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Activism Deferred Among Black American Students

By Patrice W. Glenn Jones

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore attitudes of prosocial behavior (i.e., advocating and organizing) among Black American high school and college students age 18-23. The study is guided by two research questions: (1) How do Black American students perceive activism, and (2) What factors influence youth activism among Black American students? Seventeen participants contributed their perceptions, and data was collected via interviews from December 2018 through March 2019. This publication highlights the significance of youth advocacy and organizing, in general, and Black American students' specific perceptions of their involvement and contribution to social change. Findings reveal four themes: (a) voicelessness, (b) inequity awareness, (c) undirected desire, and (d) group participation and collectivism.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patrice W. Glenn Jones is an assistant professor with Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University Worldwide (ERAU-W), a periodic contributor to Pearson Education, and an online learning specialist. Despite her involvement in several professional sectors, Patrice's passion lies with helping Black students realize their best selves through education, self-actualization, and a sense of community. Dedicated to researching psychosocial factors that impede or accelerate Black students' success, Patrice taught for years in minority-serving schools and institutions prior to joining the ERAU-W faculty. Patrice began her career as an English teacher and radio air personality in Jacksonville, Florida.

After earning a master's degree in English from the University of North Florida, her career expanded to higher education and included positions as copy editor, TRIO program coordinator, faculty member, instructional designer, program director, and assistant dean. She holds an Educational Specialist degree in Information Science and Learning Technology with a specialty in design and development, from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Patrice's reputation as an authentic, passionate innovator follows her, and she has been hailed as educator to watch. Furthermore, her concern for Black students, forthright disposition, and love of people has led her to serve as keynote speaker for the Florida Fund for Minority Teachers, Richland School District, and other organizations. She holds a Ph.D. in educational leadership from Florida A&M University. You can reach Patrice at pwglenn@yahoo.com.

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BACKGROUND

Incidents of gun violence and unlawful uses of excessive force by law enforcement have been met with activism among its victims and other young Americans affected by experience or through association. Reactions to the May 25, 2020, death of George Floyd, for example, who died, quite literally, under the weight of a Minneapolis police officer included peaceful protests and riots. And teen advocacy for gun-free school zones gained national attention after 17 people were killed and 14 others injured in the 2018 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas (MSD) High School in Parkland, Florida.

Many students recognize that they too could become casualties of misappropriation of power and acts of violence. They further assert, in their own words and on their own terms, that if actions are not taken to change targeted injustice and thwart violence, such incidents will likely persist, as they have for decades, making victims of more young people in the United States. Some students take to the streets chanting "No justice, no peace" while others fight for gun control and increased accountability among those who are supposed to serve and protect. No matter the method of protest, the prosocial behavior—advocacy and organizing efforts—among young people has taken center stage across the country. For Black students, in particular, advocacy is a matter of life or death.

The history of student advocacy and organizing includes Black American college students who led sit-ins at the counters of department stores throughout the South. Four North Carolina A&T University students were among the first to protest segregated dining by sitting in a 'Whites only' section in Woolworth. Denied the equal opportunity of service, these student advocates—Ezell Blair, Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeil, and David Richmond—prompted a wave of student-led protests and were instrumental in sparking social outcry around racial discrimination from young Black American's perspective. While youth organizing initiatives often address local issues, these efforts had the potential to cause broader socioeconomic and political change, as in the case of the Civil Rights sit-ins. The sit-ins and associated behaviors led to profound social change.

Community organizers acknowledge issues and seek solutions. Prosocial behavior, which refers to voluntary action intended to help others, is prompted by communal vision that works toward improved circumstances or goal accomplishment. Through youth organizing, in particular, marginalization of young people and their experiences are highlighted, and disregarded youth become civic activists who promote institutional, social, and political change (Warren, Mira, & Nikundiwe, 2008). Furthermore, youth organizing solidifies that young people not only care about social conditions but are active participants in the decision-making that brings about change (Delgado & Staples, 2008).

Christens and Kirshner (2011) noted a distinction between youth organizing groups and highlighted youth-selected issues, as opposed to youth involvement in issues pre-selected by adults or an organization. Youth-selected-issue organizing and advocacy has a more realistic potential to shed light on student issues of marginalization. Even more, youth-initiated advocacy and organizing efforts are distinct from youth-selected ones. When young people initiate advocacy and organizing, they take the lead and seek help from adults or organizations; the issues that youths select usually have the greatest influence on and meaning to the students.

