different groups. This was evident as many of the youth first described their definitions of race based on physical attributes. For instance, when prompted about race, Jacob, a 12-year-old 7th grader, stated, "*Race is like my skin tone and like other's people's skin tone and stuff*." Jayden, a 10-year-old 5th grader, offered a response that reflected a similar belief when he stated, "*Race is like the skin color you are*." This thinking was reflected by Kevin, a 10-year-old 5th grader, who had a similar thinking but expanded. He stated,

> *Um [race is] the color of your skin. And…it really doesn't matter how your color is, or whatever like what's that called um um type of race you are. Like some people could be dark skinned, light skin, White, Asian, Hispanic American, African American, stuff like that.*

This understanding of racial phenotype as a marker of race that the youth held was common among many of the youth, who responded similarly when describing their definitions of race.

"It's like segregation. No Rights": Understanding Differential Treatment Based on Race

Despite most of the youth understanding skin tone as a marker of race without assigning any structural level meaning to it, there were 2 youth whose description of race showed a level of

understanding the differential treatment that can be a result of race. For these youth, they defined race based on the understanding that individuals who are different racial phenotypes can be treated differently and unequally, or in some manner that is not good. For example, when Leah, a 10-year-old 5th grader, was asked about race, she responded, "*Um…where a White person is being racist to a Black person*." Although Leah's response suggested that she may be confounding race with racism, her response also suggested a level of understanding that an individual's racial attributes may impact how they are treated. Jackson, an 11-year-old 6th grader, referenced the historical past when he described his thinking of race. Jackson stated, "*Race means like for me…it means like segregation. Um, no rights Uh…like…yeah, that's it*." Jackson's response also suggested that he understood the unequal treatment that comes with race but linked it to a period in history when issues of race were displayed more overtly. Both youth's responses highlight past and present examples of differential treatment that can result from race.

"I think of nothing": Having No Cognitive Schema for Understanding Race

Whereas skin tone was a racial marker of race for most youth, and a few thought of the differential treatment that resulted from an individual's race, there were two youth who showed they had no understanding of race or how to define it. For one youth, Brooklyn, an 11-year-old 6th grader, it was evident that race did not signify anything to her. This was highlighted in how she described race when prompted. She stated, "*I think of nothing*." Brooklyn's responses suggested that she likely has no cognitive schema for race or does not understand the construct. In addition to Brooklyn, Madison, a 10-year-old 5th grader, was unable to provide any description for race. When prompted, she indicated that she was "*not sure*" of what race is. Although different, both children's responses indicated that these two younger youth had no understanding of race or were unable to articulate their understanding.

"It doesn't really mean anything to me": Rejecting Race as Meaningful

In addition to describing their thinking about race, the youth also described the meaning of race to them. As many of the youth previously described race based on phenotype characteristics, their descriptions of what race meant to them implied that they understood the implications of what that meant for different groups, despite not articulating that in how they defined race. Despite this understanding that one's skin tone could result in unequal treatment, the youth rejected that it as being meaningful to them. For example, most of the youth (n=8) indicated that race had no meaning to them or that it was something that didn't matter. 11-year-old Ryan shared his belief that race was something that did not have much meaning when he stated, *"Race doesn't really mean anything to me. It's just the color of your skin. It doesn't matter*." Other youth responded similarly, highlighting their belief that race had no meaning or did not matter to them. However, the two older youth from the sample responded similarly but briefly expanded on what race meant to them. For instance, Mila, a 12-year-old 7th grader, expressed her belief that race had no meaning but also expressed her beliefs about equality. Mila stated, *"It [race] doesn't really mean anything to me um…you have to be treated equally regardless of race, so I feel like it doesn't really play a role in anything*." Mila's response reflected her belief of race being linked to equality and how one was to be treated. Jacob, a 12-year-old 7th grader, also responded that race had no meaning but also thought of what it meant for his identity. When asked what did race mean to him, Jacob said, "*Well, it's being like a Black male, kind of but hmm…I don't think it has no meaning.*" Jacob further explained that being able to be a Black male in his community was important to him. Mila and Jacob both agree that race has no meaning, but they also have thoughts about what it means for how they expect to be treated and their identity. In addition to rejecting race as meaningful, the responses

from Mila and Jacob also highlight a counternarrative to racism. Despite an understanding that individuals may be treated differently due to their skin tone, Mila and Jacob's responses show their belief that individuals should be treated equally and that one's skin tone should not matter in who you are and how you are treated.

Black Early Adolescent's Understanding of Racism

"Not including people just because of their skin tone": Understanding Racism Based on Interpersonal Experiences

In addition to youth describing race and what it meant to them, they also described their definitions of racism, which were illustrated through different levels of articulation. Some youth provided more sophisticated descriptions than others. The youth's understanding of racism was based on interpersonal experiences that they had likely observed or experienced, contributing to what they had come to understand about racism. This understanding was not representative of the structural aspects of racism. This was the case for most of the youth (9). Despite the various definitions used to describe racism, the youth's responses collectively revealed how they thought of interpersonal experiences related to racism. Furthermore, as they described these experiences, they thought of them in reference to how an individual is treated due to their skin tone, highlighting their understanding that skin tone has meaning, despite their rejection of this meaning when describing race. For example, 11-year-old Jackson described racism as "*Oh, racism? Um. So basically, i'll define it like basically un-including [not including] like, not including people just because of their skin tone*." Jackson's description of racism reflected his belief that racism was the act of excluding someone based on their skin tone. When 12-year-old Jacob was prompted about how he described racism, he responded in a similar manner by saying, "*Racism is like somebody doesn't like a certain race and they have like a type of conflict….*"

Similar to the other youth, 12-year-old Mila described racism as "*Um I feel like racism is like having like discriminating against the color or like ethnicity*."

Although some of the youth described racism as it relates to experiences of how one is treated based on skin tone, 11-year-old Brooklyn also referenced similar thoughts; however, for Brooklyn, her thinking appeared to be centered around how she felt people should act or be treated to not be racist. She stated, "*Umm treat people how you want to be treated or just wait to get to know them better and just don't think of the wrongs or underestimate how they look or how their skin color is*." Based on Brooklyn's response, it was evident that when she thought of the interpersonal experiences related to race or skin tone, she thought of what not to do when interacting with someone. The responses from these youth highlight their understanding of racism based on the experiences that individuals face due to their race or skin tone.

Whereas the youth above described their understanding of racism in a more articulate or sophisticated manner, two of the youth did so in a less articulate manner. For instance, when asked about racism, 11-year-old Ryan responded, "*It's not right*." 10-year-old Madison shared similar sentiments when she was asked to describe racism and responded, "*I think it's bad."* Although Ryan and Madison described racism in a less articulate manner than the other youth, they later discussed personal experiences, which revealed a similar understanding of racism based on interpersonal experiences due to one's race.

