Towards an Understanding of Civic Engagement and Civic Commitment among Black
Early Adolescents

by

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Dedication

To my sister, Asha.

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Abstract

Civic engagement and civic commitment are important for individual and community well-being. In this dissertation, I explore critical analysis and political efficacy in relation to civic engagement and civic commitment among Black early adolescents. Scholars have suggested that these sociopolitical factors are highly indicative of sustained civic development, particularly for Black youth. As such, I investigated the relationships among critical analysis, political efficacy, and civic engagement among Black early adolescents. I tested whether critical analysis and political efficacy are directly related to civic engagement and civic commitment. I also examined whether the relationship between critical analysis and civic outcomes varies by level of political efficacy. Finally, I tested whether critical analysis is related to either civic engagement or civic commitment through political efficacy beliefs. Findings from a quantitative investigation of 118 Black early adolescents show that political efficacy is related to four domains of civic engagement and civic commitment: helping, community action, formal political action, and activism. Political efficacy moderates the relationship between youth social responsibility and activism, such that the relationship between youth social responsibility and activism is stronger for youth with higher political efficacy beliefs. There is also an indirect effect of youth social responsibility on the relationship between political efficacy and commitment to future activism. Further, through a qualitative investigation of 36 Black early adolescents, evidence suggests that Black youth are actively thinking about their sociopolitical environment in complex

ways. Youth consider systemic and individual attributions for problems and solutions in

their communities and schools. Moreover, these early adolescents consider their own role

in constructing positive change (youth social responsibility) as well as barriers that

prohibit youth engagement. Taken together, this research broadens our understanding of

civic development through a snapshot of civic thought and civic engagement among

Black early adolescents.

<p style="text-align: center;">**Chapter 1**</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">**Introduction**</p>

What makes Black youth successful? This question has been the primary catalyst of my research and a question that is considered by many researchers, practitioners, parents, community members, and Black youth themselves. In America, one indicator of success is civic engagement, which is also one of the most critical areas of social development for the health and stability of our society (Yates & Youniss, 1996). This dissertation will explore civic engagement and civic commitment among Black early adolescents, with a focus on how these youth understand and engage with society.

Civic Engagement in the Black Community

The United States functions as a participatory democracy, where citizens elect public officials and those officials make decisions to govern based on the views and needs of their constituents. However, in the United States, there exists a history of political marginalization where the voices of some constituents are stifled through gerrymandering, voter suppression, and other forms of institutional oppression that serve to limit the political power of particular groups of people, for instance, Black Americans. The history of political activism in the Black community runs as deep as the history of racism and political disenfranchisement. For example, during the 1960s, Black Americans and many allied groups worked through the Civil Rights Movement to counteract systemic political and social injustice and to demand equal political rights under the Constitution. Through the Civil Rights Movement and other grassroots

movements (e.g. the Black Power Movement), racial segregation, political disenfranchisement, and racial violence were constitutionally outlawed, granting all citizens equal protection under the law. Black Americans were no longer subject to voter suppression, private acts of race-based violence, and separate and unequal public education without legal recourse in the face of those injustices. With these legal changes, that were fueled by political and social activism that included sit-ins, protests, and marches, came the slow decline of overt mainstream racism and discrimination. The systemic constraints that precluded all Americans from exercising their civil rights were challenged under the law. Discrimination that was once legally sanctioned, as well as socially expected, was no longer tolerated as a barrier to engaged citizenship.

The long-standing history of institutional violence against people of color, though *constitutionally illegal*, still impacts the lived experiences of people today. In the past 50 years since the Civil Rights Act of 1964, many Black Americans still report experiences of racial discrimination and systematic inequality in schools, communities, and institutions (Cohen, 2005; Fine, Burns, Payne, & Torre, 2004; Williams, et al., 2012). To counteract these negative experiences, many individuals and programs are dedicated to decreasing discrimination, increasing respect of diversity and difference, and promoting critical analysis of social issues (Bowman, 2011; Ginwright, 2010a; Kumagai & Lypson, 2009). Modern sociopolitical movements seek to help maintain the system changes that have occurred through the Civil Rights era and to encourage further systemic social evolution to challenge contemporary injustice. For example, sociopolitical movements are made manifest through protests of failed economic policy, grassroots movements that

target educational inequity in public schools, and unprecedented mobilization of citizens exercising their right to vote, among other issues.

With this changing political and social landscape, the nature of civic behavior in the Black community has also evolved. In the 2012 presidential election, Blacks had higher numbers of voters in their precincts than other racial groups (File, 2013). Like the youth of the civil rights movement who were an integral part of sit-ins and other forms of protest, politically engaged Black youth tipped the scales and helped to re-elect the first Black president of the United States, President Barack Obama. In the 2012 Presidential election, the political participation of young people proved a critical influence, as 29% of youth ages 18-29 voted according to exit polls (Rogowski & Cohen, 2012). Researchers at the Black Youth Project noted the specific impact of Black youth on the election results (emphasis original):

> "This new analysis shows that youth again increased their presence at the voting booth, and this increase was driven largely by *high levels of turnout among young Blacks and Latinos...* Because of the increased percentages of young people of color in the population and in the voting electorate, these populations have played an increasingly important role in selecting the nation's president, *and will continue to do so*."
>
> - Black Youth Project (November 9, 2012)

While the fight for constitutional equality was enacted into legislation 50 years ago with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, there is still work to be done towards supporting the continued civic participation and growing civic development of Blacks, particularly given the racial history of political disenfranchisement and marginalization in America.

The high numbers of Black voters and strong representation of young Black voters in the 2012 Presidential election is an example of how such change can occur. Change is also often created through grassroots movements, community organizing, and other forms of social and political participatory citizenship (Cohen, 2005; Ginwright, 2010b).

Civic Engagement in Early Adolescence

Recently, youth development has been described less in the traditional terms of discrete stages that are achieved at specific times, and more as variable transitions that may occur over a broader window of time at different rates for different people (Larson & Hansen, 2005). One particularly important developmental transition period for civic development is during early adolescence – generally between the end of elementary school and the beginning of high school, between the ages of 10-14 years old (Eckstein, Noack, & Gniewosz, 2012; Mitra & Serriere, 2012). During this period of early adolescence, there is often an onset of more complex thinking skills including abstract thinking, perspective taking, and moral identity development (Piaget, 1964; Hart, Atkins, & Ford, 1999). These skills are critical as they give young people the competencies to initiate a deeper exploration of their social values and belief systems, and to develop ideological stances that guide how they chose to engage or disengage with their world and civic issues around them. With these new and burgeoning skills, early adolescents begin to ask questions about the world around them, how societies and institutions function, and the injustices that may occur within institutions and societies (Mitra & Serriere, 2012; Sherrod, 2003).

Scholars have called for an increase in research that addresses issues of adolescent civic engagement, especially before the age of voting eligibility (Flanagan, Beyers, &

Žukauskienė, 2012). Research has shown that early civic engagement predicts lasting

involved citizenship and that early adolescence is a critical time period for establishing

civic habits that help sustain long-term civic participation (Martínez, Peñaloza, &

Valenzuela, 2012; Hahn, 1998). In fact, civic responsibility and civic commitment are

generally malleable during early adolescence, given the development of new cognitive

skills, and civic agency and civic competence can develop as early as the 5th grade (Mitra

& Serriere, 2012; Eckstein, Noack, & Gniewosz, 2012). Taken together, early

adolescents are beginning to develop civic skills and understandings of political and civic

processes that will impact civic engagement over the course of their entire lives.

Dissertation Goals

Today, Black youth participate at a growing rate in traditional electoral politics, as

evidenced by the 2012 Presidential election. But where does it all begin? What are the

roads to engaged citizenship among Black youth today? What are the ways in which

Black youth, from politically and socially marginalized backgrounds, begin to understand

their sociopolitical world? How do Black youth understand current social conditions in

their own communities? How are Black youth participating in their communities, even in

early adolescence and how do they imagine themselves as citizens of the future? These

are the valuable questions that have inspired my dissertation work.

The goal of this dissertation is to complicate the current understanding of civic

engagement among Black youth during early adolescence in an effort to identify

mechanisms that can support engaged citizenship in the Black community. Towards this

goal, there are specific research aims that guide this dissertation:

First, I examine how critical social analysis and political efficacy relate to civic engagement and civic commitment for Black early adolescents. I consider civic engagement across four domains including helping action, community action, political action, and activism. This expanded definition also considers prior engagement as well as commitment to future engagement in each domain. In this research I also investigate how psychological mechanisms such as political efficacy and social responsibility may function across each type of civic engagement.

Second, I consider Black early adolescents' critical analysis of their local social, political, and economic environment. Scholars from a critical consciousness and sociopolitical development perspective suggest that in order to effectively engage as citizens, individuals from marginalized groups must understand how sociopolitical systems function, particularly in ways that might be to the detriment of their group (Freire, 2005; Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011). I explore how Black early adolescents might describe problems within their proximal sociopolitical context – their local community and school. To better understand this dynamic, I explore the different ways that Black early adolescents understand their world, problems they view as salient, and attributions they place for the causes of problems, responsibility they assigned for creating and implementing solutions, and how they consider their own possibilities for and barriers to civic participation.

To reach these dissertation goals, I take a multi-method approach. To address the first research aim, I use data from a self-report survey of Black middle school students in the Midwest. For the second research aim, I use data from focus group interviews with a subset of Black middle school students who participated in the survey questionnaire.

Both studies draw from the same theoretical and conceptual literatures that are dedicated to understanding the civic lives of Black early adolescents. I consider civic engagement broadly, to include developmentally appropriate and differentiated forms of civic engagement such as pro-social behavior and commitment to future civic engagement. I also explore how sociopolitical factors function in relation to civic engagement among early adolescents. On one hand, political efficacy and social responsibility are more established psychological constructs that are appropriate to examine as functional mechanisms of action that may differentially support civic engagement and commitment. On the other hand, the ways that Black early adolescents understand and analyze their proximal sociopolitical context is a less well understood phenomenon that requires a more nuanced investigation of how youth construct and convey meaning of their own lived experiences (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Taken together, these two studies will help broaden the understanding of civic engagement among Black youth, in an effort to increase and sustain civic and political involvement in the Black community.

Research Contributions and Significance

This research will contribute to the literature on civic engagement and Black youth development in several ways. First, civic engagement among Black early adolescents as a population is often understudied in civic engagement literature. Much of the literature on civic engagement focuses on late adolescents and young adults given the ability for young people over the age of 18 to vote and the likelihood that late adolescents may participate in other civic activities given their growing ability to direct their own out-of-school time activities. Scholars, however, have recently noted the growing importance of investigating civic engagement earlier in order to understand the civic skills that

impact long-term civic participation (Mitra & Serriere, 2012). Much of this work does not consider the unique civic experiences of Black youth, thus the current investigation focuses on this population. Second, I consider how psychological mechanisms relate to different types of civic engagement. While previous work has either considered civic engagement broadly, or has considered different types of civic engagement (e.g., volunteerism, voting) separately, this work adds to this literature by looking at different modalities simultaneously. Specifically, it will consider pro-social behaviors, such as helping, as a form of civic engagement that is developmentally relevant during early adolescence. It will also account for community-based civic engagement, interactions with formal political systems, and activism as distinct ways that early adolescents may engage with or plan to engage with their sociopolitical environment as citizens. Finally, I talk to early adolescents about their own perspectives of the social, political, and economic problems they see in their communities every day. As we move forward as a field, this and future extension of this work will aid researchers in engaging students, as young as middle school, in thinking about their communities and becoming active and engaged therein.

Organization of the Dissertation

In the following chapters I present my dissertation research. Chapter Two begins with a review of the relevant theoretical and empirical literatures that consider civic engagement and related psychological factors. Following this, I present my specific research questions and hypotheses for the quantitative and qualitative studies of my dissertation. In Chapter Three, I give an overview of the school settings where I collected my data and the procedures for data collection. In Chapter Four, I present the methods,

data analysis plan, and findings for the quantitative dissertation study, along with a discussion of those findings. Chapter Five follows with the qualitative methods, data analysis strategy, findings, and discussion. Finally, in Chapter Six, I summarize the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative components of this dissertation, describe the implications and limitations of the dissertation research, and discuss directions for future research regarding civic engagement and Black youth.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Civic engagement is critical to the promotion of well-being and positive development of youth as well as the advancement of society. Young people who participate in local public policy decisions report increased knowledge, higher levels of college attendance, and greater commitment to public service (Checkoway, Allison, & Montoya, 2005). Similarly, those youth who engaged in community service activities have shown a greater sense of social responsibility and community belonging (McGuire & Gamble, 2006) as well as increased confidence, connectedness, commitment to helping others, and tolerance toward people from disadvantaged communities (Yates & Youniss, 1996). In addition to the benefits of civic engagement for youth, there are also community benefits, such as policy reform to improve quality of life in some communities that were championed by youth-led movements (Checkoway, Allison & Montoya, 2005; Ginwright, 2010a; Lerner, 2004). Moreover, research has consistently found that civic engagement through the lifetime is related to participation in civic activities during adolescence (Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007; Reinders & Youniss, 2006). Civic engagement in adolescence is not only relevant for the positive development of youth as individuals, but it is critical for the sustained positive development of communities. This is because youth become increasingly experienced in and committed to their civic responsibilities to invest in addressing the local needs of their community when they become involved at an early age.

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The growing attention to youth civic engagement in the developmental science research literature corresponds with federal policy initiatives and civic education standards in the public schools. In recognition of the mutual benefits of community service for the advancement of communities and the welfare of youth participants, Congress passed the National and Community Service Act of 1990 and the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 (Yates & Youniss, 1996). More recently, in 2009, Congress passed the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act to reauthorize and expand national and community service legislation to support volunteerism and community service across the lifetime (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2010). Through these acts, the US Congress has emphasized the need for and the advantages of service that helps youth become informed citizens and constructive members of their communities, and the importance of maintaining involved citizenship throughout one's lifetime. Schools reinforce the expectation that youth become engaged citizens through social studies curricula, and according to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, forty states require students take at least one American Government or Civic course prior to high school graduation (Godsay, Henderson, Levine, & Littenberg-Tobias, 2012).

However, there is a mixed picture of civic engagement among Black youth. On one hand, scholars have noted a civic achievement gap, where youth of color and youth from low-income backgrounds report lower levels of civic knowledge, political skills, positive civic and political attitudes, and traditional forms of political participation (e.g. contacting elected officials) (Levinson, 2007, & National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2011). Moreover, the American Political Science Association (2004) has

highlighted growing disparities in political participation across racial, socioeconomic and generational lines, with older, more wealthy Whites being the most politically active. On the other hand, more recent research shows that Blacks, and Black youth specifically, are voting at record rates above even White voters (File, 2013). Research also suggests that some racial minority youth may be civically engaged through non-traditional means such as participating in youth-led social justice movements, providing family financial assistance, and participating in politically motivated cultural and artistic expression through poetry and hip-hop (Ginwright, 2010a; Watts & Flanagan, 2007).

It is particularly important to understand these discrepant findings because of the potential for alienation and marginalization of Black youth and because we live in a participatory democracy, where individual and community needs are met through participation in traditional political systems. Marginalization includes limited access to political power, economic resources, and social capital, and being positioned as an outsider in traditional political systems. Currently, scholars suggest that youth of color participate less through traditional political avenues due to a history of political marginalization, lack of government trust, and the perception that the government will not respond to their political interests (Diemer & Li, 2011; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). There has been increased participation in national elections (File, 2013), but not local mid-term elections and politics (Panagopoulos, 2011). There has been limited research on factors that affect Black youth civic engagement and, even less consideration has been given to experiences of marginalization as a part of what deters such involvement.

Defining Civic Engagement

Civic engagement is a widely used term with little consensus on a specific and consistent definition; the literature offers a range of definitions that encompass individual and collective civil and political participation (Adler, 2005). Throughout psychology, education, and political science literatures civic engagement is referred as community service, activism, volunteerism, social action, and political participation. One common factor among most definitions is that civic engagement is performed by a citizen and, his or her actions, whether individual or collective, interact with society, and more often address the problems or concerns of the public. In this dissertation, I adopt a broad definition of civic engagement offered by Adler (2005): "Civic engagement describes how an active citizen participates in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future." Scholarship on youth civic development supports the use of a comprehensive definition, suggesting:

> Perhaps the fairest conclusion is that there is not a definite demarcation between political and civil realms. Rather there is a continuum between formal political acts such as voting, political actions such as protesting for a moral cause, and performing a service such as working in a rural literacy campaign. Scholarship concerned with young people's preparation for civic participation as adults would be wise to take into account the whole range. – Youniss, Bales, Christmas-Best, Diversi, McLaughlin, & Silbereisen (2002)

In recent scholarship on the multidisciplinary study of civic engagement development, Amnå (2012) asserts that the term civic engagement is often used to indicate the social, civic, and political dimensions of engaged citizenship. As such, Ekman and Amnå (2012) developed a typology of civic engagement that considers both individual and collective forms of civic engagement, while also considering civic engagement broadly as non-participation, civic participation, and political participation. The first category, non-participation, is divided into active/anti-political forms and

passive/apolitical forms of inaction, which include non-voting. Active or anti-political actions are motivated by dissatisfaction or disgust while passive or apolitical actions are related to disinterest in politics and feelings that politics are not important. Civic participation is the second category and consists of social involvement – attention to and interest in politics and society, and civic engagement – actions with attention to social and political issues. Finally, political participation includes formal political participation such as voting and contacting political representatives. Political participation also includes extra-parliamentary actions - legal activism such as boycotts and involvement in social movements and illegal activism in the form of civil disobedience or politically motivated violence. By considering distinct types of civic engagement, scholars can have a common framework and language to understand mechanisms of action relevant for voting versus volunteering, while acknowledging both as equally important components of civic engagement.

Another dimension of civic engagement that scholars consider as part of a comprehensive approach to citizenship and civic participation is pro-social behavior (Sherrod & Lauckhardt, 2008; Sherrod, Torney-Purta, & Flanagan, 2010). Pro-social behaviors include helping behavior, sharing, concern for others, and tolerance (Metzger & Smetana, 2010; Wentzel, Filisetti, & Looney, 2007). During early adolescence, young people may not have physical access, logistical resources, or cognitive and developmental capacity to participate in other types of community and political actions. However, they act as citizens through local polities, such as classrooms, playgrounds, neighborhoods, and schools (Astuto & Ruck, 2010; Flanagan, 2013). These spaces function as microcosmic reproductions of broader society, where democratic processes

and principles are learned and practiced. In these spaces, pro-social behavior is a developmentally relevant form of civic engagement. For instance, while an adult might help the community by participating in a "Meals-on-Wheels" program, children might share their lunch with a hungry classmate. In fact, these pro-social behaviors in childhood are proposed as antecedents to long-term civic engagement (Astuto & Ruck, 2010) and have been found to relate positively to social responsibility (Metzger & Smetana, 2010). These pro-social behaviors, such as helping, can be considered as a unique type of civic engagement relevant during early adolescence.

Typically, research on civic engagement considers performed behavior as an indicator of civic engagement without giving proper attention to the intention of the individual to become civically engaged in the future. However, some theorists contend that commitment to civic engagement without action is a relevant consideration, particularly for groups such as youth who may not have access to opportunity structures that promote civic engagement (Diemer & Li, 2011; Watts & Flanagan, 2007; Watts & Guessous, 2006). *Civic Commitment* is emotional and intellectual resolution to future action that may serve as a proxy for performed civic engagement. During adolescence, particularly in early adolescence, individuals may have barriers to engagement beyond their control, and what may appear to be civic dis-engagement may in fact be a reflection of poor resources, access to resources, or insufficient scaffolding to support the development of civic knowledge and agency towards civic engagement. By considering civic commitment, we can understand what factors relate to commitment to future civic engagement, as well as past civic engagement.

In this dissertation I consider both civic engagement and civic commitment across four dimensions: helping action, community action, political action, and activism. These four dimensions align with Amnå's proposed typology of civic engagement, while also considering the developmental relevance of pro-social behaviors as a component of civic engagement during early adolescence (see Figure 2.1).
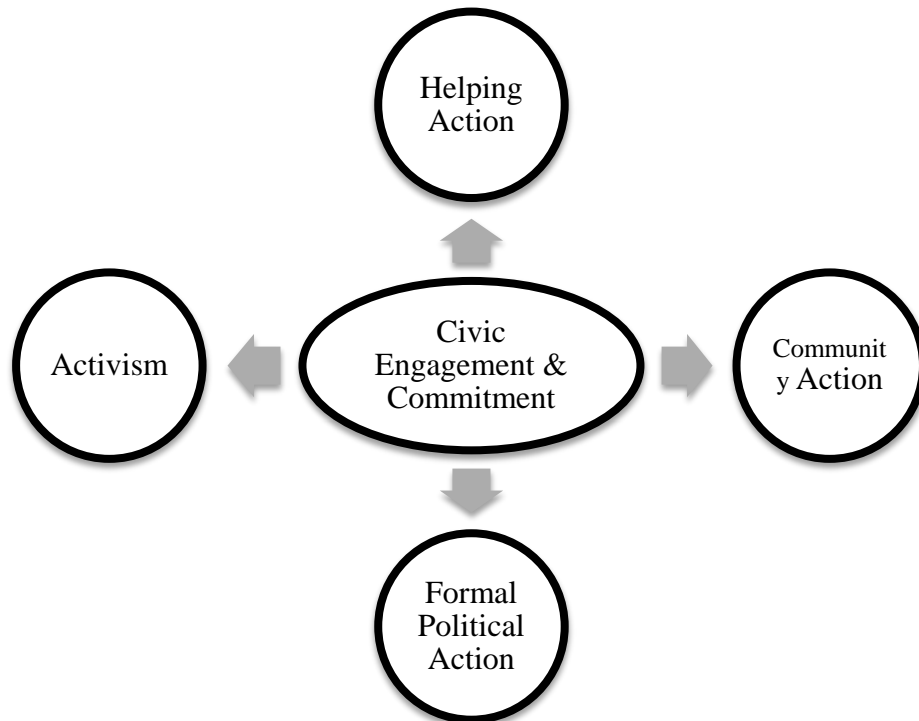
Figure 2.1 Typology of early adolescent civic engagement and civic commitment

Psychological Theories of Civic Engagement

Scholars have proposed psychological theories of action and constructs that implicate individual level psycho-social factors to better understand causes and correlates of civic engagement. Several of these theories specifically take up this issue with regard to marginalized populations, including youth, racial minorities, and the economically disadvantaged. In the following section I outline the basic tenants and assumptions of several theories that make claims regarding factors that promote civic engagement in ways that are specifically relevant to Black early adolescents.

Critical Consciousness. In the 1970s, Paolo Freire proposed the idea of critical consciousness through his work in Brazil where he used education and literacy as tools for liberation and social justice of peasants in Brazil. Freire suggested that disenfranchised groups of people are best able to be active participants in their own liberation if they have engaged in a critical analysis and understanding of the structural forces and political systems that oppress them (Freire, 2005). In essence, once people begin to understand how oppressive conditions are systematically developed and maintained, they will be motivated to act strategically to change those conditions. In addition to an understanding of contemporary issues, critical consciousness requires attention to historic oppression and social movements that worked to eradicate such conditions. Similarly, the same tenants hold true for marginalized and disenfranchised groups today. From Freire's work, psychologists have proposed three components that make up critical consciousness: Critical reflection – critical analysis of sociopolitical conditions that recognizes systematic inequality, political efficacy – perceived ability to

enact social change, and critical action – actions taken within or outside of traditional political structures to address systemic inequality (Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011).

Sociopolitical Development Theory. Borrowing from the fundamental tenants of Frierian critical consciousness, psychologists have proposed an extended theoretical model of sociopolitical development (SPD) to interrogate the nature of youth activism and processes by which youth come to think about and become involved in political and civic action for societal change (Figure 2.2; Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003; Watts & Flanagan, 2007; Watts & Guessous, 2006). In essence, SPD is "an evolving understanding of cultural, economic, and political systems, how these systems shape society and how societal definitions impact one's own status within the society, with specific attention to oppression and injustice" (see Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003; Watts & Guessous, 2006). The SPD model extends the psychological study of civic development by taking into consideration individual and contextual factors that promote the development of social-justice activism among young people. Sociopolitical development in this framework is particularly relevant for marginalized youth – youth who experience socioeconomic, race-based, or gendered discrimination or disenfranchisement (Diemer & Li, 2011; Garcia Coll, et al., 1996).
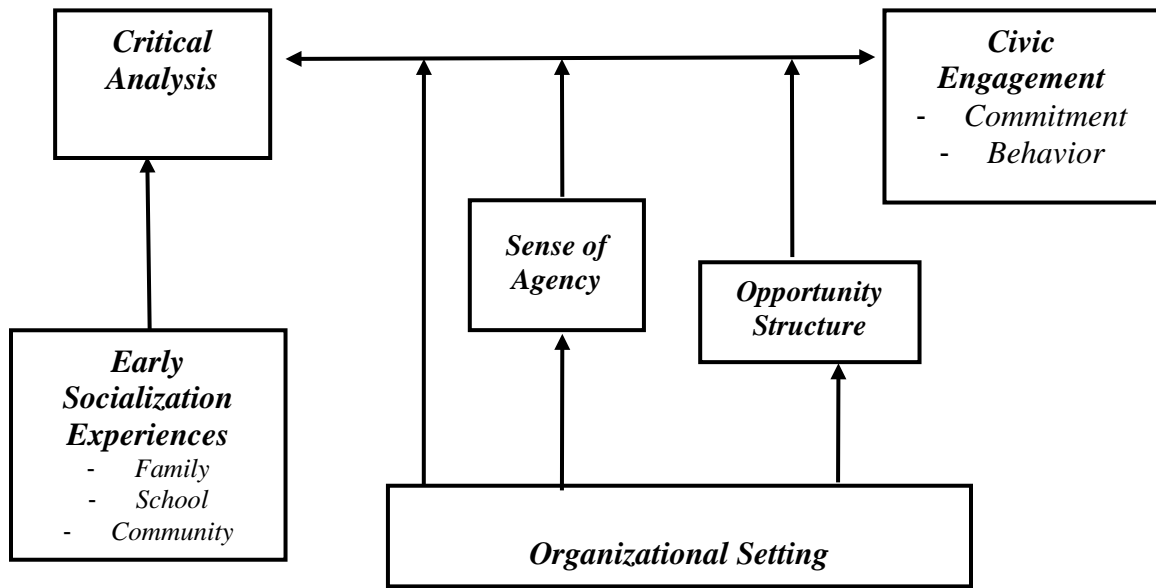
Figure 2.2 Model of sociopolitical development (Watts & Guessous, 2006)

Through SPD, youth acquire knowledge, analytic skills, emotional facilities, and a capacity for action to participate in political systems (Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003). Understanding how cultural systems and political institutions work, and how they directly and indirectly impact one's personal and community well-being is key, with emphasis on recognizing hegemony and systematic oppression. According to this framework, the most ideal form of civic engagement is a "critical" form of activism, where one engages in critical social analysis to purposefully discern root causes of social asymmetry and take actions towards meaningful, systematic change to correct such inequities. Thus, the types of civic and political involvement most explicitly explored through the SPD model are those that bring about systematic change to contest oppression and inequality and move towards a more just, democratic society. However, the model may also be useful when considering forms of civic engagement that are not traditionally viewed as activist behaviors (e.g. contacting government officials, community service), but may invoke social or political change.