While the practice of youth organizing is presently increasing, participation among Black American students may not live up to the historical activity of those students involved in the Civil Rights Movement. Many would argue that there is less need for such wide-spread activism among Black students, and many, still, would disagree. Incidents of police-initiated violence against Black youth highlight the social inequity that persists. After Zimmerman was acquitted for killing 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, a surge of youth-led and youth-involved protests escalated across the country. That same weekend, for example, a group of young Black activists met in Chicago to mobilize a political and social movement (Smith, 2014); the meeting was an effort of the Black Youth Project, which is led by adult scholars. While many professionals and scholars advocate for young people, youth-led advocacy is an important facet of social change. Furthermore, youth-led advocacy is not a Black or White issue. However, the discussion herein relates to youth-initiated organizing and the attitudes of Black American students toward involvement in advocacy and organizing. Specifically, this discussion on organizing and advocacy emphasizes the perspectives of Black American youth in predominately Black American communities (e.g., those attending predominately Black American high schools and historically Black colleges and universities).

PROBLEM AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Many Black American students have come to expect and even accept issues of social injustice, educational

inequity, racial discrimination, institutional racism, and other issues that shape them. Frequent experiences with such social disparities can and have led many Black American students to develop a perceived apathetic disposition to the wrong. For Majors and Billson (1992), this emotionlessness, fearlessness, and aloofness, a term they coined the "cool pose," is used by Black Americans to combat inner pain. This "cool pose," which is not an actual pose but a characterization of Black youth's physical movements, can subsequently lead to behaviors that result in greater opportunity and treatment inequity (Majors & Billson, 1992) because White teachers, in particular, can confuse the students' physical demeanor as a form of defiance or quality of delinquency. In some cases, these disparities are accepted as 'normal' and are expected. Circumstances outside of these perceived norms (i.e., school-target mass shootings and unjustified police shootings) can, and often do, illicit advocacy and organizing among youths. The aforementioned issues of disparity present a genuine threat to social equity and the future of Black American communities, and these issues warrant prosocial behavior.

Moreover, with a bountiful legacy of advocacy and organizing, coupled with continued incidents of institutional racism and social inequities, there remains issues around which Black Americans must mobilize and organize toward change. Many Black American leaders, like Congressman John Lewis, have a history of student organizing and prosocial behavior. With so much work yet to be done, young leadership is necessary. Where, then, are the young advocates with a trajectory of community leadership, and how can we prepare them if apathy seems to persist among Black American youth?

Herein, I examine Black American student attitudes about prosocial behavior, in general, and advocacy and organizing, specifically. Hence forth, the term activism will be used to refer to prosocial behavior, advocacy, and organizing. The elements of social identity (Reicher, Hopkins, Levine, & Rath, 2005), along with sense of community and perceived self-efficacy research, were identified and framed to guide interviews of Black American high school and college students. Select responses are revealed. This brief also reveals themes that emerged from those interviews. These themes amplify conditions that negatively affect students' perspectives about activism and further deter student-led activism among the participants. Its purpose is to understand student perspectives about activism and isolate factors that deter involvement. The desired outcome is outlined strategies to prepare the next generation of young Black American organizers and advocates. To achieve such, we must first identify factors that promote and defer involvement in activism among this group of students.

There are conflicting reports about the level of activism among young Black American and youths from low income backgrounds, but it is important to note that the research presented herein precedes the death of George Floyd, which has been created with awakening activism among America's young people. Some research indicates that Black American students and urban youth are less involved in post-Civil Rights activism than their White and middle-class peers (Camino & Zeldin, 2002; Hart & Atkins, 2002). Hart and Atkins (2002) identified adult socio-political apathy as an obstacle that mitigates activism and civic responsibility among students in urban areas. Those who consider youth participation in politically-charged expressionism (e.g., hip hop, spoken word, poetry, and social media) view the level of activism among Black American youth more positively (Ginwright, 2010). Akom (2009), for example, discussed the role of hip hop to promote social improvements among Black American communities. Likewise, Kinloch (2010) examined the relationship between community activism and critical literacy in Harlem New York. Clay (2012) conducted a two-year study among two youth, hip-hop generation groups to determine their engagement in activism. With the attention placed on achievement disparities between Black and White students, as well as poor and wealthy children, Black youth advocacy re-emerged out of the need for academic and social equity (Ginwright, 2010; Ginwright, Cammarota, & Noguera, 2005). Black youths are aware of the injustice, and those who participate in advocacy efforts realize that they can contribute to policy changes.

