

ABSTRACT

COFIELD-POOLE, BRITTNEY MARIE. Exploring the Role of Perceptions of Environment, and Individual Experiences in Predicting Civic Engagement among Black Youth. (Under the direction of Dr. Craig (Kwesi) C. Brookins.)

The present study is a secondary analysis of the Black Youth Project dataset (Cohen, 2005), a national data collection effort designed to capture a snapshot of “the ideas, attitudes, decision making, and lived experiences of black youth, especially as it relates to their political and civic engagement” (blackyouthproject.com). The current research intended to focus primarily on the civic behaviors of Black youth. The sample was comprised of 236 Black youth between the ages of 15-25. Correlational and logistic regression analyses were conducted to determine the relationship among demographic characteristics, perceptions of environment and discrimination, racial attitudes, experience with criminal justice, and youth civic activity. Findings revealed that age and experience with personal discrimination significantly predicted civic engagement as defined by political discussions with family, community service participation, and membership within an organized social group. These results support the role of environmental context in understanding and promoting civic behavior. Finally, this study promotes the need for further research on understanding social involvement among Black youth, the value of a mixed methods approach in capturing this information, and provides insight for civic minded practitioners seeking to engage this population in a meaningful way.

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Exploring the Role of Perceptions of Environment, and Individual Experiences in Predicting
Civic Engagement among Black Youth

by
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DEDICATION

“I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves or figments of their imagination, indeed, everything and anything except me.”

— Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

This investigation is dedicated to Black youth striving to be seen, heard, and lifted forward.

BIOGRAPHY

Brittney M. Cofield-Poole was born in San Antonio, Texas at Lackland Air Force Base before moving to Cleveland, Ohio where she spent the majority of her childhood raised by a supportive and inspirational single mother. Personal and vicarious life experiences led her on the path toward an interest in Community Psychology. Brittney attended Loyola University Chicago where she obtained an undergraduate degree in Psychology, before continuing on to North Carolina State University in Raleigh, North Carolina to pursue a PhD in Psychology in the Public Interest. Her current research interests include youth civic engagement, community development, and Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR).

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The current generations of youth are faced with a breadth of expectations and challenges from today's society. "As always it is youth's task to make history in the future and society's obligation to provide youth with sufficient resources and an honest basis for hope in carrying out this task" (Youniss et al., 2002). However, youth are usually among the least heard and often perceived by adults as individuals uninterested in shaping the world around them. Fortunately, this perception is not a universal truth for all young people. These kinds of misconceptions have prompted a need for researchers to further explore how youth contribute to their communities. Especially since these formative years are a period of time where young people are immersed in self exploration, construct their identities, and begin sorting out their place within the larger social sphere (Flanagan et al., 2009). As citizens youth should be treated as active participants capable of making positive contributions within their environment.

Civic engagement can serve as a dynamic measure of how youth identify themselves as citizens. Defining this concept within a specific context is complex since there is no one universal definition. Adler & Goggin (2005) suggest that defining civic engagement is largely dependent on the interests and perceptions of the researcher and their goals. Often civic engagement can encompass an array of elements inclusive of but not limited to collective action, active citizenship, political involvement and social change (Adler Goggin, 2005). Being "civic minded" involves being "knowledgeable and attitudinally supportive of

the political system” whereas being “civically engaged” is defined by active involvement (Sanchez-Jankowski, 2002). While these concepts are mutually supportive of sociopolitical behavior for youth they are not always connected.

In addition to acknowledging youth involvement in civil society there is also a need to examine diversity within civic engagement. According to Watts and colleagues (2007), “The structural barriers and uneven opportunities for different groups of youth to participate in the civic and political process raise questions about the discrepancy between ideal and real-world democracy.” (p. 781). In regards to young people of color these discrepancies could manifest themselves in the form of limited social networks, lack of relatable leaders and community driven organizations. It is also important to note that youth are not one large group void of diversity in personal and collective experiences (Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Specifically for Black youth, understanding their choice to become civically engaged should involve examining contextual factors like discrimination (Seaton et al., 2006; and Brody et al., 2006) environment (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; and Kang & Kwak 2003) and racial identity (Chong & Rogers, 2005; and Sanchez-Jankowski, 2002).

Given that the definition of civic engagement is multi-dimensional it can also be assumed that the outcomes related to participation are equally diverse. Previous research on the subject has also suggested there are several benefits of civic engagement which can include “intangible benefits such as pride, satisfaction and accomplishment” (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2012). Particularly for youth, these benefits could also potentially be linked to “powerful educational, sociopolitical, and psychosocial benefits” (Watts et al., 2003, p. 193)

Currently there is a dearth of research on empirical links between the aforementioned experiences and civic engagement. More importantly this gap is largely notable in scholarship regarding minority youth. In order to properly address this hypothesized relation between individual level dynamics and civic engagement one must also take into account the factors that have the potential to both encourage youth as well as dissuade them from becoming actively engaged. The foundation for the current research literature review will be pulled from scholarship that is centered on youth personal experience, social and environmental characteristics, civic engagement, and other factors that may impact civic engagement among. This review will provide a comprehensive outline of previous research on social capital, social networks, and their relation with civic engagement. In addition, in order to address the gaps in research regarding Black youth civic engagement the research will conduct a thorough exploration of demographic factors, neighborhood contexts and perceptions of discrimination within the Black community. Finally the overview will conclude with a discussion on the association between minority racial identity and the development of civic worldview. Overall this review seeks to provide an in-depth exploration of collective and personal factors that may influence Black and their decision to be civically engaged. The current study will take a more extensive look at a portion of these theoretical factors through an examination of extant data (Cohen, 2005) focused on understanding the social and political behaviors of Black youth. For the purposes of the current study civic engagement will be inclusive of both political and collective community related activities. The researcher argues that both individual and community level factors are related to and will significantly predict civic engagement among Black youth.

Literature Review

Ecology of Civic Engagement. In order to understand the relation among individual, environment and youth civic engagement it is necessary to consider the developmental psychology perspective. Adolescent development is a process characterized by a diverse set of influences on the individual that are both explicit and implicit. Traditional developmental psychology has centered its focus on analyzing the individual growth experience. However over time developmental theorists have become more integrative in their research on this topic. More contemporary approaches suggest that external experiences may also contribute to the variation of individual outcomes. Where adolescence is an interactive process, and as individuals mature they are being influenced from multiple facets of their social environment. In turn youth also contribute to and help to shape that environment as well. One theoretical framework that supports this notion of interactive youth development is the experimental ecological approach to human development introduced by Bronfenbrenner (1977). In this active-interaction perspective the child is the center of focus and research supporting strives to understand how interconnected systems shape their development. According to Bronfenbrenner (1977) the development process is “affected by relations obtaining within and between these immediate settings, as well as the larger social contexts, both formal and informal, in which the settings are embedded” (p. 514). Relations within and between these levels occur in different systems level. These systems were identified as the microsystem (family), mesosystem (home and school interaction), exosystem (media), and macrosystem (cultural beliefs) (Bronfenbrenner 1977). A young individual’s psychological, physical, and social growth is tied into these systemic interactions.

A part from general development the social ecological theory has also been used to explore specific behavior among youth. For example, Farmer (2006) also supported the idea of a multi-level analysis of pro-social behaviors in regards to civic engagement among Black youth. Farmer (2006) identified this framework as the ecology of civic engagement for African Americans. Similar to the original theory this perspective supports the idea that behavior is greatly impacted on multiple levels. Farmer (2006) emphasizes the impact of personal characteristics related to social capital and stake in the community (micro level). Second, collective cooperation and social networks (mezzo level) as they relate to micro level factors. Finally, organizational institutions and social organizational involvement (macro level) were also highlighted as key influencers on civic engagement among black youth (Farmer, 2006). In conclusion, the social ecological theory implies that a multitude of factors contribute to the shaping young people's individual and collective worldview. Getting youth involved in community building, service, and political activities are the best ways that they can be taught to properly understand how to navigate their social networks.