Empowerment Theory. Similarly, psychological theorists contend that

empowerment is a process by which individuals, organizations, and communities can

influence the social issues most relevant to them (Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, 1995).

Psychological empowerment specifically considers the individual process of

empowerment, including perceptions of personal control, critical analysis of the

sociopolitical environment, and proactive community involvement (Zimmerman, 1995;

Christens, 2012). According to Zimmerman (1995), "Psychological empowerment

includes beliefs that goals can be achieved, awareness about resources and factors that

hinder or enhance one's efforts to achieve those goals, and efforts to fulfill those goals."

It is important to note, while the fundamental tenants of psychological empowerment are

static, the construct may manifest in a variety of ways to account for skills and behaviors

that may differ across people, across situation, and overtime. Psychological

empowerment consists of three components: intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral

forms of engagement (Zimmerman, 1995). The interpersonal domain refers to perceived

psychological agency, such as perceived control, and domain specific self-efficacy. The

interactional dimension is the understanding people have about their community and

sociopolitical system they are a part of and the skills they need to obtain the goals/change

they want. Finally, the behavioral component includes the actions one takes to become

and remain empowered, such as civic engagement and organizational participation.

Similar to critical consciousness scholarship, psychological empowerment theory

delineates empowering processes – developing a critical understanding of the

sociopolitical environment and engaging in opportunities to exert sociopolitical control

from empowering outcomes – the end result of an empowering process (Zimmerman,

1995). Through the psychological empowerment process, individuals develop cognitive, emotional, and behavioral skills to participate in their communities and enact change in social and political systems to counteract disenfranchisement their communities. Christens (2012) suggests that "It is the most marginalized or least powerful members of societies – women, minorities, the poor, and the young – who experience the greatest vulnerabilities and instabilities in their community contexts." When these individuals engage in meaningful civic and political processes in their community, they experience psychological benefits. Psychological empowerment is related to greater community participation and more positive sense of community, and more positive psychological well-being (Christens & Peterson, 2012; Christens, Peterson, & Speer, 2011; Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles, & Maton, 1999).

Conceptual Framework

Altogether, these theoretical frameworks each move beyond a traditional model that foregrounds the influence of sociopolitical systems on adolescents and considers a transactional model where youth are also actors on sociopolitical systems. They all take into consideration interactions between context and people, moving beyond the impact of context on individuals, by attending to ways that people learn to understand sociopolitical structures in their environments and in turn counteract structural marginalization. SPD theory foregrounds the critical analysis of structures and systems, as does critical consciousness literatures, while also implicating individual perceptions of their own ability to participate. Psychological empowerment theory differs from critical consciousness and SPD as the point of emphasis is on individual political efficacy and sociopolitical control as the primary mechanism of action towards civic and political

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participation. As an organizing framework for this dissertation I integrate tenants from

critical consciousness, sociopolitical development, and psychological empowerment as

complimentary constructs, to explore civic engagement among Black early adolescents.

Specifically, I examine the relation between critical social analysis, political efficacy, and

civic engagement among Black early adolescents (see Figure 2.3). Together, this work

addresses current gaps in our understanding of the changing landscape of civic

engagement among Black youth, particularly for younger adolescents who are not yet

eligible to vote and are often overlooked as civic participants.
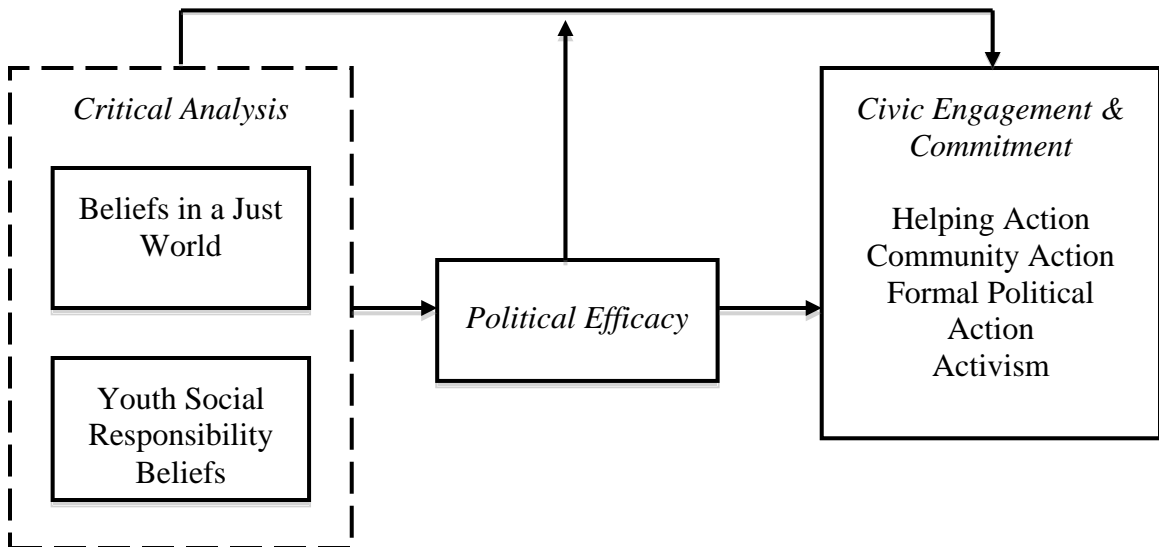
Figure 2.3 Conceptual model

Critical Analysis

Each framework outlined above strongly suggests that a deep critical understanding of sociopolitical structures is essential for civic participation of disenfranchised people, especially for civic engagement towards justice-based change. While this critical analysis is vital for all citizens, it may be particularly relevant for adolescent civic development given the formative development of both identity and cognitive ability, such as reasoning (Metzger & Smetana, 2010; Slater, Fain, & Rossatto, 2002). Among other things, adolescence is marked by identity exploration, where youth explore who they are in relation to the world around them. During this time of discovery adolescents refine their own personal identity, standards, and beliefs across multiple dimensions including academics, morality and social relations (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Moreover, during adolescence and the transition to adulthood, opportunities become available to promote civic development and critical thinking as youth expand and refine their social and political point-of-views (Finlay, Wray-Lake, & Flanagan, 2010). Identity exploration can serve as a point of departure for political, cultural and systems exploration, which in tandem may contribute to further identity development rooted in an understanding of relevant institutions and ecological systems.

Critical analysis refers to an individual's understanding of and beliefs about cultural, political, social, and economic systems - locally, nationally and internationally (Watts & Guessous, 2006). This also includes beliefs about how micro- and macro-level systems (e.g. culture, government, school) influence one's own family, community and personal life chances. The ways that youth think critically about systems, such as schools, government, and community is integrally connected to how youth decide to act within

these systems based on their understanding. A *critical* analysis of structural oppression and consideration of the impact of structural oppression on communities and individuals can may lead youth to become civically involved in response to their understanding of how the government is (or is not) meeting the needs of their community. This is particularly important given the history of and potential for alienation and marginalization of youth of color within these systems. Through critical analysis youth have an opportunity to reflect on the social and political conditions within their environment, especially conditions that may inhibit political participation and civic engagement. By developing an understanding of social conditions, youth are in turn empowered to act politically and civically to express their own political voice. SPD theory contends that an achieved critical analysis reflects critical consciousness and serves as a potent catalyst to meaningful justice-oriented civic engagement (Watts, Williams, & Jagers, 2003). Research supports this assumption, finding that individual characteristics that reflect aspects of a critical analysis, such as civic knowledge and political trust, are related to political activism among youth (Hart & Gullan, 2010) and youth who believe the world is unjust have a stronger commitment to civic engagement (Watts & Guessous, 2006). Given the prevalence of identity exploration, adolescence marks a critical period for scholars to understand and examine critical analysis of individuals and communities situated in sociopolitical context, in relation to civic engagement.

I consider critical analysis along two dimensions – system justifying and system challenging analysis. The system justifying view contends that people determine their own destiny; they earn what they get and get what they deserve. According to a system

justification perspective, society is fair and individual circumstances are solely the reflection of personal capabilities, fate and unforeseen forces beyond one's control (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). This represents a shallow analysis that does not consider the ways that systems function in a social justice oriented manner and tends toward individual blame attributions. The system challenging dimension maintains that failed or oppressive institutions centrally and casually related to personal circumstances and misfortunes; no matter what a person may do individually, there are some things systematically out of their control. From this perspective, institutions are strategically and purposefully designed to benefit some members of society to the detriment of others; political, social and economic prejudices and biases account for misfortune and hardship experienced by individuals within society. Critical consciousness and SPD suggest that system challenging views indicate higher levels of critical analysis and should be related to more system changing behavior.

    System Justification. One such system justifying orientation, Belief in a Just World Theory (Lerner 1977, & Lerner & Miller, 1978), suggests there is a fundamental human desire to live in a world that is just and fair, and a desire to maintain congruence between the actions one takes and the life consequences one experiences. Scholars assert that the belief in a just world, is an ideology that serves to legitimize existing social and economic arrangements (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost & Hunyady, 2005), regardless of how unjust and inequitable those social conditions may be. As such, just world beliefs reflect a view that individuals deserve the rewards and punishments they receive in life, individual blame. From this perspective, sociopolitical injustice may lead one to blame the victims of inequities for their negative life circumstances or it may motivate a person

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to work within an existing system to eliminate perceived inequities and maintain or restore justice (Preiser & Wermuth, 2003). Indeed, research has shown that individuals tend to justify inequality only when they are unable to engage in behaviors to restore the unjust outcome directly (Jost, et al., 2010). Thus, in the face of injustice, individuals may choose to insist the world is fair and demand the victim change, or concede that injustice has occurred and demand the system change. Watts & Guessous (2006) found that among a majority African American youth sample, beliefs in a just world were negatively related to commitment to social action, such that the less marginalized youth adhere to the belief that the world is just, the more involved they are in civic and political action. These findings supported previous research, which found that adults who were engaged in civic participation endorsed strong feelings of social injustice (O'Neill, et al, 1988). While adhering to perceptions of a just world may be related to maintaining the status quo, perceptions of an unjust world are related to individual action and commitment to act among youth of color.

   Social Responsibility. Social responsibility is a construct that may help us better understand the *willingness* of young people to engage in critical analysis and critical action that challenges hegemonic structures. Social responsibility is often defined in psychological research as a value orientation that considers the needs and wants of individuals other than one's self (Gallay, 2006; Schmid, 2012; Wray-Lake & Syvertsen, 2011). Individuals high in social responsibility hold themselves accountable for positively contributing to society, prizing others and the whole society over their own individual needs. Scholars have conceptualized youth social responsibility that specifically considers the importance of valuing society and social change among youth

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(Pancer, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Alisat, 2007). Youth social responsibility considers the importance of understanding and participating in political processes, helping people, and contributing positively to social injustices such as racism, all before adulthood. In this way, youth social responsibility beliefs reflect an orientation towards engagement with political and civic systems in ways that privilege the greater good of the community, the needs of others within the communal system, and system challenging ideals (Pancer, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Alisat, 2007). As such, youth who endorse social responsibility beliefs, hold the opinion that adolescents should be involved in creating positive change within current systems to the benefit of the broader community. Youth social responsibility beliefs is one dimension of a system challenging orientation and reflects a burgeoning critical consciousness.

Youth social responsibility beliefs relate to civic engagement – actions and behaviors that help people and contribute positively to society. For instance, among Canadian high school students, youth who participated in helping and activism behaviors had higher levels of youth social responsibility than uninvolved youth (Pancer, Pratt, Hunberger, & Alisat, 2007). Research also has found that social responsibility is related to volunteerism and protesting among adolescents, but not electoral voting (Crocetti, Jahrome, & Meeus, 2012; Schmid, 2012). Adolescents who strongly endorsed that youth should be civically engaged in ways that help individuals participated in more civic engagement actions that deemphasize self-interest. Volunteering and protesting actions predominately consider the needs of others and the needs of the community at-large.

Altogether, just world beliefs and social responsibility both represent distinct dimensions of critical analysis. On one hand, just world beliefs constitute an abstract or

global notion of social hierarchy and fairness. These beliefs reflect universal principals about fairness and equity in the world broadly. Endorsement of these beliefs indicates a system justifying orientation that does not reflect critical consciousness. Contrastingly, social responsibility beliefs represent concrete beliefs that youth have a duty to attend to civic obligations and actions towards sociopolitical change. This perspective reflects a system challenging orientation pointing towards critical analysis. Previous work has considered either just world beliefs as measures of critical analysis or social responsibility as a value motivation towards civic action. In this work, I simultaneously consider the abstract notion about the inequitable state of society and more concrete opinions youth's role as community-minded citizens.

Political Efficacy

Political efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her own knowledge and skills to act politically. Beaumont (2010) further suggests that political efficacy is the personal belief that one has the capacity to understand and affect community change through purposeful actions. In political science, political efficacy is understood across two dimensions: internal political efficacy and external political efficacy (Morrell, 2003; Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011). Internal political efficacy is most closely related to psychological conceptions of political efficacy and sociopolitical control and refers to a person's perceived ability to participate in civic and political activities. External political efficacy on the other hand reflects perceptions of government responsiveness to one's sociopolitical concerns. Similarly, in psychology, civically related efficacy is often described as sociopolitical control - the perceived capacity to change social conditions and participate in individual and collective social action to effect social change (Diemer

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& Li, 2011; Ginwright & James, 2002; Mitra & Serriere, 2012; Zimmerman, 1995; Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles, & Maton, 1999). In this research I consider political efficacy as a cognitive and affective appraisal of one's personal ability to participate civically and politically.

A primary theoretical assumption among sociopolitical development and empowerment theories is that people take action when they believe that their voice and behavior can have the intended impact for them or their community (Watts & Guessous, 2006; Zimmerman, 1995). From this perspective, political efficacy is an internal catalyst for civic engagement. Studies have shown the political efficacy is related to voting behavior and commitment to future civic engagement among minority late adolescents and young adults (Diemer & Li, 2011; Watts & Guessous, 2006). Research has shown that the developmental roots of efficacy beliefs begin much earlier, in childhood and early adolescence. The cognitive belief regarding one's ability to make a difference in the world begins to develop as young as 10 years old (Mitra & Serriere, 2012) and continues to develop and strengthen throughout adolescence (Zaff, et al., 2011). In light of this scholarship, I will examine the direct relationship between political efficacy and both past civic engagement and future civic commitment.

The Role of Political Efficacy

Scholars have suggested that in addition to the direct relationship between critical analysis and civic engagement, this association may be mediated or moderated by political efficacy (Watts, Diemer, Voight, 2011). Some research posits that political efficacy can impact the relationship between critical analysis and civic engagement/civic commitment, suggesting that efficacious beliefs strengthen the connection between

analysis of the sociopolitical environment and civic action within that environment (Watts & Flanagan, 2007; Watts & Guessous, 2006). Empirical work has supported this theoretical assumption among adults and adolescents. For instance, self-efficacy to promote justice was found to moderate the relationship between just world beliefs and pro-social behavior among young adults (Mohiyeddini & Montada, 1998). Additionally, Watts & Guessous (2006) found that political efficacy based in previous experiences moderated the relationships between just world beliefs and civic engagement among ninth and tenth grade high school students. For students who reported a greater political efficacy, less beliefs in a just world was related to more participation in civic engagement activities. Among students with less political efficacy, beliefs in a just world was related to less participation.

Conversely, political efficacy has also been proposed as a mediating variable, following the tenants of Social Cognitive Theory which suggest that individuals act within sociocultural systems through their own efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 2001). With regard to civic engagement and commitment, it is possible that critical analysis is related to civic action through political efficacy beliefs. Research has shown support for political efficacy as a mediating variable. In research on the impact of sociopolitical control on youth development, scholars found that the impact of ecological factors works through political efficacy to positively relate to pro-social behaviors and negatively relate to risk behaviors (Christens & Peterson, 2012). Similarly, a study of political socialization found that media-based political socialization relates to civic engagement through internal political efficacy among adolescents (Hoffman & Thomson, 2009). These studies have

not yet examined political efficacy as a mediator of the relationship between critical

analysis and civic engagement and commitment.

Study Aims

In this dissertation, I seek to understand how the proposed theoretical mechanisms

of action work to explain how Black early adolescents understand their sociopolitical

environment and how they contribute as young citizens through their own civic and

political action or inaction. Preliminary empirical findings support this model, suggesting

that both critical analysis and political efficacy are related to civic engagement among

Black youth (Watts & Guessous, 2006). The current study seeks to advance our

understanding of civic engagement and civic commitment among Black early adolescents

in three distinct ways. First, a primary contribution of this work is the investigation of

civic engagement as a multidimensional construct. On one dimension, civic engagement

is considered as a typology to include a range of social and political actions (Ekman &

Amnå, 2012). On another dimension, civic engagement is proposed to include both past

civic behavior and the commitment to future civic behavior. I will investigate both of

these dimensions of civic engagement with specific consideration to how process models

may be different given the specific civic engagement outcome of interest. The second

direct contribution to the research literature is the exploration of civic engagement in

younger adolescents. While scholars have noted the importance of developing civic

behaviors early in life, most research on civic engagement is limited to late adolescents,

young adults, and adult populations. Even less research has considered sociopolitical

processes in relation to civic outcomes among early adolescents. Finally, scholars have

called for research to explore more deeply the nature of critical analysis (Watts, Diemer,

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& Voight, 2011). A main contribution of my work will be in expanding understanding of critical analysis by investigating the content and quality of critical social analysis among Black early adolescents. I will use qualitative focus group methodology to capitalize on young people's ability to articulate their own ideas and to capture critical analysis in vivo through "group think" that can occur in a focus group setting. Through my dissertation project, I will examine civic engagement and civic commitment among Black early adolescents using multiple methodologies in two separate but related studies. Altogether, this work will enhance our current understanding of civic engagement among Black early adolescents in the 21st century by specifically considering youth critical analysis of social conditions and by examining how critical analysis and political efficacy relate to civic engagement. The following outlines the two dissertation studies and study hypotheses.

Study 1. In Study 1 I use quantitative survey methods to understand the relationships among critical analysis, political efficacy, and civic engagement.

H1:   Critical analysis and political efficacy are directly related to civic engagement (a) and civic commitment (b).

Past empirical research has typically considered critical analysis as a one-dimensional construct rooted in abstract notions of fairness and justice – Beliefs in a Just World, which have been found to relate to commitment to civic engagement (Watts & Guessous, 2006). Building on recent a recent typology of civic engagement, I consider civic engagement as a multidimensional construct that includes types of civic engagement (e.g. helping action, community action, formal political action, activism) as well as a temporal dimension (e.g. civic engagement (past), civic commitment (future). I predict that beliefs in a just world

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will relate negatively to each dimension of civic engagement and civic commitment, while youth social responsibility beliefs will be positively related. Moreover, political efficacy has been shown to positively relate to civic engagement. As such, I predict that political efficacy will be positively related to both civic engagement and civic commitment.

H2:   The relationship between critical analysis and civic engagement (a) and civic commitment (b) varies by level of political efficacy.

I will examine how political efficacy might influence the relationship between critical analysis and civic engagement among Black early adolescents. Current theory suggests that efficacy may serve as a moderating variable; as such I will test whether the level of adolescents' political efficacy strengthens the relationship between critical analysis and civic engagement, and critical analysis and civic commitment. I will consider interactions between beliefs in a just world and political agency as well as youth social responsibility and political efficacy.

H3:   Critical analysis is related to civic engagement (a) and civic commitment (b) through political efficacy.

Empowerment literatures have proposed that sociopolitical control, a form of agency, functions as a mediator on the relationship between ecological factors and youth development outcomes (Christens, 2012). As such, I will test whether political efficacy mediates the relationship between critical analysis and civic outcomes. I will also test the reverse hypothesis that critical analysis mediates the relationship between political efficacy and civic outcomes. Since both critical analysis and political efficacy have been shown to relate to civic engagement, this

analysis will help to clarify the relationships among these three constructs.

Moreover, given the proposed multidimensional nature of both critical analysis

and civic engagement, it is possible that both types of mediation effects exist

depending on the outcome of interest. For instance, in past research youth social

responsibility relates directly to activism and helping actions, but not formal

electoral action (e.g., Pancer, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Alisat, 2007; Schmid, 2012).

Thus, youth social responsibility might relate to activism through political

efficacy, but not other forms of civic engagement and commitment. This

contention has not been tested in the literature and will be addressed in this

dissertation research.

Study 2. In Study 2, I explore critical analysis among Black early adolescents.

Specifically, I investigate how Black early adolescents analyze social conditions in their

own communities, paying specific attention to their understanding of systematic

oppression, responsibility, and agency. To meet this goal I will use qualitative focus

group interviews to capture how Black early adolescents think about the social and

political health of their local communities, the most salient factors they attribute to the

existence of both local problems and solutions to local problems, and the perspective of

young people on their own role in creating positive change in their communities. Many

quantitative measures are limited in their capacity to capture whether and in what ways

youth might hold conflicting views of the causes of and solutions for community

problems or critical analysis of their community. This work will build on our current

understanding of critical analysis, by not only ascertaining what young people think

about their communities, but also providing more nuance regarding the complex and

developing ways that youth critically analyze their own communities.

Chapter 3

Research Method

The Research Settings

  Participants in this study are students from three middle schools in Southeast Michigan. A comparative description of the schools is presented in Appendix A. Two schools, Best Preparatory Academy (Best Prep) and Mwangaza Learning Center (Mwangaza), are public charter schools and are located in a major metropolitan area, "The City" that serve students from kindergarten through eighth grade. Best Prep was founded and opened in 1998 serving kindergarten through the third grade, and added a grade each year up to the eighth grade. Best Prep has a mission to support the intellectual, social, and physical development of their students. During the 2012-13 school year, Best Prep had approximately 797 students enrolled, with over 99% being Black or African American and less than 1% identified as two or more races. At Best Prep, 100% of the students were identified as economically disadvantaged (www.mischooldata.org). According to the principal at Best Prep, many students are residents of The City, and walk or get rides to and from school.

  Mwangaza is also a public charter school located in The City, but began as a private school in 1978. In 1995, the school became a public charter school and they were chartered through a Michigan based University charter organization. The founders of Mwangaza also established their own charter management company to manage the school. Mwangaza is a social studies immersion school, which emphasizes whole child

development for global citizenship through curriculum, extra curricular activities, and family engagement. During the 2012-13 school year, Mwangaza had 332 students enrolled with 100% of the students identified as Black/African American. Approximately 78% of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. Similar to Best Prep, Mwangaza's students live throughout The City and are typically brought to school by parents and guardians.

Woodland Mills Middle School is a traditional public school located in a smaller city in southeast Michigan, approximately 35 miles from The City. Over the past 5 years, Woodland Mills has faced economic decline, due in part to the loss of an automotive plant that provided much of the employment for the city. Woodland Mills serves students grades 5-8 and has a separate program for students identified as talented and gifted. Currently, Woodland Mills has enrolled 412 students, 68% Black/African American, 5% Hispanic, 25% White, and 2% bi-racial and Native American. Approximately 70% of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch at Woodland Mills. During this study, Woodland Mills was undergoing structural transition to be consolidated with a neighboring school district.

Setting Implications for Civic Engagement

All of the schools in this study are located in economically depressed areas in the Midwest. As a result of a combination of factors including economic decline and political corruption, many residents have moved out of the school district and simultaneously the local school systems have faced declining enrollments, as well as decreased financial resources. While the broader issues are similar, each community has faced unique challenges and triumphs during this time. For instance, as a result of financial issues in

the school system, Woodland School District will consolidate with a neighboring school district and the year of this study was the last year that the school district would exist as an independent entity. The City has experienced well-publicized political corruption, financial mismanagement, and chaos that have impacted the school system including financial trouble and an appointment of a financial manager. The plethora of political and social issues in each local municipality as well as the background of economic depression throughout the state provides a fertile context to explore how young Black students are aware of, understand, and communicate the nature of these larger societal problems and the direct and indirect impacts on their own lives and communities. There is an abundance of research that considers how systems and structures may put students at-risk for deleterious developmental outcomes. By considering sociopolitical development in these setting, I will expand the current research to emphasis on positive youth development, considering how students understand and experience their context and the influence this has on their civic outcomes.