SOCIAL IDENTITY

Reicher, Hopkins, Levine, and Rath (2005) identified three tenants of social identity in their model of helping: (1) category inclusion, (2) category norms, and (3) category interests. These elements provided a context to help examine Black American students' potential for prosocial behavior.

Category Inclusion

Category inclusion essentially means a sense of belonging. When people feel a part of a group, their potential for advocacy increases. According to Levine and Thompson (2004), people will act to support in-group members, and this action will likely take the form of a collaborative action of helping. Commonality is a focus. To understand Black American students' feelings of inclusion, I posed questions about sense of belonging, which is also related to sense of community and isolated group-membership affiliations (i.e., church membership, sorority or fraternity membership, school organizations, athletic team participation, and such).

Category Norms

The second element, category norms, refers to the group meaning or collective purpose, as manifested by group traditions, practices, and terms of acceptable behavior. Individual identity is thus influenced by group culture and the standards of acceptable behavior. Within a group, these norms can be defined or implied. Cultural implications are isolated to identify congruence among perceived norms and behaviors that consistently are viewed as abnormal or unacceptable.

Category Interests

Category interests refer to common concerns among a group. According to Reicher, Cassidy, Wolpert, Hopkins, and Levine (2006), prosocial behavior is more likely to occur when group members perceive that advocacy and organizing will indeed help their interests. Trends regarding Black American student interests were isolated to provide a more focused perspective of prosocial behavior levels among students with varied interests.

At the center of Reicher et al.'s (2005) social identity elements is the individual-to-group relationship. An individual's participation in a meaningful group to which he or she feels communion is key. In contrast, the ability to belong to a group without identifying with the group is a possibility. For example, specific level of achievement and grade point average can qualify a student to be a part of the National Student Honor Society (NSHS). However, being a part of the NSHS does not mean the student feels like he or she belongs, accepts the behaviors of the NSHS membership as normal, and is interested in the principles representative of the organization. Therefore, I interject sense of community as an important quality to supplement Reicher et al.'s (2005) social identity theory.

SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Sarason (1974) offered sense of community (SOC) as an alternative to his perceived limitations in traditional community psychology models. According to Sarason (1974), a sense of community is, "The perception of similarity to others, an acknowledged interdependence with others, . . . and the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure" (p. 157). Shortly after Sarason introduced SOC, Doolittle and MacDonald (1978) constructed the Sense of Community Scale to determine the behaviors and attitudes of individuals functioning as a social organization at the community level. Early sense of community studies focused on neighborhoods. For example, Ahlbrandt and Cunningham (1979) examined the relationship between sense of community and neighborhood satisfaction and discovered that those most satisfied with their neighborhood viewed it as a community within a city, had a sense of loyalty to the community, and identified communal activities within the neighborhood. A decade after Sarason proposed SOC theory, McMillan and Chavis (1986) conceptualized a multi-dimensional sense model. The dimensions include membership, influence, integration, fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection.

PERCEIVED SELF EFFICACY

Willing participation in a community is reduced to individuality, as is a person's ability to contribute to group goals and communal interest. Individual behavior, thus, shapes goal and group accomplishment. Bandura (1998) introduced perceived self-efficacy and defined it as an individual's "beliefs in [his or her] capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments" (p. 624). Perceived self-efficacy further refers to a person's beliefs about his or her own abilities to exercise control over personal behavior and over events (Bandura, 1991).

While youth advocacy, as a component of prosocial behavior, can occur as a solitary effort, its reach is likely to extend beyond an individual. Organizing, however, by definition is about collective action. The relationship between individuality and communal work are thus reciprocal. Individuality is an important element of communal and personal responsibility, for individuals make up the collective. When youths organize in groups, they are not only individually engaged, they have the potential to motivate and engage others. Moreover, individuals are engaged in the development of a larger community and are more engaged in the democratic process.

