

## Silence is Not an Option: Oral History of Race in Youth Development Through the Words of Esteemed Black Scholars

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### Abstract

*The study of race has been silenced in many areas of science including youth development research. We present this commentary in response to an invitation to address the impact of racism on the field of youth development for the Journal of Youth Development. Through oral history narratives, the paper synthesizes an antiracist agenda from the perspectives of 6 Black scholars: Tabbye Chavous, Michael Cunningham, Davido Dupree, Leoandra Onnie Rogers, Stephanie Rowley, and Robert Sellers. The narratives depict each scholar's perspective on race research that informs youth-serving programs and the study of race in research of children and adolescents, particularly Black children. We selected scholars based on their commitment to supporting research that helps children of color thrive, and who have in-depth knowledge about racist ideologies and practices that have persisted since the inception of the science of youth development. Each scholar offered thoughtful critiques regarding racially biased measures and methodologies, the problematic use of deficit-oriented language, and the challenges that scholars of color encounter with advancing in the field. While the scholars expressed a consensus that the field has struggled to name racism in research and practice, they share hope in the complexity of future race research and practice that centers culture and context in youth development studies and programs.*

Key words: racism, oral history, Black youth, deficit framing, youth development

*Research and theory on black children's identity formation is problem ridden (Spencer, 1982a). The literature lacks coherence, is not developmental, and focuses more so on pathological, than normal developmental processes. Perusal of 40 years of research on this topic suggests a dire need for synthesis. Synthesis is both imperative and basic to the generalization process (Wolf,*



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Oral History of Race in Youth Development

*1980). Without generalization, or the process of obtaining clear statements about principles underlying a phenomenon, science stagnates, leaving us unable to comprehend natural phenomena. (Margaret Beale Spencer, 1985, p. 216)*

The call to action for research in youth development to address race and racism is now more pressing than ever. The horrific events of 2020 including the police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery among a plethora of other unpublicized killings of unarmed Black people, the protests that called for racial justice and the fight for Black lives in the United States and abroad, and the unequal health and educational disparities that were exacerbated between Black and Latino citizens and White Americans as a result of the spread of COVID-19 make this an unprecedented time period to highlight systemic issues that have been silenced in the history of youth development research. From its inception, the field of youth development research has lacked diversity in its representation of scholars of African descent and has advanced scholarship that has undoubtedly remained silent about racism and the impact that systemic inequalities have on the nation's young people (Outley & Blyth, 2020). As referenced by Margaret Beale Spencer's quote, science on Black children was founded on the basis of pathological orientations and has limited the full scope of which human phenomena have been understood.

The study of race in youth development research is embarking on a burgeoning turn which calls for scholars to address racism in research design, conceptual framing, and the advancement of Black scholars (Adams-Wiggins & Taylor-García, 2020; Gabriel et al., 2020). We have written this commentary in response to an invitation to review the history of racism in the field of youth development with particular attention to shifts in conceptualizations of Black youth in research and practice over time. As a way of documenting these changes, we have interviewed six leading Black scholars who have not only researched systemic inequities that oppress Black youth but have also witnessed the impacts of racism in their own professional journeys: Tabbye Chavous, Michael Cunningham, Davido Dupree, Leoandra Onnie Rogers, Stephanie Rowley, and Robert Sellers. The interviews chart each scholar's intellectual and interpersonal path to the study of race in research on youth development, critically review key concepts, and discuss the limitations of measurement issues that focus on the outcomes of research on Black youth, rather than effective evaluations of context and biological and psychosocial processes. In doing so, the interviews conceptualize Cunningham's adoption of the "hourglass phenomena," Rowley's account of generational contributions of Black scholars, Rogers' advocacy for the inclusion of race as a normative component of human development, Dupree's dedication to accurately depict the data of participants, Sellers' charge for researchers to develop new measures and models, and Chavous' contributions to indicators of positive adaptations to

## Oral History of Race in Youth Development

racism. The interviews address the challenges presented to Black scholars to represent their racial group in the field and to open doors to those who come behind them, which highlight the distinct contribution of an oral history methodology. In closing, the interviewees express a consensus that while the history of youth development research has virtually been dismissive of racism, they envision a future that celebrates race research and thoughtfully considers the context and multidimensional lived realities of Black youth.

