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The Pedagogy of Protest: Extra-Institutional Learning in the Black Lives Matter Movement

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The Pedagogy of Protest:

Extra-Institutional Learning in the Black Lives Matter Movement

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by

Allegra Basch

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Pedagogy of Protest:

Extra-Institutional Learning in the Black Lives Matter Movement

by

Allegra Basch

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Cecilia Rios-Aguilar, Co-Chair

Professor Kristen Lee Rohanna, Co-Chair

The goal of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of Black high school students who participated in Black Lives Matter protests in Los Angeles in 2020. While research has been conducted on the effects of student participation in school-based protests, and in political-engagement assignments couched within a school curriculum, little information is available on the effects of student participation in independent extra-institutional political actions. The study aimed to shed light on the protest experiences of students and how their participation potentially influenced them. The hope was for findings to provide communities and schools with information that might help them better support Students of Color. Engaging a conceptual framework steeped in Yosso's (2005) concept of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) and Freire's (1970, 1993) critical consciousness (CC) and critical action (CA), the act of protest

and the perceived learning its spaces cultivated were viewed with an eye to Transformative Resistant Capital (TRC). The study found that, as a result of participating in protests, participants reported they were able to process past and present racial traumas, cultivate a critical lens in relation to the world around them, and activate their voices and creative expression, with the support of educator mentors. These findings were significant in that (1) perceived learning occurred in an independent, extra-institutional experiential protest context, (2) a conceptual framework emerged from participant narratives that might contribute to future pedagogical approaches to effective TRC-based programs such as YPAR (Youth Participatory Action Research), and (3) these findings speak to a new post-pandemic, post-BLM historical moment of potential educational reform. Implications suggest that schools serving BIPOC students offer opportunities for experiential and arts programming that emphasizes social-emotional processing of racial traumas, and critical action, with a focus on culturally responsive, trauma-informed educator training.

The dissertation of Allegra Basch is approved.

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University of California, Los Angeles

2023

DEDICATION

For my students. And for my children.

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VITA

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Chapter 1

Statement of the Problem

Prologue

In February 2015, the archbishop of the diocesan high school at which I taught in San Francisco announced that all teachers would be expected to sign a morality contract. The language of said contract would put LGBTQ+ teachers and allies at risk of dismissal and require educators to teach that homosexuality was "gravely evil." Within days, a student protest movement was born. Among the student leaders were several of my Civics and AP Government students who previously had taken little interest in academics.

One of them was Isaiah (pseudonym), a senior who rarely did his homework and most days sat slumped at the back of the room. His grades spanned C and below, but I knew from written work that his skills of critical analysis were off the charts. I tried everything to engage Isaiah, to no avail. That is, until the unit on civil disobedience. I remember clearly the Monday in November after Tamir Rice was murdered. It was a rare occasion when Isaiah spoke in class. As one of the few Black male students at the school (majority populations were white, Latinx, and Asian-American or Pacific Islander/AAPI), at a certain point in my lesson on the Black Lives Matter "Die Ins" happening at HBCUs and other universities around the country, Isaiah no longer could tolerate sitting in silence as other students discussed in theoretical terms something that impacted his life so immediately, devastatingly, and daily (a paraphrase of his words that day). After that class, I observed Isaiah's participation increase. He laughed more in class. He started turning in homework. When the morality contract was announced later that school year and student protests began, Isaiah was among the first to get involved. His grades steadily improved in his classes. By the end of the school year, he was admitted to an HBCU. For the

next several years, Isaiah continued his political involvement in college at two different HBCUs. He graduated, became a teacher, and remains politically engaged today.

Isaiah's journey was not an isolated one. I remember standing on a rainy plaza watching my high school students, Isaiah included, holding prayer candles and signs that proclaimed "Teach Acceptance" and "We Love our LGBTQ+ Teachers." Many of these students previously had been overlooked academically or dismissed behaviorally. Many were BIPOC students. Yet here they were, young people with agency, critical consciousness, and purpose. I saw in them a reflection of a new generation of youth activists from Standing Rock, Ferguson, and Parkland to Hong Kong, Santiago, and Tangiers. My pedagogical aims crystalized on that plaza; I understood that my job was to harness the wealth of knowledge my students brought with them to the table, so that they might be able to become more active participants in shaping their lives and those of others in their communities.

Introduction

Youth movements have emerged across the globe in recent years to confront issues impacting the next generation from inequality to dictatorship, discrimination, and Global Warming. Mainstream media outlets such as Time Magazine have referred to this global pattern of youth activism as a "Youthquake" (Alter, 2020). Social media has connected and activated these movements, enabling young people to critically engage and voice their visions across geographic boundaries. In the wake of the global Covid-19 pandemic, a massive wave of youth-led protests emerged in the United States in the form of the second wave of Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests. Sparked by the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, and in response to multiple highly publicized examples of police brutality, protesters took to the streets in what the New York Times identified as possibly the largest protest movement in United States history,

with 15 to 26 million people self-reporting participation in the first month alone (Buchanan et al, 2020). Of these participants, the largest share were individuals under 35 years old (Buchanan et al, 2020). These youth-led movements, while pervasive, have been little researched as holding pedagogic potential for participants.

As a backdrop to this trend is the extensive and pervasive history within the US education system of dismissing Students of Color as disruptive and ineducable (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Howard, 2020; Shalaby, 2017). Education scholars have identified a related "achievement" or "opportunity gap" between Black, brown, and indigenous students and their white and certain Asian peers (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Hanushek, 2020; Howard, 2020). In many ways, schools in the US have mirrored and replicated structures of systemic racism and class oppression in larger society, rather than providing students with essential tools for interrupting these structures and creating a more equitable and democratic one (Robinson & Aronica, 2015; Freire, 1970; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). This deficit approach in which BIPOC students are depicted as underperforming, lacking, or victimized has been a dominant one over the past half century (Quinn, 2020; Yosso, 2005; Howard, 2020; Kozol, 2012). While its related research may be useful in pointing to deeply rooted problems leading to inequitable access for Students of Color, the approach also has the potential to transmit unintended messages about the value, or lack thereof, of these students (Quinn, 2020). A strengths-based reframing that centers the skills, experiences, and values Students of Color bring into educational spaces may be more useful in improving their outcomes. In particular, involvement in now prevalent extra-institutional protest movements, such as BLM, may be a useful source for schools to consider in order to catalyze these experiences into effective learning opportunities.

The aim of this research study is to understand the potential of youth protest spaces as

arenas of growth and fora for the cultivation of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), particularly in the form of transformative resistant capital (Yosso, 2005), as well as for critical consciousness and critical action (Freire, 1970; 1993). It focuses on the experiences of Black youth who were high school students in Los Angeles during the BLM protests in the summer of 2020, and attempts to amplify the voices of a group statistically marginalized by traditional educational spaces. It seeks to highlight participant perceptions of how high schools might effectively incorporate learning from non-traditional spaces into student academic trajectories, particularly for BIPOC students.

Background of the Problem

Students who participate in protests are often considered to be disruptive in schools. When the Tinker siblings attended school with black armbands, their principal's first instinct was to suspend them. In challenging this administrator's actions, Tinker v. Des Moines established that students do not "leave their freedom of speech at the schoolhouse gate," unless it disrupts learning. Protests that take place within a school context, whether addressing local issues, such as the 1968 East L.A. walkouts, or national ones, such as the 2018 *March for Our Lives* school walkouts for gun control, are often met with consternation from administration, conveyed as disruptive, and therefore limited (Garcia, 2014; Raphelson and Bowman, 2018). Since the so-called achievement gap between Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) and white students has not budged in 40 years (Hanushek, 2020), skills of critical consciousness and critical action (Freire, 1970; 1993) gleaned from experiences such as protests may be an effective means for students in certain circumstances to demand greater equity in their settings.

Research has shown that opportunity gaps can be lessened when communities are deeply involved in their students' educational experiences (Howard, 2019). Service Learning and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) programs also have been examined to discern their

positive impacts on student learning outcomes (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Student involvement in extracurricular activities and forming mentorships and community with others in after-school programs have proven effective towards improving academic achievement (Middaugh & Kirshner, 2015). And student participation in after-school Youth Organizing (YO) programs run by non-profits has been shown to positively affect academic outcomes, although these improvements are often attributed to addended support systems embedded within the programs such as college preparation workshops (Rogers, 2018). However, extra-institutional participation in political action does not seem to have been explored as a means in and of itself towards improving student learning or reducing opportunity gaps. A better understanding of the potential pedagogical outcomes of high school student participation in extra-institutional protests may be useful in helping schools harness the wave of youth movements underway, particularly for BIPOC students who are more likely to experience marginalization in traditional school settings.

In the summer of 2020, when BLM protests resurfaced, many leaders of the movement were youth activists. Within their experiences, there may be tools communities and schools might harness to empower youth to improve their outcomes. The students who often are conveyed and punished as troublemakers by our education system may, in fact, be truth tellers necessary for bold democratic discourse (Shalaby, 2017). Students who speak up to figures of authority in schools, most often punished for these behaviors, are preparing themselves for active life in a modern, multifaceted, and diverse democracy. They are individuals embodying ideals of a country that promises social mobility, social justice, and democratic voice.

Statement of the Research Project

The goal of this project was to explore the experiences of Black high school students

who participated in Black Lives Matter protests in Los Angeles in 2020. While research has been conducted on the effects of student participation in school-based protests, and in political-engagement assignments couched within a school curriculum, little information is available on the effects of student participation in independent extra-institutional political actions. The study aimed to shed light on the protest experiences of students and how their participation potentially influenced them. The hope was for findings to provide communities and schools with information that might help them better support Students of Color. Engaging a conceptual framework steeped in Yosso's (2005) concept of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) and Freire's (1970, 1993) critical consciousness (CC) and critical action (CA), the act of protest and the perceived learning its spaces cultivated was viewed with an eye to Transformative Resistant Capital (TRC).

Research Question

In what ways, if at all, were Black high school students from Los Angeles influenced by their experiences participating in extra-institutional protest(s) during the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020?

Overview of the Research Design

This was an exploratory study as (1) little prior research exists on student independent extra-institutional participation in political protests, (2) the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 are a recent phenomenon, (3) the concept of community engagement as a means to improving student outcomes is often framed as unidirectional, with family and community depicted as providing support to students, but reciprocal student contributions back to the community often are not examined, (4) protest sites have not been widely perceived as informal schools until recent studies by Black and Indigenous scholars, and (5) studies of student political action often

focus on the acquisition of social capital useful towards more antiquated visions of economic viability and democratic participation, rather than on invaluable community-transmitted knowledge. The research utilized a qualitative approach via interviews in order to give voice to students. In engaging this approach, the door was left open for discovery by listening to the narratives (and potential counternarratives) of these students – an essential element of CCW. In order to situate these student narratives within the unique historical context of the global Covid-19 pandemic and the second wave of BLM, an analysis of news sources contemporary with participant experiences was also conducted.

Study Significance

In attempting to better understand the CCW-related TRC, as well as the CC and CA high school students may cultivate in protest spaces, the hope was for the study's findings to aid communities and schools in more effectively fostering their students' capitals from a strengths-based perspective. The ultimate hope was to contribute to knowledge on closing educational opportunity or achievement gaps for BIPOC students and simultaneously to bolster future research that reframes said gaps as unacknowledged and untapped forms of student potential.

The study also attempted to gain a better understanding of protest spaces as potential nontraditional, extra-institutional "schools" (Eagle Shield, 2020). In exploring the perceived learning of high school students in shared, interactive spaces of community formation, approaches were explored that might aid communities in more effectively advocating for their students and to engage in the transmission of community knowledge (Eagle Shield, 2020; Dolan, 2001).

The ultimate hope was for the research to benefit Communities of Color whose schools may be fiscally underfunded, as well as innovative educational leaders who wish to harness its

result, to improve high school programming towards the success of their culturally wealthy BIPOC students.

Chapter 2

A Review of the Literature

Introduction

There is little prior research available on student independent extra-institutional learning in protest spaces, particularly in response to the current wave of youth activism. Therefore, the literature presented in this chapter as related to the study provides a backdrop for potential discovery.

This chapter will first discuss the problem of inequitable opportunity access for BIPOC students within the traditional US education system. Within this context, prior scholarship on opportunity or achievement "gaps" or the *Opportunity Debt* (Ladson-Billings, 2006) will be presented and interrogated for a deficit approach. Then, attempted solutions to the problem will be described and analyzed for their effectiveness, starting with curricularly-related initiatives such as Service Learning and Community Engagement programs. As these programs do not often cultivate Social Justice Citizenship (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004), which might enhance student critical consciousness and critical action (Freire, 1970), more recent and rare programs which do emphasize this approach will be examined for their efficacy. As these examples cannot fully address student independent extra-institutional learning in political action contexts, recent exploratory research by BIPOC scholars on protest spaces as arenas of non-traditional education for the transmission of community knowledge will set the stage for further exploration. Finally, a conceptual framework built on Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), critical consciousness (CC) and critical action (CA) will be presented, with a focus on Transformative Resistant Capital (TRC).

The Opportunity Debt

The terms *Achievement Gap* and *Opportunity Gap* have been used by scholars in the field of Education to refer to the long-standing distance between the experiences, opportunities, and outcomes of BIPOC students and their white and (certain) AAPI counterparts (Howard, 2020). In particular, educational access for African-American, Native American, Latinx, and certain Asian-American students has been limited throughout the history of the United States due to patterns of structural racism (Yosso 2005, Howard 2020). This so-called gap is primarily situated in the economic extremities intrinsic to our country's gross inequalities. Race and class have been sociologically linked since the origins of the United States, and thus it is BIPOC students of the lowest socioeconomic groups that suffer the most from a lack of access to education (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Ogbu, 2003; Howard, 2020; Hanushek, 2020). Poor white students, particularly in rural areas, suffer academic losses similarly (Howard, 2020). If the goal of public education ostensibly is to provide all students in the United States with the same access to economic and democratic opportunities, our system is failing.

The language of a gap – metaphorically, an unmoving, unmovable void between the haves and have-nots – may contribute to deficit thinking and stereotyping around the capabilities of BIPOC students to achieve parity with their white and certain AAPI counterparts (Quinn, 2020). Indeed, even engaging in the language of such a gap might reinforce racial stereotypes which presume a lower performance inherent in BIPOC students based on intellect or ability, as opposed to the structural obstacles they face and have faced for generations, such as lack of access and discrimination (Howard, 2020). Gloria Ladson-Billings refers to an educational *Opportunity Debt* owed Communities of Color, accumulated from centuries of discrimination (Howard, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2006). This concept underscores the notion that, for students to

grow into successful adults equipped with necessary tools for economic viability, social emotional balance, and participatory democracy, it is important first to recognize the ways in which the system has failed them. Indeed, many Students of Color recognize the role structural racism plays in their compromised learning (Howard, 2020). In *Why Race and Culture Matter in Schools*, Tyrone C. Howard (2020) highlights a qualitative study in Los Angeles in which high school Students of Color noted multiple missing material resources in their own schools, and how those compare to schools that were "99% white" or in other (predominantly white and certain AAPI) neighborhoods that possessed greater resources. This kind of critical consciousness, which can emerge in students with exposure to political action-related curricula, is important in the empowerment of BIPOC students. It might aid them in more fully laying claim to their own educational and occupational trajectories.

Beyond socioeconomics, there is evidence that BIPOC students may be limited in academic access and outcomes regardless of class. Researchers Hanushek and Rivkin (2009) found that the achievement gap widens as students ascend in grade level -- and is particularly devastating for Black students who initially display higher achievement. They stipulate that this is due to the ways in which schools may be harming students (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2009). They approach the Hispanic-white achievement gap as an additional concern, however they point to the complexity of Latinx identities, including immigration status, English language proficiency, and race and ethnicity as variables muddying the research waters (Hanushek & Rivken, 2009). What they do find across Latinx populations is the same correlation between blackness and this increasing achievement gap, particularly for those students who start with higher achievement (Hanushek & Rivken, 2009). This trend is important to note as it displays how structures of racism limit opportunities for Black students across demographic contexts.

Gaps apparent in resources or outcomes that disproportionately impact Students of Color are often in direct parallel with the more general resources available to their communities – such as access to clean water, healthcare, housing, safe neighborhood conditions, or green spaces (Milner, 2015; Howard, 2020). Indeed, the recent Black Lives Matter movement has pointed to such structural inequities, as evidenced in the numbers of Black Americans harmed or killed due to police brutality, Covid-19, lack of access to healthcare, and other systemic dangers. In a longitudinal study exploring the differences of district expenditures and potentially correlating racial outcomes, scholars found districts deeply segregated and the least resourced schools, not surprisingly, producing the lowest achievement outcomes (Sosina & Weathers, 2019). Education scholars have been able to effectively causally connect per student spending with short and long term student outcomes; greater per capita spending per student correlated with substantially improved outcomes (Sosina & Weathers, 2019; Candelaria & Shores, 2019; Hyman, 2017; Jackson et al., 2016; Lafortune et al., 2018). As school funding is so often connected to property taxes in a given neighborhood, and the ways in which BIPOC communities have been blocked from access to property ownership and purchasing homes in valuable areas because of discriminatory policies such as redlining (Rothstein, 2018), it seems unlikely for schools serving urban Communities of Color to increase spending in a way that might benefit their respective student bodies academically. Additionally, recent studies have explored the connection between increased income inequality and segregation of housing based on income, which leads to economically-induced increased racial segregation (Sosina & Weathers, 2019; Reardon & Bischoff, 2011; Reardon, Bischoff, Owens, & Townsend, 2018). All of this leads to fewer material resources invested in the education of Black students, which, in turn, results in the apparent gaps in outcomes between them and their white and certain AAPI peers.