However, in consideration of perceived self-efficacy, if an individual perceives that he or she is unable to control personal behavior or to make a difference, the individual's involvement with and contribution to a group or social activity is unlikely. Perceived self-efficacy is, therefore, another important dimension in examining individual student activism and the likelihood of organizing and advocacy behaviors.

Perceived Truth

Along with perceived self-efficacy, individual perception of truth and how we weigh facts prompt our responses to those facts. Ditto and Boardman (1995) asserted that when an individual does not want to believe something, more work is involved in reaching acceptance of said information; however, if an individual wants to believe something, there is less effort required for the person to perceive it as truth. For example, if a student has limited perceptions of civic engagement and does not see many people engaged in prosocial activity, this may shape his

perception and his belief system. In turn, it may take more effort to convince him that he has the ability to make a difference through involvement in organized activity. According to Ditto and Boardman (1995) our beliefs sway how we interpret facts. Perceived truth, as a tangent element of perceived self-efficacy, is particularly important among young people, as they are still developing both cognitively and socially. Therefore, the ability to influence their belief system, and thus their perception of truth, are likely more probable than among older adults. As students believe in or accept situations as truth, their perceived self-efficacy helps to propel them into mobilizing around problems.

SOCIAL ADVOCATE EFFICACY

Consistent with the above referenced conceptualizations of social identity, perceived self-efficacy, and sense of community in relation to Black American student advocacy and organizing, other research indicates that prosocial behavior, being defined as voluntary participation in a helping activity, is most likely and most powerful when students have positive relationships with adults (Bowers, Johnson, Warren, Tirrell, & Lerner, 2015) and feel individually empowered, a high sense of belonging, (Akiva, Carey, Cross, Delale-O'Connor, & Brown, 2017), a sense of efficacy (Taft & Gordon, 2018), a sense of responsibility (Goessling, 2017; Stoudt, Cahill, Torre, Lopez, Belmonte, Djokovic & Rosado, 2016), and are personally affected by issues (Montague & Eiroa-Orosa, 2017).

I, therefore, offer Social Advocate Efficacy (SAE) as a conceptualized framework to explore Black American student attitudes about advocacy and organizing. Figure 1 displays the relationship among these factors.

As indicated by the presence of social identity, a high perceived self-efficacy and a high sense of community could contribute to a greater chance of involvement in advocacy. While presence of these elements cannot be said to predict student involvement in prosocial behavior, advocacy, and organizing, the intersection of these factors could lead to increased understanding of Black American student involvement in activism.

As the aforementioned conceptualization has not been previously studied, its investigation calls for expanded dialogue and possible clarification of related concepts among youth. Therefore, a qualitative approach using interviews was used to determine if the intersectionality of factors, as well as other concepts, contribute to probable Black American youth involvement in advocacy and organizing. Students' perceived attitudes toward (a) prosocial behaviors, (b) the Civil Rights activism, and (c) group-shared issues were also explored.

METHOD

For the purpose of this study, I used perspective interviews to examine the perceptions and attitudes of Black American high school and college students regarding prosocial behavior and related concepts presented in the aforementioned framework. The sample for this study was selected using purposive and directed sampling, which increases theme generation.

The seventeen Black American students in this study, which include eight men and nine women, met identified criteria: (a) self-identify as Black American, (b) enrollment at a predominately Black American high school or historically Black college or university, and (b) between age 18-23. Students were enrolled at five different institutions—three high schools and two universities—in the same state.

I interviewed participants using an open-ended interview schedule of 14 questions (See Table 1). The questions were developed from the review of literature on pro-social behavior, sense of community, and perceived self-efficacy. All interviews were held between December 2018 to March 2019 (i.e, after the shooting at MSD High School but before the death of George Floyd). Interviews took place in person and through audio-visual enabled virtual collaboration programs, based on participant preference and availability.