Procedure

I gained access to each of these schools during 2012-2013. Each of these schools serves students in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades and had an interest in understanding factors that influence non-academic success among students. At Best Prep, I was first introduced to the principal through their charter school authorizer who was familiar with my research. At Mwangaza, I was introduced to the school leadership through a colleague; she and Mwangaza leadership had previously discussed developing an on-going university-school partnership. My work served as an initial project in this school to help address some concerns and interests of the school founders and

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administrators. I was introduced to Woodland Mills through my advisor who had previously established an on-going university-school partnership in the district. At each school I communicated through email with school leadership to describe my overall research goals and to assess the schools' interest in participating in my study. After initial email communication, I met with a school research liaison to determine feasibility of conducting my research in the school, as well as the risks and benefits of the project for both the students and the school. At Best Prep and Mwangaza, the principal served as the primary liaison and contact. At Woodland Mills, the Title I coordinator served as my primary liaison for research. For each school I offered to present my study findings to staff, parents, students, and community partners, as relevant to the schools interest and needs. After the school leadership agreed to participate, I received an official letter of support from the principal at Woodland Mills and Best Prep, and both the principal and Board of Directors at Mwangaza. After obtaining Institutional Review Board approval for each site, I distributed parental consent forms to all sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students at each school (and fifth grade students in fifth/sixth combined classes at Woodland Mills). At Mwangaza I began data collection in Winter 2012 and at Best Prep and Woodland I began data collection in Winter 2013. I explained the purpose of the study to students and teachers and asked teachers to collect the consent forms from students by an established deadline (Appendix B). In each school, I returned throughout the week of consent form collection to remind teachers and students to return the parental consent form regardless of whether the parent declined or granted their child's participation in the study.

After I collected all parental consent forms, the school administrator and I determined the best way to collect survey data. Students at each school who were consented to participate were pulled out of class and brought to the cafeteria or an empty classroom to complete the survey. At Best Prep and Woodland, students completed the survey in the afternoon, during their elective class period. At Mwangaza, students completed the survey in the morning, during elective or general education class periods. I was present at all survey administration sessions and one graduate student accompanied me to help with survey administration at Mwangaza and Woodland Mills.

After students were gathered to complete the survey, the researchers passed out the survey and administered survey instructions and verbal student assent (Appendix C). The students were reminded that their answers were confidential and that they could stop the survey at any time. At the request of administration at Best Prep and Woodland Mills, I also read the survey out loud to some students who were less proficient readers. At both schools, the school administrator suggested reading the survey aloud if there were any students in the group who may have challenges with reading and reading comprehension. In those instances, I read the survey aloud to the entire group, as to not isolate any students. All other students completed the survey on their own.

Students at each school received a University of Michigan pen to complete the survey that they were allowed to keep after the survey administration. At Best Prep and Woodland Mills, students were also entered into a raffle to win a $25 Visa Giftcard. The survey took approximately 40 minutes to complete and asked questions regarding civic engagement, critical analysis, political efficacy beliefs, political and civic socialization, and school experiences. Measures used in this study are presented in Appendix D.

After students completed the survey questionnaire, I determined dates to conduct follow-up focus groups with select students at each school. At Mwangaza, students were selected to participate in focus groups based on reported past civic engagement as indicated from the survey questionnaire. I conducted four focus groups of three to five students each during lunch periods at Mwangaza. In the focus groups, I used a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix E). The focus groups ranged from 34-57 minutes.

At Woodland, the teachers and administration preferred to minimize academic disruption by conducting focus groups during the students' elective class periods. As such, I was not able to select students based on reported past civic engagement and instead randomly selected students to participate based on their elective class period. I conducted four focus groups at Woodland Mills, with four or five students in each focus group, following the same semi-structured interview protocol. The focus groups ranged from 37-43 minutes at Woodland Mills. Best Prep declined to participate in the focus group portion of the research project.

Chapter 4

Sociopolitical Factors Related to Civic Engagement and Commitment

Methods

Participants. Participants in this study were 118 Black middle school students, ages 10-15 ($M = 12.28$, $SD = 1.07$). One hundred (84.7%) of students identified as Black/African American and 18 (25.2%) identified as bi-racial or multi-racial. Sixty-four percent of the students were girls. Twenty-four students were from Best Prep, 39 from Mwangaza, and 55 from Woodland. The students were represented across middle school grades with two fifth graders (1.7%), 48 sixth graders (40.7%), 37 seventh graders (31.4%), and 31 eighth graders (26.3%). On average, students reported that their grades were mostly Bs, with 73.8% indicating their grades are mostly Bs or higher. Seventy-six percent of participants indicated they receive free or reduced lunch.

Measures. Complete scales for all measures can be found in Appendix D.

Belief in a Just World. Worldview beliefs are measured using the Global Beliefs in a Just World Scale (Lipkus, 1991). This scale measures the extent to which people believe that life is fair and people get what they deserve in life. Students indicated their level of agreement with 7 items on a 5-point likert scale from (1 = Strong Disagree to 5 = Strong Agree). Items include statements like, "I feel like people earn the rewards and punishments they get". Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .69. In previous research the alpha reliability was about .70 among adolescent samples (Watts & Guessous, 2006).

Youth Social Responsibility. Critical analysis was also measured using the Youth Social Responsibility Scale (Pancer, Pratt, & Hunsberger, Alisat, 2007). This scale youth attitudes and beliefs about youth's socially responsible behavior. The original scale contains 29-items with alpha reliabilities of .85 to .87 among adolescents. However, for this study I included an abbreviated 10-item version. Items included in the short version focus on youth response to injustice, beliefs about helping, and beliefs about youth political and social knowledge. Items were chosen to reduce redundancy and were guided based on short versions used in prior research (Crocetti, Jahromi, & Meeus, 2012). Such items include, "Young people have an important role to play in making the world a better place" and "It's important for young people to speak out when an injustice has occurred". Students indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale from (1 = Strong Disagree to 5 = Strong Agree). One reverse coded item was removed from the scale for data analysis due to poor reliability. The Cronbach's alpha for the 9-item social responsibility scale was .77.

Political Efficacy. Political efficacy beliefs were assessed through a modified measure of internal political efficacy with items from the Black Youth Project (Cohen, 2006) and the Beliefs about Individual Action and Societal Change scale (Gurin, Nagda, & Zuniga, 2013). Items were chosen to reflect individual political efficacy in politics and community. These items measure how much youth believe they can positively impact their community and participate in politics. Students indicated their level of agreement with five items on a 5-point Likert scale from (1 = Strong Disagree to 5 = Strong Agree). Sample items include, "Even if it is hard, I still believe I can change my community". The Cronbach's alpha for the political efficacy beliefs scale was .75.

Civic Engagement. Civic engagement was measured using a modified version of the Youth Involvement Inventory (YII; Pancer, Pratt, & Hunsberger, Alisat, 2007). This scale was modified to include items specific to legal activism and to distinguish some civic and political activities that may be more relevant during early adolescence. For this scale, respondents reported frequency of past action by indicating how often they participated in each activity during the past 12 months (1 = never, 2 = once a year or less, 3 = a few times a year, 4 = monthly, 5 = weekly). Civic engagement was considered across four different categories: Helping, Community, Political, and Activism. With the exception of helping, each of the items were delineated theoretically, according to the Ekman & Amnå (2012) civic engagement typology. Helping was measured using two items, such as, "visited or helped out people who were sick or elderly". Community was measured with eight items (α=.79), such as, "Helped plan or organize neighborhood or community events (like a festival or fair)". Formal Political was measured with seven items, such as "worked on or volunteered for a political campaign" (α=.68). Finally, activism was measured with 4 items including, "participated in a boycott" (α=.77).

Civic Commitment. In addition to assessing *past* civic engagement, I modified the YII to assess *future* civic commitment - whether or not students would consider participating in civic engagement behaviors in the future. Respondents indicate whether or not they would participate in each activity in the future on a 3-point scale (1 = never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = always). An average score was computed for each civic commitment subscale: Helping, Community (α=.79), Formal Political (α=.77), and Activism (α=.73).

Results

       Power Analysis. Power analysis was conducted using GPower statistical program (Erdfelder, Faul, & Buchner, 1996). In previous empirical studies, effect sizes for the relationship between beliefs and action have between .15 - .25 (e.g., Diemer & Li, 2011), global just world beliefs predicted with an effect size of .19 and experiences of agency predicted with an effect size of .20. For a multiple regression analysis with four predictors, assuming an alpha level of 0.05 and a two-tailed test, the required sample size to achieve power of 0.90 for a significant R-squared and change in R-squared is 108 participants. A conservative estimate on the number of participants needed to detect an effect-size of .15 with .90 power is 108 students with four predictor variables using multiple regression techniques. Given power analysis, my sample size of 118 participants is adequate to continue with my data analysis plan.

       Data Analysis Plan. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 21. Prior to running analyses, I performed missing data analysis to determine the nature of the missingness in the data and to establish a method to account for missingness. Appropriate missing data imputation techniques were used to retain as much of the sample as possible. After accounting for missing data, preliminary descriptive analysis were performed to evaluate means, standard deviations, skewness and kurtosis for all continuous variables and the frequency of all categorical variables. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to examine mean group differences of the main study variables by school to account for any differences in context, by grade, and by gender given some research which has found gender differences in civic engagement (Eckstein, Noack, &

Gniewosz, 2012). Finally, I examined bi-variate relationships of the study variables through correlation analysis.

The first research question examines the relationship between global beliefs in a just world, political efficacy, youth social responsibility, and civic engagement and civic commitment. I used multivariate linear regression analyses to test these relationships through General Linear Modeling (GLM). I chose regression analysis through GLM given the flexibility to conduct multivariable analysis and consider multiple dependent variables as well as multiple independent variables. As such, I ran two multivariate linear regression models: one examined all four civic engagement subscales simultaneously and the other all four civic commitment subscales. To test whether participant's level of political efficacy influenced the relationship between critical analysis and civic outcome, I created interaction terms and tested for moderation following procedures outlined by Aiken & West (1991). I ran each model with interaction terms, even when the main effect was nonsignificant, to test for cross-over interaction effects.

Next, I investigated the second research question to determine whether political efficacy mediates the relationship between critical analysis and civic outcomes. I conducted mediation analyses using procedures outlined by Baron and Kenny (Baron & Kenny, 1986). First, I tested the relationship between critical analysis variables and civic outcomes. Then, I tested the relationships between critical analysis and political efficacy. Next, I tested the relationship between critical analysis and civic outcomes controlling for political efficacy. Finally, I tested the strength of the indirect effect through the Sobel test. A full mediation exists if the path coefficient that represents the relationship between critical analysis and civic outcomes is zero, when controlling for political efficacy. A

partial mediation may exist if political efficacy is significantly related to civic outcomes, but critical analysis is also still significantly related to civic outcomes.

Missing Data. To address missing data I conducted a missing data analysis in SPSS. Missing data analysis revealed that 62.7% of all cases had complete data. Additionally, 18% of all variables (prior to creating scales and sub-scales) had no missing data. With regard to each individual variable, the largest percent of missingness was 8.5% for four variables. After assessing the state of missingness in the data, I examined the pattern of missingness in the data to determine whether the data was missing completely at random (MCAR). Little's MCAR test was not significant, $\chi^2 = 3536.48$, $df = 3446$, $p = .14$, indicating that the data was missing completely at random. Since the data was MCAR, I used expectation-maximization imputation techniques in SPSS to account for missing data (Graham, 2012).

Preliminary Analyses. Preliminary analyses were conducted to evaluate means, standard deviations, normality, and distribution for the main study variables. Table 4.1 presents the mean, standard deviation, and frequencies for all dependent variables. Overall, the sample was fairly engaged in their community over the past 12 months prior to the survey. On average, students indicated that they participated in helping activity a few times a year ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.07$). Eighty-three percent of the students reported helping the sick or elderly and 63% reported taking care of children without pay. Seventeen percent of the youth did not participate in any helping behaviors. The students were active in their community, participating in a community activity about once a year ($M = 2.21$, $SD = .79$). Over 85% of respondents indicated participating in a fundraising project over the past year. Only 3.4% of the participants had not participated in a

community activity in the past 12 months. With regard to political activity, the middle school students were also politically active, participating in political activity about once a year ($M = 2.11$, $SD = .77$). Over 75% of students indicated they had listened to, watched or read about current events or politics, and about 57% had donated money to a political or social cause. Similar to community action, only 5.1% of the students had not participated in any political activities in the past 12 months. Finally, the youth participated in activism less than once a year ($M = 1.55$, $SD = .80$). About half of the participants had not participated in any activism in the past 12 months (47.5%). The most frequent activist activities reported were protesting (35.6%) and signing a petition (32.3%). The least frequent civic engagement activities that the early adolescents reported were participating in a boycott (14.4%), volunteering on a political campaign (23.7%), and contacting a public official (24.6%). As expected for early adolescence, most youth participated in helping, community actions, with moderate participation in political actions, and less youth reporting activism experience.

With regard to civic commitment, participants indicated that in the future they would likely complete helping actions ($M = 2.57$, $SD = .49$). It is interesting that just over 99% of students reported they would help the sick or elderly in the future. On average, students reported that they might complete community action in the future ($M = 2.33$, $SD = .45$), with 95% indicating they would fundraise and 98% reporting they would donate food or used items. With regard to formal political action, students reported, on average, that they might participate ($M = 2.21$, $SD = .50$), with 87% indicating they would donate to a political or social cause and about 70% reporting they would contact a public official and volunteer for a political campaign. Finally, students, on average, reported they might

engage in activism in the future (*M* = 2.06, *SD* = .58). Seventy-eight percent reported

they would sign a petition and about 75% indicated they would collect petition signatures

and participation in a protest. Even though fewer students had past experience with

activism, over two-thirds of participants indicated they would consider activism as a form

of future civic engagement.

Table 4.2 presents the means and standard deviations for all demographic and

independent variables. Students indicated moderate agreement with beliefs in a just world

(M = 3.48, SD = .66), with this variable following a fairly normal distribution. The

students also reported strong beliefs in youth social responsibility (M = 4.16, SD = .54)

and endorsed the idea that youth should be well informed and invested in understanding

and participating in social and political issues. The youth also reported moderately strong

feelings of political efficacy (M = 3.73 SD = .67).

Table 4.1 Mean, standard deviation, and frequency of civic engagement and commitment

	Civic Engagement			Civic Commitment		
	M	*SD*	% Yes	*M*	*SD*	% Yes
Helping Action	2.91	1.07		2.57	0.49	
Visited/Helped Sick or Elderly	3.08	1.37	82.2	2.73	0.46	99.2
Took care of children without pay	2.73	1.56	62.7	2.41	0.76	83.9
Community Action	2.21	0.79		2.33	0.45	
Helped with fundraising project	2.94	1.17	86.4	2.59	0.59	94.9
Helped plan community event	1.89	1.20	44.1	2.35	0.68	88.1
Got information about community services	2.15	1.40	49.2	2.16	0.72	71.4
Volunteer Community Service	1.84	1.14	43.2	2.20	0.81	78.0
Presentation to organization or agency	1.59	1.09	28.0	2.02	0.78	70.3
Wrote letter to newspaper	1.73	1.22	33.9	2.09	0.79	72.9
Neighborhood improvement project	2.57	1.43	66.9	2.50	0.69	89.0
Donated food or used items	2.94	1.18	85.6	2.73	0.50	97.5
Formal Political Action	2.11	0.77		2.21	0.50	
Joined or participated in a political club or organization	1.76	1.23	33.9	2.09	0.78	75.4
Contacted public official	1.51	1.03	24.6	1.99	0.77	69.5
Volunteered on a political campaign	1.48	1.03	23.7	1.98	0.79	69.5
Listened to, read, or watched about current events/politics	3.05	1.50	77.1	2.25	0.78	79.7
Donated money to a political or social cause	2.25	1.28	57.6	2.52	0.71	87.3
Discussed political or social issues	1.72	1.20	32.2	2.16	0.72	81.4
Activism	1.55	0.80		2.06	0.58	
Signed a petition	1.68	1.17	32.2	2.18	0.76	78.0
Collected petition signatures	1.62	1.13	28.8	2.07	0.76	75.4
Participated in a protest, march, or demonstration	1.63	1.02	35.6	2.12	0.78	75.4
Participated in a boycott	1.28	0.80	14.4	1.86	0.81	61.0

Table 4.2 Psychometric properties of study variables (n=118)

	M	*SD*	*α*	Possible	Actual	Skew	Kurtosis
				Range			
Demographic Variables							
Gender	0.64	0.48	--	0 – 1	0 – 1		
Age	12.28	1.07	--	10 – 15	10 – 15	0.05	-0.71
Grade level	6.82	0.84	--	5 – 8	5 – 8	0.18	-1.24
Free/Reduced Lunch	0.76	0.43	--	0 – 1	0 – 1	0.22	0.44
Grades	5.33	1.44	--	1 – 7	1 – 7	-1.12	0.50
Independent Variables							
Beliefs in Just World	3.48	0.66	.69	1 – 5	1.57 – 5.00	-0.25	0.15
Youth Social Responsibility	4.16	0.54	.77	1 – 5	2.56 – 5.00	-0.49	-0.13
Political Efficacy	3.73	0.67	.75	1 – 5	2.00 – 5.00	-0.17	-0.27

Note. For grades, 5 = Mostly Bs.

Preliminary analyses revealed mean group differences by gender, grade level, and school (Table 4.3). Girls endorsed youth social responsibility more than boys, $F(1, 117) = 4.11$, $p = .045$. There were also mean group differences by grade. The 6th graders endorsed higher beliefs in a just world than 8th grade students, $F(3, 117) = 3.79$, $p = .012$. The 6th graders also reported stronger feelings of youth social responsibility $F(3, 117) = 4.63$, $p = .004$, and political efficacy $F(3, 117) = 3.06$, $p = .031$ than the 7th grade students. The 6th graders also reported stronger commitment to community action than both the 7th and the 8th grade students, $F(3, 117) = 3.95$, $p = .01$. Lastly, there were mean group differences by school in frequency of civic engagement – helping action $F(2, 117) = 6.29$, $p = .003$. Students at Best Prep participated in helping action more frequently than students at Mwangaza and Woodland.

Table 4.3 Mean group differences by gender, grade, and school

	Gender M(SD)		Grade M(SD)				School M(SD)		
	Boys	Girls	5th	6th	7th	8th	Mwangaza	Best Prep	Woodland
Independent Variables									
Beliefs in a Just World	3.52	3.45	2.57	3.65[a]	3.50	3.25[a]	3.49 (.76)	3.49 (.53)	3.46 (.65)
	(.65)	(.67)	(.20)	(.63)	(.65)	(.65)			
Youth Social Responsibility	4.02[a]	4.23[a]	4.33	4.33[c]	3.91[c]	4.17	4.16 (.55)	4.21 (.49)	4.13 (.56)
	(.64)	(.46)	(.00)	(.48)	(.56)	(.51)			
Political Efficacy	3.67	3.77	3.89	3.94[a]	3.52[a]	3.66	3.74 (.71)	3.92 (.76)	3.64 (.60)
	(.77)	(.61)	(.12)	(.64)	(.65)	(.69)			
Civic Engagement									
Helping Action	2.85	2.94	2.75	2.93	2.82	2.98	2.72[b1]	3.57[b1 b2]	2.75[b2]
	(1.03)	(1.09)	(.35)	(1.01)	(.109)	(1.06)	(1.00)	(1.01)	(1.04)
Community Action	2.31	2.15	2.56	2.41	2.00	2.12	2.24 (.65)	2.23 (.92)	2.17 (.83)
	(.77)	(.80)	(.62)	(.84)	(.69)	(.78)			
Formal Political Action	2.21	2.07	2.07	2.22	1.96	2.14	2.19 (.69)	2.06 (.88)	2.09 (.78)
	(.70)	(.80)	(.00)	(.84)	(.63)	(.83)			
Activism	1.57	1.54	1.25	1.59	1.34	1.77	1.44 (.59)	1.60 (.92)	1.61 (.87)
	(.84)	(.78)	(.35)	(.82)	(.53)	(.98)			
Civic Commitment									
Helping Action	2.53	2.59	2.50	2.53	2.55	2.67	2.67 (.39)	2.65 (.45)	2.46 (.55)
	(.62)	(.40)	(.00)	(.55)	(.51)	(.37)			
Community Action	2.29	2.35	2.46	2.49[ab]	2.18[a]	2.33[b]	2.44 (.40)	2.29 (.43)	2.27 (.48)
	(.51)	(.41)	(.06)	(.46)	(.40)	(.45)			
Formal Political Action	2.20	2.21	2.36	2.32	2.13	2.12	2.31 (.51)	2.21 (.51)	2.13 (.49)
	(.55)	(.47)	(.10)	(.47)	(.55)	(.48)			
Activism	1.95	2.12	1.88	2.19	1.97	1.97	2.12 (.56)	2.13 (.59)	1.98 (.59)
	(.63)	(.54)	(.18)	(.62)	(.54)	(.53)			

Note. Superscript letters indicate group means are significantly different from each other. $p < .05$ = a, $p < .01$ = b, $p < .001$ = c.

Bi-variate Correlation Relationships. I examined bi-variate relations among the study variables through correlation analysis (Table 4.4). Global beliefs in a just world had a low, positive correlation with youth social responsibility beliefs and a moderate, positive relation with political efficacy. Youth social responsibility beliefs had a moderately high, positive correlation with political efficacy.

Critical analysis and political efficacy were also correlated with civic engagement and civic commitment. Global beliefs in a just world had low, positive correlations with each type of civic engagement, and it was positively related to commitment to community action. Youth social responsibility beliefs had a low positive correlation with civic engagement helping action, community action, and formal political action. There was no systematic association between youth social responsibility and past activism. Youth social responsibility also had a low and positive correlation with civic commitment community action, political action, and activism. Political efficacy had a moderate and positive relationship with all subscales of civic engagement and civic commitment.

Finally, I explored bi-variate relationships between civic engagement and civic commitment variables. Each dimension of civic engagement positively correlated with the other forms of civic engagement; helping action and activism had the lowest positive correlation while community action and formal political action were most highly correlated. Similarly, each dimension of civic commitment was positively correlated with the others. Past civic engagement was generally positively correlated with civic commitment, with a few exceptions to this pattern. Civic engagement helping action was not correlated with community action or activism forms of civic commitment. Equally,

formal political action and activism forms of civic engagement were not related to commitment to helping action.

Table 4.4 Bi-variate correlation coefficients for study variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Beliefs in a Just World	–									
2. Youth Social Responsibility	.19*	–								
3. Political Efficacy	.40***	.55***	–							
4. CE Helping Action	.20*	.19*	.40***	–						
5. CE Community Action	.21*	.20*	.28**	.41***	–					
6. CE Formal Political Action	.20*	.22*	.39***	.32***	.73***	–				
7. CE Activism	.19*	.09	.21*	.24**	.65***	.64***	–			
8. CC Helping Action	.09	.07	.27**	.36***	.18*	.09	.17	–		
9. CC Community Action	.14	.31***	.31***	.10	.44***	.37***	.25**	.29**	–	
10. CC Formal Political Action	.20*	.37***	.41***	.19*	.42***	.54***	.26**	.27***	.66***	–
11. CC Activism	.14	.38***	.29***	.07	.31***	.36***	.34***	.31***	.68***	.62***

Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$. CE = Civic Engagement. CC = Civic Commitment.

H1a: ***Critical Analysis and Political Efficacy in Relation to Civic Engagement.***

I conducted linear regression analysis using general linear model procedures (GLM) to test whether global beliefs in a just world, youth social responsibility, and political efficacy account for a significant portion of the variance in each type of civic engagement: helping action, community action, formal political action, and activism. I also ran the model with gender, age, SES, and school as control variables. None of the controls were significant, so they were not included in the analysis to provide a more parsimonious model (Table 4.5).

Helping Action. The overall model for frequency of past helping behavior was significant, $R^2 = .162$ (adjusted $R^2 = .14$), $F(3, 117) = 7.36$, $p < .001$. Political efficacy beliefs, $b = 0.63$, $p < .001$ was a significant predictor of past helping behavior. Global beliefs in a just world and youth social responsibility beliefs were not significantly related to frequency of past helping action.

Community Action. When considering community civic engagement, the overall model was significant, $R^2 = .154$ (adjusted $R^2 = .132$), $F(3, 117) = 6.91$, $p < .001$. As with helping behavior, political efficacy was the only significant predictor of the frequency of past community engagement behavior, $b = 0.43$, $p = .001$. Global beliefs in a just world and youth social responsibility were not significantly related to community action.

Formal Political Action. When considering formal political action, the overall model was significant, $R^2 = .093$ (adjusted $R^2 = .069$), $F(3, 117) = 3.90$, $p = .01$. However, none of the independent variables were significant predictors.

Activism. For activism, the overall model approached significance $R^2 = .058$ (adjusted $R^2 = .034$), $F(3, 117) = 2.36$, $p = .08$. Again, none of the independent variables were significantly related to activism.