"Different Rights": Understanding the Moral and Legal Implications of Racism

In addition to providing descriptions of racism, youth also provided descriptions of what racism meant to them. Based on their responses, there was a level of thinking about the moral and legal implications of racism. As youth thought about this, they understood what it meant for them personally. This implied those youth understood individual racism and how it may impact

them and others who look like them. For instance, Jayden, reported that racism to him meant "*Different rights*." Jayden didn't further expand on what he meant by different rights, but he later described being conscious of his behavior so that others would not judge or view him as suspicious. When Mila was asked to describe what racism meant to her, she also mentioned inequalities that Black people face, particularly Black youth. Mila stated, "*It does [mean something], because I feel like a lot of black youth won't, be able to get like jobs or opportunities because of their race.*" In her response, Mila acknowledged the lack of opportunities that Black youth may face due to their race. Whereas Jayden and Mila described their meanings of racism in regard to the rights and opportunities that Black youth may face, Jacob described what it meant for him personally, hinting at its influence on him emotionally. Jacob stated,

> *Umm, racism does mean something to me, because when somebody like says something that's racist or something like that and it's my skin tone, then I'm gonna take it to the heart...it makes me feel sad… and mad because of one, a skin tone. You have problems with a skin tone…*

Jacob's description of what racism meant to him highlighted his emotional response to something that he would take personally. Similar to other youth, 10-year-old Kevin and 11-year-old Ryan also thought about what it meant for them personally. For instance, when Kevin was asked about his meaning of racism, he responded "*Um what racism means to me is probably people not want[ing] to be friends*." Kevin went on to state that racism to him also meant hate and "*people fighting because of their race*." For Ryan, he stated that to him, it meant, "*They [people] judge you by the color of your skin*." All of these responses from the youth highlight

how they understand racism and the moral implications that it may have for them morally, as they may be judged by others, and legally, as there are laws that may unequally impact them.

Despite many of the youth's descriptions of what racism meant for them morally and their rights, 2 of the younger youth (Brooklyn and Madison) could not respond when prompted about the meaning of racism to them, and 2 youth (Riley and Jackson) indicated that they felt it had no meaning to them.

"It's getting more serious": Change Due to Age and Experiences

As the youth discussed race and racism during the interviews, it was common for the 12-year-old youth in the sample to mention changes they had witnessed as they had gotten older. These changes were characterized as a change in awareness, self-acceptance, and conversations with parents. For instance, Jacob, a 7th grader, talked about changes that he had witnessed in his awareness and recalled "*I'm getting to realize like wow, like I'm getting to realize stuff that's being said about Black youth and stuff like that…it's like it's getting more serious*" Jacobs's statement reflected his belief that he had become more aware of potential stereotypes about Black youth as he had gotten older. Riley, a 6th grader, also talked about noticing changes as she got older. However, Riley's changes were related to how she thought about her identity and acceptance of self. Riley shared, "*Initially, I hated being Black. I wanted to be like the other kids, but now I have accepted being Black*." She later went on to describe how as she has gotten older, she has more conversations with her mother about racism, and these conversations are more open. Mila, a 7th grader, shared a similar observation as Riley, describing more serious conversations with her parents now that she has gotten older and become more knowledgeable.

In addition to the 12-year-olds bringing attention to changes they had observed in themselves, there was one younger youth who shared similar changes. 10-year-old Madison (5th

grade) also felt as if she had become more aware; however, it was due to her personal experiences with peers. In an exchange with Madison, she stated,

Madison: *Um, I think it's changed* [what it means to be a Black child]

Interviewer: *It has. How? In what way?*

Madison: *Um, it kinda changed because um people were kinda racist to me at school and stuff.*

Madison went on to confirm that she feels like this has been a change since she's gotten older, as these experiences weren't something she had to deal with when she was younger. These accounts reflect changes the youth have noticed in how they think about racism as they have gotten older.

Influence from Socializing Agents

"I tell my parents everything": Parent Conversations as Significant

The youth described having conversations with various individuals who contributed to their understanding of race and racism in some manner. However, parents were one of the primary sources of socialization for what they had come to understand about race and racism. This was highlighted in their discussion of conversations with their parents and the messages received from their parents. As the youth described their parents as socializing agents, they first described the significance of conversations about race and racism with their parents, followed by parental messages they had received. In order to understand how various socializing agents may have influenced the early adolescents' understanding of race and racism, youth were first asked about potential ways their parents had influenced them. The youth shared if they had conversations with their parents or not, what these conversations had been about, and what they learned from these conversations.

There was some variation when it came to the youth reflecting on conversations with their parents. When prompted about conversations that they have with their parents, 4 children reported that they did not have conversations about race or racism with their parents. Interestingly, these youth were all younger (10- or 11-years-old). However, despite 11-year-old Ryan's claim that he did not have conversations about race or racism with his parents, he implied otherwise later in the interview. Ryan recalled a specific instance in which he initiated the conversation when he went to his parents to discuss a racialized encounter with someone in his neighborhood. He also stated that he goes to his parents with questions about race or racism "*sometimes, if it's needed*."

Contrary to the 4 youth who reported not having had conversations with their parents about race and racism, the remaining 6 youth revealed having had some sort of conversation with their parents about race or racism. As the youth acknowledged having talked with their parents about race and racism, it was clear that they valued their parents and these conversations. For instance, when prompted about things they have talked about with people in their life that they felt were important for them to know and understand, many of them referenced conversations with their parents as important. The value that the youth placed on the conversations had with their parents was also evident based on their expressed willingness to share experiences with their parents. For instance, when asked about knowledge or experiences that they may have had that their parents were unaware of, many of the youth asserted that when it came to issues of race or racism, they always included their parents. For instance, 12-year-old Jacob stated, "*if something was to happen about racism, I would definitely tell my parents*." Ryan shared a similar belief when he responded, "*I tell my parents everything*." On the other hand, 12-year-old Riley revealed she had hidden an experience with a peer from her mom. However, she spoke of later

realizing the value of sharing and having conversations with her mom. Riley explained, "*I don't see any need of not telling her something about racism because if I tell her she'll explain it to me. She tells me everything about racism*."

Parent Messages. As the youth went on to describe conversations they have had with their parents about race and racism, they described various types of messages their parents provided. For some of them, these messages from their parents were about how to react and respond as a Black youth and how that required them to act. For instance, 10-year-old Jayden spoke of important guidance from his mother on what not to do. He explained, "*I think my mom said this but like I think she said it don't do certain things in public maybe…like don't try and steal stuff*." 12-year-old Jacob also recalled conversations with his parents. Although he could not remember intricate details from the conversations, he did remember his parents telling him, "*I remember them saying that I'm gonna grow up being a Black man in this type of world*." These messages from Jayden and Jacob's mother are clear attempts at having them understand that things will be different for them due to their race. 10-year-old Madison also expressed messages she had received from her parents, especially her mom. She recalled a message from her mom stating, "*don't let other people like control my feelings, because I'm the person who can control that*." Madison also recalled, "*my mom said that um Black people have to work um harder than White people*." For Madison's mom, it appeared that she was trying to have her understand that she will not be afforded the same privilege as others and as a result, will have to work harder. 10-year-old Kevin was another youth who described his mom's messages that informed him of what to expect as a Black child. However, Kevin described his mother's conversations as beginning by ensuring that he had an understanding of concepts around what racism was. Kevin said, "*My mom mostly has been talking to me about like do you know what*

racism is? And do you know how racism and how it how does it work?" As can be seen through what Kevin described of his mother's comment, she wanted to prepare him and make sure he was knowledgeable about what racism is.

In addition to the above messages, 4 youth reported their parents' conversations around egalitarian messages and colorblindness, as well as teaching them cultural pride and history. Riley's mother was one who talked to her about equality during their conversations. Although Riley remembered her mother talking to her about instances of Black individuals being mistreated, many conversations were around messages that reflected equality and egalitarianism. Riley stated, "*my mom really advises me that uh it really does not matter that you're Black or white, you're just important*." She later expressed her mother telling her "*never to treat the other person badly because they're White. She tells me to love them and to treat them fairly*." Unlike the conversations of the children above, for Riley, her mother emphasized a colorblind ideology and the importance of treating everyone the same.