FIGURE 1. SOCIAL ADVOCATE EFFICICACY

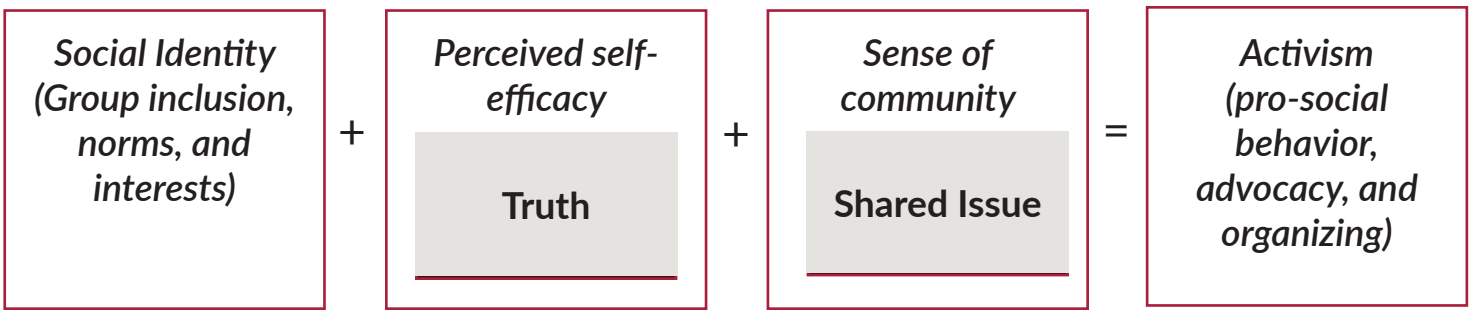


TABLE 1: INTERVIEW TOPIC GUIDE

Pro-Social Behavior	*Talk to me about pro-social behavior, activism, and organizing around an issue or problem.* *What do you voluntarily do to help others?* *Are you currently involved in any activism? Why or why not.*
Inclusion	*Describe your family. Are any members of your family involved in any social activism or organizing?* *Talk to me about your teachers and school.* *Describe your relationships with your closest friendships.* *In what group do you feel that you most belong?*
Norms	*What group traditions, practices, and acceptable behaviors do you share in the group previously discussed?*
Sense of Community	*What about that group makes you feel you belong?* *Would you feel a greater sense of empowerment if you were connected to a group with the same social concerns and issues? Explain.* *Do you feel involvement in such a group would encourage your pro-social behavior?*

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do Black American students perceive activism?
2. What factors influence youth activism among Black American students?

All interviews were transcribed, and participant member-checks were then conducted for accuracy. Upon transcript approval, I analyzed and coded the qualitative data using open and axial practices. Key themes were identified among the participants.

Articulation of reflexivity includes analyzing how the researcher's background may shape the study. Researcher experiences as an alumnus of one of the high schools and one of the universities did not persuade interpretations of the findings. Likewise, sharing ethnic-racial group background with the participants also had no influence on coding or interpretation of the data. The researcher does recognize the potential force of ethnic-racial group congruence as a potential leverage on participant responses during interviews. Feelings of belonging, which are often present among people with similar characteristics (e.g., race, culture, gender), can promote sense of community (Sarason, 1974) and affect participants' behaviors (i.e., responses).

FINDINGS

Data saturation, which occurs when no new themes emerge during interviews, occurred at 17 interviews. I assigned pseudonyms to the participants to maintain their anonymity. All participants self-identify as Black Americans. Participant gender, level of education, and age were also identified. Participant characteristics are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2: PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

Participant	Gender	High School/ College	Age
Andrew	Man	High School	18
Brenda	Woman	High School	18
Chantel	Woman	High School	18
DeAllen	Man	High School	18
Eve	Woman	College	20
Fran	Woman	High School	18
Greg	Man	College	21
Hakeem	Man	College	23
Ian	Man	College	23
Jayden	Woman	College	21
Karen	Woman	College	22
Landon	Man	High School	18
Monica	Woman	High School	19
Nia	Woman	High School	18
Olivia	Woman	College	19
Patrick	Man	High School	18
Quinton	Man	College	22

Based on the data collected, four themes emerged based on participant's responses. In addition to these themes, related ideas also emerged. These themes and related ideas are presented in Table 3 and are described using data extracts to illustrate each of them.

TABLE 3: THEMES AND RELATED IDEAS

THEME	RELATED IDEAS
Voicelessness	Invisibility Powerlessness Control Frustration becomes apathy
Inequity awareness	Race as a construct Racism as a normal part of life
Undirected desire	Lack of modeling Family legacy Civil Rights movement Mentorship
Group participation and collectivism	Friends as community Common issues and concerns Support desired Isolation

The four themes, including extractions of the data collected, are presented above.

