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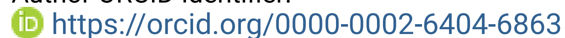
Della V. Mosley
University of Kentucky, della.mosley@uky.edu
Author ORCID Identifier:

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6404-6863

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Della V. Mosley, Student

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EXPLORING CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS,
FACILITATING BLACK LIBERATION

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Education
at the University of Kentucky

By
Della V. Mosley

Lexington, Kentucky

Co-Directors: Candice Hargons, PhD, and Danelle Stevens-Watkins, PhD

Lexington, Kentucky

2018

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

EXPLORING CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS,
FACILITATING BLACK LIBERATION

The current study aimed to uncover processes and experiences that led individuals to critically engage in racial justice activism, specifically the Black Lives Matter movement. A constructivist grounded theory approach was utilized under critical-ideological and Black feminist paradigms in order to build a practical theory related to developing critical consciousness about oppression facing the Black community. Black activists in the movement between the ages of 23 and 60 (N=12) participated in intensive individual interviews. The result of the study is a co-constructed theory of racial justice activism development (the Critical Consciousness of Anti-Black Racism [CCABR] model) that can be used to increase psychopolitical wellness for Black people. In this model, developing CCABR started with witnessing ABR, required three interconnected methods of processing ABR to increase agency, and led to critical action against ABR. Results indicated that CCABR is a cyclical process through which each of the stages build upon and support one another. The CCABR model is discussed with respect to how it converges with, diverges from, and expands upon extant literature. Recommendations and implications associated with the CCABR model are delineated.

KEYWORDS: Critical Consciousness, Racial Trauma, Anti-Black Racism, Activism, Black Lives Matter

Della V. Mosley

October 19, 2018

EXPLORING CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS,
FACILITATING BLACK LIBERATION

By

Della V. Mosley

Candice Hargons, PhD
Co-Director of Dissertation

Danelle Stevens-Watkins, PhD
Co-Director of Dissertation

Michael Toland, PhD
Director of Graduate Studies

October 19, 2018

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ... iii
Table of Contents ... viii
List of Tables ... xii
List of Figures ... xiii
Chapter One: Introduction and Rationale ... 1
Facilitating Black Liberation: The Movement for Black Lives ... 2
Psychopolitical Wellness: A Theoretical Framework for Exploring Black Liberation .. 4
Power ... 6
Wellness ... 8
Sources of Black Oppression ... 9
Whiteness and the creation of a racial hierarchy. ... 11
White Supremacy as a barrier to Black wellness. ... 13
Outcomes of Whiteness and White supremacy: Overt ABR, covert ABR, and racial trauma. ... 15
Overt racism. ... 15
Covert racism. ... 16
Overt and covert racism in the context of #BLM. ... 17
Racial trauma. ... 18
Pursuing Black Liberation ... 19
Critical consciousness: A prerequisite for Black liberation. ... 20
Activism as a component of critical consciousness. ... 21
Counseling Psychology and the Study of Black Oppression and Liberation ... 22
Chapter Two: Literature Review ... 24
Developing Critical Consciousness ... 24
History of Critical Consciousness ... 24
Components of Critical Consciousness ... 26
Critical reflection. ... 27
Sociopolitical efficacy. ... 29
Opportunity structures. ... 29
Collective identity. ... 30
Motivation. ... 31
Critical action. ... 31
Family. ... 34
Schools. ... 35
Community-based organizations. ... 36
Limitations to the Extant Literature on Critical Consciousness ... 36
Developing as a Black Racial Justice Activist ... 37
Aims and Research Questions ... 40
Chapter Three: Methods ... 42
Appropriateness of CGT ... 43
Giving Voice ... 43
Context-Based Inquiry ... 44
Theory Development ... 45
Positionality of the Researchers ... 46

Positionality of Primary Investigator ... 46
Research Team and Dissertation Committee ... 51
Blanka Angyal. ... 51
Candice Davis. ... 53
Carolyn Meiller. ... 54
Paris Wheeler. ... 55
Dissertation committee. ... 55
Methodology ... 56
Participants ... 56
Data Collection: Modality and Protocol ... 61
Data Analysis ... 63
Attending to Psychopolitical Validity and Trustworthiness ... 66
Chapter Four: Results ... 69
Witnessing ABR Categories ... 72
Bearing Witness to ABR: "I was called a nigger and people started throwing things at me." ... 74
Experiencing Racial Trauma: "On several levels there are various justifications for my death." ... 77
Internalizing ABR. ... 78
Feeling shame. ... 79
Feeling anxious and traumatized. ... 79
Feeling angry. ... 81
Feeling sad. ... 81
Feeling exhausted. ... 82
Feeling disempowered. ... 82
Lacking safety. ... 83
Being othered. ... 84
Experiencing isolation. ... 85
Having relationships weakened or severed. ... 85
Experiencing division within Black community. ... 86
Processing ABR Categories ... 88
Cognitive Growth: "We all realized that it wasn't us. It was something larger and systemic . . ." ... 90
Increasing systemic and historical awareness. ... 90
Committing to a critical stance. ... 96
Critical thinking. ... 96
Openness. ... 99
Lifelong social justice learner. ... 101
Intersectional Growth: "Black people be knowing some shit." ... 101
Developing intersectional self-awareness. ... 102
Understanding Blackness. ... 104
Understanding religion and spirituality. ... 106
Understanding gender and sexuality. ... 109
Committing to intersectionality. ... 110
Becoming a lover. ... 112
Becoming a unifier. ... 114

Behavioral Growth: “I think it was that anger that made me start getting involved.” 115
Coping with racial trauma. 116
Performing respectability. 116
Disconnecting. 117
Distancing from Whiteness. 118
Increasing guardedness. 119
Using cognitive tricks. 120
Practicing self-care strategies 121
Connecting with social support. 122
Making connections. 123
Connecting to settings. 124
Connecting with people. 125
Growing through connection. 127
Increasing Agency: “I’m not scared.” 130
Acting Critically Against ABR 133
Doing Black Liberation Work: “What can we do? How can we train? How can we build? And how can this be undisputed?” 134
Storying survival. 136
Spacemaking. 139
Artivism. 140
Coalition building. 140
Physical resistance. 141
Modeling/mentoring. 143
Organizing. 145
Teaching. 146
Scholar-activism. 148
Utilizing Black Racial Justice Activist Approaches to Activism: “We have to go, now.” 150
Having urgency. 150
Being self-reflective. 151
Specifying focus. 153
Being actively intersectional. 154
Being resourceful/affording activism. 155
Contextualizing. 158
Being persistent. 159
Maintaining future orientation. 160
Chapter Five: Discussion 163
Interpretation of the Findings 163
Witnessing ABR 167
ABR and racial trauma. 167
Witnessing ABR as a step toward liberation. 169
Processing ABR 171
Processing ABR cognitively. 176
Processing ABR intersectionally. 178
Processing ABR behaviorally. 180

Processing to increase agency. 182
Acting Critically Against ABR 183
Limitations 188
Utilizing the CCABR Model: Implications for Counseling Psychology 189
Counseling Psychologists and CCABR Self-Assessment 190
Promoting Healing from Racial Trauma 194
Implications for educators. 194
Implications for clinicians. 195
Implications for researchers. 196
Advancing Intersectional Self-Awareness 197
Implications for educators. 197
Implications for clinicians. 198
Implications for researchers. 198
Focusing on Black Racial Justice Activists and Black Racial Justice Activism 199
Implications for educators. 199
Implications for clinicians. 200
Implications for researchers. 201
Conclusion 202
Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer 204
Appendix B: Protocol 205
References 207
Vita 222

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Participant Demographic Information: Age, Race/Ethnicity, Geographic Location, Gender, Sexuality, and Religion/Spirituality 59
Table 2: Participant Demographic Information: Education, Ability, and Class 60
Table 3: Categories and Processes in the Development of Critical Consciousness of Anti-Black Racism 70

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: A theoretical framework for exploring Black liberation. 5
Figure 2: Critical consciousness of anti-Black racism model... 71
Figure 3: Witnessing anti-Black racism (ABR) chart... 73
Figure 4: Processing anti-Black racism (ABR) chart 89
Figure 5: Acting critically against anti-Black racism (ABR) chart 135

Chapter One: Introduction and Rationale

Violence against Black Americans has garnered increased national attention and media coverage in the mid 2010s. Many people have cited the mantra "Black Lives Matter" and engaged in activism under this label and hashtag (#BlackLivesMatter) on social media (Cooper, 2015; Garza, 2014). One example of violence Black Lives Matter (#BLM) activists responded to involved a church massacre where a White, 21-year-old man attended bible study with and then killed nine Black people (Orjoux, 2015). Much of the attention following this event included newly invigorated calls for the removal of the Confederate flag in the state of the massacre, South Carolina (Robles, Fausset, & Barbaro, 2015). Activist Bree Newsome, in absence of actions by the South Carolina government, scaled the flagpole on South Carolina statehouse grounds and removed the flag. Speaking about violence on Twitter, Newsome (2015) stated, "Violence concerns the exercise of power, physical or otherwise. This is why oppression in any form is a form of violence." Her actions and words reflect that she is an activist equipped with an understanding of oppression and a desire to dismantle it. Yet, despite people gaining consciousness about the violence against Black Americans (Shahid, 2015) and asserting a desire to reduce or end it (Clement, 2015), many people remain inactive. What makes people like Newsome participate in actions meant to improve the well-being of Black Americans? How did she come to participate in an action meant to signal that Black lives matter? The current study investigated the answers to these and other related questions through interviews with activists in the Movement for Black Lives. This research explicated their process of developing critical consciousness specific to anti-Black racism

(ABR) in order to collectively develop, or co-construct, a practical theory of Black activism engagement.

This chapter will equip readers to better understand the context for this study. First, an overview of #BLM will be offered. Next, psychopolitical wellness (Prilleltensky, 2003, 2008) will be introduced as a theoretical framework for exploring Black liberation. Within this frame, power, wellness, sources and outcomes of oppression, and liberation are illustrated. Research on Whiteness, White supremacy, racism, racial trauma, critical consciousness, and activism are integrated with the psychopolitical wellness framework to further narrow the focus to mechanisms of Black oppression and liberation. Finally, an overview of counseling psychology's engagement with Black oppression and liberation is provided.

It should also be noted that "Black" will be used herein to refer to African diasporic people to remain consistent with the language of the #BLM movement. The term "Blackness" is used to refer to Black people and Black culture, particularly in the context of the United States. White will be capitalized in order to offer consistency with respect to discussions of other racial groups. When other authors' work is referenced, the term and capitalization or lack thereof used by those authors will be preserved. While the analysis in this study is primarily rooted in contemporary race relations in the U.S. context, Black oppression is a global phenomenon (Jung, 2015).

Facilitating Black Liberation: The Movement for Black Lives

When Bree Newsome removed the Confederate flag following the South Carolina massacre, she joined a long history of Black people who have fought for Black liberation and wellness. For example, in the 19th century, Harriet Tubman fought for the abolition

of slavery and in the 20th century, Baynard Rustin was a strategist in the civil rights movement of the ‘60s. For Newsome, her actions in the 21st century will be remembered as part of the #BLM movement, also referred to as the Movement for Black Lives (Hargons et al., 2017).

The Movement for Black Lives represents one liberatory strategy popular in contemporary American society. Alicia Garza, Patrice Cullors, and Opal Tometi created the Black Lives Matter hashtag and chapter-based organization in response to George Zimmerman’s acquittal for the 2012 killing of unarmed Black teen Trayvon Martin (Garza, 2014). #BLM is “an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are *systematically* [emphasis added] and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks’ contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression” (Garza, 2014, para. 2). By nature of its psychologically- and politically-centered framing and focus on systems of Black oppression, #BLM activism requires that people fighting for Black liberation be both sociopolitically aware and active. Stated alternatively, #BLM activists operating within this paradigm are critically conscious.

#BLM has grown since 2012 and evolved into a large network of people and various organizations advocating on behalf of all Black lives. Between August 2014 and September 2015, over 1,030 #BLM protests were held and over 1,000 people attended the #BLM national convening in July 2015 (Cooper, 2015). People organizing and participating in actions meant to signal that Black lives matter could be considered Black racial justice activists. Hargons and colleagues (2017) consolidated the principles of #BLM, presenting the following four overarching areas:

1. All Black Lives Matter: All Black lives have value, including queer, transgender, formerly incarcerated, poor/working class, differently abled, women's, immigrant, elderly, and young Black lives. BLM supporters have a respect for diversity, identify with the international Black community and their issues, and a desire to create spaces that affirm those Black individuals who are disproportionately subjected to oppression.
2. Love and self-love are signposts of success: This principle is broad and involves having (a) empathic understanding; (b) desire to pursue restorative justice; (c) loving, forthright, and honest communication; (d) a constant and active self-care practice supported by human and financial resources; and (e) a belief that "To love and desire freedom and justice for ourselves is a necessary prerequisite for wanting the same for others."
3. 360 degree vision guides work: The past, including Black historical struggles and Black elders or ancestors, and the future, including the generations to come, are to be honored. "Black villages," where people join communities of extended families to care for one another as a collective, are cultivated and avoid ageism. BLM facilitates reflexive innovation by requiring supporters to "embrace the best tools, practices, and tactics, and leave behind those that no longer serve us."
4. Training and leadership development is constant: Individuals who are most directly affected by oppression are experts who should lead the movement. The movement has been described as leaderfull because there are leaders across the United States working locally, and in national and international coalitions, for Black liberation. (p. 879)

Although there are Black activists throughout the world who pursue liberation for African diasporic people, #BLM activism lends itself to the current study because of these clearly defined principles. The inclusive values of #BLM activists are transparent in these guiding principles. The current study sought to co-construct a theory of critical consciousness development that focused on Black racial justice activists who have an inclusive and intersectional vision of Black liberation, making #BLM an appropriate point of departure.

Psychopolitical Wellness: A Theoretical Framework for Exploring Black Liberation

To better understand the oppressions from which #BLM activists are seeking liberation, the psychopolitical wellness framework is offered. Figure 1 provides an illustration of this framework. Critical community psychologist Isaac Prilleltensky

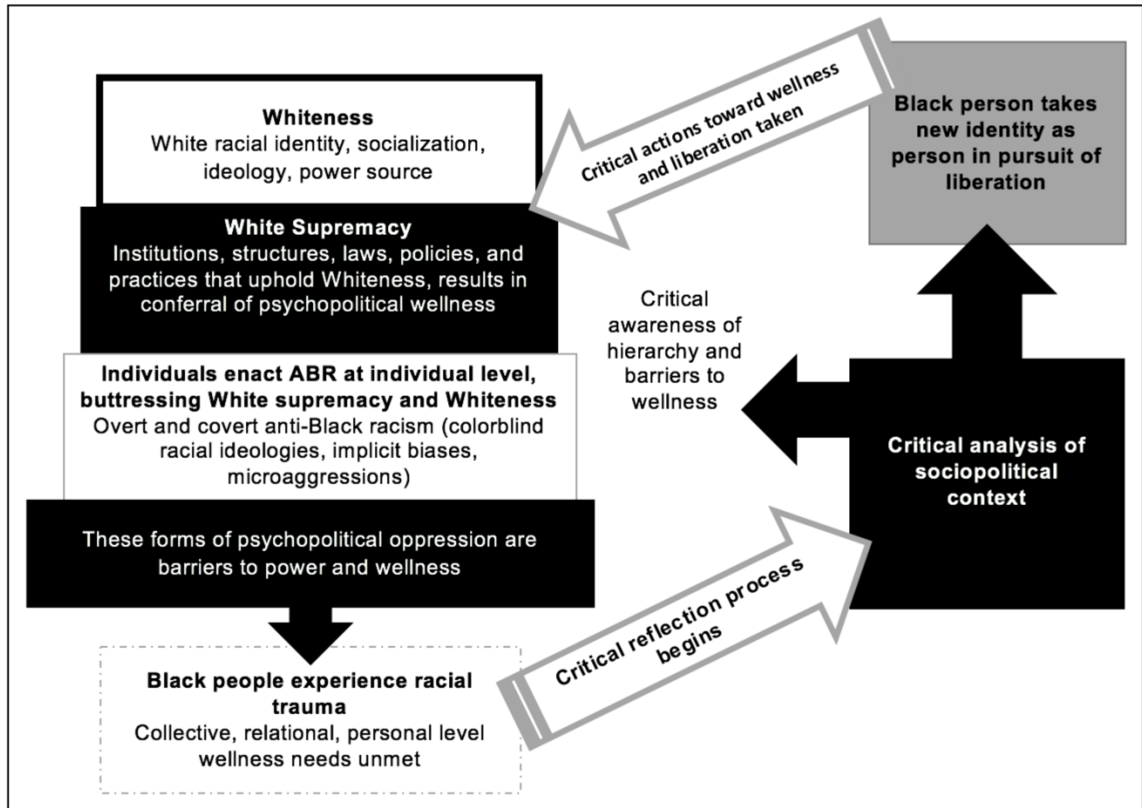

Figure 1: A theoretical framework for exploring Black liberation.

(2003, 2008) and colleagues (Moane, 2006; Prilleltensky & Fox, 2007; Prilleltensky, Prilleltensky, & Voorhees, 2008) have argued that it is a necessity for psychologists to simultaneously attend to the psychological and political components involved in wellness. The use of the term "psychopolitical" is meant to underscore that these constructs cannot be separated (Prilleltensky et al., 2008). As a term, psychopolitical demands that wellness be conceptualized with an intentional consideration of power. Power, along with oppression and liberation, are always both political and psychological. For example, in the case of the June 2015 South Carolina church massacre, there were several asymmetric power relations contributing to the situation. Provided that the church is one of the few remaining places where Black people congregate together, it can

be a space of vulnerability. The shooter used his power by exploiting the vulnerabilities of this Black community, showing a disregard for them and their sacred environment. Intimidation was present, not only in the act of the shooter but in the response, and non-responsiveness, of the state. The violence against Black bodies and subsequent lack of governmental support led to actions that were both psychological and political. Members of that church, the community at large, and Black Americans in general reacted differently to this oppression. Some people offered their forgiveness to the shooter and reflected on their powerlessness, while others felt empowered to join in solidarity with people and groups fighting hate crimes (Darlington, Bowers, & Asberry, 2017). Regardless of the response of Black Americans, these psychopolitical factors influenced wellness. This example emphasizes that power must be analyzed in order to uncover the consequences of oppression, including activism. Furthermore, this example highlights how an analysis of psychological factors serves to deepen sociopolitical awareness and contributes to critical action (Moane, 2006). The psychopolitical wellness framework suggests one must have a thorough psychopolitical understanding of power, wellness, oppression, and liberation if they truly seek to improve Black lives.

Power

Power is important, always present, and ever changing (Prilleltensky, 2008). This dynamic theory is grounded on 10 interconnected postulates about power. First, power involves having the ability and the opportunity to facilitate or prevent individual or group needs being met. Second, the roots, expressions, and outcomes of power are both psychological and political. Third, Prilleltensky (2008) highlights that there are methods for and a need to differentiate between power that is invoked by oppressors and the

resistance power of those who pursue wellness and liberation. Fourth, power is both overt and covert. The obviousness or subtlety of power may depend on who is analyzing, benefitting from, or suffering as a result of it. Fifth, identity and positionality matter greatly as power is applied across personal (e.g., toward oneself), relational (e.g., toward one's social circle or environment), and collective levels (e.g., toward social identity groups). Sixth, because of the intersecting nature of identities and the shifting contexts in which people exist, power structures people differently based on their positioning as oppressor, resister, or wellness seeker. Seventh, the oppressor can be oppressed and the oppressed can be the oppressor, depending on contextual factors. These roles are fluid and shift with respect to time, place, identity, and action. Eighth, multiple identities (e.g., racial, sexual, spiritual) contribute to one's power level. Ninth, it is also important to consider that non-social identity based factors such as "beauty, intelligence, and assertiveness; constructs that enjoy variable status within different cultures," also influence power (Prilleltensky, 2008, p. 119). Finally, the tenth postulate underscores that when power is enacted people may have differing levels of consciousness about the consequences of their behaviors (Prilleltensky, 2008). En masse, power can be seen relationally and collectively, versus as an aspect deriving from a person (Prilleltensky et al., 2008). Thus, personal motivations may be at the source of oppression (and they even emanate from social norms), but this definition clarifies that power is never simply an individualized experience. This comprehensive, ecological view of power recognizes and centers contextual factors, which is necessary given the history and dynamism of oppression.

Wellness

Wellness is used herein to refer to a "positive state of affairs, brought about by the simultaneous satisfaction of personal, relational, and collective needs of individuals, groups, communities, and societies" (Prilleltensky et al., 2008, p. 110). The necessity of wellness to be achieved concurrently in all domains is key. Our ecological perspective is interrelated such that when personal level wellness needs (e.g., being physically healthy) are met, relational wellness (e.g., active participation in the community) is also likely to increase. Alternatively, when collective level needs are unmet (e.g., lack of police accountability measures), relational (e.g., excessive use of force by police) and personal level (e.g., hopelessness) wellness is likely to decrease. The consequences of wellness and/or unmet wellness needs work in both directions across domains (Prilleltensky, 2003).

The personal, relational, and collective level each have a unique set of needs. For example, personal needs that must be satisfied for wellness include: (a) control and self-determinism, (b) mastery, learning, and growth, (c) hope and optimism, (d) physical health, (e) psychological health, (f) meaning and spirituality. #BLM activists represent one group of people who are advocating for these personal needs to be met for Black people. For example, by demanding the removal of psychologically violent representations in public spaces, those activists are seeking to achieve greater personal wellness (e.g., control, psychological health) for Black people.

At the relational level, areas of need include: (a) caring and compassion, (b) affection, bonding, and social support, (c) solidarity and sense of community, (d) democratic participation, and (e) respect for diversity. Being able to experience non-

oppressive healthful and supportive relationships is important. Engaging in #BLM activism is an example of democratic participation, a relational wellness need. We see these relational needs also reflected in the #BLM values, such as in their intentional focus on multiply marginalized Black people (e.g., queer Black poor people, differently abled Black youth) and respect for diverse families. These five interpersonal needs are essential to achieving wellness.

Finally, collective-level needs include: (a) equality, (b) freedom, and (c) environmental sustainability. #BLM provides several illustrations of the fight for collective-level needs. For example, the fights against Black voter suppression and for fair wages are important foci in the movement for Black lives (see www.BYP100.org). Similarly, there is a #BLM-initiated push to support Black businesses in hopes of redistributing wealth (Edney, 2015; Workneh, 2014). Each of these campaigns reflects a desire to meet collective-level needs for Black Americans. #BLM activists recognize that collective needs are critical to Black wellness at other levels.

Sources of Black Oppression

In order to understand how Black activists come to engage in liberatory action, it is important to first define and contextualize oppression, including sources of Black oppression: Whiteness, White supremacy, and racism. Within the psychopolitical wellness framework, *oppression* refers to “a state of asymmetric power relations characterized by domination, subordination, and resistance, whereby the controlling person or group exercise its power through processes of political exclusion, violence, and psychological deprecation” (Prilleltensky, 2003, p. 195). This oppression is experienced externally, by political means, and internally, by psychological means. Political

oppression involves the creation and maintenance of barriers to wellness (e.g., material, legal, military, economic) for the marginalized person or group (Prilleltensky et al., 2008). Whereas, psychological oppression involves internalizing socially constructed and promoted stereotypic negative views of self, not seeing self as worthy of inclusion or of accessing resources for well-being. Thus, oppression is more sustainable due to the processes that encourage marginalized people and groups to succumb to its psychological components (Freire, 1970; Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil, 1999). Black racial justice activists are important to study because they have refused to succumb to the psychological warfare and continue to both imagine and fight for Black liberation (Brown, 2017; Carruthers, 2016). #BLM activists have a robust understanding of oppression as a psychopolitical experience (Brown, 2017; Carruthers, 2016).

This psychopolitical framing of oppression also suggests that is it both a state and a process and that it results from consistent disproportionate access to resources (Watts et al., 1999). For example, Black people's vulnerability to illness and loss of life opportunities are two consequences or conditions of oppression that illustrate oppression as a state (Prilleltensky, 2003). Whereas, the process of oppression involves leveraging power, as defined above, to create and maintain disenfranchisement (Prilleltensky, 2008; Watts et al., 1999). Examples of this process include denial of rights or deprecation of one's culture (Prilleltensky, 2003). As this definition shows, oppression is pervasive. Its omnipresence requires that oppressed people gain a critical awareness about how oppression works in order for them to resist it (Prilleltensky, 2003; Watts et al., 1999). As evidenced by their engagement in activism, BLM activists have a critical awareness of Whiteness, White supremacy, and racism.

Whiteness and the creation of a racial hierarchy. Race is an important factor in oppression. Race is a sociopolitical construction that was created in the 16th century to categorize people (e.g., Negro, Indian) into a hierarchical system, often, but not exclusively, based on phenotype (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). Despite not being rooted in biology, the social order is racialized and impacts people biologically, psychologically, and socially (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). Bonilla-Silva (1997) argues that by systemically structuring people and groups in a hierarchy, the racialized system creates groups with different positions in life and disparate aims (e.g., maintenance or transformation of the system). These groupings represent asymmetric power relations based on racial categorizations. In this stratified system, the dominant race has greater access to resources and greater wellness. Ultimately, the dominant race or races have greater "life chances" than races lower in the hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, p. 467). Bonilla-Silva's (1997) reference to life chance is rich in that the language underscores that race not only determines degree of wellness, but how one's ranking in the racial hierarchy is directly connected to probabilities associated with life and death. The phrase "Black Lives Matter" reflects a critical awareness of limitations to life chance for Black people. Importantly, Whiteness and White supremacy serve as the sources restricting life chances for African diasporic peoples (Jung, 2015).

Whiteness is a broad construct, as it is a social identity, an ideology, a process of socialization, and a source of psychopolitical power (Gusa, 2010; Helms, 2017; Knowles, Lowery, Chow, & Unzueta, 2014). Knowles and colleagues (2014) define Whiteness as possessing and being acknowledged as having a White racial identity. As an ideology, Whiteness involves having the power to set and maintain standards of normality (Bonilla-

Silva, 2018; Gusa, 2010). Therefore, individuals who subscribe to Whiteness position the White racial group as the norm against which People of Color and Indigenous People (POCI) are measured and society is structured. As a result of this ideology, White people and POCI are socialized to value Whiteness, literally and figuratively (Lipsitz, 2006; Sherman, 2017). Scholars Harris (1993), Lipsitz (1998), and Sherman (2017) draw connections between Whiteness socialization and psychopolitical power using metaphorical and practical examples of Whiteness as a wage that has worth (Sherman, 2017), which people invest in (Lipsitz, 2006) and protect legally (Harris, 1993). These scholars argue that those who uphold Whiteness preserve its value through socialization processes that confer power, particularly social (e.g., social capital, ranking in social hierarchy, protection under law), economic (e.g., property rights, resource acquisition, economic mobility), and psychological dominance (e.g., dignity, pride, recognition as human) over other races (Harris, 1993; Lipsitz, 2006; Sherman, 2017). This list, though not exhaustive, illuminates how the processes that afford Whiteness value necessitate the marginalization of POCI, which drives POCI to compete for the advantages associated with Whiteness. The attractiveness and value of Whiteness comes at the expense of POCI, and particularly Black people (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Lipsitz, 2006; Sherman, 2017). This explication of Whiteness provides clarity as to why oppression against POCI, particularly Black people, occurs: to maintain White dominance in the racial hierarchy (Liu, 2017).

Although Whiteness has been normalized, such that the psychopolitical advantages that confer White dominance are often invisible to White people, Whiteness is ubiquitous (Bonds & Inwood, 2016). POCI, including #BLM activists, tend to possess

an awareness of the ubiquity of Whiteness and White privilege (Berg, 2012; Knowles et al., 2014). For example, Black people tend to be aware that White people are afforded privileges, such as freedom from assumptions of criminality and passes for illegal behaviors for which POCI receive punishment (see #CrimingWhileWhite). However, since Whiteness maintains its dominance through its invisibility, scholars engaging in critical White studies tend to argue for making Whiteness visible (Bonds & Inwood, 2016; Case, 2012; Helms, 2017). McIntosh's (1988) now classic essay framing the normalization of White privilege as an "invisible knapsack" of advantages bestowed upon White racial group members has contributed greatly to this cause of rendering Whiteness visible. However, the work of scholars (Berg, 2012; Bonds & Inwood, 2016; Case, 2012; Helms, 2017; Harris, 1993; Knowles et al., 2014) and #BLM activists to illuminate Whiteness as not just a racial identity, but as an intentional yet subtle socialization process that confers privilege and power has been difficult. By focusing on White supremacy, some activists and scholars have been able to make psychopolitical gains for POCI (Mitchell, 2017).

White Supremacy as a barrier to Black wellness. Provided that Whiteness is a broad (identity, ideology, socialization process, power source) and ever-evolving construct, individuals and collectives pursuing Black liberation often center their analytic and activism focus on White supremacy (Helm, 2017; hooks, 2001; Mitchell, 2017). White supremacy calls attention to the institutions, structures, policies, laws, and practices upon which Whiteness rests and White dominance is enforced (Berg, 2012; Bonds & Inwood, 2016; Liu, 2017). In order for Whiteness to be the norm and maintain its value and dominance, sophisticated structures of White supremacy are produced. For

example, Liu (2017) argues that White supremacy laws and practices intertwined to advance White, cisgender man, wealthy, and Christian identities as the archetype of normality in the U.S. Institutions produce White supremacy by forming complex systems that allow a numeric minority to dominate the global majority (Liu, 2017). However, White supremacy is a global phenomenon and scholars predict that Latinx and Asian people will soon be absorbed into Whiteness with the support of systems of White supremacy (Bonilla-Silva, 2004; Jung, 2015). These processes that systematically ensure White supremacy depend upon anti-Blackness (e.g., surveillance of Black bodies, Black erasure in educational curriculum, urban blight; Applebaum, 2016).

As an analytic, White supremacy provides a direct link between Whiteness and myriad forms of Black oppression, up to and including premature death. Although White supremacy causes harm to all people, including White and diverse POCI, this study centers on Black wellness. As such, the term ABR is used herein to represent the specific form of psychopolitical oppression that is enacted against Black people (individual-level ABR), the Black collective (institutional-level ABR), or Blackness and Black culture (cultural-level ABR). Whiteness is reproduced and ABR is enacted by both White and POCI people through structures of White supremacy. Like the aforementioned critical White studies scholars, #BLM activists have also tried to increase the legibility of Whiteness. However, Black racial justice activists often use the White supremacy analytic in their liberatory efforts. Activists have often expressed that Black people are not suffering as a result of broken systems but that the systems are working exactly as they were structured to (see #indictthesystem). These activists recognize that the structural mechanisms upholding Whiteness were initially created by European settlers in

North America and have continued to evolve in order to fulfill their White supremacist aims (Applebaum, 2016; Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Jung, 2015; Lipsitz, 2006). As these examples show, White supremacy provides a means through which Whiteness and ABR can be connected.

Outcomes of Whiteness and White supremacy: Overt ABR, covert ABR, and racial trauma. Overt and covert ABR are outcomes of Whiteness and White supremacy that have psychopolitical consequences for Black people. This section will provide definitions and examples of overt and covert forms of racism and introduce racial trauma as one outcome that serves as a barrier to psychopolitical wellness for the Black collective.

Overt racism. Racial discrimination that is purposefully mean or hurtful is deemed *overt racism* (Carter, 2007; Donovan, Galban, Grace, Bennett, & Felicié, 2013). Originally, overt racism was the primary mechanism through which Whiteness was maintained. The aforementioned church massacre in South Carolina would be an example of overt ABR. While overt forms of racism had been waning, businessman Donald Trump's campaign for the U.S. presidency marks a period of increased overt racism in the U.S. (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Although Trump purported to not be racist, his campaign rallies served as a public, highly publicized gathering space for racist rhetoric and violence (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Morrison et al., 2018). Furthermore, the people he initially appointed to his cabinet had overt and covert connections to white supremacy (as a system) and white supremacist groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Bonilla-Silva (2018) argues that by claiming to be "the least racist," Trump was seeking to maintain covert, color-blind forms of racism (p. 222). Provided that the racialized social system has

existed for over five centuries, it is important to consider its evolution (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Staats, Capatosto, Wright, & Contractor, 2015).

Covert racism. Covert racism accounts for the subtler ways in which racism is experienced: (a) ideologically, through color-blind racial ideologies; (b) cognitively, through implicit racial biases; and (c) relationally, through microaggressions. C*olor-blind racial ideologies* comprise a more covert "set of beliefs that minimizes the very existence of racism" (Neville, Spanierman, & Lewis, 2012, p. 338). As laws, policies, and the moral fabric associated with overt racism have changed, color-blind racial ideologies have become more common (Bonilla-Silva, 2018). Extant research on color-blind racial ideologies suggests that individuals tend to emphasize racial similarities and deny the existence of oppression based on race (Neville, Awad, Brooks, Flores, & Bluemel, 2013). Yet, color-blindness does not prevent implicit racial biases and microaggressions from causing harm to Black people.

Implicit racial biases are the positive or negative feelings and cognitions that derive from past experiences and subconscious cultural memories and are specifically based on racial characteristics (Dovidio, Kawakami, Johnson, Johnson, & Howard, 1997; Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, & Davies, 2004; Goff, Eberhardt, Williams, & Jackson, 2008; Staats et al., 2015; Stanley, Sokol-Hessner, Banaji, & Phelps, 2011). For example, there are commonly held implicit racial biases that associate the Black race with criminality (Goff et al., 2008; Staats et al., 2015). Individuals who hold these biases may not consciously believe that a Black person is more likely to commit a crime; however, the repeated exposure to stimuli (e.g., words, images, video) associating these two factors with one another solidifies the connection in the individual's unconscious mind.

Microaggressions represent the behavioral enactment of one's implicit attitudes (e.g., protecting one's possessions more closely around a Black person). *Racial microaggressions* have been defined as the "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group" (Sue et al., 2008, p. 273). Overt and covert racism is enacted at individual, cultural, and institutional levels to reduce Black wellness.

Overt and covert racism in the context of #BLM. Police officers may enact individual-level covert ABR through subscribing to color-blind racial ideologies and possessing negative implicit racial attitudes that cause them to assume criminality among Black individuals. Alternatively, officers may enact individual-level overt racism by giving Black people "rough rides" that cause them physical harm and premature death (Donovan & Puente, 2015). Such practices are reflective of anti-Blackness in that Black people are deemed bad, amoral, and unworthy of wellness and subsequently experience harm. In this way, the officers' ABR serves to uphold the ideology of Whiteness because their actions are purported to be part of normative and race-neutral treatment of a bad or amoral criminal element. When called to task for engaging in racist actions, people tend to invoke "bad apple" narratives that further protect Whiteness and shift the focus away from the White supremacist system (Plaut, 2010). However, a focus on White supremacy allows for an analysis of the institutions that collectively form a system—a power structure—that privileges White men and perpetuates ABR across all levels (Liu, 2017). Within this frame, #BLM activists have focused their efforts on systemic interventions. For example, these activists engage in analysis and reform efforts associated with

increased accountability for police officers who target and/or kill Black people, or they work strategically to counteract dehumanizing bail policies on a national level (Mitchell, 2017). As these examples illustrate, #BLM activists are critically conscious of Whiteness and, therefore, committed to dismantling the White supremacist structures that cause racial trauma for Black people.

Racial trauma. Racial trauma is the conceptualization of racial incidents as traumatic events (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2006). Although this experience is commonly called racial trauma, scholars have used alternate language to describe this experience including race-based traumatic stress (Carter, 2007; Carter & Forsyth, 2009) and racial-incident based trauma (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2006; Jernigan & Daniel, 2011). Notably, the anticipation of these racial incidents, experience of individual racial incidents, and cumulative impact of incidents can lead to racial trauma (Brondolo, Brady ver Halen, Pencille, Beatty, & Contrada, 2009). Researchers have found evidence for development of trauma symptoms in response to racial discrimination among Black university students (Pieterse, Carter, Evans, & Walter, 2010), racial and ethnic minority emerging adults (Polanco-Roman, Danies, & Anglin, 2016), doctoral students of color (Truong & Museus, 2012), and Black children and adolescents (Jernigan & Daniel, 2011). Furthermore, scholars have shown that trauma-specific symptoms, such as dissociation, can result from racial discrimination (Polanco-Roman et al., 2016). Racial trauma can additionally include symptoms such as guilt, shame, and self-blame, which can in turn increase internalized racism (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2006). For Black people, having a critical consciousness about ABR may help them recognize their

experiences of trauma as tied to Whiteness or White supremacy and thus liberation as a method of promoting their wellness.

Combined together, Whiteness, White supremacy, overt and covert ABR, and racial trauma congeal with the psychopolitical wellness concepts of power, wellness, and oppression to offer a framework for understanding the necessity of Black liberatory effort as a wellness imperative. This model (see Figure 1) recognizes how society is systematically structured to uphold Whiteness through White supremacy and how ABR is enacted in overt and covert forms across individual, institutional, and cultural levels, resulting in racial trauma (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, 2018; Prilleltensky, 2003, 2008). Because Whiteness and White supremacy are sustained through both their subtle normalization and ubiquitous institutionalization, critical consciousness development is a psychological health imperative for Black people.

Pursuing Black Liberation

#BLM activists have a critical awareness of oppression and actively work toward Black liberation. Within the psychopolitical wellness framework, liberation has been defined as "the process of resisting oppressive forces and striving toward psychological and political well-being" (Prilleltensky, 2003, p. 195). Like oppression, liberation is both a process and a state (Prilleltensky, 2008). As a process, it involves the act of resisting oppression (e.g., joining a #BLM chapter, practicing inclusion in hiring practices). As a state, liberation is the result of not being oppressed, as an individual or as a member of a larger social group (e.g., having peace, being healthy, experiencing social cohesion; Prilleltensky, 2003, 2008).

The process of liberation involves working toward the creation of a society where power relations are symmetrical for all so that none are oppressors or oppressed (Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003). Collective action is required to make such pervasive change. Many liberation-focused scholars (Brown & Pickerill, 2009; Comas-Díaz, 1998; Freire, 1970; Moane, 2003; Watts, 2004) assert that this work must be collaborative, "action *with* the oppressed" (Freire, 1970, p. 53, emphasis in original). Theories of liberation and in liberation psychology often include an ecological view, moving from the personal or micro-level to the relational or meso-level to the collective or macro-level, so as to gain a more holistic understanding that links the political to the psychological. Importantly, these theories note that liberation begins with a process of critical consciousness-raising (Diemer, 2012; Freire, 1970; Prilleltensky, 2003; Watts, 2004; Watts et al., 2003). Liberation from Whiteness and White supremacy cannot be achieved without critical consciousness.