H2a: *Civic Engagement: Political Efficacy as a Moderator.*

To address whether the level of political efficacy strengthens the relationship between critical analysis and frequency of civic engagement, I ran GLM testing the interaction between youth social responsibility and political efficacy and global beliefs in a just world and political efficacy. The overall model was significant for helping action, $R^2 = .162$ (adjusted $R^2 = .125$), $F(5, 117) = 4.317$, $p = .001$; community action $R^2 = .172$ (adjusted $R^2 = .135$), $F(5, 117) = 4.657$, $p = .001$; and formal political action $R^2 = .107$ (adjusted $R^2 = .067$), $F(5, 117) = 2.67$, $p = .026$. However, both the interaction between political efficacy and global beliefs in a just world and the interaction between political efficacy and youth social responsibility beliefs were not significant. The model predicting activism was also significant $R^2 = .098$ (adjusted $R^2 = .057$), $F(5, 117) = 2.421$, $p = .040$. In this model, the interaction between political efficacy and youth social responsibility beliefs did relate to frequency of past activism, $b = .43$, $p = .03$. For students with high political efficacy, the relationship between youth social responsibility and frequency of activism is stronger than for students with lower political efficacy beliefs (Figure 4.1). Simple slope analysis showed that the slope for youth at low and high levels of political efficacy beliefs was not significantly different than zero.
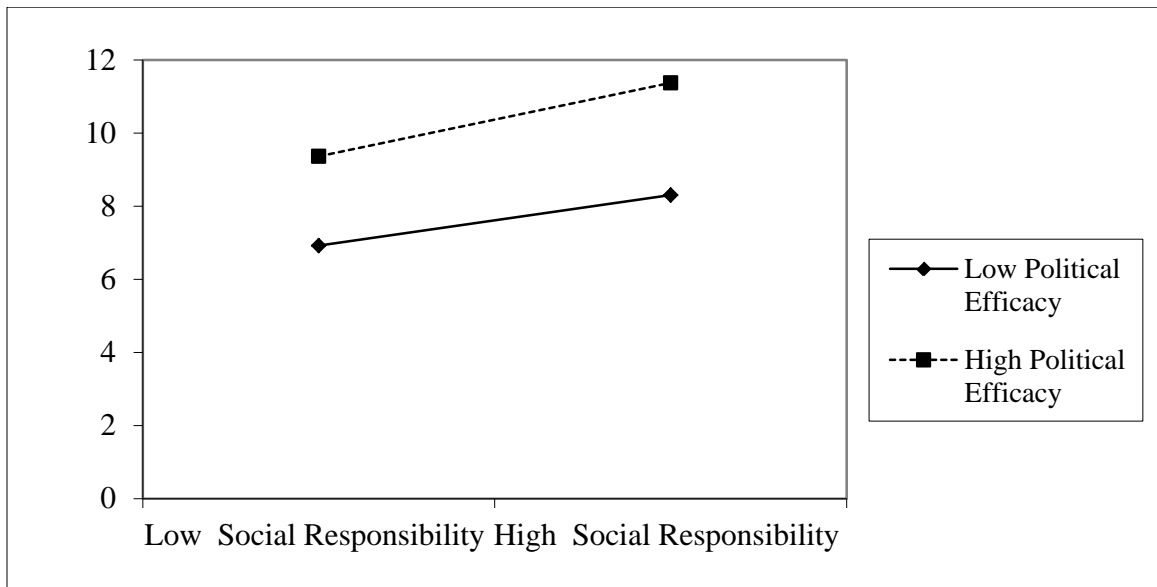
Figure 4.1 Moderation of political efficacy on the relationship between youth social responsibility and civic engagement - activism

Table 4.5 Multivariate regression analyses predicting civic engagement (n = 118)

Predictor	Helping Action			Community Action			Formal Political Action			Activism		
	b	SE_b	β	b	SE_b	β	b	SE_b	β	b	SE_b	β
Step 1												
Global Beliefs in Just World	.09	.15	.06	.07	.12	.06	.13	.11	.11	.15	.12	.12
Youth Social Responsibility	-.07	.20	-.04	-.02	.15	-.01	.14	.15	.10	-.05	.16	-.03
Political Efficacy	.63	.18	.39***	.43	.13	.36***	.20	.13	.17	.22	.14	.18
Step 2												
Global Beliefs in Just World X Political Efficacy	.01	.20	.00	.20	.15	.12	.13	.15	.08	-.06	.16	-.04
Youth Social Responsibility X Political Efficacy	.02	.25	.01	.11	.19	.05	.15	.19	.07	.43	.20	.20*

Note. $^+p<.10$, *$p <.05$, **$p<.01$, ***$p<.001$.

H1b: Critical Analysis and Political Efficacy in Relation to Civic Commitment.

I also conducted linear regression analysis using general linear model procedures (GLM) to test whether global beliefs in a just world, youth social responsibility, and political efficacy account for a significant portion of the variance in civic commitment to helping action, community action, formal political action, and activism (Table 4.6).

Helping Action. The overall model for commitment to helping behavior was significant, $R^2 = .084$ (adjusted $R^2 = .060$), $F(3, 117) = 3.48$, $p = .02$. Political efficacy beliefs, $b = 0.25$, $p = .003$, was a significant predictors of commitment to helping action. Global beliefs in a just world and youth social responsibility beliefs were not significantly related.

Community Action. With commitment to community engagement, the overall model was significant, $R^2 = .199$ (adjusted $R^2 = .178$), $F(3, 118) = 9.44$, $p < .001$. In this model, political efficacy, $b = 0.17$, $p = .02$ and youth social responsibility beliefs, $b = .18$, $p = .03$ were significantly related to community engagement commitment. Global beliefs in a just world was not significantly related to commitment to community action.

Formal Political Action. When considering commitment to political behavior, the overall model was significant, $R^2 = .124$ (adjusted $R^2 = .101$), $F(3, 118) = 5.40$, $p = .002$. In this model, political efficacy, $b = .14$, $p = .09$, and youth social responsibility beliefs, $b = .18$, $p = .07$, approached significance in relation to commitment to political behavior. Global beliefs in a just world was not significant.

Activism. For commitment to activism, the overall model was significant, $R^2 = .155$ (adjusted $R^2 = .132$), $F(3, 118) = 6.94$, $p < .001$. In this model, youth social responsibility was the only significant relationship, $b = .34$, $p = .003$.

H2b: Civic Commitment: Political Efficacy as a Moderator

To address whether the level of political efficacy strengthens the relationship between critical analysis and frequency of civic engagement, next I ran GLM testing the interaction between youth social responsibility and political efficacy and global beliefs in a just world and political efficacy. The overall model was significant for each type of civic commitment; however, the interaction terms were not significant in these models.

Table 4.6 Multivariate regression analyses predicting civic commitment (n = 118)

	Helping Action			Community Action			Formal Political Action			Activism		
Predictor	b	SE_b	β	b	SE_b	β	b	SE_b	β	b	SE_b	β
Step 1												
Global Beliefs in Just World	-.02	.07	-.03	.04	.06	.06	.02	.07	.03	.04	.08	.05
Youth Social Responsibility	-.10	.07	-.11	.18	.08	.22*	.18	.10	.19[+]	.34	.11	.32**
Political Efficacy	.25	.10	.34**	.17	.07	.25*	.14	.08	.19[+]	.09	.10	.10
Step 2												
Global Beliefs in Just World X Political Efficacy	.10	.10	.10	.03	.08	.03	-.11	.10	-.11	.05	.11	.04
Youth Social Responsibility X Political Efficacy	.18	.12	.14	.17	.12	.14	.01	.10	.01	.02	.14	.01

Note. [+]$p<.10$, *$p <.05$, **$p<.01$, ***$p<.001$.

H3a: Civic Engagement: Political Efficacy as a Mediator

Next, I investigated whether the direct relationship of critical analysis to civic engagement was mediated by political efficacy. Since there was no direct relationship between global beliefs in a just world and civic engagement, I examined the hypothesis that the relationship between youth social responsibility and civic engagement is mediated by political efficacy beliefs. In the first step, I examined if youth social responsibility beliefs are related to political efficacy beliefs. Youth social responsibility beliefs were significantly and positively associated with political efficacy beliefs, (b = .688, p < .001). Next, I examined whether youth social responsibility beliefs was significantly related to each of the civic engagement domains. Results indicate that youth social responsibility was significantly associated with helping action (b = .382, p < .036), community action (b = .298, p = .027), and political action (b = .307, p = .019). Youth social responsibility was not significantly associated with activism. Lastly, to examine for potential mediation, I tested whether political efficacy beliefs was associated with helping action, community action, political action, and activism, while controlling for youth social responsibility beliefs. To test the significance of the indirect effect of political efficacy on the relationship between youth social responsibility and civic engagement, I conducted a Sobel test using the unstandardized regression coefficients and the standard errors. In addition, given the cross-sectional nature of the data, I also conducted analysis to confirm that the relationship between political efficacy and civic engagement is not mediated by youth social responsibility. There were no significant meditational paths for this reverse hypothesis.

Helping Action. The overall model was significant, $F(2, 115) = 10.93$, $p < .001$, accounting for 14.5% of the variance in helping action. Political efficacy was positively associated with helping action ($b = .665$, $p < .001$), while youth social responsibility beliefs were no longer significantly associated with helping action ($b = -.075$, $p = .71$), indicating partial mediation. Results showed a significant indirect effect of political efficacy on the relationship between youth social responsibility and helping action ($Z = 3.55$, $p < .001$).

Community Action. Similarly, the overall model accounted for 13.6% of the variance in community action ($F(2, 115) = 10.19$, $p < .001$). In this model, political efficacy was significantly related to community action ($b = .464$, $p < .001$), while controlling for youth social responsibility beliefs. Youth social responsibility beliefs were no longer significantly associated with community action ($b = -.021$, $p = .89$). Sobel tests indicated a significant indirect effect ($Z = 3.38$, $p < .001$).

Formal Political Action. There was also a significant model predicting formal political action ($F(2, 115) = 5.16$, $p < .01$), accounting for 6.6% of the variance. Political efficacy was positively related ($b = .259$, $p = .037$), and youth social responsibility beliefs were not ($b = .13$, $p = .40$). There was a significant indirect effect on the relationship between youth social responsibility and formal political action by political efficacy ($Z = 2.02$, $p = .04$).

Activism. Finally, the model was not significant, ($F(2, 115) = 2.79$, $p = .07$), accounting for only 3.0% of the variance in activism. Political efficacy was positively related to activism ($b = .276$, $p = .035$), controlling for youth social responsibility beliefs. Youth social responsibility beliefs were no longer significantly associated with activism

(b = -.054, p = .74), indicating there is a partial mediation of political efficacy on the relationship between youth social responsibility and civic engagement. Sobel test confirms a significant indirect effect (Z = 2.03, p = .042).

H3b: Civic Commitment: Political Efficacy as a Mediator

Finally, I examined the mediation hypotheses that the relationship between youth social responsibility and civic commitment was also mediated by political efficacy beliefs. In the first step, I examined if youth social responsibility beliefs were related political efficacy beliefs. Youth social responsibility beliefs were significantly and positively associated with political efficacy beliefs, (b = .688, p < .001). Next, I examined whether youth social responsibility beliefs was significantly related to each domain of civic commitment. Results indicate that youth social responsibility was significantly associated with commitment to community action (b = .310, p < .001), commitment to formal political action (b = .284, p = .001), and commitment to activism (b = .404, p < .001). Youth social responsibility was not significantly associated with commitment to helping action, indicating no mediation effect. To test for mediation for the other commitment variables, I examined the relationship between political efficacy and civic commitment, controlling for youth social responsibility. To test the significance of the indirect effect of political efficacy on the relationship between youth social responsibility and civic commitment, I conducted a Sobel Test using the unstandardized regression coefficients and the standard errors.

Community Action. First, the model predicting commitment to community action was significant, $F(2, 115)$ = 13.02, p < .001, accounting for 18.2% of the variance. Political efficacy beliefs (b = .190, p = .005), and youth social responsibility (b = .18, p =

.03) were both positively related to commitment to community action. Sobel tests

indicate a significant indirect effect (Z = 2.64, *p* = .008), indicating a partial mediation.

Formal Political Action. I also tested whether political efficacy related to formal

political action, controlling for youth social responsibility. This model accounted for

10.8% of the variance in commitment to formal political action ($F(2, 115) = 8.11$, $p <$

.001). Political efficacy was positively associated ($b = .154$, $p = .051$), while youth social

responsibility was no longer significant ($b = .18$, $p = .07$), indicating partial mediation.

The indirect effect was not significant according to Sobel test (Z = 1.90, *p* = .06).

Activism. The model for activism was also significant, $F(2, 115) = 10.41$, $p <$

.001, accounting for 13.9% of the variance. Political efficacy beliefs were associated

commitment to activism ($b = .103$, $p = .246$), controlling for youth social responsibility

beliefs. Youth social responsibility beliefs remained significant for activism commitment

($b = .333$, $p = .003$). Sobel test indicated that the indirect effect was not significant (Z =

1.16, *p* = .25).

I also tested the reverse mediation hypothesis, to determine in youth social

responsibility mediates the relationship between political efficacy and civic commitment.

This alternative hypothesis was held for commitment to community action and activism.

In both cases, the first criterion for mediation is that political efficacy is related to youth

social responsibility was significant ($F(1, 117) = 50.87$, $p < .001$; $b = .44$, $p < .001$). The

second criterion was significant; political efficacy was directly related to commitment to

community action $F(1, 117) = 22.70$, $p < .001$; $b = .27$, $p < .001$) and commitment to

activism ($F(1, 117) = 10.84$, $p = .001$; $b = .25$, $p = .001$). The final criterion to establish

mediation is that youth social responsibility is significantly related to civic commitment,

when controlling for political efficacy. For commitment to community action, the overall model was significant $F(2, 117) = 14.02$, $p < .001$; political efficacy ($b = .19$, $p = .005$) and youth social responsibility ($b = .18$, $p = .03$) were significantly related to community action. A sobel test indicated a significant indirect effect ($Z = 2.07$, $p = .04$). Similarly, for activism the overall model was significant $F(2, 117) = 10.41$, $p < .001$. However, in this model youth social responsibility was significant ($b = .33$, $p < .001$), while political efficacy was no longer significant ($b = .10$, $p = .25$). A sobel test suggests a significant indirect effect ($Z = 2.79$, $p = .005$).

Discussion

In this chapter, I investigated how sociopolitical factors such as critical analysis and political efficacy relate to distinct types of civic engagement and civic commitment among Black early adolescents. I explored several theoretically proposed hypotheses as a preliminary step towards a more nuanced understanding of civic development in this population. Overall, there was support for the fundamental assertion that political efficacy and critical analysis, as measured by youth social responsibility beliefs, are significant factors associated with civic engagement and civic commitment for Black early adolescents. These findings provide partial support for the fundamental tenants of psychological empowerment and sociopolitical development theory that suggest political efficacy as essential psychological mechanism that support civic engagement and civic engagement for Black youth.

In the current study, I extended prior research to consider four distinct dimensions of civic engagement. The research on youth civic engagement is quite fractured as scholars across disciplines often investigate one indicator of civic engagement such as

voting or volunteering or the combine all types of civic engagement into one broad construct to represent citizenship behavior (Ekman & Amnå, 2012). However, research has found that adolescents often participate in types of civic actions, such as helping and activism (Pancer, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Alisat, 2007). In the current study, the early adolescents participated widely in community and political action; less than 5% of the sample had *not* participated in community or political action. Conversely, only half of the sample had participated in activism in the past year. This is expected, as community and political activities may be more accessible and available for more frequent participation, while activism might require more resources and referral for participation not typically available in early adolescence. Moreover, I considered commitment to civic engagement in the future in addition to past civic behavior. Scholars have suggested that intention to participate in civic activities is a relevant outcome to consider, particularly for youth who may not have the opportunity or structure available to engage civically (Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011; Watts & Guessous, 2006). For each dimension of civic commitment, youth reported that they would at least consider civic participation in the future. This finding supports research that suggests early adolescence is an important developmental period where opinions and attitudes towards civic participation are still malleable. Thus, while most students indicated that they might participate in civic engagement actions in the future, there is time and opportunity to solidify this wavering civic commitment. It is possible that early adolescence who are exposed to positive and supporting civic experiences may in turn had a stronger commitment to civic engagement in the future.

In the present research, political efficacy was a dominant sociopolitical factor that was related to civic engagement and civic commitment. With minor exception, youth

who strongly endorsed beliefs that they can positively impact their community through civic and political action also participated in more civic engagement and had stronger commitment to civic action for the future. This was consistent for past engagement in helping action, community action, formal political action, and activism. For civic commitment, political efficacy was relevant for helping action, community action, and formal political action, but not activism. This finding supports previous research and theory that contend efficacy beliefs are fundamentally necessary to support behavior, particularly with regard to enacting civic duty to participate in community and politics (Zimmerman, 1995; Bandura, 2001).

The one deviation from the political efficacy findings was concerning activism; for this type of civic commitment, political efficacy was not directly related. Political efficacy strengthened the relationship between youth social responsibility and activism. For these early adolescents, the impact of youth social responsibility on past activism is magnified when considered in tandem with highly positive feelings of political efficacy. This finding is in line with how sociopolitical development and empowerment theory emphasize the importance of community action for social justice change. Even though activism was the least frequent type of civic engagement among early adolescents, those with strong beliefs that youth should be engaged in community change and positive beliefs in their own ability to engage in civic and political action were engaged in activism. Activist behaviors are most commonly identified as social justice oriented, considering the needs and rights of the broader community above any one individual. This finding supports this assumption as youth who believed strongly in action for social

change participated in more civic engagement activities that align with those sociopolitical beliefs.

Finally, findings from the study indicate that critical analysis, as measured by belief in a just world, was not related to any types of civic engagement or civic commitment. At first glance, this finding might suggest that the theoretical assertions of critical consciousness and sociopolitical development literatures are not confirmed by empirical findings. However, it is important to note that belief in a just world is just one conceptualization of critical analysis, and it may not be developmentally appropriate for early adolescents. Just world beliefs constitute an abstract or global notion of social hierarchy and fairness. These beliefs reflect universal principles about fairness and equity in the world broadly. In education research, findings have shown that abstract attitudes about education do not predict achievement, while concrete attitudes do predict achievement among adolescents (Mickelson, 1990). Equally, abstract and concrete beliefs about systematic inequity may be related differently to civic engagement for early adolescents. A measure of critical analysis that considers more concrete examples of system inequity may be a more accurate reflection of the relationship between critical analysis and civic outcomes among early adolescents.

Taken together, this research highlights important contributions to the civic engagement literature. First, it is important to consider types of civic engagement, as psychological factors do not predict civic engagement in the same ways across type. Additionally, political efficacy is a relevant factor related to civic engagement and commitment in terms of individual beliefs and value orientations. Political efficacy alone accounted for up to 20% of the variance in some civic engagement and commitment

70

actions. This also confirms that there are additional factors not considered here in this study that may pertinent to further understand how and why Black youth engage in their community, civically and politically. For instance, future work should consider the possible roles of family socialization that supports civic engagement and civic commitment, as well as the availability of opportunity structures within the community and schools that support civic engagement. This is important given these students are young and if we can understand what factors are related to initial and continued civic engagement from an early age, research suggests they will continue to be involved into and through adulthood.

Chapter 5

Black Early Adolescents' Critical Analysis of Communities and Schools

In this chapter, I address my third dissertation goal: to understand deeply how Black early adolescents analyze their proximal sociopolitical context, paying specific attention to their understanding of the roles of both individuals and systems (critical analysis). This study will also speak to ways that Black early adolescents view barriers and supports to civic engagement. In the quantitative portion of this dissertation, I examined beliefs in a just world and youth social responsibility beliefs, components of critical analysis, in order to develop the current understanding of how critical analysis is related to civic engagement. The current qualitative study extends the quantitative work by addressing the limitations of existing measures of critical analysis. In this qualitative study, we hear directly from Black early adolescents about concrete issues they face in their local communities, their interpretation of these experiences, and their understanding of agency and responsibility in this context. Prior work that examines how youth understand and analyze the world regarding economic, political, and social dimensions, typically, gives youth a topic and asks youth to respond with their understanding, perceptions, and feelings (Flanagan, 2013). While this approach gives us valuable information regarding youth comprehension of civic issues and political processes, we do not gain an understanding about what issues are most salient in the daily lives of youth and how they make sense of the sociopolitical nature of those most relevant concerns.

In the present study, the youth participants decided which issues were most relevant in their own communities and discussed causes, solutions, and responsibility around those most pressing issues. The two communities represented in this case were The City and Woodland Mills (pseudonyms). The City, a once thriving major metropolitan area is now in economic decline and replete with political turmoil. Many locals and natives have migrated from The City to nearby suburbs. Similarly, Woodland Mills, was built around and supported heavily by a large manufacturing plant and was once described as a large town or blossoming suburb for middle class families. After the plant shutdown, many families from the community moved, schools began to decline, and the economy slowed tremendously. In this work, I examine the types of sociopolitical issues that students from these two communities recognize as most problematic and the emphasis that students place on system-based or individual-based attributions for those issues. Additionally, I describe critical analysis among Black early adolescents and use this understanding of critical analysis to contextualize political efficacy and civic engagement experiences.

Method

Participants. Thirty-six students participated in eight focus group interviews. Seventeen students participated in four focus groups at Mwangaza Learning Center, in The City. Nineteen students participated in four focus groups at Woodland Mills Middle School, in Woodland Mills. Twelve focus group participants were males and twenty-four were females. All students self-identified as Black or African-American, with the exception of one male student who identified as Latino. The students ranged in age from 10 to 14, with the average age being 12.35 years old. The majority of the students (66%)

qualified for free or reduced lunch, indicating lower socioeconomic status. A summary of participant background information can be found in Table 5.1. Additional information regarding participants' civic engagement, civic commitment, and civic beliefs by focus group can be found in Table 5.2. At Mwangaza, students were selected to participate in focus groups based on reported past civic engagement as indicated from the survey questionnaire. At Woodland Mills the teachers and administration preferred to minimize academic disruption by conducting focus groups during the student's elective class periods. As such, I was not able to select students based on reported past civic engagement and instead randomly selected students to participate based on their elective class period.

Instrument and Rationale. To accomplish the goal of this study, I conducted semi-structured focus group interviews with Black early adolescents in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades at Mwangaza and Woodland Mills. Critical analysis can be a dynamic process, where one seeks to gain understanding of systematic inequality through considering multiple perspectives and grappling with new ideas (Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011). As such, I decided to use focus group interviews to allow for discussion among the participants and to make room for consensus and disagreement within the group discussion around community-based problems and solutions, responsibility, and agency. This dynamic also allowed youth to consider alternative hypotheses and re-assess their original conclusion – critical analysis in vivo. Additionally, focus groups can provide a space for youth who feel less comfortable in one-on-one conversation to participate and to give opportunities for the students to collaborate ideas, elaborate on

each other's points, and talk through contradicting ideas (Clark, 2009; Hoppe, Wells,

Morrison, Gillmore, & Wilsdon, 1995; Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Laub, 2009).

Table 5.1 Description of each focus group and focus group participant

	% Female	Mean Age	Mean Grade	Mean GPA	% Free or Reduced Lunch	Years at School/Community
Mwangaza						
Focus Group 1	67%	12.67	6.67	5.67	33%	
Chris	M	12	6th	As & Bs (6)	Yes	7 years / 12 years
Traci	F	12	6th	Mostly Bs (5)	No	7 years / unknown
Zhanae	F	14	8th	As & Bs (6)	No	9 years / 14 years
Focus Group 2	60%	12.20	6.80	5.20	40%	
Diane	F	11	6th	Mostly Bs (5)	Yes	1 year / 11 years
Karen	F	12	6th	As & Bs (6)	Yes	3 years / 12 years
Anthony	M	12	7th	Mostly Cs (3)	No	1 year / 12 years
Zuri	F	13	7th	As & Bs (6)	No	5 years / unknown
Dustin	M	13	8th	As & Bs (6)	No	3 years / 12 years*
Focus Group 3	75%	13.00	7.50	6.50	75%	
David	M	13	7th	Mostly As (7)	Yes	7 years / 11 years*
Angela	F	13	7th	Mostly As (7)	No	4 years / 13 years
Emma	F	13	8th	As & Bs (6)	Yes	3 years / 13 years
Danielle	F	13	8th	As & Bs (6)	Yes	1 year / 13 years
Focus Group 4	40%	12.00	6.20	5.80	20%	
Daisy	F	12	6th	As & Bs (6)	No	7 years / 12 years
Shelia	F	12	6th	As & Bs (6)	No	7 years / 12 years
Nelson	M	12	6th	Mostly As (7)	No	7 years / 6 years*
Archer	M	11	6th	Bs & Cs (4)	Yes	7 years / 11 years
Samuel	M	13	7th	As & Bs (6)	No	8 years / 13 years

Note. * indicates participant moved from city to a suburb. GPA is measured on a 7-point scale. 7 = Mostly As, 6 = As & Bs, 5 = Mostly Bs, 4 = Bs & Cs, 3 = Mostly Cs, 2 = Cs & Ds, 1 = Mostly Ds.

	% Female	Mean Age	Mean Grade	Mean GPA	% Free or Reduced Lunch	Years at School/Community
Woodland Mills						
Focus Group 5	80%	11.40	6.00	5.40	80%	
Suriya	F	11	6th	Mostly Cs (3)	Yes	7 years / 11 years
Khloe	F	11	6th	As & Bs (6)	Yes	7 years / 11 years
Damon	M	11	6th	As & Bs (6)	Yes	2 years / 3 years
Trinity	F	11	6th	As & Bs (6)	Yes	1 year / 5 years
Sean	M	13	6th	As & Bs (6)	No	2 years / 2 years
Focus Group 6	60%	13.00	7.00	4.60	80%	
Trevor	M	13	7th	Bs & Cs (4)	Yes	8 years / 13 years
DeAndre	M	14	7th	As & Bs (6)	Yes	1 year / 1 year
Zihna	F	13	7th	Cs & Ds (2)	Yes	8 years / 13 years
Amber	F	12	7th	As & Bs (6)	Yes	2 years / 2 years
Tiffany	F	13	7th	Mostly Bs (5)	No	8 years / 13 years
Focus Group 7	100%	11.25	6.50	5.50	100%	
Delilah	F	11	6th	Mostly As (7)	Yes	4 years / unknown
Charise	F	10	6th	As & Bs (6)	Yes	7 years / 10 years
Julia	F	12	7th	Mostly Bs (5)	Yes	8 years / 12 years
Lisa	F	12	7th	Bs & Cs (4)	Yes	8 years / 12 years
Focus Group 8	80%	13.40	8.00	5.20	100%	
Heather	F	13	8th	Mostly As (7)	Yes	9 years / 13 years
Kent	M	13	8th	Mostly As (7)	Yes	9 years / 13 years
Kelsey	F	14	8th	Bs & Cs (4)	Yes	5 years / 5 years
Michelle	F	14	8th	Bs & Cs (4)	Yes	4 years / 4 years
Kennedy	F	14	8th	Cs & Ds (2)	Yes	4 years / unknown

Note. * indicates participant moved from city to a suburb. GPA is measured on a 7-point scale. 7 = Mostly As, 6 = As & Bs, 5 = Mostly Bs, 4 = Bs & Cs, 3 = Mostly Cs, 2 = Cs & Ds, 1 = Mostly Ds.