Youth Socio-Political Development. Watts & Flanagan (2007) also explored this multi-level perspective within the context of youth civic engagement. Through their youth sociopolitical development (SPD) model they focused on positive youth development, community centered youth development, and "calls for progressive social change" (Watts, Williams & Jagers 2003). They proposed that sociopolitical engagement can serve as a conduit for positive development, and as a protective factor for youth development in community settings (Watts & Flanagan, 2007; Nitzberg, 2005). The theory of sociopolitical development takes into account the benefits of empowerment focused pedagogy. Watts &

Guessos (2006) define the concept of sociopolitical development (SPD) “as a product of both liberation and developmental psychology” (p. 60), with the first addressing issues of social power, and the latter addressing individual growth (Watts & Flanagan, 2007). While these two theories are distinctly different they are also synergistic. SPD theory has a critical understanding of the systemic forces like politics, economics, and culture that ultimately affect how individuals navigate the social world (Watts & Guessos, 2006).

Watts & Flanagan (2007) further expanded on this theory through an adaptation of SPD known as the youth sociopolitical development, which is focused on promoting positive youth development and community youth development. The community youth development perspective understands that youth are a valuable community resource and that it is important to provide opportunities for civic participation. This framework consists of four important dimensions and serves as a unique interpretation of the relationship between worldview and social involvement. *Worldview & Social Analysis* involves understanding how youth perceive the social systems that they interact with from both micro and macro levels. *Sense of Agency* pertains to a navigation of the dynamics among collective identity and efficacy, and self-efficacy and identity. The third is *opportunity structures*, which are simply resources and opportunities that encourage civic engagement. The last element is *societal involvement* or amount and depth of the activities that youth are involved as a product of how the other three dimensions interact with one another (Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Overall this research encourages that sociopolitical initiatives bring youth to the forefront, share power, and push the envelope on approaches to civic engagement. Sociopolitical development at its core is grounded in African American activism, and the foundation for this framework is rooted in

“African (American) culture and liberation traditions” (Watts, Williams & Jagers, 2003, p. 186). This could be an important conceptual lens through which to analyze the theoretical association between individual (i.e. social capital) and collective (i.e. social networks) factors with civic engagement as it relates to Black youth.

Social Capital, Demographics & Civic engagement. In Robert Putnam’s iconic book *Bowling Alone* (2000), the author cited that social networks were instrumental in providing channels through which individuals learn the value of reciprocity, and where people recruit one another into the realm of altruism. Putnam (2005) also discussed the importance of social capital and how that shapes civic engagement within society. For example, neighborhoods and communities are where youth are first exposed to helping behaviors. Ginwright (2007) argued that community based organizations within Black communities provide Black youth with what he identified as “critical social capital”. “Critical social capital departs from traditional notions of social capital by placing a greater focus on the collective dimensions of community change, and it centers on how racial identity and political awareness serve as an important community and social resource for youth” (Ginwright, 2007, p. 404). Critical social capital is fostered among Black youth in three ways (1) it challenges negative preconceptions of Black youth as civic problems by conceptualizing them as important political actors in their communities (2) fosters a collective racial and cultural identity (3) helps young people understand the political explanations for their personal challenges (Ginwright, 2007, p. 407) . In other words, this form of communal support could potentially serve as a buffer against negative external factors such as discrimination. Findings suggested that community connectedness could

foster political awareness and assist in preparing black youth to actively address community issues (Ginwright, 2007). In summary, if youth are prepared to understand the context of their social issues and are supported by their community they should be prepared to engage as informed citizens.

The demographic composition of one's social network can also have a strong influence on their individual civic engagement. Leighley and Matsubayashi (2009) in their study on political networks proposed that the race/ethnicity and social class of the network membership can have implications for how individual members engage politically and perceive political information. For their study they examined whether or not Whites benefited from the advantages of their social networks over Blacks, Asians, and Latinos. Researchers were also interested in whether or not these advantages were related to differences in SES. Overall this framework implied that Whites have access to more socio-economic resources than minorities. Their findings suggest that "political behaviors of racial and ethnic groups tend to be disadvantaged by their distinctive social networks" (Leighley & Matsubayashi, 2009, p. 848). Social networks that were made up primarily of minority members tended to have smaller less informed networks and access to fewer resources. These findings shed some light on the relationship between economic inequality and civic engagement.

Previous research has uncovered a link between racially homogeneous environments and limitations of an individual's social capacity. Solt (2008) further explored that relationship while investigating how economic inequality impacts active engagement in the political process. The author hypothesized that economic inequality "depresses political

interest, political discussion, and participation in elections” (Solt, 2008, p. 48). Solt (2008) also aligned his perspective with the theory of *relative engagement* which proposes that power tends to be more concentrated among individuals with higher wealth and income. In turn, issues of the affluent are not mirrored within the lives of the less affluent. Therefore they may not be as motivated to engage in political activities that are not relevant to them. In opposition to this view the researcher also presents an alternative theory known as conflict theory that states that inequality should fuel debates about the direction of political priorities which results in “higher rates of mobilization” (Solt 2008, p.49). The researcher tested these theories through cross national surveys deployed in democratic countries. Support for the *theory of relative engagement* was strongly reflected within the data. Growing inequality discourages political participation among the poor and “economic inequality undermines political equality” (Solt 2008, p. 57).

Community contexts and social class are not the only demographic factors related to civic engagement, gender and age may also play a role. A significant amount of previous research has been devoted to addressing the gender gap among women and men in regards to their political participation. It is widely supported that “compared to women, men are more knowledgeable about and more interested in politics and more likely to feel politically efficacious” (Verba, Burns, & Schlozman, 1997, p. 1051; and Bernstein, 2005). In an ethnographic study of gender differences among youth Gordon (2009) found that girls were more likely to engage in “softer issue politics” like rallying for funding whereas boys tended to choose more action oriented activities like mobilization. Verba and colleagues (1997) also argued that gender differences in can be partially attributed to differences in critical resources

(e.g. income) and “differences in the taste for politics” (p. 1070). A study on college students and gender differences report that there is a strong association between awareness of gender inequality and political engagement for women but not as strong for men (Bernstein, 2005). These studies while very informative about the general relationship between gender and politics did not delve into how these findings might translate across race/ethnicity. In an analysis of social organizational involvement and friendship diversity Farmer (2006) found that young Black males’ involvement in non-faith-based organizations, social capital, and diversity within social networks were all strongly associated with civic engagement. In addition to gender as an influence on engagement, other demographic factors like age can also make a difference in the type of civic activities that individuals engage in as well (Putnam, 2000). Young people tend to be more involved through acts of volunteering, and this participation can be indicative of future sociopolitical engagement above and beyond demographic factors like SES, education, and self-esteem (Putnam, 2010). Seaton and Colleagues (2006) found that age moderated the relationship between how Black youth viewed their ethnic group and perceived racial discrimination. Older youth appeared to have less private regard as they experienced more racial discrimination. These studies are illustrative of why background factors should not be discounted as potential predictors of civic engagement. In addition to micro level factors, perceptions and experience may also shape civic engagement of Black youth.

Perceptions of Discrimination, Experience with Criminal Justice & Civic engagement. Black youth encounter a myriad of external pressures throughout their lives, and some of those pressures revolve around negative perceptions of their race/ethnicity.

Brody and colleagues (2006) argued that there is an association between racial discrimination and adjustment problems for Black youth. Some of those issues can manifest themselves in the form of emotional distress, conduct problems, and depressive symptoms (Brody et al., 2006). From a longitudinal standpoint racial discrimination can impact development in both public regard (society's views about one's race) and private regard (how one views their own race (Seaton, Yip, & Sellers 2009). This "person-context process" (Seaton, Yip, & Sellers 2009) dictates that Black youth are continuously constructing their identity based on how broader society views them and regarding their experience with racial discrimination. Racial discrimination has also been found to be negatively related to school self-esteem (reflects student feelings about their performance) and school bonding (student sense of belonging) (Dolterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2009).