Critical consciousness: A prerequisite for Black liberation. Critical consciousness, also known as conscientization or sociopolitical development (as per other scholars in the area, e.g., Freire, 1970; Watts, et al., 1999; Watts et al., 2003), has been identified as a prerequisite for liberation (Prilleltensky, 2003). Critical consciousness is when a person thoughtfully problematizes their lived experience and sociopolitical environments and engages in actions in response to their critical reflection and problematization (Diemer, Kauffman, Koenig, Trahan, & Hsieh, 2006). By developing critical consciousness, individuals and collectives can pursue liberation (Freire, 1970; Moane, 2003; Prilleltensky, 2003; Watts et al., 2003). Specifically, #BLM activists must independently or collectively analyze their psychopolitical realities, increasing their

awareness about how Whiteness and White supremacy have shaped outcomes for Black people, in order to enter in the struggle for liberation. Critical questioning and action are necessary for liberation. For example, understanding that Michael Brown's murder was not just an individual stand-alone mistake made by a "bad apple" police officer, but that it occurred within a context of ongoing cultural and institutional ABR, moved activists to pursue liberation (Applebaum, 2016). Critical consciousness facilitated liberatory action in this situation.

Freire (1970) is heralded for his theory of conscientization (Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011). In the classic text Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire (1970) introduces the process of sociopolitical development, writing,

> It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot purely be intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis (Freire, 1970, p. 52).

Since then, this process has been delineated in simpler terms, with scholars noting the three components of critical consciousness as (1) critical reflection, (2) sociopolitical efficacy, and (3) critical action (Watts et al., 2011). Together, these components of critical consciousness comprise Freire's "praxis." Once a person has learned to be critically conscious, their praxis is often termed activism. We do not yet know how critical consciousness is developed for Black activists publicly engaged in critical action on behalf of Black lives.

Activism as a component of critical consciousness. Critical action is the behavioral component of critical consciousness (Watts et al., 2011). People who engage in critical action are often called activists (Corning & Myers, 2002; Watts et al., 2003).

Watts and colleagues' (2003) brief and broad definition of activism as "efforts to reduce oppression" is well suited for the present study as it allows racial justice activists to self-define their anti-oppression work. Not all people who engage in critical action use the term activism. However, there are liberatory behaviors that link these individuals. Corning and Myers (2002) outline an activist orientation as the fairly stable tendency to participate in sociopolitical actions to solve problems. These actions may be low- or high-risk, can involve working from within a system or disrupting a system, and can be passive or active (Corning & Myers, 2002). The parallel between Corning and Myers's (2002) definition and that of critical action (Watts et al., 2011) offered above is clear, with both illustrating behaviors that facilitate liberation (Watts et al., 2003). Thus, an activist is a person who engages in critical action toward liberation. The current study uncovers the processes of critical consciousness development among activists who have a systemic awareness of oppression and liberation and an inclusive #BLM-aligned vision of Black liberation. This study of Black activism, while novel given its contemporary focus, is not new to the field of counseling psychology.

Counseling Psychology and the Study of Black Oppression and Liberation

As a discipline, counseling psychology is well positioned to undertake research on Black activism. Historically, counseling psychologists have been leaders in the field on ethnic minority and racialized issues. Multiculturalism has long been a focus in the field, with counseling psychologists spearheading initiatives that would eventually lead to the development of disciplinary competencies and guidelines (Munley, Duncan, McDonnell, & Sauer, 2004). By the late 1990s, counseling psychologists progressed beyond multiculturalism to a more collective-level and action-based interest in social justice

(Norsworthy, Abrams, & Lindlau, 2013; Singh et al., 2010; Vera & Speight, 2003). In counseling psychology, *social justice* has been defined as:

> A concept that advocates engaging individuals as co-participants in decisions which directly affect their lives; it involves taking some action, and educating individuals in order to open possibilities, and to act with value and respect for individuals and their group identities, considering power differentials in all areas of counseling practice and research. (Blustein, Elman, & Gerstein, 2001, p. 9)

This social justice orientation is an issue of not just moral values but also professional ethics for counseling psychologists (Toporek & Williams, 2006).

The counseling psychology history, identity, and ethics suggest that counseling psychologists have been, are, and will be essential in the process of liberation (Pieterse, Hanus, & Gale, 2013; Vera & Speight, 2003; Watts, 2004). Watts (2004) suggested that to radically move counseling psychology forward, scholarship and practice related to coping (e.g., with oppression, shame, low self-esteem) should shift in focus to consider topics centered on resisting oppression and other barriers to wellness. This study seeks to attend to Watts's (2004) call, placed in the flagship counseling psychology journal *The Counseling Psychologist* (Reimers & Stabb, 2015), by studying the resistance efforts of #BLM activists.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Empirical research in the field of counseling psychology that explores the processes or components involved in cultivating a critical consciousness about oppression is scant, particularly as it relates to the Black community. This dissertation study seeks to fill this gap in the literature. Provided the liberatory potential in critical consciousness development, the study involves exploring the processes of conscientization as it relates to activists fighting the oppression of Black people in the U.S. Corning and Myers (2002) emphasize that social movement research would benefit from analyses of activist identity development processes. This chapter will begin to explore those processes, with a specific focus on how Black activism is cultivated in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement (#BLM). This chapter will review extant literature on critical consciousness and activist development.

Developing Critical Consciousness

Critical consciousness development is a complex process. Not only does it include three individual, yet interrelated, steps (Watts et al., 2011), but it is also a process that is mediated by identity and context (Watts et al., 2003). To clarify this process, this section reviews the history of critical consciousness development, highlights seminal research on the three components in conscientization, and addresses the limitations to the existing research.

History of Critical Consciousness

Freire (1970) conceived *conscientizacâo* (Portuguese for conscientization) as an imperative for freedom in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He used this theory of critical consciousness to educate and liberate Brazilian citizens (Freire, 1973; Watts et al., 2011).

He posited that the oppressed and the oppressors both need to advance in their development, occupying a new category based on their identity as individuals in the midst of a liberatory process (Freire, 1970). This new identity was essentially that of an activist (Freire, 1970). This seminal research was advanced through the end of the 20th century (see Chapter One for additional background) by a number of individuals. For example, Freire's (1970) theory was connected more firmly to psychology through scholars in Black psychology (see Fanon, 1969; Karenga, 1975), community psychology (see Prilleltensky, 2003), feminist psychology (see hooks, 1994; Moane, 2010), and liberation psychology (see Martín-Baró, 1994; Watts et al., 1999). All of these scholars integrated the psychological and political components of oppression and liberation, recognizing the importance of critical consciousness in that process (Moane, 2010; Watts et al., 2011).

By the early 2000s, the empirical study of critical consciousness had expanded. Watts and colleagues (2003) presented a theory of sociopolitical development comprised of five stages: (1) acritical, (2) adaptive, (3) precritical, (4) critical, and (5) liberation. Like Freire (1970), Watts and colleagues (2003) described the cyclical, successive process involved in developing psychopolitical awareness. Their research suggests that as one moves through the five stages, they increasingly engage in action and reflection, and resultantly their sociopolitical analysis skills improve. *Sociopolitical* is a term that refers to the "cultural and political forces that shape one's status in society" (Watts et al., 2003, p. 185). Although similar to the term *psychopolitical* introduced in Chapter One, *sociopolitical* has a focus on the intersection of cultural and political processes, whereas *psychopolitical* is explicit in its focus on the intersection of psychological and political

processes. Critical consciousness scholars have always emphasized the importance of praxis to sociopolitical development, and ultimately to liberation (Freire, 1970; Prilleltensky, 2003; Watts et al., 2003). Importantly, Watts et al. (2003) clarified that it is the cumulative effects of recurrent praxis that are key to development.

As the body of literature on critical consciousness has grown, counseling psychologists, such as Matthew Diemer (Diemer & Li, 2011), Helen Neville (Neville, Coleman, Falconer, & Holmes, 2005), and Dawn Szymanski (2012), among others, have built on varying psychopolitical frameworks for liberation and centered emerging critical consciousness-related research in the discipline of counseling psychology. For example, Neville and colleagues have validated a measure of color-blind racial attitudes, which essentially indicates the absence of a critical racial consciousness (CoBRAS; Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Browne, 2000). Additionally, their team has found that color-blind racial ideologies are associated with increased self-blame for socioeconomic disparities, just world beliefs, and internalized anti-Black stereotypes (Neville et al., 2005). These studies on critical consciousness situate the concept directly within counseling psychology, linking them to topics such as identity development, well-being, and assessment. Watts and colleagues (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015; Watts et al., 2011) set forth a model of critical consciousness that has also helped advance the concept.

Components of Critical Consciousness

The three components of critical consciousness include (1) critical reflection, (2) sociopolitical efficacy, and (3) critical action (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015; Watts et al., 2011). While not qualitatively different from Freire's (1970) and Watts et al.'s

(2003) models, this approach adds clarity about the various components, their relationship to one another, and their significance to Black activism.

Critical reflection. Critical reflection, also termed critical social analysis, is key to critical consciousness. Whether they are the oppressed or the oppressor, individuals cannot liberate themselves without reflecting on the sociohistorical factors that structure their experience and making the decision to reject oppression (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015; Watts et al., 2011). Watts and Hipolito-Delgado (2015) outlined four aspects of critical social analysis: (1) recognition of and a vocabulary for describing oppression and inequality, (2) historical perspectives on oppression, (3) causal attributions with an emphasis on structural factors, and (4) action strategy/approach to resistance. As these four aspects make clear, critical reflection may require certain supports in order to be enhanced.

Increasing critical reflection about anti-Black racism (ABR) is important for the psychopolitical wellness of Black people (Diemer, Hsieh, & Pan., 2009; Neville et al., 2005; Tatum, 2003). Black people are bombarded with problematic images of and ideologies about their racial group (Collins, 2004, 2009). At the personal level they endorse negative stereotypes of Blackness, relationally they disconnect from other Black people and groups, and collectively this contributes to the prevalent disparities in health, education, employment, and other measures of wellness (LaVeist, 2005; Neville et al., 2005; Stephens & Few, 2007a, 2007b). Critical reflection is fostered through dialogue, emphasizing the importance of relationships to critical consciousness development (Freire, 1970, 1973; Godfrey & Grayman, 2014; Watts et al., 1999). Freire (1973) engaged group members in debate in his “culture circles” (p. 38), and Watts et al. (1999)

similarly used a small group setting to foster critical reflection among young Black men. For Black individuals in the current sociopolitical climate, critical reflection may be fostered through discussion of topics such as the extrajudicial killings of Black citizens, the school-to-prison pipeline, or the outcomes of recent judicial hearings on jury diversification. While Black activists regularly offer critical social analyses of similar issues in a wide range of forums, such as academic papers (Lindsey, 2013), social media sites (see the Twitter profiles of @breenewsome, @Nettaaaaaaaa, @aliciagarza), educational settings (Helms, 2015; Whack, 2015), and even popular hip-hop music (Bort, 2016; Finley, 2015), there remains a need to increase critical awareness about ABR (Neville et al., 2005).

Increasing critical reflection is associated with several markers of psychopolitical wellness for Black Americans. For example, critical consciousness was a protective factor in HIV-related health among a sample of Black women infected with HIV (Kelso et al., 2014). Participants with higher critical consciousness reported less disease progression than those with lower levels (Kelso et al., 2014). Critical awareness about systemic barriers to wellness mediated goal-striving stress among a sample of 399 Black college educated men (Sellers, Neighbors, & Bonham, 2011). Similarly, higher system blame was associated with decreased mortality over a 13-year span in a study of Black adults (LaVeist, 2003). These examples suggest that critical social analysis is helpful for Black people in that it warrants a reflection of the racialized social system from a collective-level perspective and, in doing so, reduces victim blaming and other manifestations of racism. For #BLM activists, it is not yet known the degree to which critical reflection skill development facilitates sociopolitical efficacy.

Sociopolitical efficacy. Sociopolitical efficacy is also a required component of critical consciousness (Diemer et al., 2009; Godfrey & Grayman, 2014; Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles, Zapert, & Maton, 1999). *Sociopolitical efficacy* refers to the degree of confidence a person has that they—alone or as a part of collective—can create social change (Diemer & Blustein, 2006; Watts et al., 2011; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). The study of political efficacy began in the 1950s in political science and has since been undertaken in psychology (Watts et al., 2011). Perceiving that one can help create social change is important. #BLM activists—such as Umi Selah, leader of the Florida-based group Dream Defenders—are often quoted as saying "I believe that we will win," reflecting the power of self and collective efficacy in Black liberation (Alvarez, 2013). This construct centers on a person's confidence that they are capable of being successful in their activism efforts (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). Aside from a sense of agency, opportunity structures (Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011; Watts & Flanagan, 2007; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015), collective identity (Neville & Cross, 2017; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015), and motivation (Diemer et al., 2009), have been conceptualized as important aspects of sociopolitical efficacy.

Opportunity structures. In order for sociopolitical efficacy to develop, "opportunity structures" comprised of settings, roles, and figures that can facilitate development are required (Watts & Flanagan, 2007). These opportunity structures are present in families, schools, community-based organizations, and other groups organizing for social justice. For example, culture circles (Freire, 1973) and local #BLM chapters represent opportunity structures. Opportunity structures provide space for critical reflection and influence self-definition (Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011), which is

especially important for Black individuals healing from multiple forms of racism (Ginwright & James, 2002). Additionally, opportunity structures are necessary so that leadership and mobilization skills can be developed (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015).

The opportunity structures available to a person during critical consciousness development help dictate their activism trajectory—for example, whether it is primarily centered in community organizations, city government, or online venues (Watts et al., 2003). Watts and Flanagan (2007) suggest three distinct typologies of activism: (1) community service efforts aimed at helping an individual; (2) civic engagement at the local, state, and national levels; and (3) extra-institutional sociopolitical activism. Given advancements in the popularity and role of social media and online venues in social activism (McDonald, Archdeacon, & Chavar, 2015), virtual activism can fall into any of the three typologies. Virtual activism has been significant in #BLM, with the formal organization starting with the use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. Virtual activism through social media served to advance the phrase "Black Lives Matter" from a single hashtag into a social movement and an activist identity (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

Collective identity. Sociopolitical efficacy is also fostered through the development of a collective identity (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). Individuals come to adopt, often as a result of the opportunity structures they have access to, a collective vision of wellness (Moane, 2008). They have shared values and needs that bind them and guide their action (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). Those collective values can be broad (e.g., psychologists' collective identity based on promoting wellness) or they can be more specific (e.g., #BLM-LA's collective identity based on resisting ABR specific to the Los Angeles community). However, provided that critical action is

also a required component of critical consciousness, it is important that people developing critical consciousness align with activists who share their values (Mosley, Crowell, & Stevens-Watkins, 2015). Collective identity, as evidenced by a sense of pride, shared values, and likeminded comrades with whom a person can engage in critical reflection and action, is an important aspect of sociopolitical efficacy.

Motivation. Motivation to transform sociopolitical inequity contains four domains: (1) motivation to decrease socioeconomic injustices, (2) motivation to be of service to people with whom one is in community, (3) engagement in community-based activism, and (4) repeated activism engagement (Diemer et al., 2009). Although listed here under sociopolitical efficacy, motivation is conceptualized to include participating in actions and therefore overlaps with the critical action component of critical consciousness. Exploring the motivation of low socioeconomic status youth of color, Diemer and colleagues (2009) found that a positive racial climate at school and parental support influenced critical consciousness. Specifically, youth whose parents encouraged them to live their values and to analyze sociopolitical issues were better able to develop their agency (Diemer et al., 2009). Taken together, the sociopolitical efficacy that is fostered through these components (agency, opportunities, collective identity, and motivation) results in critical action.

Critical action. C*ritical action* refers to "individual or collective action taken to change aspects of society, such as institutional policies and practices, which are perceived to be unjust" (Watts et al., 2011, p. 50). These actions may be considered activist behaviors, and they create material for critical reflection. By engaging in repeated action and reflection, individuals are expected to increase their sociopolitical efficacy (Watts &

Flanagan, 2007; Watts et al., 2011). Thus, the components are cyclical, and critical action is not a final step in critical consciousness (Watts & Flanagan, 2007). As noted above, to transform sociopolitical inequity entails having a desire and commitment to help oneself and to help others (Diemer et al., 2009). Yet critical action involves advancing from commitment to action in hopes of facilitating liberation.

Critical action is the least studied aspect of critical consciousness (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). Seeking to remedy this, Watts and Hipolito-Delgado (2015) proposed a two-by-two matrix of sociopolitical action that describes actions as personal or collective, and internal to the activist group or external. The spectrum then ranges from lower- to higher-impact actions. These researchers reviewed critical consciousness literature and analyzed both theory and practice related articles associated with critical action. Key findings associated with critical action include: (1) structure and power are barriers to critical action; (2) higher-impact actions are harder to successfully enact, requiring a number of supports and resources; and (3) actions must be practical, personally salient to activists, and developmentally appropriate (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015).

Critical action is most often measured by assessing the number and types of sociopolitical actions in which an individual participates (Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011). For example, activism orientation scales and measures of social involvement (e.g., Activism Orientation Scale, Youth Inventory of Involvement) and voting behavior are often used in psychological research (Diemer & Li, 2011; Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011). Using a national data set focused on high school students, critical action was also measured by participation in student government and community-based volunteering

(Godfrey & Grayman, 2014). In Szymanski's (2012) study of Black activism, a feminist activism scale was modified by replacing "feminist" with "African American." Although it was noted that it might not capture all aspects of Black activism, the Involvement in African American Activism Scale represents an attempt to begin to catalog the range of critical action behaviors undertaken on behalf of Black racial justice (Szymanski, 2012). These measures all assess either whether a person has engaged in activism, or whether or not they have an intention to do so.

The type of roles that individuals take on in their activism efforts is also important (Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Individuals with greater responsibility, voice, and leadership are more committed to critical action (Flanagan, 2004; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Szymanski (2012) found that, among a sample of 269 Black adults, the most frequently endorsed behaviors were: (a) voting for political candidates who support Black issues; (b) reading Black literature; (c) membership in Black organizations or groups; (d) educating others about Black issues; and (e) attending Black sociopolitical, community, organizational, and/or academic activities and events. While not all of these efforts would fit our definition of activism, they may contribute to critical consciousness development (e.g., reading, attending Black-focused events). Additionally, Mosley and colleagues (2015) have developed a website (see www.blmactivism.com) highlighting five key areas of #BLM activism, including college-based, community-based, research-related, media-based, and interpersonal, each with their own interventions. For example, college campus-based activism includes social media efforts, vigils, teach-ins/town hall meetings, rallies and marches, die-ins, and creating social groups (Mosley et al., 2015).

Several other factors influence critical action. Highly related to the concept of collective identity, Moane (2006) suggested that it is important to develop “niches of resistance” wherein individuals work in concert toward liberation (p. 76). Within this niche of resistance, a person can shape their own environments, creating small liberatory opportunity structures that facilitate critical action. Reflexively exploring her history of liberation psychology work, Moane (2006) noted the importance of the terminology used to described critical action. Many people do not consider their work to be “political” in nature and come to engage in it because of their personal connections and needs. Indeed, “political” is often associated with the government and oppression processes, having negative connotations for many marginalized individuals and groups (Moane, 2006). Kelly’s (2009) study of social trust among youth ages 15-25 corroborates this point. Participants who had trust in others and in the government were more likely to engage in civic action (Kelly, 2009). Additionally, being able to see the outcome of one’s resistance actions tends to facilitate continued critical action and sociopolitical development (Caldwell, 2008). Finally, settings such as the family unit, schools, and community-based organizations are important spaces for facilitating critical action (Watkins, 2009).

Family. Family is an important site for facilitating sociopolitical development broadly, and critical action specifically (Diemer et al., 2006; O’Connor, 1997). Parents who value their child “standing up for their beliefs” contribute to their sociopolitical efficacy and capacity for critical action (Diemer et al., 2006). O’Connor (1997) found that having models in the family who resist racism or engage in other activism increased individuals’ activism. Importantly, gender differences may influence parental acceptance

and support of activism. Boys engaging in activism received more parental support and were more confident in their ability to navigate power dynamics with parents than girls across two activism groups (Gordon, 2008). Gordon's (2008) findings suggest that the intersection of identities, particularly race/ethnicity, gender, and class, influence activism engagement and support.

Schools. Schools also influence critical consciousness development. A positive racial climate (Diemer et al., 2006) and open classrooms (Godfrey & Grayman, 2014) are two variables in the school that positively influence critical action. By providing civic education and opportunities for leadership, schools may also contribute to critical action (Watkins, 2009). There are some school settings that may be particularly influential in the development of critical consciousness specific to Black identity, Black culture and ABR. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have been critical to the socialization and advancement of Black students and Black communities since they were developed in 1837 (LeMelle, 2002). Additionally, Freedom schools have promoted activist development, focusing on social action and liberatory education (Jackson & Howard, 2014). Following the tradition of the Mississippi Freedom Schools that emerged during "Freedom Summer" in 1964, the Children's Defense Fund has operated Freedom Schools for kindergarten to 12th grade since 1995 (CDF Freedom Schools Program, n.d.; Jackson & Howard, 2014). More recently, scholars and activists have been providing free access to syllabi online (e.g., #BlackLivesMatterSyllabus; Roberts, 2017) that link to self-directed courses of study related to Black liberation and the Black experience. HBCUs, Freedom Schools, and web-based Black cultural syllabi may have contributed to increased critical action on behalf of Black racial justice. However, it may

be that some schools (i.e., urban, low-resource) limit the critical consciousness of students and could be viewed as oppressive settings by marginalized students (Diemer et al., 2006; Fine, 1991).

Community-based organizations. A third setting, community-based organizations—such as identity based social clubs, community recreation centers, or churches—provides additional opportunities for action (Watkins, 2009). These settings are able to provide the training, modeling, and recruitment needs that helps sustain activism at a collective level (Zubrow, 1993). Community-based organizations are, by nature, tied to the community, so they often provide a space for individuals to engage in personally meaningful critical action (Watkins, 2009). Additionally, these settings are more likely to have explicit social and racial justice intentions (e.g., Black churches, #BLM or National Association for the Advancement of Colored People chapters), thus facilitating Black activism.

Limitations to the Extant Literature on Critical Consciousness

The models and empirical studies of critical consciousness described herein, while helpful for the current study, are not without their limitations. First, there remains a debate in the literature about whether critical consciousness is a developmental process or a state (Diemer, McWhirter, Ozer, & Rapa, 2015). In lay terms, a critically conscious person is seen as one who has a systemic understanding of oppression, though they may not do anything about oppression. This model clarifies that to be considered critically conscious a person must have engaged in critical action (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). In doing so, attaining critical consciousness as a state becomes more difficult. For example, barriers to participation such as voting age and location of resistance

actions could prevent critical consciousness development. Second, differential definitions of what constitutes critical action can make it difficult for conceptual advancement (Diemer & Li, 2011). For example, interventions enacted between members of the same social activism group, signing a petition, and organizing a boycott all reflect sociopolitical actions of varying reach. Additionally, it may be counterproductive in the quest for Black liberation to encourage critical reflection without a prerequisite component centered on the psychological barriers to wellness, like internalized racism, that impact People of Color (Moane, 2006). Watts and Hipolito-Delgado's (2015) model seeks to account for this need through an emphasis on collective identity; however, it has the potential to be strengthened by a more explicit focus on mediating existing barriers. Finally, no articles examine how critical consciousness relates to a specific social movement (Watts & Delgado-Hipolito, 2015). While the theoretical and empirical data articulated herein account for processes of critical consciousness relevant to oppression and racism, they do not specifically focus on Black people, or on social movements such as #BLM.

Developing as a Black Racial Justice Activist

Theorized as having three key components, critical consciousness is a complex developmental process. By engaging in critical action, individuals take on the identity (albeit not always the title) of an activist. The current study is interested in the development of critical consciousness, specifically the critical action component, among Black racial justice activists. For Black individuals engaging in critical action for Black racial justice, there are several factors that differentiate the activism experience. The antecedents of and experiences during activism are two areas worthy of consideration.

First, for most Black people, their Blackness cannot be hidden. While they may have other identities that are marginalized in society, being Black is often visible and thus, readily subject to oppression. As such, Black people have embodied experiences of Blackness that influence their activism trajectory. Lived experiences navigating the harmful processes associated with Black oppression makes antiracism work especially salient for Black Americans. Szymanski's (2012) and Szymanski and Lewis's (2015) findings that racist events and race-related stress were predictors of activism engagement among Black people illustrate the salience of resistance for African Americans. Empirical data also suggests that racial identity development stages influence activism for Black people (Neville & Cross, 2017; Szymanski & Lewis, 2015). In a study using the Expanded Nigrescence model (Cross & Vandiver, 2001), the stages of Immersion-Emersion Anti-White, Internalization Afrocentricity, and Internalization Multiculturalist Inclusive attitudes positively predicted Black activism engagement (Szymanski & Lewis, 2015). Individual and collective engagement in activism for Black people is then a matter of promoting psychopolitical wellness and racial identity development.

Once actively participating in Black activism, Black Americans face hurdles unlike their comrades of other races. One struggle unique to Black activists, including those in #BLM, is the increased surveillance of their words and actions (Joseph, 2015; Patterson, 2015). From government agencies (see Joseph, 2015; Patterson, 2015) to media conglomerates (Pargett, 2015) and independent citizens (Dalton, 2015), Black activists have to contend with the costs of being surveilled and silenced. Additionally, Black activists fight to be perceived as credible and trustworthy, even when sharing about personal experiences (Sue et al., 2008). Oftentimes, Black people engage in activist

behaviors (e.g., educating others). However, their stories and experiences are discounted, unless validated through dominant sources. For example, #BLM activists have critiqued the way Ferguson citizens' complaints of institutional racism (i.e., unreasonable suspicion, excessive police force) were dismissed en masse until the Department of Justice report corroborated their claims (Newton, 2015) or video footage confirmed their guilt/wrongdoing (Watson, 2015).

Black people are also targeted by police during resistance actions. For example, a Black and a White graduate student, attending a protest together and both taking the same critical actions during the event, made national news when officers arrested the Black student and offered decidedly more lenience toward the White student (Dwyer, 2014; Harris-Perry, 2014). Additionally, because not all Black racial justice activists endorse or are equipped to apply the inclusive values of #BLM, identity-based discrimination can persist even within activist communities. This can make engaging in activism more difficult for some Black activists (e.g., Black trans activists navigating gender discrimination in activist circles). All of these factors, in concert with typical stressors inherent in resistance, produce barriers to activism for Black people that others in the movement for Black lives do not face.

Alternatively, there may be benefits for Black activists. Black activists may experience greater connection, feel a higher sense of self- and collective-efficacy, and feel more welcomed when engaging in Black activism than others (Movement for Black Lives, 2015; Young, 2015). Increasingly, Black activists are creating spaces for healing from racial trauma that are exclusively for people who identify as Black (e.g., Black yoga, Black joy Sunday events), which may also protect against some of the risks they

contend with (Jackson, 2015; Jones, 2015). In fact, engaging in resistance efforts has been applied to models looking to enhance healing from racial trauma among People of Color, as actions of resistance can enhance empowerment (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2006; Jernigan & Daniel, 2011). Therefore, the development of a model that can identify how Black racial justice activists come to critical action, as the current study works to outline, may be further applied to facilitate healing from racial trauma.

Aims and Research Questions

Although theoretical and empirical studies of critical consciousness and activist development exist, no published articles on critical consciousness specific to a social movement such as #BLM have been found (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). This study seeks to fill this gap by qualitatively exploring critical action among #BLM activists. The ultimate aim is to develop a practical theory of critical consciousness development that may facilitate Black liberation.

The primary research question is: What experiences lead to increased critical action on behalf of Black racial justice? Using the psychopolitical wellness framework (see Figure 1) as a guide, the author aimed to uncover the key components and processes involved in critical action for individuals engaged in activism that aligns with #BLM values. Specific sub-questions explored by the study include:

- What were the key moments or experiences viewed as critical by activists as it relates to their awakening or radicalization around #BLM?
- What influenced their feelings of efficacy to act against the issues salient to #BLM?

- How did these activists come to actually begin participating in #BLM activism after becoming aware of Black oppression? What did they describe as precipitating their critical action?
- What was common and unique across identities related to the process of entering into critical action in the #BLM movement?

Chapter Three: Methods

The psychopolitical wellness model presented in Figure 1 represents the theoretical framework for this study. Two methodological paradigms—critical-ideological and Black feminist-womanist—also undergird this qualitative study. The critical-ideological paradigm recognizes one's subjectivities, the goals for justice inherent in the project, and the researcher's values (Ponterotto, 2005). The Black feminist-womanist paradigm involves taking an intersectional approach, attending to the different positioning of people based on their social identities, to explore and explain oppression and liberation processes (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1994). Black feminism-womanism is useful for the current study as it not only speaks to both oppression and resistance, but is also representative of the Black Lives Matter (#BLM) values. Further, both the critical-ideological and Black feminism-womanism paradigms align well with the psychopolitical wellness (Prilleltensky, 2003, 2008) framework used for the present study. From these paradigms, constructivist grounded theory (CGT) methods (Charmaz, 2014) were used to understand #BLM activists' critical consciousness development processes. CGT is best suited to address the research questions because it facilitates exploration of critical consciousness with attention to context, processes, and an overt declaration of social justice values. The current chapter will expand upon the appropriateness of the CGT method, outline the methodology utilized in this study, and assess the validity and trustworthiness of the study. The appendices contain the recruitment flyer and interview protocol.

Appropriateness of CGT

Glaser and Strauss originally articulated the grounded theory method in 1967 (Charmaz, 2014; Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014). Grounded theory developed as a systematic method of developing theory by coding qualitative data, memoing, and engaging in theoretical sampling. The constructivist approach advanced by Charmaz beginning in the mid-1990s (Higginbottom & Lauridsen, 2014) maintains these components; however, the constructivist version of the method is differentiated by its attention to context and subjectivities, including that of the researcher. CGT is appropriate for this study as it (a) honors the voice and experiences of the participants, (b) is intentional in its consideration of context, (c) aids in theory development, and (d) recognizes the role of the researcher in interpretation (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012; Charmaz, 2011, 2014).

Giving Voice

Qualitative methods are useful when the topic of research interest has been understudied and exploration is still needed (Creswell, 2007). #BLM is young, simultaneously local and global, and evolving in a dynamic sociopolitical climate; thus, exploratory methods are appropriate. The CGT approach allows for the voices of the movement to be amplified, which is especially important given the prevalence of color-blind racial ideologies that seek to minimize the presence and impact of anti-Black racism (ABR; Neville et al., 2005). From a critical-ideological paradigm, the inherent power differential that creates ABR is actively resisted through this study's scholar-activism.

Although the study of activist development is not new, research on the development of activists who align with the values outlined by #BLM is novel. Individual interviews, which are popular in CGT research, ensured that the voices of these activists were central in this study. Moreover, the present approach aligns with Black feminist-womanist paradigms, which are characterized by an emphasis on and elevation of dialogue (Collins, 2009; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015; Phillips, 2006).

IRB approval was requested and granted for this study to be non-confidential in nature. Non-confidentiality in psychological research is a newer trend, particularly aligned with social justice-focused research (Anderson & Muñoz Proto, 2016). Anderson and Proto (2016) reviewed psychologists' ethical responsibilities with respect to research and argued that there can be paternalistic protectionism in the use of confidential research methods. Recognizing that confidentiality can limit representation and the extent of critical researchers' and their participants' social justice aims (Anderson & Muñoz Proto, 2016), this study joins the budding body of psychological research using non-confidential video. The non-confidentiality of the study truly allows for the dialogue and voices of the participants to be elevated. It is a strength of the method as it not only provides transparency and the amplification of participant voices but also ensures their contributions to the final theory co-construction is clear.

Context-Based Inquiry

In addition to honoring the values, subjectivities, and realities voiced by participants, CGT methods also consider the entire research context. Attempts are made to recognize all of the ways that the researcher and participant(s), and their various identities and contexts, influence the interpretation of reality (Charmaz, 2011). CGT

attends to the researcher's biases or generalizations, the relevant existing literature, and the role of power (Charmaz, 2011). In this way, CGT's integration of contextual influences also integrates into the psychopolitical framework undergirding the study. Charmaz (2011) elucidates the connection, noting how CGT may be utilized to deepen awareness of how people are impacted by psychopolitical constructs (e.g., power, justice, oppression, liberation).

This study of Black racial justice benefited from the relativist approach inherent in CGT (Charmaz, 2014). Relativism acknowledges that there are multiple realities and seeks to illuminate the context in which one's reality is experienced. As such, the CGT method attended to the nuances in the developmental trajectories of Black activists. A collaborative, iterative coding process (delineated below) then led to the co-construction of a theory explaining the processes and contexts that produce individuals who engage in critical action for Black racial justice.

Theory Development

The potential for developing a practical theory is an imperative facet of CGT. The tools of CGT—for instance the entire constant comparative process, use of gerunds, and diagramming—aid the researcher in theorizing about patterns and connections (Charmaz, 2014). In CGT, actions and processes are the focus of analysis and theorizing (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012, Charmaz, 2014). The emphasis on process allows the research team to better specify the circumstances within which critical consciousness development processes occur and to uncover what influences phasic change. Furthermore, Charmaz (2014) conceptualized four areas of concern associated with constructing grounded theory (theoretical plausibility, theoretical direction, theoretical

centrality, and theoretical adequacy) and outlined strategies for interviewing so as to overcome them in the interest of theory development. These tools and strategies are reflective, encourage emergence, and are explicative. As such, they are helpful for uncovering the links between personal experiences and the sociopolitical context (Charmaz, 2011).

Positionality of the Researchers

Qualitative researchers often note their positionality (e.g., assumptions, social identities, and biases) to help audiences understand their perspective (Morrow, 2005, 2007). Locating oneself and speaking from that position is also crucial in Black feminist-womanist paradigms (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). Given my personal interest and involvement in Black racial justice, the methodology I applied to this study must account for my subjectivities. Therefore, the selected CGT methodology is intentional about having researchers interrogate their standpoints and allows them to articulate their values explicitly (Charmaz, 2011).

Positionality of Primary Investigator

I identify as a Black, queer/bisexual, cisgender woman. As a queer Black woman, I have experienced multiple identity-based traumatic incidents, particularly related to my racial, gender, and sexual identities, and live with the biopsychosocial and spiritual consequences of these experiences. Because I hold these identities, I had emotional and physical responses to the stories of racial trauma and resistance that were shared with me. Evidence of my activation could be seen as I teared up during participants' stories or when I suggested a participant and I pause the interview to respond to an instance of racial profiling we were witnessing during an interview. These identities also allowed me

to share moments of joy and connection with participants. Examples of small moments of connection that were facilitated due to my identities include singing along with another participant as we "remixed" the lyrics to a song that was playing nearby and dialoguing with the Black owners of a café where an interview was conducted.

Although my racial, gender, and sexual identities are discriminated against consistently within dominant society and represent sources of my oppression, they also align with the identities of people who have been seen as leaders (e.g., large scale organizers, popular spokespersons; Sands, 2017) in the movement for Black lives. As such, they served as advantages in some ways during this research study. These identities had informed my worldview, contributed to my understanding of and commitment to intersectionality in both theory and praxis, and thus equipped me with a language and understanding central to the current movement. Though always needing to be sharpened further, I had experiences that allowed me to critically analyze some of the intricate ways that interconnected systems of oppression served as barriers to wellness for myself and others. Being a medium-toned, Black, cisgender, able-bodied, femme likely allowed me easier access or passage into spaces where some of my differently hued (e.g., darker skin tone, racially ambiguous), transgender or gender expansive, and differently abled comrades experience discrimination, whether overtly or covertly. Given my advantage, I sought to intentionally recruit interviewees who experienced oppression based on their skin tone, gender expression, and ability and sought to reduce power differentials during our time together.

I also grew up with the privilege of living in a two-parent, dual-income home that could be classified as working middle class. I resided on the side of town that had not

been systematically disenfranchised due to the race and class of its majority population, and I was therefore better able to maximize my public high school diploma and go on to obtain three college degrees. As an individual who is currently working to obtain a doctorate in counseling psychology, my educational background served as a privilege in this research project. Because of my position within a university, education and training in social justice-informed counseling psychology, and ability (e.g., cognitive, interpersonal, physical) to matriculate to the stage of conducting a dissertation study, I was able to determine what to study, how to study it, and dictate the parameters within which the research team and interviewees would operate. This privilege allowed me to determine what questions would be asked and which would not. I sought to use plain language, a conversational style, and a relational approach to minimize the impact of these privileges. I also had each participant choose the location of our meeting and dressed casually during interviews.

My class and education privilege contributed to my development as a Black racial justice activist (e.g., scholar-activist, organizer, healer, protestor, teacher). For example, familial socioeconomic factors allowed me to pursue a doctorate degree, which has taken me roughly six years to complete post-master's and does not typically lead to a high-income career. This is a time-intensive and expensive educational endeavor, which many less-resourced but more capable people than myself are unable to pursue. Having obtained counseling skills and experiences working with Black youth throughout my educational journey, I was positioned to engage in critical action in response to ABR. Furthermore, because of these identities and experiences I was often respected and supported when I engaged in activism.

My interpretations of the world are shaped by these identities and led me to desire a theory of Black racial justice activism that upholds my identity-based values. As a counseling psychology trainee, I sought to utilize the skill set, and particularly the research methodology, of the discipline to achieve my central goal: Black liberation. I ascribe to the guiding principles of the #BLM network, which privileges intersectional analyses, uplifts Black voices, promotes holism, and champions strengths-focused paradigms. Similar to #BLM co-founder Alicia Garza, I believe that "when Black people get free, everybody gets free" (Garza, 2014, para. 13). Therefore, I approached this study in the interest of uncovering strategies and contextual factors that facilitate Black liberation. This belief also illuminates my bias toward learning about activists who have a Black feminist-womanist perspective and theorize Black racial justice as an intersectional, inclusive project. Another personal standpoint involves my awareness of the ways in which Black people's contributions have historically been erased, minimized, or appropriated. My conscientiousness regarding this type of oppression has influenced my decisions to incorporate rich, culturally relevant yet non-traditional sources of data in this study (i.e., tweets, hashtags, blog posts, and podcasts) alongside the more traditional, empirical works.

My standpoint on Black liberation must be explicated further as my values influenced this project from conceptualization to execution. I am, to borrow the slogan from the Black Youth Project, "unapologetically Black." I am unapologetically in pursuit of Black liberation. My vision for Black liberation is one wherein both Black people and people of other races and ethnicities are able to recognize the painful historical (e.g., transatlantic slave trade, Jim Crow era policies and lynching) and current (e.g., impact of

mass incarceration, voter disenfranchisement) truths associated with ABR and actively imagine and pursue Black wellness in the face of this cultural awareness. Although my vision may sound futuristic, I do not see Black liberation as some inaccessible, far-off possibility, but I see Black liberation occurring when one is able to live and move in the dialectic where they hold a strong sense of awareness around the experience and pain of anti-Blackness as well as maintain hope that the Black collective can experience wellness and live their lives with dignity. I see Black liberation happening as I watch Black women, like the participants in this study or those on my dissertation committee, affirm Black people while dismantling White supremacy in the various spaces they occupy. In this vision of Black liberation, the hope we hold for Black wellness is used as fuel to imagine possibilities for the present and future of the collective. I believe that being able to hold such a vision, in the midst of reality that seeks to diminish the humanity and colonize the minds of Black people, is a radical act of healing and liberation.