Table 5.2 Civic engagement, civic commitment, and civic beliefs by focus group (FG)

	Mwangaza					Woodland Mills		
M (SD)	FG 1	FG 2	FG 3	FG 4	FG 5	FG 6	FG 7	FG 8
Past Civic Engagement								
Helping	2.00 (1.00)	2.00 (.79)	3.50 (1.08)	3.30 (1.04)	2.30 (.97)	2.04 (1.14)	2.62 (1.11)	2.34 (1.03)
Community	1.67 (.26)	1.80 (.46)	2.28 (.37)	3.20 (.74)	1.78 (.51)	1.80 (.26)	2.09 (.51)	2.16 (.66)
Formal Political	1.76 (.54)	1.80 (.70)	2.86 (.76)	2.74 (.60)	1.80 (.67)	1.63 (.46)	1.91 (.50)	2.02 (.65)
Activism	1.08 (.14)	1.65 (.99)	1.75 (.58)	2.05 (.74)	1.15 (.22)	1.10 (.22)	1.50 (.68)	1.44 (.63)
Future Civic Commitment								
Helping	2.50 (.87)	2.60 (.65)	2.75 (.29)	2.90 (.22)	1.90 (.41)	2.40 (.82)	2.88 (.25)	2.70 (.21)
Community	2.38 (.22)	2.25 (.22)	2.56 (.43)	2.80 (.07)	2.10 (.78)	2.25 (.53)	2.25 (.39)	2.26 (.28)
Formal Political	2.43 (.14)	1.95 (.56)	2.65 (.45)	2.57 (.36)	2.14 (.57)	2.09 (.45)	2.23 (.31)	2.21 (.34)
Activism	2.42 (.63)	1.85 (.63)	2.44 (.52)	2.25 (.56)	1.79 (.47)	1.75 (.47)	2.00 (.71)	2.00 (.71)
Civic Beliefs								
Political Efficacy	3.60 (.87)	3.44 (.68)	4.05 (.60)	4.36 (.78)	3.52 (.64)	4.00 (.37)	3.95 (.34)	3.72 (.52)
Social Responsibility	4.59 (.17)	4.09 (.53)	4.72 (.26)	4.51 (.36)	4.67 (.27)	4.22 (.67)	4.08 (.61)	4.43 (.35)

Note. Past Civic Engagement is measured in frequency from 1 (Never) to 5 (Weekly). Future Civic Commitment is measured 1 (No), 2 (Maybe), 3 (Yes). Political Efficacy and Youth Social Responsibility are measured on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

The focus group protocol was designed to capture Black early adolescents'

critical analysis of challenges in their most proximal sociopolitical context, as well as

their political efficacy about and perceptions of responsibility for these challenges. I was

particularly interested in 1) how youth articulate problems or challenges that they see

within their communities and schools, 2) solutions, both real and imagined, that students

express to address these challenges, and 3) how students envision their role in creating

positive change in their communities and schools both now and in the future. For the

complete focus group protocol, see Appendix E.

Data Analysis Strategy

While my research questions are guided by previous theory and research on civic

engagement, critical consciousness, and sociopolitical development, I used an inductive

thematic analysis approach to analyze the focus group data. I followed guidelines for

conducting thematic analysis offered by Braun & Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2006): 1)

familiarize yourself with your data; 2) generate initial codes; 3) search for themes; 4)

review themes; 5) define and name themes; and, 6) produce the report.

To begin analysis, I first familiarized myself with the data by reading each focus

group transcript and making notes regarding the types of community problems identified,

critical analysis of these challenges, and political efficacy to address these challenges.

Next, I began within-case analysis to generate initial codes. I generated initial codes

beginning with the high engagement focus groups and the low engagement focus groups

from Mwangaza and continued to the focus groups at Woodland Mills until all focus

groups were coded. The initial codes identified systems based attributions, individual

based attributions, and more integrated critical analysis of community problems and

solutions. Initial codes also recognized attributions of responsibility, as well as supports

and barriers to youth civic participation. Following the generation of initial codes, I

completed analytic memos for each focus group to help refine the coding categories and

develop themes.

To organize the data I used the unordered meta-matrix as outlined by Miles and

Huberman (1994). An unordered meta-matrix is useful when using a multisite design to

see patterns and points of departure across sites. I entered each theme into the meta-

matrix organized by focus group. I then organized evidence from the focus group

interviews into the matrix by theme and focus group, which aided me in reviewing

themes for consistency with-in and across settings, as well as in refining and naming the

themes. Next, I conducted across-group analysis in two ways. First, I completed a within

school comparison of the themes to determine and interpret any thematic patterns among

focus groups from the same school. Next, I looked across schools to determine if there

were any thematic departures and interpreted any patterns in critical analysis and efficacy

that differed by school.

Findings

To present the data, I produced a report of the findings, providing exemplars of

respondents' data to highlight the students' voice while also supporting the arguments

that I present from the analysis. I begin by describing the types of problems that students

in both schools designated as relevant and most important in their communities. Given

some unique differences in the ways that students in both schools talk about their

communities, I then present findings by school, beginning with Mwangaza and followed

by Woodland Mills. Finally, I end this chapter with a summary of the findings that elucidates similarities and differences across each school setting.

Early Adolescent Descriptions of Community Problems

As a result of the changing landscapes of The City and Woodland Mills, residents are faced with variety of social, political, and economic challenges. As such, youth in these communities were able to describe the issues that they see as most prevalent and the problems they felt were in need of the most attention to help better their respective communities. There were two major themes among the students when describing local problems: school problems and community problems (see Table 5.3). Mwangaza students lived in The City and focused exclusively on city-wide issues and most often naming crime, violence, and gang activity as a prevalent community problem, along with education and the economic recession. Given the political climate in The City and the increased presence of violence, it is not surprising that these are the issues that the students described as most salient. Even as early adolescents, the youth were in touch with the reality of the broader community context which they are a part of. Conversely, at Woodland Mills, the students' discussion of local problems centered around the school and school system, implicating school food, bullying, student misbehavior, and teachers' attitudes as the most prominent concerns. At the time of the interviews, Woodland Mills was undergoing a consolidation with a local school district; this problem was also brought up by students, but generally in relation to or in conjunction with another specific within school concern. The school consolidation and financial troubles of the district were a widely discussed topic in the local area, and the school serves as a point of connection for students within the community. As such, the students did not readily talk

about broader community issues, with the exception of some gang violence within a particular sub-community of Woodland Mills.

As these students discussed these community problems and potential causes and solutions, six major themes were prevalent in the data: Systems Attributions, Individual Attributions, Complex Integrations, Social Responsibility, Agency, and Barriers to Participation. In the follow sections, I will explore the meaning of each theme within the school and provide evidence from the focus groups to support my claims. With the first three themes: Individual Attributions, System Attributions, and Complex Integrations, I focus on the ways that students described problems within their community and solutions for those problems. In the Social Responsibility theme, I illustrate to whom students attribute specific responsibility for local issues. In the final two themes, Agency and Barriers to Participation, I describe how the students imagine their roles as civically involved community members as well as obstacles that might impede civic engagement. Finally, I will conclude with a summary of findings that compares and contrasts the representation of themes across schools.

Table 5.3 Sociopolitical community and school problems identified by focus group (FG)

	Mwangaza				Woodland Mills			
	FG 1	FG 2	FG 3	FG 4	FG 5	FG 6	FG 7	FG 8
School								
Bullying					4	4		4
Classroom Placement							4	
Dress Code					4	4		
Food					4		4	4
Lack of Student Activities							4	
Money/Resources					4	4		4
Sanitation					4		4	
Security					4		4	
Shootings (like Newtown)					4			
Student Behavior/ Fighting/ Vandalism						4	4	4
Teachers' Attitudes					4			4
Community								
Abandoned/ Rundown Buildings					4			4
Animal Abuse		4						
Crime	4	4						
Child Abuse		4						
Drugs		4		4				
Economics / Recession	4			4				
Education (Drop-outs, overcrowding)		4	4	4				4
Gangs	4	4						4
Government Problems/Fighting	4							
Homelessness		4					4	
Parent Involvement			4					
People Acting Ghetto/ No Motivation		4	4					
Pollution	4							4
Poverty / Unemployment		4	4	4				4
Sexual Assault/ Human Trafficking		4						
Violence/Shootings/ Killings		4	4	4	4			

Critical Analysis at Mwangaza

       Theme 1: System Attributions. System attributions refer to instances where students explained problematic social conditions on an institutional level, placing onus on macro-level society structures such as government offices or officials and the criminal justice system. Most of the focus groups at Mwangaza gave multiple examples of system attributions throughout their discussion, with the exception of Focus Group 2. Focus Group 2, on average, was enrolled at Mwangaza for a shorter period of time than the other focus groups and also reported the lowest level of political efficacy beliefs than the other groups at Mwangaza. Students in Focus Groups 1, 3, and 4 implicated broader systems as reasons for the challenges in their communities, particularly when they spoke about crime and the education system.

       Zhanae focused on failures of police and the criminal justice system as reasons for persistent crime and violence throughout The City, emphasizing how the police do not arrest criminals for serious crimes which impacts future crimes.

> *Zhanae:*   *I think it's not protected enough. Or just some people need to be locked up for actual crimes instead of these other crimes like, uh, like I said; tickets and stuff the police get people on instead of actually getting the real murderers and so...*

       Students also considered larger systems as reasons that problems exist in their communities and schools with regard to education, implicating the role of finances in the broader issues of education, specifically laying off teachers. Emma explained how larger issues within the school system impact individual student education:

> *Erica:*   *Um you want me to explain what I think the problem is with education?...*
>
> *M:*   *Uh huh.*

Emma: *Okay, so teachers are being laid off so there's not anyone to teach the students. There are too many students in the classrooms so we can't really learn. Some schools aren't teaching the students at, what they're supposed to be teaching, like they're teaching on lower levels than what they're supposed to be learning. And, it's a whole bunch of other stuff, but I don't really know how to explain that so.*

Angela: *Books.*

Emma: *Yep books, your um, your utensils, another word that you need to use, you know like that.*

Nelson relayed similar thoughts connecting layoffs implemented by elected city officials to the direct and negative implications to learning in the classroom.

Nelson: *Like (clears throat) like my dad is a teacher in The City and like the govern... the Mayor or somebody I guess, that's like running The City and stuff, they like always laying off teachers and um taking down schools and stuff like that. And then let's say like next year, classes can be like up to 40-something people or 50-something people so then that's just gonna cause the kids not to learn nothing because they can't get no attention to learn what they need to know.*

The students also conveyed system-level thinking through their ideas regarding crime and the justice system. In focus group 4, the students expressed that major crimes are often penalized inadequately, while minor infractions are punished harshly.

Nelson: *Like dealing with the violence and stuff. Like if somebody kills somebody I think they should go right straight to jail, they shouldn't um like need no; you know what's that called? Like go to court to see if they're gonna go to jail, I think they should like go straight to jail if they took somebody's life...*

M: *Okay. They should go straight to jail because they took somebody's life?*

Nelson: *...Cause sometimes they don't.*

M: *Okay. You guys have anything to add? Any solutions that will help any of these problems?*

Archer: *When ---, it's not fair to us though.*

M:	*What's not fair?*
Archer:	*When we don't like, say you get a ticket or something, you can be going to jail. But then they kill somebody they don't go to jail, that's like that's not fair.*
M:	*Do you guys hear of that kind of thing happening?*
P:	*What?*
M:	*Where somebody might not go to jail for something they did.*
P:	*Uh huh.*
Archer:	*Uh huh. All the time.*
Nelson:	*You got to do what… like that dude that killed Treyvon Martin, but I think he's going down but he still...*

In Focus Group 4, the students also suggested focus was also on providing more police officers to help fight violent crimes in the city, however, the students quickly brought up the economy and how more police cost more money than the city has to pay them.

Archer:	*We need more officers...*
M:	*More officers, what's that mean?*
A:	*Like the police to like stop the violence and the killing.*
M:	*Okay.*
Shelia:	*But they can't because of the economy...*
M:	*Can you say that again?*
Shelia:	*They can't because of the economy. I mean they don't have enough money to pay everybody, but they don't have to pay some people, because some people can just volunteer to do it. They just don't have to get paid and people don't understand that. You don't have to get paid to do everything.*

In Focus Group 1, Zhanae and Chris entered into a debate amongst themselves regarding the best way to integrate changes in the police department that have positive

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impacts on the community. This discussion was qualitatively different than in any other focus group as they considered merits and disadvantages to various solutions. They considered both increasing the number of and presence of police and reform regarding police priorities. While the students were not in agreement on what specific changes should be made within the police department, it was clear that some change should be implemented.

M: *Okay. So let's talk about that a little bit. So, Chris you say we need more police and Zhanae you disagree.*

Zhanae: *Yeah.*

M: *Okay, so Chris why do you think we need more police?*

C: *Because um, like, uh there's a lot of, like, robberies, um stuff like that. Like robberies, um, robberies, carjackings, people get kidnapped, killed. Uh, they uh, police need to be like, like in the streets, like not 24/7 like, like most of the time, be there, be there for um like if there's a crime happening let there be uh, police there.*

M: *Okay, okay. And Zhanae?*

Zhanae: *Um, I don't think there needs to be more police or less police, I think they need to focus on the right things. Like, they're, the police are busy worrying about people wearing seatbelts and giving out tickets, but there are still people getting murdered and shot like, um, like Chris had said, but they're more focused on getting money out of the people instead of actually solving crimes.*

Finally, the students in Focus Group 1 were the only ones to address gun control as a means to reduce violence and crime in the city. Rather than stating one staunch opinion, the students engaged in a discussion about positive and negative implications of different approaches to gun control and even brought up issues of constitutional rights versus public safety.

Zhanae: *But guns, I don't think you can take them away from people, but I think that would be a smart idea because everyone, like almost*

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everyone owns guns now. Because like I see pictures on like social networking sites where teenagers, I mean kids like my age or even younger have guns out and taking pictures with them. And some people even bring them to school and stuff. And I don't think um, certain people should have guns.

M: *Okay.*

Chris: *Well, I heard, another thing, um my mother said there was a law, I think it was an old law that 12 year olds could have guns, uh have guns, but I think that should be like when you are like 18, when you are an adult where you are more responsible. Or you have to take a test, like to see how responsible you are. Like if you are responsible you can own a gun, but if you are careless and just go out with it, you can uh, put them in jail for people like that.*

Zhanae: *I disagree.*

Traci: *And, what Chris said, like 18 year olds should like carry guns, like they're more responsible, not all 18 year olds are like responsible; like they can be childish and do crazy things with guns and weapons and stuff, so.*

M: *Okay.*

Zhanae: *I think they should go back when people couldn't even own guns.*

Chris: *Hmm. Um, I disagree. But um, for like, not like 18 year olds, like um, like a lot of 18 year olds... Like if you um, if you have a clean record, um they could actually like, um, um... Still, if you have a clean record and you are trying to do something with it, um, that, I'm thinking they should um, actually have something like a tracker like on a gun. Like if you do, do something crazy with it, um the police can actually see, uh, see if that gun goes off and it will start blinking. Like, um they should have like a tracker, like it will track every gun a person have. We don't have to have like, um, we don't have to have... I know we don't have to have guns all the time, but sometimes when you have to defend yourself, like a robbery or you might get murdered, you have to have some kind of protection. Um, but, uh, but, you don't have to carry a gun all the time, just when you feel in danger, but not like, like an angry boyfriend or something. If it's something like that, call the police and ask them for protection.*

Zhanae: *I kinda agree with that. Like cause how they have trackers in cell phones and stuff...*

Traci: *Uh huh, uh huh.*

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Theme 2: Individual Attributions. Students also spoke to the ways that individuals and groups of individuals contribute to and perpetuate local challenges. Mwangaza students from each of the focus groups commented on individuals or groups of individuals who they felt were culpable regarding the condition of their community. For example, Zhanae from Focus Group 1 explained how gangs contribute to the drug and violence problem in The City:

M: *What are some of the different gangs that exist?*

Zhanae: *Like, they're all, most of them start, I mean most of them are three letters, like they have, um some even go to the school, like some are BBC, TMC, CNE. It's like they all mean something, mostly about cash and stuff. And most of them are either teenagers or actual adults who go around just saying they are in a gang and they are shooting people. I mean, in other gangs they are fighting, they're selling drugs and stuff like that.*

Similarly, in Focus Group 2, the students specify that gangs are a large part of the challenges of crime and violence that are being experienced within the city.

Karen: *Um, like, people trying to it's like kind of like gangs; they get in gangs and the gangs are like selling stuff and they add more people and it gets bigger and bigger until they like just takes up like, just the like almost the whole city.*

M: *Oh okay.*

Anthony: *And I was going to say like, um, like drug dealers near school, um selling drugs near school property and um, that's all on my mind right now, but.*

Diane: *Too many people are here selling drugs and stuff...*

M: *Okay.*

Diane: *...like they get killed from gangs and stuff.*

Nelson also explains how gangs violence contributes to overall issues of violence and crime in The City:

Nelson:	Like, people, like they always got to have problems and try to start conflicts and stuff like that and nobody you, might know how to be nice no more so then, maybe like make other people mad and then just cause conflict.
Archer:	Like when you sell like drugs and stuff and then like they say they want their money and then you don't give it to them like, they just try to like to kill.
Shelia:	I think everybody wants to solve their problems with violence when they can just sit down and talk it out, but they have to go do something to this person and then go to their family and do this or that, I mean, they just use violence to solve their problems.
M:	Okay, and who is they, you guys are mentioning?
Archer:	Like, like people like so called thugs.
Shelia:	Gang members.
M:	Are there any other people that you think are contributing to the violence problem?
Shelia:	It's everybody, but mostly the people that we named.
Archer:	The people that's not like, the people that has problems all the time or they're like irritated or they just like, they want to do it because they just want to do it.

The students also implicated person-centered issues, such as drug and alcohol abuse as well as psychological issues such as depression and low self-esteem and at the extreme, psychopathology/sociopath.

Chris:	Um, and a lot of people, the reason of some crimes, are just because people are on drugs, like K2, they are fighting against that right now. Uh, a lot of things, like problems, like home, uh, family problems and drug problems, alcohol problems. It could be anything. You don't know, you don't know so, you have a lot of things that uh, that is crime related.

In another example from Focus Group 2, Anthony and Karen talk about how mental health problems may impact violence and drugs.

M:	Okay. Okay so, we talked a little bit about what the problem is; so why does this drug problem exist?

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Anthony: *Um, because loneliness and no education, and desperate, um maybe isolation, depression and something like that.*

M: *Okay. Uh huh?*

Karen: *People not having like parents and like um, what do you call it, adoption houses? They run away from there because they feel like nobody want to take them and take care of them.*

Finally, the students at Mwangaza also implicated parents, and particularly

fathers, as holding significant and primary responsibility for the actions of their children,

particularly as those actions negatively impact the community and contribute the on-

going problems within The City. Overall, the students felt that while good parenting does

not guarantee a child stays away from violence and criminal activities, children with

more positively involved parents have a better chance to succeed at life, particularly if

both the mother and father are involved. In Focus Group 3, they discuss:

Danielle: *Yes and you going out there and making a bad influence they gonna do the same thing; "I wanna be like my daddy, I wanna be like my mamma."*

Emma: *Yeah and these fathers need to take... (saying loudly) MORE INITIATIVE WITH THEIR CHILDREN!*

David: *Yes.*

Emma: *Anyways but yeah the fathers need to take more initiative um with their children because not all the problems are from that, but I'll say a good amount is from... (over talking)*

David: *I agree. Actually.*

Emma: *...their fathers not being in their life or their mother. It could be in effect with their mother too because it's not just the father, so actually both the parents, they need to be together. And don't be trying to go out to the club and doing all that stuff and then having a child and then he run away and go to somebody else. You got to don't do that, you know what I'm saying, you just gotta --- sit down.*

Angela continues by bringing up the importance of good mothering to children's well-being and the group finishes this discussion with the conclusion that both parents, interacting with their child in a positive way and setting a good example is in the best interest of the child and that, overall, parents should be more responsible for their children.

> *Angela:*   *I said mothers have a big, um have a big you know role in their children's life, but in most cases the father is always gone and there's the mother taking care of the child, you know what I'm saying. And if they're doing it wrong, I mean like you can take care of your child really good and they can still grow up to be disrespectful or in gangs and in jail and stuff like that.*
>
> *Danielle:*   *Yes, most of the time, if you grow up and have your parents teach you right or discipline you right, you don't grow up to be like that; you want to make them proud. And if you don't have a mom like that, that doesn't really care, and then she doing whatever she want to do and she just can't wait until you get 18 and get out of her house... (laughter) then what you gonna do? You just gonna go run the streets.*
>
> *Angela:*   *Oh, I was gonna say, I think (laughter) if you have positive influence in your life then you're more successful...*
>
> *David:*   *Yes, that's true. (over talking)*
>
> *Angela:*   *...and then you make the right decisions.*

Theme 3: Complex Integrations. Lastly, students demonstrated more complex thinking through integrative explanations of how both individuals and systems contribute simultaneously or consecutively to both the existence of and persistence of problems within their community. Examples of complex integrations were present throughout each of the focus group interviews. However, Focus Group 1 did provide some of the more thorough and clear examples. For instance, Zhane discussed how stereotype based mistreatment by the police may lead to dissension among the community members that may cause them to distrust the police and rebel against their authority.

| Zhanae: | And then they talk about how police are rough on certain people, like stereotypes in a way, because if they um... I think the reason is that, another reason why everyone is doing all this crime is because of rebellion. Because like they say skip the police and stuff like that because they're mean to them and stuff like that, so they do bad things just so they can test something out. |

Students also connect the economic downturn to homelessness, violence, and other city-wide concerns. For example:

Nelson:	It's the economy.
M:	The economy. Explain, how is that connected?
Nelson:	Like when somebody get fired or laid off or something then they got a lot of anger and then they want to take it out on somebody or something like that.
M:	Okay.
Archer:	And people don't want to make a change.
Shelia:	Oh and like homeless people, well not homeless people, like people who don't have homes, but they have clothes and stuff they steal from other people in which causes another problem and then violence.

Comparably, Zhanae connects how the recession and current economic climate might make it difficult for people to maintain jobs, attain proper medical care.

M:	Okay, and what do you mean by economic problems?
Zhanae:	Um, how like how we're kinda, well I think we still are in a recession. We are kinda getting out of it and like, not many people have jobs and I think that's the main problem with the crime too or the main cause of it.
M:	Okay. And you said some people are just crazy, what's that mean?
Zhanae:	Like, some people actually have mental problems, like schizophrenia and stuff and since we're such in a recession, most people can't afford the medicine or the proper treatment for their illnesses, so they're just either robbing people to get money for their illness, or they're just crazy and they need a lot more medicine than they can afford.

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M: Okay. And Traci, were you going to say something?

Traci: Um, I was just going to say that they're crazy. Like, Zhanae said, like they're just like, like she said they have problems and they need medication and they can't afford it so they go ahead and rob people.

The students in Focus Group 1 also implicated education as connected to other major issues within their city.

Zhanae: I think economics and education.

M: Okay. And so you said education and economics also.

Zhanae: Yeah, but I think money is the main reason because the smartest person can still go to crime. And like the smartest people end up, they can lose their home and because of the recession or something like that and turn out to robbing people instead of just; most of the smartest people end up in jail for something. Like I think um, money is the main problem.

M: Okay.

Zhanae: I think education is second.

Chris: Hmm, I really think it's, I disagree. I think education is first, then education, everybody is like in the same place because a lot, (clears throat) because a lot of people are like faking things, like get hurt on purpose to get money out of the school district and a lot of the school district is trying to get um...

Zhanae: Um, scammed?

Chris: Yeah, they are trying to scam, uh, scam other people.

The students also exhibited complex integration in their discussion of solutions to problems in The City. Several students across each focus group suggested social intervention as a viable solution to help curb the prevalence of the issues seen in their communities and schools. While each intervention suggestion was different, the students offered that there may be system-based social programs that should be created or implemented more effectively that well help the community by virtue of supporting

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individuals within the community. This perspective further suggests that these youth were

not considering individual attributions as excuses to justify faulty systems and blame

community members. Rather, there may be programs and policies that can help support

individuals and thus contribute to positive shifts in the community. In Focus Group 2, the

suggested intervention was to find substitutions for the drug problem to help curb drug

addiction.

M:	*Alright. So imagining [a perfect] world, what do you think are the types of solutions that will help us fix like the drug and violence problems?*
Anthony:	*Finding something else to substitute for drugs.*
M:	*Like what, can you give me an example?*
Anthony:	*Um, chew sticks...*
M:	*Okay.*
Anthony:	*...cigarettes even if they bad, but.*

Students in Focus Group 2 also talked about the importance of mental health

related interventions, as they saw mental health problems as co-morbid with violence in

the community and student struggles in the schools. In the following example, the

students suggested mental health support as an intervention to decrease violence in The

City.