Two of the youth also talked about discussing Black history with their parents, along with their parents encouraging them to have pride. For example, Jayden mentioned one specific conversation with his mother about the Underground Railroad. He stated "*we was talking 'bout the underground railroad and then we said something like Harriet Tubman…she killed all the people that didn't go to the underground railroad with her I think*" Jayden recalls, asking his mom questions of why during this conversation. It is evident that for Jayden, his mom offered him information around history, that may not have been accurate. Similar to Jayden, Mila shared having conversations with her parents about history, but referenced how important these conversations were to her. Mila explained, "*some of the like Black history, I feel like that's a*

pretty important aspect to know about it…because we need to know, like our back story and where we like empowered ourselves to this point."

"They just basically tell me the same thing that my parents tell me": Conversations with Extended Family

Although parents were the primary driver of messages that the youth were receiving from individuals in their environment, extended family members also played a role in contributing to their understanding of race and racism. As the youth described conversations with non-parental adults, over half of them indicated that they did not have conversations about race or racism with other adults. However, some of the youth did briefly discuss having conversations with extended family members. As they talked about conversations with extended family members, they briefly described the nature of these conversations.

Despite most of the youth suggesting that they did not have conversations with other adults who were not their parents, it was apparent that some youth (3) did engage in conversations about race and racism with non-parental adults who were extended family members. For example, Madison stated that she has had conversations with her grandmother and aunt. When prompted about the nature of these conversations, she stated, "*they just basically tell me the same thing that my parents tell me",* highlighting that these conversations were similar to the ones she has had with her parents. Jacob shared a similar experience as Madison, indicating that his grandfather has had conversations with him. He also talked about what these conversations were like, sharing the conversation "*was just about growing up to be a Black male. He was telling me about how it is and stuff*." As Jacob recalled a conversation with his grandfather, he shed light on messages his grandfather gave him, not just about being Black, but being a Black male. Another youth, Mila, also confirmed talking with her grandparents and

extended family but also talking with her older sister. Like the other youth, she described these conversations as very similar to those she had had with her parents. These recollections of conversations suggest that extended family plays a role in racial socialization conversations that mirror conversations the youth have with their parents.

"All we mostly do is just play": Lack of Conversations with Peers

As the children detailed the conversations with parents and extended family members, the interviews also revealed how the youth engaged with their peers around topics of race and racism. There were notable differences such that a majority of the youth (7) claimed that they did not talk to their peers about topics such as race and racism. Of the youth who indicated that they did not converse with their parents about race or racism, 4 of those also indicated they did not have conversations with their parents or other adults. Although the youth were not prompted to discuss why they didn't talk to their peers about race or racism, two of the youth willingly shared. 10-year-old Kevin stated, "*All we mostly do is just play around and have fun like normal kids*". On the other hand, 10-year-old Madison said, "*because it kind of gets a little bit uncomfortable for me because most of my friends are White*." In her statement, Madison acknowledged that she does not feel as if she can have conversations like this with her friends.

"We talk about how it's unfair": Same-Race Peers as a Community

Three of the children, all of whom were 12-years old, did discuss talking with their peers about race or racism. Based on what the children shared, they had these conversations with their Black peers. These conversations were primarily around the peer discrimination they had witnessed or experienced. Riley talked of how conversations with her peers about race or racism typically go by stating "*Maybe it's an instance when let's say in school a Black kid has been mistreated. So like when we talk, we talk of cases of Black kids being mistreated and why they*

are being mistreated. Stuff like that." Mila also mentioned talking with her peers about mistreatment. Echoing similar sentiments as Riley she stated,

> *We talk about how it's unfair because we don't get treated the same as other like, maybe different skin color kids. We don't really get treated equally just because of our race. We honestly just talk about social problems that go on around us and how we can make it better.*

Mila went on to describe how she and her peers also discuss how to navigate being discriminated against by an adult. Jacob shared similar experiences of talking with his friends about White peers who were mistreating Black students in what seemed to be a manner of informing each other about their peers' behavior. As the youth talked about these conversations with their peers, they did not go into detail about how these conversations had influenced them in any specific way. However, Riley did suggest that gaining Black friends and seeing them love themselves led her to accept her Blackness.

"She did not want to play with me": Peers Engaging in Discriminatory Behaviors

As the youth discussed the various socializing agents that had influenced their understanding of race and racism, not only did they talk about conversations they had had with others, but they also discussed racialized encounters with individuals. From the interviews, it became clear that although some of them did not talk with individuals about race or racism, they had racialized encounters. This was true for encounters the youth had with their peers, as they experienced their peers engaging in discriminatory behaviors. It is important to note that with the exception of one youth, the youth who discussed experiencing these racialized encounters among their peers, either as witnesses or as victims, were the older youth from the sample.

Riley talked about witnessing Black peers being mistreated by White peers at school but also talked of a personal experience in which she was mistreated by a White friend from her neighborhood. Riley stated, "*I was told by my friend that I'm Black, so I shouldn't be playing with her…She did not want to play with me…She told me I'm Black, so I shouldn't touch her toys*." As Riley described this experience, she clarified that this was a friend from her neighborhood with whom she had previously played. However, the friend no longer wanted to play with her because of her race. Madison echoed a similar experience of direct peer mistreatment from her White peers. She described an incident of being called a racial slur by one of her classmates. As she talked about racism, she recalled, "*I kind of experienced it myself…one of my classmates, he called me the n-word…And someone asked me if Adam and Eve were White, how do Black people exist?*" Unlike Riley and Madison, Jacob and Mila described talking with their peers about witnessing peers mistreat other peers due to their race. For instance, Jacob described how he and his Black peers witnessed a White peer engage in racist behaviors. He said, "*We just be like humph, he doing all that just cause he don't like Black people*." Jacob indicated that this was not a peer he had direct interactions with but a peer whose behavior he observed at school. Mila spoke of this briefly but mentioned she felt the mistreatment she experienced and observed came from other racial-ethnic minority peers, specifically her Latinx and Asian American peers. Madison's and others' experiences highlighted the types of racialized peer encounters that Black youth are having in the school context. These experiences that the youth mentioned also suggest that even when they observe mistreatment due to race, it is significant to them in some manner.

"He was cursing me out and called me the n-word": Non-Parental Adults Engaging in Discriminatory Behaviors

In addition to detailing racialized encounters with peers, two of the youth also mentioned having racialized encounters with White adults, during which the adults engaged in discriminatory behaviors. These adults' behavior marked the symbol of race with a negative value for the youth in such a way that they recognized and remembered the significance of the encounters. Although it was not common across all the youths' experiences, two of them did recall specific instances in which they had a racialized encounter with an adult. Ryan recalled an encounter in his neighborhood with a White neighbor. He stated,

> *So this guy, he was a White guy. I was like walking around in my neighborhood. He came up, I was walking around, and he was like, you don't belong here and all that. He was cursing me out and called me the n-word.*

Mila also reported experiencing what she felt was being treated differently because of her race, specifically when it came to her appearance. Mila recalled this incident with her teacher. She stated

> *So I was in the class, and it was me and my friends. It was me my friend [redacted], and my friend [redacted], and they were both of a lighter skin tone [White]. So we were in class, and the teacher it was during like Covid times, and she was like, oh, could you guys like, maybe pull down your mask because one of us happened to pull down our mask to like blow our nose or something and she was like oh I never see what you guys look like. And she kind of like, when the 2 other kids pulled down their mask, she was like telling them how like beautiful they were, and how like their facial features, and how she*

was, like you know complimenting them. But when I pulled my mask down. She was just like, oh.

As Mila described this incident, she explained that her two friends and the teacher were White. These experiences weren't common among the youth, but they highlighted the nature of some youth's racialized experiences with non-parental adults.