I brought my vision of liberation to bear on the present project in several ways. By imagining a research project where the end product is a model that can be used to increase critical consciousness of anti-Blackness and promote Black activism, I am working in the interest of Black liberation. Throughout this project, I merged empirical research and psychological theory alongside the words and works of Black activists and community members, thus promoting cultural awareness. Obtaining IRB approval to conduct a non-confidential study so the Black activists who participated in the study could have their voices and contributions to theory fully highlighted further evidenced liberatory praxis. Furthermore, participants were not forced to check boxes of preselected identity markers but could self-define and elaborate freely on their social

locations and important identity markers. They were not interviewed by a scientist who was questioning them as a blank slate seeking to extract their knowledge, but by a conscientious comrade who was seeking to amplify their voices and experiences. Once the project was approved and underway, I continued to bring my vision of Black liberation to bear. For example, throughout the data analysis process, I was tuned into and working to promote the critical consciousness development of my research team members, as they were decoding narratives *about* critical consciousness. Finally, I was committed to not only presenting these findings in academic settings, but to translating and making them accessible to people who could most benefit from them. Just as my identities, values, experiences, and hopes for Black liberation are important to understand in the context of this study, the positionality of my research team members are also of importance.

Research Team and Dissertation Committee

CGT methods are strengthened through the use of a team-based approach to analysis. In addition to this author, the research team contributing to this project included three counseling psychology doctoral students and one educational psychology doctoral student. The positionality of each of these researchers is delineated below.

Blanka Angyal. Blanka Angyal is a fourth-year doctoral candidate in Counseling Psychology at the University of Kentucky. Her research interests include multicultural competence, diversity training in psychology programs and organizations, and social justice advocacy. She responded to the invitation to be part of the present research because the foci directly aligned with her interests in (a) social justice advocacy, (b) grassroots organizations and movements, and (c) Whiteness on societal and

organizational level. Blanka came to the project with both experience in Black racial justice work and qualitative research training.

In approaching this project, Blanka was committed to holding her privileged identities of being White, able-bodied, educated, cisgender, and straight under close consideration of how it would impact her understanding. She recognized her social identities would limit her exploration and consideration of certain codes, and that consulting and memoing throughout the process would help account for her limitations. Recognizing that she held many privileged and marginalized identities, Blanka made a concerted effort to make visible and examine their impact, particularly her White identity. Importantly, during the project, Blanka found out that she is bi-racial, White and ethnically Hungarian and Roma (for Roma there is no racial category, but non-White). For Blanka, the news was validating of her experiences and interactions within White communities and communities of Color. For Blanka, the new awareness helped her understand both the sense of lack of belongingness and sense of community that she had felt navigating primarily White and primarily People of Color spaces, respectively.

In researching Black oppression and liberation as a non-Black individual, Blanka listened intently and sought to honor the experiences and vulnerabilities Black racial justice activists shared. She persistently attended to not only what she thought but also what she felt, what questions surfaced, and what questions she failed to ask. She exuded an inherent curiosity and desire to experience what liberation meant for the participants in the research study. Blanka's upbringing in Romania as an ethnically Hungarian and Roma woman helped her connect and relate to the narratives of participants in this study, particularly those of oppression, discrimination, and engagement in social justice work.

She tried to acknowledge the affective and cognitive load her own experiences carried. For instance, Blanka was cognizant of how her own experiences could facilitate her empathic attunement to participants' narratives as well as how they could limit her in understanding and seeing the very different context, reality, and history associated with the Black participants' narratives.

Candice Davis. Candice Davis is a fifth-year doctoral student in Educational Psychology at the University of Kentucky. Her current research interests include Whiteness, White privilege, White supremacy, and the psychological and behavioral impact White oppression has on Black students. She was drawn to this project because she was interested in understanding how conscious Black individuals cope with racial oppression and the motivating factors that contributed to their activist development. Candice identifies as an African American, cisgender woman with a desire to do social justice research that will contribute to the empowerment of people who experience racial oppression. The current project gave Candice the opportunity to understand the different ways in which Black individuals cope with ABR and use their positive and negative experiences to become agents of change. Candice's background and research interest served as a tool during the data coding phase. She came to the research team understanding how it feels to cope with racial oppression. Moreover, though her background and interests were useful tools, she was aware that her beliefs and assumptions could influence how she analyzed the data. Being aware of her own biases and discussing and memoing about them throughout the process allowed her to be cautious and focus on the interviewees' responses.

Carolyn Meiller. Carolyn Meiller is a second-year doctoral student in Counseling Psychology at the University of Kentucky. Her research interests include sexual pleasure and sexual experiences of individuals with diverse and intersecting identities. Carolyn's research is qualitative in nature to help raise the voices of the actual participants. She became involved in the current project for two reasons. First, Carolyn had been trained in qualitative research methods with the lead author by University of Kentucky Assistant Professor of Counseling Psychology Dr. Candice Hargons; therefore, she was drawn to the project to further grow her skills as a qualitative researcher. Additionally, Carolyn came to the project wanting to learn more about Black racial justice, and, specifically, about how research can be used to help advance Black racial justice. Carolyn identifies as a White, bisexual, cisgender woman. As a White ciswoman, Carolyn needed to recognize the privilege she held over the participants and other researchers on the team. Therefore, throughout the research process, Carolyn engaged in memo writing, not only in tandem with the qualitative research process, but also to address biases and reactions she had towards the participants and their narratives. Carolyn further recognized the impact of the different life experiences she has lived that differ from participants. For instance, whereas the participants learned about ABR and oppression through personal experiences, Carolyn gained her understanding of these topics through academic courses. Therefore, Carolyn worked during coding to stay close to the participant's narrative and dialogue, so that her own biases would not influence the codes. Moreover, Carolyn also found it important to confer with fellow research members when she felt that her privileged identities were keeping her from fully understanding a section of the transcript. Finally, Carolyn recognized the importance of engaging in outside research when

participants discussed historical moments or individuals in the Black racial justice movement that she was not familiar with in order to further understand the participants' narratives. Overall, Carolyn approached the present research wanting to learn and grow in her qualitative research skills and knowledge around Black racial justice.

Paris Wheeler. Paris Wheeler is a second-year doctoral student in Counseling Psychology at the University of Kentucky. Her research interests include substance abuse, health disparities, race-related stress, and racial identity development among Black Americans. She was drawn to the current project because of her interest in how socially conscious Black individuals cope with racism and how they utilize their skills to combat oppression. She personally identifies as a Black cisgender woman and is personally invested in achieving Black liberation, as it has a personal impact for herself and for many of her family and loved ones. She came to the project with an awareness that liberation for her is different from liberation for a Black person of a different gender identity and, thus, was interested in exploring what liberation means across the spectrum of Blackness. Due to her background and research interests, Paris brought a focus of coping skills and strategies to the research team. Most of her efforts were focused on how the participants coped with ABR and with the stressors associated with fighting oppression.

Dissertation committee. The makeup of the dissertation committee is also in alignment with the primary investigator's values and the study aims. The dissertation co-chairs, Drs. Candice Hargons and Danelle Stevens-Watkins, are professors at the University of Kentucky whose personal and professional commitments and accomplishments embody the values of #BLM. The dissertation committee (including

Dr. Candice Hargons, Dr. Stevens-Watkins, Dr. Alicia Fedewa, Dr. Chamara Kwakye, and Dr. Kenneth Tyler) is comprised of diversity scientists who not only champion the author's commitment to Black liberation but also have the knowledge and skills to ensure the present study is executed with both scientific rigor and social justice ethics.

Methodology

The CGT data analysis method is conceptualized as a bottom-up approach with seven steps (Charmaz, 2014). The first step is choosing the research question, which informs the recruitment and sampling of participants. Data collection follows; then analysis begins with coding (initial and focused). Coding is followed by theory building and the write up. The research questions guiding this study were: What factors lead to increased critical action on behalf of Black racial justice? What are the key components and processes involved in critical action for individuals who engage in Black activism and ascribe to #BLM values? The following subsections delineate the steps of CGT from recruitment through theory building.

Participants

Participant recruitment was intentional in order to best investigate the process of critical consciousness among #BLM activists (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007). A purposeful sample (Morrow, 2005) of individuals who engage in activism and explicitly associate themselves with the #BLM movement was recruited. The focus on #BLM activists was decided because engaging in #BLM activism reflects the highest level of critical consciousness, critical action (Diemer & Li, 2011; Diemer et al., 2006). For one to engage in critical action around #BLM, the individual must have already engaged in critical reflections and possess sociopolitical efficacy, which are the other two

components of critical consciousness (see Chapter Two). Additionally, the present study was delimited to activists who physically attended #BLM related events or who engaged with #BLM related hashtags on social media sites. Such a focus helped restrict the sample to individuals who were intervening against ABR according to the intersectional paradigm that is set forth by #BLM leadership and that align with counseling psychology values (Hargons et al., 2017).

In CGT, *theoretical sampling*, which involves sampling data to comprise an emergent conceptual category, is undertaken until saturation is reached. *Theoretical saturation* occurs when continued data gathering fails to produce new insights or properties (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012). Ultimately, 12 participants were interviewed in the initial round of sampling. Although the researcher was open to recruiting additional participants at later stages in the analysis, further recruitment did not occur due to reaching theoretical saturation. Although Creswell (2007) suggests 20–30 interviews, the manuscripts utilizing CGT methods that were more recently published in the counseling psychology flagship journals, *The Counseling Psychologist* and *Journal of Counseling Psychology,* often include between 10 and 25 participants (Budge, Orovecz, & Thai, 2015; Latta & Goodman, 2011; Todd & Abrams, 2011; Tuason, 2008), supporting the use and analysis of 12 participants' interviews in this theoretical co-construction. Guest Bunce, and Johnson (2006) experiment on saturation in qualitative interviews also supports this number of interviews. Although Black and non-Black participants were eligible for participation in this study, all 12 participants identified as Black; one additionally identified as Haitian, one as Honduran, and one as a quarter German. Participants' ages ranged from 23 to 60 with a mean age of 37. Participants were given

space to identify themselves during the interview. This led to participants highlighting different aspects of their identities, including gender, sexuality, religion or spirituality, education, ability, and class. Detailed descriptions of the participant's social identities are delineated in Table 1 and Table 2 (see below).

Table 1: Participant Demographic Information: Age, Race/Ethnicity, Geographic Location, Gender, Sexuality, and Religion/Spirituality

Name	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Geographic Location	Gender	Sexuality	Religion/Spirituality
Aaron	35	Black	Illinois	Cis man	Straight	Did not disclose
Conigan	30	Black	Illinois	Cis man	Straight	Believes in God, seeking answers on spirituality
Elena	32	Black; Haitian	Montreal	Cis woman	Straight	Spiritual non-religious (curious about Vodou)
Erica	29	Black	Louisiana	Cis woman	Straight	Christian ("more spiritual than religious"
Geo	23	Black; Honduran	New York	Cis woman; androgynous	Queer; still learning	Spiritual non-religious
Laina	Mid 40s	Black	Ontario	Cis woman	Straight	Agnostic
Lamin	38	Black	Kentucky	Cis man	Straight	Spiritual; agnostic
Lauren	30	Black; Quarter German	North Dakota	Cis woman	Straight	Atheist
Micah	60	Black	Michigan	Cis man	Straight	Christian
Michael	50	Black	District of Columbia	Cis man	Gay	Did not disclose
Michelle	35	Black	Maryland	Gender fluid; androgynous woman	Lesbian	Spiritual; non-religious
Quess	35	Black	New York	Cis man	Straight	Spiritual; non-religious

Table 2: Participant Demographic Information: Education, Ability, and Class

Name	Education	Ability	Class
Aaron	Did not disclose; discredited American education	Physical disability causing altered gait; PTSD	Middle class
Conigan	Did not disclose	Did not disclose	Working class
Elena	Did not disclose	Did not disclose	Very low income
Erica	Graduate degree (HBCU pride)	Full figured	Middle class
Geo	Bachelor's	Did not disclose	Lower income
Laina	Graduate student	None	Upper middle class, but "broke grad student"
Lamin	Some college	Cerebral palsy (in wheelchair for 25 years)	Middle to upper middle class upbringing
Lauren	Graduate student	Vision impairment	Middle class now, feels like "broke grad student"
Micah	Graduate degrees, divinity and psychology	Anxiety, PTSD (abuse survivor)	Upper middle class now
Michael	Graduate degree	None known	Working middle class
Michelle	"Educated"	Did not disclose	Middle class
Quess	"Two pieces of paper," graduate degree	Manic depression, social anxiety, PTSD	Lower class

Participants were recruited through online and direct contact methods. In-person recruitment was conducted at the Allied Media Conference, #BLM marches and vigils, and activism training workshops during the summer of 2016. Online recruitment was conducted by posting the flyer (see Appendix B) on sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter using the hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName. Three participants (Erica, Micah, and Michael) were introduced through a gatekeeper who was organizing a psychology institute where the researcher was giving a talk on activism.

One participant (Aaron) was a friend of the researcher; however, he responded to the flyer via e-mail and followed the same procedures as other participants. Snowball sampling was also utilized. The use of snowball sampling is appropriate when done purposefully and to identify exemplars that can speak to the topic at hand (Morrow, 2005). The flyer that was distributed in person and online indicated that #BLM activists were being asked to participate in video-recorded interviews about their experiences developing as an activist aligned with the #BLM movement. Interested parties were advised to contact the researcher to discuss the process in further detail and to schedule interviews should they elect to move forward. The researcher followed up (whenever possible this occurred by phone in order to build rapport), answered questions, and scheduled interviews at a mutually agreed upon location. A methodological journal was kept by the researcher throughout the recruitment process to keep track of recruitment.

The researcher engaged in strategic travel to obtain a sample with representation from across the United States and Canada. The researcher traveled to Detroit, MI, where the first four interviews (Elena, Laina, Geo, and Quess) were conducted. She traveled to the Chicago, IL area to conduct three interviews (Conigan, Aaron, and Lauren). She traveled to the DC metropolitan area where four additional interviews were conducted (Micah, Michael, Erica, and Michelle). The final interview was conducted in Lexington, KY (Lamin). Ultimately, the sample represented eight U.S. states and two Canadian provinces (see Table 1).

Data Collection: Modality and Protocol

Initial data were collected through intensive interviews. Intensive interviewing encourages the creation of a space where participants can openly share their experiences

while being led, in a gentle manner, by the interviewer (Charmaz, 2014). Interviews did not have time constraints, as this is discouraged in CGT (Charmaz, 2014); therefore, the interviews varied in length, averaging 73 minutes. The in-person format of the intensive interview is congruent with Black feminist-womanist values of dialogue and communalism (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). Intensive interviews have the potential to be healing when undertaken with the "ethic of caring" characteristic of the Black feminist-womanist research paradigm (Collins, 2009; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015).

Interview questions initially centered on the research topic of critical consciousness development and were specific to the context of #BLM. The initial protocol is attached as Appendix B. In CGT, the line of inquiry may evolve over the course of interviews due to the nature of the constant comparative method and goal of theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2014). As the interviews progressed, the researcher identified some recurring themes in participant narratives that were not captured in the protocol related to art and activism, the performative nature of activism, and vulnerability. Rather than altering the protocol and adding questions, the researcher would name that the theme or topic has been "coming up" and typically the participant would begin to speak to it without being asked a specific question. Alternatively, the researcher would ask if the participant has anything to add related to that theme or topic if they did not volunteer without prompting. The interviews were video recorded when possible (otherwise, they were audio recorded) and transcribed for analysis by a research team.

A unique contribution is that the study was conducted as a non-confidential study under IRB approval. The non-confidential aspect of the research was sought to adhere to

Black feminist principles of honoring the voices, positions, and identities (Collins 2004, 2009) of individuals and groups by presenting them in an organic context. As such, the participants' names are included in lieu of pseudonyms. The real names and names of the campaigns of the activists will be used throughout this dissertation. The process of the present non-confidential study works to challenge the traditional research process (Anderson & Muñoz Proto, 2016). Instead of presenting the data in a top-down manner as if the researcher is passing the science down from the ivory tower, the approach honors that CGT is a co-construction, and the participants are passing the science up to the ivory tower.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in CGT methods has two steps: initial and focused coding. Data for both steps emanates from the interview transcripts and researcher's memos. Coding involves writing short, summative statements about the data. The research team assisted in the transcription and coding of the interviews. Additionally, some interviews were transcribed by outside transcriptionists solely helping with the transcription stage. Transcripts were coded line by line, using gerunds to code for actions. In initial coding the researcher stays closely connected to the narratives and interrogates her engagement with it (Charmaz, 2011). For example, key questions a CGT researcher may ask during initial coding include: (a) what is this data about, (b) what stands out in actions and statements, and (c) what is taken for granted or unsaid given this person's point of view (Bryant & Charmaz, 2012; Charmaz, 2014)? The initial stage of coding was open and provisional, which allowed the author to acknowledge embodied and subject area knowledge. During initial coding, and all subsequent stages of coding, narratives were

coded by hand without software to ensure that the researchers stayed close to the data. The research team met regularly to engage in initial and focused coding. During meetings, the team would also discuss new insights generated by each team member, with an emphasis on highlighting gaps and uncovering potential categories (comparing codes with codes). Additionally, team meetings allowed space for processing reactions and considerations about positionality to the interviews. Toward the beginning of initial coding, research team members coded together as a collective, asking further questions to highlight the meaning of the narrative, and to instruct members new to qualitative research on the coding process. As team members became more comfortable with the data and the coding process, coding was conducted individually, with meetings focused on sharing reactions or clarifying portions of the narrative. Team members additionally engaged in memo-writing throughout the initial coding and transcription process. Memos were made by team members following coding individually and at the end of team meetings.

The most frequent of the initial codes were explicated in the focused coding stage (Charmaz, 2014). Additionally, initial codes that were most interesting or stood out were pulled for focused coding (e.g., doing political organizing, questioning identity). Focused coding provided clarification regarding the appropriateness and strength of the concepts in the initial codes (Charmaz, 2014). During this stage of analysis, the codes were integrated, and their relationships to one another explored (concepts are compared to concepts). For example, groups of focused codes related to engaging in activism (e.g., organizing, art-based activism, funding activism endeavors) were sorted and compared to one another. When indicated, codes with theoretical reach were elevated to the next level

of analysis (e.g., types of activism, approaches to activism). Discussions with the research team assisted in developing and validating categories and subcategories. Concepts that were conceptually strong and independent were determined to be tentative categories (e.g., Doing Activism, which was later termed Doing Black Liberation Work) while the concepts that supported that category (e.g., Organizing, Artivism) were separated into subcategories. Due to the importance of minimizing the influence of one's preconceptions on the codes, memo-writing, journaling, and team meetings were continued in this stage by all members of the research team.

Theoretical sampling commenced after these tentative categories—those indicating a theoretical direction—were agreed upon. In theoretical sampling, the data were sorted and applied to the tentative categories in the emerging theory. Additional data were pulled from the narratives to fill the categories, ensure they were complete and rich, and better illuminate the relationship between categories (Charmaz, 2014). This process served as a check of theoretical adequacy of the emerging categories (Charmaz, 2014). Categories without theoretical centrality were identified and removed from ongoing analysis. For example, although engaging with allies was identified as having theoretical plausibility, it was not central to the developing theory after closer assessment. At this stage of analysis, theoretical sampling included *abduction*, a process that involves making inferences about theoretical possibilities based on gaps in the data and then forming and testing related hypotheses. Once the theoretical categories were saturated, meaning they no longer led to new insights or properties, the researcher pursued theory development. Theoretical sorting and diagramming, as well as consultations with the research team, facilitated interpretation and theory construction. Upon co-construction of

the theory, draft writing commenced. Although the theory did not change as the draft was written, category names were altered to better explain the data. For example, Making Connections was originally named Opportunity Structures before it was finalized.

Attending to Psychopolitical Validity and Trustworthiness

Psychopolitical validity, while not a popular measure of validity in psychology as of yet (Prilleltensky, 2008), is a goal of the present study. Psychopolitical validity measures the degree to which research and practice considers and includes lessons on psychopolitical wellness and power (Prilleltensky, 2003, 2008; Prilleltensky & Fox, 2007). Two types of psychopolitical validity have been conceptualized. Epistemic validity focuses on whether research attends to global, political, and economic factors and their relationship to psychological wellness. Research that has epistemic psychopolitical validity addresses power dynamics and oppression. Transformative validity is more concerned with interventions and whether or not they are focused on liberation. With transformative validity, psychologists are evaluating how their interventions educate, empower, and otherwise move people toward a state of liberation.

The current study attended to epistemic psychopolitical validity in a number of ways. First, a thorough review of the racialized social system and its impact on Black wellness is articulated herein (see Chapter One). The contexts of Whiteness, White supremacy, and ABR at personal, relational, and collective levels are explored and illustrated. The use of CGT methods, which allow for and encourage the researcher to reflect on this knowledge base, also strengthens claims for psychopolitical validity. Charmaz (2014) argues that a CGT study can use concepts, such as power and

oppression, to lay a foundation for potential inquiry. Second, the study considered the role of one's social locations and environmental contexts on their development. Scheduling in-person interviews and engaging with participants at direct actions during recruitment provided a deeper understanding of the psychopolitical environment of the participant. In addition, the psychopolitical validity processes allowed the researcher a better understanding of how the participant perceives and responds to their surroundings. Finally, the Black feminist-womanist framework guiding the study encouraged researchers to allow participants opportunities for self-definition (Lindsay-Dennis, 2015). The protocol (see Appendix B) reflects this goal and serves as another illustration of the study's epistemic psychopolitical validity.

Measures of trustworthiness are also of critical importance in qualitative research (Morrow, 2005). Some measures of trustworthiness central to the present study include fairness, adequate data, and adequate interpretation (Morrow, 2005). Fairness requires the researcher to uncover and elevate multiple constructions regarding the research (Morrow, 2005). These data emanate from activists whose reach ranges from local, low-impact actions to international, high-impact actions. The diversity across social identity factors is another testament to trustworthiness of the final model. The purposeful sampling approach undertaken allowed for multiple narratives to be captured and elevated, ultimately enhancing adequacy of the data.

Credibility is increased when subjectivities are named explicitly (Morrow, 2005). Both the research team's reflexivity and the participants' open-ended disclosures are included herein, contributing to credibility. Credibility can also be achieved by interacting with participants over longer periods of time, observing their interactions

within the normal contexts in which they operate, and through coanalysis (Morrow, 2005). Intensive interviews were conducted with these participants, lasting an average of 73 minutes. For nine of the 12 participants, multiple days were spent in community with the researchers. For example, over the course of a weekend, Quess and the lead researcher attended a training and a Black joy-focused Juneteenth celebration together, and she witnessed and supported his spoken word poetry event while memoing throughout the process. The process was rigorous, and the memos serve as an audit trail of the interactions (Elder, Morrow, & Brooks, 2015). Finally, a team based coanalysis was utilized and was paramount to the process of initial and focused coding, increasing the adequacy of interpretation (Morrow, 2005).

Chapter Four: Results

Critical Consciousness of Anti-Black Racism (CCABR) development involves three overarching processes: Witnessing Anti-Black Racism (ABR), Processing ABR, and Acting Critically Against ABR. Our analysis uncovered two categories, each with unique properties, that are part of Witnessing ABR: Bearing Witness to ABR and Experiencing Racial Trauma. Processing ABR involved three categories of processing: Cognitive Growth, Intersectional Growth, and Behavioral Growth, and resulted in a fourth category of Increasing Agency. Finally, Acting Against ABR included two categories: Doing Black Liberation Work and Utilizing Black Racial Justice Activist Approaches to Activism. Table 3 explicates these categories.

Figure 2 illustrates the processes of CCABR. These data make clear the processes that a person who engages in critical action specific to Black racial justice moves through. From top to bottom, Figure 2 captures how participants advance in development. They start from a place of witnessing ABR, supported simply by whatever their individual identities, capacities (e.g., social, intellectual, emotional, physical), environments, and experiences up to that point allowed. While some Black people who witness ABR may process it through an internalized oppression lens, these activists processed ABR in a critical manner by moving through the following three processes: (a) increasing their cognitive capacities (by developing systemic and historical awareness), (b) developing an intersectional awareness (particularly with respect to their race, spirituality, gender, and sexuality), and (c) experiencing behavioral growth through coping with racial trauma and connecting with people and places that can expand their

Table 3: Categories and Processes in the Development of Critical Consciousness of Anti-Black Racism

Category	Subcategories	Processes
Witnessing ABR	Bearing Witness to ABR	Becoming aware of ABR through either direct lived experiences or through indirect methods such as consumption of media or family stories.
	Experiencing Racial Trauma	Experiencing a wide range of psychological and social outcomes as a result of witnessing ABR. *Experiencing Racial Trauma involves:* Internalizing ABR, Feeling Shame, Feeling Anxious and Traumatized, Feeling Angry, Feeling Sad, Feeling Exhausted, Feeling Disempowered, Lacking Safety, Being Othered, Experiencing Isolation, Having Relationships Weakened or Severed, Experiencing Division with Black Community.
Processing ABR	Cognitive Growth	Becoming aware of ABR as a longstanding systemic phenomenon by drawing linkages between ABR and White supremacy and, ultimately, increasing capacity for systemic and historical analyses of ABR. *Cognitive Grown involves:* Increasing Systemic and Historical Awareness and Committing to a Critical Stance.
	Intersectional Growth	Developing an intersectional self-awareness that changes the way one views and interacts with others. Requires an exploration of one's own Black identity, religious and/or spiritual identity, gender, and sexuality. *Intersectional Growth involves:* Developing Intersectional Self-Awareness and Committing to Intersectionality
	Behavioral Growth	Finding ways to cope with the personal experience of racial trauma. Becoming connected to people and settings that facilitate self and cultural awareness while actively working to develop a collective identity as a racial justice activist. *Behavioral Growth involves*: Coping with Racial Trauma and Making Connections
	Increasing Agency as a Result of Processing	Becoming committed to, and feeling increasingly capable of, responding to ABR in critical manner.
Acting Critically Against ABR	Doing Black Liberation Work	Engaging in behaviors that align with one's social identities, skills, contexts, and interests with the aim of preventing, resisting, and/or healing from ABR. *Doing Black Liberation Work involves*: Storying Survival, Spacemaking, Artivism, Coalition Building, Physical Resistance, Modeling/Mentoring, Organizing, Teaching, and Scholar-Activism
	Utilizing Black Racial Justice Activist Approaches to Activism	The context-specific, systemic, and intersectional approaches used by activists; often tied to their development in the Processing ABR categories. *Utilizing Black Racial Justice Activist Approaches to Activism involves:* Having Urgency, Being Self-Reflective, Specifying Focus, Being Actively Intersectional, Being Resourceful/Affording Activism, Contextualizing, Being Persistent, and Maintaining Future Orientation.

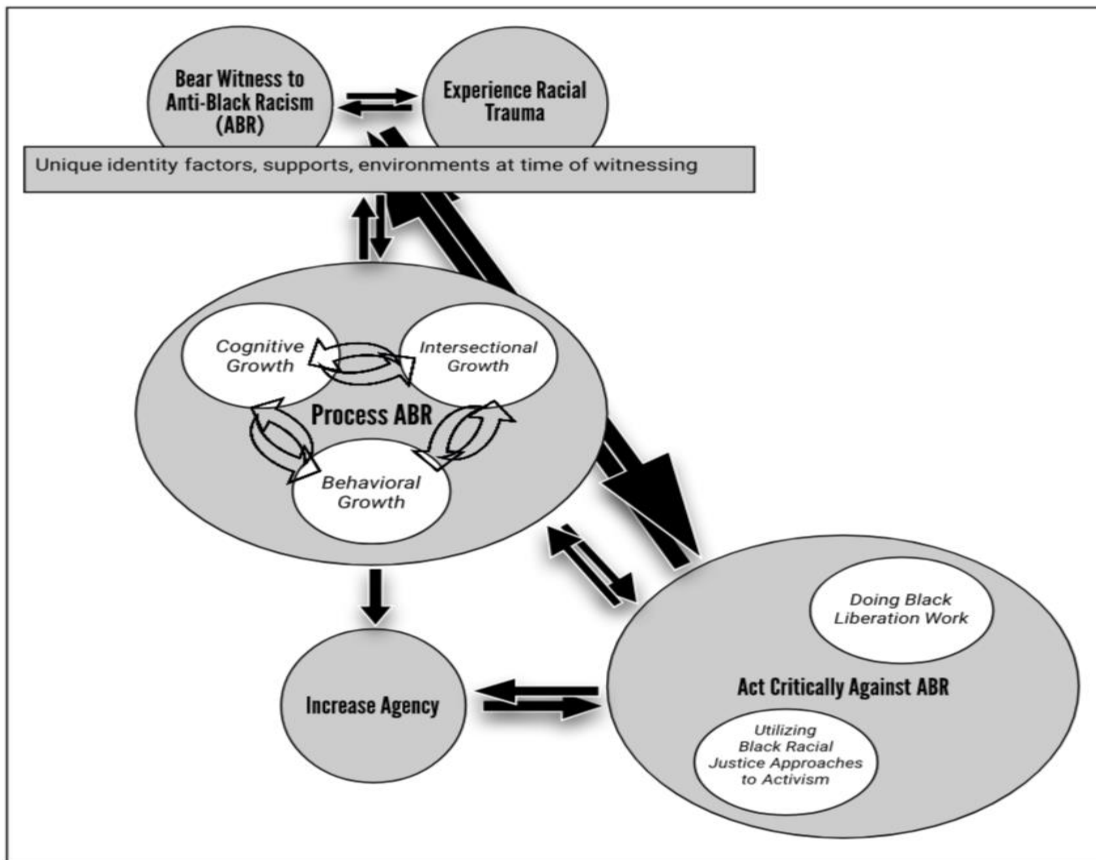

Figure 2: Critical consciousness of anti-Black racism model

capacity for coping and action. These processes are non-linear and cyclical. However, the deeper participants are able to engage in each, the greater self and collective agency they accrued to act against ABR.

Participants start at different places in the process and have varying degrees of access to growth promoting spaces for processing ABR. Therefore, some participants may have developed a historical awareness of racism before they experienced racial trauma. For example, Michelle's father nicknamed her "Little Angela Davis" and exposed her to agency-increasing knowledge about Black activism before she had her first experiences of ABR in school as a young girl herself. For others, they were exposed

to ABR, connected with people who could help them process their experiences, and then increased their agency as activists. Although the order was inconsistent, all participants moved through the identified categories. Furthermore, participants cycled back through previously experienced processes based on their contexts. Participants were constantly navigating ABR, which required them to return to witnessing, processing, and acting categories as the experiences warranted. Elena illuminated the fluidity of the process, noting, “Nothing is linear at all . . . it’s, like, more a context that evolves.” Evidence of the research team’s contribution to this co-constructed model is our presentation of the order of the model. The order illustrated in Table 3 represents the order that, from our coanalysis, allowed for participants to build upon prior processes most effectively. For example, Doing Black Liberation Work was more effective after Making Connections. To offer readers additional clarity of the processes involved in CCABR, each of the three overarching categories are accompanied by a chart that outlines its subcategories and processes.

Witnessing ABR Categories

Witnessing ABR, in the CCABR model, involved Bearing Witness to ABR and Experiencing Racial Trauma (see Figure 3). Witnessing ABR was important as the experiences provided participants with a critical lens to view ABR, setting them on a trajectory toward critical action. Because ABR is omnipresent, participants did not stop witnessing ABR or experiencing racial trauma after moving through these processes for the first time. Instead, as will be illustrated throughout this chapter, they often returned to these processes while processing ABR as well as engaging in critical action against ABR. The first process involves Bearing Witness to ABR.

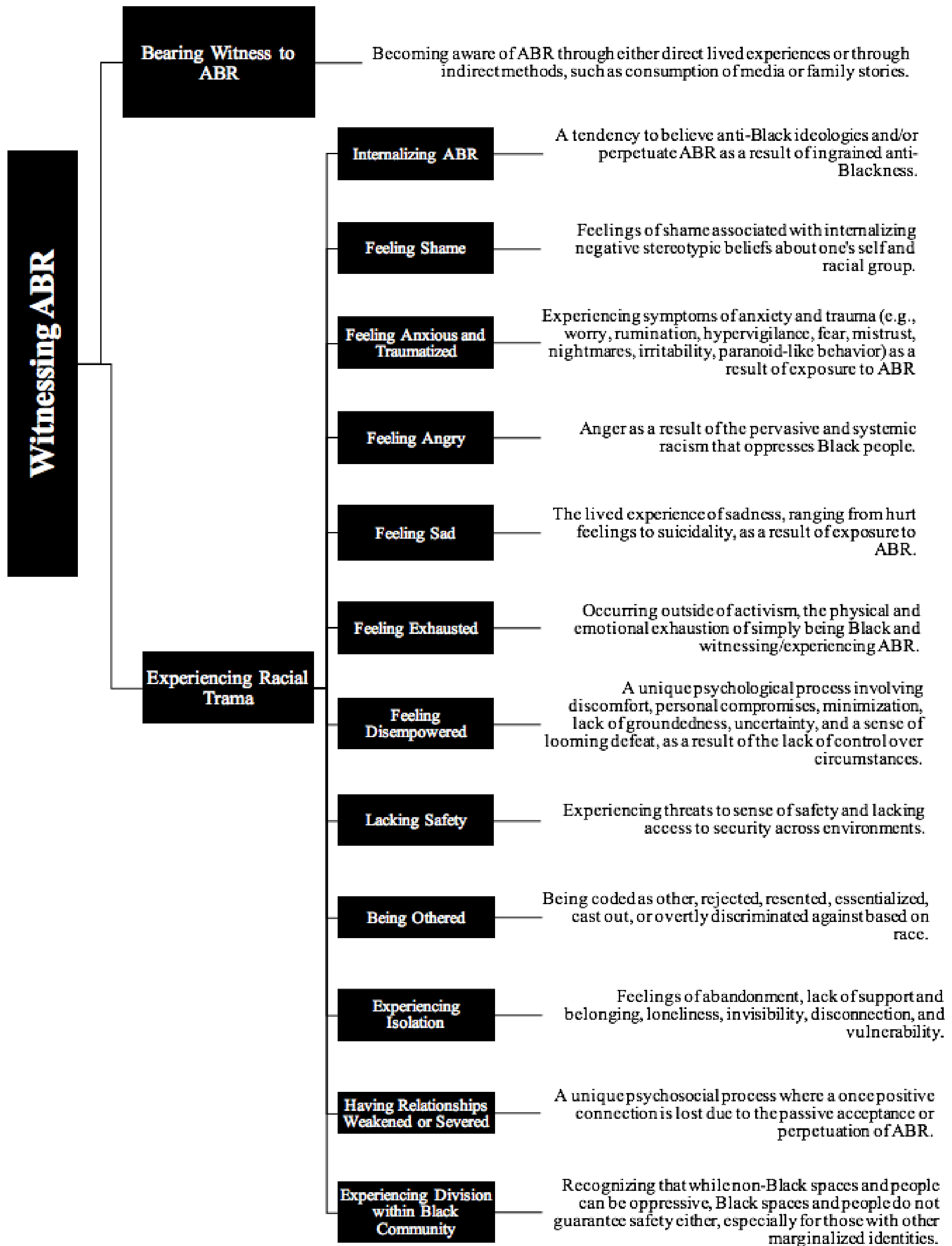

Figure 3: Witnessing anti-Black racism (ABR) chart

Bearing Witness to ABR: "I was called a nigger and people started throwing things at me."

Bearing witness to ABR personally is about witnessing (e.g., hearing, seeing, experiencing) ABR in an intimate manner. Whether participants bore witness to ABR that was perpetuated against them or bore witness through a storytelling process about ABR perpetuated against someone else, in person or through mediated forms, it involved making a personal connection to an experience of ABR. Participants bore witness to ABR early in life and repeatedly.

When ABR was experienced directly among this sample, it typically occurred at school, through family, and to a lesser extent at work. Stories of ABR began as early as kindergarten and went up through graduate education. Because these experiences began so early for some participants, they often witnessed ABR firsthand without having a cognitive understanding or memorable forewarning of it. Bearing witness to ABR in schools was the most prevalent set of codes in this category. Participants described bearing witness to personally mediated racism from peers and authority figures. They were discriminated against, tracked, stereotyped, and criminalized in these educational settings. Michael describes an early experience of bearing witness to ABR personally in school. He shared:

> I had a teacher in the ninth grade. I have always been a geek, but a cool geek. I used to wear blazers in ninth grade just like a geek. I used to carry a briefcase and I had an art teacher who went to the principal, who happened to be Black, and said that I come to class and I open up my briefcase like I have drugs or something in it. I am like, "Okay, I am in honors classes, doing well and the assumption was I must do drugs because I am a Black student in a school." Now this was a majority White school and majority of the Black students that were in the school came from public housing. I happen to be one of the students who walked to school. A couple of times when the buses were leaving the teachers would be like "Oh, Mike, you are going to miss your bus." I would say, "Well, I

> walk." They would be like, "Oh, you live in the neighborhood?" We were one of the first Black families in the neighborhood, but it was made clear to me that I wasn't supposed to be one of the Black kids that moved in, more like bussed in.

For Michael, he not only had to endure ABR, but he thought through it, making connections between his actual identity (e.g., geek who lives in the neighborhood) and his perceived identity (e.g., drug user who lives in public housing) that helped him to understand ABR. Experiences like this were common. For Laina, she bore witness to ABR personally much sooner, explaining that at 5 years old she faced overt racism. She stated, "I mean the first day I got on the bus I was called a nigger and people started throwing things at me." These experiences contending with ABR were formative for participants.

Other participants may not have experienced ABR firsthand; however, they bore witness personally because they heard the stories directly from their Black family members. Their core support system shared with them about White supremacy and ABR, and did so in a manner that stuck with them. Aaron shared about how he bore witness to ABR initially through his grandmother's storytelling. He stated:

> My grandma, 'cause she come, she grew up from Melrose, Louisiana. Moved to Rockford in, like, 1944, somewhere around then. So, just being in the house with Granny, she's talking about what's going on and why this happens and why this doesn't happen. And it's, you know, because White folks don't like this or that and, you know, they're not gonna let a Black man do this or that. So, we hear it so constant. We realize, like, okay, this is something that we need to be aware of.

This personal bearing witness was significant. Aaron did not simply hear the stories his grandmother told, but he took meaning from them. He went on to discuss how bearing witness to his grandmother early on helped him when he personally had a direct experience of being criminalized at a neighborhood candy store by a White security

guard. He shared the story of being profiled at age 8 or 9 and then concluded, "That's when you realize, like, okay he's White. I'm Black. Granny told me. There it is."

Work also was a place where participants bore witness to ABR; however, participants discussed fewer instances of ABR at work than at school. Seemingly, fewer work codes were present because by the time the participants entered the world of work they were describing bearing witness in more systemic manners and/or had disconnected (a common coping response after bearing witness to ABR) from settings where ABR was prevalent. However, those who did share about bearing witness to ABR at work also described serious consequences, such as loss of work opportunities, loss of income, and exhaustion. For example, Geo described bearing witness to ABR personally at work with the help of a faculty member. She narrated:

> Then I ended up making friends with one of my professors, who is one of the only Black tenured professors at this school and really gaining some of my voice back through there and being supported by him. Cause right now they're demoting me because I don't have my master's, which is their excuse. And he was on the search committee and basically like called them out and they couldn't explain things to him. He was just like, "So why are you replacing Geo?" And they're like, "That's not what they're doing, she was on board with this." And I'm like, "I wasn't on board with this, you told me I can't apply because I don't have a master's. You completely eliminated me from the process, but you gave me great reviews. So, I'm not understanding what's happening." And he was like, "Yeah, I don't understand why you didn't offer her help to go to grad school or why some sort of contract wasn't . . ." And they were like, "Oh well the way student affairs works . . ." And he was like, "I think this is all bullshit and you all should check your racism right now."