M:	*What else? What are some solutions to the violence problem and the drug problem?*
Anthony:	*Um, let me think.*
Anthony:	*Giving everybody the right education, don't make people feel lonely, you know um, making everybody feel like a somebody.*
M:	*Uh huh. Anybody else have something to add? Solutions?*
Dustin:	*Give the people like, as he said, don't let the people be like, somebody didn't talk to them, like get rid of all... like say if they*

had like social problems, like whenever they were like young, then they grew up to be like crazy, but just give them somebody to let all of their anger out on, without using violence.

In Focus Group 3, they also talked about implementing more programs for children so they have positive things to do during outside of school time, rather than be lured by the prominence of gangs, crime, and violence.

M: *Okay. So okay, we imagined what the world would be like if violence didn't exist. So what do you think are some solutions to fix the violence problem?*

Emma: *Oh, more um, for the kids more programs, have their parents put them in programs so they don't have time to go out and do all these gangs.*

David: *Keep them busy.*

Emma: *Yeah keep them busy and have them dong this and doing that so that way they won't have time; when they come home, they're not trying to get their guns they're hiding, they want to take a nap cause they're tired from all the things that they're doing. You know things like that.*

Emma also reminds the group that while Mwangaza has substantial programs available, students at other schools may not have the opportunity to be as equally involved.

Emma: *You know we're able to do these things, but most of the schools and most of the parents don't care. And like yeah, like how they're trying to do The City public system and all that type of stuff because of the problem that they're having, because they don't have that many things going on at the schools. So if the kids don't have anything going on, then they're gonna do these things. I mean it's a choice to do it because you know you can't force someone to do something that they don't want to do. But, I think it would be better off, if like these schools would try to give more programs for people, like try to know people more like not, you know what I'm saying. Like do you guys know what I'm saying, cause I can't word this?*

P: *Uh huh.*

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P: *Yeah.*

P: *Thank you. (short laugh)*

Theme 4: Social Responsibility. As the students talked about challenges in their communities and schools, a theme of social responsibility was present in their conversations. The Mwangaza students identified three primary stakeholders who they felt should and do have a responsibility to the social welfare of their community: youth, community at-large, and public officials.

Youth Responsibility. As one part of responsibility, these early adolescence embraced the idea that they, as youth and the future generation of citizen leaders, are responsible for initiating and promoting positive change in their communities. Zhane explained,

> *I think we're the main people who can do something because they're um, like I said the gangs and stuff most of them are young people and then most of the crime you hear, um, about people getting raped, people getting robbed; the ages are about, you hear they're either 18 or 20 something. All of them are young and um, the older people really aren't doing anything. But I think the main crime reason... I mean the main crime, criminals are younger people.*

Another way that the students felt they were responsible for setting a better example for the next generation than the previous generation set for them. Archer commented that "sometimes they need to like grow up and be a man or something, like telling like, hey stop, like that's not necessary to be like killing people for no reason or selling drugs. Like own up to what they do." Zuri explained:

> *Well um, we can end drug problems, little kids can end drug problems because it starts off as when we were kids because we think (knocking) that we do drugs it's a cool thing because everybody else do it, and if we be above the influence we can make an impression that; doing drugs is not a cool thing and you can be cool by doing the right thing.*

Nelson provided a similar description of how the behavior of young people can influence the cultural expectations of future generations:

> *Like (clears throat) if we, if this generation stop, like our age, then like when the next set of generations come around they won't see what we doing and then they won't copy off of us. Like the generation before they'll be doing that and then we'll, like the younger generation will see what they will be doing and stuff and then they're like; oh, we could do that because they're doing it and they will just keep on going on and on and on.*

> *Community Responsibility.* The next idea regarding responsibility, was that not only youth, but the community as a whole is responsible for making local improvements, emphasizing that community members can impact each other and that when one person begins to do well there can be a "chain reaction" of positivity throughout the community. Anthony and Dustin explained the responsibility of the community to impact positive change:

M:	*Okay, these are all good solutions. Any other solutions? Okay. So whose responsibility is it to fix these problems?*
Anthony:	*Us.*
Dustin:	*Everyone's.*
M:	*Okay, so talk about it, why is it... Well first, who is us?*
Anthony:	*Well the community.*
M:	*Okay, and so why, why is it the community's responsibility?*
Anthony:	*Because their community is the one being jacked up, messed up, so they need to take things in their own hands.*
M:	*Okay. And you said…you said us and then?*
Dustin:	*I said, um, everyone...*
M:	*Everyone, okay. So why is it everybody's responsibility?*
Dustin:	*Because like, everything you do has a chain reaction. So when you like forget to do something or mess up or like go mess with*

somebody, then that's going to have a chain reaction on your life and theirs and the whole community.

M: *Okay.*

Dustin: *So say like, TaRondo was picked on like his whole life, then he grew up just, out of the ordinary just there and he's like insane. And then, now, the people who mess with him are regretting it and then just, like, like... How do I put this? Like his community... like you know community has to make it better, like since everyone caused the problem, everyone has to work together and fix it.*

The students in Focus Group 4 express the idea that if individuals within a community took personal responsibility or "just handled theyself (sic)", then there would be less conflict and "commotion" in their communities and schools.

M: *Okay. These are all good solutions. So whose responsibility is it do you think to fix these problems?*

Nelson: *Everybody's...*

M: *Everybody's?*

Daisy: *To make the change.*

Nelson: *I mean if everybody just handled theyself (sic) then it will all go away.*

M: *Okay, what does it mean if everybody handles themselves? What does that mean?*

Daisy: *Stop putting their nose in other people's business....*

M: *Okay. Tell me more about that.*

Daisy: *Like say um, you got in a conflict with somebody and you trying to work the problem out and then somebody come and then they run around and, tell your whole neighborhood and then they started a whole big commotion. Like mind your own business.*

M: *Okay. What else?*

Nelson: *And like when everybody just um... Like kind of what Daisy said, if you mind your own business and not get into any drama then that could um, mostly all will go away.*

Public Officials are Responsible. Beyond individual and community

responsibility, some students also implicated elected and public officials as responsible

parties in creating and solving challenges faced in their communities and schools. When

asked who is responsible for fixing the crime problem in The City, Traci responded

immediately and definitively with "the Mayor." In this example, Charles explained how

both the mayor and the police could do more to protect The City and gives an example of

every day citizens who have formed a community watch group to help protect in their

neighborhoods and solve crimes.

> Chris: *Hmm. Um, I know the Mayor can't do like everything like order*
> *them to fix the crime, but I'm just saying; like try to um, try like the*
> *The City um 300, the 300, that those are citizens, walking the*
> *streets at night, putting their own lives in danger just so crime can*
> *um, so they can fight crime and stop it. That should be the police*
> *trying to uh, like, not, like I said you don't have to have a whole*
> *bunch of policeman, just like one or two, like one in a car like and*
> *one on the streets actually looking.*
>
> M: *Can you um, describe for me what the The City 300 is?*
>
> Chris: *Um, it's like a walk, like it's a walk for um, looking for victims,*
> *um they're looking for...*
>
> Traci: *Criminals.*
>
> Chris: *Yeah. Like, like the girl that got raped um, they actually, they got*
> *the description and passed it out to people and it said; if you've*
> *seen this person call the The City 300 or the police and like that.*

Similarly, Anthony responded with "the police's, the President's". And later in

the same focus group, Diane implicated "councilmen". She explained that it was the

councilmen's responsibility because "they own The City". While this example illustrates

misinformation regarding how government functions, the students clearly understand that

councilmen exist and that part of their job is to help solve problems through job creation

and ensuring the well-being of the people of the city.

M:	*Okay. And who else's responsibility is it?*
Diane:	*Probably the half of it like councilmen.*
M:	*Okay, why is it their responsibility?*
Diane:	*They own The City, like they can help fix The City.*
M:	*Okay, how can they help fix it?*
Diane:	*Um by putting more jobs out. And institutions.*

Theme 5: Agency. Even as youth understand and articulate broader system implications for many of the problems they recognize in their communities and schools, each focus group shared direct ways that young people could be agentic in their own communities and contribute positively as citizens, including: personal improvement, help seeking, speaking up, and action steps. This differed from social responsibility, because the students implicated these actions as direct contributions that youth can actively make, rather than the abstract value of the role of youth in the community. Interestingly, the students in Focus Groups 1 and 2, who engaged in the most discussion of youth agency, also reported lower levels of political efficacy than the students in the other focus groups.

The students mentioned personal improvement as one way that youth can help alleviate the problems and challenges faced in their schools and communities. The students felt that by listening to parental advice and staying out of the streets, young people could avoid being associated with victims of crimes and violent acts. As the students in Focus Group 1 describe:

Chris:	*Hmm. I think um, if we like get young people out of…*
Zhanae:	*The streets.*
Chris:	*…yeah, the streets, like they can actually have a friend; a friend that's in a gang and as they're walking home they could get attacked by another person's gang because their gangs are enemies and have wars. So, that person gets, he's just an innocent*

> *bystander while somebody else, while he pays for someone else's doing.*

Zhanae: *That's what my mom said, know who your friends are and watch who you hang out with. Because like its so much crime going on, like, some, like I said, some people my age are in gangs. Like, I have a friend who's in, that's in one, but I know not to hang out with that person because, say if we're out in somewhere and they want to fight; I'm just an innocent bystander like Chris said, that just got hurt, because of someone else and me knowing um, that they're in a gang and me still going along with it; that's like me putting myself into a dangerous situation before it even happens. Like some things I know young people can prevent from happening, but they just want to do whatever they want to do.*

Zhanae and Traci also explained how listening to parents and other responsible

adults can help keep young people out of trouble, a sentiment:

> *Like sometimes I know, parents make you mad, but you just got to listen to them sometimes because that I totally understand. Like if my mom tells me not, that I can't go somewhere because a certain person is there, I understand because something bad could happen. And sneaking out and stuff like the younger people do, and then they end up getting kidnapped or raped or something like that; it's all because, their parents told them what to do, but they just didn't want to do it and decided to rebel and they ended up getting hurt and wishing they had listened to what their parents said. - Zhanae*

> *Well, I just think kids should listen to their parents when they tell them not to do bad stuff and if their parents don't tell them anything, then they should just probably listen to like teachers and stuff. Like if teachers tell them like don't do anything bad or whatever, just listen to someone older than you that's more responsible. – Traci*

Lastly, education was ascribed as a mechanism for young people to positively

impact their community during multiple focus groups, emphasizing that one should "get

an education" to help address violence, crime, and economic issues. Samuel went on to

describe educational attainment as having an immediate impact on the current individual

and generation, but also impacting future generations:

Samuel: *I believe people our age should focus more on their schoolwork and education more than they're trying so there's no reason to do other stuff.*

M: *Okay, and how will that help?*

Samuel: *And if they focus on their education then they teach their kids how to be smarter, then they can teach theirs and it will go on and on and on and instead of violence they can be more educated in life.*

Help-seeking. Zhanae and Chris also spoke briefly about the value of help-seeking among young people, particularly with regard to anger and other problems they might face. Both students felt that if young people would consider seeking help of parents or other caring adults that young people would be less likely to commit a violent act as the result of unresolved personal issues. Chris also provided his own experience as an example of how seeking help can help resolve anger issues before they grow into more substantial and potentially detrimental problems.

Zhanae: *Yeah I think younger people should actually seek help if they know they have a problem instead of just going out with friends and stuff or like suppressing the problem. That's why I think most kids have anger issues because they haven't talked to anyone about them. It's either they can't talk to their parents about it, they don't want to talk to their parents about it. I think everyone should have a person they can talk to about issues, because all that built up anger could cause you to kill someone if you wanted to. Because I think that anger is a main issue of crime and just revenge to people. I just think um, younger kids, they need more stuff to do instead of being in the street and they should either try to start something where they can help other kids or just seek help.*

Chris: *Uh, I agree. A lot of kids like have built up anger, like I do for instance, I have a lot of anger but I try to talk it out. A lot of kids should have that, like you don't have to go to a shrink and talk to 'em because a lot of people don't have the money for it. Just talk to your parents and if your parents don't do it; like if your school has a school counselor, if you, if you, if a person... if a kid does go to school and the school has like a school counselor, ask her, well ask he or she.*

The third way that youth felt they could positively impact their community was through speaking up and speaking out against injustices and wrongs they see. At both schools, students felt that their voice represented a valuable contribution to efforts to change their communities, particularly around issues that directly impact future generations. Anthony shared this during Focus Group 2:

M:	*Okay. Okay, so do you think that young people can help address these problems?*
Anthony:	*Uh, they could speak up.*
M:	*Okay. And Anthony, you said young people can speak up.*
Anthony:	*Yeah...*
M:	*What does that look like?*
Anthony:	*Well, for example, um like when those um, trucks that pollute the area and give some kids asthma and stuff like that; like some people spoke up about that, even the kids that were diagnosed with asthma. So the main thing is that; even if you are little and puny, thousands of little 'puny-es' can um take out someone big, like lions, cheetahs, they are so small, but if they all team up they can take out the elephant.*

Theme 6: Barriers to Participation. The students also expressed disappointment and concern with adults' responses to youth ideas and input as a barrier to participation. The students noted actions they could take or would want to take, but cannot yet because they are not adults. At Mwangaza there was a focus on adults in broader community-level positions and with specific comments about how adults can't make decisions as well as students could. This theme was most apparent in the discussions in Focus Group 2. Participants in this focus group described how students can think in more creative ways than adults, and if adults would listen to them, there might be better outcomes for the overall community. Interestingly, these students also reported the lowest average political

efficacy beliefs at Mwangaza and had attended the school for less time than the other

students.

M: *Is there a difference between what a young person can do and what an adult can do?*

Anthony: *Well yes.*

Anthony: *It's a big difference, if you're big... (over talking)*

Zuri: *It's a certain extent that a kid can do and an adult can do...*

M: *What do you mean? Describe that, explain that to me.*

Zuri: *Well, a kid can't go to the city and tell them that they should be doing this. They can like go to the community and talk to an adult; but, an adult, they can go to somebody higher that has rule over what happens (coughing) in the community or in the city and tell them.*

M: *Oh okay. You got something more to add?*

Karen: *Um, like, um like, like why does it, like always have to be, hmm, the adults that are like, um... the like sometimes adults who makes mistakes too. So, if like, it's a little difference between like kids and adults because adults can, they, they like, they think smaller than kids.*

M: *What do you mean?*

Karen: *Because like kids think bigger and that's why we have um, adults don't really like, listen to us because of our imaginations and they don't like understand that.*

M: *Okay. More to add?*

Anthony: *Oh yes, she was and I agree with her on the part, on the part where she said um, adults don't really listen to kids, but I think they don't have the power to do anything, like on a movie; um, I think ya'll might have saw this before. You know the movie, "The Day after Tomorrow"?*

M: *Uh huh.*

Anthony: *Where the kid was trying to tell them that they needed to stay inside or freeze to death outside, but they didn't believe him because like he was a little kid. But actually, the kid was right, but*

they just wanted to believe the older um guard, because he was older and they went out and they all died. But when the um, the few that followed the kid, um, they survived, but they all died because they were just trying to believe the grownup, the adult.

M: *So does that happen in real life?*

Anthony: *Yeah, sometimes.*

P: *Yeah.*

M: *Can you guys give me some examples?*

Karen: *Like, I think like, does it, like the government, sometimes they like make decisions that like, I think even like some kids like us, like our age, can like even think of a better way we could have done that, and like it could; why does it always have to be like adults that's like in charge, like...*

M: *Oh, like what? What do you think... can you guys give me an example of a decision the government made and you might have done it differently?*

Karen: *Hmm, like spending a lot of money on stuff we don't need. Like you know that that Governor that's trying to build another bridge to Canada? Like why do we need that, we already got one? It's like just wasting our money when we don't even have a lot that we have already.*

M: *Okay, and what are some of the things that you would spend the money on?*

Karen: *Like better schools and to build up um, desolated communities and stuff.*

M: *Does everybody agree with that?*

Anthony: *Yeah.*

Dustin: *Yes.*

M: *What other stuff would ya'll spend the money on? Uh huh?*

Dustin: *Like um, like houses for the homeless, like where they can get, it's like, they can live their life in a house. Like, not to pay, just live there until they get back on their feet.*

M: *Okay.*

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Diane:	Like fixing the abandoned, like what he said, like fixing houses for homeless and people that need houses.
M:	Uh huh? Can I go back to something that Karen said? Karen, right? You said desolated communities, is that what you say? What do you mean by that?
Karen:	Like, like communities that's like broken down and like, a whole lot of empty lots and just um tore up buildings and burnt down buildings. People think that they're in, unrepair-able, but they aren't, you just have to like start from scratch sometimes...
M:	Uh huh.
Karen:	Adults don't really like want to start from scratch, they want to like build up.

Critical Analysis at Woodland Mills

Theme 1: System Attributions. At Woodland Mills, the students offered a similar analysis to students at Mwangaza regarding economic attributions to local problems, but were focused predominately on their local school and school system. Here the students connect financial corruption within the school system to broader financial issues that have led to the school system consolidating with another local school system.

Trevor:	I think that's why we combining with Overeast cause we're losing a lot of money.
	[Quote shortened]
M:	Okay, and so both the school districts are combining?
Trevor:	Yeah.
Amber:	Uh huh.
M:	And how is this related to the lack of money? (all talking)
Trevor:	Cause we don't have enough money.
DeAndre:	Cause they don't have enough money and we don't got enough money....

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Tiffany: All together we're broke.

Trevor: …and we barely got money so… so we come together, we got some money at least.

Zihna, whose grandmother worked in the school system, also shared how internal corruption was implicated in the district's financial troubles.

M: Okay. So why do you guys think that this problem exists? The money problem exists?

Zihna: I heard that someone like took the money from Woodland Mills, that's what I heard.

M: Like what do you mean?

Zihna: Like someone like, I guess someone, I guess, the superintendent about the money or something and I heard that someone took like half of it and that's why we we're kind of low on money, that's what I heard.

In Focus Group 7, the students connected the broader system-wide changes to the school systems to disruptions within their school. The students in this focus group commented on how neighboring school district Overeast seemed to have a stronger influence on their school and that they were changing to integrate into their school rather than a mutual consolidation.

Julia: Like ever since the people from Overeast came they had changed everything.

P: Yea.

Julia: Like once everyone be quiet every table could go to lunch.

Lisa: Like usually when we first come down to go to lunch we get straight in the line and go through. But now since the people from Overeast came to look at our school they talking about we gotta go in the lunch room first and sit down and call the quietest table and stuff.

M: And who are the people form Overeast?

Lisa: I guess they someone special. They coming to look around to see what school they gonna shut down or something like that.

Julia: Like they seeing what the teachers they do around to help us and stuff like that. And observing us and

Lisa: How our school works.

The recognition of systems was also prevalent as the students discussed and recommended school policy changes to improve school conditions and education quality. In Focus Group 7, students felt that activities where the students from each school district could get to know each other. In doing so, they could begin to interact to help smooth the transition into a consolidated school district.

Julia: We should like, the schools, we should all come together and get to know each other more better so we won't have violence and stuff like that. Like we should all get to know each and see and we may be alike and we might have our same things that we like. And then, we just keep our school separate and they school separate. But I don't think it should be like that, I think we should all get to know each other better.

M: How would you go about doing that?

Lisa: I think we should have like a…

Julia: A event.

Lisa: …group after school or during school like to talk about problems and like drama and stuff so it will quit.

Julia: Like we have events, like we all get together.

Lisa: That involves everybody.

Delilah: Like if you have events, then you can, that's like, cuz we don't have any events here usually, so if we have more events then we can get to know each other more and that will probably cut down the violence.

The Woodland Mills students also felt that some teachers should be fired and additional teachers hired to improve the students' experiences in the classroom.

Specifically, students wanted to have a voice in evaluations that would contribute to hiring and firing decisions.

> *Suriya:*   *Okay. If they'll like check the teachers before they like hire the teachers to like see if they got anger issues or something. See how they act and...*
>
> *Sean:*   *They wouldn't show it.*
>
> *M:*   *So how would...what would the school...*
>
> *Suriya:*   *Or let them teach for one day and let the students judge them.*
>
> *Damon:*   *Yeah. Let the students judge them.*

Trevor also considered hiring and firing as a system-based solution to address the school district's money problems as part of the school consolidation.

> *Trevor:*   *Okay, I think that since we're like in the same West County that we should just come together, and then like the teacher's getting paid too much, or it's like it's more than our teachers to get paid that certain amount, so if we come together we're using less money, but still paying the teachers so then like half of that would still come to us or the school so we have a larger profit of money...*
>
> *DeAndre:*   *I do not understand that, say it again man.*
>
> *Trevor:*   *It's like there's two, there's like 50 teachers in both schools...*
>
> *DeAndre:*   *Uh huh.*
>
> *Trevor:*   *...cut that in half. I mean like that's a hundred total so you cut it in a half that's 50 and you still would have some money left over, but if we still got both school districts that's taking a lot more money so if we just come together that's using less money...*
>
> *DeAndre:*   *Some of the teachers are going to get laid off though.*
>
> *Trevor:*   *Yes, so well they better find them a different job.*

When considering the sanitation problems faced in the schools, the students also felt that purchasing resources and hiring janitorial staff would help improve school conditions.

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M:	*So what do you think are solutions that would fix this problem?*
Kelsey:	*If they bought soap. (laughter)*
Kennedy:	*Or if they got more janitors. Cuz our janitor don't do, well he does something, but he don't it all.*

Students at Woodland Mills also talked about institutionalizing reward systems for student as a way to increase student academic achievement and as a way to raise money for school improvement. For example:

Kennedy:	*Fun stuff! So kids can have fun and pay at the same time.*
Kelsey:	*So the kids at the school can have fun.*
Michelle:	*Or you could be like ok so...*
Kelsey:	*And the adults can have fun.*
Michelle:	*Right.*
Kelsey:	*Have something that the adults and the children would like.*
Kennedy:	*Ok so, if you be like, ok so, you guys, like if you get this much on a like, to improve our math scores or whatever you just said like our scores on tests and stuff. Like, be like, ok, so if you guys get this much on,*
Michelle:	*Your test.*
Kennedy:	*Like if you get higher than a B or something on a test, then you could go and we'll set up this thing for you guys and you guys can have a field day or whatever, or something like that, cuz I guarantee people would get more high scores.*
Michelle:	*Cuz kids want to pass their tests.*
Ken:	*Right. That would make it even better. Like just have them, even if it's just a swim party. We have this big ole pool in our school.*
Kal:	*And nobody goes to it.*

Theme 2: Individual Attributions. The students at Woodland Mills also gave individual attributions for the challenges within the local school and school system. The

students in Focus Group 5 did not provide as many examples of individual attributions. This focus group was not very different from the other groups in terms of descriptive characteristics, except that they had lower political efficacy beliefs than the other focus groups. The other students specifically implicate personal characteristics of the teachers, such as psychological disorders as reasons why the teachers have attitudes with their students and may be providing subpar academic opportunities. For instance,

Trinity:	*I've got a couple of things to say about these teachers. Mr. Drew, he always be like; hello darling, like he a girl. Second of all, he likes yelling at people and nobody didn't do nothing. I think he's bipolar.*
M:	*Why do you think he's bipolar?*
Suriya:	*I think he got a lonely life.*
Trinity:	*Cause if we don't got our pencil he'll just break out with a sad story talking about my cousin went to jail because he didn't do this, he forgot his priorities and stuff like that just because I lost a pencil. And he can be overdramatic. And if you talk in class, he be like stop talking, you've got lunch detention. I understand that but if you would just say one little thing, you're talking to yourself he going to be like why you talking to yourself? Are you crazy?*

The students also believe that the teachers do not like children, based on their negative attitudes, and determine that the teachers should find another profession:

Trinity:	*I got something else to say. Well, I think these teachers be having these attitudes like this because they don't like kids. If you don't like kids, don't teach. But then I got another reason because...*
Sean:	*Why are you a teacher?*
M:	*Wait. Hold on. Why do you say they don't like kids?*
Trinity:	*Because they (over talking) the way that they yell at us like they they mommas or my daddies. My mom ain't sign no contract for you to yell at me all day. They supposed to teach me. They not supposed to yell at me all day. (all talking)*

Finally, at Woodland Mills the students also attribute immaturity and lack of taking care of responsibilities as an individual characteristic that influences the persistence of problems within the school. In Focus Group 7, they implicate security guards who do not do their job:

M:	Sometimes? Ok, so we're gonna talk about the other problem too. So somebody describe to me what is the violence problem? So you said there needs to be less violence and more security.

Lisa:	Because the security, they, they not…

Julia:	They don't do nothing.

Lisa:	They need some tougher security guards cuz them security, like, they just talk, they just tell you not to do nothing, they don't try to break it up or nothing. They just sit there and talk, they just, I don't know, they not tough enough.

Delilah:	I agree because usually at lunch the security guards, but they don't anything but walk around. And like if people are doing bad things they don't say anything. All they do is like walk around and talk to like the teachers.

Lisa:	Yea, only if Mrs. Johnson is around and she tells them to do something.

The students also implicate other students, who do not take care of the school property, and have vandalized the school.

M:	But, like, why does the problem exist?

Kelsey:	I don't know. Some kids are childish and they kick the little soap thing off the wall.

Michelle:	I don't like people touching me if they ain't wash they hands.

Kelsey:	Some kid in the sixth grade.

Michelle:	Well yea, if they keep pushing it, it will fall on the floor and stuff…

Kelsey:	No, no, they kicked it off the wall.

M:	In the sixth grade? And so…

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Kelsey: Out of the main hallway bathroom. They just kicked it off and then
                  threw it away. And then the garbage got taken out and they never
                  seen that soap thing again.

Theme 3: Complex Integration. Along with attributing school problems to

systems *or* individuals, students at Woodland Mills also conveyed a complex integration

of the role of both individuals and systems. The students in Focus Groups 6 and 7 provide

the clearest examples of complex integrations. Overall, the students in Focus Groups 6

and 7 had similar levels of past civic engagement and future civic commitment as the

other students. However, the students in Focus Groups 6 and 7 also focused on the

economic issues at the school; this subject may have provided a catalyst to consider both

systems and individuals in relation to school-based problems. As at Mwangaza, students

at Woodland Mills connect lack of economic resources to other issues faced within the

school. For example:

M: Yeah? So why do you think that they don't have as many activities
                  for the middle school?