BIPOC students are also far more likely to have less qualified, non-credentialed, or off-subject teachers than their white (and certain AAPI), more affluent peers, which directly limits their ability to learn and grow (Dreeben, 1987; R. E. Ferguson, 1991; Howard, 2020). In the absence of material resources and qualified teachers, BIPOC students of low SES face greater obstacles in acquiring essential Math and English literacy skills that are predictors of later student successes (Howard, 2020). Compounding all of this is the increasing number of US students experiencing devastating poverty and homelessness, particularly in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis. BIPOC students from low SES backgrounds are more likely to experience housing instability, violence, and death than their white and certain AAPI counterparts, while lacking in psychological supports provided by schools or the healthcare system – all of which has an impact on their success and well-being (Howard, 2020). The absence of support provided for students experiencing such devastating losses compounds the challenges already faced by them.

These multiple contributing elements to what Ladson-Billings refers to as an Opportunity Debt are additionally impacted by the ways in which schools disproportionately engage in punitive disciplinary actions against BIPOC students. This discipline gap further distances BIPOC students from their white and certain AAPI peers by enforcing mechanisms that further block these students from otherwise available resources. Multiple studies have pointed to the relationship between a student's race and their likelihood of experiencing school punishment (Artiles, 1998; Artiles & Trent, 1994; Harry & Anderson, 1999; Harry & Klingner, 2006; O'Connor & Deluca-Fernandez, 2006; Losen, 2015; Orfield & Losen, 2002; Howard, 2020). The data reveals that students who struggle with reading and math literacy are the same ones likely to be punished through suspension, expulsion, or other means (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber,

1994; Howard, 2020). In a recent study, Maithreyi Gopalan (2019) identified a clear relationship between achievement and discipline gaps that negatively harms Students of Color. All of this deepens the challenges BIPOC students face on the road to economic viability, social-emotional health, and democratic participation.

Beyond school punishment, external law enforcement such as police departments in certain districts have been dispatched to assist in the punishment or detention of Students of Color – including for those in lower elementary school (Vox, 2020). Police, or School Resource Officer (SRO), programs in schools are correlated with higher rates of suspension, expulsion, and lost class time (Fisher and Hennessy, 2016), all related to students being referred to law enforcement for low level offenses (Fisher & Beneke, 2019; Nance, 2015). Even though there is no substantial evidence of the efficacy of such programs, they are increasingly implemented to ensure "school safety" (Turner & Beneke, 2019). SRO programs were formed as a response to school shootings, beginning with Columbine in 1999 (Turner & Beneke, 2019; Howard, 2021). However, even though such violent actions as mass shootings have been committed primarily by white boys and men, the policies that enforce police presence in schools has statistically targeted schools serving BIPOC communities (Triplett, Allen, & Lewis 2014; Turner & Beneke, 2019). Despite a lack of research to substantiate claims, SROs are often posited by school administrations as engaging in "restorative" rather than punitive roles, thus undermining student and faculty testimony to the contrary, and seemingly as an attempt to compensate for a lack of the presence of Teachers of Color (Turner & Beneke, 2019). In addition, civil rights advocates have expressed concern about police presence in schools and its potential to condition youth to unquestioningly accept a "policed state" and the consistent invasion of their space as "normal" (Little, 2013; Howard, 2020), thereby perpetuating the school to prison pipeline.

While the school system is statistically more likely to identify Students of Color as worthy of punishment, it is exactly these students who may be displaying essential qualities of democratic participation. If schools promote cultures of conformity based on an industrial revolution era model of preparation for the workplace (Robinson & Aronica, 2015) and dominant culture white middle class values (Quinn, 2020), it is no surprise that students who disrupt the status quo are more likely to be punished by that system – particularly if that critical questioning is housed in a Black or brown student body. In *Troublemakers: Lessons in Freedom from Young Children at School,* Carla Shalaby (2017) shadows several elementary school students identified by their schools as problematic and deserving of discipline. She finds that "routinely pathologized through testing, labels, and often hastily prescribed medications, these young people are systematically marginalized and excluded through the use of segregated remediation, detentions, suspensions, and expulsions," adding that schools do "not welcome this [form of] protest, this natural way of childhood" (Shalaby, 2017, p. xxvi). Indeed, regularly pathologized, punished students may possess untapped potential for success. Their actions display essential elements of participatory democracy in questioning the conformist fabric of the current US education system.

Acknowledging discrepancies in material resources, opportunities, and disciplinary treatment between BIPOC students and their white and certain AAPI peers is essential to identifying a structural problem endemic in the US education system. Endowing students with tools to address these inequities has the potential to cultivate critical consciousness and critical action in students. However, this deficit approach may have an unintentional inverse effect – conveying to BIPOC students a sense of their being lesser than their white and certain AAPI peers due to lack of access and resulting outcomes. Thus, while it is important to confront

structural racism within the US education system, it is likewise crucial to present successful models which overcome its barriers, and alternate conceptual frameworks, which offer a strengths-based counternarrative.

Service Learning and Community Engagement

Involvement in community and enrichment outside of school can be significant factors in improving student achievement (Hanushek & Rivken, 2009). With an eye to closing opportunity or achievement gaps, or repaying the Opportunity Debt, various schools and non-profits have implemented programs which embrace experiential political engagement as central elements. Two related pedagogical approaches in this vein are Service Learning and Community Engagement, often embedded within school curricula. Service Learning is the practice of project-based learning which allows students to learn about real-world issues, then take action on them, through service-based activities. Community Engagement, as integrated into an academic setting, refers to similar programs that result in activities beyond community service, such as Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) and Youth Organizing (YO). Various studies have been conducted to measure the impact of Service Learning and Community Engagement programs on student outcomes. They have described the effectiveness of these programs in improving student achievement.

Studies of Service Learning as a means towards academic improvement have displayed that student outcomes do improve; however, these outcomes often can be attributed to more time spent engaged in meaningful (rather than non-productive) activities (R. Howard, 2006). Similarly, Community Engagement programs in the form of YPAR have measured related academic improvement. Participatory Action Research (PAR), based on the work of Kurt Lewin and Paolo Freire, offers an opportunity for everyday people to research social issues that directly

affect their lives, and then take action based on them (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Fine et al., 2004; Powers & Allaman, 2012; Pyne et al., 2013; Torre, 2009). Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), then, is a pedagogical approach aimed at empowering students to engage in this work. Students who have participated in college access programs within a YPAR format have been shown to increase their "college-going capital" – an essential element of social capital for the dominant class in the United States (Hudson et al, 2020). However, these improvements could possibly be attributed to college preparation workshops addended to the YPAR program. The hands-on aspects of YPAR programs, however, have the potential to enable students to connect more deeply with their communities and view their education in a context of improving success for others within their communities (Hudson et al, 2020). In addition, students may cultivate empathy and a sense of reciprocal responsibility to their communities, and in some cases, a desire to harness their social capital towards activism to benefit their communities (Hudson et al, 2020). Because students are directly involved in shaping the research in a YPAR format, they are more likely to recognize the value in community-based knowledge and culture, rather than seeing their communities as "holding them back" (Yosso, 2005; Hudson et al, 2020). These findings are significant in that they show the ways in which students might be improving their outcomes as democratic participants, while also benefitting their communities. However, they do not address gains in academic achievement as related to the participatory action element of student experiences.

Service Learning and Community Engagement programs have been effective in many cases due to partnerships forged between schools, communities, and families to scaffold student achievement (Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2009). For example, activities such as helping with or monitoring homework, discussing school activities, and providing adult supervision all have an

impact on student outcomes (Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2009). In fact, localities with high community social capital are often those in which civic engagement is central (Putnam, 1993; Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2009). In communities with strong social capital, adults provide a support system that might bolster student learning both in and outside of the classroom (Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2009). These findings may be applicable when students participate in independent extra-institutional political actions, as well, if strong adult support is perceived in the student experience, particularly in communities with high social capital.

Within traditional schools, civic engagement programs may be implemented to cultivate greater skills of democratic participation in students, with an eye to improving academic outcomes. However, the models implemented are not always effective at achieving these goals. In Joel Westheimer's (2015) book *What Kind of Citizen? Educating our Children for the Common Good*, he outlines three perceptions of the role of a model citizen: the Personally Responsible, the Participatory, and the Social Justice-Oriented Citizen. The first is one who volunteers through community service, emphasizing personal responsibility and hard work; the second engages in politics at the local, national, and even global level, participating in civic actions such as voting; finally, social justice-oriented citizens think critically about societal structures and envision and advocate for changes to address problems and inequities (Westheimer, 2015). Of these three, schools are most likely to provide programming featuring the first two (Westheimer, 2015). However, very few programs teach about "root causes of problems or challenge existing social, economic, and political norms as a way of improving society and pursuing democratic ideals of liberty, equality, and social justice" (Westheimer, 2015, p. 10). In fact, teaching students to question social, economic, and political structures has the potential to be greatly disruptive, as schools are inherently part of all of these systems.

Schools must function while serving more students than their resources sometimes allow. In order to do this, schools may need to enforce rules which perpetuate conformity and submission and ask students to follow the directions of teachers and administrators unquestioningly. While this may be a convenience for schools in the short term, it has the potential to be of grave damage to the democratic skills, and emotional experiences, of students. Schools' programmatic emphases on cultivating Personally Responsible and Participatory Citizens may unintentionally undermine initiatives to improve student achievement as they eschew the critical consciousness aspects inherent in the cultivation of Social Justice Citizens.

The Pedagogy of Protest

In recent years, scholars have examined the rare programs embedded in school curricula and after-school programs that do attempt to cultivate Social-Justice Citizenship tools. Social-Justice Citizenship education resonates with concepts of critical consciousness and critical action – the critical analysis of one's place in society and related social actions enacted to interrupt related oppression and effect change (Freire, 1993). Critical action has been shown to play a role in cultivating improved career expectancies in Black high school students and has the potential to empower these students towards higher-status occupations later in life (Rapa, Diemer, & Bañales, 2017). Engagement in activism such as protests is a clear example of critical action (Watts & Flanagan, 2007; Rapa, Diemer, & Bañales, 2017). It therefore follows that participation in independent extra-institutional protests may hold the potential to improve occupational outcomes for BIPOC students.

Critical consciousness on its own has been shown to be a catalyst for academic motivation in Students of Color. In fact, Black students' critical consciousness of racial oppression has been shown to help them navigate and challenge injustice (Ginwright, 2010;

Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011), and improve academic achievement (Carter, 2008; O'Connor, 1997; El-Amin et al., 2017). School curricula aimed at cultivating critical consciousness has been shown to increase academic achievement (Cabrera et al., 2014; Cammarota, 2007; Dee & Penner, 2016) and college enrollment (Rogers & Terriquez, 2013; El-Amin et al, 2017). Critical consciousness that addresses racism itself can motivate Students of Color towards greater persistence (Carter, 2008; El-Amin et al., 2017). Successful examples of such programs teach students to recognize the language of inequality and how to take action around it (El-Amin et al., 2017). Student participation in protests, particularly anti-racist protests, have the potential to glean parallel results. The cultivation of critical consciousness through the critical action of protest participation may aid in the replication of the improved student outcomes shown in critical consciousness pedagogical programs within more formal school programs.

Outside of these settings, there are several examples of non-profits which have created after-school programs to provide students with opportunities to learn about and engage in activism. A collaborative UCLA-USC study examined the impact of such Youth Organizing (YO) programs on low SES students in Los Angeles (Rogers & Terriquez, 2013). Examining the experiences of several hundred alumni of YO programs and comparing those with students who had not participated allowed researchers to discover that YO-affiliated students were more likely to enroll in four-year institutions of higher education and engage in civic activities (Rogers & Terriquez, 2013). However, through quantitative analysis, it was determined that these findings could be attributed mostly to the opportunities for academic support and college-preparation built into the YO programs (Rogers & Terriquez, 2013). In other words, while engagement in YO programs resulted in improvement to student outcomes academically and democratically, these improvements were not attributed to protest actions, but rather to academic supports embedded

within said programs. What is unclear is in what ways engagement in activism itself impacted the students.

There is a current wave of Black and Indigenous Education Scholars, many of whom describe their participation in protest actions as central to their own personal critical consciousness development, who attempt to understand spaces of protest as non-traditional schools. This reframing empowers communities to reject dominant narratives of achievement "gaps" and rather to celebrate the transmission of essential knowledge, including forms of transformative resistant capital, from elders to a new generation. In *Education in Movement Spaces: Standing Rock to Chicago Freedom Square* (Eagle Shield et al., 2020), BIPOC scholars examine the connections between recent spaces of anti-racist protests led by indigenous and Black communities, respectively. Spaces of protest themselves – the camps that were constructed during the #NoDAPL protests in Standing Rock and the outdoor community center that was created during the Freedom Square protests in Chicago – became active, immersive learning environments (Hayes, 2020). In both settings, temporary outdoor spaces lacking in a central legislative or educational power became open exchanges of knowledge and ideas, particularly between elders of the communities and youth who had come to protest (Eagle Shield et al., 2020). The history of education for Indigenous and Black students in the United States is fraught with a history of oppression, assimilation, and alienation. By reclaiming education in spaces of protest, essential intergenerational knowledge was passed down – of history, language, and culture, as expressed through the performance of music and dance (Eagle Shield et al., 2020). In this way, the second wave of the Black Lives Matter movement that took place across the United States in 2020, particularly in Los Angeles with its rich history of protest in Black and Latinx

communities, created spaces for the pedagogical transmission of intergenerational community-based knowledge.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this research study is based on critical consciousness and critical action (Freire, 1970; 1993), discussed earlier in this chapter, and Community Cultural Wealth (CCW). CCW celebrates the resistance cultures of Communities of Color as essential educational elements, rather than embracing a deficit model focused on gaps and debts. Within CCW, transformative resistant capital was centered within perceived student learning in protest spaces.

The concepts of the *Achievement Gap, Opportunity Gap,* and *Opportunity Debt* were developed to confront systemic racism in the US education system by naming it. This is useful in order to understand the practical ways in which racism is reflected in the statistical outcomes of students of different races and socioeconomic circumstances. However, it unintentionally embraces a deficit-centered model of thinking which fixates on the many ways Students of Color fail within the system. This, in turn, steeped in a culturally racist framework originating in the Eugenics movement of the early 20th century, unconsciously (and sometimes explicitly) explains the differences in academic performance as rooted in students' so-called cognitive or motivational capacities (Valencia, 1997; Howard, 2020). The resulting language around solutions to the problems presented in these performance gaps can then be translated into a false notion that poor and BIPOC students are not equipped for academic success (J. E. King, 1991; Pine & Hilliard, 1990; Howard, 2020). This unfairly places the blame for society's failures on children rather than on the society in which they learn.

CCW, as described by Tara Yosso (2005) in her seminal article "Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth" outlines a strengths-based approach steeped in Critical Race Theory (CRT) to address improving educational outcomes for Students of Color. Her concept is to shift away from the narrative of Communities of Color as loci of deep disadvantage, and towards an emphasis on the cultural strengths of these communities (Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) begins by citing the five tenets of CRT as outlined by Daniel Solorzano (1997, 1998), which acknowledge that: race and racism are intrinsic to the functioning of the United States and need to be recognized as such (Bell, 1992; Russell, 1992); dominant ideologies emerging from white privilege such as objectivity, meritocracy, and colorblindness must be challenged; a social justice approach that is liberatory and transformative needs be employed (Matsuda, 1991); the experiential knowledge of people of color, such as through storytelling, is essential to analyzing racial oppression (Bell, 1987, 1992, 1996; Delgado, 1989, 1993, 1995a, b, 1996; Espinoza, 1990; Olivas, 1990; Montoya, 1994; Carrasco, 1996; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000, 2001, 2002a; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Villalpando, 2003; Delgado Bernal, 2002); and race and racism must be explored across disciplinary boundaries (Yosso, 2005). She takes this one step farther by recognizing the contradictions inherent in the current educational system, in which schools have the capacity to empower students, but often oppress and marginalize them instead (Yosso, 2005). This fits into the concept of schools as sites of societal reproduction rather than revolution – institutions preparing students for conformity rather than diverse democracy.

For scholars in the field of Education, CRT carries with it an emphasis on research as an active and activist engagement. Indeed, Yosso remarks that ideally, through the active engagement of participants in a given CRT research approach,

> [t]hose injured by racism and other forms of oppression discover that they are not alone and moreover are part of a legacy of resistance to racism and the layers of racialized oppression. They become empowered participants, hearing their own stories and the stories of others, listening to how the arguments against them are framed and learning to make the arguments to defend themselves. (Yosso, 2005, p. 75)

CRT challenges the notion that Students of Color should be acculturating to a white, middle class value system, and are deemed failures if they do not. Building on this, Yosso (2005) posits that a model of CCW be embraced to emphasize the cultural assets inherent in Communities of Color.

She angles the CRT lens to view CCW as nurtured through multiple forms of capital, including transformative resistant capital (Delgado Bernal, 1997, 2001; Auerbach, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Faulstich Orellana, 2003; Yosso, 2005). Resistant capital is the knowledge gained through behavior that challenges inequality and in opposition to oppression (Freire, 1970, 1973; Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 1994; Delgado Bernal, 1997; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005). In resistant capital, resistance to structural oppression acquires a transformative form (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005). Yosso refers to this as transformative resistant capital, which is the terminology used throughout my analysis.

The study, exploratory in nature, was conducted and data analyzed with an eye towards transformative resistant capital as it might appear in students' personal stories and reflections of their participation in the Black Lives Matter protest movement of 2020.

The conceptual framework of this study brings together theories of transformative resistant capital with critical consciousness and critical action. In order to achieve this, I interpret learning gleaned through transformative resistant capital as necessarily including critical consciousness (Freire, 1970), the ability to cultivate a critical analysis of one's place in society towards

disruption of oppression (Freire, 1970), and critical action, in which critical consciousness leads to related social actions to interrupt oppression and effect change (Freire, 1970, 1993). Through the process of data analysis, the relationship between these elements was deepened and expanded, as will be discussed in the findings chapter of this dissertation.