Perceptions of discrimination can be conceptualized by various types of social encounters. These encounters can be particularly damaging when they are delivered through formal institutions like that of the criminal justice system. Stewart (2009) conducted a study on Black adolescent's reports of police based discrimination and data indicated that 25% of participants had indeed experienced perceived discrimination of unfair treatment by the police. This study examined factors (i.e. family, individual, and neighborhood factors) that either increased or decreased the potential for adolescents to experience police based discrimination. The author proposed that varying ecological contexts like neighborhood racial composition could potentially affect how police engage with citizens. Very little research has been focused on police-based discrimination outside of crime rates and SES (Stewart, 2009). According to Stewart (2009) neighborhood social contexts like racial

composition “is an especially salient dimension of community context for advancing our understanding of neighborhood variation in experiences of racially biased police discrimination among Black youth” (p. 852). Weitzer and Tuch (1999) suggest that conflict theory plays a role in the link between criminal justice institutions and the prevalence of systematic discrimination. For Blacks criminal justice organizations and the police may be “portrayed as key mechanisms in the control of subordinate groups and in the protection of dominant group interests” (Weitzer & Tuch, 1999, p.495). This portrayal may in part be due to individual perceptions that race fuels the discriminatory acts conducted by police.

Very little research has explored the relationship between perceptions of discrimination and civic engagement among Black youth. Other studies have looked at the connection between perceived discrimination and civic engagement among ethnic minorities such as Muslim Americans (Sirin & Katsiaficas, 2011) and Latino Americans (Schildkraut, 2005). However research about the association between these two concepts for other racial/ethnic minorities could be helpful in holistically understanding this relationship. Schildkraut (2005) examined how the role of identity and perceptions of discrimination impacted political engagement for Latino Americans. This study revealed that the probability of action oriented engagement (e.g. voting) varied depending on perceptions of discrimination and how participants self-identified (e.g. National, Latino, or American). The same could be hypothesized for Black youth that self-identify with diverse ethnic backgrounds. Another finding illustrated “that generalized trust affects trust and confidence in political institutions” (Schildkraut, 2005, p. 305). Consequently lack of trust in others translates into lack of trust in formal institutions like the government (Schildkraut, 2005).

These findings speak to the experience of many minorities. What needs to be assessed is how Black youth and young adults can still develop healthy socio-political trust even in the midst of stressors like racial prejudice. Branscombe, Schmitt & Harvey (1999) suggest that racial prejudice can be partially alleviated by strong identification with one's minority group whereas Diemer & Li (2011) propose that raising critical consciousness through peer, family, and school networks could promote socio-political efficacy. The social context within these networks also has the potential to impact political actions and behaviors among minority youth as well.

Neighborhood Context and Civic engagement. According to McMillan & Chavis (1986) there are four elements that make up the definition of community. Those four elements include membership, influence, reinforcement and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. Membership involves an investment of self, which yields a sense of ownership within the community. This component provides emotional safety, a sense of belonging, and protection against potential threat. Second is influence, "through collective action, they cause the environment to be more responsive to the needs of the individual and the smaller collectivity" (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 11). In order for community members to feel a sense of togetherness the community must offer some benefits because "people do what serves their needs" (p. 13). Finally, a shared emotional connection is an important part of defining community because shared values help members identify what they need individually and collectively (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). This idea of psychological sense of community (PSOC) was introduced by Chavis & Pretty (1999). This perspective takes into consideration the original factors that define community while adding a psychosocial context.

Belonging to a supportive community involves feeling a sense of ownership and social responsibility. Individuals that experience this communal responsibility participate in reciprocal exchange with their community. They may feel empowered and may want to give back to the environment that contributes to their positive development.

In addition to individual sense of belonging neighborhood characteristics also have implications for civic engagement. Kang & Kwak (2003) suggest that researchers take a multilevel approach to understanding the relationship between environment and participation. “As much as various individual characteristics promote or constrain the process by which one gets civically involved, some community level characteristics may also have important contextual effects on individuals’ participation in civic activities” (Kang & Kwak, 2003, p. 83). Neighborhoods can serve as spaces for information exchange. Guided by a framework based on communication and sociopolitical studies Kim & Rokeach (2006) suggest that civic engagement is largely influenced by community storytelling networks and neighborhood contexts. In another multilevel approach the researchers conducted a study looking at (1) the unique effects of individual level connections to communication opportunities on civic engagement; (2) whether or not there is a unique neighborhood level contextual effect on civic engagement; (3) if there was any cross level interaction between neighborhood level and individual level variables on civic engagement (Kim & Rokeach, 2006). They stated that individual civic engagement depends on integrated and connected environment that promotes storytelling and an environment that “facilitates the creation and sustenance of an integrated storytelling network” (Kim & Rokeach, 2006).

According to Huckfeldt (1979), engagement in “political activity seldom occurs in individual isolation” and “social context is an important determinant of the extent to which individuals participate in politics” (Huckfeldt, 1979, p. 579). Local social context should be considered an ideal variable when predicting political participation. The assets, needs, and idiosyncrasies of an individual’s environment can shed light on how they conceptualize the world around them. In accordance with previous research the author states neighborhood social context should be examined because “many political activities involve locally based interaction” and that “the neighborhood environment is a relatively constant and inescapable source of political and social stimuli” (Huckfeldt, 1979, p. 580). It is likely that community issues will initially be addressed at the local level, and these local socio-political interactions can shape attitudes which in turn can influence behavior. The individual-environment interaction while strong could vary by types of community. For example, neighborhoods with different levels of access (i.e. social, economic, etc.) may vary both how they communicate political messages, and how they influence political behavior.

Cohen and Dawson (1993) also looked into neighborhood context and political engagement among African Americans. However their primary focus involved addressing this relationships and its empirical links to poverty. Different neighborhoods produce different types of political environments which can also impact political choices (Cohen & Dawson, 1993). Resources are a primary focus of this study because communities that lack resources are less likely to “provide the fundamental requirements necessary for the functioning of democracy” (Cohen & Dawson, 1993). Data for this study uncovered interesting results that contradicted the assumptions of the stated hypotheses. Severely

impoverished neighborhoods were more likely to perceive political acts as “efficacious”. Political opportunities that were unavailable to their community were viewed as effective possibly because individuals felt that if the resources were available to them then their issues would be properly addressed. Participants’ political opinions were reflective of the idea that “evaluations of political efficacy may be in many cases, not only an assessment of the act...but also a comment on the leverage to be gained from financial and social resources” (Cohen & Dawson, 1993, p. 292). Findings for community efficacy reflected a quite different sentiment. Neighborhood poverty did impact how residents viewed their ability to effectively address community problems. Blacks in poverty were less likely to believe that they could have any significant influence over the state of their community (Cohen & Dawson, 1993). What has not been previously addressed in this extensive canon of literature regarding community context is how this impacts youth involvement.

Racial Identity and Civic engagement. Racial identity is a multi-dimensional concept that encompasses different levels of individual and collective understandings of one’s racial group membership (Cross, 2001). One important aspect of racial identity is the concept of collective self-esteem. According to the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981) the social or collective self is “that aspect of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to the membership” (p. 255). This idea of collective self can also be inclusive of either racial or ethnic identity (Crocker et al., 1994). Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) suggest that collective self-esteem can be influenced by both public and private opinions about an individual’s group. Those that have membership in groups that

have been influenced by “conscious raising movements” (i.e. Civil Rights Movement) may experience divergent feelings about the way they are perceived and how the rest of society perceives them (Crocker et al., 1994). Perceptions of racial group membership have the potential to influence behavior especially in terms of civic engagement. During the 1960s-1970s there were increases in political participation among Blacks and previous research reveals that this was partially attributed to racial solidarity (Chong & Rogers, 2005). Civic engagement begins with the acquisition of knowledge about the complex functions of the political system (Sanchez-Jankowski, 2002). Youth imbibe this knowledge through interactions with institutions and entities like schools, the media, and government. For minority youth these social exchanges may be painting a grim picture that society is only interested in their civic participation so that they contribute to greater society instead of bolster their own communities (Cohen, 2010). These institutions also set the foundation upon which minority youth develop their political attitudes. Individuals that identify with the exclusion group will more than likely acquire “attitudes toward civic engagement that correspond with their sociopolitical position” (Sanchez-Jankowski, 2002, p. 240). Positive attitudes will be reflective of their feelings towards their communities whereas negative attitudes will be geared towards formal political systems (i.e. “a punitive justice system”, Sanchez-Jankowski, 2002). Exploring the attitudes of youth is relevant because they “are more capable of seeing the links between personal experiences of prejudice, membership in a particular racial/ethnic group, and the status of that group in larger society” (Flanagan et al. 2009, p. 501).