For Geo, being demoted as a student affairs staff member, and having a Black faculty member draw connections to ABR with and for her, was an experience of bearing witness to ABR personally.

Participants sometimes bore witness to ABR through indirect and impersonal methods. Although these experiences were less intimate than the direct methods

discussed above, they still provided opportunities for critical reflection of personally mediated ABR. When bearing witness to ABR occurred indirectly, it typically occurred through public dialogue (e.g., discussion among peers, public speakers), their immediate environments (e.g., slurs written on buildings, anti-Black signage), or the media (e.g., witnessing the Rodney King beating on the news, witnessing police involved killing of Black people on social media). Although no one was speaking to the participant directly about ABR, nor perpetuating ABR in an interpersonal manner, these indirect experiences still made an impact. For example, Elena had to reconcile what it meant that "In Quebec, we were, until last summer, we were the only province that had places in the province still with the word 'nigger' in it." Participants made meaning of those indirect ABR experiences and discussed them as being of importance to their critical consciousness development. However, witnessing ABR also led participants to experience racial trauma.

Experiencing Racial Trauma: "On several levels there are various justifications for my death."

Although witnessing ABR served as a barrier to wellness in many ways, experiencing the psychosocial consequences of racial trauma seemed to contribute to participants' motivation for engaging in activism. The psychological processes delineated by participants include: (1) internalizing ABR, (2) feeling shame, (3) feeling anxious and traumatized, (4) feeling angry, (5) feeling sad, (6) feeling exhausted, and (7) feeling disempowered. The social processes delineated by participants include: (1) lacking safety, (2) being othered, (3) experiencing isolation, (4) having relationships weakened or severed, and (5) experiencing division within Black community. Although

physiological processes were described by some participants in conjunction with their description of the psychological and social processes, the narratives on physiological experiences of racial trauma were generally second-hand (e.g., a co-worker's physical exhaustion, death by murder of Black community members) and were not robust enough to warrant their own subcategory.

Internalizing ABR. Participants described an awareness of both the chronic cognitive and emotional burden of overt and covert forms of racism. However, they reflected on times in their past when they and others in their lives experienced ABR without having a full cognitive understanding of what was occurring. For example, Lauren offered a story of experiencing ABR as a child and reflected on her lack of language for what it was she was experiencing at the time. She noted:

> The first time I was called a nigger I was in kindergarten. A little White girl pushed me down and rubbed mud on me and called me a dirty nigger. So that is an experience that I don't think a lot of my colleagues have had. And I think that has shaped me as I continued through academia, which is also an exceptionally White place. . . This did not start as a multicultural class in grad school for me. This started before I knew what that word was.

Their worldview was changed as a result of their exposure, and they sometimes internalized negative beliefs and stereotypes about their racial group until their racial awakening occurred. For example, Laina reflected on the internalization, asserting, "We are so ingrained with the fact that we are nothing that we believe it." Micah also illustrated an awareness of the way Black people internalize and perpetuate ABR, stating, "It was mind boggling to see how we internalize and become internally oppressed and, and really hurt ourselves and hurt our own community." Participants overall discussed struggles with their sense of self-esteem during this time and feeling disheartened by the ways they or other Black people can become complicit in upholding Whiteness.

The point at which one no longer internalizes, but has a broader understanding of ABR, is what many participants deemed as their awakening or when they became "woke." Aaron described this period where he was unaware and internalizing negative beliefs about self as "sleepwalking." He noted:

> There's a system of circumstances that we go through, you know, being Black, being impoverished, being . . . not having enough money to decide what you really want to do. Once you realize that that system is in play and you can see a way around it or you have a motivation to be outside of that, you're awake. You go through several things in life that will wake you or that will push you or that will put you on a path, and once you have that experience you'll realize, okay, up until that point I was kinda sleepwalking through life.

Feeling shame. Participants reported feeling shame, both as a result of internalizing stereotypic beliefs about themselves and their racial group as well as, after experiencing an awakening around how ABR operates, feeling shame for their previous internalized beliefs. Laina highlighted this latter form of shame reflecting on her actions and decision to write a book on Black women's resistance through heavy metal:

> I had to check myself this year and say who am I doing this for? Am I doing this to prove to them that I'm not stupid? Or am I doing this for myself? And that's a hard thing because I feel a level of shame because I think that some of the stuff that I've done in my life was to please others and not myself.

Some participants, like Laina, recognized how they had internalized White supremacist and anti-Black beliefs on their own.

Feeling anxious and traumatized. Many participants articulated feeling anxious and/or traumatized due to their exposure to ABR. A wide range of symptoms associated with anxiety and trauma were reported. Participants experienced symptoms of anxiety (e.g., worry, rumination, hypervigilance, fear) and trauma (e.g., mistrust, nightmares, irritability) and, given their awareness of how ABR contributed to their symptomatology, they expected other Black people to suffer in a similar manner. Sleep disturbances and

nightmares were also reported consequences of ABR. Paranoid-like behaviors were common among participants. Geo reflected on her experience of anxiousness in college:

> I feel like all Black people at some point, especially if you're in college, you live in this state of paranoia where you feel like you're given this too much attention. You don't know if this is real. Like is this really happening? Are they really looking me this way? Am I the only person who thinks this? Like constantly . . . it's not even a reflection at that point. It's damaging to constantly have to overthink and overcompensate but also be respectable and polite.

For Geo, her anxiousness was described as a constant experience, a state in which she lived. However, living in a constant state of "paranoia" can have physical consequences. Micah shared that he "had to manage" his physical symptoms of anxiety at the age of 16 when he was diagnosed with an ulcer. Furthermore, Black men participants tended to recognize and name their experience as trauma. Although he did not report a formal PTSD diagnosis, Aaron acknowledged the prevalence of trauma among Black men. Aaron shared that "a lot of people who go through post-traumatic stress disorder, we'd see eye-to-eye. And I think that's a common thing with Black men, period and Black people in life in general."

A particular anxiousness about premature death and imprisonment among participants existed. Our Black racial justice activists feared for their lives, reported living in fear, expected to die prematurely, anticipated being the target of police surveillance, and foresaw themselves experiencing imprisonment. Elena spoke candidly about the fear of imprisonment, sharing, "I always felt like, at some point, I would be in prison. I don't know why. It came, it was kind of like, one day, it will happen, and it's a fear that I've been walking with all my life." Similarly, Michelle offered an anecdote about the ease with which people could justify her death. She shared that "at any point, somebody is going to have a problem with me when I wake up. You know? And on

several levels there are various justifications for my death." Taken together, participants experience a number of psychological symptoms that serve as a barrier to their wellness.

Feeling angry. Participants also experienced anger in response to ABR. They were aware of the differential treatment, poor resources, and other micro- and macro-aggressions they and other Black people faced and felt anger. For many participants, their anger originated in school-based experiences of ABR. Whether they recognized a different quality of resources being given to them than to non-Black students or heard a White student use the n-word, Black participants experienced anger in response to ABR at young ages. Participants responded to feelings of anger on a continuum. Anger could call forth an externally-oriented resistance behavior in some participants or facilitate an internal (more cognitive) process driven by a desire to contain or manage anger privately in others. Irrespective of personal choices and outcomes, the anger served to move participants toward engagement in critical action. Quess provided an example of how the processing of anger related to ABR was a motivator for racial justice action. He shared:

> I've always been so cerebral in my head and then at a point . . . it's like everything that was in my head just felt like it needed some manifesting. It needed to be put out because it's like either that or curse out Don Lemon and CNN all day. It's like nah we can get out here and actually do shit.

Feeling sad. Our participants experienced sadness and reported having a depressed mood due to their awareness of and exposure to ABR. In terms of severity, participants covered a spectrum from describing hurt feelings to recognizing they were on the brink of attempting suicide. Although she lamented stigma about getting help and lack of access to therapists who would understand her experience, Geo recognized her feelings as likely tied to depression. She disclosed, "I'm depressed. Everything sucks. I can't eat. I can't sleep. I'm having panic attacks." For Geo and other participants, the

emotions that emerged in the context of ABR led to a range of coping responses that served to promote Black wellness and Black racial justice. Their sadness or depression was a lived experience that, whether or not it immobilized them for a period, was ultimately tied to their progression as activists.

Feeling exhausted. Physical and emotional exhaustion were commonplace in participants' narratives. Feeling exhausted, here, refers to exhaustion that occurred outside of one's activism, simply due to being Black and witnessing or experiencing ABR. Participants often had to engage with racism in multiple contexts. They described (1) feeling pressure to explain or justify themselves or their racial group, (2) fighting for respect and their human dignity to be honored, and (3) witnessing the ease with which White people were able to complete similar tasks in the absence of ABR. These experiences wore on participants emotionally and physically. Elena mused about the energy loss associated with living in a racist society. She asked, "If racism didn't happen, what would I be? Cause so much of my energy is spent in this."

Feeling disempowered. By definition, ABR reflects a lack of power and experiencing oppression based on your race. However, the feeling of disempowerment is a unique psychological process that participants grappled with. Participants recognized the lack of control they had in many contexts and the feeling of disempowerment emerged. Disempowerment involves discomfort, personal compromises, minimization, a lack of groundedness, uncertainty, and a sense of looming defeat. Quess shared about how ABR within the school system disempowered his mom and led to his own feelings of disempowerment related to how he would engage with her about systemic racism.

> My moms was not woke in a political sense, she was not. She still learn shit from me to this day that I kinda have to get back to her. But she's woke in a way

> where like she knows it, but she knows what she's gotta do to survive. You know what I'm saying? And so, she knows the school shit is fucked up and I be like, "Ma, Ma . . ." and if I push too long she gone break down and then that's when I realize oh I can't do that. That's why she does what she does because actually she knows about the corruption in this system. She watched a whole bunch of her friends get fired from Atlanta to New York when they came in and gentrified and privatized those systems. Her biggest fear is that that would happen to her. You feel me? So far be it for me to come in there talking about, "Nah this is the bullshit, this the system and we gotta leave." And it's like, gotta leave? Like my whole life is grounded on this.

In this example, Quess reflected on how his mom is aware of the ways in which systemic racism has reduced wellness for other Black employees in the school system and how she is stuck in that system nonetheless. Recognizing that his own wellness has been based on his mom's ability to make a personal compromise and maintain employment in a corrupt system helps him moderate his expectations for her, despite his discomfort. Feeling disempowered certainly provided an experiential frame of reference for many participants.

Lacking safety. Transitioning from psychological to social processes, lacking safety was a socially based experience of racial trauma described by participants. Interviewees described feeling unsafe in the U.S. broadly. They provided detail of the ways in which predominantly White spaces, known racist environments, and even communities that were intended to be healing presented threats to their sense of safety and security. This experience of racial trauma was particularly significant as the absence of safety was a constant in the lives of participants, from within their own neighborhoods, to their school and work settings, to their observance of broader systems. Conigan offered a contextually rich example of how a lack of safety played out in Chicago in the aftermath of the Laquan McDonald shooting and the cover-up trial. He shared his immediate reactions and ongoing reflections related to safety:

> It didn't hurt the same as the first time. Because you get so used to it and then you start to realize like all of the stuff that came out in the open. It's like the mayor's been hiding over 400 deaths, crimes, incidents since your attempt to be re-elected. . . So, you could ensure your re-election. But these families have been sitting here hurting and all you did was throw cash at them. . . The things that he's done has like forever crippled a lot of the faith that people in Chicago have in authority, hence all the murders now. Nobody's going to respect a police . . . police officers are not coming to the hood anymore. The hood is like the projects used to be in Chicago. They're not coming to protect you anymore; they're only coming to shoot. They're not coming for minor . . . so now people are not safe in their own neighborhoods because the authority that we were taught to respect . . . doesn't have that anymore. And now everybody's running rampant.

This passage not only reflected the absence of physical safety and protection but also touched on what it means to live with the understanding that safety and security is inaccessible. Similarly, Michelle used the metaphor of war to describe her perpetual sense of unsafety: "Every day we wake up we feel like we're in this war zone. And that's what I'm saying, I feel like I am at war every single day." Lacking safety is an experience of racial trauma that was pervasive among participants.

Being othered. Another social process of racial trauma involves being othered. Participants were coded as other and rejected on the basis of their race at all stages of life. Reports of being rejected, resented, essentialized, not fitting in, and cast as an outsider were common in among participants. Sometimes othering was the result of overt discrimination and other times it was subtle and potentially stemming from more implicit biases. Because ABR can be perpetuated by anyone, there were stories shared where White, Black, and people of other races and ethnicities engaged in othering. Geo recalled an overt example where she experienced othering from within the Latinx community.

> There is just so much anti-Blackness from Dominican people, and they're all fucking Black. But some may be lighter and hair not as kinky as mine, and you speak Spanish you just kind of disassociate yourself. So, we would go to salons, and these Dominican women, some of them would be calling her racist things in Spanish or talking about her hair not knowing that my mom knew exactly what

> they were saying. So that kind of thing would happen a lot. Or we would go into these Spanish restaurants and the same kind of thing that happened at that Friday's would happen in the Bronx where we would be sitting at the counter and they'd be like we don't see you and somebody would have to say something in Spanish and they would be like, "Oh okay."

Othering is an experience of racial trauma that left participants feeling isolated.

Experiencing isolation. Participants reported existing in spaces where they regularly felt isolated. Some of the words and themes that recurred include abandonment, lack of support, lack of belonging, loneliness, invisibility, disconnection, and vulnerability. Participants often described feeling sad as a result of the isolation and articulated their need for social support in various contexts. Participants spoke about being the only Black person in a class or the only Black person with a seat at the table in their careers. For example, Micah disclosed his thoughts about the passing of a Black woman in his department who was isolated for much of her career and how he thought about his own isolation after her death:

> There was one other um Black faculty member hired at VCU. Because it's a young school in a sense of um psychology, maybe 25 years, something like that. I can't remember what it is now, and Maxine um was just a gift and Max was a fighter. I mean sister was a fighter. And my daughter had just been born. We're over her house she had a old swing set she wanted to give to us and she, she passed away the next day. And I knew her passing was because of, I felt some system things that were done in psychology that just hurt her to her heart. And for her to have the heart attack or the aneurism, they weren't sure what it was, to die like that, you know, just really reminded me: one, you've gotta fight these battles. But we just can't own 'em the way they kill us. You gotta have good self-care. You've gotta have good community. And so, I watched her die alone. She was the only. And I then became the next only.

As will be outlined in the section on coping, experiencing isolation is a part of CCABR because feeling isolated moves individuals toward connection and community.

Having relationships weakened or severed. The experiences of racial trauma described by participants often had relational costs. While disconnection is a method of

coping that will be discussed in the next section, the experience of having one's relationships weakened or severed is a unique psychosocial process itself. Participants described having colleagues who were not open to them or friends who allowed or enacted ABR in their presence. This experience of racial trauma is different from isolation in that participants moved from a place of having or expecting a positive connection to the experience of loss and an absence of connection. One example of weakened relationships comes from Laina, who shared about how ABR shaped her past and current connection to her adoptive parents.

> And even to this day . . . I don't have a very good relationship with my family now. However, in the years past, if I were to even mention that, they would get really defensive. They would. And I'm like, "this is me!" I'm talking about me and who I am. And, and it's been, because of . . . like I remember I had . . . it was like grade four or five . . . and we, we [read] *Huckleberry Finn* and every time the teacher would say the word nigger, he'd look at me. And I remember going back to my mother, even though I knew . . . and I said, "can you tell this teacher not to do that?" I would just, instead of saying, "Mommy this happened." I just would have to say, yeah, could you just say, "Stop!" My mom, "Oh, well that's just a book and that's history." And she wouldn't do it.

Laina's early experiences stuck with her and reflect a relational loss with psychosocial consequences. When relationships were weakened or severed due to ABR, participants felt hurt, disrespected, disappointment, and betrayed, and lost faith in people.

Experiencing division within Black community. Black people are diverse. The African diaspora includes people from different geographic locations who have diverse identities aside from race (e.g., ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion) and possess different worldviews. As such, the four social processes associated with racial trauma described above (Lacking Safety, Being Othered, Experiencing Isolation, and Having Relationships Weakened or Severed) were all also present within the Black community. The examples provided in the current subsection included references to the division

within the Black community (e.g., the unsafe Chicago hood referenced by Conigan, the Afro-Latinas who othered Geo). However, this subcategory is highlighted individually to underline the fact that predominantly Black space was not necessarily protective.

Our participants experienced psychosocial consequences even when surrounded by Blackness. Indeed, the division within Blackness was particularly devastating because of the prevalence of racial trauma in so many other spaces. Furthermore, participants were acutely aware of how racial trauma had divided their people and experienced this as a loss. For example, Michelle was aware of the division among Black people and expressed appreciation for the Black bank movement. She said, "You know, people are going to Black banks, and things like that. And I think that we should be that way because we're the only community that is so decentralized." In addition to decentralization, which is a function of White supremacy and colonialism, several other factors were noted as contributing to the division among Black people.

Participants discussed ruptures and divisions among people who shared a Black identity. They described a desire for belonging and connection within the Black community. For instance, Geo, who identifies as Honduran and Black, gave a rich description of her attempts at finding connection with other Black classmates:

> There is a very specific American Black culture, right, and I didn't know this growing up. I was like you're Black. I'm Black. We all eat rice and beans and chicken. So, learning those differences and confronting that very early on like going to school and even having your friends talk about what they're watching on TV. Everyone was watching like *106 & Park* and I'm like what's *106 & Park*? And I'm like watching novelas and listening to Luis Guerra or something like that and they're listening to totally different things. I feel like for a long time I was trying to assimilate into American Black culture and trying like to almost finesse my way in.

For Geo, her ethnic identity and culture left her on the outside of the Black cultural experience of her peers. The tendency to prioritize a particular performance of Blackness (such as hip-hop culture in Geo's case), colorism, classism, language barriers, heterosexism, gender differences, and nativism represent some of the barriers to connection these Black interviewees faced in the company of other Black people.

Processing ABR Categories

Participants engaged in a number of growth-enhancing processes that helped them to process ABR at a systemic level, understand themselves as intersectional beings, and increase their capacity for coping. The cognitive-, intersectional-, and behavioral-growth related processes explicated herein occurred in no consistent order among all participants. However, processing ABR in each area contributed to an increased sense of self and collective agency for participants, ultimately leading to more critical actions against ABR. Figure 4 illustrates the areas of Processing ABR.

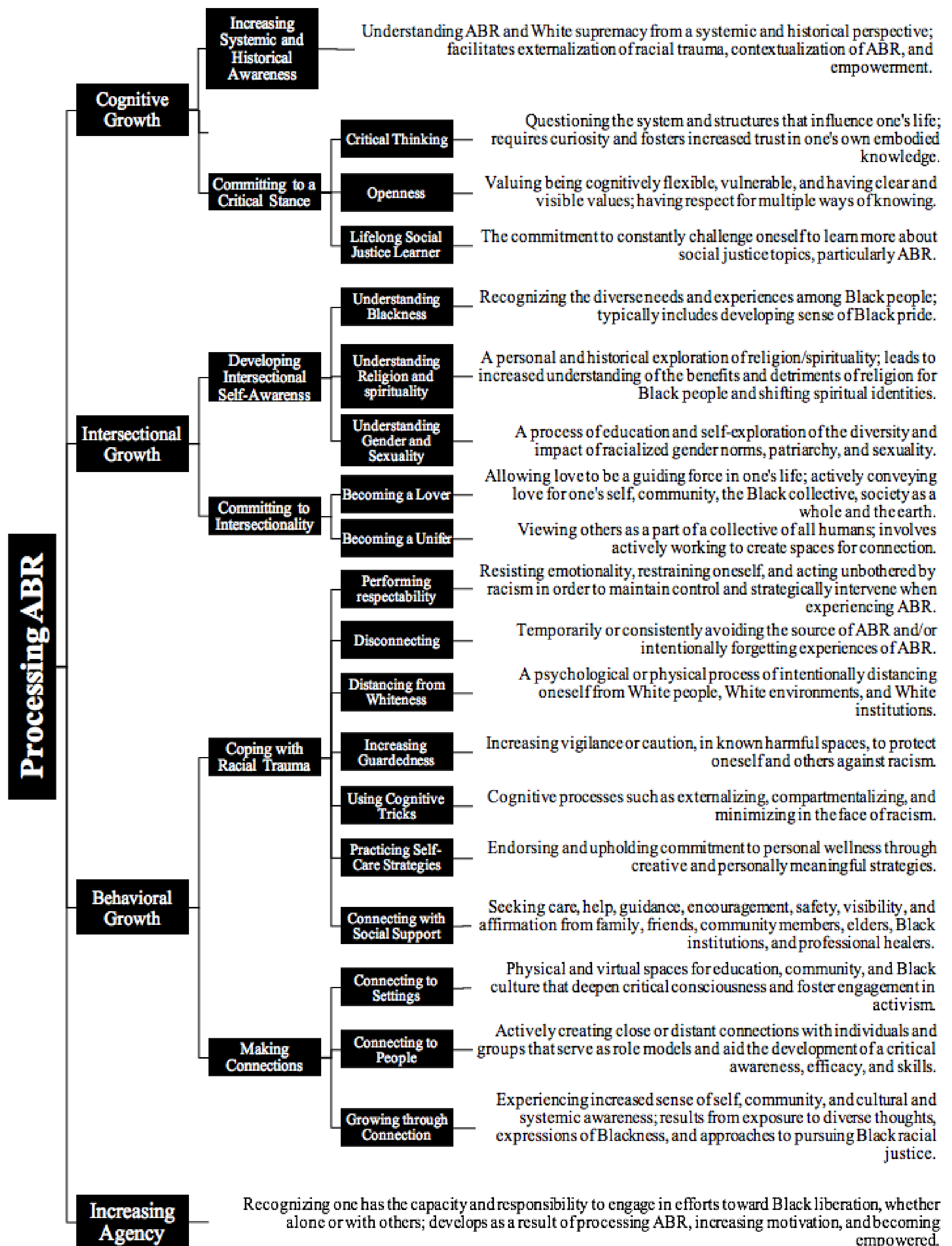

Figure 4: Processing anti-Black racism (ABR) chart

Cognitive Growth: "We all realized that it wasn't us. It was something larger and systemic . . ."

CCABR involved cognitive growth processes. Participants increased their awareness and knowledge of ABR as a systemic, versus simply interpersonal, phenomenon. Cultivating historical awareness facilitated in this process as well. In order for participants to ultimately advance from witnessing ABR to acting critically against it, they made a commitment to being critical, open, and a lifelong social justice learner.

Increasing systemic and historical awareness. Participants began to draw linkages between ABR and White supremacy and, ultimately, understanding ABR as a systemic phenomenon with a deep history. Increasing systemic and sociohistorical awareness was a process that allowed participants to make connections between their personal experience of ABR and racial trauma, and to externalize those experiences.

To illustrate the difference between Bearing Witness to ABR and these cognitive growth processes, recall Michael. Michael was accused of doing drugs because he was Black and carried a briefcase. The following passage picks up after his telling of that schoolhouse experience.

> Della: When do you think you realized that it wasn't just something that was happening to you, or at that school, but it was a systematic thing?
>
> Michael: Probably multiple of the times. Probably the most resilient time was my first year in graduate school. I went to Morehouse in undergrad, and three of my closest friends were in graduate programs at different places. One was in med school at John Hopkins, one was in med school at Ole Miss and one was in the Public Health program at Yale. I was doing my PhD program at Emory and we were talking on the phone. Back in the day it was a three-way conversation and you would have to tap people in and we would say, "Oh my gosh, that is happening to you there?" "And happening to you there?" We all realized that it wasn't us. It was something larger and systemic in different types of programs as well.

Like Michael, participants bore witness to ABR repeatedly and in varied contexts. In doing so they came to better understand Whiteness, White supremacy and the systemic nature of ABR. They valued opportunities to increase their understanding of the way power is structured and how it impacts Black lives.

ABR was described as an inescapable phenomenon that showed up across generations, across ages, across mediums and ideologies. Although it was ubiquitous, participants were able to understand the systemic nature of ABR and make connections to their own personal experiences of ABR. Elena's quote about bearing witness at a conference is poignant:

> I would go to conferences where they would speak about Black realities, and I would be in the room full of other Black people who would say, "Mm-hmm (affirmative)," at the same times as me. And it's like, "Okay, we share this together." "Okay, you live that, too. Oh, shit, this is real."

This quote illustrates the validation that came for many participants from bearing witness systemically. It allowed for externalizing and appeared to aid in coping with ABR.

Once aware of the systemic nature of anti-Blackness, participants were tuned in and able to bear witness to it in the many ways that ABR manifests. Participants noted bearing witness to several expressions and consequences of systemic ABR (e.g., invisibility, internalized racism). Geo provided an example of her increasing understanding of how systemic ABR results in invisibility. She shared:

> I think art has been tremendously important. I think like going to museums early on was really important because that was the first institution that I really started to question, "Why can't we touch things here? Why are all these people dead? Why are all these people old, White, dead men?" and really having to find my own space in art.

Participants like Michael, Elena, and Geo bore witness to the systemic nature of ABR while critically reflecting on their experience and making personal and historical connections.

Making historical connections was an important aspect of the cognitive growth processes in CCABR. In order to make such historical connections, our participants first had to value history and ancestry and then practice making historical connections as they analyzed their environments and experiences. Valuing history and using it to contextualize often led to an increased sense of empowerment and strengthened participants psychosocially.

Participants repeatedly reflected a high regard for factual and historical ways of understanding their lived experiences and environments. They believed it was important to understand one's own ancestral history, the history salient to their racial and/or ethnic group, as well as U.S. and world history. Elena described the importance of knowing history and its connections to her family and personal identity. She shared:

> My parents, being from Haiti and growing up most of their lives into the Duvalier era, who was the dictator. I don't know if you know about that. It was the father in 1957 that took control of the country by being and becoming a dictator. And he was really popular, and he was known by the community. And he was the first one, I think the first one, really considered a Black president—because a lot were, uh, mixed or light-skinned—and who really wanted to give power to people who are Black. At first, he had that discourse. This is what I remember, but I'm not super good with history. You know, but it's so important actually, so I want to fix that.

While in this example, the historical analysis was tied to her family's identity as Haitian, Elena explicitly named her value of historical knowledge. Many sought this knowledge from their family and noted a lack of historical accuracy emanating from their formal schooling. The present category not only highlighted the importance of understanding

history, but also analyzing the ways in which history influenced one's identity and experiences. For example, Erica noted how her process of "searching self" was enriched through learning her family history:

> I think about my role as a part of a larger group. I need to understand myself as an individual. And so, taking the time to . . . my aunt loves to kind of give story about my grandmother and her mother and she's kind of the historian uh for our family. And so even her anecdotal stories I feel like provide me with rich information about the lineage of women and men that I came from. And so just even asking general questions about my family was really helpful.

When exposed to accurate and historical facts about their family, community, or broader world, participants would appreciate the new knowledge they acquired, and, because they could apply it to their current experiences, they saw value in accruing more historical knowledge. Laina valued history to the degree that she believed one could not deem themselves "woke" or critically conscious if they did not engage with history. She defined being woke as being "aware of the kind of issues that we are facing . . . not only at a specific time like contemporary time, but also historically."

As our participants' historical knowledge expanded, their ability to contextualize in a way that utilized those historical connections increased. Their awareness became enriched due to their ability to draw on history in their analyses. For example, Lamin, who was exposed to a great deal of Black history from his grandparents, aunt, and uncle growing up, noted:

> Everybody wants to march but don't want to look at the long term. And, again, we have our textbooks to blame, our history books to blame, all of that. If they look back at the '50s, '60s and '70s, if they look back at that, all they see is King marching, but they don't see King in the White House. Don't see King with mayor of you know, some racist parts of the town. They don't see him at the tables . . . and I think that would change a lot.

Because Lamin had a more robust historical account of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s sociopolitical involvement, he could make connections to his own current experiences. In this example, Lamin's historical awareness served to underscore the importance of engaging with political leaders to work toward change over the "long term" in addition to participating in marches, which is typically considered a short-term action. Similar to Lamin, many participants contextualized their current narratives and experiences by making historical connections. For example, in this excerpt from Micah he discussed a personal moment of awakening and tied it to moments of awakening that he perceived other Black people who are known for their pursuit of Black liberation:

> I went to the dean and I was livid and hot like, "This is just totally unfair." And he's like, "You know, you don't realize you know, you're, you're brilliant and we know it, you're the one who doesn't know it." And it was like, "What?!" . . . What he said to me was, "It's not what you do, it's what you do with what's done." And that became, I think, a piece of me . . . And so as I've come back and looked at many of our elders, you know they, she and he have done great things. You can see that quite often they will respond. I love the Black Panther, *Black Power Mixtape*. It's done from a Swedish perspective and what I love to look at. I understand Stokely [Carmichael] coming after Martin [Luther King, Jr.] and making it better. And then they brought Angela [Davis] in and she sits there, and that Swedish dude comes in there to interview her and she spanks him with knowledge. What I realized was that's when she awoke in a way which I don't think she was conscious of, as well as anybody. And it was like she just did it because he was putting his foolishness in front of her. But her rhetoric, her response and her brilliance then propelled her to a whole 'nother being. And I'm like, there it is again. "It's what you do with what you're dealt with." And she was sitting falsely accused and put in jail. What did she do with it? She came out a stronger sister. Catalyst moment you know? And then you can just go back. And I've kind of done that, just looking at folk and realizing. Okay Booker T. [Washington], you know he moves to Tuskegee and he has this moment here. What happens with it? And you can see how he had to pull Carter G. Woodson in because he knew, "I need this." And you could see some victories, you could see some failures and that's been a good piece.

Micah had a personal experience where he was challenged to make the most of his situation and contextualized it with respect to how other Black current and historical

figures grew from similar “catalyst moments.” Being able to put one’s own experiences within a Black historical framework appeared to be motivational.

Historical connections provided a source of strength and empowerment for participants. Participants’ knowledge of familial and racial history was a source of pride that they drew strength from in the face of oppression. Some discussed their ties to key people or moments in the history of the diaspora, particularly those tied to liberation. In addition, when they engaged in activism at different times throughout their lives they reflected on the historical significance of those moments as well. Elena illustrated this point well. She shared:

> I have a fear of having kids one day and . . . and my kids ask me, “What did you do?” Because we’re, like, not often really aware of the situation when we’re in it. So, our era, we can be active, but we don’t always have the overall context and it’s like, the future generation that will be having that privilege of knowing all the context and knowing, like, what those people did. So, I’m like, if my kids say, like, “But what did you do? Like, all of this was happening in your era, Mommy, and, like, what did you do?” And I could, I would never be okay with being, like, “Oh, I just worked, I just couldn’t deal with it.” I can’t have this answer.

Indeed, participating in actions and movements for Black liberation at a time projected to have future significance was important to our participants. Thinking historically also provided a sense of connection to their ancestors, whom they recognized had also been in active in Black liberation.

> But my mom side is like Garifuna, those are the Black people who ended up on the coast of Central America so the bottom of Guatemala, Belize, and Honduras. They’re descendants from like slaves that committed mutiny on the ships and killed their ship captains and the slave holders or whatever. And they ended up in the Caribbean and built communities with indigenous people there and got kicked out by the British. So, they technically were never enslaved. So, I think that’s so powerful. There’s like some fire in that blood. That’s something I need to get in touch with because I don’t know the language or the practices very well but there’s something there.

Despite sometimes not being well-versed in the cultural specifics of their ancestors, participants reflected on them with pride, sought to learn more, and likely gained confidence and motivation due to their awareness of history.

Cognitive growth is an essential part of critical consciousness development. The narratives of our participants highlight important insights about the process for gaining CCABR as a Black person. Our sample consistently sought to grow in awareness. There was no end point at which they no longer sought to increase their cognitive awareness. Developing systemic and historical awareness prior to engaging in actions focused on Black racial justice seemed to contribute to participants' sense of agency.

Committing to a critical stance. CCABR involved not only becoming aware of systemic and historical factors but committing to maintaining a critical stance. Participants developed, enhanced, and were committed to consistently advancing their critical thinking skills. Thinking critically also appeared to facilitate openness and require a lifelong commitment to being a social justice learner.

Critical thinking. Critical thinking required curiosity and involved questioning the systems and structures shaping their lives. Participants were critical about the things they were taught and/or told, rejecting that which did not register as true upon their critique. Lauren offered an example of such a critique, sharing:

> The challenge that I get a lot from folks is, what oh well "I heard a," insert person of Color, or "I heard a Black person say." Well okay, this shirt talks about loving Blackness [shirt worn during interview reads: "I love my Blackness and yours"]. "But that's racist because don't you love my Whiteness?" And I said well, there's a difference. Even if I were a discriminatory or a prejudiced person, which I'm not, but let's pretend for a second that this is Bizarro World [Superman reference] and that I was. So even if I said, "Yep, I absolutely hate insert minority group or insert majority group," I don't have the power to redline you. I don't have the power to restrict your children from going to schools with perhaps the most competent teachers. And I don't have the power to only allow one of your

> particular group, or identity factor into my school program, my housing complex, my this, my that. And that is because I don't have the power to pull those things off.

In this way, participants had developed and were open to sharing their critical analyses when interacting with others. Having already developed a propensity for making historical connections, critical thinking also involved continuing to place experiences and discussions within a historical context. Additionally, they learned to pay attention to and question what is missing from dialogues and education that was offered to them. For example, Elena offered an illustration of critically questioning her teacher. She shared:

> I was one kid who would challenge my teachers about what they're teaching me in class because of, "This is not the reality I know, how come this is in my book?" So, I feel, "and how come we're a group of kids learning this right now?" Like, that, I would say that.

Participants' critical lens was attuned to Blackness, the Black experience, and specifically ABR in its multiple forms. Participants were not simply critiquing Whiteness, White supremacy and ABR as it manifests in Black-White relationships but within their own racial group as well. For example, Laina shared:

> People really need to do some self-awareness and really start looking at their own biases. Like I think it's almost like having an auditor come in and say okay, "I'm observing the way how you, your organization has been communicating. Here are the problems." I think the problem is that they have is what every human being has, is the lack of self-awareness. You're classist, deal with it. You've got respectability politics. You are afraid of what the White man thinks of you. Because if you weren't you wouldn't be policing people as to how, what is appropriately Black. We need to have these conversations . . . we need to check ourselves.

Many participants, like Laina, highlighted connections between cognitive growth and a commitment to intersectional, critical, self-reflective thought. The practice became a consistent and valued part of participants' process. Moreover, participants' ability to think in this way contributed to their sense of efficacy as racial justice activists.

Developing a commitment to being a critical thinker helped participants to accept the ambivalences that would arise throughout their CCABR development process. For example, critical thinking allowed them to grapple with how to balance societal rules and personal and/or cultural values. Importantly, this attribute also fostered their thinking about the consequences of action versus inaction in response to ABR. Participants recognized that dichotomizing (e.g., black-and-white thinking) was a tactic that did not serve them, and they became comfortable exploring and/or existing in the range of thoughts and actions available between the dichotomies (i.e., accepting the gray areas). Embracing non-dichotomous thinking was protective, reducing the likelihood that participants would be lied to, pacified, scapegoated, or otherwise manipulated. Furthermore, critical thinking allowed them to put their conflicting experiences in perspective and move them toward action. Elena offered two anecdotes that highlight this process. First, she illustrated how critical thinking helped her obtain more accurate information from others beginning at a young age. She stated that when she was "four or five" she asked her mom about "penis and vagina," and her mother:

> . . . started to explain to me the story of, um, I don't know if you heard that story, but, like, bringing the kid in a basket . . . and that this big bird, and I was like, "What is the point? I talked to you about penis and vagina, what is this?" So, I was like, "So, can you just answer (laughs)?" And she tried, and I was like, "Uh, can, can you . . . " and then she just, like, "Okay, this is . . . " and she had to explain to me. . . So, for me, it was like, "You cannot try," like, if I sense that you're . . . you can tell me yes . . . but you cannot tell me no with no explanation.

Elena was able to think critically, ask questions, and demand answers. In doing so she set a precedent for an expectation of accurate explanations in her familial relationships. Unsurprisingly, as she aged and advanced in CCABR development, she was able to take

a broader view, applying her critical thinking skills to the Black experience. This is evidenced by her reflections.

> My experience is that Blackness, it's the most powerful, beautiful, magical, uh, grounded, you know, meaningful thing. So, I can't accept that the world doesn't know that and tries to erase that. So, as long as this happens, I cannot rest.

Elena highlighted the theme of being unable to accept that which does not match with what is known. Thus, critical thinking is a skill that fosters increased trust in one's own embodied knowledge, resultantly contributing to their analyses of ABR at the relational and collective level.

Openness. Participants valued openness and learned to be open. For our sample, openness involved being cognitively flexible, vulnerable, and having clear and visible values. Participants came to respect that there are different ways of knowing and were open to and respected information that they received in different forms. Participants desired and increasingly strived to interact with new people and to expand their own worldview. Lauren illustrates this desire and how her openness to feedback was tied to her sense of safety in a space. She stated that the "multicultural center is a safe space for me because I can speak with people sometimes that look like me and oftentimes that look different from me and get other, get other feedback." Participants also practiced inclusion, accepting and celebrating difference and diversity, and promoting the dignity of all people. Because they had witnessed ABR, often developing a sense of guardedness as a method of coping, being open did not mean that these lessons and mechanisms were abandoned. Participants were open and simultaneously critical, learning to assess and determine the limits of their openness with respect to their liberation goals. They recognized they would need to navigate different roles, and changing contexts and being

open to experience and change helped to facilitate this goal. Two men who illustrated how being open helped them to grow as activists were Aaron and Quess. Aaron acknowledged the value of vulnerability, reflecting on how it made him feel more effective in his activism.

> Basically, the magnitude of anybody's story can be great if you can relate to it strong enough . . . The more relatable that issue is to each individual, the more they get from it . . . Vulnerability is basically one of the most important things in a relationship. Like, if you don't allow the person or the people that you're trying to reach to see who you actually are at your core, you know, you're kind of robbing them of some of your interaction. You're kind of shooting your own energy in the foot. Cause you're trying to do this thing, but you're not saying, "Well, this is who I actually am that's trying to do it." So, it's a hard thing. It's a struggle because the things that help us relate is some of the roughest shit that we've been through.

Although Aaron recognized the difficulty in being vulnerable, he committed to this form of openness because he recognized the way that it served to strengthen the relationship and impact of the encounter. Whereas, Quess offered a frame through which we can comprehend how Black racial justice activists understand the value of and practice inclusion. He noted how he organized for Black racial justice with queer and trans people and stated:

> At the end of the day it's about whatever your liberation is, you know what I'm saying? What's your freedom? Whatever make you feel good in your body and your skin. This is your temple; you better be able to worship it.