"I have seen things on social media": Media as Significant

During the interviews with the youth, they were also asked about what media content around race or racism they had seen and the source of that exposure. They discussed media in different forms which included media content they had viewed, witnessing police violence in the media, and the influence that media had on them. In asking the youth to talk about media, it became apparent that this was how they were most exposed to race-related content. Despite some of them indicating that they did not engage with their parents or other individuals to have conversations about race or racism, all of the youth described seeing race-related content via media, seemingly on a consistent basis.

As the youth talked about how they engaged with viewing racism through media, many sources of exposure were spoken of. This included television (TV), Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. However, based on the children's responses, it was clear that social media, particularly YouTube and TikTok, was a space where the children saw the most forms of racism. For instance, when Mila was prompted about what she had seen via media, she immediately responded, "*I have seen things on social media*." After social media, TV was another place that the children named as seeing forms of racism. Instagram was only used by two of the youth, one of whom indicated she had an account but rarely used it. From this, it seemed that the children had access to various social media sites and TV.

YouTube videos were among the most common forms of racialized content the youth reported seeing online. Many of them mentioned watching videos from the same YouTuber, who makes videos based on staged scenarios. One of the children, Kevin, stated, "*the topic is race, kindness, helpfulness, ending bullying, stuff like that*," indicating that the YouTuber makes videos on various topics. However, as they described the videos they had viewed on YouTube, most of the children acknowledged that the videos were in some way race related. For instance, Brooklyn described what she saw and stated, "*I see like these White friends bullying someone that's Black…or for someone, for culture, for no reason. And sometimes I see them beating each other up.*" Similar to Brooklyn, Leah also described the nature of the videos as racially motivated, stating "*The videos where it's like this one White person is being racist to this Black person because they're Black*." Leah continued to describe other videos she has viewed on YouTube, which are also centered around content that displays racist behaviors. At one point, Kevin describes a video he had seen from the YouTuber. However, this video involved an entitled White woman who attempted to take a Black man's dog away. As Kevin described the YouTube video, he characterized the White woman as a Karen. Jayden echoed similar sentiments as the other children, as he described seeing videos from this YouTuber, which displayed Black individuals being profiled by the police. However, unlike the other children, Jayden classified the videos as "not real" and for "entertainment."

In addition to YouTube, viewing race-related content on TikTok was also common among the youth. However, unlike the YouTube videos the children spoke of, the TikTok videos they spoke of appeared to showcase stereotypes about Black people and other racial-ethnic groups. Jacob spoke of this when he indicated that he had seen videos on TikTok making fun of Latinx people's food, stating, "*It was a joke about like their food and stuff*". When prompted

about social media, Madison also made it a point to mention that she had recently seen a video on TikTok that said something about Black people eating chicken. Although Jacob and Madison talked about videos on stereotypes of food, Mila spoke about the other factors that Black people are made fun of for. She responded by stating, "*they are random videos, but they'll like, maybe have, like a person maybe saying the n-word, or like commenting about our hair, our skin tones, or the way we what outfits we wear, what music we listen to, and just stuff like that*." These youth's descriptions on TikTok reflected their awareness of stereotypes made against Black people.

Viewing Police Violence Content via Media

Aside from viewing videos On YouTube and TikTok, many of the youth also commented on observing instances of police violence in the media. They referenced this within the context of the murder of George Floyd. However, unlike YouTube and TikTok, in which the children seemed to willingly engage in using those social media platforms and viewing the content that was presented to them, their exposure to police violence around George Floyd was not always one that was voluntary or willingly. For instance, Riley recalled two instances of witnessing police violence, and in both instances, her mom presented the footage to her. With George Floyd, her mother showed her the video of his murder on tv and suggested she was showing her because she was Black. Riley recalled another instance of seeing a Black individual being beaten by the police. This time, her mom showed her the video on her cell phone. Riley's reflection here made it evident that sometimes Black youth view things in the media because their parents force them to. This may have been her mother's method of teaching her about racism and the potential of experiencing police brutality. Jacob also spoke about watching the news and witnessing police

violence that led to a Black man's death. However, for Jacob, there potentially were no means for him to not become aware of the incident—it occurred in his neighborhood. Jacob stated,

> *When that boy got killed, so some happened… In the city that I live in. And he was, I think it was he was killed by uh the police. And his name was [redacted] and that just, that kinda just shook me and it's like, it was basically just like a wow like all just because of his skin tone.*

Here, Jacob recalled not only seeing the police violence on tv, but also hearing about it within the community. He described this as shocking to him, and went on to state that it led his parents to have conversations with him.

"It's just like preparing me for the real word": Influence of Media

Despite many of the youth giving detailed narratives about the instances of racism they had seen on TV and social media, they didn't always describe how it had influenced them. However, Jayden, perceived the content from social media and tv as what could happen to him, along with acknowledging racist behaviors as wrong. This was evident when he stated,

> *Like I took the knowledge of that stuff like what happens to the kids. Like this shouldn't be happening just cause their skin color and they're trying to do the right thing [referencing a video of a Black man being racially profiled by the police].*

Jacob shared a similar belief about how viewing police violence from the media and within his community had influenced him. Despite the shock that he experienced from observing the police violence he stated, "*I think that it's like just preparing me for like the real world*."

Whereas Jayden and Jacob briefly touched on media teaching them what could happen to individuals like them, Riley and Kevin mentioned media influencing them by teaching them about caring for each other and not treating someone unfairly because of their race. Brooklyn and

Leah shared similar feelings about how they had been influenced by media. They stated, "*treat people how you want to be treated*" and "*it's helped me to understand you can be any color you want to be, and you don't have to be racist to anybody that's a different color than you*." Mila was the only child who referenced positive content in media and its role as empowering. She stated,

> *Some of the videos on Tik Tok are like empowering to Black youth. So I usually watch those as well, and those have changed my views on certain things. …um in a pretty positive way um getting to feel comfortable in my own skin color, and my hair. Yeah being able to feel comfortable with that*.

Some of the other youth (3) mentioned disengaging from media, likely so it would not impact them negatively. For instance, when Brooklyn was prompted about things she had seen via media, she stated "*I mostly delete 'em*." Mila was also vocal about disengaging with racist media. She stated, "*I try not to watch things like that on Instagram, but sometimes they pop up*". Unlike Jayden and Jacob above, who felt as if certain media helped them understand what could happen to them and other Black kids, Brooklyn and Mila, felt the need to take a different approach and disengage from the media, particularly media that displayed racism. Whereas Brooklyn and Mila reported willingly disengaging from media, Madison also referenced disengaging but noted that it was by force, as her mother forced her to delete TikTok. Despite them engaging from media at times, the depth to which the youth discussed engaging with various sources of media and media content, is evidence of how prevalent it is for them.

Curiosity Around Race and Racism

Although this study did not aim specifically to examine youth's desire or curiosity to learn about race and racism, this was a common theme that emerged from discussions among

some (7) of the youth, which provides additional context to the study by highlighting that their understanding of race and racism is preceded by their curiosity to learn about these constructs Throughout the interviews with the youth, many of them described scenarios that confirmed their curiosity or desire to learn more about race. Although they navigated their curiosity differently, their responses reflected a desire to learn about racism. For example, Jackson, an 11-year-old 6th grader, talked about having a knowledge of racism. When prompted regarding how he obtained this knowledge, he shared his experience of being curious and turning to the internet when he had questions about racism. He stated,

> *I searched it up on Google…When I heard people first started talking about racism, which I don't remember when they first started talking about racism…I was like, 'what is racism?' And basically I searched up on Google. And basically I was like, [child gasps] what is this? Like, what is this? Like, why are they treating Black people this way?*

In this instance, Jackson detailed how he had recently become curious about racism after hearing others talk about it. When Jackson was promoted and asked who he heard discussing racism, he responded, "as I was watching tv."