There is a breadth of outside factors that contribute to how an individual feels about themselves, and how they develop their worldview. For minorities factors including discrimination, limited social capital, and racial identity can play a large role in how they interact within the world around them. Minority youth are consistently professed to be on the edge of becoming products or potential, and at risk for a tumultuous future. For example, young African Americans might attempt to achieve goals that are valued by the average American; however they may be deterred because of instances of discrimination, or even self-perceptions as a failure (Hughes & Demo, 1989). According to Festinger (1954), an individual's beliefs about themselves and evaluation of themselves can have a major impact on their behavior. With respect to civic engagement, negative perceptions, prejudice, and resource insecurity all have the potential to influence whether or not minority youth choose to be civically engaged. While analyzing the interplay between racial identity and engagement it is important to keep in mind the influence of historical context. "What all groups in the United States have in common is that each of them was discriminated against by the groups that preceded them" (Sanchez-Jankowski, 2002, p. 237). This common experience is the thread bonds these individuals while simultaneously setting them apart. Although a substantial portion of the immigrant experience has been one of prejudice throughout US history, each group has had unique experiences (Sanchez-Jankowski, 2002). According to Sanchez-Jankowski (2002), the history of racial exclusion for groups like African and Latino Americans revolves "has provided an indelible scar that continues to influence the content, amount, and intensity of their civic engagement" (p.238). Racial

salience and the social value attached to that continue to be a lens through which minority groups construct their perceptions and attitudes about society.

A previous study conducted by Cohen (2010) on the political attitudes and activities of African American youth yielded findings that supported this notion of informal participation. The Black Youth Project (BYP, Cohen, 2005) was a large scale data collection effort that attempted to paint detailed picture of the social, cultural, and political nuances within the lives Black youth and their peers. BYP data revealed what Cohen (2010) referred to as “invisible engagement”, which involved youth engagement at primarily at the community level void of political context. This community driven engagement was driven by what she coined as a fear of “domestic deportation”. In other words the idea that minority youth choose to remain invisible to formal systems like the government out of fear that this institution is solely interested in “identifying, regulating, controlling, and possibly incarnating them” (Cohen, 2010, p. 195). Naturally these apprehensions affect the amount of trust and faith they have towards formal institutions and youth’s desire to associate with them. Observed within the BYP data was that these feelings were highly prevalent among minority participants, specifically for Black and Latino youth. “There are [a] myriad [of] factors in the daily life experiences of Black youth that might prompt them to disengage from political and civil society” (Cohen, 2010 p. 124). The researcher identified this social, emotional, and political disengagement as *political alienation*. Building off of the work of the work of social scientist Easton (1975), Cohen (2010) re-conceptualizes political alienation as theoretical concept comprised of three dimensions. The first is government orientation, which represents the feelings one has towards systematic figures of authority like

that of government officials. Second is political orientation, this dimension largely focuses on an individual's sense of connectedness and membership within their greater political community. The third and final dimension is equal opportunity which gauges how one feels about fairness and opportunity in the country. Through this examination of political alienation the researcher highlights the pressing threat of "systematic pathologizing" of Black youth in research (Cohen, 2010). Instead it is suggested that scholarship delve into the determinants of this social estrangement among Black and Latino youth. In accordance with this notion Flanagan et al. (2009) also expressed that ethnic background, ethnic awareness, and experiences (vicarious and personal) are related with minority youth's belief in fair American institution. In addition ethnic experience also affected their goals of civic engagement. The findings of this study of African, Latina, Arab, and European American also revealed greater ethnic salience for the three minority groups. Findings for African American youth illustrated that they were less likely to believe that American fairness was properly bestowed to their group in the form of rights and opportunity (Flanagan, 2009).

As youth are socialized to become engaged citizens there are very distinct facets of the social institution that they interact with that provide them with sociopolitical knowledge. In a discussion on "Minority youth and Civic Engagement" Sanchez-Jankowski (2002), delves into this issue by introducing the concept of *transfer stations*. There are three transfer stations that dictate this socialization process. The first is popular culture or media dimensions and the second is social class or socioeconomic factors. Finally there is social order, a dimension that also encompasses social class in addition to community economic structure and ethnic makeup, historical context of ethnic relations, and openness to the

existing political system (Sanchez-Jankowski, 2002). For youth the development of civic knowledge, attitudes, and participation are all linked to these transfer stations. Civic participation is a relative and subjective process greatly influenced by both formal and informal institutions and it is “the interaction between the two that guides individuals toward civic responsibility and participation” (Sanchez-Jankowski, 2002). Minority group history is also an essential part of youth civic behavior because it encourages young people to promote the interests of their own specific community (Sanchez-Jankowski, 2002). These highly influential socio-cultural factors should be recognized by scholars and uncovering how they relate to civic engagement among minority youth is the next step.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH QUESTIONS & HYPOTHESES

The Present Study

As previously mentioned, in recent years scholarship regarding Black youth has been primarily guided by a deficit focused framework (Ginwright, 2007). However the direction of the present study will embark on a different path through an examination of factors that influence pro-social behaviors (i.e. civic engagement) among Black youth. Some factors while negative in their origin (i.e. perceived racial discrimination, experience with police, etc.) may have the capacity to inadvertently push youth towards collective community engagement. Conversely they may lead to feelings of distrust in formal institutions (Schildkraut, 2005) and little desire to participate in traditional political activities. A significant portion of social science research is devoted to the social trajectories of Black youth, however very little research has been conducted on the civic development of this

population. Through a secondary examination of data from the Black Youth Project (Cohen, 2005), a national study examining the socio-political activities and attitudes of African American youth, the current study contributes to our understanding of how both negative and positive factors impact their behavior. Specifically by exploring variables such as demographic characteristics, experiences with the criminal justice system, perceptions of neighborhood and discrimination, racial attitudes and how they relate to youth civic engagement.

The goal of this research is to investigate how young people's individual attitudes, perceptions, and experiences impact whether or not they choose to be active political participants. There are two main objectives of this study: (1) to establish whether demographic factors, racial attitudes, perceptions of discrimination and neighborhood, and criminal justice experience are related to civic engagement; (2) to explore whether these variables significantly predict civic engagement among Black youth. Listed below are the hypotheses and research questions associated with objectives of this study (See Table 1 Summary of Study Variables).

Research Question 1: To what extent are demographic factors like family income, gender, and age related to civic engagement among Black youth?

Hypothesis 1: Family income and age will be positively correlated with civic engagement as measured by reports of civic engagement.

Hypothesis 1.2: There will be gender differences between male and female respondents in civic engagement.

Previous studies have stated that there is a strong relationship among SES (Solt, 2008), age (Seaton, Yip, and Sellers, 2009), and civic engagement. The researcher will attempt to replicate these findings within the BYP data. However “less developed in this literature is a consideration of how systems of gender shape the sociopolitical development of youth” (Gordon, 2008, p. 32). Studies on gender and civic engagement have not explicitly focused on Black youth therefore the current study intends to address this gap.

Research Question 2: Are perceptions of neighborhood characteristics and perceived discrimination (i.e., collectivism, esteem, and personal discrimination) significantly related to civic engagement among Black youth?

Hypothesis 2: Respondents who score higher on perceptions of neighborhood collective efficacy and neighborhood esteem and score higher on personal discrimination will score higher on civic engagement.

Neighborhoods are complex social environments that can serve as a resource for how individuals receive and process political information (Kim & Roleach, 2006). Examining how Black youth perceive the collective abilities and quality of their neighborhoods could have implications for how engaged they are as residents. Whereas exploring an individual level variable such as perceived personal discrimination could also potentially shed light on the impact of social interactions on Black youth’s desire to contribute civically. Flanagan and colleagues (2008) supported this notion by hypothesizing that “experiences of discrimination are associated with his/her beliefs in the fundamental fairness of America and her institutions and with his/her goals for civic engagement” (Flanagan et a., 2008, p. 502).