Our foremost aim for this commentary is to provide insights into how race has been studied in youth development research through the words of esteemed Black scholars. Our goal is to shift the way in which the experiences of Black youth are conceptualized in the field to support antiracist scholarship and practice. In response to Outley and Blyth's (2020) call to action, we have been charged to develop a manuscript that reviews the presence of systemic racism in research and practice since the inception of youth development research. It is important to critically examine historical and current trajectories of youth development research as it informs how youth-serving programs are developed. Additionally, we aim to illustrate how the field is making a shift towards social justice and to provide implications for strengths-based work with youth of color. We have grounded the paper within commentary and oral history methodologies that focus on the development and scholarly contributions to a field of study (Bowers & Geldhof, 2020; Goldberg & Shaw, 2010; Plamper, 2010; Quinn et al., 2020). Our commentary acknowledges the existence of antiblack racism, defined as beliefs and practices that situate African descent people as inferior (Gordon, 1995). We welcome the reader on a journey of introspection and reflection for the field and ask for your participation in dismantling antiblack tendencies to dehumanize Black youth in research and silence the academic experiences of Black scholars. Finally, we invite youth-serving organizations and intermediaries to use these narratives to enhance culturally relevant and strengths-based approaches to support the experiences of racially minoritized children and adolescents in youth development programming and outcomes-based evaluation.

## Method

### *Oral History*

Norman Denzin (2008) claims, we live in stories and that "we need to tell the past and its stories in ways that allow us to disrupt conventional narratives and conventional history" (p.119). Considering Denzin's claim of the past making its way into our narrated selves to be true, this project weaves a complex narrative of a past, present, and imagined future through oral history. Oral history is defined as "a collection of memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews" (Ritchie, 2015, p.1). During the interviews

## Oral History of Race in Youth Development

the exchange of language is set in situational and interactional contexts and produces narratives similar to storytelling for an imagined audience. Oral history, as a narrative form of communication, serves a multitude of purposes, but “must always be considered in context, for [it] occurs at a historical moment with its circulating discourses and power relations” (Riessman, 2008, p.8). Narratives detail the heterogeneity and the similarities within culture (Johnson, 2009). Using this powerful form of narratives, individuals are able to make sense of, and construct their identities through stories they tell. This, in turn, allows individuals to construct stories that go beyond the “cult of the self” toward the formation of community through mutual understanding of time and space being held in society (Riessman, 2008, p.7).

The current sociopolitical context as presented in the introduction of this paper lays the groundwork for understanding and contextualizing narratives by highlighting the lived experiences of six Black scholars researching Black children and youth, particularly in the field of youth development. Eliciting narratives from these Black scholars allowed for the collecting, analyzing, disaggregating, and deriving of meaning of past, present, and future outlooks. The conversations that took place and the collected stories reflect their experiences while simultaneously allowing the scholars themselves to assist in the production of knowledge via discourse and meaning making (Collins, 2009) of the activity of “researching while Black” (Foucault, 1977; 1991).

### ***Participants***

This oral history method required a purposive sample that could highlight relevant firsthand research experiences of scholars in U.S. academic institutions, who identified as Black and/or African American. We identified potential interviewees from our knowledge of key contributors to the early development of the field, as well as researchers from subsequent decades. These contributors included those who were heavily involved in national organizations, served as editors of journals, made significant contributions to literature in the field, and were viewed as select members of the familial and professional network. Last, it is important to acknowledge that we developed this commentary in consultation with one of the lead developmental psychologists on race, Margaret Beale Spencer, who has contributed to research on race in developmental psychology since obtaining her doctorate from the University of Chicago in 1976.

### ***Procedure and Analysis***

We developed a standard set of questions and prompts to be used as a guiding instrument to synthesize the individual and combined narratives pertaining to the Black scholars’ experiences. The guiding instrument included questions on recollections about the beginning of their

### Oral History of Race in Youth Development

experiences in the field and their academic backgrounds, their understanding of the development of the field, issues concerning conducting research on Black children and youth, their experiences as Black scholars, and how to continue development on Black children and youth research into the future. Each of these areas served as a starting point, however the Black scholars were given wide latitude to introduce areas outside of the prescribed questions that we viewed as important. We conducted interviews one-on-one with the exception of Robert Sellers and Tabbye Chavous, who were interviewed together. We held virtual interviews that ranged from approximately 45 to 90 minutes in length.