Jacob, a 12-year-old 7th grader, shared an additional experience of developing a curiosity about racism, stating, "*I remember when I searched 'what is racism?' the meaning of it…searched and found things there, information about it*." When asked what led him to ask this question and turn to the internet, Jacob spoke of being in the hallway at school and overhearing a peer. He explained, "*I just heard somebody yell out 'oh she's a racist or 'she's racist,' or something like that*." Jacob followed up by describing this as an incident that happened some time ago and that he only found the definition of racism on the internet. In each of these

instances, the children had questions about racism, and decided to use the internet as a resource to seek answers.

Other youth also mentioned having questions, but unlike Jackson and Jacob, they went to their parents for answers. For instance, Mila recalled a memorable instance of going to her parents to seek answers to her questions. For her, these questions came after the murder of George Floyd. She described her experience by stating,

> *During the George Floyd situation…asking kind of why the cops would do this or just kind of asking questions on why and how we could stand up for these things so it won't happen again. I was asking questions before, but that's when I really started to you know ask a lot more serious questions.*

From each of these accounts, it was clear that, whether observed in the media, experiences from peers, or experiences of their own, they recalled having questions about racism. Furthermore, it was clear that when they did have questions, they were proactive in using various resources to seek answers. A few other youth indicated also having questions and going to their parents for answers; however, these youth stated they could not remember the context of what led to their questions.

Walking the Walk: Racial Socialization Observation Task Results

In order to examine how Black early adolescents' understanding of race and racism may be revealed when they are asked to discuss two potential discriminatory experiences, consideration was given to how they expressed navigating the scenarios during discussions with their parents. The findings detailed below describe common reactions that youth had to each scenario.

The School Counselor

During the RSOT, one of the scenarios that the children discussed with their parent was *The School Counselor* scenario. In this scenario, a Black youth is met with a, explicit discriminatory comment from a school counselor who has previously been identified as racist by other students. The school counselor in the scenario says to the youth, "I don't know why you're interested in being in that advanced camp. Kids like you don't belong in advanced academic camps–you won't be able to keep up." As the youth discussed with their parent, it was common that they youth identified the presence of racial bias, prejudice, discrimination, or racism in the scenario. In this school counselor scenario, all of the youth, except one, were able to identify this. However, for two of the children, Riley and Jackson, their parents prompted this reference to the racialized nature of the scenario. Although most of the students could identify the scenario within its racialized context, their way of doing so was very perfunctory. Many of them made statements such as "*she's being racist*" or "*the kids are right about her being racist*". Furthermore, the youth's description of the scenario in relation to racial bias, prejudice, discrimination, and racism was considered low, given they did not expand upon their identification of the scenario as being racialized.

As the youth discussed navigating the scenario, over half of them made no reference to the injustice or unfairness of the scenario. However, three of the youth (Jackson, Jacob, and Mila) did so at a low level, indicating that they made one brief statement to identify the scenario as unjust or unfair. For instance, Jackson and Jacob made statements to reflect their belief that the scenario was unfair. Jackson stated "*That's just not right*" and Jacob stated, "*She hurt my feelings. That's not right*." Mila, had a similar response, stating "*I wouldn't curse her out because that is disrespectful, but I would tell her that she is wrong*." Each of these responses

highlighted the children's ability to identify that what took place in The School Counselor scenario was something that was unfair or unjust. They believed that the counselor in the scenario was wrong for the comment that she made. No other children identified or made reference to the scenario being unfair or unjust.

When discussing *The School Counselor* scenario, some of the children also identified the stereotype present within the scenario. Jackson, Kevin, and Madison did such at a low level, meaning they were able to identify the presence of a stereotype but thought of it less broadly and on an individual basis. Other youth failed to identify stereotypes present within the scenario. Kevin's comment represented how he, Jackson, and Madison were able to identify the stereotype but thought of it at the individual level. For instance, Kevin was prompted by his mother on why the counselor would make such a comment and he responded, "*She's saying that since I'm a Black kid, I can't keep up with up with other people and I can't keep up with White kids*."

The Store Clerk

During the RSOT, children also discussed *The Store Clerk* with a parent, which involved a Black youth encountering a discriminatory comment from a store clerk. The store clerk commented to the youth in the scenario: "Keep an eye on that kid. You know those type of people like to steal." Considering the store clerk scenario, not all of the children could identify the presence of racism. In this scenario, which did not explicitly label the perpetrator (store clerk) as racist, Brooklyn, Leah, Riley, Jayden, and Ryan were all unable to identify the scenario within a racialized context. However, Jackson, Jacob, Kevin, Mila, and Madison were each able to identify the racialized context of the scenario without being prompted by their parents, suggesting that some of the older youth able to identify this compared to the younger youth. When talking with his mom about the scenario, Jackson immediately responded to his mother: "*I*

would want to leave the store because the store clerk might be racist." Jackson's mother followed up to this by questioning him on why the store clerk would be following him, and he responded once again with, "*Because he's racist*." Other youth made similar statements regarding their identification of the racialized context of the scenario. Furthermore, the children's description of the scenario in relation to racial bias, racial prejudice, racial discrimination, or racism was at a low level, given they did not expand beyond identification.

Similar to the school counselor scenario, some of the children described the scenario as unfair or something that was wrong. Leah and Mila, did this at a low level, indicating their belief that the store clerk following them and making such a comment was wrong. Mila, described the scenario and stated, "*That's bad; I just feel like that's rude*." Leah shared a similar belief when she said to her mother, "*That wasn't very nice*." Jackson held similar thoughts but at a moderate level, indicating that he expanded on his belief that the scenario was unjust or unfair. While discussing the scenario with his mom, he stated, "*Why would you follow us around when we have a right to shop in that store? I was a good boy in the store, and the store clerk started it*." Jacobs, first sentence is evidence that he believes the store clerk in the scenario would be wrong for following him around. He makes it clear that he believes he has a right to be in the store.

As the children discussed the store clerk scenario, many of them identified the stereotype that was present in the scenario. At a low (Jackson, Madison), moderate (Brooklyn, Leah, Riley, Jacob), and high (Kevin, Mila) level, most of the children acknowledged the presence of a stereotype in the scenario. For Jackson and Madison, they made comments which suggested they were aware that stereotyping was taking place. These comments acknowledge that a stereotype was present, but the children thought of it broadly and on an individual basis. For instance, Madison stated, "*I don't steal. I would never steal because I would get in trouble if my mom*

found out that I stole. I've never stolen anything in my life." For the youth who referenced the stereotype at moderate levels, they were able to identify the stereotype and acknowledge that it applied to their racial group. Riley, for instance, commented "*I would feel bad because everyone does not steal. It's not because I'm Black I'll steal*." Riley's comment makes it clear that she is aware of the stereotype that Black people steal. Kevin also acknowledged the stereotype within the scenario but goes on to suggest that it is not true. He responded to his mom, "*That's offensive to people. Because they're saying like that kind or that race likes to steal. I would be offended because he said our kind likes to steal, but that's not true.*" Whereas Kevin, refutes the claim that Black people steal, Mila comments and makes it clear that because of this stereotype, she must also be aware of her actions. Mila explained, "*You know those types of people like to steal. What do they mean by that? You mean Black people" If I run out the store, then they'll think I'm suspicious. If they did it to me, they did it to somebody else. I feel like I can't be the only one they follow.*" Kevin and Mila's comments prove they are aware of stereotypes about their racial group.