Delilah: Maybe because we're younger so they think that we don't need all
                  the activities so they just don't give us a lot of choices to go to and
                  like sports to be in and things like that.

Julia: We don't have enough money to do anything. Like less people
                  giving in.

M: Okay, something to add.

Charise: Like, like she said we don't have enough money to like do big
                  events like that.

Similarly, Trevor implicated school finances:

M: Okay. So today we're going to talk about the lack of money and
                  why it's a problem and then if we have some time we'll get to the
                  dress code. Okay?   Okay. So now I want you, well first can
                  somebody describe to me what the lack of money problem is?

Trevor: That goes with not enough school books I think…

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M:	*It does?*
Trevor:	*…cause we don't got no money then how you going to buy books?*

In Focus Group 6, implicated student behavior, an individual attribution, but also noted the importance of systems-based solutions to curb school-based problems. The students felt that previously offered school-based mental health interventions should be continued in order to help students with problematic acting-out behavioral challenges. Students felt that people who do not receive support to address mental health in childhood are more likely to be violent and criminal in adolescence and adulthood.

M:	*What does that mean, what's the problem?*
Zihna:	*There's a whole bunch of bad kids. They don't follow directions, disrespect other people and stuff like that.*
Amber:	*They tear up stuff! When they get mad they tear up the things that we need. Like this, they be tearing up this.*
Zihna:	*So, what happens, cause the reason why they probably act up is cause they have problems at home and they want to take it out on school, and last year we used to have this counseling we used to have, but now we don't have it no more.*
M:	*What happened to it?*
Zihna:	*We used to have…*
Trevor:	*It's after school ain't it?*
Zihna:	*After school? no we used to have it during the day like we did last year. We had Mrs. Lucas.*

Theme 4: Social Responsibility. Similar to Mwangaza, the students at Woodland identified three constituencies they felt hold a sense of duty to the social welfare of their school. They suggest that youth, community, and public officials are responsible for the sociopolitical welfare of the community.

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Youth Responsibility. Students across each focus group implicated young people as responsible for the well-being of the community. For example, in Focus Group 5, the students commented that youth have a responsibility for promoting solutions to some of the problems in both school and community.

> *M:*　　　　　*Thank you. Khloe?*
>
> *Khloe:*　　　*hmm?*
>
> *M:*　　　　　*Whose responsibility is it to fix [the problem of teacher attitudes and student behavior]?*
>
> *Khloe:*　　　*Ours.*
>
> *M:*　　　　　*Who is our?*
>
> *Khloe:*　　　*Um, the classes, but I don't think we gonna be able to.*

One student in Focus Group 6, in particular embraced the idea that the youth are "the future", while another stated that the burden of responsibility did not fall to her, stating:

> *M:*　　　　　*Okay. And so who do you think is responsible for the money problem, who's responsible to fix it?*
>
> *Trevor:*　　　*Us.*
>
> *M:*　　　　　*Us? Who's us?*
>
> *Trevor:*　　　*Children.*
>
> *M:*　　　　　*Yeah? It's your responsibility?*
>
> *Tiffany:*　　　*It ain't mine.*
>
> *M:*　　　　　*Why?*
>
> *DeAndre:*　　*Don't want to point no elbows.*
>
> *Trevor:*　　　*Because we make the community, we the future. (laughter)*

Community Responsibility. Additionally, students suggested that individuals within a community should take personal responsibility to behave well and act as productive and good members of the community. Khloe suggests that individuals might attend religious services to help garner a sense of focus and community cohesion, rather than participating in violent crimes that endanger their own lives and the lives of others.

Trinity: *It's just people like period.*

Suriya: *Just the people need to learn.*

Damon: *Yeah. There's people I mean they won't listen to nobody, I mean if you put them in jail, that somebody can either buy them out or they can get out when their time is up.*

Trinity: *Bail them out. If you go to jail, I think you should go to jail for a very long time if you kill somebody.*

Khole: *I just think people just don't go to church, they need to like go to church because they don't get that (over talking) you only live once, they don't get that. Because like they shooting people and they didn't even get, they didn't even finish their life, like they didn't continue.*

Public Officials are Responsible. Some students also suggested that national political figures as well as local public officials are responsible for challenges in their community and school. Shelia and DeAndre both implicate the president as a source of the economic troubles seen in their community. DeAndre shares: "Our money problems might be from like the President, but I heard he like, he had us in debt for like billions of dollars and stuff."

Shelia also suggests that the President may be responsible for economic issues due to poor spending. With Shelia, again we see that while the students are unsure of exactly how the government functions, they are aware of what types of elected officials could impact change at local, state, and national levels.

Shelia: Like the President and the people he like train with them, I guess...

M: Okay, tell me more about that.

Shelia: When we spend money on things we hardly don't need, but they say we need it, they're just using money unecessa... well they're using money, but they don't really need to. That can go on something else, like um, paying teachers and police offices and stuff, but I think the money is getting used for unnecessary causes...

M: Okay. Whose job is it to spend the money?

Shelia: Um, I don't know.

M: Anybody know who decides?

Shelia: Is it the President?

M: I'm asking.

Archer: Us.

Nelson: You mean like some like the city or the United States?

M: Yeah, like the city or the United States.

Nelson: For city um, probably for the state it will be the Governor...

Shelia: Yeah, the President and the congress.

M: Okay.

Nelson: For the city it would be like somebody lower, like a Mayor or something.

Along the same lines, all of the focus groups in Woodland Mills implicated "the superintendent", "the principal" or "the board" a responsible party for the state of schools in Woodland Mills. In Focus Group 6, the students agree that it is the superintendent's and principal's responsibility to establish positive change in the schools because "they control the whole school" and "they are the ones trying to run stuff". They also suggest that the efforts to run the school and school system may be in vain given the lack of financial resources available in the district.

Amber:	I think it's the principal's.
DeAndre:	And superintendent.
M:	Principal's responsibility, and superintendent?
Tiffany:	I sure do.
M:	Tell me more about that.
Tiffany:	Let's see I think.
M:	Well why? (over talking)
Amber:	Yeah, they the one trying to run this school, we not trying to run it.
Tiffany:	How you are going to try to run it and you ain't got no money? (laughter)
M:	Okay. Who else's responsibility?
Zuri:	Superintendent.
M:	Superintendent, why?
Zuri:	Cause it's like they like, they control the whole school so that's why I say, um control the money too and like I said before that's part of the reason why we got robbed, cause she probably, whoever was the superintendent probably wasn't paying attention about our money and who was controlling, who was controlling it and stuff.

In Focus Group 8, the students connected the responsibility of the school administrators and the board of education not only to the functional problems in the school district, but the effect of those problems on student achievement and learning in the classroom.

M:	So, okay, so we talked about who's responsibility it is to fix these problems. And you guys said, can you say it again?
Kelsey:	Ms. Ladsby
Kennedy:	Superintendent.
Kelsey:	Yea the superintendent or our principal.

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Michelle:	*The board of education.*
Kennedy:	*Yea.*
Kelsey:	*Yea, because they're suppose to order the things that we need to have in our classrooms. If we don't have that stuff then how are we gonna get a good education.*

In Focus Group 7, they implicate the superintendent and principal, but also implicate the student council. They recognize the student council as a governing student organization but also recognize the limitations of a student body within the school. Focus Group 5 also states that students groups may have some responsibility, but that ultimately the responsibility lies with the principal.

M:	*Okay. So you talked a little bit about solutions to fix this problem, but are there any other solutions to fixing the activity problem? Things that people could do? Who's in charge? Who could make the changes?*
Lisa:	*The superintendent or the principal.*
Delilah:	*Or the student council because some, they plan most of the events so they can help.*
Julia:	*Yea.*
Delilah:	*So they can help too.*

Theme 5: Agency. At Woodland Mills the students felt that one way they could positively impact their community was through speaking up and speaking out against injustices and wrongs they see. In Focus groups 6 and 7, all of the students agreed that student voice would help alleviate some of the challenges they face in their school district and that opportunities to share their opinions and suggestions were lacking in the district. For example:

M:	*What does that mean, you're the future?*
DeAndre:	*You got to be heard.*

M:	*Why?*
DeAnre:	*Because …*
Trevor:	*And if it ain't for us then it ain't nothing. Because…*
M:	*What does it mean to be heard? Who has to hear you?*
DeAndre:	*Everybody.*
Trevor:	*Everybody. Well I think the superintendent gotta hear what you got to say.*
Zihna:	*Yep.*
Amber:	*Yep.*
Trevor:	*…cause if it ain't us, it ain't no future, and if there ain't no future, then what there's going to be? Nothing.*
DeAndre:	*How she going to know what we like if she don't hear from us or something?*

In Focus Group 7, Delilah summed it all up in one phrase:

Delilah:	*I think that um, we should have a chance to like talk to the teachers and like the board and stuff like that so they can try to help us instead of just doing it themselves, because I don't think that's gotten us anywhere with them making all the choices.*

Finally, the students in Focus Groups 6 and 8 implicated direct civic and political action as a way that youth can participate as an agent of change in their school and community. While the students in Focus Groups 6 and 8 did not report different levels of past civic engagement, they were more inclined to discuss school-based activism. Ideas from all of the Woodland Mills focus groups included "write a letter", "donate", "start a riot", "petition", and "protest". In each focus group students suggested writing letters to express their displeasure with a particular situation. Even though it was also mentioned that the recipient may not be particularly receptive to a letter, the students still felt this

was an acceptable way to voice concern and initiate change. In Focus Group 6, the

students discussed writing *another* letter to the superintendent:

Amber: You should write another letter to the superintendent like we did last year.

Zihna: She won't listen to me, I wrote one letter, she won't listen to me.

M: You wrote a letter? What did you say?

Zihna: I asked for a group, like I begged, I said please we need a group, like a singing group, and stuff like that, dance group or something like that and I still haven't heard from her and that was last year.

Amber: Oh yeah, I remember…

Trevor: Well, we just got something in music talking about electives so and now they're trying to act like…

M: Whose idea was it for you to write a letter?

Zihna: Myself.

M: You?

DeAndre: Yeah.

Amber: Zihne, oh girl. Smart.

Focus Group 6 also translated the idea of letter writing to address their concerns

with unhealthy food options at school breakfast and lunch.

M: So what's the solution? What's the solution for [unhealthy food]?

Trevor: They better go to McDonald's to buy me a… (laughter)

Amber: Write a letter to the kitchen plus the principal plus the other principal plus the superintendent.

M: Write letters? What would you say in the letters?

Tiffany: A lot.

DeAndre: We need more food, we need better food.

Trevor: In the morning, I be freezing. I be waiting to come to school to have a hot breakfast, but it be cold.

Amber:	And have a hot school to be in, but it ain't. (talking)
DeAndre:	We need better lights outside. We need a better breakfast, we need a better lunch, we need a better everything.

In Focus Group 8, they also suggested writing to the school board, and some students were even aware of when the school board meets and when it might be likely to garner a response:

M:	Okay, so we kind of veered off a little bit. We were talking about what young people could do and we said protest. What else?
Kelsey:	They can, yea they can protest.
Michelle:	Talk to the board of education about it.
Kelsey:	Write letters to the board.
M:	Would they listen?
Kelsey:	Maybe
Kennedy:	umm umm (no)
Michelle:	Probably.
Heather:	I think if you got enough people to do it they would
Kelsey:	Yea.
Michelle:	Yea. Like, they got meetings every Wednesday, so
Kelsey:	So I mean, if you send it umm, couple days before Wednesday they might talk about it.

In addition to letter writing, the students in Focus Group 6 also considered starting a petition as a way to initiate changes to the dress code. They considered both a petition and a riot but Zihna suggested that things would "go into catastrophe if you have a riot." Trevor continued with the idea of a petition:

Trevor:	Have a petition, I think.

Amber: Have a vote.

M: Have a petition, what would the petition say?

Trevor: Dress codes.

Amber: And then send it to the superintendent.

DeAndre: For certain grades.

Tiffany: Why do you say dress code?

Trevor: Yes, dress codes for certain grades yes.

Amber: Yeah. We should have like a paper and have a … (over talking)

Tiffany: What we need to change? You said dress code.

Trevor: From seventh to the…

Zihna: Fifth.

Trevor: Fifth.

…

Amber: And if you think we should, if you think we should not, we should put it on here, we think we should put it over here...

M: Okay.

Amber: And then send them to the lady who head that...

Trevor: There is no superintendant right now cause she just got fired. Well, she didn't get fired, she got laid off because since we're going into the same school they don't, everybody…

Amber: We need a principal, somebody.

Trevor: Can I finish?

DeAndre: We do got a principal.

Zihna: So you mean superintendent?

Tiffany: I recall, but I don't know.

After they developed a plan for their petition, the students quickly realized that because of the impending school consolidation that they may not have a superintendent to send the petition to and were unsure of the changes in the authority structure within the district. Similarly, the students in Focus Group 8 suggested a protest to address some of the problems with school food and teachers in the school. The students also suggested that if they protest, they would be disciplined, thus not solving any of the problems. They also mention that the high school students "fight back" and have protested against school policies in the past.

M:	*Okay, and do you think it's anything that young people can do to address these problems?*
Kelsey:	*Yea, protest.*
Kennedy:	*If we do that, then they're calling the police.*
Kelsey:	*So.*
Kennedy:	*Like how they do all the time at the high school when they try to have protest.*
Kelsey:	*That's funny cuz the high schoolers be fighting back.*

Theme 6: Barriers to Participation. In addition to ways that youth could be direct contributors in positive ways to their community, the students across all focus groups at Woodland Mills also acknowledged potential barriers to positive engagement. One barrier to participation was adult authority figures within the school. The students recalled how teachers and principals might silence their concerns or consider their actions defiant and punish them. In Focus Group 5, the students were convinced that the teachers and principal would punish the students for acting to change the problems they identified in the school. They believed the superintendent might listen to their concerns, but were unsure of whether that would lead to substantive change.

M:	Okay. So, do you think that, is there anything that the students can do to fix this problem?
Sean:	No.
Trinity:	Um-um.
Sean:	Except for get a lunch detention.
Damon:	No. They not going to let us.
M:	Get lunch detention? Who's they?
All:	The teachers.
Trinity:	No, the principal.
Suriya:	The principle and the teachers, probably the superintendent. Cuz Mrs. Ladsby, how do you pronounce her name again?
Damon:	Mrs. Ladsby.
Suriya:	She probably going to let us fix it.
Damon:	She would listen to us.
Suriya:	I mean, she nice enough.
Damon:	She will listen to us I mean but she won't... (all talking)
Suriya:	Not Mrs. Johnson, she mean.

Similarly, when Amber suggests peer-monitoring as a strategy to reduce student mis-behavior in school, Trevor points out that "if you tell somebody to do that, teachers' going to be like, 'stay out of their business' and then a whole altercation and what not." The students feel that their attempts at positive and productive behavior are often construed as negative and punishable behavior among teachers and administrators.

Along with perceptions of negative reactions and consequences from teachers and administrators, some students recounted experiences of negative response and non-

response from teachers when they attempted to participate positively as citizens in their

school. For instance, Zihna shared her experience trying to establish a donation drive:

> Zihna: I think it was sixth grade, I think, I was trying to do a donation cause it was like around wintertime, but no one would listen, I'm like we could donate like this and that for charities and stuff but they just wouldn't listen.
>
> M: Who wouldn't listen?
>
> Zihna: My old teacher Ms. Brown... (laughter)
>
> DeAndre: Ms. Brown.
>
> Trevor: I dislike her.

In Focus Group 7, the students shared their disappointment that the new name for

the consolidated school district had been chosen and felt that the choice was made

without true consideration to the suggestions given by the students as Woodland Mills.

> Lisa: And they gave us, they gave everybody a choice to write a piece of paper and turn it into the office box. But I guess they didn't pick none of ours.
>
> Julia: I said West County Intermediate Learning Center.
>
> Lisa: Yea, the should've just kept it the…cuz they gonna have to change a whole bunch of stuff in the high school. Cuz our bleachers make the sign Woodland Mills, they make WM our bleachers. And on the floor it say it and in the high school a whole bunch of that stuff say it.
>
> Julia: Like y'all taking away from what we want to be.
>
> Lisa: Yea, they gonna have to a whole bunch of removing and stuff.
>
> M: Yea? How do you all feel about the changes?
>
> Delilah: I don't think it's a good idea because I think, cuz there's a lot of things that say our school name, so it would be hard to take it away. And before when they gave us a choice to turn in our names that we thought that would be a good name for the school, my brother said that they didn't pick any of the ideas because they thought they were like too funny to pick.

The students in Focus Group 7 expressed that they felt students should be given more voice in the decisions surrounding school consolidation, but that the principal, would not be receptive to student input.

M:	*So, what kind of solutions will help solve those problems, of the violence, and the mixing schools? What could fix it?*
Delilah:	*Well, for the mixing schools, I think that students who have more choice, like more of opinion than just the teachers. Because some of the teachers said that they wanted to but if students didn't to choose, they didn't even ask us.*
Lisa:	*I don't think Mrs. Johnson want us to...*
M:	*Say that again.*
Lisa:	*I don't think Mrs. Johnson want us to choose nothing. She just wants to do everything herself. She evil.*
M:	*Why do you say that?*
Lisa:	*Cuz she just yell at people for no reason, she get mad for no reason, she an angry woman.*

In Focus Group 8, the students described a similar experience, where the teachers decided to combine two classes together and co-teach during that class period. In this particular instance, one class was a regular class and the other had only 10-12 students, all with major disciplinary issues. The students described the negative impact this classroom structure change has had on their own educational experience and the wish that teachers would have asked their opinion before instituting such a drastic change:

Michelle:	*And it's kinda hard for us to learn when like half of the class is talking and...*
Kelsey:	*And you're trying to concentrate*
Michelle:	*And the other half is trying to concentrate.*
Kennedy:	*They should've had a vote on whether we should've opened that wall or not.*

Kelsey:	*Exactly.*
Kennedy:	*Cuz I personally don't think that that's…*
Kelsey:	*They just went ahead and did it without even asking us if we wanted to do it. They was like, oh umm, when we come back from break we're colliding the classes. We was like, no, why would you do that, that's stupid. And then they did it anyway.*

In addition to the concern the students have regarding their voice being silenced, some of girls in Focus Groups 7 and 8 at Woodland Mills experienced times where they put in personal effort to participate in a school beautification project initiated by a teacher, only to come back to school and find all of their work removed. Students in Focus Group 7 described:

M:	*Okay. Anybody else? What would you do, if they had some things for you to do? What kind of stuff would you like to do to have a positive impact on the community?*
Julia:	*Paint, like last year we got to paint the girls bathroom downstairs to make it look good but I don't know if they finished or not.*
M:	*Okay.*
Julia:	*Cuz afterschool we used to make, like spray it and make all curtains and stuff like that.*
Lisa:	*But they took it off, they took the paint off.*
Julia:	*They put rugs down to make our bathroom look real good.*
Lisa:	*Then, when we came back, it wasn't in there.*
Julia:	*Like, they spray painted white all over it. Like we took our precious time to make the boys bathroom was red and black.*
Lisa:	*Yea, they took the rugs off and everything.*

Finally, the students expressed that the adults in the school system do not listen to students. Trinity shared "cause when we make complaints and they not going to listen to

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us cause we, they think we're just kids and we just be saying that stuff." Similarly,

Delilah commented:

Delilah:	*I don't think any of the adults here take us seriously. Because if they did then they would listen to us and they don't do that.*
M:	*Why do you think they don't take you seriously?*
Delilah:	*Like because they think that we, we're not as capable of doing as many things as they can or we don't have the right education or something like that.*
M:	*Okay.*
Delilah:	*Cuz most of the teachers that are here they are like, "oh, you don't have a degree, so I know what I'm doing", stuff like that.*
Lisa:	*Yea, like if we make a mistake on something or say something then they be like, "I already passed the seventh grade" or something like that.*

Summary of the Findings

In this study, I examined how Black early adolescents in two communities describe local problems and attribute systems and individuals as culpable in the problems' existence. First, context is an important factor that impacts what and how these youth engage in their critical analysis of social issues. In The City, the students focus is broad, with the whole city as the context and crime and violence being among the most salient issues. Conversely, at Woodland Mills, the students are focused on their most proximal context, which is the school district. In The City, the students hear a lot about the entire city on the news and, their city has even made national headlines consistently within the past few years due to the economic downturn and political issues. In Woodland Mills the most accessible challenge has been consolidation of two local school systems. The delineation of students from The City describing community-level problems

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and students from Woodland Mills describing school-level challenges provides evidence that point of reference is important when considering what types of problems are most salient to students. In previous work, scholars have provided students a list of problems to discuss; it seems that specifying a broad parameter and allowing students to provide a description of what they consider to be their community might add to our understanding of the development of civic engagement and civic understanding (Flanagan, 2013). Scholars have written extensively about how oppressive circumstances in urban communities, such as many of those identified primarily by students in The City, can contribute to declines in civic engagement and programs that promote and support civic growth (Ginwright, 2010a). Less is known about how similarly oppressive circumstances in suburban communities might impact sociopolitical thinking and civic engagement among Black youth. By understanding the sociopolitical environment that youth are most familiar with, we can also begin to understand their expectations of civic engagement, nature of relevant issues they might consider, and the level of municipal understanding necessary to effectively navigate and participate politically.

Another important finding is the diverse and complex nature of critical analysis among early adolescents. Scholars have proposed that critical analysis is a fundamental component of the civic development process, particularly with regard to action towards social equality (Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011). Essentially, in order to act as responsible citizens towards positive social justice oriented changes in their community, Black youth must first have a *consciousness* of the structural oppressions that sustain the negative sociopolitical conditions. When asked to describe the identified community problems and solutions, these early adolescents gave examples that suggested a

burgeoning critical consciousness as well as less critical analyses that implicated individuals or groups of individuals in more simple ways. This held true for students who lived in The City and Woodland Mills, despite the varied methods of selecting participants in each setting. Similar to the way that students at Mwangaza discussed city-wide problems and solutions, the students at Woodland Mills implicated broader systems, individuals, and a more complex integration of both systems and individual attributions for problems and solutions in their school district. When students described individual attributions they did not contrast them "to" system attributions, but rather, "in addition to". System Justification Theory suggests that people seek to justify current social and cultural systems in order to make sense of the inequitable way our society functions (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). This work, however, does not regularly take into account how citizens who are historically and contemporarily disenfranchised by inequitable systems make sense of those systems. In this case, and contrary to theoretical assertions, students spoke about the contributions of individuals and groups of individuals with no evidence that this was in contrast to the contribution of systems to sociopolitical problems. The ways that students explained individual contributions also did not serve to justify systematic inequity.

Moreover, through their explanations of possible program and policy solutions for social challenges, these early adolescents show the range of complex thinking and imagination to describe how youth can contribute as members of a community to better the community. Many of the solutions reflected a complex integration of system and individual attribution, describing how system-based policies and programs might help address specific individual issues that contribute to broader community problems.

Particularly in Focus Group 1, the students engaged each other in elaborate discussions of the merits and disadvantages of suggested police and crime prevention strategies to decrease crime and violence in The City. These are skills that are regularly used in political and civic activities, including participation in city councils, voting, and debating political issues. This combination of cognitive and social-emotional maturity invites the possibility of including youth more regularly in the behind the scenes decision making that occurs around policy reform and program implementation. Indeed, research has found that youth as young as twelve years old can participate successfully in local policy making decisions (Checkoway, Allison, & Montoya, 2005). As we scaffold these developing skills, we prepare community and political leaders that are not only committed to community work and engaged citizenship, but equipped with the skills needed to impact change.

The students provide various levels of critical analysis to describe the nature of negative sociopolitical conditions in their schools and communities. Through the system and integrative explanations, students show the ability for early adolescents to begin the grasp basic concepts that reflect a *burgeoning* critical consciousness. While their analysis did not typically include the direct role of historical discrimination, or modern-day racism and classism, some students did integrate emergence of these types of thoughts into their analyses. It is also important to note that students were not probed to consider social identity or social inequality. The type of analysis that the youth offered is encouraging regarding the capacity of early adolescents to understand and begin to grapple with root mechanisms of action that help maintain the inequitable status quo in their local contexts. Almost every focus group implicated individuals, but these implications were not at the

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expense of system attributions. Similarly, each group implicated broader systems through either their explanation of the problem or recommendations for solutions. This indicates the potential for developing a balanced view among early adolescents where they can simultaneously consider how both systems and individuals within systems can be instrumental in maintaining the status quo.

Altogether, the students embrace the concept of social responsibility, in that someone should be concerned with the broader well-being of the community. Within this understanding, the students implicated different stakeholders as holding the burden of responsibility. Most groups felt that youth should be responsible for the civic well-being of the community. This finding mirrors the quantitative study, which found that most Black early adolescents endorse strong feelings of youth social responsibility and that positive endorsement of youth social responsibility was related to civic engagement and civic commitment. Other groups also felt that the community should be responsible for investing into their own communities, and especially should not wait for politicians to make positive investments on behalf of the community with the best interests of the community in mind. Finally, the students clearly felt that politicians *should* be responsible for improving social conditions, particularly because it is their job. Many of the youth felt that with their positions, elected officials "own" The City. These examples of underdeveloped civic knowledge provide examples of how civic identity and knowledge may be improved through civic education and hands-on experience. At Woodland Mills, the students were clear that the superintendent and principal are in charge of decisions by virtue of their job. The more proximal nature of the principal to the students, compared to the mayor or president, may help provide transparency to the

students with regard to how taking political office works. Taken together, the students are clear that someone is and should be responsible, though they express multiple and varied expectations regarding the distribution of that responsibility.