Quess determined that, ultimately, being open-minded and inclusive and holding a liberatory (human dignity-focused) frame was important to him as a person working toward Black racial justice. Being open produced a richness in the lives of our participants. They valued being open and engaging with others who also had this attribute.

Lifelong social justice learner. Participants valued getting and staying woke. That is, they were committed to the process of constantly challenging themselves to learn more about social justice topics, particularly ABR. Activists strove to remain cognizant of their own limits and articulated how getting woke is a never-ending learning process. They continually challenged themselves to improve on growth edges and sought additional education through various means when needed. Depending on what participants were seeking to learn, they might read independently, take a class, or consult with other activists. Although many participants came to see themselves as educators in the realm of ABR and Black racial justice, they underlined the importance of their role as one who is constantly seeking and gaining education from others. Lauren summarized this commitment well:

> I think that to be woke means that I challenge myself. I don't view multicultural competence as a definite you're either 0 or 100 percent . . . No, absolutely not. I think I as a Black woman I have to push myself to try harder. There's all types of cultures and understandings that I don't get. And I think it's partially my job when I challenge other people to have an awareness to challenge myself as well. So, woke for me means you don't stop. You're on a treadmill. I need to be sweating.

Like Lauren, participants saw utility in increasing their social justice-related knowledge. Continuing this learning aided them in their critical action and provided material for processing.

Intersectional Growth: "Black people be knowing some shit."

Intersectional growth occurred in concert with cognitive and behavioral growth. Participants in this study shared narratives about how they deepened their intersectional self-awareness, particularly with respect to their Black, religious and/or spiritual, gender

and sexual identities. Through this process, their sense of self expanded, as did their commitment to being loving and unifying as activists.

Developing intersectional self-awareness. Developing intersectional self-awareness involves beginning to recognize difference, learning one's own positions of privilege and oppression, considering them in context and owning them, and becoming changed—intersectional—through that process. Within intersectional self-awareness, four identities stood out as particularly important for awareness: racial, spiritual, gender, and sexual identities.

Being exposed to and recognizing differences was an important step in the process of developing intersectional self-awareness. Participants made clear the importance of having exposure to different ways of performing Blackness across class, gender, geographic location, and other social locations to their development. Exposure to different performances of Blackness allowed them to see the systemic nature of anti-Blackness but also the diversity within themselves and among others that merely share their racial group. Exposure provided new possibilities for selfhood previously inaccessible or unimaginable to them. With exposure to different options they could envision those and other possibilities. Thus, witnessing difference facilitated hope and positive imaginings. Aaron shared:

> When you grow up, you spend the majority of your childhood somewhere, 18, 20 years. I mean, you go somewhere else, it is a whole new world. Circumstances are different. Even though people are speaking English, the language is different. The way people communicate is different. Slang is different. If you're in the streets, the gangs are different. You know what I mean? If you're in a profession the software is different. The attire is different. You might be in the Midwest and you're a business-owner. You have to have all of your employees in professional attire. Out West, that's just not gonna fly. You're not gonna wear suits all day long in 100-degree heat. So, just to realize there's different ways of having money. There's different ways of being broke. There's different ways of doing

> business. There's different ways of communicating the same, exact things that we communicate. To where, when you realize . . . if I want to come back somewhere and bring the best of that here. . . You realize what we're missing. You realize, first of all, you have to have the knowledge of the fact that there is more out there. You have to have something that says, "Where I'm at isn't as good as where I could be. Where I'm at now doesn't reflect where I feel like I should end up." So, having that in the back of your mind pushes you.

As Aaron's quote illustrates, seeing new possibilities for what his community might look like, from an intersectional perspective, was inspirational; he quickly began thinking about how to change his environment after seeing another.

In this way, witnessing difference helped participants to nuance the way they perceive themselves and articulate their identity. They became self-reflective, exploring their own areas of privilege and oppression, turning their positionality into one of many possibilities within Blackness. For instance, Lamin shared about his awareness of the possibilities within Blackness as it relates to gender performance. He shared:

> I have kind of that battle with my girlfriend right now because I am a straight Black male, but being with those people . . . like Pride every year is when the people . . . I look forward to it. You know, Pride Festival. I've been to Pride here in Lexington, I've been to Pride New York. . . And it just baffles her that I'm a straight Black male. But some of my really good friends are gay. I told them, I would love to do drag. . . One of my favorite types of music is garage, house dance.

Participants like Lamin grappled with where their identities were in conflict and how that conflict might be resolved. They acknowledged the way their skin tone, socioeconomic class, gender presentation, etc. positioned them differently in the social hierarchy. Participants connected in some places to a shared Black identity and also were able to self-define based on their own experiences and intersecting identities. Elena illuminated how witnessing difference and reflecting on self in the context of her social environment contributed to her intersectional self-awareness. She described:

> I think, also, there's definitely a hierarchy within People of Color. . . I don't come from a wealthy class, at all. I come from two parents who had university education and could never do their job. So that's why my dad left the country. But my mom was never able to work full-time in her domain at all. So, that was very low-income. And I see it in people who have this privilege within the Black community, in having this further step and expecting that from others, or otherwise "I cannot interact with you." And it's very subtle. And then colorism, I come from a family that is [laughs] weirdly very light-skinned. And my mom is dark, and I came dark, and my dad also is mixed, and he came dark. And it's like I have all the Blackness I could have. And then I have cousins that are light and light, light, light, and the colorism is not something we can talk about in my family. And I've been trying, and it's like, "Yeah, I know what it is, but it doesn't happen in our family." And I'm like, "Of course you don't know, because you're light." And it's tough because it's people I love dearly, and that are the most important people for me.

Developing intersectional self-awareness helped Elena to understand herself and others. Importantly, through the processes of developing intersectional self-awareness, participants came to see their identities as one inseparable whole. For our sample, understanding Blackness, religion and spirituality, and gender and sexuality were especially important to developing intersectional self-awareness.

Understanding Blackness. Understanding what it means to be Black was an important developmental task for activists. While witnessing ABR provided an awareness that a Black identity is a burden and tied to ABR, it was important that participants developed an expanded view of Black people and the African diaspora. Recognizing the diversity within and beyond Blackness was particularly important. Participants began to understand that Blackness is a broad construct, comprised of a wide variety of experiences. Empathy for other Black people came from this process. It allowed participants to reflect on what their needs and concerns are and how they might be similar or different to other Black and non-Black people. Michael's story of learning

about the diversity of Blackness through his attendance at an HBCU is representative of this process. He indicated:

> My roommate was from public housing, and then I had friends like Bill Cosby's who went to Morehouse as well. There was a gamut of experiences. And you didn't realize it until people went to the parking lot. And I would get in my beat-up Volkswagen and they would get in their Mercedes. And I would be like, "Oh wow, I guess you come from someplace else."

Activists began to recognize that Black people of different genders had differing needs, that Black people experienced differing levels of wellness based on their geographic location and class, and therefore may require a different approach when it comes to activism. For example, acknowledging the diversity of the Black experiences encouraged participants to recognize that there are different goals for Black people in different places geographically, as well as within the same geographic location but across different intersections of social locations. For example, Geo highlighted community-based differences for Black people across the country. She shared:

> It's definitely community-based. What Detroit needs is not what the Bronx needs. What Minneapolis needs is not what D.C. needs right now. . . It gets that micro, and you need to address it.

Witnessing the diversity of Blackness, and processing that exposure to diversity, set a precedent for them to then seek to understand and consider contextual factors when engaging in critical actions aimed at reducing ABR.

Understanding Blackness also involves seeing beauty in Blackness or developing Black pride. It involves understanding that Blackness is not merely tied to struggle but also to greatness. Micah reflected this code as he asserted, "I think African people are a gift to the world." Participants, after being exposed to the diversity of Blackness and truly engaging with different Black people, tended to increase their Black pride. Quess

illustrated this process in the following passage, describing the different people he came across when seeking signatures for a petition related to taking down Confederate monuments in New Orleans:

> I find like the little young sister, 12, you know, 14, and her sister 16. I taught ’em both. You feel me? It was the most snap neck, couldn’t stand Mr. Mo when they was in my classroom . . . but would come back and tell me, “Oh yeah I’m glad you’re doing this Mr. Mo. You know I always be failing history because my grandpa he be telling me about all this, he be telling me all this real stuff and then I gotta go memorize a lie and I just be failing.” What? And that’s our people . . . the old jaundice-eyed cat you know stumbling all around the chair, he looking all crazy. “Oh my God bro, can you sign the petition?” “Oh, yeah, yeah, I could sign that. Man, you know what, and you know John Slidell? The whole town was named, Slidell was a conspiracy. He was with the British army. He was actually trying to work with the British army to overthrow the U.S. just to help the Confederacy.” I’m like, “What? Wait, what? Tell me more!” “Oh, I wrote a whole book on this. Let me hook you up with my boy Chuy. Chuy got a access channel.” And so, we go into the hood and we find out, especially in the hood of New Orleans, this is a very educated populous. Motherfuckers have never been granted access to say what they know in public, but Black people be knowing some shit.

Recognizing that Black people and one’s own Blackness is cool, precious, associated with brilliance, and worthy of celebration was an important marker in activists’ identity development. Geo’s concluding remarks exemplified this code: “Blackness is magic.”

Understanding religion and spirituality. Participants also spoke in depth about their processes of understanding religion and spirituality. While many disclosed traditional Christian upbringings, they overwhelmingly identified as spiritual and non-religious at the time of interview. Participants appeared to go through a process that involved: (1) exploring religion and spirituality, (2) understanding the beneficial and harmful aspects of Christianity, (3) rejecting religion, and (4) adopting a spiritual stance instead.

Participants began to explore religion(s) and spirituality versus continuing to believe the religious messaging they were socialized into by their families and communities. They started to understand that individuals tend to have narrow worldviews and that there is a great deal humans do not know about religion and spirituality outside of their own. Some began to do independent research around religions and spiritual beliefs. Through this process they recognized a need to trace spiritual history within larger sociocultural contexts for self-awareness. For example, Michelle offered insights about how she explored and learned similarities about religions. She shared:

> I don't subscribe to any one religion. I believe there is one truth. There's 16 fallen and risen saviors. These stories are given multiple times. These people have come, they have gone. In the historical context, if they actually existed, that means that actually [there is] just this one truth that we should align with because everybody's trying to tell us the same thing.

Participants began to value personal and historical ways of understanding religion and spirituality and were less likely to passively consume religious doctrine.

During their exploration of religion, participants were able to understand some of the benefits and detriments of religion and religious practices. Most consistent among their narratives was a discussion of the importance of understanding (1) the connection between Christianity and White supremacy (particularly violence against People of Color throughout history) and (2) the tendency for religion to facilitate passivity among Black people when critical action may be a more healthful response to their oppression. Elena and Aaron illustrated these perspectives in the following passages:

> Believing in Christianity, for me, is not getting away from the Black Code. I don't know if it's Black Code in English, but in French, it's Code Noir, which . . . I just literally translated it. And the Code Noir, it's the code of law that a king in France, Louis 16 or Louis 14. I never remember, and him, with the Vatican,

> wrote a code of law of how to punish anybody who practices a spirituality, a religion that is not Catholic or Christian. And that's what allowed lynching . . . So, for me, being Christian, practicing Christianity, is perpetuating that. For me, I can't do it. -Elena

> Many of us are separated by religion, which is completely unnecessary. Many of us attack issues with the best heart and we'll use a religious platform to get that done, which immediately alienates a lot of those who were trying to help. So, I think that ignorance, as a whole around just how this life came to us, how our souls actually move, how our bodies respond to the world around us. . . And then, how our ignorance is being played into religious acts and . . . basically traditional things that we would not normally be a part of. It keeps us separate to where, when we say, "We need to stand up and fight," we have a part of us who need to be fighting, who say, "All right. I'm gonna pray about it." And then you have another part who says, "Well, you shouldn't pray. You should do this." Then you have another part who says, "Not only should you not pray, you should pray this way." So, we're all separated even though we're all in this bucket trying to get to the top. -Aaron

Despite participants' increasing awareness about the harmful aspects of religion, and particularly Christianity, some participants were still able to hold on to and highlight some positive attributes of religion. For example, the community and connection that religion often provided were held in high regard. The Black church was specifically noted as a protective factor for youth. Although they honored some aspects of religion, participants overwhelmingly tended to transition from identifying as religious to identifying as spiritual.

Key to this stage of identity exploration was the process of seeking a personal relationship with God in lieu of structured, rule-laden doctrines of religion. Religion was often compared by participants who had really reflected on the meaning of both. For example, Micah, who is a pastor, shared, "Religion so often is for people who are broken and don't want to admit it, but spirituality is for people who are healed." Participants were able to reflect and deepen their self-awareness, ultimately forging a better connection to God. They prioritized their connection to and relationship with their

version of God. Participants declined to identify with one religion over another, with many claiming an agnostic identity or simply beginning to identify as "spiritual but not religious." After going through the exploration process and adopting this stance, participants referred to themselves as spiritually awakened or enlightened. Subsequently, after experiencing spiritual awakening, participants tended to share a set of spiritual beliefs. Generally, participants believed: (1) in the ability to receive wisdom through spiritual forces, (2) in the ability to manifest outcomes in one's life, (3) in an ancestral presence, (4) in one's own inner spirit or guide, and (5) that goodness is in or accessible to everyone.

Understanding gender and sexuality. Gender and sexuality were two final areas of intersectional self-awareness participants deemed important. Participants grew up experiencing gender policing. Stated alternatively, gender norms were imposed upon them, gendered-racialized respectability messaging was passed on to them, and risk was associated with breaching gender norms for them. Norms around cross-gender dating were especially prevalent. However, these participants also took advantage of opportunities to gain a deeper understanding of patriarchy and took note of gender expansive modeling when available to them. They recognized the toxicity of many masculine norms and male privilege and were moved to do something about it. For example, they talked about acknowledging their advantages and seeking to unlearn toxic messages around masculinity. Quess, for example, described how he was damaged through misogynistic messaging in hip-hop. He indicated, "I had to heal and recover from being taught, 'bitches ain't shit but hoes and tricks' and everything that Biggie gave me. I had to recover from those things." Taking the time to grapple with messaging that

was not promoting participants' individual wellness was important and contributed to their development of intersectional self-awareness.

Exploring one's gender and sexuality was seen as key to intersectional self-awareness for our participants. They described a process where they broke away from cultural gender norms by questioning sexuality, acknowledging the fluidity of sexuality, seeking to learn more about sexuality, coming to voice about sexual desires, and expanding their social circles to be inclusive of diverse presentations of gender and sexuality. Micah offers an example of this process of cultivating a more diverse social network, linking it to his later commitment to performing civil ceremonies despite incongruence with the church. He narrated:

> I love it because there were actually several persons in my community, and we lived off of an alley, and so they would come through the alley and they were very colorful. They were transvestites or, I don't think they were transgender back then, and they befriended me . . . so I'm heterosexual, but . . . what I do as far as weddings and I've done civil weddings, etcetera. So, I respect the church's right to not have them in the church because that's their rule, but me personally I'm just, I'm "us" and "we" . . . we are one.

Committing to intersectionality. "Searching self" is a constant theme in the lives of Black racial justice activists. Intersectional growth involved openness, reflection, and a willingness to commit to expanding one's mind and actions in response to what they were witnessing and processing. Participants tended to cultivate attributes of being a lover and being a unifier as they expanded their intersectional framework.

Through recognizing the impact of oppression on people who are differently ranked in the social identity hierarchy, reflecting on that difference, and being accountable to that new understanding, participants came to use an intersectional framework to understand themselves and others. With this framework, they could no

longer simply witness the differences. The witnessing changed the way they thought, felt, and acted. It encouraged them to explore their own roles, identities, and labels. For example, after sharing about witnessing a Black lesbian-identified work colleague go into labor, Micah underscored how he was changed through the process. He stated, “I’m there with my wife and my daughter. She’s there with her wife and her daughter and . . . so that was kind of for me like an integration where I couldn’t come back from.” This sample felt a responsibility once they were exposed to information that increased their awareness. Elena offered another profound example of this process. She attended a conference featuring Black activists and writers where people spoke about the Black experience in a manner that resonated with her lived experience. Sharing about how she felt once she had been exposed to this awareness-increasing space, Elena stated:

> I feel like, now, I have received this. I cannot just deal with my life after that and be like, “That’s it. That happened and now I can . . .” And also, it’s just, while you’re sitting there, and you have people telling you so much about your life, but they don’t know you and they’re not actually talking to you, they’re talking to a bunch of people. And for me, it’s just, doors open, open, open, open, open. Scars that are open like that. So, I have to, I need, I said it before, I’m a person, I need to do something about my issues, otherwise I panic. I don’t feel grounded. So now that all of this is opened, and now I cannot see the world without those lenses anymore. It’s like now they’re in my eyes all the time. Since then, I need to know that the day I leave, I tried.

For Elena, exposure and self-reflection created an increased sense of motivation and accountability.

Although the majority of participants adopted this intersectional framework for understanding themselves, one person, Conigan, did not discuss moving through any of the subcategories in Intersectional Self-Awareness except Understanding Blackness. In self-identifying, Conigan described himself using terms that reflect behaviors, such as “observant man” or being a “floater” who floats “to different responsibilities.” Conigan

may have had fewer opportunities to develop intersectional self-awareness because he was inundated with responsibilities as he grew up in Chicago. He discussed rarely having the opportunity for reflection. Conigan shared:

> I started to wake up when I was distanced from everything. When I started driving trucks. Cause I wasn't around everybody, I got to see nature. I got to go to different places, see so many different walks of life. I got to experience other shoes. I got to have my own life and see . . . I got to answer my long-awaited questions . . . but I'm answering them myself.

Although he may not have had many opportunities to develop intersectional self-awareness, particularly with respect to gender, sexuality, religion, or spirituality, Conigan made connections between exposure to difference, developing empathy, and self-reflection. This alternate narrative may also suggest that intersectional self-awareness is more likely to be cultivated by people with more privilege.

Becoming a lover. Intersectional growth also involved taking on the attribute of being a lover. Participants were lovers who allowed their love to serve as a guiding force in their lives. Participants reflected love for themselves, their communities, the Black collective, society as a whole, and the Earth. Love was exhibited by participants in several ways. Love of self and community was present for participants. They loved all people, particularly referencing love for those people and communities deemed disposable by others, such as people with insecure housing or those who are currently or were formerly incarcerated. Conigan's love of Chicago offered one illustration of how being a lover served to increase his agency:

> Chicago means everything to me because it is who I am, and when people see me they can tell that I'm from Chicago. And that means a lot to me sometimes. It makes me feel different about the things that I've done in my life. Sometimes I may feel grief, remorse at times, anger, pain perhaps [at] some of the things that I've done or experienced. But when I think about Chicago I think about all of those things. But they don't bring those individual emotions. It just brings like

> life, it brings acceptance to me. It feels pure to me. And that's why I love Chicago no matter how bad it's gonna be. It's as pure as this world is ever gonna be, and I live there, I manifested myself through that, and I survived like most people haven't. And I feel blessed.

Conigan could reflect on himself and his city, recognize flaws in both, but ultimately draw strength and connection rooted in love. In this way, being a lover means, recognizing strengths and being focused on resiliency in the face of hardship.

Being a lover also meant that participants were concerned with the survival of Black people in diverse ways. For example, love moved participants to help other Black people who were struggling and to forgive other Black people who have hurt them. But being a lover also meant that they were concerned with preserving Black love, Black families, and the process of Black reproduction. Elena spoke to this concern, sharing:

> How are we going to survive if we don't feel like we can love each other and continue and create this future generation? Where is that future generation going to be if you dream of a Black kid and that Black kid has blond hair or blue eyes? Why is that the goal? I see that so often, but it's subtle. Nobody tells it, but I see it in the way . . . and I don't know how I see it. Maybe it's in the media, maybe it's how people talk, I don't know. . . I need to know that we will survive. I need to know that we exist in the future.

Being a lover meant thinking about the preservation of Black people and Black culture in a society that systematically oppresses and threatens their survival.

Being a lover, for this sample, was active. Loving one's self, loving Black people and culture, and loving in the face of oppression requires intentional work and actions. As such, being a lover was important to the development of CCABR because it motivated participants to take critical action based on their love. Participants sought to recognize the goodness in others and then actively worked to convey love for other people. Showing love to others in ways that were congruent with participants' identities and positions did not just involve giving love but typically also allowed for them to be shown

love by others. Their community was strengthened through the open exchange of care, support, and love. Lauren described this process at her university. She shared:

> Even if we're just having a cookout or a safe place to have food that is made by us and not necessarily for us. So, what that might look like at the University of North Dakota is Black history month, which notably has been filled with hugely stereotypical things such as watermelon and cornbread and Kool-Aid, and this is a true story. Being able to have a place that's safe, and cooking stuff for ourselves, and understanding what soul food means . . . um is about togetherness and love and connectivity. So, I get validated by enjoying some of the fruits of our labor in that way, feeling connected with folks, I get validated internally, and that pushes me and also sometimes people say, yeah, you're doing the most in the best way.

Lauren created spaces where she could express love to the Black community at her university, countering anti-Blackness perpetuated there. In turn, she received motivational connection and validation.

Becoming a unifier. Being a unifier meant that participants valued unity and cultivated skills that would enhance their ability to bring people together. Having practiced intersectional self-awareness, they were able to draw parallels between their own and others' experiences. They saw themselves as members of a collective that included all humans. Aaron reflected what it meant to be a unifier. He stated:

> We're not the only ones who are caught up in a negative-ending system, meaning we're as in Black people. So, when you say, "I'm gonna fix the system. I want to create some real change," you have to realize that's gonna affect more than just Black people. It's kind of like, to use a metaphor . . . We've all watched a movie where the superhero is, he or she is chasing after that one loved one that's been estranged from them. And they know that they're gonna get them and find them. But when they do, they may be in a cage full of people or they're in a prison where everyone is there. And now you can't just take that one person. And that's how it is. You can't just say, "I'm gonna help all Black people." You have to get everybody that's caught in the system.

Like Aaron, many participants held a collectivist frame that informed their later actions as activists. As unifiers, they sought to create a well-connected community. They valued and sought to connect with people who were different from them. Because they valued

unity, they actively worked to create spaces for connection. Unifying was motivational. Recognizing Black people as valuable parts of the human collective, they were moved to unify people in the interest of promoting Black wellness.

The skills associated with being a unifier were enhanced as participants used their positionality and intersectional self-awareness to inform their efforts toward unification. They learned to take advantage of opportunities to connect people based on their own privileges, contexts, and skills. For example, Micah, who is a pastor that has developed CCABR, shared:

> A couple years ago I started just having services with the White church down the road . . . they had a very conscious pastor. And one of my members is, her name is Dr. T. And she has the . . . reconciliation project. And so, she brought that to the church and we invited them and had a discussion about race after the play together. Now we're looking at doing monthly . . . readings from *The New Jim Crow* to *A Slave by Any Other Name* to *Race Matters*, *Disintegration* . . . and to have a White church and a Brown church have this conversation together. It's going to be interesting to see what happens with it.

As unifiers, participants were often looking for ways to bring people together with a focus on Black wellness. In sum, developing intersectional self-awareness and committing to intersectionality as praxis increased participants' sense of agency.

Behavioral Growth: "I think it was that anger that made me start getting involved."

Participants described two behavioral means that facilitated processing ABR and advanced their CCABR development: Coping with Racial Trauma and Making Connections. These processes helped participants to increase their self and collective agency in important ways. Although these growth processes (cognitive, intersectional, and behavioral) were not always linear, they were connected and tended to build upon one another.

Coping with racial trauma. Participants shared a range of psychosocial consequences of racial trauma they had to cope with as Black people. Their ability to cope, and particular strategies for coping, served to increase their sense of agency. Coping with Racial Trauma includes an exploration of the diverse, creative, as well as commonplace approaches to responding to the psychosocial strain of racial trauma. The consequences of this trauma were both intrapersonal and interpersonal, and participants often were aware of what those experiences meant on a broader, collective scale. As such, the experience of racial trauma motivated them to pursue means of coping that would be useful at each of those levels.

To cope with and/or heal from their experiences of racial trauma, participants took various approaches. Coping is differentiated from healing in that coping is focused on surviving ABR and bolstering resilience whereas healing is focused on resisting ABR and achieving psychopolitical wellness. Many participants pursued action to cope and/or heal from their experiences, and the processes associated with critical action are explicated in the next section. However, several other approaches were employed prior to and alongside action specifically to cope with the psychosocial consequences of racial trauma. Participants described coping through (1) performing respectability, (2) disconnecting, (3) distancing from Whiteness, (4) increasing guardedness, (5) using cognitive tricks, (6) practicing self-care strategies, and (7) connecting with social support.

Performing respectability. Participants contended with ABR regularly. Many chose to cope with racial trauma by acting unbothered by the experiences of racism. They resisted emotionality, restraining themselves from showing a response to the trauma. Sadness and anger were two emotions that participants typically reflected having

to suppress in order to get through their day-to-day responsibilities. Participants talked about preserving themselves and sustaining their wellness through taking a non-confrontational stance. By meeting adversity with restraint, they maintained control and could be strategic about how to intervene in a manner that best suited them given their identities, contexts, and relationships to the perpetrator. Michael highlights the coping potential in respectability in the following passage:

> I was raised that you give respect to people, even when they do not give the respect for you. Even when I had teachers in high school, or middle school who may not have believed in what or who I am as a student, I would still say thank you mister so and so or misses so and so. I would tune out that person as a person of authority and that I would need to listen to. I would do my work and get over it. . . I would learn how to give back information to get an A on an exam or get what I needed.

For Michael, coping with ABR meant being respectful to his oppressors in order to matriculate successfully. He knew that he should not internalize what the person in authority said to him and learned to navigate the relationship so as to produce the outcome that he ultimately wanted.

Disconnecting. Disconnecting, or otherwise avoiding the source of ABR, was another common coping strategy employed by our sample. Participants would isolate themselves, disconnecting either temporarily or over the long term. Some tried to intentionally forget their experiences. For example, Elena shared, “Sometimes, I have this mechanism of forgetting things that I want to forget.” Coping through disconnecting again allowed participants to maintain control to the best of their ability. Participants sought to choose what they would or would not worry about and disconnecting facilitated this process. Michelle captured disconnection, noting, “I’m a big subscriber to ‘what people think of me is none of my business.’” Disconnecting was often a coping strategy

utilized in social media spheres. Participants would withdraw from social media or apply filters so as to disconnect from known sources of racial trauma.

Distancing from Whiteness. Participants could not always fully disconnect from the source of racial trauma. They often coped by distancing themselves from Whiteness, a common source of their pain. In this model, Whiteness refers to White people, primarily White spaces, and primarily White institutions that uphold White supremacy. Distancing from Whiteness was a coping process that could be psychological and/or physical.

Psychologically, participants would experience racial trauma (as described in the prior category), and, subsequently, they began to distrust White people, often making connections to prior lessons told to them. As a result, they distanced themselves by disbelieving, becoming ambivalent toward, increasing limits and boundaries with, disregarding, and/or renouncing Whiteness. Many participants transitioned from believing that Whiteness could be reasoned with and changed to recognizing that they could not facilitate meaningful change within Whiteness. Quess shared several instances of ABR perpetuated by White people and then noted how he eventually coped through distancing:

> That was the third offense. Three strikes you're out! And after that I was just like, "You know what White people, I'm done." And I have been since. And I feel great about that cause it opens me up to like, first of all protect my space, psychologically, psychospiritually. And really all it did was affirm everything my barbers and mommas told me in Tallahassee, "can't trust them crackas." And I found a whole bunch of Black people that's in same room and "can't trust them crackers." And I'm starting to understand psychologically. It is so deep. It's what we been known. It's their fear runs so deep that it makes them do really crazy shit. And so, once we know that, we know that we just can't waste our time trying to bring them out of that when we still have wounds to heal.

Quess's reflection captured distancing from Whiteness, highlighting how it is not an initial coping response, but one that is a response to the additive nature of ABR. He illustrated how distancing was a coping response impacting him both physically (creating environmental safety) and psychologically (creating congruence between his personal and Black socialization experiences and allowing space for healing).

School was one institution falling within Whiteness that commonly led to distancing as a means of coping. Racial trauma regularly occurred in academic settings from elementary through graduate school. As a result, participants would psychologically and physically distance themselves from these environments. Participants discussed disconnecting and disengaging with schooling in ways that reflected both empowerment (e.g., choosing to attend HBCUs) and disempowerment (e.g., being steered away from gifted and talented program despite qualifying). Codes reflecting empowerment, or an intentional choice to distance oneself, were those captured within this subcategory of Distancing from Whiteness as a means of coping with racial trauma. For example, participants reflected Distancing from Whiteness when they discussed having graduate-level degrees as mere "pieces of paper," thus refusing to align with Eurocentric notions of educational excellence. Michael illustrated this form of coping as he reflected on his educational affiliations. He noted, "She would say, 'Well why don't you give to Emory?' I would say, 'Because Emory is racist. I went to Emory, I got degrees from Emory, but I am an alumni of Morehouse.'"

Increasing guardedness. Participants increased their vigilance, putting guards up to protect themselves from ABR. They increased their cautiousness in certain spaces known to be particularly harmful to them. For example, Conigan described increased

guardedness as having to keep his head "on the swivel" since he never knew where the threats would be coming from. By staying alert, participants could better protect themselves and not be caught off guard when ABR was present. Participants described guarding or protecting themselves physically as well. Elena recalled ABR occurring in her school and her approach to protecting herself:

> I would fight a lot at school. Every time, I would be called a nigger that would be my response. I would hit the people. So, I would always be like that, and I would always have a sense of, you hurt a Black person, I'm the first one to be like, "I will jump." So, that was always there. And also, I always had this discourse. But not really well articulated because I didn't have the research or whatever. I would just defend all the time.

Like Elena, participants protected themselves and other Black people by remaining on the defense and staying prepared to respond to the racism they encountered.

Using cognitive tricks. Activists in our sample also practiced a set of cognitive tricks that allowed them to cope with ABR. Externalizing, compartmentalizing, and minimizing were all cognitive processes employed by participants in the face of racism. Participants externalized racist remarks and behaviors by intentionally locating the source and cause of discrimination outside of themselves. Michelle described how she externalized early racist experiences occurring at school, noting:

> We grew up in this very middle-class bubble of convenience, which had its perks but also had a lot of weight. For me, it was like "Wait, wait, something ain't right." That teacher still treats me terrible and not them. Something ain't right.

Participants like Michelle recognized and named that the discrimination they faced was not something they should internalize, whether or not they could label that experience as ABR at the time. This process, which required attending to contextual factors that influence one's experience, served to protect participants' self-esteem. Participants also compartmentalized their experiences of racism so as to make sense of their surroundings

and to survive them. For example, Geo noted, "We are constantly having to categorize things and that may be like a survival mode because you have to know what's good for you, what's not good for you." Quickly sorting through experiential data in order to make determinations that will inform responses was a useful approach that helped participants to cope with ABR.

Practicing self-care strategies. The importance of self-care was clear among participants. For this sample, self-care comprised both a stance on personal wellness and personal level actions to promote their own wellness. Self-care for participants meant endorsing a commitment to prioritize their own wellness. Micah touched on the importance of personal wellness, noting, "I think we're better as a collective when we're healed as individuals." Participants desired balance and had to learn to not push themselves too far. Self-care was recognized as a pre-requisite for activism. Elena captured this stance on self-care: "If I don't take care of myself, I cannot take care of others."

The personal level actions participants took often involved spirituality and art (sometimes combined). For example, Micah coped with his trauma responses through self-care. He shared, "I have a singing bowl and a set of prayer beads by my bed that I often have to use when I wake up with dreams and nightmares." Both the consumption of art, such as music and film, and creation of art, such as acting or writing and performing poetry, were part of the self-care process for participants. When consuming art for healing, the products or performances selected were deemed to be affirming, inspiring, and enlightening. For example, the movie *The Matrix* and Beyoncé's visual

album *Lemonade* were art forms participants turned to as a mode of coping. Michelle shared her affinity for *The Matrix* in the following way.

> You know the moment in *The Matrix* where Neo says, "So what are you telling me, I can dodge bullets?' And then Morpheus says, "No, Neo, what I'm telling you is that when you're ready, you won't have to." I watch *The Matrix* like every month. . . It keeps me sane. It lets me know that I'm not crazy.

Whether participants were the creators or the consumers, they often described arts-based self-care as something that helped them to connect to their emotions and feel empowered. Participants used creative, personally meaningful self-care strategies to cope with racial trauma.

Connecting with social support. Activists also coped with racial trauma by connecting with social support. Social support was sought from family, friends, community members, elders, Black institutions, and professional healers. Participants discussed how their emotional reactions to racial trauma, such as anger, motivated them to seek connection and build a sense of community with others. The people sought for social support were racially diverse, with Black and People of Color utilized more often than White people. Black women and Black elders were greatly revered for their ability to offer social support to participants. Participants' diverse support systems offered care, help, guidance, encouragement, and safety, and made participants feel seen and affirmed. Elena shared, "I do this for my sanity. . . I need to be friends with people who have safe politics." Both individuals and institutions were sought as a means of coping with racial trauma. HBCUs were repeatedly noted as one institution offering social support for Black people who faced racial trauma in historically and primarily White academic settings.

While participants sought to improve their mood through connecting with social support, it was often described as a mutually beneficial, bidirectional process. Micah describes how, after advocating for the hiring of Black faculty, he ended up building a supportive community with them. He stated:

> I just got fed up with VCU. It was the four of them that sat with me in the basement of Black Studies, African Studies and we just planned, we strategized, we comforted, and we cared for each other. And it's just like, my advocating got them there . . . and they kept me from losing my mind up in there. And so that's been the piece. . . I'm so grateful to them to this day.

Social support systems, such as the one cultivated by Micah and colleagues, were an important coping mechanism for participants.

Importantly, while participants employed these seven strategies for coping with racial trauma, they also described having difficulty finding wellness-promoting coping strategies. Sometimes they described unhealthy coping strategies (e.g., sex, substance use, violence) and decried their lack of effective coping strategies. For those who felt relief by coping through use of social support, they also reflected a tension coping in this way since they were aware that other Black people were also struggling with racial trauma. Although participants reported this struggle to cope, they were overwhelmingly able to cope with the personal and relational forms of ABR that they contended with, and as a result were able to continue on the trajectory toward activism.

Making connections. Participants increased their personal and collective agency through making connections with settings and people that bridged gaps in their development as Black racial justice activists. Making connections with particular settings and people allowed for increased self-knowledge as well as systemic and cultural awareness, ultimately contributing to an increased sense of efficacy as activists. Our

participants provided a clear picture of the settings and people that contributed to their development as well as how they served to bridge gaps in their awareness and ability to act against ABR.

Connecting to settings. Participants saw educational, community, and Black cultural settings as important to their development of CCABR. In terms of academic settings, high school and, more often, college offered opportunities to develop critical consciousness and engage in activism. Classes and academic programs centered on Black people, Black history, or Black culture were growth-promoting settings for participants who had access to them. Geo described the gratitude she feels for her educational setting and its role in her CCABR development. She shared:

> I think I got lucky in my education. I went to elementary school in south Bronx. At this school they had just gotten this big art fund. So, the thing I was telling you about my teacher who was really radical and really about talking about being Black and not using the textbooks and telling us about all the things we were seeing in the Bronx. It was mostly this immigrant community, but heavily Hispanic and heavily Black. I don't think there were any White kids at my school. There was some Southeast Asian people but not too much. She was really good about confronting things that we have words for now, like colorism and us putting ourselves against each other based on like bullshit things, and she called it out.

The school setting was important site for critical consciousness development for Geo and other participants. Community groups, programs, and events served as less formal and often more diverse settings contributing to CCABR development. Community settings were more likely to facilitate the development of a collective identity as a racial justice activist. Black colleges and universities, churches, and community centers are examples of community settings that created space for CCABR to develop. For example, Laina described a community setting that facilitated her development as a teenager.

> But there was an older guy who was a family friend of someone, who was Black. And he said, "Let's start an organization," like just kind of a teen community group. Yeah, and so it was really kind of him just kind of taking us under his wing. He wasn't that much older than us. He was maybe 3 or 4 years older. But he just created this space where we could really talk.

The final setting, Black cultural spaces, are physical and virtual spaces and events that are centered on Black people and culture. They could be stable, such as barber shops and Black Twitter, temporary, such as a conference or get together with friends centered around Black music, or transient in form, such as sororities and campaigns that crossed physical and virtual platforms (e.g., #BlackGirlMagic, #BlackLivesMatter). Geo described how #BLM, as a Black cultural movement, bridged a gap for her:

> Geo: Something as simple as three words [Black Lives Matter] can change people's state of being. . . I believe this movement made it okay to grieve. You know like whatever you're doing is fine. Whatever your Blackness looks like is fine. If it's hurting other people, then you should probably check yourself.
>
> Della: But you can be unapologetic.
>
> Geo: Yeah. Totally. Totally. Totally. Which is good. I'm like a weird art kid. I like sculpture and welding shit. I listen to punk music, but I also listen to like grind music. I listen to hip-hop. I can still do all of those things and still be Black.

Geo received affirmation about who she is and her emotional needs, and she learned how language can be invoked as an intervention on behalf of Black wellness through this Black cultural movement. Overall, participants expanded their capacity for coping by connecting with academic, community, and Black cultural settings. These settings allowed participants to grow, particularly because they offered participants exposure to people who would increase their critical consciousness.

Connecting with people. Actively working to connect with certain individuals and groups of people was an important aspect of participants' growth as Black racial

justice activists. While these people were sometimes a part of participants' families or friendship network, often they accessed them from within the aforementioned settings. For example, Micah offered a reflection on his high school math teacher who helped him to grow in consciousness. He stated:

> It must have been some folk around who were pouring conscious thought in me. . . I had a, a math teacher by the name of Toussaint. And of course, he took us back to Haiti and what was going on, and so I had that. I had a couple of conscious teachers who brought things to me. So, high school was very, very conscious raising.

Many supportive individuals offered formative education related to social justice activism (e.g., direct action tactics), the system of White supremacy, and diversity of ways in which ABR shows up across levels. In addition to contributing to participants' knowledge and awareness, they also were role models who served as leaders and active members of their community. Having more intimate connections with people and settings capable of bridging multiple gaps in CCABR development process was helpful for participants as they sought to grow and act against ABR. However, the participants' relationship to the person did not have to be intimate in order for it to be a meaningful connection with respect to increasing CCABR. When the connection was not close, participants were more likely to rely on multiple people and/or settings to help them process ABR and grow as activists. Michelle's principal, though not teaching her directly, served to increase her efficacy related to facing ABR through his presence. She recalled:

> I think in middle school I was confronted with that. This White boy called my friend a nigger and I heard about it. And I came out of class and I fought him in the middle of the quad. Like physical altercation. I just had no tolerance for the ridiculous. Cause to me, we the most powerful people in the school in my mind. And it was true. Our principal was a Black man, you know what I'm saying? And so, to me, that wasn't far-fetched. I mean the leader of this school is a Black

> man. He wasn't necessarily loved by all but that was, to me, I was like, "how dare you come across us like that?"

While Michelle made connections to her principal that facilitated her efficacy, she also had strong connections to family members who helped her to increase her capacity for coping and responding to ABR as well. Multiple gaps in participants' awareness, efficacy, and skills were bridged through these connections whether close or more distant.