Conclusion

The traditional educational spheres of schools and their satellite loci of curricular programming are often viewed as the only spaces in which student growth might be possible. These zones are most effective when engaged and in dialogue with the communities in which they are situated. Spaces in which students are able to embody the values of Social Justice Citizens, glean from the Community Cultural Wealth of elder community members, and critically perceive and embody societal injustices and solutions through critical consciousness and critical action, have the potential to improve student academic and nonacademic outcomes. Through this study, it was my aim to provide a platform for student voices to be heard which might provide insights into the effective paths that communities, and the schools that serve them, might cultivate greater student growth and success.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

The goal of this project was to explore the experiences of Black high school students who participated in Black Lives Matter protests in Los Angeles in 2020. While research has been conducted on the effects of student participation in school-based protests, and in political-engagement assignments couched within school curricula and affiliated programs, little information is available on the effects of student participation in extra-institutional political

actions. Protest sites have the capacity to serve as informal schools in which intergenerational cultural knowledge might be transmitted. The voices of youth participants in such spaces, when situated within the cultural context of their respective communities, and within the specific historical moment in which the protests occur, may have the potential to illuminate learning traditionally undervalued in formal school settings. Within this study, it is hoped that participant perceived learning may provide insights for schools and communities into how to better support student growth.

Research Question

In what ways, if at all, were Black high school students from Los Angeles influenced by their experiences participating in extra-institutional protest(s) during the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020?

Research Design and Rationale

This was an exploratory study and engaged a qualitative approach by conducting interviews with individuals who were high school students when participating in Black Lives Matter protests in 2020. The sample was comprised of participants who, at the time of the protests, lived in Los Angeles, the geographic epicenter of the 1992 racial uprisings and multiple previous anti-racist protest movements, and were experiencing a unique historic moment in the midst of a global pandemic and the second wave of BLM. The transformative resistant capital, critical consciousness, and critical action gleaned by students through these experiences must therefore be contextualized historically – in this case, through examining print, television, and radio articles and segments produced concurrent with the events discussed.

This was an exploratory study as (1) little prior research exists on student independent extra-institutional participation in political protests, (2) the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020

are a recent phenomenon, (3) the concept of community engagement as a means to improving student outcomes is often framed as unidirectional, with family and community depicted as providing support to students, but reciprocal student contributions back to the community often are not examined, (4) protest sites have not been widely perceived as informal schools until recent studies by Black and Indigenous scholars, and (5) studies of student political action often focus on the acquisition of social capital useful towards more antiquated visions of economic viability and democratic participation, rather than on invaluable community-transmitted knowledge.

The research utilized a qualitative approach via interviews. In engaging a qualitative approach, the door was left open for discovery by listening to the narratives, and potential counternarratives, of these students – an essential element of CCW. The choice to engage in a qualitative approach emerged directly from the exploratory nature of the research question. The study's intent was to understand how participants made sense of their experiences, to frame this within the specific context in which the participants acted via the exploration of concurrent media coverage, and to understand the processes by which these actions took place (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Maxwell, 2013). In addition, the data illuminated unanticipated phenomena, as the study's structure allowed for the flexibility necessary to modify design in relation to new discoveries (Maxwell, 2013). Through conducting interviews that positioned student voice and storytelling at the center of the research, the words of participants themselves formed the basis for the rich descriptions illuminating the subsequent analysis (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). This approach allowed for the assumption that there is something essential in the shared experience of youth participation in community protest actions deserving of attention and magnification (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). In the analysis, imaginative variation was employed to allow for

viewing the data from the multiplicity of perspectives presented by participants, examining different angles within the many participant perspectives (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

In engaging a qualitative approach, I left the door open for discovery by listening to the needs and hopes of participants for whom the work is intended – an essential element of CCW. An exploratory process left space for ideas to emerge that I might not have considered, such as an important adult mentor who helped to catalyze student perceived learning, or the social-emotional processing that participants experienced as essential to what they gleaned from these experiences.

Recruitment

The research site was defined by the geographic boundaries of Los Angeles County. Digital flyers advertising the study were shared via social media (Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook) with BLM organizations and hashtags, and via email and social media with local community organizations such as The Blazers Safe Haven, Community Coalition, Communities in Schools South Bay, College Track Los Angeles, YMCAs, Challengers, Boys and Girls Clubs, The Bell, Black Lives Matter Youth Coalition, Students Deserve, BLM Youth Vanguard, and Teens Take Charge. l emailed and called all community colleges and universities located within Los Angeles via student activities offices, particularly those curating and/or serving Black Student organizations such as Umoja and Black Student Unions (BSUs), and relevant departments such as African-American Studies. In addition, printed flyers were distributed to organizations, and were hung up on college and university campuses throughout Los Angeles. Respondents to recruitment were asked to fill out an online intake form to help select a relevant sample. Once initial participants were identified, snowball sampling was attempted to identify additional participants.

Participants were individuals who self-identify as Black and were high school students living in Los Angeles during the 2020 BLM protests. Participation was defined as physical presence at a minimum of one public BLM protest. Recruitment material emphasized that participants should feel that participation in the protest(s) had a lasting impact on them. I conducted interviews with individuals who were high school students in 2020, but who are 18 years old or older currently, to avoid engagement with minors.

The goal was to attract an array of Black high school students from Los Angles spanning the spectrum of gender identity, socio-economic status, and neighborhood. Initially, the aim was to identify 20 potential student participants and then to conduct interviews with approximately 15 of them. Initial recruitment proved challenging when multiple respondents were discovered to have falsified their identities on the intake form. Recruitment strategies were subsequently adjusted to ensure integrity of identity. This was done by requiring participants to show a government issued or school photo ID during the interview, and also by recruiting via college student activities offices with whom I was connected through ELP colleague networks and referrals. Over the 8 month period during which I recruited, I was able to interview four participants. Those who were selected for interviews were offered financial compensation in the form of $25 Amazon gift cards as an incentive. Later, this was increased to $40, to attempt to attract more participants. An additional $10 gift card was offered as an optional addition, should participants be interested in sharing information about the study with other potential participants.

Data Collection Methods

The primary data collection method was in the form of individual interviews with participants. All communication and interviews with participants took place virtually through Zoom software. I conducted one sixty-minute interview per participant. The process followed

Seidman's (2019) recommended structure for phenomenological interviews, incorporating relevant life history, details of the lived experience(s), then reflection on the meaning of the experience(s) for each participant. The goal of this exploration was to better understand what participants perceived may have changed for them as a result of their involvement in these extra-institutional protests. Interview questions were asked in an open-ended format to allow for students to guide the narrative of their experiences. I was the person conducting the interviews.

In addition, I gathered and read, or read transcripts from, 128 news articles, radio or television segments contemporary to the second wave of BLM protests. These articles were gathered from an array of Los Angeles media outlets, including the Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Sentinel, LA Weekly, KCRW, KCET, and KTLA. I initially collected all articles and segments from these sources from between May 26, the day the George Floyd protests began, and June 30, two weeks after the national Juneteenth protests, which marked the end of the most heightened activity of the second wave of BLM protests. By late June 2020, most coverage related to BLM had ended, except in the Los Angeles Sentinel. Due to this, I collected articles from this periodical through the end of July 2020.

Data Analysis Methods

Interviews were recorded using computer tools directly embedded in the Zoom software. As backups, I simultaneously recorded using a Sony Mono Digital Voice recorder and the Rev App on my cell phone. Digital interview files were labeled with the pseudonym used for each interviewee and stored on my secure home laptop and on the Cloud in an encrypted file. A handwritten list with a key to the identities of the interview participants was separately in a secure locked drawer in my home. After each interview was recorded, I transferred the Zoom voice recording to Otter.ai software. In Otter.ai, I re-listened to interviews while correcting any

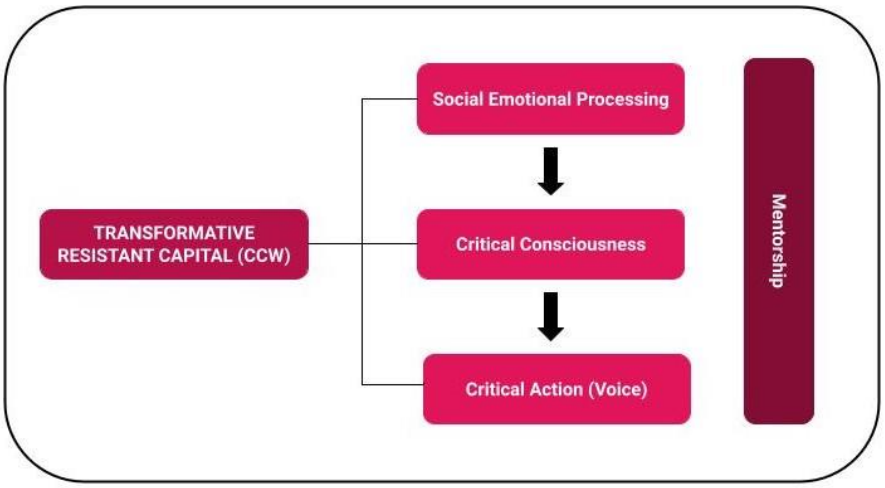
mistakes made in the Otter.ai transcription and taking initial researcher notes. After each transcription was corrected and notated, it was transferred to Quirkos software for data analysis.

In Quirkos, I reviewed transcripts and conducted coding based on the exploratory nature of the process, the research question, and the conceptual framework. The first cycle coding method engaged the exploratory method of Holistic Coding (Saldaña, 2011), in which sections of text were intuitively labeled as sub-categories guided by the research question. Subcategories such as Family, Religion, School, Neighborhood, Police Experiences, Racism Experiences, Sense of History, Sense of Self, Advocating for Others, and Aspiration emerged organically and were laid out and examined using Quirkos' visualization tools. I was able to move subcategories around on the visualization map and re-read related sections of text within each to ensure accuracy of categorization. This first cycle of Holistic Coding process allowed for "all the data … [to] be brought together and examined as a whole before deciding upon any refinement" (Dey, 1993, p. 105; Saldaña, 2011, p. 119). I then engaged in a second cycle of Pattern Coding (Saldaña, 2011) as I clumped together subcategories with an eye to the research question and the guiding conceptual lens of CCW and observed as themes organically emerged. The dominant area of CCW which came to the fore was Transformative Resistant. Descriptions of the experience of protest were lumped together with participants' perceptions of their learning based on these experiences, such as Sense of History and Sense of Self. The protest category then required a third cycle of analysis, engaging Pattern Coding (Saldaña, 2011) to better understand potential findings. In this process, three major subcategories emerged: Trauma, Noticing, and Creative Expression. After re-examining the data within these subcategories further, I recognized the latter two as critical consciousness and critical action, both of which appear prevalently in prior literature.

These three cycles of coding allowed me to re-evaluate my conceptual framework. As I began to write up data, it became clear that Transformative Resistant capital was central to answering the research question. When I reflected on what elements make up TRC, I realized the three that I had identified – social-emotional processing, critical consciousness, and critical action – seemed to fit within what might activate this form of capital. I also recognized a separate category that was prevalent in the data – that of mentorship for students that helped facilitate their perceived TRC learning. I then created a visual model of this updated conceptual framework model (Figure 1: Conceptual Framework).

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Due to the small sample size interviewed in this exploration, additional data was identified and examined for cross-comparison. This data included 128 news articles, radio or television segments contemporary to participants' BLM experiences. For print periodicals – Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Sentinel, and LA Weekly – I was able to access their archives and find every article published between May 26 and June 30, 2020. For the Los Angeles Sentinel, I extended the end date to July 31, 2020, the date at which that periodical seems to have stopped

publishing articles on the movement. By reviewing the titles of every article published during that time period, I was able to select and save all the ones that referenced the BLM protests and related issues. Key words used to identify relevant articles grew over the course of reviewing titles to include: Black Lives Matter (BLM), George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, protest, march, demonstration, activist, racism, racial inequality, justice, curfew, lockdown, riot, vandalism, Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), defund, brutality, accountability, reform, People's Budget, Rodney King, 1992, social justice. As KCRW, KCET, and KTLA's archives are not available on their public websites or via research databases, I manually reviewed all print articles on the KCET and KTLA websites published between May 26 and June 30, 2020. For KCRW, I selected one show, *Press Play with Madeleine Brand*, because it covers issues specific to Los Angeles and is widely listened to due to its times of broadcast. Every episode during the time span examined addressed BLM.

I organized all article or segment titles in a spreadsheet linked to the original articles, then read through the articles and took notes in the spreadsheet. I then coded spreadsheet notes holistically for key words and emerging themes. I grouped articles based on said themes and was able then to view patterns in each periodical's publishing to assess vantage point and shifts over time.

Positionality

I entered this study with preconceptions about the effects of student political involvement on their development. This is due to my own anecdotal experiences as a high school classroom teacher for more than fifteen years, and as a director of an experiential and service learning program. Through structuring the research design as one of exploration, I aimed to confront and interrupt my own preconceptions. In addition, the sample of students I accessed for this study did

not produce enough responses to engage in a study of statistical significance.

As I do not work directly with the students I interviewed, I am aware that I am an outsider to them and their communities. In addition, I am aware of my positionality as an outsider on multiple additional fronts, particularly as a white, female teacher from an elite research institution (UCLA). My hope was to enter into interviews with the openness, supportiveness, and cultural responsiveness I have cultivated in my many years as a teacher in various institutions within a multiplicity of communities and across myriad demographic groups. In addition, the subject of my research and approach were in support of the BLM movement, which I hoped would help in cultivating trust with participants.

Ethical Issues

All participants I interviewed were 18 years old or older and were provided with detailed information about the study and their rights within it, including to stop or withhold information at any time. In the study itself, I used pseudonyms for all participants so that their identities were protected. I also conducted regular check-ins with participants to make sure they were comfortable with their contributions and that their voices were represented accurately.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluative criteria were used as a benchmark to establish the trustworthiness of the research study. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My prolonged engagement came in the form of participation in BLM protests at multiple sites in Los Angeles, immersing in the city's culture of protest, and generating trust with community leaders within those contexts. This enabled me to engage in persistent observation of the broader phenomenon of BLM protests in Los Angeles which might provide greater scaffolding for

interpreting data from participant interviews. Peer debriefing came in the form of sharing findings with my dissertation chairs and committee members, select colleagues in my doctoral program at UCLA, and with one or more community organizers from BLM sites outside of the geographic bounds of the study. Member checking involved sharing findings with participants to ensure accuracy of their representation and the interpretation of their narratives.

While the study was not intended to be widely transferrable to other contexts, it includes thick descriptions of the process as well as the presentation of substantial blocks of text excerpted from participant interviews. In this way, it is hoped that participants represent their own experiences and expression of their perceived learning to the greatest degree possible. Reflexivity was engaged in the form of regular researcher journaling throughout the process.

One challenge to the trustworthiness of the study arrived in the form of limited sample size. As the study was phenomenological and exploratory, the research conducted was not intended to be applied widely to other circumstances or to make broad statements about student experiences in protest in general. Further research would need to be engaged to accomplish this. In addition, my own biases in support of the BLM movement and my belief that engagement in extracurricular protest does, in fact, improve student outcomes provide additional challenges to credibility. I acknowledged these biases in my analysis and intentionally shaped my research process and interview questions so that I was aware of and limited bias as much as possible.

Lastly, there is an extensive history of white academic researchers conducting phenomenological studies focused on BIPOC participants. Much of this legacy is comprised of research engaging, intentionally or not, a colonial framework (Farmer-Hinton et al, 2020; Kozol, 2012). This study attempted to distance itself from these prior models by acknowledging researcher positionality and involving participants in the process of establishing credibility. In

engaging a CCW approach, I aimed to avoid the trappings of "white savior"-infused ethnographic work and harness my privilege as a UCLA-based researcher to enable students in often disenfranchised BIPOC communities to voice their experiences and guide how they were interpreted.

Study Limitations

The study was exploratory in nature and small in scope. It aimed to uncover student perceived learning in extra-institutional protest spaces that might be further explored in future studies. As such, its findings might not be applicable directly to subsequent policy or school-based reforms. Additionally, as it took place in a multifaceted megalopolis rife with the history of red-lining and related segregation and limited access to quality public schools, its findings may not be relatable to other contexts. As it occurred during a specific historic moment of global pandemic and seismic national cultural shifts responding to BLM, student perceived learning may have been influenced by broader cultural trends beyond the protests they attended.

While these participants provided thick descriptions, and while additional data was culled from media outlets responding to the second wave of BLM in 2020 in order to situate these narratives within a specific, phenomenological historical context, the findings may be limited if expanding the study to a larger group of respondents. As a middle aged white researcher speaking to Black high school and college-age students, there may have been reactivity in participant answers, or biases in my interpretations of participant responses. I did my best to address these possibilities by conducting open ended interviews led in large part by the participants, and by acknowledging my potential biases in entering into the research. Finally, I am a classroom teacher who practices and believes in experiential, culturally responsive, social-emotionally-infused pedagogy that cultivates critical consciousness and critical action. While my

analysis was shaped by this perspective, I did my best to make sure the raw data was not, as participants were invited to speak openly and guide their own narratives through the interview process.

Conclusion

The design rationale and methods for this study were aimed at highlighting and magnifying the voices of student activists who have been academically marginalized due to their demographic and geographic identifiers. Student experiences, framed within a backdrop of cultural and community riches passed down intergenerationally, might provide necessary insights into the ways their educational needs might be met more effectively within the schools and communities that support them.

Chapter Four

Findings

Introduction

The aim of this research study was to understand the potential of youth protest spaces as arenas of growth and fora for the cultivation of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), particularly in the form of Transformative Resistant Capital (TRC). It amplified the voices of Black high school students who participated in the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020 in Los Angeles in order to center their perceptions of their own learning in these spaces. It also situates their perspectives within a historical context by examining the emphasis of BLM coverage in local news media contemporary to their participation in protests.