The authors listened to, watched, and read each of the narratives and conducted open and axial coding to identify recurrent concepts, topics, and experiences to develop a tentative understanding of emergent themes (Charmaz, 2006). The open coding consisted of two parts: skimming the transcribed data for an overall view in order to document general impressions of the data and establishing primary core categories to assist in the next level of analysis. During the axial coding phase, the authors reduced and organized the data by focusing on the properties of each category by classifying and identifying subcategories in order to draw connections between the narratives. The analysis approach also allowed the authors to focus on the development of emic categories that were derived from the viewpoint and perceptions of the participants (i.e., importance of representation) and etic categories that were derived from the literature (i.e., Padilla's [1994] cultural taxation; Yin, 2010). After the initial formation of categories, the authors discussed the meaning of various aspects, quotes, and patterns of the narratives in a back-and-forth process to develop the final themes. To ensure reliability, the authors engaged in a member checking process by sending each interviewer the overall thematic findings for review. Once the interviewers returned comments, the authors developed the final manuscript. The authors obtained IRB approval from Boston University, the first author's institutional affiliation at the time the manuscript was written.

### ***Positionality***

Examining the field of youth development from Black scholars' perspectives reflects the complexity and polyvocality (multiple voices) of narratives expressed through oral history, a time-honored tradition in African American culture used for cultural and identity development. Furthermore, Patricia Hill Collins (2009) supports the claim of dialogue in the African American community as having deep roots. Cultural folklore and cultural histories are passed down and teach responsibility of the individual to the collective whole of the group. In line with this cultural tradition, we acknowledge that the views and interpretation of the phenomena are impacted by our cultural, social, and economic positions in society and must be considered as

### Oral History of Race in Youth Development

part of this research process. Underpinning this project is an understanding that race and gender are social constructions that have salient meanings. Through our experiences, we acknowledge that we work in a society that functions in a White racial hierarchy system, where race is valued and de-valued causing subsequent impact on emotional and mental well-being. Thus, it is critical that the positionality of the authors and the participants are reflected upon in this study.

#### *Researchers*

Similar to the oral histories passed down throughout African American culture, the authors of this paper occupy the same space both emotionally and physically as the participants. As Black scholars, we share some of the same generational pivots and turns. Their academic journey is in many ways our academic journey and the collective memory that has been a part of their community represents our community as well. This oral history project provides an opportunity for the authors to counter the master narratives surrounding Black scholars and research on Black youth and their programmatic needs, which we do with racial pride. We recognize our own positionality as Black scholars, who believe in the power of stories and bring our lived experiences to this project. Both authors acknowledge their stance, as Black women, toward protecting Black children and youth, as well as the community in which they reside, as an overriding approach in their research pursuits—a nod to the notion of “ethic of care.” This notion represents the fact that as Black scholars, we have had to create alternative spaces to study Black communities in order to fully capture their lived experiences while simultaneously supporting and protecting their psychological, physical, and spiritual well-being. We acknowledge that we are using our positions of power, as highly educated Black women with terminal degrees working in predominantly White institutions of higher education, in order to disrupt dominant notions of what is accepted as “normal” and “valid” in youth development practices by which Black youth are compared, measured, and evaluated based on deficit discourses (see Outley & Blyth, 2020). Next, we acknowledge the power that exists in providing communities with recommendations for programmatic changes that benefit these young people as opposed to harming them. Issues of race and racism need to be situationalized within each community. We recognize the impact that ignoring these sociopolitical contexts has had on evidence-based programs and intervention outcomes for Black youth. Finally, the authors acknowledge their own intersectional identities and the gendered experiences and perspectives that have been historically silenced (hooks, 1994).

## ***Participants***

For this study, the authors derived knowledge directly from the experiences of the participants as Black scholars. The participants understood their experiences were unique to them as individuals; however, they acknowledged that their experiences and sentiments may be echoed by other Black scholars in the field. The positionality of these researchers is critical due to the meaning making that results from our various identities and it is their experience and interpretation of the meaningfulness that serves as the core to the development of knowledge in this research area. Even though each individual had a varied background, there were numerous threads and recurring themes that connected the experiences. The cultural background and value system of an individual shapes his or her realities (Bourke, 2014). Thus, the following vignettes provide information on the professional journeys of the Black scholars in order to share their lens, which is critical to comprehending the context of their reported experiences.