Growing through connection. The connections participants made to these people and settings were critical to their CCABR development. First, by making connections, participants were able to enhance their sense of self as Black racial justice activists and develop community around that identity. Having family and friends who were further in their CCABR development and already engaging in liberatory actions often helped participants to gain entry into spaces where Black-focused consciousness raising, organizing, and activism occurred. For example, Aaron's story highlighted how a church setting, connected and conscious family members, an invitation to an organizing space, and an active community-based group merged to increase his critical consciousness, specifically his ability to bear witness systemically. He shared:

> Aaron: I think the very first time I went to a rally or a meeting or something that was about racial injustice was like 1988, when the school board here in Rockford was being sued for racial discrimination. There was a group called People Who Care and they were holding meetings in different churches. I remember going in and . . . on an off-day and nobody's praying. There's no choir. Like, "Aw man, what's going on?" . . . But they're talking about everything else going wrong. I was in gifted programs. So, that was one of the topics of discussion, how the gifted program was discriminating against Black people. And I'm in there, like, "What do you . . . I'm in gifted. How were they doing me wrong?" At 8, 9 years old, or 7, 8 years old. So, to have my eyes opened. To realize, okay there are only two or three of you in the class. Like, "Oh, it's just two. . . Why is that?" I'm like, "Okay, wow." . . . If you get your eyes opened to the testing process, and then how, at that time, they didn't have it to where a certain amount of . . .

> minorities had to be in . . . So, they were basically just allowing minorities in to make it look good. You know? To not get to that point. And the People Who Cared basically exposed that. So, at that point, you know, 7, 8, years old is when it was like, all right. This isn't right. But there wasn't much I could do. But I was awakened to realize, like, okay, when you can do something, you know, there is a war going on.
>
> Della: How'd you get to that meeting?
>
> Aaron: My Uncle Robert took me to the meeting. I think he knew somebody who was a part of the group, who was organizing. And me being involved in gifted hit home for him. I believe he wanted to get my mom to the meeting, but she had to work. And she was, like, "Well, this is about gifted. Take Aaron." Me not knowing what was really going on, he was like, "All right. I'll take him."

For Aaron, his uncle was a connection that helped move him forward in his CCABR development.

Second, participants grew through gaining exposure to concepts relevant to Black oppression and liberation. Once in settings where Black-centered activism was taking place, participants could learn, question, clarify their values, witness different approaches for responding to ABR, and begin to build or expand upon their community. Accomplishing these tasks contributed to participants' sense of agency. Information was shared directly (e.g., verbally, in writing, through performance) and indirectly (e.g., sharing a book, modeling liberatory thoughts and actions in everyday activities). Some of the information repeatedly seen as important to participants in this process includes social justice terms and meanings, as well as Black and activist values and approaches. Geo described how academic settings, non-profit community programming, and a radical supervisor exposed her to concepts and facilitated her practice as an activist. She noted:

> Geo: I think my first like early activism . . . I was doing urban farming in the Bronx, and I had this super awesome supervisor . . . She definitely introduced me to structures. I think that's what I was missing, understanding how these things could happen, when she introduces this idea of systems and structures. . . So what we were trying to do with the city was find a way to buy the [plots of land where

> buildings were burned in the Bronx] and use it for farming because now there are food deserts in the south Bronx. So that's where I learned about all of these different social justice terms and all of these things that I was seeing. . . Essentially what she was doing was breaking into lots and planting sunflowers, which was like the most radical shit to me. And I was like this is dope. It's beautiful and it also makes people question things and it's not done to hurt anyone. Like sunflowers will not hurt anyone, but it makes a point.
>
> Della: How did you come to that group and to her?
>
> Geo: I was nerding out. It was a summer program. I forget what it's called but it's a summer program in the city for high school students where you can go to one of the . . . cause the city has its own system of schools, it's called CUNY, and it was one in the Bronx. They would partner you with a non-profit in the Bronx, and you would work there a few days out the week. Then take a class on something like civil engagement or something, and that's what we would do. So, like half the time I was in class and half the time I was working through this organization.

The exposure was important, offering participants (a) material for critical reflection; (b) a broader cultural and systemic framework to consider their lived experiences; and (c) exposure to diverse thoughts, expressions of Blackness, and approaches to pursuing Black racial justice.

Third, by engaging in these settings where Black liberation was discussed (particularly in a historical context focused on the past), practiced (actively in the present with a collective), and envisioned (with concern and actions for the future), participants became more motivated and felt more efficacious about their ability to intervene against ABR. Participants recognized they were not alone but a part of a collective working toward the same goals, and, therefore, both believed change was possible and were inspired to contribute to it. One example of the increased sense of efficacy that comes from being a part of a collective came from Quess. He shared:

> Next year when the Mike Brown shit happened we was like, "Oh shit, well alrighty, we got a problem." And I was like, yo we gotta activate, you know all of us collectively. There were like 10 or 11 of us. . . It was like alright, mighty-

> morphin' Black power rangers come together. . . You know the text went out like, "Yo we gone have a vigil at Congo Square, come together.

Because Quess had developed a network of people who he knew were also critically conscious about ABR, he felt he could propose and organize a vigil that would be supported by the collective. Being able to build and/or join a community of comrades with whom one can pursue Black liberation was critical if participants were to facilitate sustainable and/or far-reaching activism. Being able to make connections to people and settings that not only allowed for such growth, but that stimulated and celebrated it, was often deemed a gift by participants.

Increasing Agency: "I'm not scared."

Witnessing ABR was not sufficient to increase participants' agency as Black racial justice activists. Navigating the cognitive, intersectional, and behavioral growth processes outlined above increased participants' agency and courage, motivating them to do something about ABR. Even though participants had personal experiences of racial trauma and found personal and relational level methods of coping with it, they were motivated to contribute to collective level change as a result of the experience as well. Having found many efficacious methods of coping with their own experiences of racial trauma, participants not only had the capacity, but also felt the responsibility to reduce ABR and/or promote Black wellness for others in their racial group. For example, Erica shared the following:

> I don't want people to say that they didn't have the opportunity when I was present to provide them with that. I think that that's where my commitment began . . . at Howard [University] saying I really have appreciated these opportunities to have women that look like me doing the things that I'm interested in doing and how can I get to that place where I can be that for someone else.

Furthermore, participants recognized that their own wellness, including their survival, was contingent on the wellness and survival of other Black people and were motivated to then contribute to this process on a broader level. They were motivated to act as a result of processing ABR and growing in these ways.

As a result of witnessing and processing ABR, participants also felt motivated to engage in critical action to make the world better for other people. Having experienced the psychosocial consequences of ABR, participants did not want other Black people to face similar experiences and, thus, were also externally motivated. Laina's story draws links between the two overarching processes (witnessing and processing ABR) and both internal and external forms of motivation. She and her older sister are Black and were adopted by a White family where she also had White older brothers and a White younger sister. She shared her story, reflecting:

> I think I was 17 when I wrote a letter to the editor for the local newspaper talking about like race discrimination in my high school. And that was the first published piece I did. I think it was really just being very angry. But luckily for me I had friends that I saw them do things . . . a lot of depression, a lot of oppression from their family. And I was always very angry. I was just an angry person. I think it was that anger that made me start getting involved. Because I'm like ,"I don't know why this is happening." . . . because I have older brothers and also because of my little sister. She's 10 years younger than me. I was seeing how they were treated by my extended family and by other people. And I'm like, "How come they are treated like this? And my older sister and I are treated like this?" So, I was always questioning and wondering "why is this happening?" And, so because I was angry, luckily for me, that's what really . . . started my activism. Because I just thought . . . I have a little, my niece, my sister's daughter, who was born when my sister was 18. So, my niece now is like 29 or something. So, she was born when I was 15. And I just swore to myself that she is not going through this shit. She is not going through this.

Laina experienced racial trauma within her family and her community. She began critically reflecting on the situation, bearing witness to the ABR and engaging in intersectional self-awareness processes. She became angry and sought a method of

coping with her anger, in this instance through writing about her experience. Her individual coping response was not sufficient for her, though; she was motivated to pursue activism beyond this singular letter to the editor because she wanted to protect her niece from such trauma.

Participants reported needing to develop courage in order to feel like they could engage in activism. Courage allowed participants to respond actively to the ABR they witnessed. Courage involved learning to overcome fear. Having cultivated critical thinking skills, participants could analyze a situation and recognize the risk involved in both responding or not responding to the instance of ABR. Sometimes that critical awareness of the risks produced a feeling of fear in participants. Whether or not they experienced fear, cultivating courage involved acting bravely in the face of real risks to wellness.

Courage was a choice that was made and enacted after reflection and contextualization of a situation. Courage sometimes involved choosing to resist authority, rules, or conventions. Acting courageously required participants to determine whether they felt justified in their actions and, therefore, needed to prepare themselves to deal with the consequences. In addition to risking consequences such as arrest, violence, loss of employment, or lack of sleep, participants also faced consequences related to their image and relationships. Courage involved learning to "stand in one's truth," irrespective of if it would align with stereotypes, create an image that others did not agree with or understand, or cost relationships. Participants reflected on these outcomes and made the choice to prioritize their pursuit of Black wellness over their own personal comfort. Conigan shared, "Once you can start answering the question of who you are . . . I mean it

doesn't really matter how a person sees you." Authentic living became more important to him than the perception others had of him. Michelle reflected how courage was tied to truth for her: "I don't really do shortcuts, or I'm not scared. You know, there's really no fear because truth is gonna be truth regardless of if I say it or not." Through reflecting on one's truth and purpose, courage was cultivated.

Participants began to recognize their power and their agency increased. Despite experiencing racial trauma and having an awareness of the omnipresence of White supremacy, a shift occurred wherein participants felt empowered to act. Participants began to believe that they, whether alone or with their community, could do something to intervene against ABR.

Having certain privileges, social capital and resources helped participants to advance in CCABR development. For example, although Geo's family was from a lower socioeconomic status, she often bore witness to her mom resisting ABR, which facilitated insights and increased her agency. Whereas someone like Erica, who shared, "my family has never really talked about race," had to process and develop CCABR in other ways. Participants who had mastered the preceding CCABR growth processes had greater confidence in their ability to create meaningful change for Black people. However, as long as participants had begun some of the processes, they began to feel more confident in their ability to act.

Acting Critically Against ABR

Acting Critically Against ABR categories were those that focused on specific actions participants took in response to ABR at any point after Witnessing ABR and understanding it as a systemic problem. Critical action in the CCABR model is what an

activist does to prevent, resist, and/or heal from ABR once they understand ABR on both a personal and systemic level. There are two categories within Acting Critically Against ABR: Doing Black Liberation Work and Utilizing Black Racial Justice Activist Approaches to Activism. Acting Critically Against ABR is illustrated in Figure 5.

Participants described both specific types of activism work and approaches to doing activism that were important. The present section will first introduce the nine types of activism that participants engaged in when Doing Black Liberation Work: (a) Storying Survival, (b) Spacemaking, (c) Artivism, (d) Coalition Building, (e) Physical Resistance, (f) Modeling/Mentoring, (g) Organizing, (h) Teaching, and (i) Scholar-Activism. Then, the eight approaches they utilized when engaging in Black racial justice work will be reviewed: (a) Having Urgency, (b) Being Self-Reflective, (c) Specifying Focus, (d) Being Actively Intersectional, (e) Being Resourceful/Affording Activism, (f) Contextualizing, (g) Being Persistent, and (h) Maintaining Future Orientation.

Doing Black Liberation Work: "What can we do? How can we train? How can we build? And how can this be undisputed?"

Participants typically engaged in many types of critical actions when Doing Black Liberation Work. The type of activism participants engaged in was generally connected to their social identities, skills, contexts, and interests. For example, Geo engaged in storying survival, artivism, physical resistance, organizing, and teaching. Quess was involved in storying survival, artivism, coalition-building, physical resistance, teaching and scholar-activism.

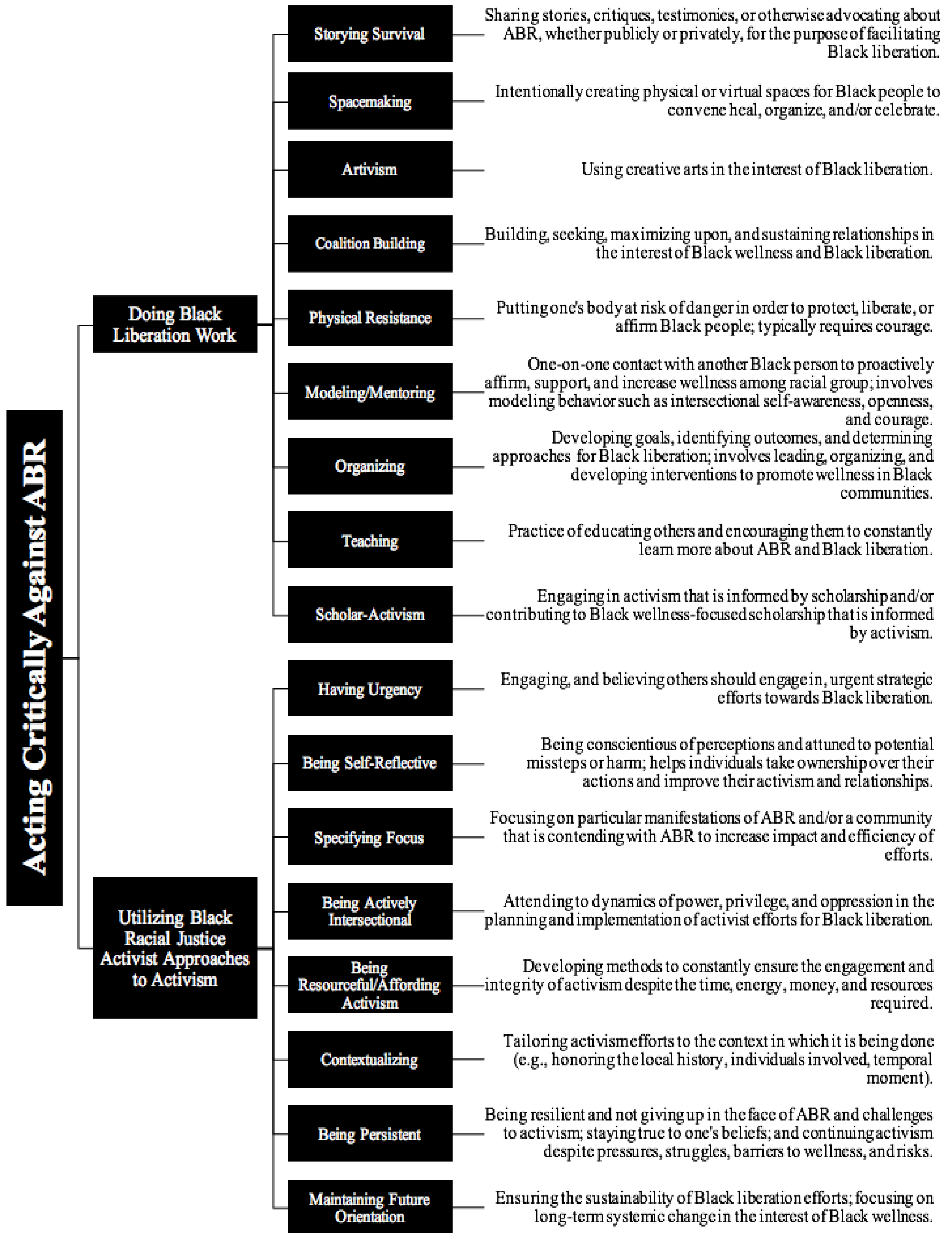

Figure 5: Acting critically against anti-Black racism (ABR) chart

Storying survival. One form of activism that all participants engaged in was storying survival. When a person shares stories, critiques, testifies, or otherwise advocates about ABR, whether publicly or privately, for the purpose of facilitating Black liberation, they are *storying survival*. The author is co-constructing the term "storying" to intentionally emphasize the way participants actively shared narratives about personal and cultural experiences. Although storytelling is a large part of storying survival, the survival component is equally important. The stories heard and shared are about the wellness and survival of Black people. Together, the term storying survival communicates both the vulnerability required for and the significant risk associated with sharing stories to facilitate Black liberation. Participants had to connect with painful experiences of racial trauma, which often directly affected them or their loved ones, when storying survival. Despite such pain, participants were open, honest, and detailed as they sought to illustrate their experiences in hopes of appealing to the hearts and minds of their audiences. The term also underscores participants' belief that stories, particularly personal narratives, were more effective at increasing awareness and creating change than sharing empirical or theoretical data. Geo described the power of storying survival, noting:

> I think when someone is being vulnerable with you, I think we feel an obligation to at least listen, even if we are not fully engaged. Just to be there and be aware that this moment is happening. It also makes you a part of it. I feel like statistics and stuff, which are important, are really dry and disconnected. When you tell someone something you're giving that to them and you're asking them to do something with it. Whether that's to hold on to it and not share it with anyone or to share it with everyone. Or just to take it. That kind of passing on I think is very felt.

Storying survival involves practicing empathy, honing listening skills, engaging in personal reflection, learning to code switch, drawing on creativity, being vulnerable,

and engaging with emotions. Participants reflected that these processes allowed them to increase their comfort sharing stories, better read their audiences, determine what stories to tell, appropriately time their storying, master the use of silence, and develop multiple modalities for storying survival (e.g., one on one sharing, performing publicly).

Storying survival is intentional, strategic, and directly tied to the oppression and/or liberation of Black people. Participants valued having control of the narrative about Blackness and ABR, and they engaged in storying survival with Black people, as well as cross-culturally. For example, Lauren has difficult dialogues with people in her largely White community in order to expose them to narratives that they would not otherwise have access to. She shared:

> My life has been a challenge in many ways that some of my colleagues don't have to face. And that that's also a spectrum, that there's some other folks who might identify as a trans female that have had to face things that I don't have to face. I have the privilege of not having to worry about if a particular presidential candidate says I can use a restroom or not, or not have to worry about whom I want to marry or something like that. To me the Black Lives Matter movement and why it's important for me as a woman, especially a woman in a very, very White place, very homogenous place that I am right now, is to be able to push back on that. Is to be able to have these hard conversations with folks, especially if they oftentimes don't have exposure to people who would have this conversation.

Stories helped participants to contextualize experiences, illustrate their points, raise awareness about ABR, and invite people to join in Black racial justice work.

Storying survival also involves developing trust in one's own knowledge and experiences as well as trusting other Black people who share stories. The process, tied to self-definition, affirmation, and trust in self and racial group, contributed to a sense of empowerment among participants. Geo described "Black Lives Matter" as language

congruent with storying survival and how it empowered her to engage in storying survival herself. She asserted:

> I think Black Lives Matter becoming a part of the conversation was . . . it's always been there but just hasn't had a consensus about it. I was already reading Fanon in high school. I was reading about bell hooks. I had this crazy francophone Pan-Africanist professor in high school who was teaching us about the Haitian Revolution and Algeria and all these crazy things. So, the conversation was always there. There just wasn't enough people . . . consensus to have it. Especially for work on Blackness, unfortunately, there needs to be a White audience there. There've been things written for like decades about what it means to be Black and all these different kind of experiences and what people were going through and we know that already. We are very well versed in our struggle. So, having that acknowledged and having people in power use that power to change things . . . that was really captivating. Like, "oh you're listening right now." So, I'm going to tell you everything. I'm going to tell you how you fucking up right now. And know that I know what I'm talking about because I have the language already. I know how to think critically, and I've already lived my life, so I can be helpful in that sense.

Geo's passage illustrates the multidirectional, active nature of storying survival and its complexity. In her example, the language of #BLM represents storying survival in that it suggests Black people have not been treated as though they matter and invites the audience (in this case Geo) to grapple with what it would take for that to change. That invitation motivated Geo to then engage in storying survival herself, based on what she already knew but previously felt unable to share. She recognized the potential in maximizing on the timing and cultural shift #BLM had initiated and was able to story survival to others more confidently.

Participants assessed their effectiveness at storying survival by the extent to which they moved audiences to think, feel, and/or behave differently. Although they often wanted to facilitate change, they were also prepared to accept multiple reactions from their audiences. Erica illustrated the empathy, patience, and cultivation of community that goes into storying survival:

> My role is to present you with information that I have, and you can do what you will with that information but I'm always going to be present to be able to talk about it and discuss it with you and it can be a situation where whenever you're ready, I'm here.

Spacemaking. Some participants engaged in spacemaking. *Spacemaking* is a co-constructed term that involves creating spaces for Black people to convene for healing, organizing, or celebration. Participants organized spaces to intentionally facilitate connections among Black people or in the interest of Black wellness. Participants created spaces for Black people to talk, mourn, celebrate their identities, and share current and historical cultural knowledge. Spacemaking could occur in physical or online spaces. For example, Lauren engaged in spacemaking through a campaign called #UpdateYourStereotypes. She shared:

> #UpdateYourStereotypes is the social media campaign we are currently working on. I'm the president of the Black Student Association at the University of North Dakota, which I'm happy to say is up to 2.4% of people who self-identify as African American, so we're coming up there. But certainly, is filled with the allies and other persons of color as well. But what it is, basically, is a social media campaign where you are holding up a sign of a label that has been placed on you. For me it is almost consistently being told I'm well-spoken. Well, I understand that and that's because I've gone to school a lot and I read a lot and that tends to happen when you do all of those things. And it doesn't mean I'm White. That just means that I'm a Black woman who has chosen to educate herself or who has been privileged enough to educate herself. So really, it's explaining all of that in one sign. And so, it's partially an act of opposition to be able to say this is what has been placed on me and no I don't want this on me. And the other part is just trying to update some of these things that get said about folks.

Sometimes these were protected spaces where Black people would gather among one another and other times they were open to and relied upon people of other racial groups. When engaging in spacemaking, participants recognized value in community building and often structured time to enhance their understanding of one another's and the collective's experiences. Elena described her engagement with spacemaking as, "What

we do is create space where we can talk about Blackness, where we have scholars who come and give speeches who are keynotes and whatever or create context where we can meet and have activities together." Spacemaking was often intentional, with forethought and planning to structure the spaces such as in Elena's example. However, spacemaking was also something some participants did whenever the moment allowed or called for it.

Artivism. *Artivism* is an existing term that, in this study, illustrates how participants used creative arts in the interest of Black liberation. Art was seen and utilized as a platform for Black racial justice focused activism. Participants used creative modalities and translated issues salient to Black liberation into art forms. From poetry to plays to music and beyond, participants tackled topics that were meant to raise awareness about ABR and/or affirm Black people and their experiences. Quess's involvement in a play illustrates one example of artivism.

> We evolved the "Voices from the Back of the Class" to a play called "Lockdown" which, was really all about the same thing, the post-Katrina privatized education system. When I say it was a breakthrough moment, where we had like sold out nights, every night. Well not every night, but the big nights, the weekends. 150 was the capacity and everybody was in there. And the people that come were like a lot of the White TFA [Teach for America] teachers, who we were actually critiquing through the play, and a lot of old school educators and activists from the community. And they're sitting alongside each other, almost in a segregated room, where one side went to the other and one side. And we had talkbacks and they disturb, you know disrupt shit. And so that was powerful.

Participants storied survival using creative arts in an intentional manner.

Coalition building. *Coalition building* involved building relationships in the interest of Black wellness. Participants would find communities to organize with in order to promote Black liberation. This form of activism is about seeking, creating, maximizing upon, and sustaining relationships that serve, or have the potential to serve, their mission of Black liberation. Sometimes coalition building was meant to help one's

immediate community and other times coalitions were built in order to have a broader national or global impact. Lauren described coalition building, noting:

> I'm particularly excited about . . . doing law enforcement trainings related to multicultural awareness, diversity, inclusion. And ideally, if I'm doing my job as well as I know I can do it, having them admit some of the prejudices or the projections that we might place on someone.

Lauren engaged in coalition building with the police in hopes of raising awareness about officers' biases. Whereas Michael, who has a stable faculty and administrative position at Tulane, engaged in coalition building to assist students who are more transient. He shared:

> When students want immediate change and you realistic and know that it's going to take like five years for that to change. But most students are only at a institution for 4 to 5 years so they may not see that. I also recognize that it is sort of important to talk about what can we do now and what can we plan. And how can we plan and make sure that any student-initiated program is sustainable. One of the things that I tell students is that "we love to see you come but, we love to see you go as well. It is not your job to stick around here but if you have something that is really wonderful, how can we make sure that is sustainable when you leave. We need to have officer training for the next group that comes in and make sure you are keeping notes so that can be translated to the next group that comes in as well so that we are not reinventing the wheel as the new cohort of students come in.

Building and maintaining coalitions that can sustainably work toward Black liberation was an important form of Black racial justice work.

Physical resistance. Participants used their physical bodies to resist ABR. They put their bodies at risk of danger in order to protect, liberate or affirm Black people. Sometimes physical resistance involved collective action where participants took up physical space (e.g., through protest marches, removing oppressive symbols of White supremacy). Other times, participants acted independently to defend Black people or

spaces. The following quotes illustrated some of the ways in which our participants engaged in physical resistance:

> I stood before a tank, the National Guard coming down our street [during the Detroit riots] and I just stood before the tank, and I said, "You're not coming down my street" . . . I was 10. –Micah

> We ended up, for whatever reason, somebody agreed to just march down the street cause the police precinct is here. –Quess

Courage was directly tied to physical resistance activism. Participants were critically conscious of the way White supremacy is written into law and, therefore, understood that engaging in physical resistance often meant breaking laws or disregarding rules and authority figures. The potential costs of this form of activism ranged from death (e.g., if the tank came down the street and Micah did not move, if protests turned violent) to imprisonment (e.g., rioting charges for protesting, civil disobedience charges for failing to follow National Guards orders) and beyond.

Physical resistance was often connected to other types of activism. Participants did not just seek to resist in physical ways, but they often also combined physical resistance with other actions such as spacemaking, artivism, or storying survival. One participant, who asked for their name to be withheld (from this part of the publication only) to protect their identity as they started to tell this story, described how they combined several types of activism to physically resist ABR. They shared:

> The last thing we did was a block party outside, with no permission. . . I was doing an action in the airport with like 50 musicians . . . and we were singing, "open the borders, open the borders . . . na-na-na," and we disrupted the airport. . . And then after that, it was the block party in the street, full downtown. And we just occupied a space and put music and the people and dancing on the streets.

Participants committed to using their bodies in ways that would potentially improve outcomes for Black people. Physical resistance served to raise awareness, physically

change the environment to make it less oppressive, and affirm the dignity of Black people.

Modeling/mentoring. Participants had a critical awareness of ABR, and, therefore, they committed to actively reducing ABR by serving as mentors and/or by modeling anti-oppressive behavior. Modeling and mentoring are interpersonal, requiring one-on-one contact with another person. Most often, participants mentored or served as a role model for other Black people. They proactively worked to affirm, support, and increase wellness among their racial group. Aaron, who serves as a role model for youth in his hometown of Rockford, IL shared:

> Me being systematic, me going about how I want things to change, I'm going for showering our youth with positivity. . . Open up their eyes towards the opportunities that are there, regardless of what they see in front of them. . . So, the theme is that Black men are poor fathers. We are criminals. You know, you'll see us on *Cops* before you see us in Congress. So, we need to reverse the fad to where we're educated, we're intellectuals, we are great fathers. . . And not just that. We're innovators. Not that we're good at the simple things, but we are out here doing great.

Participants, having intersectional self-awareness, capitalized on their positionality by intervening in ways that their social identities, roles, and locations best allowed them to. For example, Michael, who is a professor, and Erica, who was a graduate student, both served as mentors to students on campus. Erica described her mentorship as follows:

> Showing up to activities that [Black undergraduates] were putting on campus and really just kind of letting them know, here's someone that has gone through what you've gone through, has made it out on the other side, I don't even have to talk to you about it if it's not something you're interested in, but I'm interested in seeing you succeed even if it's knowing that there's someone who takes an interest in things that you've put time in to.

Conigan, who is deeply connected to his Chicago community, described how he works to be a role model for his village:

> Della: The work that you do for Black folks is really . . .
>
> Conigan: That's the village.
>
> Della: Yeah, say more about that.
>
> Conigan: Like you see how I carry myself. Maybe that'll rub off on somebody. Maybe my good spirit, my good nature can make somebody feel better about they self today. Maybe the word that I gave this guy today can stop him from killing himself tomorrow. Maybe this child was gonna run away from home, but I gave her such a kind word or him such a kind word and they went back home today. And they stayed home, and they grew up. How do we know everything that we touch isn't negative? So, since I don't know, I tried to make everything I touch as positive as I can.

Like Conigan, many participants sought to change their immediate community or social environment by committing to serving as a role model.

In addition to simply modeling positive behaviors, participants modeled what it meant to be committed to Black racial justice. They modeled key components of CCABR, such as intersectional self-awareness, openness, and courage. For example, Elena shared a story of how she made a misstep in her activism, openly shared about her misstep, and sought to right her wrongs publicly.

> I had to deal with the fact that somebody thinks I'm mad or I'm a bad person, but I'm not. But now, like, it's not for me to be like, "No, no, please believe that I'm a good person." Like, I have to respect this space. And for me to go and tell other people . . . I never had a chance to tell that person personally that that was my reflection. But I told other people, who were involved that I invited. I told them I realize I should not do this.

Black racial justice activists like Elena modeled specific behaviors that either facilitated general CCABR or specific attributes of a Black racial justice activist.

Organizing. Organizing for Black racial justice represented an important type of activism for participants. Organizing involved serving as a leader in the development of actions focused on Black racial justice and the overall wellness of Black people and communities. Participants led, organized, and developed multimodal interventions to promote Black wellness. Organizing required developing clear goals, thinking strategically and motivating others to work toward desired outcomes.

Participants who engaged in organizing developed goals specific to Black liberation. They identified the outcomes that they wanted to accomplish and organized people and spaces in order to help them reach their goals. Participants had to be strategic to determine the approaches that would assist them in meeting their specific aims. For example, Laina desired to reduce isolation among women, particularly Black women, who coped through, but experienced struggles within, heavy metal culture. She shared:

> I put on a one-day symposium in April because I felt that . . . well I deal a lot with sexism and misogyny within extreme music. Like women performers and, also obviously Black women, getting involved. And there have been some things that have happened this year in terms of men just completely disregarding the issues of sexual harassment and assault, and then also having young people email because of my book [*What Are You Doing Here? A Black Woman's Life and Liberation in Heavy Metal*] and say, "You know I'm the only one. I can't tell my friends and my family that I'm into this band or into this music." And it's really a problem for kids when they feel like they can't tell people what they love and enjoy. So, I've done a couple of things over the last couple of years, which has brought together a community of young women who are into the same thing and we have a talk or whatever . . . so creating a space so people can tell their stories whether it's good or bad. Because what people don't realize is that these kids already know that they can't tell their White friends that they were groped at a show. Or they can't tell their White friends why their Black family doesn't want to hear that they are into metal or punk. They don't understand the issues and the complications. So, they need spaces where they can have these conversations.

Organizing was also a task that participants explicitly associated with the term activist. For some, engaging in the act of organizing was what signaled to them that they were, technically, an activist. Quess draws this connection, noting:

> Activism is the engagement of public to wake 'em up again . . . that's why I say it's more than that because I quickly took the lead with Take 'Em Down NOLA. It couldn't just be me moving it. Cause I had to ask people to do things. I had to ask people to come to meetings. I had to organize the meetings or organize them.

For participants like Quess, the act of organizing people and actions is paramount to being a Black racial justice activist.

Teaching. Participants served as teachers and trainers, educating others about topics and processes that facilitate Black liberation. Whether participating in formalized training interventions or educating individuals in one's own social network, teaching for Black liberation was a common type of activism.

> Yesterday, I had a conversation with a Black person in my family about how it is actually pretty offensive for you to call someone a half-breed when you believe that they are biracial. This is why that's not okay. -Lauren

> I realized that you don't see us when you look at it, when you look at hashtag health, wellness, fitness, you don't see us. And if you do, then it's extremely unobtainable, and I was like, "wait a minute, what is that?" . . . So, in Brown and Healthy, it's a declarative statement. You see me wearing this, it means that I'm here, I'm trying to stay here, my kids gone be here, and we gonna keep existing on this plane in mental, physical, emotional well-being. . . So, what can we do? How can we train? How can we build? And how can this be undisputed? Because this is not negative. This is proactivity at its finest. . . So we doing programming, we do the Brown and Healthy speaker series here at Dovecote every second and fourth Tuesday where we talk about all manner of topic. We're booked up all the way through the year. We have people come in and speak about whatever their expertise is in the realm of mental, physical, emotional well-being, which can be huge. You can broach all topics. –Michelle

Participants realized that the process of teaching about ABR and how to develop as a Black racial justice activist was ongoing with small components being taught by different people at different points in time. Therefore, sometimes teaching was simply

offering feedback or advice to people or groups in hopes of reducing ABR. Feedback could occur once or could be a repeated and intentional process with follow-up and accountability. Having an awareness of how to best use one's positionality helped participants who utilized teaching in their activism to be more effective. In the following example, Geo described her positionality, how she used it to teach others about their complicity in White supremacy, and how to be more inclusive.

> Geo: So, where I find myself is just being a resource and helping people facilitate that through the multicultural center. I'm still advising the club I used to run. Helping them organize in that way and asking them to ask themselves if they're doing the right thing. Like who are they excluding. Then I started working with other clubs because there is a lot of anti-Blackness at Purchase, but it isn't very clearly because we're an art school and "everyone's weird" and "everyone's an individual" and "everything's great." But there's still all White spaces at this school, and that's a product of class and money because who's studying art? Who's allowed into these conservatories? Who's been training since they were three?
>
> Della: Who's had the security to feel like it was an option?
>
> Geo: Yeah, so, really going into those spaces . . . and calling them out, and they know it's happening but it's really being like get over your White guilt and find ways to include people. And it can't be you sitting in this dusty-ass room. You need to go out and find people. They're not going to come to you. They already have an idea of what this space is so it's your job to change that idea. So, doing that and trying to give them support in that way.

Teaching was such a common practice for many participants that they educated the interviewer constantly throughout the interview in an intentional manner. This process was reflective of their general tendency to educate people and encourage others to constantly learn more about ABR and Black liberation. Participants did not make assumptions about what was known by others. Participants often checked in with their listener to assess what the listener knew about the topic and then offered new knowledge to them. Participants would discuss people, historical moments, policy, and the like and

then suggest that further research be done on the topic. Sometimes they would suggest where to turn in order to enhance understanding of the matter. Of particular importance to our participants was that Black people, from the past and present, who contributed to Black liberation were named and known. Participants would often suggest that the interviewer or audience for their interview would “look up,” “Google,” “research” or otherwise follow up in order to gain more information about the person they had offered some initial education about. Whether encouraging people to learn their rights or to learn about people and programs important to Black liberation—like Linda Joy Burke and People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond—teaching and advocating for further study was common.

Scholar-activism. Scholar-activism involves participating in activism promoting Black wellness that is informed by scholarship and/or contributing to Black wellness-focused scholarship that is informed by activism. A majority of participants engaged in activism that was informed by scholarship related to Black liberation. For example, Quess’s artivism was informed by scholarship from the book *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. He shared:

> We created this play called Voices of the Back of the Class talking all about miseducation. We used James Lohan [sic] I believe. We used *Lies My Teacher Told Me* as the text. And then we create skits and do story circles off of that.

Rooting one’s activism in scholarly knowledge was common. Less common, due to the degree of privilege (e.g., class, education) required, was the production of activism-informed scholarship.

Some participants’ primary form of activism was producing scholarship to promote Black wellness. These individuals were students and professors who committed

to centering their work on Black wellness. For example, Geo described how she took the opportunity to focus her senior project on an issue impacting the Black community. She stated:

> My senior project was about how Black Twitter resurrects all these Black bodies in this really amazing way. By using these images and using hashtags you can write this narrative, and it's a grieving process and a mourning process. But it's also magical in a way because there are no limits on Twitter.

For Geo, this scholarly project allowed her to draw connections between Black death, grief, and the role of social media in collective healing. For other scholar-activists further in their careers, they not only produced research that promoted Black wellness, but also worked to reduce Black invisibility in research. For example, Michael, a professor at Tulane, shared:

> I am very active in the research in *Child Development*. . . I am a associate editor for *Child Development*. I try to make sure that there are articles that give voice to the Black experiences or to underrepresented group experiences.

It was important for participants to not simply engage in research, but to be personally involved with the communities they focused their research on. For example, Erica described her efforts to engage in activism with communities of color (whom she also researches), sharing:

> I sought out opportunities to get engaged and get active in the different areas in which I wanted to make sure to make an impact. So, in my sorority I looked for opportunities to be able to get involved in certain programs. Not only still in my areas of interest, in terms of psychology and human sexuality, but wanted to make sure that I was involved in some kind of way, especially if the groups that we were going to be impacting were gonna be People of Color.

Participants who engaged in scholar-activism were involved in a process that involved staying attuned to the needs and experiences of the Black community in a personal way

as well as producing knowledge in a professional manner that may have a broader impact.

Utilizing Black Racial Justice Activist Approaches to Activism: "We have to go, now."

Utilizing Black Racial Justice Activist Approaches to Activism refers to the manner in which participants engaged in activism. Nine approaches were repeatedly described by participants in their activism practice. The approaches overlap with many of the Processing ABR categories. For example, Being Actively Intersectional builds upon Developing Intersectional Self-Awareness and Contextualizing builds upon Making Historical Connections. Each of the approaches are described below.

Having urgency. Participants put forth effort toward Black liberation in an urgent manner and believed that others should as well. Aaron highlighted the importance of urgency sharing:

> We have to formulate a next step. And we can't be slow to reaction at it, to where a Black life is taken and then, all of a sudden, we move. We have to have a plan of action before our lives are lost. In this movement, we react instead of take act. So many things are going on that we feel like, okay, once the next thing happens, then we're gonna do this and that. We have to take preventative measures and then take pride in the fact that we're taking preventative measures and not be told that this hasn't happened yet, so we can't fight against it. We have to go, now.

Participants like Aaron articulated their value of action as a response to injustice. Erica, who is from Baton Rouge and was impacted by the police-involved killing of Alton Sterling, described her desire for urgent responsiveness from her family members who were in the area. She shared:

> I feel like I was so far away in terms of distance that I wouldn't be able to attend any demonstrations. I wouldn't be able to attend any protests. I couldn't get to North Baton Rouge fast enough. My father and his wife actually live a couple of blocks from the store. And so, they talked a lot about the traffic and kind of what

> they were hearing. Or that was kind of his take, but I think I was so, again, I was so engrossed in what was happening on my timeline that I was revved up and I was looking to kind of hear them volunteer the way that they were going to be involved. Because that to me is, was my natural kind of reaction and next movement.

For Black racial justice activists, like Erica, getting involved and engaged in actions that signaled Black lives mattered was important.

Participants in the sample reflected a high degree of responsiveness to ABR through critical action. While they were committed to urgent action, they were not simply reactive. Their actions were explicitly tied to Black liberation. Furthermore, they believed actions should be enacted strategically, yet urgently. The following two examples highlight how critical actions were undertaken urgently.