Research Question 3: Is experience with the criminal justice system significantly related to civic engagement among Black youth?

Hypothesis 3: Respondents who score lower on experience with the criminal justice system will score higher on civic engagement.

A significant amount of research has been conducted on perceptions of police-based discrimination (Stewart, 2009; Weitzer & Tuch, 1999). However very few researchers have focused on the potential link between negative experiences with the criminal justice system and how that impacts political participation among Black youth. Negative experiences with formal institutions may deter youth from becoming actively engaged.

Research Question 4: Is racial identity (i.e. racial group esteem and racial attitudes) significantly related to civic engagement among Black youth?

Hypothesis 4: Respondents who score higher on racial group esteem and lower on racial attitudes will score higher on civic engagement.

The lens through which an individual views their own racial/ethnic group can be influenced by societal and individual attitudes (Crocker, 1992). More importantly, how one identifies with their racial/ethnic group regarding those attitudes can potentially impact their views and civic behaviors within that group (Festinger, 1954; Sanchez-Jankowski, 2002).

Research Question 5: Will demographic characteristics, experiences with criminal justice system, perceptions of neighborhood and personal discrimination, and racial attitudes predict civic engagement among Black youth?

Hypothesis 5: Respondent reports of demographic characteristics, experiences with criminal justice system, perceptions of neighborhood collective efficacy and esteem, personal discrimination, and racial group esteem and attitudes will significantly and positively predict civic engagement for Black youth.

As previously mentioned, in past research social scientists have extensively explored predictors of civic engagement. They have found civic participation to be influenced by social environment (Kang & Kwak, 2003; Huckfeldt, 1979; & Kim & Rokeach, 2006) perceptions (Sirin & Katsiaticas, 2011; Schildraut, 2005), attitudes (Sanchez-Jankowski, 2002), and demographic factors (Leighley & Matsubayashi, 2009; Putnam, 2005; Solt, 2008). Nevertheless, there is a dearth of scholarship focused primarily on predicting the civic engagement among Black youth.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Participants and Procedure

The current study used data from the Black Youth Project (BYP) study (Cohen, 2005). The purpose of this project was to examine political activities and attitudes of African American youth between the ages of 15-25. This project was funded by the University of Chicago, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the National Opinion Research Center (NORC). Data collection for the Youth Culture Survey occurred from July 20, 2005 through November 10, 2005, and a total of 1,590 surveys were completed. NORC was responsible for collecting data for a larger study known as the Youth Culture Survey (YCS), and the Black Youth Project data comes from a portion of that study. The YCS sample was selected using a

random digit dialing system, and eligible respondents participated in forty-five minute phone interviews. During the phone interviews participants were asked questions from a 237-item survey that covered a range of various topics. Those topics included: demographic information, rap music, efficacy and self-esteem, political participation, religion, health, gender and sexual orientation, sex and sexuality, racial attitudes and discrimination, and lived experience. The sample for the BYP project consisted of individuals identified as eligible by NORC for future in depth interviews. Eligibility was defined by households with Black or Hispanic youth were oversampled and 100 percent of Black & Latino youth were eligible for participation in future interviews.

Overall there were three different sample types collected for this study which included a National, Oversample, and Chicago samples. The national sample was a standard nationally representative sample of youth across the United States between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five. Next the oversample, was obtained from areas that were fifteen percent or higher non-Hispanic African American or Hispanic as a percent of the total population in the area where the participants lived. Finally the Chicago sample was a supplemental sample chosen for the purpose of conducting future face-to-face in depth interviews with African American youth specifically in the Chicago metropolitan area. The present study will focus primarily on African American participants across all three sample types (n=236).

Measures: Independent Variables

Demographic Variables. For the BYP participants (n=236) were asked several questions about their individual background. The current research will examine reports of

gender (male=111, female=125; $M=.53$, $SD=.5$), and age ($M=19.23$, $SD=3.04$) (See Table 2 Descriptive Statistics)

Individual/Collective Perceptions. Two variables were identified as measures of youth perceptions. The first measure was personal discrimination, which asks respondents to report the extent to which they have encountered individual discrimination (i.e. race, class, etc.). These items were measured on a five point likert scale (“How often were you discriminated against because of your race”, 1=Very often, 5=Never). The second variable neighborhood efficacy/esteem measured participant perceptions about their neighborhood, and about community ability to work collectively to address issue. This scale consisted of two items with one being measured on a four point scale and the other a five point likert scale (“. In the neighborhood where you lived most of your life, how much of a problem were things like drugs, violence, gangs, and crime”, 1=A big problem, 5=Not a problem at all; “People working together in my neighborhood can solve many of our problems”; 1= Strongly agree, 5=Strongly disagree; respectively).

Experience with Criminal Justice System. The measure for criminal justice asked respondents about experiences with police and the judicial system. This measure consisted of one item measured with a dichotomous response of yes/no (“Have you ever been unfairly treated by the police?”).

Racial Identity. The variable racial identity was measured through two constructs including racial group esteem and racial attitudes. The racial group esteem scale consisted of items related to individual level feelings the respondents’ specific racial group. This three question scale was measured on a five point likert scale (“I am proud of [race group] people”,

1=Strongly agree, 5=Strongly disagree). The racial attitudes scale asked respondents to report their general attitudes toward Black youth. This six question scale was measured on a five point likert scale (“On average, Black youth receive a poorer education than white youth”, 1=Strongly agree, 5=Strongly).

Measures: Dependent Variable

Civic Engagement. Participants were asked to report their participation in civic activities. This study focused on three specific dimensions of civic engagement including political talk with family & peers, organization group membership, and community service participation. Each item was measured by a dichotomous yes/no response (“In the last 12 months, have you talked with family or friends about a political issue, party or candidate”).

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Scale Descriptives. The current study included several independent variables measured on a likert scale such as, Neighborhood Collective Efficacy & Esteem, and Racial Group Esteem, Racial Attitudes, and Personal Discrimination. First, for consistency variable items were recoded so that higher scores reflected positive response outcomes. Next, the researcher addressed the Neighborhood Esteem scale which consisted of two items each measured on two different likert scales (4-point and 5-point likert scales). This issue was addressed by standardizing each scale by transforming them into z-scores, followed up by running the internal reliability analysis which yielded an alpha coefficient for of $\alpha = .75$. The remainder of the independent variables were also included in tests of internal reliability as

well. The alpha coefficient for the Neighborhood Collective efficacy scale was $\alpha=.43$. The alpha coefficient Racial Group Esteem scale was $\alpha=.15$, and for the Racial Attitudes scale $\alpha=.57$. Finally, the primary variable used in final analyses (logistic regression), Personal Discrimination, consisted of six items intended to measure individual level instances of discrimination among Black youth. The alpha coefficient for this scale was $\alpha=.74$. The mean scores, standard deviation, and reliability estimates of scores for all scales are presented in Table 3.

Removed Variables. Prior to addressing the first hypothesis regarding demographic variables preliminary analyses were conducted to explore the viability of each IV. Racial group esteem was removed due to low internal reliability as a scale. Next, descriptive statistics revealed that all independent variables could be used in further analysis with exception of family income. The issues were related to the manner in which family income variable was measured (See Table 1 Summary of Study Variables). The independent variable was measured on an uneven 9-point Likert scale, income levels were also divided into categorical ranges. The accuracy in capturing family SES was in question therefore this variable was not included in analyses.

Correlational Analysis

RQ1: To what extent do demographic factors like family income, gender, and age influence civic engagement among Black youth?

H1 & H1.2. The first hypothesis proposed that age would be positively and significantly related to civic engagement. Results from a Point-Biserial-Correlation revealed that age was significantly and positively related to two out of the three civic engagement

dependent variables. There was a positive and significant relationship between age (15-25) and two of the dependent variables representing civic engagement. The first positive and significant relation was between age and organizational group membership $r_{pb}(236) = .25$, $p < .01$. As respondents reported an older age they also tended to report belonging to organizational groups. The second positive and significant relationship was between age and community service participation $r_{pb}(236) = .14$, $p = .03$. As respondents reported an older age they also tended to report participation in community service. Finally, Point-Biserial-Correlations including gender and all three civic engagement DVs did not yield any significant relationships. Consequently, no subsequent analyses were conducted to examine the potential for gender differences in civic engagement (Hypothesis 1.2).