**Dr. Tabbye Chavous** is a Professor and Associate Dean for Academic Programs and Initiatives at the Rackham Graduate School at the University of Michigan. Her research focuses on racial and gender identity development among African American adolescents and young adults, transitions to secondary schooling and higher education among ethnic minority students, and racial and multicultural climates within secondary and higher education settings. She is a principal investigator and co-director of the university's Center for the Study of Black Youth in Context and serves as the Director of the National Center for Institutional Diversity at the University of Michigan. She has a Ph.D. in Community Psychology from the University of Virginia.



**Dr. Michael Cunningham** is a Professor at Tulane University where he has a joint faculty appointment in the Department of Psychology and the undergraduate program in Africana Studies. He also serves as an Associate Provost for Graduate Studies and Research in Tulane University's Office of Academic Affairs. He is a developmental psychologist that researches racial, ethnic, psychosocial, and socioeconomic processes that affect psychological well-being, adjustment to chronic stressful events, and academic achievement among African American youth and their families. He is a first-generation college student, graduate of Morehouse College, and has a Ph.D. from Emory University in Educational Studies.

### Oral History of Race in Youth Development



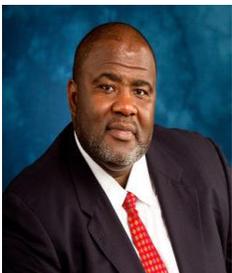
**Dr. Davido Dupree** is an Assistant Professor at the Community College of Philadelphia. His research interests include addressing the effects of exposure to violence and racial identity status on the cognitive functioning of African American adolescents, and evaluation research focused on interventions designed to address such social issues as community violence and disproportionate minority contact with the juvenile justice system. He received his Ph.D. in Cognition and Development from Emory University and has a B.A. from Hampton University.



**Dr. Leoandra Onnie Rogers** is an Assistant Professor of Psychology and a Fellow at the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University. She is a developmental psychologist whose research focuses on racial and gender identity development among racially diverse youth in urban contexts, the role of cultural stereotypes in shaping the development and intersectionality of identities and the extent to which youth resist or challenge racial and gender stereotypes for social emotional well-being. Dr. Rogers earned her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from New York University, and a B.A. in Psychology and Educational Studies from UCLA. She is a first-generation college student.



**Dr. Stephanie Rowley** is Professor and Provost, Dean, and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Teachers College. Her research focuses on the influence of race- and gender-related attitudes and beliefs on the development of children's academic self-concept with a strong emphasis on parents' roles in the development of these attitudes. Her research challenges the model in which African American children are viewed from the perspective of deficiencies by documenting the cultural and familial sources of strength and resilience these children bring to face challenges. Dr. Rowley earned her B.A. from the University of Michigan, and her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from the University of Virginia.



**Dr. Robert Sellers** is the Vice Provost for Equity and Inclusion, Chief Diversity Officer, and the Charles D. Moody Collegiate Professor of Psychology and Education at the University of Michigan. His primary research activities have focused on the role of race in the psychological lives of African Americans and how African Americans suffer from and often cope with experiences of racial discrimination. He also developed a conceptual and empirical model of African American racial identity to understand the heterogeneity in the significance and meaning that African Americans place on race in defining themselves. Dr. Sellers earned a Ph.D. in Personality Psychology from the University of Michigan in 1990 and a B.A. from Howard University.

## Interviews

The authors organized findings from the current oral history project into four overarching themes: (a) Our Contributions, Our Enduring Impact, (b) Issues and Progress, (c) Faculty of Color Challenges: The Cultural Labor Taxation, and (d) Future of Race Research in Youth Development. We present and discuss each of the major themes with selected quotes from the Black scholar interviews.

### ***THEME 1: Our Contributions, Our Enduring Impact***

Black scholars in the field of youth development have come from varying socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds and have intentionally imposed varying racial theories and frameworks to expand the ideology on the role of race in human development. Research during the 1980s and 1990s was often pragmatic and focused on addressing issues of race from a deficit perspective.

#### *Works of Black Scholars From the 1980s*

Rowley and Sellers recall the major work that was underway by leading scholars such as Vonnie C. McLoyd and Margaret Beale Spencer during this time period to counter the lack of focus on Black children and youth in the field:

*One of my earliest memories was when I was an undergraduate student back in the 80s, if you can imagine that and my mentor was Dr. Vonnie McLoyd. I was a freshman, and she was working on a paper that looked at how Black children were treated in developmental literature . . . She found that oftentimes Black kids and youth were compared to White youth without regard to socioeconomic status and circumstance. There was very little normative work on Black youth. Most of the focus was on pathology or just negative comparisons to Whites. And often, there was a [focus on] deficit [framing]. (Stephanie Rowley)*