In this chapter, findings will be presented in light of the phenomenological, exploratory approach engaged in the interview process, and the resulting holistic and subsequent pattern-based data analysis process. First, a historical context will be presented based on the examination

of local news media coverage of the protests contemporary to participants' experiences. Following this, study participants will be introduced in order to provide an overview of their expressed identities. Then, three themes that emerged from their narratives will be highlighted: Space for Processing Racial Trauma, Cultivating a Critical Lens, and Activating Voice and Creative Expression. Space for Processing Racial Trauma features participant perceptions of the ways in which protest experiences endowed them with tools to reflect on past encounters with racism towards social-emotional healing; Cultivating a Critical Lens examines the ways in which participants expressed more actively noticing and critically approaching racism in their daily lives and systemically; Activating Voice and Creative Expression looks at the sense of agency, voice, and creative expression participants cultivated as a result of their participation. Finally, an additional theme, The Role of Mentorship, will be explored. This section highlights mentor figures whom participants noted as being essential to their processing, noticing, and embodying, i.e., catalysts for their transformation through resistance.

Research Question

In what ways, if at all, were Black high school students from Los Angeles influenced by their experiences participating in extra-institutional protest(s) during the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020?

Historical Context

The research question presented in this study must be interpreted with an eye to the specific historical and cultural moment in which the second wave of BLM protests occurred. The study's phenomenological nature means that its analysis should be situated in such a context in order to deepen the understanding of participants' conveyed experiences. In order to do so, several local Los Angeles news sources were examined for their coverage of the second wave of

Black Lives Matter protests in Los Angeles. These sources included an array of media types and perspectives – from mainstream to grassroots, culturally to public service focused, print to radio and television media. Represented within it are the Los Angeles Times, the city's largest, most nationally recognized print periodical; the Los Angeles Sentinel, the city's historically African-American print periodical; LA Weekly, the city's free, culturally-focused print journal; KCRW, one of the city's public radio stations; KCET, the public television station, and KTLA, a private television station historically situated in Los Angeles. It should be noted that while a full audit of print media was possible, capturing all stories presented via ephemeral media such as television and radio proved more of a challenge. Archival documentation for television and radio is not often preserved or publicly shared on websites, and topic titles are not included in programming guides. Therefore, an examination of the television and radio sources focused on news articles still present on KCRW's, KCET's, and KTLA's respective websites from the timeframe of the wave of BLM protests between May and July 2020.

In the more mainstream, privately-funded news sources (Los Angeles Times and KTLA), representation of the protests engaged more sensationalized language and was more likely to portray the protests as "riots" and describe "looting" and individuals "taking advantage" of a situation, and less likely to criticize government and police authority (Mozingo et al, 2020; Rector et al, 2020). These two sources have greater reach and readership/viewership throughout the city of Los Angeles than the other sources, and likely entered into discourse participants would have been exposed to during this time, even if indirectly. In the Los Angeles Times, it is striking that initial articles (late May to early June 2020), engaged extreme language to describe protests "spiraling out of control," laden with "riots," "looting," "vandalism," "violence," "turmoil," and "rage" (Jarvie & Read, 2020; Hennessy-Fiske, 2020; Hamilton et al, 2020; Rector

et al, 2020). One article title even segregated the issue by referring to “Black America” as being primarily affected by the circumstances (Jarvie & Etehad, 2020). Early in coverage, the voices of LAPD (police) representatives were privileged as they “condemn[ed] the violence,” and Mayor Eric Garcetti was positioned in a sympathetic light as he “[took] a knee” in solidarity with “peaceful protesters” (Chabria, 2020; Cosgrove et al, 2020). Notably, the first time that voices of protesters or activists were represented was almost two weeks into the protests (Gomez et al, 2020). Then, it seems, a cultural shift took place in the journalism as voices of activists were more prominently featured. This may be related to the simultaneous increase in articles about celebrities (from Hollywood and professional sports) expressing support for the protests (Carras, 2020), or to larger cultural shifts taking place nationally and locally in response to the protests. One month into coverage, the LAPD is presented in a more critical light, including for their treatment of protest participants, naming it “abuse”, and calling for a release of arrested protesters (Chang, 2020). As the Juneteenth protest, part of a nationwide action that comprised a coalition of multiple groups including the LGBT+ community (in the form of LA Pride) approached, the articles predominantly featured activist perspectives, covering intentional strategies of the organizers such as actions in high-income neighborhoods rather than historically Black, low-income neighborhoods in South Los Angeles, and criticizing institutions by using the language of “systemic racism” (Jennings, 2020; Roy, 2020; McNulty, 2020). Youth protest was covered, as was the movement to “Defund Police,” including school police (Lai & Money, 2020). The arts were covered heavily, with articles on graffiti, murals, theater, and music (including an article on Kendrick Lamar) emphasizing the impetus behind the protests (Phillips, 2020; Pineda, 2020; Easter, 2020; Hernandez, 2020; McNulty, 2020). For most of June, the protests were conveyed in a positive, sympathetic light (Parvini et al, 2020; Miller, 2020;

Wigglesworth, 2020). Then, towards the end of June, the language of looting and curfews returned, criticizing attacks on businesses (Miller, 2020; Mejia 2020). Coverage stopped in early July.

In contrast to this coverage, LA Weekly, the culturally-focused free print journal, presented a different face to the protests. While this periodical may not have the preeminence or wide distribution of the Los Angeles Times, it is written and distributed to appeal to youth and a wide array of the socio-economic spectrum, as it is available for free in stores, cafes, and open boxes in the street. Its content covers culture to appeal to youth, including fashion, music, film, and a section on the cannabis industry. Its June 5-11, 2020 edition was titled "Black Lives Matter" and featured photographs of protesters presented in close up to generate a sense of compassion, interviews with activists attending protests, including many youth, and articles about visual artists leveraging their media to respond to the protests ("Art Helps Us Understand…," 2020; "Breaking the Cycle in Central L.A….," 2020; "L.A. Fights for Black Lives…," 2020). The only critical segment was one which condemned "thieves [taking] advantage of protests to target cannabis stores," which seemed to be presented more for entertainment value than as a critique of the larger movement (p. 8, "Under Cover of Darkness…", 2020).

In order to gain a window into coverage of the protests on public radio station KCRW, the Los Angeles-produced, nationally syndicated show *Press Play with Madeleine Brand* was examined as its content confronts complex issues directly affecting Los Angeles, and is played twice during the day, including during rush hour, when many Angelenos are commuting in their cars. In the thirteen syndicated episodes that centered around issues related to the George Floyd protests, all were sympathetic to protesters, critical of police and city government action,

particularly as related to treatment of protesters, and employed language such as “erupted,” “anguish,” and “smolder” in relation to what other periodicals referred to as “looting” (Brand, June 1, 2020). Placing the city’s experiences within a national context was a central focus, with the show examining local and national reform in policing and legislation (Brand, June 8, 2020). Structural racism was addressed in multiple arenas, including in news journalism, where means to diversify newsrooms was explored – in essence, a topic itself steeped in activism for a journalistic entity (Brand, June 16, 2020). The arts were featured heavily, including an entire episode focused on the influence of Kendrick Lamar (Brand, June 29, 2020). Another episode covered youth protest and the movement to defund school police (July 1, 2020). One episode touched on connections to the city’s history, but most looked forward, rather than backward, to reform that might take place in response to the public outcry (June 19, 2020).

Finally, the Los Angeles Sentinel, the city’s historically Black print newspaper, covered the protests perhaps the most extensively and for the longest period of time – printing articles on the subject into late July, in contrast to the other sources, which ended coverage one month earlier. Articles from this periodical engaged a sympathetic bent to the protests from the earliest coverage, writing extensively about the protests’ connections to history, memory, and the Black community in Los Angeles (Keller, 2020; McGinnis, 2020; Petrie, 2020). While the arts and youth voice were covered extensively, so were topics not touched upon by other sources, such as the connections between healthcare-related losses in the Black community during the Covid-19 pandemic. Three separate articles described healthcare professionals protesting Covid deaths in the Black community (LeGardye, 2020; “Kaiser Permanente West…,” 2020; Chavis, 2020). Youth voices were featured in several articles, and their concerns about school police and learning loss during the pandemic were also tied to the protests (Keller, 2020). Poems and

reflective essays provided spaces for collective grieving ("Poems Reflect Anguish…," 2020; "A Requiem in Memoriam…," 2020). Journalistic angles for the articles and opinion pieces took on strength- rather than deficit-based language, describing the process for creating and advocating for the People's Budget rather than engaging sensationalized language about riots and looting (Abdullah & Anderson, 2020; Halsell, 2020). Language of "de-escalation" with the LAPD, "healing," "public reckoning," "solidarity," and "community" cast a tenor of hope ("Wesson Attends Black Lives Matter…," 2020; Ridley-Thomas, 2020; "YWCA Greater Los Angeles…," 2020) rather than deficit.

These various sources provide a window into the public discourse around the Black Lives Matter in Los Angeles at the time participants engaged in protests. It is likely that mainstream sources' sensationalized language of looting and rioting overlapped with more hopeful, forward-looking ones from the cultural and grassroots perspectives to influence some participants' perspectives as they reflected on the meaning of their participation.

Characteristics of Study Participants

Of the four participants who engaged in interviews, three identified as female, and one as male. Three attended large public high schools, and one attended an all-girls charter school. Three of the four described being enrolled in arts-focused specialty programs at their schools. After high school, two attended the same large, elite public university, and two attended different community colleges. Two grew up in South Los Angeles, one in Downtown Los Angeles, and one in Southeast Los Angeles on the border with Orange County. Of the two attending community college, one expressed interest in transferring to a larger university in the future, while the other expressed pursuing a degree in counseling without specifying an educational path. All four participants identified as Black, with one self-describing as having Latina heritage.

Two participants described going through foster care. Two described taking on leadership roles at their high schools, and two described struggling through it. Two emphasized the centrality of God and religion in their lives. One described being the child of African immigrant parents. Three described negatively associated encounters with police, or school police (SROs), that resulted in trauma.

The four participants were (pseudonyms): Xotchil, Timothy, Jamila, and Charlene. I provide a brief overview of each participant's unique vantage point here, then provide more specific language and text for each of them in subsequent sections.

Xotchil attends a community college in Downtown Los Angeles. She is a survivor of the foster care system and today acts as an advocate and mentor for foster youth. She is studying with the aim of one day becoming a counselor for foster youth. In her interview, she described a deeply traumatic upbringing that included familial abuse, drug addiction, homelessness, and multiple police interactions. She credited her survival and perseverance to religion, marijuana, school, and her brothers, not by blood but by choice, who aged out of foster care alongside her and today, with her young son and his father, make up what she considers to be her family. She considered herself a vocal person who has always voiced her ideas, even when it got her into trouble (which, she reflected, it often did). However, the protests emboldened her further, to speak up when she noticed racism – something to which she had not applied her voice previously.

Timothy attends an elite public university in Los Angeles. He is the child of Nigerian immigrants and grew up in a predominantly Black neighborhood in South Los Angeles. Raised in a deeply religious household, he credits his family and church community with instilling in him values of hard work and compassion. He excelled at school – academically, extra-

curricularly, and socially. He was the editor of his high school newspaper and the president of the Black Student Union. He considers himself a soft-spoken person who leads by example rather than with his voice. He is passionate about the arts and, inspired by his participation in the protests, founded and designed the graphics for a clothing line with his friends. He hopes to be able to pursue a creative career in Communications, and through hard work and hopeful success, give back to his community financially one day.

Jamila attends the same elite public university as Timothy. She is also a survivor of the foster care system, but with a different outcome than Xotchil. At age 9, she was adopted by her forever family, which included her mother, a pre-school Head Start educator and an aunt, a dance teacher at her middle school. Her birth family and adoptive family all encouraged her love of learning, particularly her passion for reading and writing. She considers herself an outspoken person. She always excelled in school and took on leadership roles within and outside of the classroom. In high school, a teacher informed her of an upcoming BLM protest and her mother gave her permission to attend. Someone handed her a megaphone and she discovered her calling to activism – what she hopes to continue doing through her life, professionally, if possible. She is working on a memoir of her life and has a passion for writing and making visual art.

Charlene attends a community college in Southeastern Los Angeles. Identifying as Black in a predominantly Latino/a/x community, she expressed often feeling different while growing up. She found community in joining the Color Guard at school, where she felt part of something. Her dream is to become a police officer, but that, and taking part in Color Guard, which involves practicing physical routines with a fake gun, are private parts of her life, as she worries what others in her neighborhood might think of her in light of her "difference" and the BLM protests. She lives in a multigenerational household with her aunt, uncle, and grandparents, who raised

her. Getting involved in BLM protests with her cousin, a lawyer whom she admires, allowed her to open up with her family to discuss their experiences with racism, and to reflect on her desire to join the police force in the context of what that means as a Black woman. It also allowed her to process her brother's expulsion and arrest related to an incident at school, which haunted her own school experiences. Generally shy, she has found herself able to notice and try to speak up more as a result of joining the protests. Related to her protest involvement, she joined Umoja and Black Student Union groups on her community college campus.

Themes

The themes which emerged holistically when data was analyzed through the lens of the research question and conceptual framework included: A Space for Processing Racial Trauma, Cultivating a Critical Lens, Activating Voice and Creative Expression, and the Role of Mentorship.

A Space for Processing Racial Trauma

The social-emotional processing of racial trauma related to protest appeared in all participant narratives. Three described past traumatic encounters with police, inside and outside of school contexts. One discussed protest as a metaphorical act that acknowledges an anticipated life ahead of struggle – a fight for equality, and towards freedom from fear in a Black body.

One of the most consistent and prevalent themes found in participant interviews was the processing of past personal encounters with police via the act of protest. In seemingly the same breath, Xotchil described why she felt the need to join the protest and her own past police experiences, explaining:

> I'm fighting for my family. I'm fighting for me being mistreated constantly, [my baby daddy] being mistreated constantly, … for [my son]: I didn't bring him [up], you know, so he doesn't end up being mistreated later. And in life, like, I've been, I've honestly been

> treated just like George Floyd was, [the officer] put his knee on my back, on my back area, like they did with him, like, that back area, like upper area that they have used before and I, and I told him, I cannot breathe. I cannot breathe. … I was like 14, 15. That's why I went out there and I fought because [I'm sick of being] disrespected just because they got a little bit of power.

She described watching the George Floyd video and relating to it viscerally and personally from interactions she herself had with police during her time in the foster care system, and with what could happen to the Black men in her life, especially her son, whose future she wanted to "fight" for. She described a sense of social-emotional processing in reflecting on her own experience of police abuse in light of George Floyd's, and of feeling a sense of purpose and empowerment marching in community with others to fight for the Black men in her life.

The two other female participants described their police encounters as youth as integral to their protest participation and subsequent reflection. Both of their stories involved police officers stationed in schools. Charlene alluded throughout her interview to feeling trepidation about speaking up at school because she was afraid of getting in trouble. She later elaborated that this was a result of her older brother getting expelled and jailed for defending a bullied peer:

> I felt like if I didn't apply to the rules, I would just get sent to the office. [I] kind of felt like pressure to be kind of perfect. … I was like, I won't speak out. … Like, I would have to keep a certain character and rules … because I couldn't get in, like, fights or anything or nothing. … I was not going to fight anyone. … I was not going to get kicked out of the program. It, it happened to my older brother. He got kicked out of the district. So, I honestly felt targeted…

She elaborated on her brother's experience:

> The police went to the school and arrested or took him. … They were like, he's going to … get arrested for helping his friend. And I … was young, but I knew, I'm like: that's the police and that's not right.

Her sense of dismay at police conduct in this situation, when she was still in middle school, was connected to her participation in Color Guard and her related aspiration to be a police officer herself one day – all complicated by her understanding of her brother's experience, especially in light of viewing the video of George Floyd's treatment at the hands of police, when she and her brother attended a local protest in their neighborhood:

> Me and him were protesting about, about the police stuff because he'd been through that. And he told me … how, like, … he was defending his friend, and he had to, like, get arrested at school, and he punched someone's nose for defending them. And he was like, he couldn't stand for it. Because he was like, well, if I'm helping someone, and I broke someone's nose, just to help them. How are you going to kill a person? When he's buying money for his food? And he like … kind of like, not really broke down. But he was like, like, we like we weren't standing for that at all. … We were just like: … We're going to protest for that. Because you're not going to kill a man.

She described her brother getting arrested at school because he punched someone while attempting to defend a friend. She then articulated both of their disbelief at a police officer killing someone for presenting a counterfeit bill, with which George Floyd was attempting to buy food. She touched on the injustice of her brother being harshly punished for trying to protect someone, while a police officer, who was tasked with doing his "job" of protecting, instead killed an individual, George Floyd, for trying to buy food. As she spoke, she seemed to be cognitively working through the structural imbalances that might allow for the injustice of what happened to George Floyd and to her brother.

Charlene described feeling silenced throughout high school due to the specter of her brother's expulsion from school and related arrest. However, when she attended a local BLM protest alongside her brother, it seems she felt a sense of liberation from this pressure. At the

protest, they discussed his experience of being arrested at school. She described this conversation as something special and unprecedented for them. The shared protest experience created a space for Charlene and her brother to share about and confront this past trauma together.

Jamila's story of police trauma serves the purpose of illuminating her personal relationship to policing, and catalyzing the profound transformation she experienced through the act of attending her first protest. As background to her police experiences, it should be noted that Jamila was three years old when her birth mother was incarcerated, which began Jamila's journey towards the foster care system. Jamila described throwing herself into schoolwork as a refuge from her life's struggles, and at that same age, learning to read from her grandmother. She described this as a "problem" by the time she got to kindergarten, as the other students were at a "beginner's level" and she was "interrupting, … finish[ing] the sentence or like … always be the one answering the questions." It would "get [her] into trouble." From a young age, she discovered disciplinary repercussions for being "vocal," as she called it, even when it pertained to academic engagement. Her understanding of the justice system and punishment in school was limited to these contexts until the end of her ninth grade year, one year after finalizing adoption with her forever family.