RQ2: Do perceptions of neighborhood characteristics and perceived discrimination (i.e., collectivism, esteem, and personal discrimination) significantly impact civic engagement for Black youth?

H2. A Point-Biserial-Correlation did not reveal a significant relationship between neighborhood collective efficacy and neighborhood esteem with any of the three civic engagement dependent variables. In regards to the hypothesized relationship between personal discrimination (PD) and civic engagement correlation analyses revealed a positive and significant relationships. That relationship was illustrated among two of the dependent variables including political talk with family and peers $r_{pb}(236) = .13$, $p = .05$ and community service $r_{pb}(236) = .13$, $p = .05$. Respondents that reported higher scores on personal discrimination (higher score = less instances of PD) tended to report engagement in political talk with their family and peers. Also respondents that reported higher scores of personal

discrimination tended to report engagement community service participation. Finally, the independent variables Neighborhood Collective Efficacy & Esteem, and Racial Group Esteem & Attitudes yielded non-significant relationships with dependent variable therefore they were not used in further analyses (See Table 4 for Correlation Matrix).

RQ3: Does experience with the criminal justice system significantly impact civic engagement for Black youth?

H3: The present study also hypothesized a relationship between negative experience with the criminal justice and reports of civic engagement, with less reports of negative experience resulting in reports of higher rates of civic participation. Results were not supportive of this hypothesis and revealed a non-significant relationship.

RQ4: Does racial identity (e.g. racial group esteem and racial attitudes) significantly impact civic engagement for Black youth?

H4. The final hypothesis proposed that respondents who scores reflected positive racial attitudes and racial group esteem (high score=positive less negative attitude/high group esteem) would report more civic engagement. Point-Biserial-Correlation revealed a non-significant relationship between racial group esteem and racial attitudes and civic engagement DVs.

Logistic Regression

RQ5: Will demographic characteristics, experiences with criminal justice system, perceptions of neighborhood and personal discrimination, and racial attitudes predict civic engagement for Black youth?

H5. Point-Biserial-Correlations were conducted to address the hypotheses that the independent variables demographic (age & gender), personal discrimination, neighborhood collective efficacy & esteem, racial group esteem and racial attitudes were significantly

related to the three civic engagement DVs (political talk with family & peers, organization group membership, and community service participation). Nevertheless, the only independent variables significantly related to the civic engagement DVs were age and personal discrimination. Logistic regressions were conducted to examine the predictive potential of age and personal discrimination as significant and positive predictors of civic engagement. For age analyses revealed that with every unit increase in age respondents the odds increased by 10% that Black youth would engage in community service, and odds increased by 19% that they would be a member of an organized group (See Table 5). Results for the second dependent variable analyses revealed that for every unit increase for scores on personal discrimination (hi score=less discrimination) odds increased by 37% that respondent would report engaging in community service engagement, and odds increased by 42% that they would report engaging in political discussions with their family and peers (See Table 6). These results captured a unique relationship between individual and social contextual factors and civic engagement that will be further elaborated on in the discussion of these findings.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of the current study was to explore civic engagement among Black youth on three dimensions of civic engagement. The researcher examined civic behavior and its relation to individual experience, perceptions of environment and race/ethnic group membership. According to Sanchez-Jankowski (2002) when examining the civic engagement of minority groups “it is necessary to recognized that the population may be more diverse than would have been previously understood” (p. 237). Specifically, researchers

should take into account other contextual factors in addition to racial group membership as predictors of social involvement. More importantly, the primary goal of this study was to determine which of these socio-cultural factors had predicted civic engagement among Black youth. Analyses revealed age and personal discrimination were the only IVs related to civic engagement DVs including political discussion with family and peers, community service participation, and organized group membership. These variables also served as significant predictors of these behaviors as well. The following results have several implications for how civic engagement should be examined in research. These findings provide support for a closer examination of age cohorts and perceived racial experience and these contextual factors shape civic engagement among Black youth.

Analyses: Non Significant Findings

Demographics. A part from age, hypotheses theorized that there would be significant differences between males and females in their reports of civic engagement. Hypotheses also postulated that gender would to be related to and significantly predict civic engagement. Present analyses revealed there was no significant relationship between gender and civic engagement therefore the researcher did not move forward with exploring differences between males and females. This non significance could be related to how civic engagement was measured. Although the BYP data did provide a range of choices for respondents to identify civic engagement the heavily skewed responses for some items limited the amount of items that could be used as dependent variables. Only three items were selected as DVs to measure civic engagement. Therefore this narrowly defined DV may have limited the scope of the hypothesized gender relation. Other research conducted by Coffe & Bolzendahl (2010)

purports that “gender differences may also result in different types of political engagement among men and women...rather than simply a matter of more or less engagement” (p. 319). A more diverse set of civic engagement variables may have illustrated the nuances associated with differences in civic engagement behaviors between males and females.

Neighborhood Collective Efficacy & Esteem. Although neighborhood collective efficacy and neighborhood esteem were not related to the DVs measuring civic engagement the potential for their influence should not be overlooked. The intercorrelation matrix uncovered significant relationships between these two variables and other independent variables (See Table 4 for direction of these relations). Addressing this concept of communal basic needs for youth is a key component to understanding what promotes civic engagement among this demographic.

Fogel (2004) explored the relationship between neighborhood and engagement with a qualitative study on urban youth from disadvantaged communities and how their perceptions impacted their social involvement within their environment. Focus groups were conducted with adolescents of color and the discussion focused on social & economic predictors of community involvement. Findings suggested that negative perceptions and experiences (i.e. delinquent activity), lack of adequate communal space, and a lack of youth driven engagement opportunities greatly impacted their involvement (Fogel, 2004). In regards to the present study, there is a possibility that respondents in the BYP study did not feel as though their needs were being met by their communities. Therefore prevalence of neighborhood cohesion and esteem were not as salient to them and did not directly impact their civic engagement.

Racial Group Esteem & Racial Attitudes. The independent variable racial group-esteem was not included in further analyses because of extremely low internal reliability (See Table 3). This weak cohesion between items may have been attributed to differences in underlying constructs within the scale. This scale consisted of three items that appeared to be measuring racial group esteem on three separate dimensions: individual, public, and collective perceptions of racial group esteem (See Table 1). These divergent perspectives may have been the reason why the items were unable to hold together as one reliable construct. Next the racial attitudes scale had moderate internal reliability (See Table 3) and this variable was not related to any of the dependent variables of civic engagement. However, the intercorrelation matrix revealed that it was significantly correlated with the independent variable age (See Table 4). Although previous research has illustrated that racial identity and civic engagement are related that relationship was not reflected in the current study. As previously mentioned the youth sociopolitical development framework takes into account experiences of oppression especially in regards to race, and the process of development as key factors of influence on youth civic engagement. Watts, Williams & Jagers (2003) wanted to explore SPD to better understand this model as a process of development. This was achieved through interviews with Black activists aged 16-35 years old representing a spectrum of ideologies and community settings. What they found was that this “is a cumulative effect of many transactions over time that increases sociopolitical understanding and the capacity for effective action” (Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003, p. 192). This information is pertinent to the current study because it addresses the issue of measuring the relationship between the opportunities to acquire civic knowledge and how that might impact

the level of civic engagement. Questions within the BYP dataset ask about whether or not youth are engaged however there were none inquiring about how often they engaged or how often they had the opportunity to do so.