> We created an inspired by Black Lives Matter group in Montreal. And it was because someone was killed recently by police and we met the . . . friends [who] organized a march. And then after that march, we decided to meet and talk about it, and then that became, like, "Okay, let's do something about this." –Elena

> You know, I'm looking at a Latina dude with this big-ass bulge on the side of his fucking jeans smiling the whole time, you know what I'm saying? Clearly a under [undercover police officer]. And so, at that we knew what the stakes were. But we also knew let's plan this time . . . within a day or two we sat down and planned to do our own march. –Quess

In both narratives, an incident occurred that inspired the activists to respond urgently. However, they analyzed the situation, met with their comrades, and planned a strategic response that could still be executed fairly rapidly.

Being self-reflective. This sample was self-reflective while doing different forms of activism. Because they were self-reflective, they recognized their limitations, when their efficacy was low, and when help was needed. Participants were conscientious about how others might perceive them and tried to stay attuned to when they made a misstep in their actions that could potentially harm others. Their self-reflectiveness enabled them to

take ownership over their actions and improve their activism and their relationships in the process. Geo's self-reflectiveness, both in the context of her interpersonal activism with her boyfriend, and as it relates to her broader identity as a Black racial justice activist on campus, helped illustrate this process. She shared:

> My ex-boyfriend plays a big role in what was happening in college because he was half White and half Indian, but completely Jewish. So, this whole other identity that he never dealt with. And so, me, trying to confront all this racism and stuff. He passes but doesn't really pass. He grew up upstate and is comfortable in White settings. And me challenging him on that was really tough. He had not seen himself in that racial lens. I'm like are you fucking kidding me? Do you know who I am? You're making me look bad. You can't be saying these things.

Geo's self-reflectiveness allowed her to intervene with her partner and also to assess the impact of their relationship on how she is perceived in the world as an activist fighting for Black liberation.

Participants also thought through the meaning and impact of their commitment to activism. They were explicit about the fact that their engagement in activism was, sometimes, taken on as an intentional attempt to heal from the pain of ABR. Occasionally, participants increased their commitment to action as a result of their self-reflection. For example, Elena's self-reflectiveness highlighted the cost (loss of energy) and also underscored the personal benefit she received (personal emancipation) from doing activism. She shared:

> If racism didn't happen, what would I be? Cause so much of my energy is spent in this. Would I be at the same level, or would I be further, more? Or would I be never emancipated, because I emancipated through this? I don't know, but those are questions that I'm asking myself.

Similarly, for Erica, her self-reflectiveness allowed her to preserve her energy. She noted:

> I think for me it is challenging with the way that I receive the information about what is going on. And how do I protect myself so that I can make sure that the impact or my involvement is as good as it can be? Because I think if I am spent and if I am emotionally depleted, just from the visual assault of what is happening . . . keeping in mind that that's not my life's work right? And, fortunately and unfortunately, I have a profession that is also emotionally taxing. And when I think about choices, I have to be very careful about how I spend my emotional resources. And so, what I've started to think a little bit about is ways that I can be involved that doesn't create an environment for me to be emotionally impacted in the same way. So again, trying to think about it from a very systems perspective and how I can fit in that kind of system.

Self-reflectiveness while immersed in ABR allowed Erica to remain involved in activism without compromising her professional career-related needs. Self-reflectiveness allowed participants to pivot in their activism pursuits while in process. In doing so, their efficacy and sustainability appeared to also increase.

Specifying focus. Interviewees in the present sample demonstrated the importance of specifying a focus when engaged in Black racial justice work. By focusing efforts on particular manifestations of ABR and/or a community that is contending with ABR, participants felt impactful. Participants' decision-making processes regarding their foci varied based on their own identities, contexts, skills, and comfort in different roles and positions. For example, Lamin describes how his skills informed his focus as an activist. He shared:

> I have a political background also, so I have friends who are on the city council and people in the police department, so where can I pull from those resources? Also, I have a . . . public relations background, so how can we use media effectively?

The focus of participants in this sample included Black youth, Black queer people, Black people in their immediate geographic location, Black victims of police brutality, and more. Michelle specified her focus, both in terms of the community she hopes to impact and the aspect of ABR that she wants to change. She shared:

> What comes to me is the radicalness of taking care of what you are directly responsible for and that is your household. Training people in your homes. Read books, get the counseling, talk to your network, get your people involved. Whatever you can do with that you can get your hands on, that's tangible, that you can sit and have a conversation. Because in the narrative with Brown and Healthy, the tagline is "Change the narrative, change the world." So that's what I was talking about with the hashtags and stuff. Cause I said we have to change this narrative; we have to address it.

For Michelle, taking care of her immediate community and altering the narrative around Black wellness was important. Specifying focus allowed participants to better plan their efforts and assess their impact.

Being actively intersectional. Participants were actively intersectional when engaging in their activist work. Being actively intersectional means that while one is working toward Black liberation they attend to dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression in both planning for their activism work and implementing their activism work. Given participants' understanding of power as it relates to structuring hierarchies and creating barriers to wellness, they sought to be mindful of privilege, leveraging their own privilege when beneficial to the cause and working to expand the power of those who experienced oppression. Being actively intersectional took many forms but upheld the aforementioned characteristics. Aaron provided a rich example of being actively intersectional as he discussed his efforts toward increasing access to safe spaces for youth in his community through his website as well as the importance of thinking about people who may not have internet access. He narrated:

> Now the focus of S.A.F.E. Rockford's website, saferockford.org, which compiles a lot of the people, a lot of organizations, a lot of community centers, and positive events for families. It's pretty useful. I basically tried to keep kids away from negative things. So, in just realizing the need for that, you also see the need for . . . if I create a website, how does a parent who doesn't have internet get to that? Well, there's a program at Rockford that gives internet to every student in public school. But if you don't have any awareness of that program, you're missing out

> on that internet that's gonna lead you to my website that's gonna lead your kids to a better life. So, there's a whole lack of awareness, a network of ignorance, that is keeping us down. . . What S.A.F.E Rockford wants to do is just attack that awareness aspect and every tangible detail that goes along with it.

Aaron realized access would be an issue for some of the community he sought to reach. Therefore, he found mechanisms of increasing internet access and made it part of his mission to increase community awareness about this solution. Aaron was actively intersectional during the planning stages of his activism. Elena offered another example of being actively intersectional while in the process of completing activism focused on people who were incarcerated. She shared:

> I would have conversations and record them with people who had lived that, or with people who were inside and would call us. So, we had a center who had a relationship with them and we would just, we had scheduled where we would be there and receive calls. And then, so, that was intense. And I learned a lot about that life. . . The one thing that I discovered is that I never lived incarceration, so there's still my gaze of my interpretation and my questions. And I was working so hard on, I think I'm not judging, but even though I don't want to, there are things that I don't know about that life. So, I wanted that project to eventually become led by people who lived that reality.

For Elena, she used her privilege to establish relationships and initiate a project that would amplify the voices of people who are incarcerated. Being actively intersectional, however, she recognized the need to then relinquish leadership (e.g., privilege) to the people most directly impacted by incarceration. Participants tended to value people our society traditionally devalues, and they reduced power differentials by being actively intersectional in their activism.

Being resourceful/affording activism. Doing activism required time, energy, money, and resources. Participants were resourceful and developed methods that would help ensure they could afford to engage in activism. While financial concerns were often noted as barriers to activism, participants worked to find ways to not only fund their

activism-related needs but to allow them the time, energy, and other resources required for engaging in activism. For example, some of the costs of activism included time away from primary jobs, housing when traveling to a protest or Black liberation conference or training, a workforce, space for activism and/or Black wellness events, or materials for artivism projects (to name a few). Micah described some of his methods for affording activism, noting:

> We literally have bought a new church with 19 acres and six buildings, it's a campus style. We still own the old 138-year-old church. Me and my wife came as one pastor, we didn't come where I'm senior. We came as one. And she left her job as a human resources person to run the enterprise and that's what she does full-time and it lets me do a lot of other stuff. . . And then we leased the old property to another church, and so the rent there literally pays enough to pay our mortgage. . . and the blessing will be, the county is fighting me, but I'm going to do the school for brown and Black boys, middle school there. And we're working on that. Got an after-school program that's called Impact. And my program, which is really teaching problem solving, conflict management. And what we do, is we literally go to one of our less resourced schools and we bring boys from there. And they've gone from being the worst boys in the school to being the best. And the program is called BEST, Brothers Energized Spirited and Talented.

Micah used family resources, leveraged space from his church, and found creative ways to improve wellness for Black boys in the face of structural challenges.

Being resourceful/affording activism was an approach that participants engaged in constantly throughout their activism. Participants often relied on their social networks to support their activism efforts. They recognized that activism required, as Quess noted, "many hands, light work." By utilizing "many hands," they lightened their load and resourced their activism work. In addition, resourcefulness also meant finding ways to merge one's activism interests with their professional responsibilities. Participants were committed to fighting ABR but needed to sustain their income. They worked creatively to merge these two, sometimes competing, commitments. For Michael, being

resourceful/affording activism meant using his position as an associate provost to engage in Black racial justice work. He detailed:

> In terms of admissions decisions, in my department programs, to make sure that students that are underrepresented are given a chance, even for the interview process. When I first got there, they would get an Excel spreadsheet of all the applicants and they would be sorted by GRE score. They would have GRE score, name, race, school, publication, GPA, and all that type of stuff. I would go down by the race category and be like, okay who are all the Black students who applied? And so, and what's the GRE score, what this that and the other? And I would say, okay so this person needs to be interviewed, that person needs to be interviewed. I would say, I might work with this person; this person would be good for you. It is to make sure that other Black students would be at least reviewed if you will and considered for admission. In my role as associate provost, I run a office called the Office of Graduate Studies and Postdocs. I oversee the PhD programs and the research-based master's program at the university, and I approve all the new postdocs. And so, I have marketing funds for programs to recruit students, PhD students. One of the things that I did was require that we have a diversity plan, otherwise you cannot get the marketing funds. And so, I did this one year and the first year we did it, if you didn't have a diversity plan then you didn't get as much money. So, I had people email me saying, "Hey, I sent in the same application as I did last year, and I didn't get the same funding." And I said, "Well, did you read the RFP, it said you must have a diversity plan and so that why you didn't get it.'" So that's the least that I can do in my position.

Michael had an intense full-time position at a university as a professor and an associate provost. Affording activism, for him, meant utilizing his time and roles so that he was working toward Black liberation while maintaining the standard commitments of his profession.

For participants who engaged in activism outside of their primary jobs, they had to be resourceful and find ways to afford their activism endeavors as well. Sometimes this meant adding a formal structure to their activism efforts. For example, Lamin and Elena co-coordinated social groups that could be recognizable by others when recruiting support. For Michelle, being resourceful meant turning her movement from a hashtag into an organization. She shared:

> We had to become an organization, so that we could get the grant funding and things to push the programs. You have to. You can't just exist in the nether regions. It has to exist, and it has to be a clear and defined rule, a clear and defined mission, and a clear and defined person who you can come to if you got some issues with Brown and Healthy. Or if you want to understand what Brown and Healthy is, you talk to me or you talk to one of my directors or you talk to somebody that's working for me. But either way there's a voice, there's a person behind it that you can communicate with. It will not be adapted or taken by other people as the forefront of whatever. It is, yes, a movement but it is a movement with a clear base and with a clear structure.

Being resourceful/affording activism was imperative in sustaining and maintaining the integrity of activism among participants like Michelle.

Contextualizing. As demonstrated throughout the data, participants attended to context while engaging in activism. They believed that their activism efforts should be tailored specifically to their environmental contexts. They made choices about how to respond to ABR based on the setting they were in, the community they were doing activism with and for, and what the temporal moment called for. By attending to context, participants were able to garner support, tailor their actions to their specific targets, and, ultimately, make meaningful impacts in their communities. Geo provided an illustration of contextualizing. She noted:

> I think you have to work the community. I think some of these activists who are idolized don't work in a community anymore or they're now the spokespeople for a movement, and I feel like the Black Lives Matter movement can't function like that.

The following passage from Quess also highlighted the importance of contextualizing when doing Black racial justice activism. He narrated:

> We all, you know, kinda rock stars in the community for whatever things that we do. So, we knew between the 10 of us we could get people. We did not know it'd be 300 people. That's the biggest action we've ever had. That's a big number in New Orleans all gathered. And I made a suggestion that night, "Yo, let's go to Lee Circle." "Alright, we'll go to Lee Circle. We gone highlight you know what is going on." I was hip to that because Malcolm and Leon who were old-school

> activists had been doing that work for decades. And I went to one of they teachings like 5, 6 years prior. And, so, you know when we highlighted that. That began the work of uh Take 'Em Down really. Because we all made asks that day. We had three different petitions went out, and one of them was to have Lee Circle taken down.

In this example, Quess highlighted many forms of contextualizing. First, understanding his social support network and each person's potential reach when promoting a racial justice event was one context he considered. Second, in thinking through what would constitute a success, he contextualized based on contemporary history of New Orleans social actions. Third, he suggested an action centered on a local environmental context where White supremacist symbols were present. As demonstrated by Geo and Quess, contextualizing is a powerful approach that helps activists as they conceptualize, execute, and reflect on their actions.

Being persistent. In the CCABR model, being persistent means being resilient and not giving up in the face of ABR and challenges to activism. Participants stayed true to their beliefs and continued their activism, despite pressures, struggles, barriers to wellness, and risks. When relationships, conversations, actions, or outcomes did not go as they hoped, the participants were persistent and remained committed to their goals irrespective of the time and work that it took to reach that end. For example, Erica highlighted being persistent as she described her struggles to work with people earlier in their CCABR development.

> I think that some of the things that can happen as folks, as they're not as passionate as you are or if they're not being involved in the same way that you are, then you can get frustrated. And you can kind of say, "Well you don't really understand, you're not really standing with us, you must be against us." I think it can create this environment that doesn't really need to be created. It's just, again, a continued understanding, a respect for what's going on. And I think just a continued presence and just saying, "You know I'm going to maintain this presence." If you think about love, a true demonstration of love is being with

someone through the good and the bad as they develop, as they change. And even if someone interacts with you in a way that is, that you feel hurt or hurtful and are affected by. It doesn't mean you can't love them; it means that you love them in a different way.

Erica's love ethic helped her to be persistent and maintain a presence with Black people who were not committed or acting on behalf of Black racial justice.

The types of activism participants engaged in sometimes required significant time and effort, especially to make a large impact. Being persistent is what allowed participants to actually follow their actions through over the long term. Whether their Black racial justice efforts were organizing a symposium, changing university policy, organizing a citywide demonstration or protest, or putting on a play, their activism took persistent effort to make it happen. Lamin described the persistence required to garner support for marches in Lexington, KY that would be in solidarity with #BLM and the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO. He noted, "I remember, we came back from Ferguson 2 years ago. It took us a few months to even get, we did get a nice 100 or 300 downtown, but that took months." Being persistent during activism was critical. Participants knew that persistent effort would be required in order to achieve the outcomes they hoped for, particularly as it related to making broad, systemic change.

Maintaining future orientation. Maintaining future orientation is an activism approach that involves working to ensure efforts toward Black liberation were sustainable. Activists who maintained future orientation were visionaries interested in facilitating long-term systemic change in the interest of Black wellness. When participants had historical and systemic awareness (particularly of White supremacy and how it manifested through colonization and facilitated ABR), they knew that systemic change would take time. Participants were also aware that some of the commitment to

Black activism would be reduced over time, and they actively grappled with how to sustain the movement. For example, Erica shared:

> Folks may be doing it initially just to make sure that they belong and don't get left behind. But I would hope that they could get connected in another way, to just kind of maintain that participation, maintain that drive. Because of course things will hamper down and things will really kind of fade out. But I think it's important for us to not look for opportunities to be involved but look for reasons to be involved.

Activists such as Erica wanted to ensure that people who were beginning to engage in activism developed a critical awareness around the issues and their participation in order to remain committed to Black racial justice in the future.

Participants maintained a future orientation so that they might strategically intervene against ABR. Interviewees described having short- and long-term goals and actively worked toward sustainability in their activism. Because they had a future orientation and engaged in the goal setting process, participants tended to be focused on quality over quantity when engaging in activism. For example, Laina reflected on her activism efforts and recognized the need for ongoing support for the women of color she was spacemaking for as well as the importance of meaningful community building efforts. She stated:

> I'm seeing how it works. The networking and the community that's being built, which I think is really important because I certainly didn't have it at all when I was a kid . . . and that you know things don't end after this one day. . . I think that really is something that, and knowing that you will have to continue on with this. Knowing that one symposium is not going to be enough or one hang-out or meet-up is not enough. That there's always going to be more women that should be involved. And there's always going to be the negative issues that will bring them, like they will need to talk about.

Laina and other participants engaged in activism, assessed its impact, and—if it met their Black wellness goals—then worked to strategize methods for ensuring the activism could be maintained in the future.

Acting Critically Against ABR was a robust category. After having witnessed ABR, gaining a cognitive, intersectional, and behavioral understanding of it, and figuring out how to respond to it alone and with others, participants were able to act against ABR in diverse and critical ways. Whereas the Coping with Racial Trauma subcategory describes how participants cope with racial trauma on a personal level, Acting Against ABR illustrates how they strategically combat ABR at both the interpersonal and collective levels. These activists illuminated a range of behaviors that contribute to Black racial justice.

Furthermore, the activists clarified their process for acting against ABR as Black people who endorse a commitment to Black racial justice as an intersectional and inclusive project. The values of the activists were evident as they reflected an integration that honored immediacy alongside strategy, perseverance with resourcefulness, and clear foci and creativity. The activists interviewed for this study have identified a process of developing CCABR which moved them from witnessing ABR, to processing ABR, to acting against ABR in a critical manner; ultimately facilitating Black liberation.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This research study was designed to develop a practical theory about how critical consciousness is developed for individuals engaged in activism that aligns with the intersectional values articulated by the Black Lives Matter movement (#BLM). The co-constructed model presented in Chapter Four outlines the processes for developing critical consciousness of anti-Black racism (ABR) as narrated by 12 Black activists and co-constructed by the research team. This final chapter of the dissertation will summarize the results of the study, with an emphasis on connections to previous research and recommendations for counseling psychologists.

Interpretation of the Findings

The CCABR model is the first to qualitatively explore the processes involved in developing critical consciousness specific to a form of oppression: ABR. While broad models of critical consciousness development exist (Watts et al., 2003, 2011; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015), few explore critical action, and none have explicated the inner workings of critical consciousness development among people within one movement (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). These data offer insights into the processes of critical consciousness development of Black activists who are actively working to dismantle ABR through an intersectional approach.

The CCABR model is divided into three categories (Witnessing ABR, Processing ABR, and Acting Critically Against ABR). This model converges and diverges from the general critical consciousness model (Watts et al., 2011) in distinct ways. The CCABR model aligns with Watts and colleagues' (2011) theory in that both involve critically reflecting on oppression, increasing sociopolitical efficacy, and engaging in critical

action. However, the categories within the CCABR model are unique processes that are specific to developing critical consciousness as a Black person working toward Black liberation.

Importantly, CCABR begins with a process of witnessing ABR and experiencing racial trauma. This is an intimate and emotionally laden process, as participants described personally experiencing or witnessing oppression based on an identity they themselves, as well as the people they care about, possess. The personal nature of this experiencing resulted in racial trauma and was a source of motivation toward action. The degree of intimacy and emotionality indicated by our participants is a unique contribution to the critical consciousness literature. Existing models of critical consciousness, broadly defined, do not approximate these personal factors (Freire, 1970; Watts et al., 2011). However, Watts and colleagues' (2003) early research on sociopolitical development converges with the current findings in that both suggest it is the "cumulative and recursive process" that leads to increased awareness and agency (p. 192). Although identified first in CCABR, Witnessing ABR was often revisited during and between the other two primary components of the model (Processing ABR and Acting Critically Against ABR), contributing the recursive nature of this model.

The current model also builds upon Nigrescence Theory (Cross, 1971, 1994; Vandiver, 2001; Vandiver, Fhagen-Smith, Cokley, Cross, & Worrell, 2001). Nigresence, or the process of becoming Black, involves several experiences that participants contributing to the CCABR model also identified. For example, Witnessing ABR maps onto stage two in Cross's (1971, 1994) model, the Encounter stage. Witnessing ABR is similar to the Encounter in that both are described as "fluid" developmental periods

marked by one or more eye-opening racialized experiences (Vandiver, 2001, p. 168). There are also key parallels between the cohesive CCABR model and stage 5 of Nigresence, Internalization, particularly Internalization Multiculturalist (Cross, 1994; Vandiver, 2001). During the Internalization stage, a Black person has high race salience and, for the Multiculturalist, they also recognize several of their other cultural identities as important (Cross, 1994; Vandiver et al., 2001). In the Internalization stage, a person also engages in activism and experiences healing (Cross, 1994; Vandiver et al., 2001). The current study advances the Nigresence model by delineating the critical consciousness development processes Black people move through to ultimately end up in the Internalization Multiculturalist stage in the current sociopolitical climate.

For an individual to advance in CCABR development, they need to process the ABR they have witnessed. Advancing in critical consciousness to reach the stage of critical action involved moving through three complex, interrelated growth processes that served to increase agency. Participants navigated cognitive growth (Increasing Systemic and Historical Awareness and Committing to a Critical Stance), intersectional growth (Developing Intersectional Self-Awareness and Committing to Intersectionality), and behavioral growth (Coping with Racial Trauma and Making Connections) processes. Participants had several significant growth-promoting experiences across these three spheres of development that, together, increased their agency as individuals and as a part of a collective invested in Black liberation.

Feeling more efficacious, participants described then being able to act against ABR in a critical manner through participating in one or more of seven overarching actions. The Black liberation work that these activists chose to engage in made sense to

them given their critical lens, aligned with their intersectional framework and self-concept, and felt doable to them based on their capacities and connections. For example, Aaron's creation of a website identifying safe spaces for Black youth aligned with his talents, passion for youth, and awareness of a lack of safety and youth opportunity in his hometown. Like Aaron, activists in this sample utilized approaches to activism that built upon their prior witnessing and processing, further highlighting the flow-on nature of the CCABR model.

The activists who co-constructed the CCABR model described a non-linear context-based process that is strengthened through repeated engagement in each of the processes. For example, Doing Black Liberation Work was strengthened as an activist continued to Make Connections. Their ability to Make Connections improved both as they Witnessed ABR and Developed Intersectional Self-Awareness. Developing CCABR thus involved moving through and constantly returning to each of the processes. The clear delineation of this fluid process, as well as the specificity related to ABR, are two important and unique contributions of this study.

The fluidity of the CCABR model aligns with the work of Watts and colleagues (2003), who noted the necessity of "ecological and transactional" perspectives over stage models in their study of sociopolitical development (p. 190). While Watts and Abdul-Adil (1998) originally introduced a stage model based on their work with young African American men, later interviews conducted with young urban African American activists by Watts et al. (2003) encouraged an expansion to the theory, which focused more on contextual factors. Like our participants, the people, places, and unique experiences in Watts and colleagues' (2003) study were critical and varied with each participant. For

our participants, experiencing racism, attending programming fostering social justice language and skill development, or being exposed to Black arts and culture were some of the contextual factors that advanced CCABR by providing material for witnessing and processing. The participants clearly identified formative experiences that built upon one another, delineating a process that moved them toward Black liberatory action. Provided the novelty and complexity of this model, a close interrogation of each of the categories is necessitated. Each of the three major CCABR processes (Witnessing ABR, Processing ABR, and Acting Critically Against ABR) is outlined below, and extant research related to each of these categories is synthesized as appropriate.

Witnessing ABR

For Black people cultivating CCABR, the process begins by Witnessing ABR. The concept of witnessing is made increasingly salient due to the ubiquity and normalization of Whiteness (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Gusa, 2010). Being able to witness the ways in which Whiteness is maintained through acts of ABR was critical to CCABR development. The process of Witnessing ABR was not impersonal or academic (e.g., focused on language acquisition and strategy building), as described in Watts and Hipolito-Delgado's (2015) review of critical consciousness literature, but was intimate and born of personal and often painful experiences. ABR was something that Black people experienced firsthand, were told about, or indirectly observed patterns of as they navigated their varying contexts.

ABR and racial trauma. The CCABR model specifies that for Black people to increase their agency and move toward action they must intimately (although not necessarily directly) witness ABR. Witnessing occurred directly through overtly

traumatic instances of ABR and indirectly. Sharing personal and familial stories of both pain and resistance is a historical tradition among People of Color and Indigenous People, including Black people (Comas-Díaz, 2007; Shenk, 2000). However, racial trauma is carried through the generations in this important socialization process (Comas-Díaz, 2007; Shenk, 2000). Whether received directly or indirectly, every participant in the study identified their experience witnessing ABR as critical data they reflected on in their trajectory toward activism. For many, this cumulative process involved both repeated personal experiences where they witnessed individual-level racism and consumed stories repeatedly from others in their families and social spheres.

These findings corroborate Neville and Cross's (2017) outcomes, suggesting that personal experiences and observations of racism precipitated racial awakenings. That these participants witnessed ABR and were subsequently moved toward resistance is consistent with other literature on activism. Mattis and colleagues' (2004), Szymanski's (2012), and Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, and Browne Huntt's (2013) studies exploring exposure to racism (e.g., daily life experience of racism, race-related stress, gendered racial microaggressions) suggested that activism engagement may be a means of coping with racism.

Countless studies make plain the prevalence and deleterious impact of racism. Extant research on overt ABR (Carter, 2007; Donovan et al., 2013), covert ABR in the form of implicit bias (Boysen & Vogel, 2008; Goff et al., 2008; Staats et al., 2015) and microaggressions (Constantine, 2007; Constantine, Smith, Redington, & Owens, 2008; Sue et al., 2008) present a clear case for the prevalence of racial trauma among Black people. Indeed, meta-analytic (Pieterse, Todd, Neville, & Carter, 2011) and theoretical

research on racial trauma (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2006; Carter, 2007; Carter & Forsyth, 2009) also support the narratives presented in this study of personal and familial racial trauma experiences across settings and across the lifespan.

Outside of academic research, Twitter serves as a rich site to explore what people know and care about (Freelon, McIlwain, & Clark, 2016). Provided that there were, for example, 40.8 million tweets related to #BLM between June 2014 and May 2015, there was certainly a palpable and international witnessing of ABR (Freelon et al., 2016) leading up to this study. Many activists, including participants in this study (e.g., Geo, Lamin), took to the streets of Ferguson, MO following the police-involved killing of Michael Brown, a seminal moment in the #BLM movement. Witnessing ABR virally through videos of violence against Black bodies is key feature marking #BLM (Freelon et al., 2016). Geo's previously used quote about Twitter resurrecting Black bodies underscored this point. Based on these academic and social illustrations of the sociopolitical context during the time of the study, these findings on the prevalence of ABR exposure were not noteworthy in and of themselves. The author was admittedly disinterested in obtaining additional data on racism and racial trauma given the prevalence of the aforementioned deficit-focused data in psychology on Black people and preponderance of anti-Black media. However, these data in the Witnessing ABR category are deeply meaningful, unique, and powerful when the identity of the storytellers, temporality of the storytelling, and purpose of the narrative are considered.

Witnessing ABR as a step toward liberation. This study took a strengths-focused frame to learn how Black liberation commitments and actions develop among diverse Black people with inclusive, intersectional politics. This qualitative study

captured the narratives salient to Black activists regarding their awakenings about ABR at a personal level. Uncovering that Witnessing ABR is a critical step in awakening as a Black racial justice activist for activists adhering to #BLM values is a significant contribution to critical consciousness and activist development, as well as Black counseling literatures. Although the consequences of ABR were not queried in this protocol, this diverse sample linked Witnessing ABR and Experiencing Racial Trauma to activism development. Participants' positionality, and resultantly their stories of ABR, spanned states and countries, decades, socioeconomic statuses, genders, sexualities, and other social locations, making a compelling case for the role of Witnessing ABR for Black people broadly. These data suggest a new lens through which individuals (e.g., Black people, psychologists, educators) can think about racism and racial trauma discussions.

The CCABR model suggests that Witnessing ABR has utility in that, when it is followed by the steps delineated in Processing ABR, it can facilitate coping, healing, and collective liberatory action. Oft-referenced resiliency tropes in the Black community related to overcoming struggle (e.g., what doesn't kill you makes you stronger, we fall down but we get up) gain new relevancy in the context of these findings. Provided that being called a nigger was critical to Laina's later development of a method of resisting oppression through heavy metal that is accessible to Black girls, and Michelle's international health and wellness campaign for Brown people, Witnessing ABR not only promotes individual resiliency but collective-level resistance. The CCABR model suggests that when space for critical reflection of that which was witnessed is allowed,

stories of Bearing Witness to ABR and Experiencing Racial Trauma are helpful on both a personal and collective level for Black people.

The embodied knowledge of ABR that Black activists in this study possessed due to their witnessing and experiencing of racial trauma appeared useful. Participants understood ABR and its consequences intimately and had this personal-level data to build from as they moved toward processing and acting. These findings align with the concept of the wounded healer archetype in psychology (Zerubavel & Wright, 2012). The wounded healer has a lens through which they can empathize, connect, understand, and help heal based on their own past history of being similarly wounded (Zerubavel & Wright, 2012). Like participants who co-constructed this theory, their personal experience of pain can lead to their helping larger numbers of people struggling with similar stressors. Alternatively, there is the potential that engaging in the work as one who has been wounded can lead to chronic dysfunction or relapse and an inability to be helpful to others (Zerubavel & Wright, 2012). Similarly, based on this model, it appears that without processing ABR, Black people may internalize racism or otherwise perpetually suffer from the experiences of racial trauma outlined by participants. Just as there are processes that facilitate post-traumatic growth for wounded healers (Zerubavel & Wright, 2012), so too are there for Black activists. When individuals have found methods of processing ABR, witnessing ABR can be motivational and informative.

Processing ABR

By experiencing and working through racial trauma, participants appeared to better understand ABR (e.g., racist behaviors, processes that serve to uphold Whiteness and White supremacy, biopsychosocial outcomes of racism). Because they intimately

knew racial trauma, participants' motivation to combat ABR increased, which corroborates Szymanski's (2012) and Szymanski and Lewis's (2015) findings that experiences of racism and recognition of race-related stress predicted activism among Black individuals. However, in order to be capable of intervening against ABR, it seems that participants needed to be well enough (e.g., mentally, physically) to do so.

Participants had to develop means of processing the ABR they witnessed. Processing ABR involved cognitive, intersectional, and behavioral growth. Although no known psychological study to date has explored activist development of people aligning with #BLM, Livingston and colleagues (2017) studied activism among African American church members during the height of the #BLM movement. They centered their study on psychological empowerment, which is defined as:

> African American people's understanding of the sociopolitical issues affecting their community, development of a critical awareness of their environment, and knowledge of the resources needed to facilitate change in their respective communities. In addition, the interactional component of psychological empowerment includes the development of decision-making and problem-solving skills. (Livingston et al., 2017, pp. 286-287)

This definition aligns with the Processing ABR category in CCABR in important ways. Overall, the construct of agency was key to CCABR development. Agency was increased as participants navigated cognitive, intersectional, and behavioral growth processes in CCABR. In addition, parallels exist between CCABR's Cognitive Growth category and critical awareness in psychological empowerment. Similarities are also present between CCABR's Behavioral Growth category and resource cultivation and interactional development of psychological empowerment. However, intersectional growth is not represented in Livingston and colleagues' (2017) definition. Despite this difference, their quantitative study found that psychological empowerment was positively

correlated with activism. Although the methodologies are different and intersectional growth was not accounted for in Livingston et al.'s (2017) study, the CCABR model delineates a process that connects cognitive and behavioral growth to increased agency in a qualitative manner that converges with this team's quantitative findings.

For some participants in the sample, Processing ABR was easier because they resided in contexts where processing cognitively, intersectionally, and behaviorally were already common and could be more seamlessly enhanced. For example, Lamin and Michelle were raised in households where Black history and current events were commonly discussed and resources for expanding awareness were readily accessible. However, other participants had to find alternate means of coping, connecting, and expanding their awareness in order to increase their self and collective agency as activists. For example, Conigan and Laina had to find means of processing, often outside of their homes, in order to grow from the ABR they had witnessed. These subcategories of growth were interrelated. For example, as participants grew in their ability to analyze ABR systemically, they improved their understanding of their Blackness. Furthermore, as participants were enhancing their cognitive processing of ABR abilities, they also enhanced their coping skills and ability to connect. Provided the interrelated nature of the CCABR model, studies that have uncovered correlations between race-related stress, coping, and collective identity of individuals who share identity factors (e.g., Black women, Black Canadians, Black adults) align well with the present study (Driscoll, Reynolds, & Todman, 2015; Joseph & Kuo, 2009). While these studies illustrate that Black people are able to cope with racism through the use of social resources (Driscoll et al., 2015) and Africultural coping strategies (Joseph & Kuo, 2009), the CCABR model is

a novel contribution as diverse, critically conscious participants articulated how these sociocultural coping and connections processes actually developed.

For individuals who regularly witness ABR yet have fewer supports for processing, the widely recognizable #BLM movement offered the cognitive, intersectional, and behavioral growth mechanisms that may have been absent or subpar in their lives. Given that even those participants who had been exposed to scholars like Frantz Fanon (e.g., Geo) or grew up around critically conscious outspoken activists (e.g., Quess) were learning and growing as they processed ABR through the mechanisms of the Black Lives Matter movement, it is highly likely that #BLM was a catalyst for growth for individuals with less access to such supports. This suggests that large-scale interventions that affirm Black lives can facilitate the critical consciousness development of diverse Black people who are inevitably experiencing racial trauma. Furthermore, with respect to the #BLM value of attending to the most marginalized communities, these data suggest that there is a need to increase wellness of Black people experiencing multiple forms of marginalization. This intervention can be accomplished potentially through both critical consciousness development and by attending to the community's racial trauma related coping needs.

These data also lead to questions related to the role of privilege in Processing ABR. On one hand, it appeared that the most marginalized participants had engaged in deeper processing and thus engaged in more critical and/or farther-reaching actions against ABR. For example, Lamin (who did not endorse stereotypical Black masculine gender norms and has used a wheelchair for 25 years in a society where differently abled people are marginalized) and Michelle (who identifies as lesbian, genderqueer,

androgynous, and woman-identified) both engaged in higher impact actions. Whereas, straight, able-bodied, cisgender participants (e.g., Conigan, Erica), offered less depth of disclosure regarding some of their experiences processing ABR and engaged in more localized and time-limited actions. It may be that possessing multiple marginalized identities requires one to more quickly advance their systemic and intersectional self-awareness. On the other hand, class privilege (or the semblance of it through Black social capital) may be the more salient privilege as it relates to one's ability to deeply process ABR. Michelle and Lamin were both from middle-class backgrounds and had early access to Black social capital, whereas Conigan and Erica did not. Although the sample size is not large enough to answer these questions, the role of privilege in activist identity development represents a rich area for future study.

Unfortunately, despite having some privileges, Black activists must overcome psychological, emotional, and physical impacts of ABR, such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, high blood pressure, and heart disease, to identify a few of the myriad, deleterious impacts (Carter, 2007; Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999). Finding ways of processing ABR, as it showed up in participants' lives at the personal and relational level, allowed them to both protect themselves (e.g., Distancing from Whiteness, Disconnecting) from some forms of racism and construct solutions for combating ABR at both of those levels and on a collective or systemic level. The present findings suggest that many Black people may have a cognitive (e.g., systemic, historical) awareness of ABR, yet lack processing strategies (e.g., coping, connecting, developing intersectional self-awareness) that would allow them to further develop critical consciousness, particularly the engagement in critical action. In this way, Processing

ABR may represent an important division point between Black people who experience and possess a critical awareness of ABR but do not engage in Black racial justice activism, and Black people who experience and possess a critical awareness of ABR and engage in Black racial justice activism. The experience of witnessing *and* processing ABR was motivational and, ultimately, enhanced this sample's agency.

Processing ABR cognitively. While bearing witness to ABR personally was novel to the CCABR model as compared to other critical consciousness models, overlap exists between the Processing ABR subcategory of Cognitive Growth and Watts and Hipolito-Delgado's (2015) assertion that critical reflection requires the ability to make causal attributions with an emphasis on structural factors. The current model, however, clarifies that for CCABR to develop Black people must come to understand some specific systemic and historical manifestations of ABR as well as what that means for Black people embedded in racist environments. While dialogue was identified as being of particular importance to the development of critical consciousness in foundational (Freire, 1970) and contemporary (Watts et al., 1999) models of critical consciousness development, and certainly present in the CCABR model, language and dialogue were not always necessary for the development of CCABR processing skills. On the basis of the present study alone, where participants could personally witness and process ABR independently *or* experience it through dialogue with others, the significance of dialogue in the development of ABR processing skills is difficult to ascertain. It is noteworthy that participants discussed not having, needing, or wanting to share the language for certain aspects of their experience. However, this was done without discrediting other ways of knowing and communicating (e.g., spiritual, "coded language," body language). These

Black participants had witnessed ABR, experienced racial trauma, and understood that coping can mean disconnecting or not performing respectability, and perhaps this helped them to not discredit that which Black people know, cognitively or otherwise.

Making Historical Connections involved valuing history and ancestry as well as contextualizing by making historical connections. Watts and Hipolito-Delgado (2015) identified historical perspectives on oppression as a key component of critical consciousness, aligning with the narratives of the participants in the present study. However, Making Historical Connections is differentiated due to the identity of the person taking the historical perspective on oppression and, thus, their connection to the experience of oppression. For the current sample, who identified as Black and valued their historical and ancestral connections to both Black liberation and Black oppression, these identity factors appeared to facilitate a sense of strength and empowerment. The process of Making Historical Connections specific to Black and African diasporic cultures has been advocated for by researchers and educators who work with Black youth (e.g., Chapman-Hilliard & Adams-Bass, 2016; Ginwright, 2010; Pratt-Clarke, 2013). Chapman-Hilliard and Adams-Bass (2016) have proposed Black History Knowledge as a psychological tool for Black youth development involving four dimensions:

> (1) the role African enslavement played in the structure of race and racism in the United States, (2) the achievements and contributions of Black people prior to African enslavement and also specific to the development of the United States, (3) one's positioning as it relates to capital (e.g., social, political, and economic), and (4) cultural strengths that facilitate continued community prosperity and empowered action. (p. 486)

The CCABR model supports the need for awareness of these dimensions. It advances this work by identifying processes (e.g., valuing history, hearing family stories, contextualizing current narratives historically) that facilitate the development of Black

historical knowledge and corroborates that attaining awareness in these areas leads to critical action centered on Black liberation. The CCABR model puts the recommendations of these Black youth-focused scholars in context of development, identifying the process of learning and contextualizing historically as a key component to Black racial justice activist development. Furthermore, because the CCABR model was co-constructed by a sample of adults, it also affirms that Black history knowledge acquisition is an important process for adults as well as youth.