Although most of the children referenced the presence of a stereotype from the scenario, some also referenced equality at a low level (Riley and Madison), highlighting their reference to egalitarian beliefs. These children felt that they should be treated equally or just as White people. Riley said to her mom, "*It's bad to judge a book by its cover. We being Black, we're just the same as being White.*" Madison shared similar beliefs when she said to her mom, "*You shouldn't judge people off the way that they look.*" Both children's statements reflect their thinking that they should be treated equally.

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

Guided by Spencer's Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST; 1995), the current study aimed to explore a) Black early adolescents' understanding of race and racism, given the current social context of injustice towards Black people in the U.S., b) how various socializing agents may influence Black early adolescents' understanding of race and racism, and c) how Black early adolescents' understanding of race and racism may be revealed when faced with potential discriminatory experiences. Findings from this study suggest that when it comes to Black early adolescents' understanding of race and racism, they view phenotype characteristics such as skin tone as a marker of race, reject it as meaningful, and understand racism based on the interpersonal experiences of Black individuals and themselves. As for how socializing agents contributed to this understanding, findings highlighted the significant role of various socializing in the youth's understanding of race and racism. Last, findings revealed differences in the youth's reactions to potential discriminatory experiences, which mapped onto how the youth described their understanding of race and racism. Even more importantly, the findings from this study provided consistent evidence of age differences, which showcases the importance of the early adolescence developmental period. Altogether, the findings highlight Spencer's PVEST (1995) as an appropriate framework for exploring Black early adolescents by taking into consideration risk and protective factors, as well as the role of context. This discussion will provide an overview of the study findings and how they relate to existing literature. As study findings are discussed, the implications of these findings will also be brought to light. Findings from the CRUI will be discussed first, followed by findings from the RSOT. Finally, an integrative discussion will address how findings from the CRUI and RSOT relate. Strengths, limitations, and future directions will also be discussed.

Discussion of Findings From CRUI

Black Children's Understanding of Race and Racism

The first research question for the current study centered around exploring Black early adolescents' understanding of race and racism, given the current social context of injustice towards Black people in the United States. Findings from the CRUI with the youth revealed that they think about race and racism as two separate constructs. When it came to race, there was an overarching association of skin tone as a signifier of race. The youth understood race to be solely a category that described the color of one's skin and rejected it as meaningful to them personally. This finding is consistent with previous research that has suggested that younger children's understanding of race is based on phenotype characteristics such as skin tone (Quintana, 2008). This finding is also representative of discussions they may have with their parents about race, based on where they are developmentally. Given that research has suggested that Black parents limit the type of racial socialization messages they provide to their younger children, it seems fitting for the youth's parents to transmit egalitarian (messages that emphasize equality; Lesane-Brown, 2006) and colorblind messages (messages that deemphasize the significance of race or avoid race; Hughes et al., 2008), given the youths' age. As a result, parents have likely communicated similar messages to their early adolescents, leading them to deemphasize race. Ultimately, these findings reveal that the youth do not yet fully understand the privilege and power that can come with race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

The youth understood race as a reference to skin color, rejected that it had any significance and believed it did not matter; in addition, they understood racism at the interpersonal or individual level, based on the experiences of Black indivudals. Individual racism is considered discriminatory practices that are enacted on individuals due to their racial group,

thus denying them opportunities (Jones, 1997). As they understood racism to be interpersonal, they considered how it impacted relationships and interactions, especially their own. Given the youth's understanding of race as an individual's skin tone and racism as the potential for an individual to be mistreated because of their skin tone, it was evident that they understood the connection between race and racism. Although they understood this connection and what it means at the individual level, they do not yet understand racism at the structural level (societal, institutional, or governmental policies and practices that seek to oppress a group of individuals due to their race; Jones, 1997).

Together, findings on how the youth understood race and racism are in alignment with where they are developmentally as early adolescents. As early adolescents, they are beginning to transition from concrete to abstract thinking (Piaget, 1970). This is apparent as the youth are beginning to think about race more abstractly, given their understanding of individual racism and the implications it has for them personally. However, their thinking about race is evidence that they are still thinking concretely in some ways. They have not yet reached full abstract thinking. Furthermore, findings support the transition that takes place during early adolescence, given the age differences among the youth in the sample. As the younger youth rejected race as meaningful, the older youth, Jacob and Mila, have begun to understand that race is not just Black and White but has implications for them personally. These findings also highlight Spencer's PVEST (1995), which suggests that youth's coping responses may differ and may be influenced by individual-level factors. In this study, given their age and likely their cognitive maturity, the older youth had a greater understanding of race and racism.

Influence of Socializing Agents

The second research question explored how various socializing agents may contribute to Black early adolescents' understanding of race and racism. Findings from the CRUI revealed the significance of different socializing agents in contributing to the youth's understanding of race and racism. Findings also revealed some age-specific differences among the youth when it came to the significance of peers.

When it came to the youth describing conversations about race and racism that they had had, parents were a salient socializing agent for the youth; however, this was not the case for the younger youth. As the youth described the conversations and specific messages their parents had provided, it was apparent that these conversations exemplified the vast existing research examining Black parents' racial socialization messages. The messages that the youth described were identical to those previously identified from racial socialization research. They understood these messages as teaching them how to react and respond to discrimination and racism as Black youth (preparation for bias; preparing youth for discrimination and teaching how to cope), to be knowledgeable and have pride in their history (cultural socialization; teaching cultural values, traditions, history, and pride in self), to treat everyone equally (egalitarian messages; emphasize equality among racial groups), and at times even deemphasized race as being significant (colorblind messages; deemphasize the significance of race or avoid race; Hughes et al., 2008) (Hughes et al., 2008; Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2021). Although it typically may be considered somewhat uncommon for younger youth to receive preparation for bias messages (Umaña-Taylor & Hill, 2021), given these youth are early adolescents whose way of thinking is changing, their parents' messages suggest that they may be aware of this shift beginning in cognitive abilities and as a result seem to have begun to shift their messages. Despite the different types of

messages, racial socialization from parents teaches youth an understanding of race and racism and provides the tools to cope with discrimination and navigate a racialized society (Coard et al., 2007; Coard & Sellers, 2005), and the youth understood this based on how they discussed what the messages had taught them about race and racism and how to act as a Black adolescent.

Although parents were salient and a primary socializing agent to the messages the youth received, which influenced their understanding of race and racism, findings suggested that extended family members were also influential. The youth identified extended family members such as grandparents, aunts, or uncles as individuals they also had conversations with about race and racism. These youth viewed these conversations as being very similar to conversations with parents, which emphasizes the significant positive role of extended family, especially in Black families. Black youth are more likely to live with an extended relative (Cross, 2018), and historically, Black families have been multigenerational families who utilize extended family when it comes to child-rearing (Anderson et al., 2022a). This inclusion of extended family in child-rearing practices is reflected by the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child." As parents engage in the racial socialization process, extended family members feel comfortable enough to step in and do the same.

When it came to peers contributing to the youth's understanding of race and racism, peers were salient to the older youth. As the youth described conversations about race and racism with their peers, their comments provided insight into the value that youth place on peer relationships, as they grow older. These peer relationships are crucial to the youth's development during the early adolescent stage. In addition to this, peer relationships often become more important for youth during this stage of development because of the influence that peers have on one another (Brown & Larson, 2009). As adolescents are likely to choose peer groups who share similar

feelings about their racial group (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011; Hamm, 2017), adolescents may be expected to choose peers who are the same race, which was the case for the older youth in the study. These youth viewed their same-race peers as a source of community, whom they felt they could consult to warn each other about racist peers, seek advice on coping with discrimination and uplift one another to have racial pride. From a developmental perspective, these youth are becoming more cognitively mature in their understanding of race and racism. They witness it, experience it, and have begun to understand that it has implications for them. This is a shared experience for Black youth, and at this age, the youth in this study have identified value in talking to their peers about issues of race and racism, unlike the younger youth who did not see the relevance of having such discussions with peers. As a result, parents are no longer the only individuals influencing how they make meaning and understand race and racism.