THEME 1: VOICELESSNESS

One of the most powerful themes that characterized the participants' perceptions of prosocial behavior and the factors that impact youth advocacy was voicelessness. The literal definition of voicelessness refers to the lack of voice or the inability to communicate. The figurative meaning of voicelessness is associated with powerlessness and the mitigation or marginalization of perspective. Most students expressed ideas that coincided with the latter definition. Participants communicated voicelessness, frustration from lack of control, powerlessness, and invisibility as a condition of being a Black American youth. As a reaction to these abstractions, the development of an aloofness was noted. Some of their comments are below:

When asked about personal interests and the ability to make a difference regarding issues that impact Black American youth, one participant responded:

Our issues don't get attention. They treat being Black in America like it's a choice. They pay more attention and seem to care more about being homosexual or wanting to transgender. Somehow, LGBT issues have become more important than the racism we experience... I'm not saying they [LGBT population] should be treated wrong; I am not saying that. I just feel it is funny that people rather be sensitive to that group's issues merely based on who they are sleeping with rather than address the racism and racial discrimination we [Black Americans] have always endured.

Another participant indicated:

No one listens to us [young Black Americans] or cares what we think.

Still another participant persistent with similar messages of voicelessness:

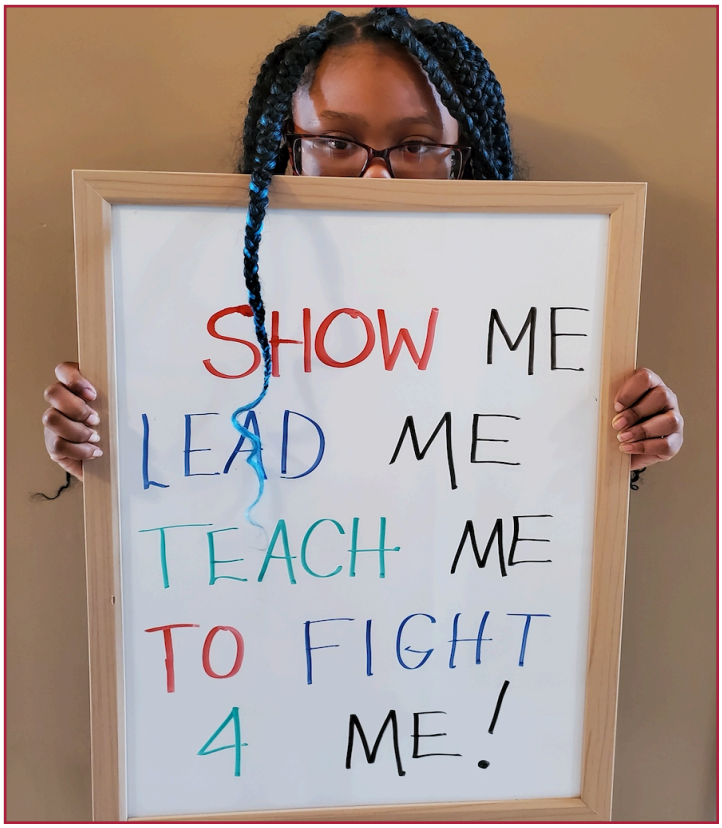
My teachers are . . .[student laughs]. . . well, most of them are White, and I guess that would be okay if they got it. But they don't get it, and they don't even want to hear what we have to say. They just want to keep us under control.

A 19-year-old participant reflected:

Hey, nobody listens to what I have to say. I'm young and Black, so nobody listens except when I get very loud.

Most of the participants indicated that being young, in general, and Black, specifically, were disadvantages in the effort to be heard and taken seriously. The participants also indicated that their experiences were marginalized and disregarded. As a result of their voicelessness, some participants indicated they did not feel as though they could make a difference and, therefore, developed and communicated apathetic ideas. Issues of race were dominant. While the ideas were present among both genders, all of the man participants communicated ideas related to this theme. These ideas coincided with Logan's (2017) assertion that apathy develops out of dysfunctional

or unhealthy relationships. Among Black American men, in particular, emotions are managed to evoke apathy (Jackson, 2018).