At the year-end picnic, she had an unexpected encounter with her school's SRO that would change the course of her school experiences. As a member of student government, she helped organize the event. A particularly hot Los Angeles day, she described being busy, running around to set up the event, but along the way forgetting to drink water or eat:

> So, I ended up passing out at school... And there was no full-time nurse on campus, so the school police officer was called. And as I woke up, like, after passing out, that was the first person I saw. And the school police officer was just like, the first question he asked me was: "Do you have a history of drug abuse? …And I'm like: "No." He was like: "Well, I believe you're having a drug overdose. And

> that's why you, like, fainted." And I was like: "I've never done drugs in my life." But he was very defensive on this: "You're having a drug overdose." And luckily, one of the parents that was there … was a registered nurse. And … she's like: "She's dehydrated. She hasn't eaten. She hasn't drinken water…" … Luckily, she was there to support me. But my school police officer's first impression was I was having the drug overdose.

She described feeling shame about the experience. So much so that she didn't tell anyone about the interaction, even her mother. She described pushing it into the recesses of her brain and forgetting about it. However, when she returned to school after the summer for 10th grade, she was forced to remember:

> I noticed, like, it became a thing where I'm walking home. And now my school police officer's in his patrol vehicle. And he's like, just watching me as I'm walking down the hill. … and like, asking me questions, like, oh, who are you hanging out with? Why are you hanging out with this person? … what do you guys intend on doing? Like, all of like, just questions that it was just like: What did I do?
>
> … In one situation I had a presentation to do at school. But he pulled me out of class, because I think earlier that week, he had, like, saw me walking with a friend. Normally I don't walk with this friend because once I get off the bus, she's already at school. But I saw her and I'm like, hey, you know, it's a late day or class or, you know, school doesn't start for like another 45 minutes. I wanted to go to Starbucks. So, we went to Starbucks and we're walking up the hill and our school police officer pulls up along. And it's like, oh, like, why are you walking with her? And I'm like: What do you mean? He was like, I've never seen you walk with her. And I'm like, because, like, I explained the situation, you know I never get the chance to walk with her.
>
> … Later that week, and he, like, took me to the principal's office. And it was like, I have a concern, because the student was walking with this person. And I believe they were up to no good. And so, from that moment, I really knew like, this man has a position of authority. And I can't really, like, do anything about that. He believes certain things about me, certain things about my intentions, and I just kind of need to kind of sweep it under the rug. So, I never really said anything.

Even as her interactions with the SRO increased and intensified, sending her to the principal's office and interrupting her learning as she was forced to miss a class presentation for a meeting with the principal, she still did not discuss the experience with her mother or other family members. The first time she spoke about it with anyone was at the first protest she attended:

> So fast forward back to when I'm at the protest, standing there with a bullhorn. And like, it's kind of like, why are you here? Why are you in this moment? Why do you want to defund school police? And I … shared my story. And that was the first time ever that I shared my story. … And I was just kind of looking around, and I see all these faces, people I don't even know. But for the first time, like, somebody was active listening, actively listening to me, I was actively being heard. And I felt supported, like people were clapping, like people were, you know, saying, like: "Oh, my God, like, he shouldn't have done that." And so, I knew it was a safe space, I knew it was somewhere I could continue to tell stories, somewhere I can continue to speak up and voice my opinions.

Conveying her story to a crowd at the protest served multiple purposes for her. She described being "heard," for the first time having others "actively listening" to her. She felt "supported," literally applauded, affirmed with comments from the crowd. She describes a "safe space" where she could "continue to tell stories" and where she could "continue to speak up and voice her opinions." The act of telling this story resulted in her continuing to speak up and voice her opinions, as she subsequently attended weekly actions and began to speak about her experiences and perspectives in front of adults in more formal settings, such as School Board meetings. Her story illuminates the ways in which SROs who are placed in schools to protect students may actually be harming them, and how psychologically and academically damaging this may be to students.

Timothy was the only participant whose language of processing racial trauma did not touch on police violence. When asked why he participated in the protest, Timothy paused and considered the question, slowing his pace. He responded:

> Every day you wake up, especially being a Black man, like… this is something you live with every single day. So that one day of protesting, that's as more of like… a representation of a lifelong thing, a lifelong fight for trying to be accepted, trying to, trying to fight for equality.

Situating himself as a Black man, or rather as being perceived by society as a Black man, even though he was still a minor at the time of the protests, is central to his motivation for participation. The video of George Floyd which initiated protests with its violent imagery of a white officer on the neck of a Black civilian, resonated enough for Americans to drive them out into the street in numbers larger than any other protest movement in recent history. For a young Black "man" such as Timothy, this imagery echoed his daily experience, but also caused him to speak with seemingly more reticence or caution than in other parts of the interview, alluding to his processing of these daily experiences and what they may mean for the rest of his life. To him, protest is a metaphor for the "lifelong fight" of his daily life, a fight for himself to be accepted and treated by society with equality. In his choice of language and reticence of tone, this young man articulated his "fight" as a burden laid out before him to bear for the rest of his life.

However, he continued by explaining the positive side of this processing of what lies ahead, and how this understanding of the ephemeral aspects of protest motivates in him:

> A couple of hours protesting, like, this is, like, you got to fight for your, stand for literally your whole life. And do whatever it takes to uplift your people, in every opportunity. Even walking by and saying hi. ... Shaking people's hands that the same color as you on campus, it's like, that's part of it too. Like, just anything you can do in life … just to make it a better experience for everybody…

In this, he describes understanding the strength of recognizing and supporting others in community and common experience with him – other Black students at school to affirm and strengthen himself and others in his community. While police violence against Black men is not directly mentioned in Timothy's response, the image of George Floyd's murder resonates with what he expresses about his daily reality of being a Black "man," and possibly, of him learning to accept and confront the reality of the implications of this for his life.

Cultivating a Critical Lens

Participants also described an increase in their awareness of racism, in their daily lives and more systemically, as a result of participating in protests. The ability to cultivate a critical analysis of one's place in society towards disruption of oppression speaks to Freire's notion of critical consciousness (1970; 1993). Participants described being more able to notice and name when language or actions they observed in others seemed racially motivated, or when historical and sociological narratives about the Black community might be perpetuating racist tropes and deficit frameworks devoid of socio-economic and cultural context.

After participating in two protests, Charlene, who identifies as Black and lives in a predominantly Latino/a/x neighborhood, described noticing multiple ways in which she felt she was being treated differently because of her race. She described noticing when other girls on the Color Guard team commented on her hair and that it "has to be a certain way," explaining that "[i]t was hard to deal with … being the only Black person on the team… I would just get certain looks." She also described a neighbor who yelled at her regularly: "They just, like, they don't want you stepping on their grass… Like, I'm trying to just walk my little cousins, at least, to the library. And they just, like, oh, can you get off our grass. … It's prejudice." In exploring this heightened sense of ways in which she may be treated differently due to race in her

neighborhood, she reflected back on the feeling she had when she attended her first BLM protest with a cousin. It seems to have instilled in her a certain sense of confidence, even if she described her natural personality as being more shy and introverted. As a result, she began to get involved with larger issues at her high school, such as an incident in which a member of the baseball team used "the N-word." She attended her first Black Student Union (BSU) meeting because it addressed this issue, and continued to attend meetings until the issue was resolved (the student was "kicked out," she reported). She described starting to boycott restaurants in her neighborhood where she felt that "the way they treat you… I don't want to be looked down upon like that." After attending the protests: "I feel like I'm able to, like, know where I can come from. And know, like, I matter in this world." This sense of "mattering" and taking up space seems key in Charlene's case to noticing and naming. She is able to identify more when others make her feel unwelcome, as she brings with her an inner sense of deserving to take up that space, carried with her from her protest experiences. In addition, she added: "I felt like I learned … I can't just be silent about, like, little things anymore. I have to show, like, the true beauty of being Black." Her experiences of standing in solidarity with others, including some of her closest relatives, at these protests, describing what it felt like to be in community with so many others that looked like her, and so many others that did not but were advocating for people who look like her, endowed her with a sense of "mattering" and with a feeling of the "true beauty of being Black" – something, it seems, that she may not have felt when growing up in a predominantly non-Black neighborhood, but now she wanted to "show." While Charlene expressed self-doubt at her capacity to "show" this yet in her experiences at her community college, she described working towards this as a goal, something that is challenging for her as someone who identifies as being quiet or shy. "I feel like I'm trying," she said, "to grow with protest and like, get stronger. And it

feels like, I'm letting myself down. But I know I'm not. Because I'm not going to stand for it anymore." In this way, she expressed the ways in which the protests inspired her to continue growing, to aspire to be "stronger" and speak up more because she does not want to tolerate the racism that she notices more actively now. However, it is an aspiration very much in process for her, particularly as a more introverted individual.

Xotchil's neighborhood was different from Charlene's, but her increased sense of noticing racism post-protest was similar. Xotchil grew up surrounded by other Black people, but in a context in which she and many around her struggled with poverty, hunger, homelessness, and drug addiction. In attending two protests, she started to realize the ways in which her life experiences in the foster care system and living on the street might be structurally connected to her race. In attending protests, she commented: "I feel like [they] had an impact on me by me just recognizing our Black community more, what we go through, this, as a whole, you know, because I didn't, I didn't, like, notice [before]." She began to notice the ways that people treated her differently when they realized she was Black and not Latina, as she described looking "light-skinned" and "Mexican." She also reflected on the ways her family was treated because she, her son, and his father all had different shades of skin color. She detailed a call she received from her son's father in which he described their two-year-old son being treated differently at the playground:

> My son, his dad was at the park, and he calls, and he like: everybody's taking their sons, everybody's taking their kids away from my kid. Like, they're literally pulling them by their shirt, driving them away. Like, you can't play with them. And if somebody even said that, that my baby was gonna hurt their baby and they're the same fucking age. … I was so tired of people disrespecting me just because I look a certain way or because my son is a little bit lighter than his Black dad, and everybody's constantly asking if it's his [son], like what the fuck, like. So, that is the impact that it had on me. Just me noticing the disadvantages Black people have.

The colorism she notices due to the way others treat her family endows her with a greater sense of compassion for her partner, and a greater sense of urgency in taking action and "fighting" for Black men and boys:

> I've seen where my son's dad, he coming from, like things that he goes through based off, like, his skin color. … 'Cause like people constantly have, like, a negative connotation with Black people.... period .... You know, walking down the street, they grab their purse tighter, they lock their doors, you know, or they'll move their children out of the way. So, I make sure I notice those little things and I make sure I speak up, like, I let them know that that is not okay.

In this case, her noticing was transformed into action, as she found herself speaking up more when she noticed behavior she identified as racist. She explained that she always had been a vocal person, but that the protests allowed her to see and articulate racism happening around her on a daily basis. Her protest experiences and the windows they provided into her increased awareness of racism allowed her to harness her natural tendency to speak out, which she mentioned getting "in trouble" for earlier in her life. With an increased sense of awareness, she was able to "voice her opinions" and feel she was taking action towards "fighting" for her loved ones and herself.

In Jamila's case, her noticing emerged from an increased involvement in social justice issues after engaging in her first protest. This happened through participating in student activist groups such as Students Deserve and Black Lives Matter Youth Vanguard, introduced to her by the same teacher that invited her to her first protest. In these contexts, she worked on a campaign to ban pepper sprays in school, commenting: "For me, I was like, I didn't even know pepper spray could be used on children. I'm like, what? So, I was like, Yes. I want to get involved." In this way, her protest involvement opened her up to other opportunities to advocate for others.

She became an advocate for students on the campus of her all-girls charter school in South Los Angeles, and then helped advocate for issues that echoed concerns expressed at the BLM protests she attended:

> We … talked about, like, our COVID demands, like, ensuring that seniors can have a safe graduation. And, like, with the transition of us going online, like, ensuring that, like, teachers weren't too harsh on grading, and were being lenient, and schools were providing food and PPE resources and, like, different, like, things so that these students are being supported while they're at home as well.
>
> And … [with] the death of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Aubrey, and names can continue on, Students Deserve partnered with BLM LA and BLM had sent out their nationwide call to Defund the Police. So then, Students Deserve said: Well, how can we support them? With our organization that works to make Black Lives Matter in schools? Well, Defund the School Police. … So, it was a really big thing when all of this had erupted in our country. And … our goals were ending these policies that were disproportionately affecting Black students. … So, it was kind of perfect, because, of course, if we said in 2016: "Defund School Police," people would have been like, … what are you talking about? But with the world with the state of mind that our country was in at the time, with the Defund the Police movement, and now we're talking about Defunding School Police, it became a little bit more plausible, a little bit more of a possibility, a little bit more logical.

In this way, Jamila described her awareness of issues "disproportionately affecting Black students" expanding. Through her involvement in Students Deserve, which emerged from standing up and speaking at the first Black Lives Matter protest she attended, she was exposed to and able to relate larger issues of discrimination in policing to experiences of school policing – particularly resonant because of her own personal experiences with being profiled by the SRO at her school. Her involvement continued to expand into multiple areas impacting Black students and the Black community in Los Angeles, attending multiple protests, in coalition with other groups and causes:

> [S]ometimes, I would show up to protests about, like, climate change and how that's affecting, like, our, our POC communities, and how can people support that, and I would support the Amazon workers and, and, like, when they were pushing to get a union at Amazon, and I would go to the Jackie Lacey protests until she was out of office, and we went to the protest to, to, like, get people out to vote. You just, like, hosted, like, people going to polls. … I spoke to the school board. And we made sure that even after like that $25 million cut happened [for SROs in schools], this money was being reinvested into Black students. And that, you know, they made sure that they knew that that was not enough, that we wanted more things to actually happen.

Jamila's transformation through the experience of protest is striking here in the ways that she was able to harness her voice, much like Xotchil, and use it to speak up to figures of authority, such as school administrators, School Board members, and political officials, to advocate for improving the conditions and experiences affecting her, her peers and community, and others in coalition with them. Her awareness expanded her beyond her immediate context, and she began to see the potential for coalition building, and the importance of advocating for others.

Within her immediate school context, Jamila began to "notice a lot more things" and take it upon herself to advocate for herself and her peers:

> If I saw the way my school was handling certain things, like, I was actively aware of it. So, I was the founder of my school's Black Student Union because we didn't have one. When I asked my principal about starting one, she had said, um, like, aren't you reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* in English class, as if that was, like, sufficient of learning Black history, and bringing my community together. So, I already knew that there were some underlying like, racist tones there.

This exchange with her school principal is striking in that her noticing inspired by her protest experience led to advocacy for Black students at her school in the form of founding a BSU, which, in turn, led to noticing the racist overtones in the response of an administrator. In the end,

Jamila was able to take action to advocate for Black students on her campus, and to notice racist language and action in a figure of school authority. She later reflected on the ways in which protest experiences transformed her natural tendency towards speaking up – a quality which, as highlighted earlier, had gotten her "in trouble" as early as kindergarten:

> I noticed how… if something was going on, before, I might have like, been like: "Oh, I'm not gonna say nothing." Like, I don't want to jeopardize my opportunities at the school. But now, it was just kind of like: I don't care. Um, and so I would speak up if I didn't like something, or I was just very, more, like, very vocal and very active. … And I would stand up stronger for what I believed in.

In this way, these participants reflected on ways in which their experiences of protest provided them with a sense of confidence and an awareness of issues affecting them that enabled them to notice more when they experienced racism, and to try to speak up more in the face of it.

Another form of noticing that appeared in the data was the critical analysis of dominant sociological and historical narratives reflecting Black experiences from a deficit perspective. Through the act of protest, Timothy was able to situate himself within a historical continuum in discourse with Black resistance history.

It was very reminiscent to reading about the Rodney King riots back in like, I think '92. …

> [Y]ou won't learn about that in school. They don't teach that in school, actually, surprisingly. I actually heard about it … I'm a big rap fan. So, playing people like, NWA. … I learned it really from that, or … Kendrick Lamar. Kendrick Lamar. He's from Compton. I'm from Carson. It's literally, like, next to each other. … [B]ecause, yeah, we don't never heard about that in school, actually. … [A]nd then I'm … big on being, like, a researcher. When I hear something fascinating, I like to do research, look at documentaries. … [S]o it's very interesting, that kind of be like, replicated in real time. And now I'm actually living in it. …You don't learn that in school. It's not part of history books, unfortunately, but it's hypocrisy being in LA, to be part of [a movement] … that we're learning through pop culture and music.

Timothy references here his appreciation for Black artists who make use of their talent and media to convey messages of social justice. In the case of NWA and Kendrick Lamar, he also views them as sources of information and educators of a history directly related to his experiences. The history he refers to here is that of the Los Angeles uprisings of 1992 that erupted in response to the acquittal of the police officers engaged in the brutal beating of a Black man, Rodney King, which, similar to George Floyd, was captured on camera by bystanders and shared widely by media in the pre-social media world. Timothy laments not learning this history in school and takes it upon himself to follow up this rap music education with personally driven independent research online and via the experience of watching film documentaries. In this way, he is able to cultivate critical consciousness about the ways in which history was taught to him, and to confront omissions of Black resistance history through his own research.