Despite conversations with peers being common among the older youth, a few youth had also had negative racialized encounters with their peers and non-parental adults. These individuals had engaged in discriminatory behaviors towards the youth. These encounters involved the youth being excluded, judged, or verbally victimized for their race and signaled to them the marginalization or negative value that comes with race, specifically being Black. These findings that detailed the negative racialized experiences that the youth had experienced were representative of the risk factors and net stress engagement that is highlighted in Spencer's PVEST (1995). Research has indicated that such encounters can lead to challenges for youth and influence their identity and how they think about race and racism (Anderson et al., 2021).

As the youth described their engagement with media, findings revealed just how significant media was to youth when it came to viewing racialized content. Media and technology usage has increased (Kruse et al., 2017), especially for Black youth (Adams-Bass et

al., 2014), and this was evident for the youth in the current study based on their in-depth descriptions of what they had viewed on various media platforms. As they viewed videos of various racialized content, often negative racial encounters or stereotypes about Black people, the youth learned from what they have viewed via media and used it, along with other socializing agents, to understand race and racism, especially racism. For younger youth who reported not having conversations about race or racism with their parents, media served as a method of education where discussions with their parents fell short. Furthermore, the youth also experienced the continued witnessing of racialized violence through instances of police brutality, which has become increasingly common for adolescents today (Anderson et al., 2022a). However, youth often did not understand why these instances had occurred. This was the catalyst that led some youth to engage in discussions with their parents about racism. This implies that although media content can be viewed as protective by teaching youth about race and racism, it can also leave youth confused and with questions (Anderson et al., 2022a). However, the youth appeared to willingly view racialized content in the media frequently and allowed it to influence how they understood racism especially. Ultimately, the emphasis that the youth placed on media and the wide range of racialized content that they had viewed through media spoke to the current socio-political context, around increased issues of racism and police brutality.

Altogether, findings from the CRUI highlighted how Black early adolescents' understand race and racism, as well as the many socializing agents that influence this understanding. For the youth in the current study's sample, it was evident that parents play a large role in influencing what they understand about race and racism, as well as peers, when they begin to get older. This influence of parents, peers, and even extended family had positively influenced the youth by providing them with individuals to communicate with about race and racism, as well as how to

navigate society as a Black youth. Despite the positive influence that parents, extended family, and peers had on the youth's understanding of race and racism, it was also evident that peers and non-parental adults had the potential to serve as a risk to the youth by exposing them to stressful racialized encounters. In addition to this, findings also highlighted the role that media, specifically social media, may play as a protective and risk factor. This is especially relevant in the current social context of the U.S. given the increased awareness and conversations around race-related issues and the increased display of these issues in the media. The youth's descriptions suggest that even when parents or other individuals may not influence their understanding of race and racism, the media will. The role that these various socializing agents play in youth's understanding of race and racism is reflective of key aspects of Spencer's PVEST (1995), including the role of protective and risk factors. Additionally, as the current study is guided by PVEST, findings also highlighted the importance of using frameworks such as PVEST, which considers contextual factors in a way that previous theories and frameworks did not.

Discussion of Findings from RSOT

The third research question focused on exploring how indicators of Black youth's understanding of race and racism may be revealed when they are asked to discuss potentially discriminatory experiences with their parent. Observing and rating the children's reactions to the potential discriminatory experiences revealed developmental differences because of age in how they reacted to the different scenarios, which has further implications for how the youth understand racism. When it came to *The School Counselor* scenario, youth overwhelmingly identified the presence of explicit racial bias, prejudice, discrimination, or racism in the scenario, by labeling the counselor in the scenario as racist. This implied that all the youth have some

understanding of racism, specifically racism that is easily identifiable. Observing *The Store Clerk* scenario revealed age differences in how the youth reacted, potentially reflecting their developmental stage, and understanding of racism. Older youth had a more nuanced understanding of racism, such that they were also able to identify the presence of racial bias, prejudice, discrimination, or racism within *The Store Clerk* scenario. Some younger youths were unable to identify the racialized context of the scenario, given their age and developmental thinking. However, despite being unable to identify the implicit racialized context of *The Store Clerk* scenario, they were able to identify and reference the presence of a racial stereotype within the scenario. This implied that these youth do not fully understand racism, given their younger age. They may or may not view an experience such as *The Store Clerk* scenario as racist. Furthermore, their ability to identify the racial stereotype but not the racialized context of the scenario hints at the idea that being able to identify stereotypes is a precursor to understanding racism. However, these youth do not yet understand the depth and salience of racism, unlike older youth who could identify the presence of racism in the scenario and the presence of a stereotype.

Integrative Discussion

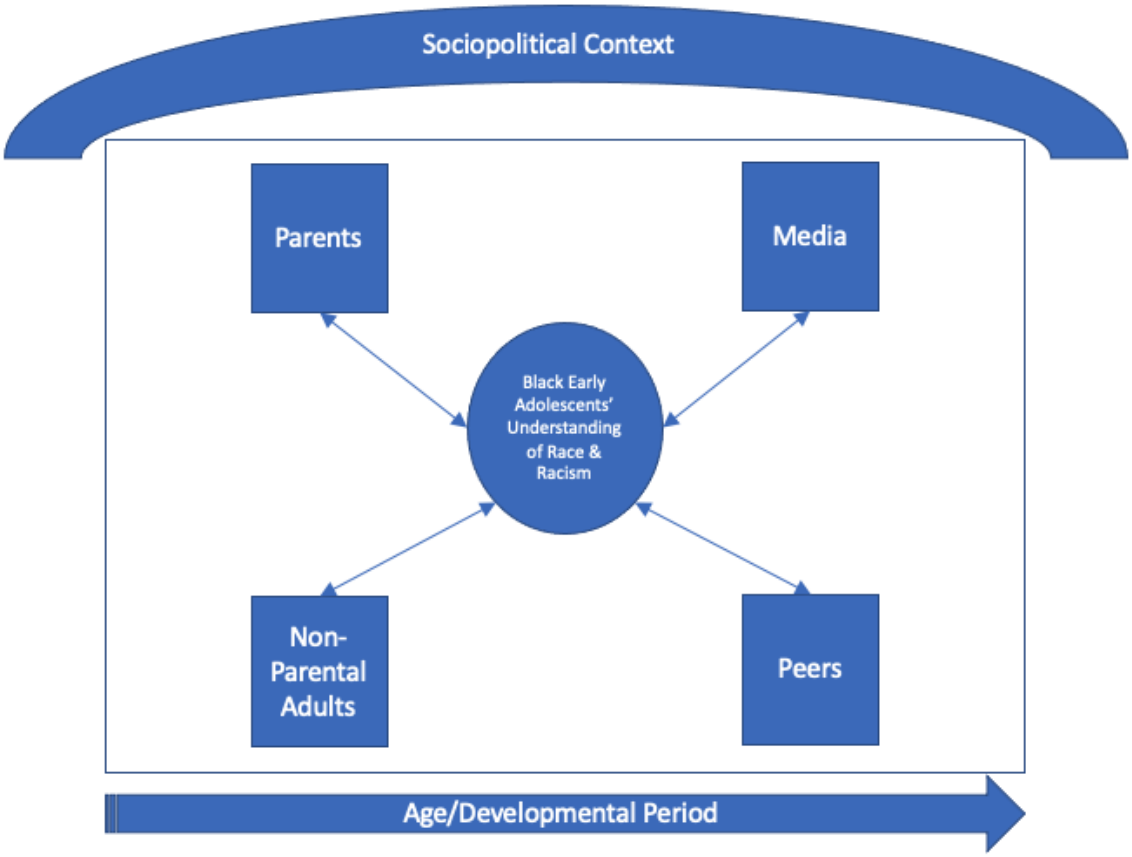
Overall findings from the CRUI and the RSOT are in alignment, such that findings from the RSOT map onto findings from the CRUI. This is specific to findings that emphasize age or development's role in youth's understanding of race and racism. More specifically, findings from the CRUI highlighted how older youth understood race and interpersonal racism as separate constructs and the implications of both. Additionally, with the RSOT, older youth were also able to identify the presence of racism in both scenarios. These findings were consistent across both findings. However, findings from the CRUI highlighted that younger youth understood race,