THEME 2: INEQUITY AWARENESS

The second theme that emerged from the participants was the awareness of racial inequity. Most participants spoke about racism. Several shared their frustration with the race, and others shared specific racist experiences. Some ideas of racism were more sophisticated than others. From institutionalized racism to social acceptance of negative racial stereotypes, participants were aware of racism and viewed it as a natural part of life in America. Below are some of their comments:

While discussing group belonging, one participant said:

If a group of us [young Black Americans] are together, [others think] we must be doing something wrong.

Another participant replied:

I just don't get it. It shouldn't matter that we are Black, but it does.

A 21-year-old college participant indicated:

I don't ever forget that I'm Black. It's important to me, and I am not even sure why. I guess it's because people always remind me. My mom always said we have to work harder to reach the same goal. Sometimes, that's just a lot to even think about.

When asked to discuss his teachers, one participant responded:

I can tell some of my teachers are racist. They act like they can't stand us. When I was in third grade, my teacher was a mean old White lady and she used to always use "you people." I really didn't know what she meant until I was older. She meant Black people.

Regarding group norms, one participant indicated:

We've been struggling since we came to this country, and most people just accept that [the struggle] as a normal part of being Black.

With regard to her concerns and interests, one participant commented:

Education is what really concerns me and institutional racism. Both are systems that affect underprivileged children and could ultimately determine whether they succeed in life.

Another participant's sarcastic response conveyed the apparent awareness of stereotypes and inequity:

Aren't we the problem? That's what it seems to suggest--that we [Black Americans] do all the wrong.

In her response about prosocial behavior and activism, one participant said:

I mean I feel bad about all the shootings in schools, but if these shootings were at Black schools, I don't think there would be interest. It would be "Oh, those people are just causing problems like they always do."

Among participant's concerns and issues, racism was the most commonly identified. Though accepting in their awareness of racism as 'normal', some students shared a sense of bewilderment regarding its continued existence. These ideas coincide with two critical race theorists' assertion that (a) race is a social construct and (b) racism is a common occurrence (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). By accepting racism as a common occurrence, the participants suggested a socially inherit disadvantage and seemed to suggest there was little that could be done, in the way of prosocial behavior or organizing, to correct racial inequities.

THEME 3: UNDIRECTED DESIRE

The third theme, undirected desire, refers to student's desire to participate in activism, but with a lack of direction from others, they are often unsure about how to engage. Through several comments about the Civil Rights Movement, mentorship, family legacy, and modeling emerged as important factor influencing the

participant's involvement in activism. Below are some of the comments:

When asked if she would feel a greater sense of empowerment if connected with a group with the same social concerns, one participant replied:

Yes, I do believe being connected to people with similar issues would empower me to do something. Even if they don't make a difference, being around people that want to see change would inspire me to do something positive. I think.

Responding to discussion about activism and organizing around an issue, one participant said:

We need to do something different [than the actions of Civil Rights advocates], but I'm not sure what or how. I don't know if we [young Black Americans] have the patience that people did during the Civil Rights Movement. They took a lot, and I'm not sure we can take what they did.

Another participant responded:

I guess I kind of envy the people who grew up during Civil Rights; they saw the benefits of working together to get things done. They had examples of how to do it [self-advocate]. They probably repeated what they saw. When was the last time we [young Black Americans] saw that level of fight? I didn't grow up seeing it, not in real life.

When asked about his personal participation in any activism, a participant replied:

Most people I know act like they don't even care about all the wrong going on. They don't do anything about it, so I don't either.

Ultimately, most participants expressed interest in activism, but they did not know how to engage in such activities, and they had never seen the behaviors in practice. According to McCracken (2017), intergenerational mentoring is an important aspect of activism and engagement. The participants' comments coincide with McCracken's (2017) assertion. Wu, Kornbluh, Weiss, and Roddy (2016) also emphasized the importance of youth-adult relationships for youth engagement and activism.

THEME 4: GROUP PARTICIPATION AND COLLECTIVISM

The final theme that emerged from the participants emphasized group participation and collectivism. Participants' comments suggested that collectivism and group participation were important factors of motivation and potential activism. In contrast, comments regarding isolation suggested apathy. Below are some of those comments:

One participant shared how group involvement motivated her:

I'm in student council, and I love being a part of a group of people that have similar concerns. It pushes me to do right by others and right by myself.