Processing ABR intersectionally. Developing Intersectional Self-Awareness was important to CCABR development for several reasons. Participants learned who they were across multiple spheres of identity and how, together, those identities positioned people differently in society. They recognized the diversity among Black people, but also solidified their understanding of ABR as a collective experience. By grappling with their racial, gender, sexual, and religious or spiritual identities and understanding them as one of many ways of being, participants seemed to increase their commitment to inclusion and pursuit of dignity for all Black people. The process of developing intersectional self-awareness has been an important aspect of Black feminism dating back to the foundational Combahee River Collective Statement of 1977 (Combahee River Collective, 1977/1995). For Black people, particularly those without straight, cisgender man, Christian, able-bodied, U.S. citizenship, and other privileges, interrogating oneself and others from an intersectional frame is now, and has long been, tied to resistance and survival. The Combahee River Collective (1977/1995) articulated that their politics were grounded in a commitment to intersectional analyses of oppression. The voices of the participants in the current study espoused the same

political statement in their narration of their intersectional self-awareness processes. While people have been fighting for Black liberation for centuries, #BLM is differentiated by its explicit commitment to liberation for all Black people (Hargons et al., 2017). An intentional emphasis has been placed on the liberation of the most marginalized Black people (e.g., queer, differently abled, youth, formerly incarcerated, non-Christian, immigrants; Garza, 2014) in the current movement. Findings from this study suggest that Developing Intersectional Self-Awareness is what facilitates the commitment to a collective and inclusive vision of Black liberation.

The #BLM organization was founded by three Black women, two of whom identify as queer (Sands, 2017). Several perceived leaders of the movement during the time of the study identified as queer (Sands, 2017) and/or adhered to a "queer Black feminist" agenda for liberation (see www.BYP100.org). Black feminism is built upon an intersectional approach that explores race, gender, and sexuality with attention to people uniquely marginalized by interlocking oppressions (Collins, 2009; Combahee River Collective, 1977/1995; Lindsey-Dennis, 2015). The combination of moving through the processes of Developing Intersectional Self-Awareness and engaging in Black liberation work under this queer Black feminist agenda likely worked in tandem to solidify participants' commitment to Black liberation for all Black people. The Black feminist approach is significantly different than prior movements for Black liberation that required or otherwise relied on maintaining politics of respectability, centering cisgender heterosexual Black men, and rendering invisible the needs and efforts of multiply marginalized Black people.

The findings associated with Developing Intersectional Self-Awareness, though novel to critical consciousness research, also builds upon extant research on implicit attitudes (Gonsalkorale, Allen, Sherman, & Klauer, 2010; Gonzalez, Steele, & Baron, 2017). Studies on implicit racial bias have indicated that exposure (through indirect or direct contact) to out-group exemplars can reduce implicit biases (Gonsalkorale et al., 2010; Gonzalez et al., 2017). The activists interviewed for this study described being exposed to people with different identities and beliefs and increasing their empathy and sense of oneness with them afterwards. Exposure may not only reduce implicit bias through contact with exemplars, but for Black people who have experienced ABR, exposure to Black people who differ from them may reduce implicit biases and increase their commitment to an inclusive vision of Black liberation as well.

Processing ABR behaviorally. James Baldwin's (1961) powerful statement, "To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time. So that the first problem is how to control that rage so that it won't destroy you," is particularly relevant to this discussion of the behaviors activists engaged in so they could process ABR (p. 205). Given participants' rage, among other psychosocial responses described in Experiencing Racial Trauma, coping and connecting were particularly important areas of growth articulated by this sample.

The mechanisms employed by Black people in order to cope with ABR vary greatly depending on their individual characteristics, environmental influences, and collective experiences (Truong & Museus, 2012). Some of the coping strategies employed by this sample were common, such as connecting with social support or practicing self-care. These strategies were on par with other research that has found that

some are more likely to employ indirect strategies of coping, such as religion and seeking moral support (Brown, Phillips, Abdullah, Vinson, & Robertson, 2011). Brown and colleagues (2011) suggested that these methods may be more effective when the complete elimination of racism is unlikely. The disconnection and distancing from Whiteness strategies are particularly powerful. Participants described moving from a place of believing that they could reason with Whiteness to deliberately protecting themselves physically and emotionally through distancing. The sadness and anger at Whiteness was often followed by attempts to remain in proximity, but later transitioned to feelings of exhaustion and disappointment that left participants desiring to cope through avoidance. This is a particularly difficult strategy in American and Canadian society, where the sample resided. The use of these coping strategies may be one reason that allies did not remain a category in the final analysis of the study. Perhaps participants had disconnected or distanced themselves from Whiteness, including White allies, such that they were not frequently mentioned by these Black racial justice activists. This would align with data that suggests people who exemplify a high internalization and acceptance of their Black identity most commonly employ direct confrontation and empowered action to cope with racism (Forsyth & Carter, 2012).

Making Connections was a key part of the CCABR process because it provided a space for participants to not only grapple with the ABR they had witnessed, but to grow cognitively and intersectionally as well. Developing a community and strengthening connections appeared to increase a sense of pride and purpose among participants, which is consistent with Moane's (2006) review of activism and change across psychology subdisciplines. This connecting process helped move participants closer to their agentic

capacities as developing activists. The actions described by participants in Making Connections facilitated collective identity development. Developing a collective identity was critical to facilitating skill-building and served as a resource that aided them in their activism. The participants in the current study clearly marked the process of making connections on their trajectory as an activist. Quess's imagery of Black power rangers banding together is powerful and appears symbolic of the leaderful framework guiding the #BLM movement (Hargons et al., 2017). These participants did not simply form a collective identity but became a part of a collective that often acted together against ABR. Their command of the skills and access to likeminded people increased their sense of self- and collective efficacy. This aligns with Livingston and colleagues' (2017) findings that psychological empowerment among Black church-goers was directly tied to participants' sense that they could mobilize resources to enact change. Similarly, the all-Black sample in the present study highlighted that connecting to settings and people that could aid in their development as Black people pursuing Black liberation was critical. Having a sample comprising people spanning a 37-year range and representing different geographic areas, class, and educational backgrounds is a significant contribution to a body of research that generally emanates from studies delimited to urban youth development (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015) in one geographic area such as Oakland (Ginwright, 2010) or Brooklyn (Sánchez Carmen et al., 2015).

Processing to increase agency. Increasing Agency was an important process as participants prepared to move from processing to acting against ABR (e.g., Doing Black Liberation Work, Utilizing Black Racial Justice Activist Approaches to Activism). In this part of the process, participants came to recognize that despite facing multiple forms

of ABR, they could work to eliminate, reduce, or otherwise disrupt the oppression. This process overlaps with sociopolitical efficacy in Watts and colleagues' (2011; 2015) critical consciousness model. Research on sociopolitical efficacy among youth has illustrated that families and schools are pivotal for youth in need of increased agency or sociopolitical efficacy (Diemer et al., 2009) and that sociopolitical efficacy is a protective factor (Christens & Peterson, 2012). Given that most participants described (a) early exposure to ABR, (b) experiencing racial trauma symptoms, and (c) the significance of people and settings to their growth, the aforementioned sociopolitical efficacy studies converge with the findings in the CCABR model well.

The developmental shift that occurred as participants increased agency is important to note and could be compared to decolonizing one's mind. In an autoethnographic narrative on "un/masking identity," Rodriguez (2006) asserted, "To decolonize our minds, we need to become critically conscious that we live in a racist and White supremacist society as well as use that particular knowledge to circumvent exploitation and oppression" (p. 1069). Participants in the current study had generally completed the reflections required to make such realizations about the "racist and White supremacist society" and became confident they had the power to resist or "circumvent" ABR. Increasing agency around systemic and institutional racism appeared to be helpful as participants sought to, initially or repeatedly, engage in Black liberation work.

Acting Critically Against ABR

These findings fill a void that exists on what Black activism is and how Black activism is enacted by Black people in the current sociopolitical climate. Although far from comprehensive due to the size of the sample, the seven forms of Black liberation

work that our participants described offer a starting point for explicating Black activism: (a) Storying Survival, (b) Spacemaking, (c) Artivism, (d) Coalition Building, (e) Physical Resistance, (f) Modeling/Mentoring, (g) Organizing, (h) Teaching, and (i) Scholar-Activism.

Szymanski (2012) used an Involvement in Feminist Activism Scale and replaced the word "feminist" with "African American" to elucidate data on liberatory activities that Black people engage in. The current study offers support for Szymanski's (2012) modified scale, as our participants endorsed nearly every behavior on the scale (e.g., organizing, mentoring, educating, attending conferences). However, three of the most frequent activities endorsed by participants in this sample (storying survival, spacemaking, and artivism) are not accounted for in Szymanski's (2012) scale. Furthermore, the current research adds to the existing literature by illuminating activities taken up by intersectionally-oriented activists engaged in Black liberation work in the current sociopolitical moment.

Storying survival is a novel construct identified by participants. Storying survival involves seeing, hearing, remembering, being accountable to, and telling stories associated with ABR. Some existing research explore these concepts independently. Comas-Díaz (2007) described testimony as an indigenous form of bearing witness and reconstructing identity through narratives. She asserted that offering testimony is a means of modifying a painful experience into a catalyst for social change (Comas-Díaz, 2007). Storying survival appeared to be a core component of the identities of the activists in this sample. Participants were not simply answering the questions posed by the

interviewer, but their responses conveyed, through content and process, that storying survival was essential to their sense of self and their desire for Black liberation.

Although it is not discussed in the counseling psychology literature, artivism is a form of Black activism that has been addressed by scholars in other disciplines. Artivism has been introduced in other disciplines in theoretical (Shank, 2005), interview-style (Corey & Pérez, 2015), and practical non-academic formats (Goris & Hollander, 2017). Artivism is touted as a means of merging art and activism. Goris and Hollander (2017) asserted that visual art is the most popular form of artivism. However, participants in the current study referenced music most often among artivism forms. Hip-hop is a particularly important culture and form of artivism for the Black community, given its genesis as a post-civil rights-era media form centering Black people and their experiences of disenfranchisement (Rose, 1994). One hip-hop cultural product that activists in this sample often payed homage to for its contribution to artivism and critical consciousness development was Beyoncé's visual album *Lemonade*, which was released in April 2016. The album's connection to Black liberation and specifically Black feminist and womanist themes resonated with activists in this sample.

The final category of CCABR development, Utilizing Black Racial Justice Activist Approaches to Activism, also represents a contribution to the research on Black activism. The category ties actions to processes, thereby specifying eight unique approaches to engaging in antiracist critical action for Black people: (a) Having Urgency, (b) Being Self-Reflective, (c) Specifying Focus, (d) Being Actively Intersectional, (e) Being Resourceful/Affording Activism, (f) Contextualizing, (g) Being Persistent, and (h) Maintaining Future Orientation. The participants' disclosures about the strategies they

employed in the process of Black liberation were critical as those strategies appeared to assist activists in being effective in the face of numerous barriers. Their strategic approaches were in alignment with the processes and outcomes associated with the Witnessing ABR and Processing ABR categories, making clear the flow-on effect of the CCABR model. For example, self-reflectiveness in activism appeared to be a sensible approach for individuals who have seen the value in developing intersectional self-awareness. Provided that researchers are just now starting to explore the activities undertaken in pursuit of Black liberation, the dearth of research on the methods taken by Black activists pursuing Black liberation is unsurprising.

Although approaches undertaken by intersectional Black activists as they engage in critical action represents a novel area of study, particularly within counseling psychology, Hargons and colleagues' (2017) call to action in *The Counseling Psychologist* converges with the Black racial justice approaches to activism in important ways. The manuscript both highlighted and serves as an example of scholar-activism. Beyond modeling and amplifying this type of Black liberation work, Hargons et al. (2017) addressed approaches to engaging in the work. The authors argued for spontaneity within counseling psychology, which involves stepping up and into formal and informal leadership roles when social inequities occur (Hargons et al., 2017). The concept of spontaneity overlaps explicitly with participants' commitments to urgency, self-reflectiveness, active intersectionality, and resourcefulness. As a call to action, the manuscript also reflects the future orientation approach articulated by participants in the current study, albeit more subtly. The approaches narrated by the participants comprising the sample were linked to prior stages of CCABR development. Provided that Hargons

and colleagues' (2017) application of spontaneity was directly connected to #BLM values, it is logical that this concept, and the manuscript more broadly, intersects with the Black racial justice approaches to activism outlined by participants in this study.

Taken together, the model of CCABR development suggests a complex, non-linear, yet specific process that can move a person from being one who simply suffers from ABR to one who critically resists ABR. Extant research on critical consciousness broadly points to several benefits of developing this capacity (Christens & Peterson, 2012; Kelso et al., 2014; Zimmerman et al., 1999). As illustrated in Chapter Two, some benefits of developing a general sense of critical consciousness include reduced disease progression for Black women with HIV (Kelso et al., 2014), protection against mental health problems among Black men (Zimmerman et al., 1999), and increased self-esteem among high school students (Christens & Peterson, 2012). Given that positive outcomes resulted from the cultivation of a non-specific form of critical consciousness development, the potential benefits for Black individuals and communities through CCABR development processes appears promising. In a sociopolitical climate where anti-Blackness, and particularly fear and anger at Black advancement, led to the election of Donald Trump as president of the U.S. (McElwee & McDaniel, 2017), the development of activists focused on Black liberation is increasingly important.

The CCABR model delineates a process that may help Black people survive and thrive in a tremendously oppressive climate. Engaging in the process of CCABR development may be healing given components such as coping, connecting, and resisting are inherent to the model. Szymanski's (2012) research on Black activism suggested that activism is a form of coping with racism. However, current models of coping do not

account for acute and cumulative experiences of ABR (Brondolo et al., 2009). CCABR attends to both (a) acute, personal, and relational forms of ABR as well as (b) ongoing, systemic forms of ABR. Because the current study involved participants who engaged in activism with a critical awareness of Whiteness, White supremacy, and ABR, results may be able to suggest that their activism was not only a form of coping, which is individualistic and survival-focused, but that they actually were engaged in a healing process through their activism. Healing is a collectivistic, resistance-focused process that helps one to thrive within their environment, and participants in this study were certainly invested in a process that not only involved coping but also were characteristic of healing.

Limitations

While several strengths of the study have been elucidated herein, some limitations may be noted. This model is transactional and therefore the order and depth of each of the major categories varies based on the participant's unique intersectionality, context, awareness, and position of their narrative. Because there was not a standard protocol to account for social identity factors or activism engagement variables (e.g., core community of care's engagement and knowledge of activism, racial identity statuses), this model cannot explain the extent to which one's core community of care or socialization contributed to their development as activists. The CCABR model was a co-construction derived from the participants, research team, and the knowledge that these parties brought as a result of their positioning and the current sociopolitical climate. This co-construction is highly contextual, dynamic, and specific to one movement for Black liberation, and thus, another team or sample may have narrated or interpreted a different

model of development. Despite having a sample from many states across the U.S. and two Canadian provinces, no participants were from the west coast of the U.S. Furthermore, ABR is a global phenomenon and the participants in this study only represented parts of the U.S. and Canada.

Additionally, the research team analyzing these data were all cisgender women. Provided the diversity comprising the sample, the study may have benefited from the insights provided by a more gender diverse research team. Although efforts were made to reduce power differentials and approach participants through a caring Black feminist framework (Lindsey-Dennis, 2015), differences in class, education, national citizenship, gender, and other axes of difference between the researcher and participants could have contributed to missed narratives and unasked or unanswered questions. Finally, the present study could be strengthened through the use of a member-checking process. In spite of noted limitations, the measures of trustworthiness outlined in Chapter Three (e.g., prolonged engagement, coanalysis, non-confidentiality of data) ensured that data are rigorously collected and analyzed.

Utilizing the CCABR Model: Implications for Counseling Psychology

There is an opportunity to promote Black liberation through the use of these data. The specialty discipline of counseling psychology is inextricably linked—through history, identity, and ethics—to social justice (Pieterse et al., 2012; Vera & Speight, 2003; Watts, 2004). Black wellness, which requires Black liberation, is a worthy social justice cause. Although the findings from this study are delimited to Black individuals, they have applicability to non-Black people as well. Using data that derives from one population (e.g., Black activists) to inform and guide the actions of individuals of other

races (e.g., psychologists, individuals who serve and work with Black people) is a goal of diversity science (Plaut, 2010). With this understanding, an overarching implication from this study involves the need for counseling psychologists to assess their own development of CCABR. After reviewing the potential for CCABR self-assessment among counseling psychologists at a personal level, implications for professional practice more broadly are addressed.

Counseling Psychologists and CCABR Self-Assessment

While Hargons and colleagues' (2017) conceptual article highlights how some counseling psychologists and trainees demonstrate a critical awareness of ABR and engage in praxis that reflects their advancement to the action components in CCABR (e.g., Doing Black Liberation Work, Utilizing Black Racial Justice Approaches to Activism), there remains room for growth across the discipline. Counseling psychologists may benefit from assessing where they are located in the process of developing CCABR. Because these data suggest that Black wellness (e.g., dignity, health, survival, joy) depends on people possessing CCABR, it is important for counseling psychologists to remember that if they are not Acting Critically Against ABR then they are not critically conscious. The CCABR model may be useful in the assessment process.

A first step in assessing CCABR may involve reflecting on one's own skills as it relates to recognizing ABR, both in their immediate contexts and across the systems in which they regularly engage. If a person has developed a capacity to bear witness to ABR, then determining their growth edges in the cognitive, intersectional, and behavioral realms may prove beneficial to their work. For example, the expansiveness,

normalization, and constant evolution of Whiteness requires that individuals enhance their analysis skills (Cabrera, Watson, & Franklin, 2016). This might also involve exploring one's capacity for historicizing and making structural attributions when concerns involving Black people are raised (e.g., in clinical work, through media stories, research findings). Participants in this study suggest that enhancing critical thinking skills as it relates to Whiteness, White supremacy, ABR, and social justice is an ongoing process that they are constantly working, "sweating" nonetheless, to expand upon. While the participants in the current study were all Black, Case (2012) found that for White people striving to practice antiracism, it similarly required ongoing self-evaluation and community support.

Counseling psychologists may be particularly well-equipped to self-assess their intersectional self-awareness. We have access to (a) cross-disciplinary theories (e.g., Black feminism, intersectionality, critical race theory), (b) practical tools (e.g., Society of Counseling Psychology's Social Justice Syllabus, the Intolerant Schema Measure; Aosved, Long, & Voller, 2009), and (c) resources granted by our education and potentially class privilege (e.g., continuing education opportunities, access to webinars and community trainings, internet access) that can easily facilitate our continued assessment and intersectional growth. Counseling psychologists may benefit from an exploration of these and related materials. Individuals in the field of counseling psychology should consider whether they could bolster their awareness or deepen their commitment to living a love ethic or working toward unification and inclusivity in their personal and professional lives. These latter two attributes served to help participants

remain committed to applying intersectional frameworks in their lives and liberatory work.

Behavioral growth may look different for Black and non-Black counseling psychologists and trainees. Black people will need to determine if they are effectively coping with racial trauma such that they can advance to other stages of CCABR development. Effectively healing one's own wounds was critical for Black participants in this study. Being a Black psychologist invested in Black liberation may complicate matters. The aforementioned wounded healer (Zerubavel & Wright, 2012) concerns have deeper meaning for Black psychologists, as these individuals have the potential to be both wounded healers in their clinical and activist roles. Indeed, the author of this dissertation witnessed ABR and experienced ABR throughout this dissertation process as she simultaneously engaged in counseling Black clients suffering from racial trauma, engaged in activism focused on Black liberation, and worked on research projects directly tied to racial trauma. Coping with racial trauma effectively is a requirement if Black psychologists are to persist in their efforts to act critically against ABR. Although not assessed in this study, non-Black and particularly White people may need to assess their capacity to "cope" with racial trauma by way of working through guilt or shame and increasing self-compassion in order to stay engaged in the work of Black liberation (Black & Rostosky, 2016). Irrespective of racial identity, making connections can assist counseling psychologists in this process. By determining where gaps between one's racial justice commitments and their sense of self or collective agency exist, individuals can strategically make connections to move them toward to critical action.

Counseling psychologists' success at Acting Critically Against ABR can be assessed fairly easily. The activists in this sample identified several strategies for Doing Black Liberation Work. Many of the actions aligned squarely with psychologists' professional roles and responsibilities. For example, scholar-activism is a form of Black racial justice work that researchers can employ. Modeling/mentoring and teaching lend themselves nicely to counseling psychologists who are embedded in any system where Black people are found. Further, noticing the absence of Black people within a mental health care setting would suggest an opportunity to organize and engage in coalition building to increase access to services for Black people. Some additional recommendations for avenues of activism specifically related to the activists who co-constructed this study are included in Appendix D. Provided the approaches to Black racial justice work delineated by participants, and their alignment with existing counseling psychology values and approaches (Hargons et al., 2017), counseling psychologists and trainees can not only assess their success at CCABR but strive toward being leaders in the process of promoting Black wellness through this framework.

These data allow counseling psychologists of all races to more critically and rigorously pursue Black liberation in their work. Furthermore, this model provides psychologists with language and theory that connects Black liberatory praxis and Black wellness. Provided the ubiquity of Whiteness and White supremacy, such a justification for Black activism efforts may be necessary in some settings. Because this study has elucidated the process of developing CCABR, counseling psychologists are not only able to thoroughly assess their own CCABR development, but they are also better prepared to assist students/trainees and clients in the process. The CCABR model has implications

for counseling psychologists in the areas of training, clinical practice, and research as it relates to (a) promoting healing from racial trauma, (b) advancing intersectional self-awareness, and (c) focusing on Black racial justice activists and Black racial justice activism.

Promoting Healing from Racial Trauma

Provided that Whiteness and White supremacy is omnipresent and Black people are constantly witnessing and experiencing ABR as a result, intentional efforts toward promoting healing from racial trauma are needed (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Helms, 2017). For many people, there are not outwardly visible signs of racial trauma, but there are nonetheless emotional tolls and people can have strong emotional reactions (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2006; Turner & Richardson, 2016). Signs that indicate someone is racially traumatized include increased vigilance, sensitivity to threats, aggression, psychological and physiological symptoms, increased substance use, and/or a narrowing sense of time (Turner & Richardson, 2016). Black people who are racially traumatized may be perceived as dangerous, hostile, etc. This study identified several psychosocial manifestations of racial trauma that can be added to existing lists, such as shame, disempowerment, and isolation. When Black people are moving through the world with a daily awareness that their death or imprisonment can be justified as a result of their Blackness, this should be an alarming call to action for counseling psychologists, regardless of their career focus.

Implications for educators. Educators who are preparing students to serve in positions where they will interact with Black people can learn much from the #BLM activists interviewed herein. Based on the participants' narratives, educators need to train

future counseling psychologists to be aware of the prevalence of ABR and of racial trauma so they can be more culturally mindful clinicians, researchers, classmates, and citizens. Training programs should ensure that clinical training includes meaningful opportunities for students to learn about assessment and treatment associated with racial trauma. Without proper training, emerging psychologists will constantly be at risk for ascribing individual diagnoses to systemic problems or ignoring clinically significant symptomatology due to only attending to systemic problems that have produced symptoms requiring individual treatment.

Implications for clinicians. Relatedly, if clinicians are able to recognize Black clients' symptoms as indicators for racial trauma, they can support them by encouraging engagement with the CCABR model. Validating that there is no "right way" to react and acknowledging the range of thoughts, feelings, interpersonal, and physical responses that may have emerged after witnessing ABR may be helpful. Although there is no one way to react, clinicians may strive to facilitate healing from racial trauma through CCABR.

Practicing psychologists could encourage clients to share about their experiences developing CCABR. Creating space for clients to engage in storying survival around their experiences of ABR, and about their process of coming to awareness about Whiteness or acting critically in resistance of ABR, may represent a healing intervention. Integrating artivism may also bolster this exercise. When clients are storying survival in this way, psychologists should look for opportunities to emphasize historical connections and other contextual factors and assist individuals in naming the systems and processes of oppression at work. Creating space for storying survival may help to minimize the tendency to internalize negative racial experiences that can lead to feelings of anger,

sadness, and/or anxiety. Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (BigFoot & Schmidt, 2010; Warfield, 2013), Narrative Therapy (Besley, 2002; Neville, 2017), and Ethnopolitical Psychology (Comas-Díaz, 2007) may be good places to begin exploring these methods for therapists new to liberation-focused counseling methods.

Implications for researchers. Although literature on racial trauma is growing, with a forthcoming special issue of the *American Psychologist* serving as a call to action in this area, the current study provides several implications for research. Participants in this study identified numerous racial trauma symptoms and went on to describe their engagement in activism as one outcome associated with that experience. Research on the extent to which activism engagement mitigates racial trauma symptom severity should be initiated. Given the prevalence of storying survival, research on the extent to which storying survival in therapy reduces symptoms associated with racial trauma should also be undertaken. Provided the salience of community in participants' CCABR development (e.g., Connecting with Social Support, Growing Through Connection) and the existence of established activist organizations (e.g., #BLM, BYP100, Dream Defenders), a systematic exploration of these organizations with respect to group members' exposure to ABR, racial trauma symptoms, and activist organization engagement could be beneficial. Such data could help racial justice organizations better serve their members and help members determine the extent to which engagement is aiding in healing and/or reducing psychological wellness. Research that leads to the development of racial trauma assessments (e.g., brief assessments, mobile applications) may be of particular use to activists and activist organizations.

Advancing Intersectional Self-Awareness

Developing intersectional self-awareness, particularly around Black, gender, sexual, and religious/spiritual identities, appeared to facilitate participants' inclusive vision of and efforts toward Black liberation. Advancing intersectional self-awareness may be a useful endeavor for educators, clinicians, and researchers.

Implications for educators. Students who have not been exposed to the diversity of Blackness would benefit from additional education on the intersections of identity outlined by this study's participants, particularly Black identity and the diversity of Blackness. At minimum, counseling psychology trainees are expected to promote wellness with respect to individual and cultural diversity, commit to self-examination, and uphold professional ethics as they engage in research and clinical practice (Bieschke, 2009). Given these expectations, the findings on intersectional self-awareness may be useful for programs seeking to determine student readiness for work with Black clients or research involving Black participants. If participants who identified as Black struggled to develop critical consciousness until they were exposed to the diversity of Blackness and grappled with their own areas of privilege and oppression across several social locations, we can surmise that this process will be critical for any trainee seeking to promote Black wellness through their role as a counseling psychologist. For students with less exposure to Blackness, it is especially important that this education be integrated into the training program. Goodman and colleagues (2015) warned against hasty use of single semester and standalone cultural immersion projects that lead to voyeurism and "othering"—an experience of racial trauma described by our participants—but suggest prolonged community engagement where students are embedded in diverse communities.

Implications for clinicians. Clinicians working with Black clients may consider exploring the noted identity categories in session. Helping clients to gain insight on how they developed certain identities and beliefs as well as the extent to which those identities and beliefs benefit and/or harm them may be healing for clients, irrespective of their age or presenting concerns (Neville, 2017). Furthermore, being attuned to one's clients' intersectional self-awareness can inform case conceptualization and treatment planning. For example, the CCABR model suggests that understanding connections between Christianity and White supremacy facilitated healing and growth. Similarly, unpacking gendered racial messaging helped move participants along in their critical consciousness development. Therefore, a clinician with this awareness might assess the extent to which deepening their client's intersectional self-awareness may aid in the reduction of racial trauma or improve self-concept. Although these data suggest a potential utility in such interventions, they should be explored empirically.

Implications for researchers. Better understanding how intersectional self-awareness develops among Black people could help promote Black wellness. Research on intersectional self-awareness should be taken up using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. In her reaction article centered on how Whiteness is addressed in counseling psychology, Helms (2017) rejected the notion that all aspects of oppression be addressed to the same extent. The current study underlines that awareness around Blackness, gender, sexuality, and religion/spirituality are particularly salient areas of emphasis for Black people. Although not noted explicitly by participants in this study with respect to intersectional self-awareness, an exploration of Whiteness and White supremacy was also important to activist development. This was evident in participants'

cognitive growth processes as they developed systemic and historical awareness. As such, researchers may sharpen their analytic lens by focusing on these identities and aspects of oppression in their studies of Black wellness. Furthermore, researchers may explore the extent to which deepening self-awareness in an intersectional manner influences racial trauma symptoms and activism behaviors among Black people. The Critical Consciousness Scale (Diemer, Rapa, Park, & Perry, 2017), Gendered Racial Microaggressions Scale (Lewis & Neville, 2015) and Intolerant Schema Measure (Aosved et al., 2009) might be useful measures to consider for quantitative and mixed method studies related to CCABR. While this study found that developing intersectional self-awareness led Black people to engage in critical action (the highest level of critical consciousness in CCABR), we do not yet know if and how the development of intersectional self-awareness influences people of other races. Explicating connections between intersectional self-awareness and engagement in anti-racist action, particularly Black racial justice work, among other races is an important line of questioning.

Focusing on Black Racial Justice Activists and Black Racial Justice Activism

The current study offered a portrait of what Black racial justice activists do to pursue Black liberation and how they do it. Because research on Black activism is nascent across disciplines (Ginwright, 2010; Hope, Velez, Offidani-Bertrand, Keels, & Durkee, 2017; Szymanski, 2012; Szymanski & Lewis, 2015), counseling psychologists can focus on Black racial justice activists and Black liberation work in a number of ways to support Black wellness.

Implications for educators. Counseling psychology's social justice values (Pieterse et al., 2012; Vera & Speight, 2003; Watts, 2004) provide a guidepost that points

us toward action. To date, this action has primarily been in the realm of advocacy (Watts, 2004), with some individuals and groups more directly claiming the role of activists (Hargons et al., 2017; Watts, 2004). This study suggests that training counseling psychologists in activist behaviors (e.g., Doing Black Liberation Work, Utilizing Black Racial Justice Approaches to Activism) is important for the promotion of Black wellness. Up to the present time, individual- and group-level interventions have failed to prevent ABR or liberate Black people. Educators may need to heed Watts's (2004) call and "scale up" training efforts by making a commitment to training students to be activists (p. 857).

Implications for clinicians. Many therapists who espouse social justice oft discuss how to integrate advocacy into their work with clients. There is sometimes a fear that promoting activism is self-serving. However, this model suggests it is an intervention that can improve one's mental health. Based on the outcomes of this study, therapists may benefit from a consideration of whether Black liberation work would be an appropriate recommendation for clients suffering from the consequences of ABR. Furthermore, identity-based groups for processing ABR and developing CCABR may represent important clinical interventions.

When treatment planning for Black clients, doing so with an aim of healing from versus coping with racial trauma may also be beneficial. There is a movement toward healing from racial trauma in clinical and non-clinical settings, often referred to as "healing justice" (Hemphill, 2017). Healing justice work prioritizes the use of culturally mindful, contextually specific strategies for healing and critical action. Clinicians may explore their potential to engage in this work themselves so as to provide care to Black

activists. Alternatively, it may be that clinicians need to expand their awareness of local and virtual resources for healing from racial trauma and refer their Black activist clients to community-based healers who engage in healing justice work as appropriate.

Implications for researchers. Counseling psychologists may contribute to this budding body of research on Black activism in numerous ways. Quantitative and mixed method studies on exposure to ABR, engagement in Black activism, and racial trauma symptomatology could help uncover strategies for improving wellness in the face of ABR. Additional qualitative studies on the costs and benefits of engaging in Black liberation work is also warranted. The unique struggles and gifts associated with engaging in Black racial justice work have yet to be uncovered and can be fruitful for scholars, clinicians, and activists alike. Studying the range of Black activist behaviors and approaches across a diverse national sample may be prolific. We may be able to further promote Black liberation by uncovering how the CCABR model differs based on interviews with non-Black people fighting ABR under this same intersectional vision of Black liberation.

Furthermore, healing justice interventions appear to be growing in popularity, yet providers lack clarity on which components of healing justice interventions are effective, for whom, and to what degree. Research that will inform the healing justice movement is needed to ensure that Black activists are receiving quality care as they work toward Black liberation. Provided that Black queer people have occupied formal and informal leadership roles in the current movement for Black lives and contend with high levels of minority stress in the process, a continued and specific focus on these populations with respect to their wellness may be particularly important.

Conclusion

Whiteness is insidious and has embedded barriers to wellness of People of Color in the fabric of contemporary society. The consequences of Whiteness—particularly as they manifest through White supremacy—range from death (Orjoux, 2015) to poor biopsychosocial health (Carter, 2007) and limited employment opportunities at all levels (Chambers, 2011-2012; Guzman, Trevino, Lubugion, & Aryan, 2010; Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011) to microaggressions (e.g., Constantine, 2007; Constantine et al., 2008) and racial trauma (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2006), to name a few. However, this study took a strengths-based approach and amplified the narratives of activists fighting this systemic oppression.

The present study was developed to uncover how critical consciousness about anti-Black racism develops among Black people. The Critical Consciousness of Anti-Black Racism model was derived through constructivist grounded theory methods and is a co-construction that facilitates Black liberation. Essentially, the model identifies key processes of developing as a Black racial justice activist. Participants in this study, a diverse sample of Black people engaged in Black liberatory actions, described a complex, cyclical process. Developing CCABR (1) started with witnessing ABR, (2) required the development of cognitive, intersectional and behavioral growth in order to process ABR and develop a sense of agency, and (3) led to action against ABR. The processes of CCABR were expounded upon with quotes in this dissertation. The results were interpreted and recommendations for research and clinical practice were offered in hopes that counseling psychologists will join the movement toward Black liberation. The data presented herein makes clear the need to focus on Black wellness as a social justice and

mental health imperative. Racial trauma is a function of cumulative incidents of ABR. As such, cumulative Black liberation interventions are needed to undo the trauma and truly move society toward wellness. Until the liberation efforts of these and many more ABR activists reach their goal of ended ABR, a need for the application of findings from this study remain.

Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

Appendix B: Protocol

1) I am very interested in how people from different backgrounds and identities have come to the movement for Black lives. Can you describe your background and important identities for me?
   - "What about in terms of _______?" will help fill in gaps to ensure race, gender, sexual identity, age, education, spirituality, SES, and geographic location are described
2) What is your role in the current movement for Black lives?
   - Do you use the term activist to describe yourself? Why?
   - How do you engage in activism? What behaviors do you do that you consider #BlackLivesMatter activism? Are there subgroups in the Black community that receive the focus of your energy or that you are most passionate about?
   - Are you formally affiliated with groups working on behalf of Black racial justice? What led you to them?
3) Can you recall when you first realized that anti-Black racism was a real thing?
   - If a personal/interpersonal story is told: How and when did you realize that it wasn't just an individualized experience but one that is pervasive, impacting the Black community broadly/globally, and longstanding?
4) How did you come to actually begin participating in the fight for Black racial justice for the first time?
   - How old were you?
   - What did you do? How did you begin getting involved?

5) How did the people, places, and things that you had access to empower you when it came to understanding or acting against racial injustices?
    - What sustained your continued action?
    - What made it more difficult to act?
6) What does it mean to be woke?
    - In the formal #BLM network being woke also involves having an awareness of how oppressions intersect, for example being Black and young and a felon or being Black and unemployed and a trans woman. They have intersectional values that support all Black people. What reactions do you have to this? How does your activism align or not align with theirs?
7) Is there anything else that you would want to share related to this discussion?

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Vita

Della V. Mosley

CURRENT POSITION

Assistant Professor, Counseling Psychology Program, Psychology Department, University of Florida (2018–present)

EDUCATION

2017–2018	Doctoral Internship	Duke University Counseling & Psychological Services, Durham, NC ty APA Accredited
2014	Specialist in Education	University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY Counseling Psychology
2012	Master of Science	The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD School Counseling
2005	Bachelor of Arts	Bradley University, Peoria, IL English

PUBLICATIONS

French, B. H., Lewis, J. A., **Mosley, D. V.,** Adames, H. Y., Chavez-Due., ILN. Y., Chen, G. A., & Neville, H. A. (In press). Toward a psychological framework of radical healing in Communities of Color. *The Counseling Psychologist.*

Mollen, D., Hargons, C., Klann, E., & **Mosley, D. V.** (In press). Abortion knowledge and attitudes among psychologists and graduate students. *The Counseling Psychologist*.

Hargons, C. N., **Mosley, D. V.,** Meiller, C., Stuck, J., Kirkpatrick, B., Adams, C., & Angyal, B. (2018). uate stus so good": Pleasure in last sexual encounter narratives of Black university students. *Journal of Black Psychology*, *44*, 103-127. doi:10.1177/0095798417749400

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Crowell, C. N., Delgado-Romero, E. A., **Mosley, D. V.**, & Huynh, S. (2016). 'The full has never been told': Building a theory of sexual health for heterosexual Black men of Caribbean descent. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, *18*, 860-874. doi:10.1080/13691058.2016.1146335

Abreu, R., **Mosley, D. V.**, & Black, W. (2014). Gender expansive and sexual minority inclusive curricula: A guide for educators. In M.C. Kenny (Ed.), *Sex Education: Attitude of Adolescents, Cultural Differences and Schools' Challenges* (pp. 243-276). Hauppauge, NY: Nova Publishers.

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

2018	*The Counseling Psychologist* Outstanding Paper Award for the major contribution "Sex Positivity in Counseling Psychology" Sage Publishing
2018	Outstanding Contribution to Scholarship on Race and Ethnicity Award for the manuscript "Black Lives Matter: A Call to Action for Counseling Psychology Leaders" Section on Ethnic and Racial Diversity (SERD), Society of Counseling Psychology (APA Division 17)
2018	Social Justice and Advocacy Award Student Affiliates of Seventeen

2017	Travel Grant for the 2017 convention in Baltimore, MD National Women's Studies Association
2017	Inclusive Excellence Award Office of the Provost, University of Kentucky
2016	Leslie Martin Endowed Fellowship College of Education, University of Kentucky
2015	Outstanding Professional Development Program Award (Stuart C. Tentoni Award) American Psychological Association of Graduate Students (APAGS)
2015	Student Travel Award for the APA Convention in Toronto, Ontario American Psychological Association
2014	Joint APA Ethics Office, Ethics Committee, American Psychological Association of Graduate Students (APAGS), and Division 44-Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues student travel award for the 2015 National Multicultural Summit
2013	Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (MHSAS) Fellow American Psychological Association Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) *Mentor:* Elida Bautista, PhD

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2018 to present	**Assistant Professor** University of Florida, Gainesville, FL
2016–2017	**Lab Leader** University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY
Fall 2016	**Adjunct Professor** Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, KY
Spring 2015	**Instructor of Record** Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, KY

SUPERVISED CLINICAL AND SUPERVISION EXPERIENCE

08/2017–07/2018 **Psychology Intern**
Duke University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), Durham, NC

08/2014–05/2016 **Counselor**
Eastern Kentucky University Counseling Center, Richmond, KY

Summer 2014, 2015 **Group Leader**
Williams Wells Brown Community Center, Lexington, KY

01/2014–05/2014 **Supervisor of Master's-Level Student**
Counseling Psychology Program, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY

08/2013–05/2014 **Practicum Student Counselor**
University of Kentucky Counseling Center, Lexington, KY

08/2011–12/2011 **School Counseling Intern**
Friendship Academy of Science and Technology, Baltimore, MD

RELATED PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

08/2015–05/2017 **Research Assistant and Relationships, Intimacy, and Sexual Enrichment Research Lab Co-leader**
Counseling Psychology Program, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY

08/2013–05/2015 **Graduate Assistant to the Director of Clinical Training**
Counseling Psychology Program, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY

03/2008–05/2010 **Work-Based Learning Coordinator**
Potomac Job Corps Center, Washington, DC