interpersonal racism, and the connection between them but did not understand the significance of race. Findings were somewhat similar for the RSOT, as younger youth had difficulty understanding racism in the context of a hypothetical scenario. This overlap is evidence of why it is important to distinguish the difference between race and racism because youth may verbally express having an understanding, yet their understanding differs when they need to put it to use. The overlap in findings also highlights the older youth as being more cognitively mature, as they have begun to think more critically about their social world and interactions. Furthermore, the youth's many reactions to the RSOT were also in alignment with the messages the youth described receiving during the CRUI. This emphasized the significance of various socializing agents to youth's understanding of race.

Overall, the current study's findings led to the development of the conceptual model found in *Figure 1*, which may be useful for examining Black youth's racial understanding. At the center of this model is the central concept that this study aimed to explore, Black early adolescents' understanding of race and racism. Surrounding this central construct are four circles representing the various socializing agents contributing to youth's understanding of race and racism. Findings from the current study highlighted that each of these socializing agents is salient to youth as they are developing an understanding of race and racism. This model also includes age and socio-political context as constructs, given findings from the current study place a large emphasis on age or developmental period as influencing youth's understanding of race and racism. The socio-political context was included due to the current socio-political context's role on the youth's engagement with media and racialized content from the media. Based on findings from the current study, this conceptual model aims to offer insight into how youth's

understanding of race and racism may be examined in a manner that considers various socializers.

Figure 1. Model for Studying Black Early Adolescents' Understanding of Race and Racism



Strengths

Three major strengths of the current study are the exploration of the early adolescent developmental period, the framework used to guide the study, and the methodological approach taken. Little research has examined Black youth's understanding of race and racism during the early adolescent period. Given how challenging this phase can be for Black youth due to the many changes that occur, it is an important developmental phase to study. The second strength of the current study is the framework used. Scholars have taken various theoretical approaches to study children's knowledge and understanding of race and racism. However, these approaches

have not always considered the contextual factors that influence children's developmental processes. Using a framework that combines a phenomenological perspective with an ecological perspective allows for examining children's racial understanding within context. The third strength of the study is the methodological approach. Few studies have utilized interview and observational approaches to explore Black youth's understanding of race and racism. Much of the previous research has utilized forced-choice tasks and survey data to capture children's understanding of race. However, the current study's use of interviews allowed children to describe their understanding of race and racism from their perspective without pre-determined meanings from other tasks. Additionally, the current study's use of an observational task allowed for this understanding to then be observed in order to explore how it may be displayed when navigating race-related experiences.

Limitations

Although the current study provided much insight into Black children's understanding of race and racism, there were some limitations. One limitation of the current study was the small sample size. Given the small sample size, findings are not generalizable to all Black youth. Another limitation of the current study was the failure to include a category such as colorblind ideology in the ratings of the RSOT. Some of the children described receiving colorblind messages from their parents, which was also reflected in their reaction to the RSOT scenarios. However, it was not captured because it was not included as a category that was rated. Another limitation was the use of the RSOT to examine how the youth's understanding of race and racism may be displayed when asked to navigate potential discrimination experiences. Although this task provided insightful information, the parent-child discussions were highly parent-driven, leaving some of the youth little opportunities to express their reactions. As a result, it may have

been more appropriate to observe the children having similar conversations with their peers. One additional limitation of the current study was the presence of some parents during the adolescents' interviews. Many of the parents chose to be present and, at times, interjected. It is possible that their presence had the potential to influence how much and what the youth shared during the interviews.

Implication and Future Directions

Findings from the current study provided insightful information into how Black early adolescents understand race and racism and how various socializing agents influence this understanding. Given that little research has explored this developmental period, the findings have various implications for parents and interventionists. As Black parents navigate providing racial socialization messages to their youth, they need to know what youth already know, when might be an optimal developmental period to transmit messages, and how other factors are influencing youth's racial understanding. First, these findings give parents insight into the developmental process of developing racial understanding, especially during early adolescence. Additionally, findings also alert parents to be cognizant of what youth are watching in the media. This allows parents to monitor youth, discern what they have access to, and use their judgment around when to use the media to teach lessons about race and racism. Furthermore, findings also inform parents that peer groups become more salient as youth approach age 12 and begin to influence youth's developing understanding of race and racism. These implications for parents may also be relevant to interventionists, who develop interventions that assist parents in how to racially socialize their youth. They allow for the development of an intervention that can be developmentally appropriate.

As scholars continue to explore Black youth's understanding of race and racism, the socializing agents that contribute to this understanding, and the ways in which this understanding may be revealed when navigating discrimination experiences, they should continue to use frameworks such as PVEST. These frameworks allow for contextual and meaning-making processes to be considered in development. Although the youth in the current study appeared to value conversations with their parents, future work should further explore how children view conversations with their parents, as interviews with parents revealed discrepancies around what parent-child dyads are discussing. Further expanding on the role of parents, future work should also consider how parents perceive their children's understanding of these constructs.

Conclusion

The goal of the current study was to explore Black youth's understanding of race and racism and how various socializing agents may contribute to this understanding. In addition to this, the current study also aimed to explore how indicators of youth's understanding of race and racism may appear when they are asked to navigate potentially discriminatory experiences – through an observational task. Overall, findings from the study revealed youth's various ways of understanding race and racism and the age differences that are apparent, along with how different socializing agents contribute to this understanding, especially media. Findings from the study also revealed that youth's understanding of race and racism maps onto how they react to potential discrimination experiences. These findings add to the limited literature on Black early adolescents' racial understanding and extend the literature regarding socialization processes – both in terms of the people, contexts, and messages that youth receive during these processes.

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APPENDIX A: CHILD RACIAL UNDERSTANDING INTERVIEW

1. How do you define race? What does race mean to you?
2. How do you define racism? What does racism mean to you?
3. What does it mean to you be a Black youth? Has this changed over time?
4. Are there things about your race that you are proud of? Are there things about your race that you are not proud of?
5. Do you talk to… o Parents about race and/or racism? If yes, what have your parents said to you? How has this contributed to what you know and understand about race/racism? o Friends/peers about race/racism? If yes, what do you and your peers talk about? How has this contributed to what you know and understand about race/racism? o Other individuals about race/racism? If yes, what have you talked about? How has this contributed to what you know and understand about race/racism?
6. What are some things you have seen or heard about race/racism in other places, such as television and social media? How has this contributed to what you know and understand about race/racism?
7. What are some things you have talked about with the people in your life that you think is important for you to know and understand?
8. What are some things that you know about race/racism or experiences that you may have had with race/racism that your parents are unaware of?
9. Can you share the first time or anytime when you asked your parents a question about race/racism or brought it up to them? Have the questions you ask your parents changed as you have gotten older? How?