He followed up this online research with asking questions to elders in his community about their experiences in 1992. He was surprised to learn that his neighbors had taken part in the "looting and rioting," as he described it. Early in the interview, he expressed disapproval of "rioters," articulating an antipathy for violence as a means of protest. However, through the process of describing his neighbors' experiences in the interview, he began to shift his language, and seemingly to critically question his understanding of looting and so-called rioting as part of the continuum of Black resistance history in Los Angeles:

> [My neighbors'] saying at that point: "We were in a low-income situation." And you've seen this happen [on the news], [looters] took advantage, … they start stealing TVs and stuff. … Hearing different perspectives and stuff … it just broadens your understanding of the situation. And then yeah, and you see a similar event kind of happening again, you think: "Oh, this is what it felt like? Oh, yeah."
>
> … A lot of people, I think, people even who are looting, are part of, like, community where like money isn't… money is … there's not

> money, a lot of money, going around. It's really hard, especially in LA. Like, a lot of poverty over here.
>
> … So, to them, at that time, even though the time where you think it'd be to reflect on how to … end violence and the brutality, [it's] also a time to find your next meal, find some extra money. … It really just gives you the reality of how it was back then. And it still is now, to be honest.
>
> So, when you hear that perspective of someone who was actually a part of it, and actually stealing stuff, it really just gives you a better understanding of how it is and like, how not much has changed, actually.

In this section of the interview, he weighed his earlier statements of disapproval about violent protest, which reflect similar language and sentiment expressed in popular news media in Los Angeles contemporary to Timothy's protest experience. By reflecting on the stories provided to him by first person accounts of those in his community that experienced both protest movements, he is able to more critically examine the source of looting and begin to approach connections between poverty and race in his city and community, and their relationship to larger issues of structural racism. Through his protest experience, he is able to harness and synthesize learning gained through music, bolstered by personal research via online and documentary sources, and in dialogue with older neighbors. In reflecting on these multiple sources, he is then able to engage in compassion for his predecessors in the continuum of Black resistance history in Los Angeles as he engages experientially in the critical act of protest and subsequent reflection.

Activating Voice and Creative Expression

An increase in processing racial trauma and critical consciousness led participants to express, or attempt to voice, their perspectives and experiences more often, including in public and to figures of authority, even when it made them feel uncomfortable. This increase in participant personal and creative expression in dialogue and community with others, echoes

Freire's notion of critical action, in which critical consciousness leads to related social actions which interrupt oppression and effect change (1970, 1993).

For Xotchil, this took the form of public speaking, as she started to advocate more for foster youth by telling her story in fora and at events supporting them. She described being in a constant state of processing her life's traumas, and the ways in which her protest experiences allowed her to speak publicly about these traumas with more of a sense of the racism that has affected her. She has continued to process this at each speaking engagement, including in interviews with researchers and journalists, as, it seems, a means of healing some of the trauma.

For Charlene, she described finding expression through her participation in Color Guard. She described this participation as being a central aspect of her identity as she struggled to come to terms with her desire to become a police officer in the wake of protests she attended about police brutality. In Color Guard, she described the enjoyment of practicing the physical routines, of running through them behind her house, and of participating in them with others in her group. She described the sense of calm and fulfillment she felt in participating, and the pleasure in the physical expression of the routines she performed, in handling the wooden guns in synch with the other girls in her group.

Jamila's protest experiences led her to more public speaking, much like Xotchil, in order to add purpose to her already "vocal" tendencies. However, she also described her enjoyment in writing and drawing as means of expression to process her experiences. She described working on a memoir, which she hopes "serves as, like, kind of a inspiration or, like, advice for somebody else." She also described her love of art, particularly of drawing and "mosaic-type art," which she still participates in to process and de-stress. This expression has been harnessed by her Students Deserve community, as she has taken on organizing some of the more creative protest

actions, such as planning an aerial drone photo of students spelling out “Defund LASPD” (Los Angeles School Police Department) while blocking traffic on a main street in Los Angeles.

Much like Jamila, Timothy’s love of and participation in the arts predated his protest experience. However, his protest experience led him to a deeper appreciation for the power of the arts and artists to transform society. Multiple times in his interview, he cited musical artists such as Marvin Gaye, NWA, and Kendrick Lamar. He described them as “vocal and proud” in their music, and as being “community leaders.” As a more introverted person who leads by example, and through creative expression such as writing or graphic design, he described these artists as inspirations for him, as they are able to lead by expressing themselves artistically, something he admires. He described his experience of attending a large protest at City Hall with the song “All Right” by Kendrick Lamar and “What’s Going On” by Marvin Gaye played as anthems, viewing these artists as Black men harnessing their art to express the experiences of being Black men and leading by example. He also described listening to speeches by his “elders” and feeling deep emotion in response to their words. After attending the protest, he explained:

> I was motivated creatively. … I started … working on clothing with my friends, started our own little clothing brand, just literally off of, just, being motivated from, like, doing something [in the protests] … to just, like, make stuff that … means something, that has a purpose. Like me, I'm really into clothes, but I always wanted to, like, make clothes that, like, when … you're in it and you feel it, this thing deeper, behind the actual garment. So, I was really just like, inspired by that moment. … And clothing is universal. There's no race, there's no gender, there's no sexual orientation, not in the clothing, you can wear anything you want. Just finding your inner-self and just being you and just saying something, like saying something bigger than what the eye can see, really. … I wanted to, like, create something because, like, my voice isn't big enough to inspire people. I'm not. I'm not famous, I'm not a celebrity. … I'm not the most vocal person, I'm not going to … preach to you. But if I can use, like, my God-given ability to make something that you can, that you can see, and it speaks to you …That to me is a lot right there, with one person or one thousand people.

Similarly to how he describes his artistic hero Kendrick Lamar, he wants to create something using his talent in graphic design to make something meaningful that others might wear and feel part of something – whether that's "one person or one thousand." He emphasizes that his means of creative expression and "voice" is not through public speaking, as with Xotchil or Jamila, but rather through his "God-given" artistic gift of visual layout, and creatively designing inclusive clothing in collaboration with friends.

Timothy's inspiration for the clothing line can be traced to his protest experience, which he described as instilling in him a sense of beauty and hope connected to the feeling of unity and community:

> There are just a lot of emotions that day and a lot of the community and the whole city come together for that… It was just beautiful. …
>
> [I saw] classmates, … old teachers, people from the community center I used to grow up in, … it was, it was honestly insane. I literally saw people I hadn't seen in years. And I know there's a moment that brought everybody here. It was amazing. … I seen a lot of people who I haven't seen since elementary school, and just to see them now. It's beautiful. …
>
> There is hope to bring people together, not just this world full of this hate, and discrimination and violence. … But during that moment, everything seemed like we're going toward the positive way. So, there is a way to, I mean, there is a good, like, there's a possibility that we could all be united. … [I]t gave me hope. … [T]here is hope that we can create … a better world. I don't know what it's gonna take. I hope I can find the answers for it, I hope I can be a part of it.

He describes his protest experience in terms of its beauty – a sense of aesthetic transcendence made up of seeing old friends and community members, and coming together in unity for this "moment that brought everybody here." It instills in him a sense of hope that he can "find the answers" and "be part of" creating something better for the world. This beauty is the impetus for his clothing line, which features slogans emphasizing peace and self-care. He follows up by repeating his

understanding of this advocacy being a "lifelong journey," especially for him as he navigates society as a Black young man. There is a clear connection for him between the "beauty" he experienced in protest, creative expression, and social justice advocacy in community with others, all of which he hopes may lead to "a better world."

Interestingly, both Jamila and Charlene also referred to a sense of "beauty" they experienced at the respective protests they attended. Jamila's comment referred to the moment of speaking in front of a crowd with a megaphone in her hand for the first time, noting that it was "just beautiful to see all of those people out. And now all of these people are listening to me talk about [my experiences]." In this way, her sense of beauty emerged from a sense of being in community and unity with others, but also from being listened to and her voice truly "heard" by the crowd. Charlene's beauty is described as the "true beauty of being Black," which is something she felt in community with other Black people marching en masse alongside her during a protest – something she does not experience on a daily basis in her predominantly non-Black neighborhood. It is a sense of beauty that insists on visibility and appreciation, a form of expression in and of itself. Beauty is perceived in these three examples as connected to being in community with others, being able to express oneself physically and verbally, and feeling beautiful in relation to a sense of being "heard" and seen, seemingly for the first time for some of these participants.

Xotchil did not use the word beauty, but described her experience as feeling like she was part of a community: "Community? Yeah, everybody was like my cousin. Like, sisters or like brothers, like, everybody felt, we all felt connected. Like that day, we just felt like … whatever we was going through personally or politically..., you know, generationally, whatever...We all came together at that moment to fight … and that shit was great." Her choice of language is

interesting here, referring to “cousins,” “sisters,” and “brothers,” particularly as a person who survived the foster system and lost touch with her biological family. This experience of being in community with others at the protest created a sense of family to Xotchil, and gave her sense of being part of a “family,” and therefore, a sense of greater belonging, and a performance of an ideal self, one with a supportive family, in the presence of whom she might feel “great.”

Within her protest experiences, Jamila related her performance of self in community with others and its authentic expression as an act of beauty and an aspiration for the future:

> I hope we don't have to keep fighting. … I hope that we can live in a world and just be free and not have to worry about, oh, I'm walking down the street, does this hairbrush look like a gun? You know, do I … look suspicious to somebody else? And you know, if I get pulled over, am I gonna get killed? Like, just to where we're not living in a constant state of fear. Um just in a moment of where we can just truly be, like, ourselves and we're not being judged, and there's not being stereotypes placed on us. Like, if my mom is laughing so loudly, like, you know, somebody outside of our community gonna be like: “Oh, look at this loud Black lady.” Like, you know, I just want us to be able to live in a world where we're not living in fear, we're living to be ourselves.

The description of her daily reality, and the daily reality of her loved ones, is one that counters the transcendent beauty she describes in her moment of speaking and being heard in community with others at the protest. She “fights,” as Xotchil would phrase it, so that she doesn’t “have to keep fighting” and so that she and those in her community are not “living in fear” of simply being their authentic selves. This performance of self is another act of creative expression, an insistence on “living to be ourselves,” in resistance to a world that would have them “living in fear.”

The Role of Mentorship

An unexpected theme that emerged was the importance of mentorship through the protest experience. Participants referred to mentors who empowered them to participate in protests, and

helped them to cultivate resulting critical consciousness and critical action. They expressed having one or more teacher or counselor mentor(s) at school who supported them through the protest process towards their perceived learning. These figures introduced students to protest opportunities, helped them process their experiences emotionally and intellectually, and supported and collaborated with them to bring programming back to schools inspired by protest experiences.

Xotchil described the ways in which teachers were touchstones to her throughout her life – a constant and caring support that helped her survive the foster care system and then helped her process her experiences at the protests. The language she used about these figures stood out in its tenderness. She described them as her "saving grace," and a "constant driving force" in her life. About her counselor mentor at the community college she attends, she said: "I respect her. … I commend her, I watch her, I want to be like her one day hopefully." She elaborated that this mentor and another professor at her college have "honestly been there for me like when I tell my story. A lot of people, like, feel it in their heart and all that stuff. And I, and I, understand it and I appreciate that. I love that. Love that y'all care about me." She went on to discuss the ways in which her professors actively engaged students about their experiences during the protests:

> A lot of teachers [talked about it], like, if we was protesting and, like, what was our experiences? Like how do we feel about, like, what's going on? So, I'm gonna be impacting there because I had to, you know, voice my opinions and I have to find the things that were related to that.

She reflected on the ways that these discussions helped her understand her experiences in the protest and the ways in which related larger issues were affecting her everyday life. She went on to describe her campus as a close-knit community, one in which everyone knows each other and checks in on each other – something she deeply values about it. School, for Xotchil, is described

as a constant, and a safe space in the midst of a tumultuous home and personal life. Teachers and counselors in these settings have allowed her to feel a sense of stability, to "voice [her] opinions" and be heard.

School was also a refuge for Jamila, whose love of reading and art was encouraged in her early by her grandmother, and whose sense of hard work in academics was cultivated by her uncle. When she later entered the foster care system and was eventually adopted, it was by a Head Start teacher, whose sister (Jamila's aunt) was a dance teacher at the middle school Jamila would attend. And in high school, she had a teacher, the advisor for the BSU club she attended, who introduced her to the organization Students Deserve and invited Jamila to her first protest. The teacher accompanied Jamila to her first protest, with Jamila's mother's permission, and later became the school's coordinator for a Students Deserve club. This teacher tapped Jamila for leadership, encouraged her to help organize more creative actions such as the aerial drone filming project, and stood by her when Jamila was handed her first megaphone, which was the beginning of her telling her story and "being heard." This teacher provided spaces beyond the classroom in which Jamila might learn and grow. Jamila commented later that she was considering "pursuing a career in education," as she reflected on how impactful this mentorship was in her own education.

Similarly, Timothy credited teachers for "[getting] me to the point where I'm … trying to be something in this world." Like Jamila, he had excelled in school from an early age. He described being the eldest child of Nigerian immigrants who focused heavily on education and religion. The resulting value system he gleaned from his family emphasized hard work and being a good person. By the time he was in high school, he was a leader in multiple settings in and out of school – editor of the school newspaper, president of BSU, involved in student government,

and interning with officials in his local government in Carson. After attending the protests, he described working closely with teachers, “three women I love, … three strong, Black women” who were “foundational pieces of a lot of the programs” at the school. He continued that, without them, he “wouldn’t even be where I’m at right now,” referring to both his developed sense of consciousness from the protests and the prestigious university he currently attends. As president of the BSU, he collaborated with them to design and implement the Black History Month programming at his school his senior year. He understood the challenges they faced in creating this programming:

> They were doing it independently. Like they don't get no help from anybody else. … [T]here's no requirement that you have to have a Black History program, they doing it on their own, their own terms with their own, spending their own time, putting their own, their own energy on it, because they want to, they want to put together, like, a, like, assembly or performance where we're celebrating and informing people of this culture. So, the fact that they're doing that on their own is not, like, it's not embedded in the curriculum, or in a school year calendar. That if they're not there, it wouldn't happen at all.

He expresses his admiration and appreciation for these figures who go above and beyond the parameters of their jobs, seemingly without or with limited support from the school, in order to bring culturally relevant programming to students. He worked alongside and with the support of these three “strong, Black women” to bring this relevant content to his peers. His commentary here reflects a lack of institutional support for curricula directly relevant to and engaging student experience. He explained that the teachers did this “independently,” because they did not get “funding or… help from the actual school.” He reported that the teachers worked extensively on the programming on their own time and without additional compensation. He explained their shared motivation, particularly at a predominantly Black school in the Carson neighborhood of South Los Angeles:

> Well, whenever a school discuss African American history, it's very slim. You hear about Martin Luther King, Jr., and that's pretty much it. Not much you hear about slavery that really much. … Especially being in LAUSD your whole life. To not hear about the Rodney King riots is pretty surreal. Like, like, yeah, 'cause it literally happened in our backyard. … And even when [the BLM protests] were happening, … you didn't hear much from your school in general. You got a little email saying: "We sympathize with you guys." But then … it's like: "Do your math homework." … I think they can do … a better job touching on topics that are meaningful, that have importance, that they're, like, the backbone of this country, really.

With the aid and hard work of these mentors in support of and response to students' protest experiences, Timothy and his peers in BSU found a way to engage in critical action and insert some of this missing history into their school's extra-curricular curriculum.

While Charlene did not mention a specific teacher figure, she did describe the ways in which participating in Color Guard at school was a stabilizing force for her, and her gratitude for her community college teachers, and BSU facilitators, for supporting her as she figures out how to bring some of the empowerment she cultivated from her participation in protests to her daily life and career trajectory.

Conclusion

These participants' perspectives provide a window into their perceived learning through the act of participating in Black Lives Matter protests, and the possible implications for what schools might glean in response. The most striking overlaps in theme came in the forms of processing racial trauma, cultivating critical consciousness, and engaging in critical action in the form of voice and creative expression. In addition, the presence of mentors in their schools – teachers and counselors – also appeared to provide an important catalyst for participant engagement in, reflection on, and embodiment of learning within and beyond protest

experiences. As elements of TRC, these themes may provide a lens through which to better understand participant perceived learning at protests.

Chapter Five

Discussion

Introduction

The goal of this study was to amplify the voices of youth participants in protests to begin to uncover their perceptions of potential learning in extra-institutional spaces. In focusing on Black students, the intention was to respond to a specific historic moment of country-wide racial reckoning in response to the murder of George Floyd, compounded by the ways in which the Covid-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted BIPOC communities, particularly in relation to health and education. Interviews were conducted engaging an exploratory, phenomenological approach (Seidman, 2019), which enabled participants to guide the direction and content of their narratives. The common themes that resonated across participant narratives in response to the research question included Space for Processing Racial Trauma, Cultivating a Critical Lens, and Activating Voice and Creative Expression. In addition, the theme The Role of Mentorship emerged independent of the research question, but prevalent enough to merit consideration. When these themes were held up against the notion of Transformative Resistant Capital (TRC), they began to clarify the study's conceptual framework and offer a clearer window into the forms of knowledge schools and communities might tap into to harness this form of Community Cultural Wealth in students.

In answering the research question, the discussion that follows interrogates these themes as component parts of TRC. It reframes TRC as constructed from: social-emotional healing,

critical consciousness, and critical action; all catalyzed in students by means of strong adult mentorship. After summarizing and interpreting the findings through the lens of this conceptual framework, the chapter will then present implications. This will be followed by recommendations for future research, before ending with final thoughts on how all of this applies to my own work as an antiracist educator.