A second participant stated that group involvement would motivate him:

Being around people that want to see change in these areas like education, racism, and homelessness would inspire me to take action.

A college participant indicated his interest in a Greek fraternity as a form of collectivism:

The past few years, I've started being more careful when I choose the people I hang with. I try to be with people who want what I want and who have the same interests. I guess that's why I'm thinking about pledging [for a fraternity].

Another participant communicated feelings of isolation and dismay about group involvement:

Sometimes I just feel alone and confused about it all. Sometimes I think, what's the point.

Most participants communicated ideas related to sense of belonging. This theme, along with the participants' comments, coincided with previous research. Hunter, Case, and Harvey (2019) explored sense of belonging among Black college students and found that Black American college students experience a sense of belonging through connection with and responsibility to others. Hunter et al. (2019) further asserted that through collective obligation, Black American college students expressed their racial identities.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, key conclusions can be drawn. First, Black American youths between the ages of 18 and 23 communicate strong emotions directly related to their racial identities. For many of them, being Black and young places them at a greater disadvantage than merely being Black. The participants revealed awareness of a social hierarchy that placed Black Americans youths as a group of lesser importance. For them, the issues associated with any other minority (e.g., LGBTQ) are more important than those of Black American youths. Previous research reveals that LGBTQ

youths also communicate feeling a sense of rejection and voicelessness regarding their personal issues (Beck, 2016; Khoury, 2010; Whittlesey, 2019). Secondly, mentorship and modeling of positive prosocial behaviors can be beneficial to Black American youths' involvement in and perception of advocacy and organizing. Therefore, Black American parents, teachers, civic leaders, and activists should work to include youths in activism as early as possible. This early inclusion models organizing behaviors for Black American youths and normalizes participation in such activities. Additionally, based on participant responses, elements of the social advocacy efficacy conceptual framework (i.e., social identity, perceived self-efficacy, and sense of community) are indeed important in determining whether Black American youths engage in prosocial behavior. The tenants of the social advocacy efficacy framework coincide with identified themes (i.e., voicelessness, as well as group participation and collectivism). Finally, collectivism is an important variable of youth advocacy. Youth involvement in extracurriculars (e.g., sports, music, dance) should include active community service and organizing activities. Students should be allowed to identify issues that are important to them and organize around these issues. It is incumbent of the adults (i.e., parents, teachers, coaches, community center leaders, activity sponsors) to help facilitate the prosocial behaviors of elementary-aged students by encouraging their voices (e.g. encouraging individualized, situation-based critical thinking; validating personal reactions; creating a safe environment for students to ask questions; and listening when they speak). Further these adults must allow Black American students to become more independent in organizing and activism as they mature.

CONCLUSION

We are halfway through 2020, and the recent incidents of violence toward Blacks in particular (e.g., Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd) have resulted in a height of unrest, anger, and social tension, and these unjust deaths are being met with protests and rioting. While the former is a more desirable reaction to injustice, the latter is a reminder of Martin Luther King Jr.'s sentiment on rioting. According to King, "Rioting is the language of the unheard." And if the participants' comments presented herein are a representation of the sense of voicelessness shared by even a small number of Black American youth, King's words offer legitimacy to all the authentic reactions of protestors in Minneapolis and throughout the nation.

Though difficult to accept, it is reasonable to conclude that injustices toward Black Americans will continue before things improve, and while some young Americans have been activated by blatant acts of injustice, activism must thrive beyond the current social climate.

Black American are still the most underserved student groups in America, and for many, particularly those from low economic backgrounds, fulfillment of the American Dream seems just that—a dream. Thus, it is appropropriate to ask as Langston Hughes questioned, "What happens to a dream deferred?" What happens when youth do not feel empowered to act?

Many people would suggest that King's dream of a nation of people who are judged by the "content of their character" does not seem much improved from conditions in 1963. Although increased opportunities are now afforded to many marginalized groups, including Black Americans, there is still much work that requires advocates and organizers who will fight for solutions to issues of injustice. Change occurs through the social and physical investment of change agents. America's youth, like the participants involved in this explorative study and those who engage in 2020 protests, are essential catalysts for social equity, and they must—as we all must—take action. Furthermore, social advocacy efficacy can empower future generations to act. Ultimately, the suffocation of perennial wide-spread inequity is one we cannot accept.

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