Analyses: Significant Findings

Age and Civic Engagement. Regression findings reveal that as young people age they are also more likely to be civically engaged through community service and organizational commitment. Developmental transitions from adolescence into young adulthood can be shaped by a series of life dynamics. As youth become older and more socially aware of the issues within their communities they may be more inclined to invest their time in addressing those needs. Previous research reinforces the notion that increases in civic participation are linked with developmental. Keating, Benton & Kerr (2011) in their longitudinal study on citizenship education among adolescents aged 11-18 found “a marked increase in political participation among the cohort as they get older” (p. 225). They also found similar patterns reflected in rates of civic participation specifically in civil society group membership (Keating, Benton & Kerr, 2011). Conversely researchers have also discovered through trend analysis that as cohort changes occurred so did their attitudes towards citizenship (Keating, Benton & Kerr, 2011). Although their “interest in and awareness of political issues increased over time” (p. 227) their levels in “distrust in political figures rose drastically” (p. 232). These findings illustrate an interesting juxtaposition which implies evolution of social consciousness could also yield a more clear understanding of the nuances of politics. As youth begin to explore the role that formal stakeholders play in issues that are matter to them they find their social and political agendas are complex. More

importantly these authors suggest that in regards to civic engagement and youth “it is important to keep in mind “that key aspects of adolescents’ citizenship practices are not stable and that young people’s attitudes and practices are still developing during adolescence” (p. 232). It is safe to say that the sample for the present study examined civic engagement through two lenses, adolescence and young adulthood. These differences may be most notable between youth that are able to vote (18 years+) and those that are not. Considering previous findings on transitions in civic attitudes and practices there may have been some benefit to examining differences in civic behavior between the two groups within the current study.

Personal Discrimination and Civic Engagement. As previously mentioned the present research has revealed that for black youth less experience with personal discrimination significantly predicted increased likelihood of engagement in community service and in political discussions with family members and peers. For this study the personal discrimination variable transcended the traditional orientation was measured in a broader context that encompassing five dimensions including gender, sexual orientation, class, age as well as race. Bigler et al. (2008), stated that “relatively little work has explored youths perceptions of the extent to which gender and racial biases permeate their broader cultural context and shape major societal institutions, such as government” (p.84). Although there is no way of assessing which aspects of personal discrimination were the most salient for Black youth results still provide some support for taking into account more than just racial discrimination when examining civic engagement. Respondents in the BYP dataset were asked to report from a personal level, however future research could examine the

relationship between perceived societal discrimination and civic engagement among Black youth.

In regards to the predictive relationship between decreased perceived personal discrimination and political discussion with family and peers, could be useful in promoting the significance of positive youth-adult relationships. The acquisition of civic knowledge is facilitated through both formal (i.e. school) and informal networks (i.e. parents, peers & mentors) According to Nitzberg (2005), youth development initiatives that are effective tend to nurture the relationship between youth and adults, and these relationships foster affiliation. Youth empowerment is often facilitated through positive and encouraging adult relationships. Previous research on the linkages between parental influence and youth civic engagement states that “adolescents who discuss politics and current events with their parents, peers, or teachers tend to score higher than other youth on measures of civic behaviors, attitudes, and skills.” (McIntosh, Hart & Youniss, 2007). Although engagement in political discussion with family was a dependent variable there is still something to be said about its potential influence as a variable to encourage higher level (or deeper) civic engagement.

Limitations

Since the present research was a secondary analysis on extant data there were several limitations that impacted the quality of this study. First there was a limited code book available that did not include all variables within the BYP dataset. Therefore the researcher had to determine the best method of coding variables chosen based on aims of the study. Second, there was no control over how measures were constructed or implemented. The organization of these measures could have influenced participant responses. According to

Andolina et al. (2002) language matters when asking youth about their citizenship and for them socio-political concepts may “not have broad resonance” for them (p. 194). Next the sample age range of 15-25 was quite broad, and developmentally diverse. Future research might consider investigating cohort differences with cross-sectional or longitudinal study designs. In addition, the questions regarding civic behaviors did not measure how often youth engaged in the activities they reported participating in. Specifically in regards to understanding the spectrum of engagement throughout development it is important to recognize that “consistency is key; that is, a civic context in middle childhood or early adolescence needs to be followed up with a civic context in later adolescence and early adulthood, key time periods in a youth’s identity development” (Zaff, 2008, p. 50). Finally the data itself was collected in before 2008 and pre-Obama administration and for that reason does not reflect the civic behaviors of Black youth currently.

Civic Engagement Post 2008 Election. Most research supports the notion that “Civic engagement is believed to be essential for community prosperity and is an important indicator of individuals belonging and connection to social institutions and gaps” (Farmer, 2006 p. 52). According to data collected by The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) Black youth are one of the most politically engaged racial/ethnic groups. According to CIRCLE they are also most likely to vote regularly, belong to groups involved with politics, etc. This information was illustrated during the 2008 election where 58% of Black youth [18-29] voted, which was one of the highest turnout rates of any youth racial/ethnic group since 1972 (civicyouth.org). Even though this information subsequently follows the 2005 data collection period of the BYP data and it does however

provide an interesting context for the shift in political participation among Black youth between the 2004 and 2008 elections. The possibility of electing a president that identified as a racial minority more than likely played a role in this increase in civic activity. In addition to the intrigue cultivated by that likelihood Black youth were also purposefully solicited to become champions of civic engagement in the 2008 election. Identifying strongly with their racial/ethnic group and having a sense of cultural pride could inspire youths desire to help their community succeed collectively which “involves challenging gross social inequities between social groups and creating new relationships that dispel oppressive social myths, values and practices (Watts, Williams & Jagers, 2003, p.187). According to Cohen (2010) “what the last election demonstrated was that resources make a difference in participation” (p. 239). Those that had access to environments and opportunities that promoted social awareness were more likely to vote. This revelation brings into account the importance of political salience and access to adequate civic education. Researcher and practitioners alike “can help to facilitate increased participation across, class, gender and education by providing meaningful opportunities for political and civic engagement” (Cohen, p. 239).

Future Research

Influence of Technology on Civic Engagement. As previously discussed, young people are often perceived as a group that has no vested interest in being civically engaged. Cassel et al. (2006) evaluated this shift in engagement in their study on online youth leadership. In their review of previous research on this topic the authors discuss the complexities of participation and leadership. While conventional political youth participation may have decreased grassroots community oriented activities like volunteering may be on the

rise. According to Cassell et al. (2006) exploring these phenomena is relevant especially in the interest of maintaining the future of democracy and understanding how youth create their identities as change agents. The internet offers a nontraditional environment for youth to find their voice on issues that are important to them, and a large amount of youth civic activity is beginning to occur through this environment. In this virtual space youth have ability to construct their identities regardless of age, race, gender, or societal expectations. In previous analysis in 2005 of the BYP data, revealed that youth were less interested in traditional political engagement and were beginning to participate in digitally driven methods (Cohen, 2010). The researcher coined these individuals as “digital democrats” (Cohen, 2010, p. 181), which is a fitting description of how many youth express themselves civically in the present. Blogs, social media, and the internet in general offer a novel way for youth to define their role within civil society freely. With the ever constant development and use of social networking among young people researchers should shift their inquiry toward understanding the role that social technologies play in facilitating civic engagement.

Next Steps. What is important to consider when collecting data with youth and “in attempts to characterize their political worldview” researchers “will need to capture both the traditional behavior and attitudes they have inherited, and the new interpretations, values, and meanings that they assign to this legacy” (Andolina et al., 2002, p. 194). Research utilizing national samples is useful in that they provide a snapshot of civic trends among youth; however they cannot account for the nuances that impact engagement. Therefore it is suggested that practitioners not rely entirely on general data to draw conclusions about how youth engage within their individual communities. The BYP project did address this by

conducting follow up in depth interviews probing further into participant responses to the overall survey. This mixed method approach allows for a qualitative interpretation of quantitative responses. Program developers, civic as well as political groups should begin to operate from an ecological context and proactively search for the unique factors impacting civic behavior. For example, as society becomes more technology driven and globally aware traditional fellowship is being replaced by web based social networking. Knowing this information researchers' can begin to assess how this transformation impacts societal involvement for young people. In addition to technological influence, developmental contexts are also central to this demographic. Andolina et al. (2002) also propose a mixed methods approach and suggest creating "an index of civic engagement measures that recognizes the continuity among generations while making room for the unique character of today's youth" (p. 195). Researchers interested in predicting positive citizenship among youth must take into account that youth civic engagement is a "composite of individual and social contextual variables" (Zaff, 2008, p. 40). According to Zaff (2008) these civic context factors can include parental participation, peers, ethnicity related variables, which have proven to be strong predictors of civic behavior in late adolescence all the way through early adulthood (Zaff, 2008). Specifically for Black youth, researcher must also take into account how racial socialization, peer and family networks contribute to how they shape their civic identity (Zaff, 2008). Individuals like "program developers and policy makers should also be aware that promoting youths' values and goals can lead to later civic engagement "(Zaff, 2008, p. 49). Overall, cultural relevance, authenticity, and a social ecological lens are invaluable when examining the civic behaviors of youth. Their potential to be significant