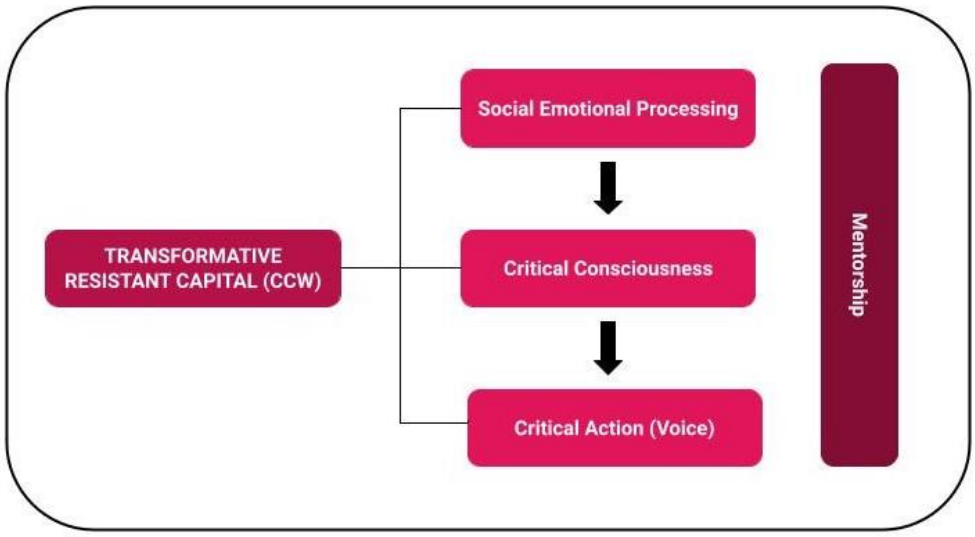
Summary and Interpretation of Findings

The findings in this chapter emerged holistically from the themes identified in participant narratives, as viewed in response to the research question. When considering how these themes might fit into TRC, clear patterns emerged. In order to harness Black students' TRC, it became clear that a space for processing racial trauma was key. I identified this perceived learning step as having the space for social-emotional processing – a seemingly necessary first step of self-reflection and personal growth on the path to more intellectual forms of learning. The next step in these participants' processes of perceived learning emphasized cultivating a critical lens of the world around them. This form of perceived learning echoed Freire's critical consciousness in participants' increase in awareness and critique of oppression and the power structures that design and enforce them (1970; 1993). Finally, participants described acting on this new-found critical consciousness via voicing themselves more publicly and creatively. This form of voice and creative expression can be viewed through the lens of critical action, which extends from critical consciousness towards effecting positive change (Freire, 1970; 1993). Thus, a three step process was identified as making up the elements of TRC. Finally, the role of mentorship was layered over the framework, viewed as a means to catalyzing these steps of TRC. In essence, the process of data analysis resulted in identifying component parts of an important element of CCW that otherwise lacks concrete parameters for its application. The chart below visualizes the

conceptual framework that emerged from this data analysis and will be used as the window through which to view the relevance of the study's data.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



In foregrounding this discussion, elements of the conceptual framework that appeared in media coverage contemporary to participant protest experiences should be identified for their possible influences, consciously or unconsciously, on participant responses. A lens of critical consciousness appeared in all media reviewed for this study to varying degrees. While approaches varied early in coverage of the protests, by the month of June, all media outlets were running at least partial content engaging critical consciousness in the service of questioning dominant power structures that perpetuate racist systems. This shift in rhetoric may have reflected a larger cultural shift in Los Angeles, and the United States, which included a mainstreaming of BLM ideas in response to national protests, making the movement's issues more accessible to a broader audience. In addition, the idea of creative expression as a means of critical action also reflects broader cultural trends during the second wave of the BLM

movement, particularly in Los Angeles. As the production of cultural content such as film, music, and visual art is central to the city's identity, it is not surprising that all media outlets reviewed for this study prominently featured articles and segments on artistic responses to the movement, including through street art, music, and poetry. The journalistic emphasis on creative responses to BLM may reflect larger cultural trends in the city of Los Angeles, and may have influenced participant responses, directly or indirectly. This study's participants' use of their voices and engagement of critical consciousness and creative expression towards critical action post-protest experiences speak directly to these broader cultural trends.

Space for Social-Emotional Processing

All four participants described processing personal racial trauma during protests as essential to their experiences. Past racial traumas were conveyed as fodder for self-reflection, affirmation, and community building. At the protests, confronting memories of racial trauma, as well as acknowledging racism's heavy daily burden, liberated and empowered participants. It also imbued them with a greater sense of connection to others.

In the group of participants interviewed for this research study, three described protests as enabling them to process trauma related to past police experiences. Xotchil described a memory of being detained by police in a similar manner to George Floyd, with an officer's knee on her back and her having to repeat "I can't breathe." Her experience of marching alongside others at a protest affirmed her sense of injustice at the treatment of George Floyd, and thus, of herself. In this way, she was able to challenge the power dynamic of her past police experience in concert with others, and to emotionally process it in a supportive context. Like Xotchil, Charlene processed her past police trauma at a protest. Attending a protest alongside her brother enabled the two of them to feel empowered to have a conversation about his experience getting arrested

at school. She described both of their outrage that George Floyd was killed for something as minor as using a counterfeit bill to buy food – likening the disproportionate use of force in Floyd's police response to her brother's arrest. She was able to express anger, and to reflect on the ways in which she previously had felt silenced at school, afraid of incurring a similar fate to her brother. For Charlene, joining a protest with someone close to her cultivated in her a sense of affirmation and empowerment. Jamila's description of profound social-emotional processing also took place at a protest when she told her story of past traumatic police interactions through a megaphone. It was the first time she shared her story of being profiled by a school police officer, and the first time she felt like "somebody was actively listening" to her, and that she was in a "safe space" where she could "continue to tell stories." Feeling heard and listening to positive responses from the crowd affirmed Jamila's experiences and enabled her to articulate her experiences as unfair, instead of shameful. Through the experience of protest, all three of these participants stopped feeling silenced, or shame, about past encounters with police, and cultivated a sense of agency and voice in the presence of supportive others.

In Timothy's example, his processing racial trauma was expressed in the context of his daily struggle as a Black person fighting for justice beyond the parameters of a protest. He described the sense of beauty he felt at being in community, and in unity, with so many others who were present at the protest. The experience empowered him to carry a sense of community with him into other spaces post-protest, as in the example of him making an effort to shake hands with other Black students on his college campus. In experiencing the sense of community, unity, and related beauty at the protest, Timothy was able to process his daily experiences related to his Black identity and consider strengths-based approaches to confront these daily realities, such as cultivating community with others through mutual affirmation. In all of these participant

examples, social-emotional processing was described as liberating, empowering, activating, and emerging in a shared space with supportive others listening and affirming.

Prior research speaks to the ways in which schools are often loci of inflicting rather than healing racial trauma in Black students. Black students experience an increased likelihood of school punishment (Artiles, 1998; Artiles & Trent, 1994; Harry & Anderson, 1999; Harry & Klingner, 2006; O'Connor & Deluca-Fernandez, 2006; Losen, 2015; Orfield & Losen, 2002; Howard, 2020), are "routinely pathologized" and experience "segregated remediations" as punishment (Shalaby, 2017, p. xxvi). School Resource Officer (SRO) programs, which are more often implemented in predominantly BIPOC than white schools, are correlated with higher rates of suspension, expulsion, and lost class time (Turner & Beneke, 2019; Fisher & Hennessy, 2016), and directly related to students being referred to law enforcement for low level offenses (Nance, 2015). Jamila's experience of being unjustly racially profiled by an SRO, as well as Charlene's depiction of her brother's arrest and her subsequently feeling silenced at school, speak to the ways in which Black students may experience their schools as arenas for punishment rather than healing. SROs are often posited by school administrations as engaging in "restorative" rather than punitive roles and as potential mentors and role models for students (Turner & Beneke, 2019). However, these participant responses convey an inverse perspective of the role of police officers on campus – describing them as causing trauma that could only be processed in the healing spaces students encountered at protests.

When considering this study's data in light of prior research and the conceptual framework, it follows that Black students require a space for emotionally processing racial trauma as a first step towards harnessing TRC. The proposed space might enable them to engage in self-reflection, affirmation, empowerment, and community building. In such a space, to

paraphrase Jamila, students might be able to tell their stories without fear, engage in active listening, and feel heard – in other words, to emotionally process their racial traumas in community with others. In doing so, students may feel a sense of beauty in community with others, and a related sense of release which might be likened to catharsis. This catharsis might clear the path for students to reframe their past racial traumas as unfair rather than shameful, and to move forward with a sense of empowerment in unity and community with others. In providing spaces for this kind of social-emotional processing for Black students, schools and communities might effectively engage the first element of TRC, thus empowering students through their experience of catharsis and affirmation in community with others.

Critical Consciousness

After attending protests, participants described having a heightened sense of awareness of racism in their daily lives and systemically. They described noticing more when they or those they loved were treated differently due to race, when figures of authority might be perpetuating harmful racist rhetoric, and when dominant narratives about the experiences of the Black community might require interrogation and repositioning. This heightened awareness made participants want to challenge or interrupt these behaviors or constructs when they encountered them.

Charlene described noticing more actively when she felt she was being treated differently by peers and neighbors because of her race in her predominantly non-Black neighborhood. She expressed that she did not want to be silent when she noticed these actions, but wished to show "the true beauty of being Black," an assertion of her identity and of her deserving positive, appreciative treatment. Similarly, Xotchil described noticing the racism permeating her daily life more. She described the ways other parents might treat her son differently on the playground, or

the way that people might "grab their purse tighter" or "lock their doors" when they saw her son's father. After attending protests, she made sure "[to] notice those little things and … speak up" to "let [others] know that is not okay."

Jamila's newly honed critical lens enabled her to question a figure of authority, interrogating the response of her school principal as containing "underlying … racist tones" in the assumption that teaching the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* was "sufficient of learning Black History." It is significant that post-protest, Jamila was able to question a figure of authority at her school, a place in which she had felt previously silenced about experiences of racism, perpetuated by a figure of authority in the form of an SRO. Timothy also experienced an increase in his ability to critically analyze dominant narratives. In his case, this was reflected in his recognition of what was missing from "the history books" that "you won't learn about … in school." The expansion of Timothy's learning about the history relevant to his South Los Angeles neighborhood took place post-protest through listening to music, specifically NWA and Kendrick Lamar. He used reference points within the music as launching pads for self-directed online research. In addition, after speaking with elders in his neighborhood who lived through the 1992 uprisings, Timothy was able to critically question dominant language used to describe the uprisings, past and present. He reasoned that "people who are looting … are part of … a community where … there's not … a lot of money going around," specifying that "[i]t's really hard, especially in L.A., like, a lot of poverty over here." He made the connection of "the reality of how it was back then… and it still is now, to be honest." Having an opportunity to engage with his elders and to reflect on his protest experiences enabled Timothy to reassess dominant narratives of race, class, and history, and to come to his own more compassionate and nuanced understanding of these historical events. In this way, Timothy's critical questioning took the

form of self-directed learning, as he carved out an understanding of history and his place within it that critically questioned dominant cultural narratives, including ones taught at his school.

Prior research has pointed to critical consciousness (CC), the ability to cultivate a critical analysis of one's place in society towards disruption of oppression (Freire, 1970; 1993), for its pedagogical efficacy. In various prior examples, pedagogy engaging critical consciousness has been shown to help BIPOC students navigate and challenge injustice (Ginwright, 2010; Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011), improve academic achievement (Carter, 2008; O'Connor, 1997; El-Amin et al, 2017), increase college enrollment (Rogers & Terriquez, 2013; El-Amin et al, 2017), and display greater levels of persistence (Carter, 2008; El-Amin et al, 2017). School-based programs emphasizing Social-Justice Citizenship have been shown to cultivate this level of critical awareness (Westheimer, 2004). CC thus has the potential to be an important pedagogical aim in confronting and overcoming opportunity gaps or debts owed BIPOC students.

When considering participant responses in this study in light of this prior research, CC can be viewed as a potential outcome of experiential Social-Justice Citizenship-infused engagement. Data from this study showed that CC can be honed effectively outside of the classroom when students engage in hands-on, meaningful learning, even in the absence of addended programming that emphasizes college readiness (Rogers, 2019). This is an important consideration, as prior studies have credited support elements of Youth Organizing programs such as tutoring with enhancing student outcomes. In the case of this study, CC was cultivated in isolation outside of a program setting, and thus shows that extra-institutional experiential learning on its own may hold the potential to improve academic achievement, increase college enrollment, and encourage greater levels of persistence.

Within the context of identifying the elements of TRC, CC might be viewed as an essential second step for Black students in cultivating this form of CCW. In light of this study's participant responses, CC might be identified as cultivating a heightened sense of daily and systemic racism that enables students to critically question the world around them, including figures of authority and dominant narratives. It encourages students to assert themselves as deserving of taking up space, and thus to have the confidence to approach and challenge dominant perspectives, and to do so with a sense of nuance and compassion. It engages students in self-directed research, including with elders of their own communities, in order to come to their own conclusions about the intersections of race, class, and their own lives. Schools and communities might consider these parameters as pedagogical aims when crafting programs to help harness student CC, an important second step within this understanding of TRC's component parts.

Critical Action (Voice)

Participants in this research study described the experience of protest as helping them to activate their voices and creative expression. They described an increase in speaking out in response to recognizing and challenging racism, including in more formal settings. They also described the ways in which varying forms of creative expression, particularly via the arts, enabled them to continue to process their experiences emotionally and critically, and to take action beyond the experience of protest.

Post-protest, Xotchil began to formalize her vocal tendencies by speaking at events to benefit foster youth. Her speaking engagements allowed her to advocate for foster youth by telling her story, and in the process, continue the work of healing her own traumas through their telling. Jamila's voice was activated when she was handed a megaphone, and she continued to

speak at protests, and in more formal settings, such as School Board meetings, extensively afterwards. She also described processing her experiences via more creative, non-verbal forms of expression, such as through drawing, creating mosaics, and writing a memoir which she hopes one day will help others. For Charlene, the physical expression of Color Guard protests was a means of reflecting on her conflicted feelings about wanting to join the police force in the aftermath of the George Floyd protests, and an assertion of her identity, even in the uncomfortable context of her predominantly non-Black neighborhood. These participants described engaging in forms of public speaking and creative expression in order to heal past racial traumas and try to effect change post-protest.

A sense of aesthetic beauty was identified by three of the participants as essential to the protest experience, and seems to have been carried with them via varying forms of creative expression in its wake. This sense of beauty emerged from the shared, cathartic experience of processing racial trauma and critically questioning dominant structures, and in Charlene's case, resulted in the sense of the "true beauty of being Black." Timothy cited aesthetic beauty and his appreciation for the arts throughout his interview, with a focus on musical artists. He described the protest he attended as motivating him to found a clothing company with friends that is aspirational in its messaging, embracing a philosophy that clothing is universal and has "no race, … no gender, … no sexual orientation" and is a means to "just being you." Timothy articulated a hope that through this expression he might, like Xotchil and Jamila, inspire others. In founding a clothing line with friends, he has replicated the aesthetic sense of cathartic unity and community with others, which he described as having experienced at the protest, in order to effect change beyond its boundaries. His creative expression aspires to communicate a sense that there "is hope to bring people together" and that "there's a possibility that we could all be united" towards

creating “a better world.” Indeed, all participants described the ways in which their participation in protests motivated them to engage their voices and creative expression towards creating a world in which, as Jamila expressed, “we’re living to be ourselves.”

Prior studies have highlighted the positive effects of critical action, which launches from critical consciousness to engage in actions that interrupt oppression and effect change (Freire, 1993), on student learning outcomes. Critical action has been shown to improve career expectancies, and to result in higher-status occupations later in life, in Black high school students (Rapa, Diemer, & Bañales, 2017). The recent wave of Black and Indigenous Education scholarship responding to protests in Standing Rock and Freedom Square, Chicago, explore protest spaces as non-traditional schools in which critical consciousness might be cultivated and passed down intergenerationally through the critical action of the arts, such as storytelling, dance, and music *(Eagle Shield et al, 2020)*. In the context of protests, crucial intergenerational knowledge which harnesses critical action via artistic expression might be engaged with the aim of inspiring future generations towards critical action beyond the bounds of the protest space.

In in light of prior research, what emerges in this study’s participant narratives is an emphasis on the activation of voice and creative expression as a form of critical action, identified here as the third element of TRC. Study participants’ post-protest creative expression enabled them to continue processing their experiences emotionally and critically, and to aspire to inspire others. They were able to assert the expression of their identity, heal past racial trauma, and try to effect change. When viewed through this lens, the experience of critical action via creative expression can be understood as a culmination of the first two identified steps of TRC, as it enabled this study’s participants to synthesize their prior social-emotional processing and cultivation of critical consciousness through the act of creative expression.

Mentorship

An unexpected outcome of this study was the emergence of the theme of mentorship. In participant narratives, mentors were described mostly within academic contexts, and were conveyed as catalysts for engagement in protests as well as subsequent opportunities for social-emotional reflection, critical analysis, and perceived learning.

Xotchil credited her teachers in community college classes with asking about student experiences of BLM so that they might "voice their opinions" and make critical connections. Jamila described the teacher who invited her to her first protest and tapped her to lead the aerial drone photo action. This teacher provided Jamila with opportunities for experiential and creative extra-institutional learning, and helped her to integrate that learning in the form of creative expression as critical action. Like Jamila, Timothy formed a collaboration with teachers at his school. Alongside them, he created and implemented a Black History Month program that reflected the more nuanced sense of history he cultivated through his protest experience and subsequent independent research. He described these teachers as role models, "strong Black women" who worked tirelessly beyond school hours to bring culturally relevant content to students. Through his engagement with these teachers, Timothy was able to process his protest experiences, critically question curriculum, and take action through implementing new, more culturally relevant curriculum in collaboration with them.

Prior research speaks to the ways in which school-based programs that involve strong mentorship in the context of community engagement and extra-institutional enrichment towards Social-Justice Citizenship (Westheimer, 2004; 2015) can be significant in improving student achievement (Hanushek & Rivken, 2009). Youth Participatory Action Research (PAR), based on the work of Kurt Lewin and Paolo Freire, offers a particularly effective opportunity for students, with the guidance of trained adult mentors, to research social issues that directly affect their lives

and then take action based on them (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Fine et al., 2004; Powers & Allaman, 2012; Pyne et al., 2013; Torre, 2009; Hudson et al). Much like protest experiences, the hands-on aspects of YPAR programs have the potential to enable students to connect more deeply with their communities and view their education in a context of improving success for others within their communities (Hudson et al, 2020). Students experiencing these kinds of school-based programs are more likely to recognize the value in community-based knowledge and culture, rather than seeing their communities as "holding them back" (Yosso, 2005; Hudson et al, 2020). This study's participants expressed having similar outcomes to these, and cited the importance of adult academic mentors who helped them to process and integrate this knowledge, thereby acting as catalysts for perceived learning.