Finally, the students at both Mwangaza and Woodland Mills expressed political efficacy with regard to actions they could take to address local challenges. At Mwangaza, the ideas focused on individual behavior. The youth felt that even if they could not personally stop crime and violence in their city, they could limit there own role as a participant or victim by removing themselves from potentially harmful circumstances, particularly at the advice of parents and other responsible adults. At Woodland Mills, the students more readily suggest civic engagement actions that they could participate in to address issues in their school, such as writing letters to administration, petitioning, and protesting. In several instances students had already written letters and attended school board meetings. This difference may be associated with the level of analysis each school focused on and the proximity of the problems as well as availability of possible solutions. Mwangaza students typically discussed city-wide issues and may have less experience and knowledge regarding the best ways to make changes in The City. The City has also undergone many political changes with new administration and a City Manager. Conversely, at Woodland Mills, the students regularly interact with the principal. Given the small size of the school district they are also familiar with the superintendent. Moreover, at Woodland, the middle school is connected to the high school, so younger students have access to role models. Many students noted that the high school students had protested school policies in the past. It is possible that with more exposure to local city-wide politics, students at Mwangaza would also be prepared to consider civic

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engagement as a method for enacting sociopolitical change. While the students at Woodland Mills were more apt to propose civic engagement strategies, they also expressed multiple barriers to civic participation in their local school district, including lack of support from school administration. Even though Mwangaza students did not advance civic engagement strategies, they also did not report barriers to civic engagement. This further suggests that this sense of sociopolitical agency may be related to lack of civic experience.

Altogether this work highlights the vast and distinct ways that Black early adolescents engage in critical analysis in their local communities and schools. First, we see that Black early adolescents are able to articulate and describe salient local sociopolitical issues with a range of complexity. The youth consider the ways that both systems and individuals contribute to local problems discretely, as well as integrated processes that include both systems and individuals. These early adolescents also discussed social responsibility among youth, communities, and public officials, implicating each party as accountable for community well-being. Finally, the youth described their own agency and ability to participate as local citizens, as well as barriers to participation. This work contributes to a broader understanding of how early adolescents begin to engage in critical analysis and develop civic identity and civic participation.

Chapter 6

Discussion and Conclusion

In this dissertation, I conducted a multi-method investigation of sociopolitical factors in relation to civic engagement and civic commitment among Black early adolescents. In the quantitative study, findings indicate the importance of political efficacy and youth social responsibility, in promoting civic engagement and civic commitment. Both political efficacy and youth social responsibility were positively and strongly related to past activism and commitment to future activism. Contrary to theoretical assumptions, critical analysis as measured by beliefs in a just world, was not related to any form of civic engagement or civic commitment in this population. The qualitative study provided insight into critical social analysis, social responsibility, and agency among Black early adolescents. Findings revealed that early adolescents engage in three types of critical analysis: analysis of the influence of systems, influence of individuals, and a more complex analysis that integrates both individuals and systems. Moreover, along with youth social responsibility beliefs, these early adolescents felt strongly that the community and public officials should act to advance positive community change. Finally, findings show that agency of participants support civic engagement, while barriers, such as lack of adult support, undermine civic engagement efforts. Altogether, this research highlights the relevance of understanding civic development processes as young as early adolescence, with emphasis on factors that promote and hinder civic engagement.

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Strengths from an Integrative Approach

A growing body of research is considering civic development in childhood and early adolescence to gain a better understanding of how citizenship is cultivated and sustained across the lifetime (Eckstein, Noack, & Gniewosz, 2012; Flanagan, 2013; Mitra & Serriere, 2012). Equally, psychologists have increasingly invested in research that prioritizes social justice and how experiences of marginalization are related to citizenship for traditionally disenfranchised groups in America (e.g., Ginwright, 2010a; Watts, Diemer, & Voight, 2011). In this study, I bring these two lines of research together to explore burgeoning citizenship among Black early adolescents.

Given the preliminary nature of this research, it was important to consider multiple methods for data collection and analysis that would allow for a rich exploration of Black early adolescent civic engagement. The quantitative and qualitative research strengthens each other to provide a robust understanding of civic engagement processes. For instance, both studies suggest the need to investigate how critical analysis develops and relates to civic engagement throughout adolescence. In the quantitative study, the more abstract measure of critical analysis, beliefs in a just world, was not significantly related to any form of civic engagement. However, in the qualitative study, the students expressed clear and varied types of analysis of social issues. It would seem that these analyses would be related to civic commitment, if not past civic engagement. The major distinction is that beliefs in a just world capture abstract notions of equality and fairness and in the focus groups, students were describing concrete examples of local and relevant sociopolitical challenges. Moreover, youth social responsibility was an important predictor of activism in the quantitative work and consistently considered in the

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qualitative findings. The qualitative work extends the discussion of social responsibility, as the early adolescents also implicated the broader community and political figures as socially responsible. Additionally, agency was implicated as an important factor in both the quantitative and qualitative studies. Students reported high levels of political efficacy and in the focus groups, the students supported that finding through their examples of ways they could participate and have participated in civic and political action in their communities and schools. Finally, the qualitative work illuminated the importance of considering barriers to participation along side promotive factors. Students in both schools acknowledged that adults are often obstacles to civic engagement through silencing youth voice, ignoring youth opinions, and specifically undermining youth attempts at engaged citizenship.

Limitations

Along with the strengths of this research, there are several limitations to consider. First, this work is cross-sectional, thus we cannot infer causality. However, given the preliminary nature of studying civic engagement with a social-justice approach among early Black adolescents, it was important to empirically establish theoretical proposed relationships. With this important step, future work can investigate relationships among these variables longitudinally in order to determine casual pathways. Moreover, caution should be exercised when generalizing these findings beyond Black early adolescents in the economically declining Midwest. While this setting provided a fertile environment to explore civic engagement and critical analysis, more work should be done to expand the applicability of these findings to other populations based on geography, age, and race. The qualitative findings specifically show how context helps to mold critical analysis,

thus future work should consider the experiences of Black early adolescents other places, such as economically viable municipalities, or more economically and racially diverse locations. Finally, this research is also limited given the sample size. While there was adequate power to detect effect sizes, a larger sample size would allow for use of structural equation modeling techniques, which may provide an even more precise estimation of the proposed theoretical mechanisms of action.

Future Directions for Research

There are several directions for future research. First, this work speaks directly to the need to develop reliable measures of critical analysis that compliment the ways that early adolescents consider their sociopolitical environment. Current quantitative measures are generally abstract and capture an ideological stance, rather than a stage or type of critical analysis. From the focus group interviews, the youth showed that they think about and can analysis their sociopolitical environment in varied and developing ways. Newly developed measures should be flexible to capture the range of depth of analysis and also the more complex ways that youth might consider both individuals and system attributions as intertwined. Moreover, historical knowledge of social movements is implicated as a theoretically meaningful aspect of critical analysis and thus should be considered in future work.

Secondly, it is important for future research to consider schools as socializing agents in relation to civic development. In the quantitative study, there were not many distinctions between schools. However, in the qualitative study, youth had similar ways of engaging critical analysis, with some differences, particularly with regard to civic experience. Thus, research might consider the role of schools as a viable organizational

setting to provide opportunities for civic participation. Moreover, across schools it was

clear from the focus group interviews that early adolescents have gaps in civic

knowledge. As such, future research should investigate how schools impact engaged

citizenship among Black youth. Research should explore the quality, quantity, and

content of civic education to understand how schools teach citizenship to Black students,

who have a history of political marginalization in America. Equally, research should

investigate how Black students interpret the civic curriculum in relation to their

experiences within the broader school culture. Scholars posit that schools serve as "mini-

polies" that replicate the civic and political structures and practices of broader society

(Fine, Burns, Payne, & Torre, 2004; Flanagan, 2013). Thus it is important to understand

what Black students are learning about being citizens and being Black citizens through

the curriculum, classroom dynamics, and throughout the hallways. Research might also

distinguish school practices that not only teach civics to Black youth, but empower those

youth to become active and engaged citizens towards social change in their communities.

Finally, future research should also continue to use a broad conceptualization

civic engagement. During early adolescence and childhood, opportunities for civic and

political engagement may be limited, thus it is important to capture as many of the

possible ways that youth are engaging as citizens, to speak most accurately about youth

civic development. In this work, research showed that distinct mechanisms of action were

relevant depending on the type of civic engagement you consider. For instance, the ways

that youth social responsibility related to helping behavior was not the same as activism.

Moreover, research might consider civic engagement typologies among early

adolescents. Previous research studies have found that there are profiles of youth

participation where some youth are primarily helpers, others are primarily uninvolved, some youth participate in more political action, and some youth are more activist-oriented in their civic behavior (Pancer, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Alisat, 2007). Future work should investigate whether these profiles of civic engagement are detectable in early adolescence and whether and how these profiles might change over time. This work could help uncover what "types" of civic engagement profiles are likely to be associated with life-long civic engagement. This work can also help determine whether young people differentiate in their civic engagement over time or whether they continue in one type of civic engagement long-term. With a person-centered approach, research might also investigate what types of youth are likely to participate in more formal political engagement like voting when they are old enough, compared to youth who continue with community-based engagement or decide to disengage civically.

Implications for Broader Society

The most fundamental implication from this research is that Black early adolescents are civically engaged. Many researchers suggest that it is important to investigate civic development in early adolescents because one day they will be engages. However, from this work, it is clear that early adolescents are already beginning to engage in helping actions, community actions, political actions, and activism. A second and equally important implication is that youth want to be more civically engaged. Most Black early adolescents, as evidenced by this research, would consider being more engaged if given the opportunity and if they would be considered equally with adults. Thus, municipalities, schools, and local authorities might consider implementation of structured ways to include youth in local civic and political activities. Prior research has

shown when youth are systematically included in municipal public policy, there are benefits for youth and community: 1) youth knowledge and expertise contribute to policy decisions and community welfare, and 2) this structured participation prepares youth and excites youth for lifelong civic participation and leadership (Checkoway, Allison, & Montoya, 2005). Some local municipalities are beginning to consider these implications more seriously. For instance, in Takoma Park, Maryland, the city council voted to lower the voting age to 16 years old (Vela, 2013). While Takoma Park residents under 18 will not be able to vote in state and national elections, this decision illustrates the importance of young people as Takoma Park citizens and allows the youth to practice engaging their civic responsibilities. Other ways to include early adolescence would be a middle school seat on local school boards, working groups or committees that cater to youth members, and workshops to teach petitioning, letter writing, and legal protesting to early adolescents.

In conclusion, this dissertation contributes to our understanding of civic engagement among Black youth with a focus on the experiences of early adolescents. This research bridges gaps within mainstream psychological theories with social justice oriented approaches to understanding civic engagement. Altogether, this work highlights both the importance of strong political efficacy beliefs, and critical analysis that evaluates the necessity of system-based change to structural sociopolitical issues. Within the history of civics in the Black community, there is a narrative of both political marginalization and against-the-odds political and civic participation. In the context of this history, it is particularly important to understand how Black youth begin to develop a civic identity, think about their sociopolitical context, and act there within. Within the

structures of existing theoretical frameworks, this dissertation offers preliminary

empirical data to support the complex nuances of critical analysis and the importance of

political efficacy in relation to various dimensions of civic engagement and civic

commitment among Black early adolescents. As young as 10 years old, Black youth are

aware of the sociopolitical challenges that exist within their communities. They are able

to offer complicated analyses to address systemic and individually based roots of such

challenges. These youth also articulate their responsibility, as well as the responsibility of

the community and public officials to engage in practices that alleviate both the

symptoms and root causes of such community problems. Finally, these youth are both

agentic and realistic, acknowledging ways to be civically involved and structural barriers

to such involvement. This political efficacy is directly and indirectly related to high levels

of civic engagement. Altogether, this research highlights the importance of considering

civic engagement and civic commitment earlier. Black youth are engaged, they are

committed, they have ideas, and they want to impact positive change in their local

communities and schools. Researchers, educators, and policy makers should continue to

support these processes that contribute to lasting civic participation among the Black

community.

Appendices

Appendix A. Description of Each Data Collection Site

	Mwangaza Learning Center	Best Preparatory Academy	Woodland Mills Middle School
Type	Public Charter	Public Charter	Public
Location	Large City	Large City	Small City/Suburb
Opened[2]	1978 (private) 1995 (chartered)	1998	
Grades[1]	K-8	K-8	5-8
Enrollment[1]	437	487	412
Specialization [1][2]	Social Studies Immersion	Academic Excellence	Special Education, General Education, Gifted Program
% Black[1]	99%	99%	68%
% Free/Reduced Lunch[1]	64%	99%	70%
Participating Grades	6-8	6-8	5-8
Number of Participants	39	24	55

[1]Data retrieved from IES Common Core of Data 2010-2011 school year
[2]Information from the school's website, promotional materials, and informal conversations with administrators.

Appendix B. Parent Consent Form

MUNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

COMBINED PROGRAM IN EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGY

1406 SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
610 E. UNIVERSITY AVENUE
ANN ARBOR, MI 48109-1259
(734) 647-0626   FAX: (734) 615-2164

Parent Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Dear Parent:

My name is Dr. Robert Jagers. I work at the University of Michigan, School of Education. My research team and I invite you and your child to participate in a research study that is designed to understand and support family, school and community influences on the positive academic, social and emotional behaviors of boys and girls in grades 6-12. We plan to ask families at several schools with students in those grades to participate in our research. We are contacting you because you currently have a student in one of these grades.

As part of the research project, we would like to ask your student about his or her thoughts and feelings about relationships with other children and adults at school, at home and in the community. If you agree, your child will complete a 30-45 minute survey questionnaire. In the survey we ask students about their experiences. For example, we ask students about the best ways teachers can help them learn and how students respond when friends and classmates ask them for help. The survey will be administered during the school day. Also, if you agree, your child will be contacted for a follow-up group interview about their school and community.

We also would like to access your child's academic records as a part of this project. We would like to access standardized test scores, final report card grades and disciplinary records. With this information, we will be able to identify academic trends across schools and communities. This information will help us accurately understand positive growth and development of boys and girls in relation to school and communities.

While you and your child may not directly benefit from participating in project, we hope that this study will contribute to the improvement of the school experience for your child and other students in your school district. All participating students will be given a small token of appreciation at the end of the survey, regardless of whether they fully participated or not. Additionally, as a participant your child will be entered into a lottery for **a chance to win a $25 VISA gift card**. The winners will be notified at school once the drawings are complete.

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The results of this study will be used to understand how family, school and community can influence the positive growth and development of boys and girls in elementary, middle and high school. All responses will be kept confidential. Many people like to talk about how they think feel and act. But, it is possible that your child may experience discomfort after describing his or her thoughts, feelings and behaviors. The likelihood of this is risk is very low. If something does bother your child, we will make sure that the school counselor or other school and community resources are available to you and your child to address concerns.

We plan to share the results of this study with students, families and the school staff. The results may also be published. However, we assure you that we will only report on group trends, and never individual student responses. To keep your information safe, all documents related to this study will be placed in a locked file cabinet and researchers will enter study data on a computer that is password-protected. The researchers plan to keep this study data indefinitely for future research about student growth and development. Identifying information will be retained for future communications with you and your child.

If you have questions about this research, including questions about scheduling the survey, the follow-up group interview or about your compensation for participating, you can contact Robert Jagers, Ph.D., University of Michigan, School of Education, 610 E. University Avenue, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, (734) 647-0617, rjagers@umich.edu.

If you have questions about your child's rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the University of Michigan Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board, 540 E Liberty St., Ste 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2210, (734) 936-0933 [or toll free, (866) 936-0933], irbhsbs@umich.edu.

Sincerely,

Robert Jagers, Ph.D.
University of Michigan
School of Education
610 E. University Avenue
Ann Arbor. MI 48109

Parental Permission
*Please return by **[INSERT DATE HERE]***

By signing this document, you are agreeing to allow your child, -
_____, to be part of the study entitled, *Growth and Promotion of Civic Activism.* Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you allow your child to be part of the study, you may change your mind and withdraw your approval at any time. Your child may choose not to be part of the study, even if you agree, and may refuse to answer a question or stop participating at any time, without penalty or loss of benefits to which s/he is entitled.

You will be given a copy of this document for your records and one copy will be kept with the study records. Be sure that the questions you have asked about the study have been answered and that you understand what your child will be asked to do. You may contact the researcher if you think of a question later.

I give my permission for my child to participate in the study survey.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

I give my permission for my child to participate in the follow up group interview.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

I give my permission for my child's school records (report cards, test scores, comments about school behavior and discipline referrals) to be reviewed.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

_____
Phone

_____
Email

I DO NOT give my permission for my child to participate in the study survey.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

Appendix C. Survey Instructions and Verbal Student Assent

Oral Assent Script

Good morning/Afternoon! My name is (say own name) and I am a graduate student at the University of Michigan. I am here with (introduce any colleagues, research assistants) and we want to talk to you about a research study we are doing. A research study is a way to learn information about something. We would like to find out more about how kids like you think about school, their neighborhoods and their communities.

If you agree to join this study, you will be asked to complete this survey questionnaire. It should take about 45 minutes to finish.

Your parents have said that it is ok for me to ask you if you wanted to take this survey. You do not have to join this study. It is up to you. You can say okay now, and you can change your mind later. All you have to do is tell us, "I want to stop". No one will be mad at you if you change your mind and you won't get in trouble for stopping.

Before you say **yes** to joining this study, we will answer whatever questions you have.

Would you like to participate in this study?

Appendix D. Survey Questionnaire Measures

Modified Youth Involvement Inventory

*Please answer the following questions. First, answer how often you have done these activities in the **LAST YEAR**. Next, tell us whether you would do these activities **IN THE FUTURE**.*

In the Last Year: 1 = Never 2 = Once a year or less 3 = a few times a year 4 = monthly 5 = weekly

In the Future: 1 = No 2 = Maybe 3 = Yes

1. Visited or helped our people who were sick or elderly.
2. Took care of other families' children without pay
3. Participated in a religious group
4. Participated in an ethnic or cultural club or organization
5. Participated in a political party, club or organization
6. Participated in a social group or organization (like a chess club)
7. Got involved in a group of young people outside of school (like Scouts, rites of passage or YMCA groups)
8. Participated in a sports team or club
9. Participated in creative or performing arts (such as music, drama, or painting)
10. Ran for a position in student government
11. Served as an officer of a school club or organization (e.g. President, Treasurer)
12. Led or helped out with a children's group or club
13. Helped with a fund-raising project
14. Helped plan or organize neighborhood or community events (like a festival or fair)
15. Got information about community services from a local community center
16. Volunteered with a community service organization (like a soup kitchen)
17. Helped make a verbal or written presentation to organizations, agencies, conferences or politicians
18. Wrote a letter to a school or community newspaper
19. Did things to help improve your neighborhood (like a neighborhood clean-up)
20. Signed a petition
21. Collected signatures for a petition drive
22. Contacted a public official by phone or mail to tell him/her how you felt about a particular issue
23. Participated in a protest, march, meeting or demonstration
24. Participated in a boycott
25. Worked on or volunteered for a political campaign
26. Listened, watched, or read about politics and current events
27. Used a computer/internet for political activity or discussions (e.g. blogs)
28. Donated money to a political or social cause
29. Donated food or used items to a good cause
30. Participated in a discussion about a social or political issue

Global Beliefs in a Just World Scale (Lipkus, 1991)
1 = Strongly Disagree   2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

1. I feel that people get what they are entitled to have
2. I feel that a person's efforts are noticed and rewarded
3. I feel that people earn the rewards and punishments they get
4. I feel that people get who are met with misfortune have brought it on themselves
5. I feel that people get what they deserve
6. I feel that rewards and punishments are fairly given
7. I basically feel that the world is a fair place

Political Efficacy
1 = Strongly Disagree   2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

1. I have an obligation to "give back" to the community.
2. I can do something to make the world a better place to live.
3. Even if it is hard, I still believe I can change my community.
4. I believe that by participating in politics I can make a difference.
5. I have the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in politics.

Youth Social Responsibility Scale (Revised)
1 = Strongly Disagree   2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

1. People in their teens should know about how their country is governed, even if they are too young to vote.
2. It's important for young people to speak out when an injustice has occurred.
3. There is not much that young people can do to solve major social problems like racism.
4. We have a responsibility to future generations to keep the environment healthy.
5. Young people have an important role to play in making the world a better place.
6. It's important for people to know what's going on in the world.
7. More young people should become active in political parties and organizations.
8. People should help one another without expecting to get paid or rewarded.
9. By helping others, parents set an important example to their children.
10. Helping others gives a person a tremendous feeling of accomplishment.

Demographics

What is your age? ___   What is your Birth Date? Month ___ Day___ Year___

What is your gender? Male ____   Female ___

What are the first three letters of your MIDDLE NAME? _____

What school do you go to? _____

What grade are you in?   __6th __7th __8th __ 9th __10th __11th __12th

What were your grades like last year? (Please check one)
        _____A (93-100)   ____A- (90-92)   ____B+ (87-89)   ____B (83-86)   _____B- (80-82)   ____C+(77-79)   ____C (73-76)   ____C- (70-72)   _____D (69 or below)

What is your race or ethnicity? (please check one)
        ____African American/Black
        ___Asian
        ___Biracial/Multiracial (please specify) _____

        ___Hispanic/Latino
        ___Native American/American Indian
        ___White/Caucasian
        ____Other (please specify) _____

Do you receive free or reduced price lunch?

____NO   ____YES   ___Don't Know

How many times were you sent to the principal or assistant principal for discipline this year?

_____ None   ____1 - 2   ____3 - 5   ____ 6 or more

Which of the following best describes the racial make up of the people in your neighborhood?
        ___ Almost all Black people
        ___ More Black than people of other races
        ___ Same number of Black and people of other races
        ___ More people of other races than Black people
        ___ Almost all people of other races

Appendix E. Focus Group Interview Protocol

Introductions & Ground Rules

Hi. Thank you for agreeing to talk with me (us) today. I (We) want to learn about what life is like here in (city name) through your point of view.

Before we get started, I would like for everyone to share a little bit about themselves to the group, so we can all know who everyone is in the room today. Can you please tell us your name, your grade, and how long you have lived in (city name)?

Before we start asking questions, we are going to set ground rules. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. We don't expect that everyone will agree all of the time. So when you have a different point of view, you can feel free to share how what you think is different than what someone else has said. Also, everyone will get a chance to speak, so be respectful and do not talk while others are talking.

To give everyone time to think, I will ask you to write down a few words or phrases throughout or time today. Then we will share our thoughts and talk about them more.

I am recording our discussion today because I do not want to miss anything that anyone says. But we will keep EVERYTHING confidential. That means that no one outside of this room will know what any one has said. In order for this to happen, I need everyone to agree that anything said in this room will stay in this room. Do we all agree? (Assent). In the future, we might discuss broad themes, but we will never say WHO said WHAT.

We are having a conversation today, so if you would like to agree or disagree with what anyone has said or if you would like to ask for more information – please feel free to do that. My job here is to help facilitate the conversation. Everyone has something important to teach us today, so we want to hear from everyone. That means, if you are talking a lot, I might ask you to give another person a chance to speak. Also, if you are not saying much, I may ask you for your thoughts. We want to make sure that everyone has a chance to share his or her ideas and experiences.

Section 1 – Views about the World

There are many different problems and challenges that exist in our world today. Some problems are very prevalent in (community name). Everyone think about problems that exist in (community name) and I will write them on the board.

1. Now I want you all to decide what the top 2 problems are here in (community name). You can only vote twice.

   NOTE: Ask students to vote on each option to determine the top problems. Revisit ground rules - Remember, everyone will get a chance to speak, so do not speak while someone else is speaking.

2. Can someone describe for me this first problem?

   PROBE: Why do you think this problem exists?

3. Ok, now I want you to use your imaginations. What would your community be like if this problem didn't exist?

4. How can you fix this problem? Are there more ways this problem could be solved? Can you give me an example?

5. Whose responsibility is it to fix this problem? Why?

   PROBE: How do you know if it [that person/entity]

6. Do you think young people can help address problems like these? Why or why not?

   PROBE: Is it important for young people to help address problems like these? Is there a difference between what young people can do and what adults can do? Please explain.

   *PROBE: D*id you learn that young people can help address problems like these from somewhere? Where?

7. Can you give me an example of what you can do now, as a teenager, to help address this problem?

   NOTE: May repeat questions for additional issues listed on the board.

Section 2 – Being Active in Your Community
Now we are going to transition and talk about you and things you do here in
(community).

8. How many of you have ever participated in anything that has had positive impacts
    on a community?

9. Can you describe the positive community activities that you have done?

    PROBE: What/who has motivated you to do this? Where did you do this?
    Can you describe how you felt after this experience? What did you learn from this
    experience?

10. Are there any positive community activities that you wanted to do, but you were
    not able to? Please describe that activity.

    PROBE: Are there any reasons that you couldn't do that activity?

11. Are there specific problems that you have wanted to change or work on in your
    community? Can you describe what you wanted to do?

12. Often times we see things happen that aren't right. Have you ever stood up for
    anything you thought was wrong?

    PROBE: In your school or community/neighborhood? If so, what was it? If not,
    what were some reasons you didn't?

    What/who motivated you to stand up for [insert thing/cause]?
    How did you know that this was something you wanted to stand up for?

13. How do the adults (e.g. teacher, parent, mentor) in your lives feel about young
    people like yourselves speaking out against things that you think are wrong?

    PROBE: Do you think they would actually listen to you? Can you give me an
    example of an adult that would actually listen to young people?

14. What is the most valuable lesson you have learned here at (school name)?

    PROBE: What is the most valuable lesson you have learned at (school name)
    about being a member of a community?

15. Is there anything else you want to tell me about the topics we've discussed or
    about your experiences here at (school name)?

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