contributors to society is at times vastly underestimated by scholars and greater society. Therefore future research should aim to capture youth's attention civically by creating opportunities that take into account the context of their social environment through the promotion of cultural values and salient activities related to youth goals and values (Zaff, 2008, p. 50). There may also be some benefit to including youth empowerment as a contributing factor to civic engagement. This literature could offer insight into which foundational aspects of empowerment are crucial for youth to feel inspired to become and stay civically active.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the goal of this research was to uncover multilevel contextual factors related to civic engagement. Previous research focused on Black youth tends to focus on them as individuals on cusp of risk and deficit. Nevertheless this study took a strengths-based approach and focused on analyzing personal and collective factors that promote positive behavior within this population. The present study has provided sufficient support for civic centered and strengths based scholarship on the behaviors of Black youth.

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APPENDICES

Table 1

Summary of Study Variables, Item List & Response Set/Scale

Variable	Items	Response Set/Scaling
Demographic(IV) Gender	What is your gender?	Male=0 Female=1
Age	How old are you?	Continuous
Racial Identity (IV) Racial Group Esteem	I am proud of [racial group] people. Other racial groups view [racial group] people in a positive manner. I believe that what happens to most [racial group] people in this country affects me.	1=Strongly agree 2=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Disagree 5=Strongly Disagree
Racial Attitudes	Too many young Black people have the wrong morals about important things like sex and work. It is hard for young Black people to get ahead because they face so much discrimination. Sometimes young Black people have to act White to get ahead. On average, Black youth receive a poorer education than white youth. On average, the police discriminate much more against Black youth than they do against white youth. Most Black people over 40 do not respect young Black people.	1=Strongly agree 2=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Disagree 5=Strongly Disagree

Table 1 Continued

Perceptions (IV) Personal Discrimination	How often were you discriminated against because of your race?	1=Very often 2=Often 3=Every now and then 4=Rarely 5=Never
	How often have you been discriminated against because of your sex meaning male or female?	4=Rarely 5=Never
	How often have you been discriminated against because of your sexual orientation?	
	How often have you been discriminated against because of your class or how much money you or your parents make?	
	How often have you been discriminated against because of your age?	
Neighborhood Collective Efficacy	People working together in my neighborhood can solve many of our problems.	1=Strongly agree 2=Agree 3=Neither agree nor disagree 4=Disagree 5=Strongly Disagree
	People in my neighborhood are able to get the government to respond to our needs.	
	In the neighborhood where you lived most of your life, how much of a problem were things like drugs, violence, gangs, and crime	1=a big problem 2=somewhat of a problem 3=not much of a problem 4=no problem at all
Neighborhood Esteem	People often have a range of views of the neighborhood where they lived most of their life. Considering things like the quality of schools, the types of businesses, and how well your neighbors took care of their properties, would you say you grew up in a...	1=Very good neighborhood 2=Good neighborhood 3=Okay neighborhood 4=Not so good of a neighborhood 5=Bad neighborhood

Table 1 Continued

Experience (IV)		
Criminal Justice	Have you ever been unfairly treated by the police?	Yes=0
		No=1
Civic Engagement (DV)	In the last 12 months have you talked with family or friends about a political issue, party or candidate?	Yes=0
	Are you a member of an organized group, such as one run through school, church or the park system? Any group or organization counts, not just political groups.	No=1
	In the last 12 months have you engaged in organized volunteer or community service work—that is, worked for others for no pay	

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for All Variables

Variable	N	Missing	M	SD	Variance	Skew	Kurtosis	Range
Age	236	0	19.24	3.04	9.27	.36	-.94	10.00
Gender	236	0	.53	.50	.25	-.12	-2.00	1.00
N. Collective Efficacy	235	1	5.40	1.78	3.18	.06	-.86	6.30
N. Esteem	236	0	.00	1.76	3.12	.22	-.31	9.00
Race Attitude	236	0	15.91	3.67	13.48	.09	-.20	22.00
Race Group Esteem	236	0	10.43	1.83	3.35	-.11	.22	11.00
Personal Discriminate	236	0	19.63	4.16	17.32	-.78	.23	20.00
Political Talk	236	0	.34	.48	.23	.66	-1.57	1.00
Group Membership	235	1	.62	.49	.24	-.49	-1.78	1.00
Community Service	236	0	.52	.50	.25	-.08	-2.01	1.00

Table 3

Chronbachs Alpha for Likert Scale Measured Independent Variables

Variable	Items	Range	M	SD	α
Racial Group Esteem	3	3-15	10.48	1.79	.15
Racial Attitudes	6	5-30	15.96	3.65	.57
Personal Discrimination	5	5-25	19.70	4.12	.74
Neighborhood Collective Efficacy	2	2-10	5.48	1.71	.43
Neighborhood Esteem	2	Standardized	-.01	1.79	.75

Table 4

Summary of Intercorrelations for Hypothesized Findings

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.Age	--								
2.Gender	.09	--							
3.N. Esteem	-.05	.18**	--						
4.N. Collective Efficacy	.01	.04	-.21**	--					
5.Racial Attitudes	-.15*	-.01	.16*	-.11	--				
6.Personal Discrimination	-.09	-.02	.22**	-.17**	.38**	--			
7.Political Talk	-.02	-.07	-.06	.06	.11	.13*	--		
8.Group Membership	.25**	-.11	-.09	.07	.02	.04	.17**	--	
9.Community Service	.14*	-.09	-.03	.04	.03	.13*	.19**	.44**	-

*p=.05, **p< .01

Table 5

Summary of Intercorrelations for Non-Hypothesized Findings

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.Age	--								
2.Gender	.09	--							
3.N. Esteem	-.05	.18**	--						
4.N. Collective Efficacy	.01	.04	-.21**	--					
5.Racial Attitudes	-.15*	-.01	.16*	-.11	--				
6.Personal Discrimination	-.09	-.02	.22**	-.17**	.38**	--			
7.Political Talk	-.02	-.07	-.06	.06	.11	.13*	--		
8.Group Membership	.25**	-.11	-.09	.07	.02	.04	.17**	--	
9.Community Service	.14*	-.09	-.03	.04	.03	.13*	.19**	.44**	-

Table 6

Results from Logistic Regression Predicting Social Group Membership

Predictor	B	SE	Odds ratio	Wald statistic	CI
Age	.18	.05	1.19	13.43*	(1.09, 1.31)

Note R²= .06 (Cox & Snell) .08 (Nagelkerke), Model X²(1) =14.63*

*p<.05, **p< .01

Table 7

Results from Logistic Regression Predicting Political Discussion with Family & Peers

Predictor	B	SE	Odds ratio	Wald statistic	CI
PD	.35	.18	1.42	3.84*	(1.00, 2.00)

Note R²=.02 (Cox & Snell) .02 (Nagelkerke), Model X²(1) =4.03*

*p<.05, **p<.01

Table 8

Results from Logistic Regression Predicting Engagement in Community Service

Predictor	B	SE	Odds ratio	Wald statistic	CI
Step 1					
Age	.09	.04	1.10	4.76**	(1.01, 1.20)
Step 2					
Age	.11	.05	1.11	5.64*	(1.01, 1.21)
PD	.32	.16	1.37	3.84*	(1.00, 1.89)

Step 1 Note R2 = .02 (Cox & Snell) .03 (Nagelkerke), Model X2(1) = 4.87*

Step 2 Note R2 = .04 (Cox & Snell) .05 (Nagelkerke), Model X2(2) = 9.74**

*p < .05, **p < .01