Xotchil, Timothy, and Jamila all described having teacher mentors who helped them process their personal traumas and protest experiences, critically analyze history and news cycles, and take action to confront injustice. In other words, teacher mentors helped these participants harness their TRC by supporting them in its three component parts identified by this study: social-emotional healing related to racial trauma, the cultivation of critical consciousness and resulting critical action through creative expression. In this way, antiracist educators who were deeply engaged with issues that affect the communities they serve, acted as catalysts for activating student TRC.

This Study's Contributions

While the perceived learning participants described embodying as a result of protest participation and teacher mentorship speaks to prior literature, what's new is observing these perceived outcomes in an independent, extra-institutional context, as potential building blocks for a new pedagogical framework interpreting TRC, and in response to the specific historic moment of global pandemic and post-BLM racial reckoning that calls for educational reform.

Prior literature speaks to the educational benefits of Black students being able to process racial trauma (Howard, 2020), and cultivate critical consciousness (Mayorga & Picower 2018; Ginwright, 2010; Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011; Carter, 2008; O'Connor, 1997; El-Amin et al, 2017) and critical action (Watts & Flanagan, 2007; Rapa, Diemer, & Bañales, 2017; Rogers & Terriquez, 2020; El-Amin et al, 2017) with the support of sympathetic, antiracist, culturally responsive educators (Kohli, 2013; Sleeter, 2001; Mayorga & Picower 2018; Howard, 2020). However, when school-based programs steeped in Social-Justice Citizenship (Westheimer, 2004), such as YPAR or YO, previously have been studied, outcomes related to CC or CA were credited to addended program features such as tutoring and college-readiness workshops (Rogers & Terriquez, 2020). In contrast, within this study, participants described cultivating CC and CA in the context of extra-institutional experiential protest engagement independent of a formal academic setting. Participant descriptions of strong teacher mentorship which helped to catalyze perceived learning may or may not relate to the addended programming referenced in prior studies – future studies would have to determine the specific source of efficacy within addended YO programs.

Another aspect of newness emerging from this study is the way in which the conceptual framework, shaped by student perceptions of their own learning in protest spaces, addresses the concrete, practicable tools that might comprise TRC. By breaking down TRC into a formula of three component parts (Social-Emotional Processing, CC, and CA) with a catalyst (antiracist teacher mentorship), schools and communities might craft programs which pedagogically mirror this construction in order to craft Social-Justice Citizenship pedagogy. In doing so, programs might attempt to replicate the perceived learning participants experienced in this study. This is especially valuable when considering its potential application to YPAR pedagogy.

Finally, the unique historic moment in which these participants experienced their perceived learning speaks to the ways in which educational reforms might take place in the wake of the global pandemic and the national racial reckoning responding to the second wave of BLM. Centering social-emotional processing, particularly in response to racial trauma, is key in responding to these participants' experiences, especially in light of the impact of the pandemic on youth mental health (Richtel, 2022). Encouraging pedagogical approaches which cultivate CC and CA might harness the impetus and energy of the current Youthquake (Alter, 2020), close the so-called Achievement Gap (Beard, 2019), and pay back the Opportunity Debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006). And equipping educators with tools of culturally responsive, trauma-informed practice to more effectively mentor Black students is essential in moving towards educational equity.

Implications

Providing the Space for Student Social-Emotional Processing

Black students require supportive spaces in which to process racial trauma, particularly via the experience of shared catharsis. Spaces in which Black students might have the opportunity to reflect on and articulate their personal narratives in community with others hold the potential for healing and empowerment. In particular, having fora in which students might process past encounters with police, including SROs, and other figures of authority, may enable them to reclaim their narratives, removing any shame they might have been caused to feel due to power imbalances.

Various routes may be taken to cultivate such spaces in school settings. Schools might carve out the space and time for affinity groups to meet on campus regularly. In order to effectively accomplish this, schools must be dedicated to the hiring, retention, and training of BIPOC and antiracist faculty and staff to lead such groups. Educators must actively display their understanding of the strengths and struggles of the communities they serve in order to cultivate a

space in which students feel supported to process racial trauma. They should publicly engage with issues affecting the school's community by showing up physically at events important to the community, such as protests, community town halls, and cultural events, and actively articulate in transparent written and verbal communication their personal and professional dedication to political issues impacting the community. In school administrators, this kind of modeling has the potential to encourage faculty and staff to follow suit, and to cultivate a culture of unity and community in which students might feel safe to speak freely about their experiences.

Schools should invest in professional development opportunities for faculty and staff that emphasizes trauma-informed responses and restorative justice. They should work to eradicate SRO programs and redirect resources from such programs towards an increase in school counselors, as well as training for those counselors, and teachers, to be effective social-emotional supports for students. This training should prepare teachers to engage with the role racism plays in the experiences of the students and communities they serve, and to self-reflect on their own racial identities as they connect to classroom pedagogy (Mayorga & Picower 2018). Additionally, it follows that teacher training programs should actively recruit and admit critically conscious BIPOC educators, and white allies, who are prepared to address racial injustice in their curricula (Kohli, 2013; Sleeter, 2001; Mayorga & Picower 2018). This approach advocates for teacher activists who implement experiential learning that criticizes and questions power structures and endows students with critical tools with which to challenge said structures (Mayorga & Picower 2018). Such a strengths-based approach might move towards the decriminalization of students, and the embrace of culturally responsive pedagogy that addresses racially-based student trauma and recognizes that "Black minds matter, too" (Howard 2020, p. 111).

Implementing Experiential Learning that Cultivates Critical Consciousness

All students deserve access to pedagogical approaches which encourage critical consciousness. Students should have opportunities to engage a critical lens actively in the pursuit of becoming Social Justice Citizens (Westheimer, 2004, 2014). Programming which involves deep student involvement through project-based leadership-cultivating experiential learning is ideal in this pursuit.

Schools should emphasize pedagogy which embraces culturally responsive teaching and learning, cultivated through teacher training and professional development. Courses should be offered which are directly relevant to the community being served, such as Ethnic Studies. Within the context of Ethnic Studies, it is critical for students to have exposure to the complex, nuanced history of racial struggle in the US, so that they might more effectively analyze and engage with present movements (Dixson, 2018). A "pedagogy of insurgency" should be implemented which embraces values of risk-taking, allyship, organizing, critiquing power structures, and reimagining systems (Au 2019). In the wake of global youth activism and the intersectionality of antiracist, anticolonial movements globally, a transnational approach to Ethnic studies is encouraged, rather than the commonly-employed historical lens of Ethnic Studies curricula, which often romanticizes prior movements, thus undermining practicable lessons potentially gleaned from such histories (Mejia-McDonald & Macias 2021). A YPAR method is advocated which might better equip students with effective tools for understanding and challenging the structural oppression that impacts their lives and communities (Mejia-McDonald and Macias, 2021). In addition, schools should work to cultivate a culture of questioning, creating respectful fora and avenues for students, families, teachers, and counselors to participate in discourse that enables them to feel heard and to practice deep listening.

Activating the Critical Action of Voice and Creative Expression through the Arts

Arts programming is essential. Students need opportunities to tell their stories, to voice themselves, and to creatively express their experiences. Empowering students to engage in creative expression such as poetry and counternarrative storytelling is one way to challenge dominant narratives and to decolonize curriculum (Manathunga et al, 2022). Deep listening might take place in such contexts, thus allowing for student voice to be heard, and to express a reshaping of dominant narratives. Such opportunities for counternarrative storytelling is advocated as a way for students to co-author curriculum and engage more fully in a literacy of critical consciousness (Kinloch et al 2020). Creating spaces in classrooms for students to tell their stories and engage with non-dominant narratives might help to generate a pedagogy of resistance which reframes dominant narratives to be more relevant to BIPOC students (Kinloch et al 2020). Creating spaces for Black youth to participate in counternarrative generation encourages students to bring their CCW into the educational sphere, and to affirm their agency within the school system and beyond (Kinloch et al 2020).

Recommendations for Future Research

As this study was exploratory in nature and limited in its number of participants, there is great potential for expanding research on perceived learning in extra-institutional protest spaces, particularly in the current era of global youth protest. The conceptual framework identified in this study might be engaged to critically analyze student perceived learning in other contexts, for example in indigenous students who participated in #NoDAPL Standing Rock protests or in Black students who participated in the first wave of BLM protests. As these examples took place in 2016 and 2014 respectively, data from such research might be able to identify concrete academic and professional outcomes of student perceived learning, as several years have passed since the protest experience. In relation to BLM protests, interviewing Black and antiracist

educator mentors identified by students engaged in protests might provide useful insights into ways that teacher and counselor training programs might improve their content, as well as recruitment and retainment strategies. Finally, programming that replaces police presence on high school campuses with alternatives that emphasize restorative justice, arts education, and experiential learning steeped in Social Justice Citizenship should be studied for their efficacy and replicable tools that might be engaged in other BIPOC-serving schools.

Conclusion

Globally, high school age students are demanding their voices be heard in a Youthquake (Alter, 2020). They are processing the traumas of racism, sexism, gun violence, and global warming; they are cultivating skills of critical consciousness as they question the world order they have inherited; and they are engaging critical action by walking out of schools and into the streets to voice and creatively express their demands. While they are engaging in protest ostensibly to effect change, they also are gaining something from it. Interrogating their potential learning opens up the possibilities for US high schools, particularly those serving BIPOC communities, to bring their practices into the 21st century, post-pandemic, and post-BLM racial reckoning.

Conducting this research has enabled me to reflect on my own practice as an educator and the ways in which I might better serve my students and their communities. As I move forward, I consider the ways in which experiential programming which empowers student voice, especially through YPAR, might be effectively implemented to harness students' transformational resistant capital. I can tap into this through structuring the pedagogical approaches of my experiential learning programming with the elements of social-emotional processing, critical consciousness, and critical action. I can more effectively advocate for

restorative justice, culturally responsive, experiential, and arts programming, regardless of where my educational career takes me. These student voices provide guiding insights and instill in me a hope that “we [can] all be united … [to] create … a better world.”

Appendix A: Intake Form

UCLA Study on BLM: Registration for Interested Participants

Thank you for your interest in doctoral student Abi Basch's UCLA Department of Education research study "Extra-Institutional Learning in Black Lives Matter (BLM)." Please complete this form if you are age 18 or older and interested in participating.

The following is information about the research study:
Black Lives Matter (BLM) was one of the largest protest movements in documented US History and involved a substantial population of high school and college students as participants and leaders. It is the goal of this study to explore what student participants perceive they learned from participation in BLM so that schools and communities can better support them. Participants who are selected for the study will be asked to participate in one 60 minute online or phone video interview. Compensation is offered in the form of a $40 Amazon gift card. A $10 additional gift card may be possible for sharing information about the study with other potential participants.

Filling out this screening form should take between 5 and 10 minutes. It asks you about your identity and your participation in BLM. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer or are uncomfortable answering, and you may stop at any time. Your participation in the screening is voluntary.

The screening information you provide in this form will be used to determine your eligibility for participation in the research study. The information you provide in this screening form will kept, without your name attached, and destroyed within five years of the study's completion. Your answers will be confidential. No one will know your answers except for the research team. In order to be included in the full research study, your answers must be truthful.

If you have questions about this research screening form, you may contact the following individuals who will answer your questions:

Researcher:
Abi Basch
abibasch@ucla.edu
(415) 341-3557

Faculty Sponsor:
Dr. Kristen Rohanna
krohanna@ucla.edu
(310) 880-6812

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or if you wish to voice any problems or concerns you may have about the study to someone other than the researchers, please call the UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program at (310) 825-7122.

5. What high school did you attend?

_____

6. What is your race and/or ethnicity? Please select all that apply.

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Black or African American
- [ ] American Indian or Alaskan Native
- [ ] Latino/a/x or Hispanic
- [ ] Asian-American or Pacific Islander
- [ ] White
- [ ] Other: _____

7. What is your gender?

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Female
- [ ] Male
- [ ] Non-Binary
- [ ] Prefer not to say
- [ ] Other: _____

8. In what year were you born?

_____

9. If you are selected to participate in this research study, are you able to provide proof of identity, such as a student ID, driver's license, or verification of attendance from a school or local organization?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

10. From where or whom did you hear about the study? (Please be as specific as possible)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

11. If you are selected to participate, would you be comfortable using Zoom for a video interview?

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Other: _____

12. What is your availability, should you be selected for an interview? (Please check all that apply)

Check all that apply.

	8am-10am	10am-12pm	12pm-2pm	2pm-4pm	4pm-6pm
Monday	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Tuesday	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Wednesday	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Thursday	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Friday	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Saturday	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sunday	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

13. Preferred First Name or Nickname

_____

14. Is there anything else you'd like the research team to know?

_____

Appendix B: Protocol and Instrument

Based on Seidman (2019)

Student Interview Protocol

Good (morning/afternoon). Thank you for your willingness to participate in a study I am conducting for my dissertation in UCLA's Educational Leadership doctoral program. As you know, the focus of the interview is your participation in Black Lives Matter protests.

This interview will take approximately 60 minutes. Everything you say in the interview is strictly confidential, so please feel free to speak openly.

Before we begin, as described in the online intake form, I would like to take a moment for you to share proof of identification that displays your photo, address, and date of birth, such as a driver's license, passport, or student ID. This action is simply to verify your identity. No images or information from your proof of identification will be recorded or kept beyond this exchange.

Thank you for verifying your identity.

In order for me to accurately document our conversation, I would like to digitally record it so I can later write down what you say word for word. The recording will not be shared with anyone else. The transcript, or written down version, of the recording will be shared with my UCLA professors, Dr. Kristen Rohanna and Dr. Cecilia Rios-Aguilar, but I will use a pseudonym, or fake name, for you. In other words, your identity is safe, and you can feel comfortable to speak openly. If there are points during the interview when you feel uncomfortable or would like the recorder off, please just let me know.

When you filled out the online intake form, you read additional details about the interview process and your rights within it.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Do you give me permission to record you and use this interview in the ways described in the intake form?

If so, let's begin.

INTERVIEW

PART ONE: FOCUSED LIFE HISTORY

In this first part of the interview, I'm going to ask you to tell me as much as possible about yourself before you took part in BLM.

What do you think is important for me to know about your life before BLM?

Follow up, if not touched upon:

Tell me about your… / What would you like me to know about your…? / What do you think is important to tell me about your…?

Family

Friends

Neighborhood

School

Work

Afterschool and summer activities

Protests/political involvement

Online activity

PART TWO: DETAILS OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

In this second part of the interview, I'm going to ask you about your actual experiences participating in BLM.

What do you think is important for me to know about your experiences participating in BLM?

Follow up, if not touched upon:

What was it like…? / What was your experience…? / Take me through your day… / Reconstruct your day for me from the time you woke up until you went to bed…

- the first time you heard about the protest/movement?
- the first time you attended a protest/engaged in protest action?
- the (first) event (Can you provide concrete examples?)
    - Perceptions
        - Sights (People, signs, background/surroundings)
        - Sounds
        - Actions (physical – e.g., die ins, speeches, marches, dances)
        - Tangibles (sounds, smells, etc.)
    - Thoughts
    - Feelings

- subsequent events
- Online
- Discussions about BLM with/in context of:
    - Family
    - Friends
    - Neighbors
    - School
    - Work
    - Afterschool and summer activities
    - online
- If BLM action(s) took place in your neighborhood, changes to perceptions of neighborhood

PART THREE: REFLECTION ON THE MEANING

In this third part of the interview, I'm going to ask you to reflect on these experiences and how they had an impact on you.

Thinking about what you shared with me about your participation in BLM, what does your participation in BLM mean to you?

Follow up if elaboration needed:

- What did it mean in the context of where you've been and where you're headed?
- Earlier, you mentioned _____. What did that mean to you? How did that matter to you?

- In what ways did these experiences influence you?
    - Attitude/actions in school
        - How much you liked school (or not)
        - How "well" you did
        - Connection to material, teachers, other students
        - Feelings about school
        - Accomplishments, pride in accomplishments
        - what's missing from school (or what school can do better) / what you wish your school taught
    - Attitude/actions in work (and/or thinking about future work)
- Tell me more about how your experiences in BLM (if they did)…
    - Made you feel more or less hopeful in the face of practical barriers *(Aspirational)*
    - Gave you a chance to speak in another "language" or way of speaking that's more comfortable at home or in neighborhood *(Linguistic)*
    - Allowed you to feel more or less creative/artistic *(Linguistic)*
    - Made you realize values or traditions celebrated in your family *(Familial)*
    - Made you feel more or less connected to others in your community *(Social)*
    - Made you feel more or less powerful/confident to make your way in places outside of your neighborhood *(Navigational)*
    - Gave you knowledge that might help you challenge inequality or oppression in the future (*transformative resistant)*

What haven't I asked you about that you feel is important to know about what you learned from your experiences, if anything?

What are your hopes for the world by the time you're my age? What about for your community?

END OF INTERVIEW STATEMENT

Thank you for your participation. If you would like to share any items reflective of your participation in the protest(s) or inspired by your experiences, such as photographs, visual art, or written response, please email them to me at abibasch@ucla.edu.

As you know, after this interview, you will receive compensation in the form of a $40 Amazon Gift Card sent to your email. If you are interested in receiving an additional $10 Amazon gift card as a thank you, you can share information about this research study with others who may be interested in participating, such as friends who were at protests with you. Would you be interested in receiving a $10 gift card for sharing the study URL (tinyurl.com/uclablmstudy) with others? If you would rather decide later, you can also send me an email to let me know if you are interested.

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