*A number of folks really actively fought for [race to be studied]—Margaret [Beale Spencer] being a part of that [group]—the cohort that preceded me and even the cohort that preceded that group, fought both politically and scholarly to have African American children be seen not only as being appropriate to study in their own right, but also not as a comparison, not as an addendum to what normal development or as an example of what happens when normal development goes wrong or normal development happens in challenging spaces. To basically say African American children are human, and if you want to understand human*

### Oral History of Race in Youth Development

*development, then you can't understand human development without also understanding Black children's experiences. (Robert Sellers)*

Despite the works of these scholars being invisible in mainstream human development and developmental psychology fields, particularly in the emerging youth development area, seasoned scholars imparted on their students that the work from the 80s and 90s on race had to continue to make a difference. This challenge was not lost on the new generation of Black scholars.

*When I was in grad school and early on in my academic career as an assistant professor, it was at a point of transition where a lot of the legends in the field were starting to talk about retirement. And they said, people got to step up and do stuff and I was just like, you know, using that old Malcolm X, quote, "If not you, who? If not now, when?" So, I stepped up and did my part. And I'd never felt like I was doing something for accolades or to be known. It was like okay, this is stuff that we have to do, because it's important work. (Michael Cunningham)*

#### *Third Generation of Scholars of Color*

The youth development field had grown by the end of the 1990s and included many well-known theoretical and conceptual frameworks (e.g., Five Cs of positive youth development [PYD], Lerner & Lerner, 2011; 40 Developmental Assets, Scales & Leffert, 1999). During this time period, research focused on PYD as a theoretical construct and its implications for research and program design, and often represented a clear focus on the role of youth development programs in contributing to young people's overall physical, psychological, and social-emotional well-being. It was during this era that Black scholars were conducting a parallel line of work across the country that focused on emerging theories, models, methods, and tools to address issues of race in the field. This slow expansion was cultivated by a network that recruited and retained Black scholars by focusing on training graduate students in research, collaborating across universities, and building inclusionary structures within professional associations across the nation. The roles of the *Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD)*, *Society for Research on Adolescents (SRA)*, and *American Educational Research Association (AERA)* were key to this period of development. Rowley recalls that:

*Vonnie [McLoyd] was part of a cohort of Black scholars in developmental psych, in particular, who were the first generation, the first large cohort of Black scholars. In the Society for Research in Child Development, in particular, but also in the American Educational Research Association and a variety of other*

### Oral History of Race in Youth Development

*institutions, you saw this new set of scholars in the 80s who were coming together and saying similar things. One of the things that happened is those individual scholars tended to be, except for the people at Michigan, they tended to be a unicorn; the one person [at their institution] who's really doing this work. Those scholars very purposefully grew infrastructure. They grew organizations. They built mentoring programs. So, things like SRCD's The Millennium Scholars. At some point the Society for Research on Adolescence came along and also those scholars really poured into that organization. What you see now is that we're into what I would think of as the third generation of scholars of color who have really good grounding in research methods, who have access to the resources to do things like rich longitudinal work. I see that first group of folks who were really trained in the 70s and early 80s as then leading to a second generation and then a third generation. I see myself in that second generation. We've built organizations on a national level, there's the National Black Graduate Student Association. When I was a student at the University of Virginia, my mentor, Rob Sellers, developed the Black Graduate Conference in Psychology. At Michigan we instituted the Center for the Study of Black Youth and Context.*  
(Stephanie Rowley)

#### *Importance of Representation: Having a Seat at the Table*

With the development and inclusion of Black Scholars within top professional associations, many outsiders believed that Black scholars were finally at the table. However, as our scholars note here, they were still considered "outsiders" in many of the political realms where power is held within a profession. Collins (1986, 1999) refers to this as the outsider-within perspective. Cunningham and Sellers recall the sociopolitical structures that served as barriers to full inclusion in mainstream White academic circles and the political action needed to ensure equitable representation as a Black scholar and for the work accomplished:

*One of the things that I realized about places like Tulane and other predominantly White institutions is that the Black students and other minority students are just as sharp as the White students, but don't graduate and go on to have all these prestigious awards. Part of that is about promoting them while they're there. And students getting groomed when they first get into universities to prepare to be a Rhodes Scholar, Marshall Scholar, and so on. I realized these minority students aren't getting the same opportunities. Once you get in those circles, you try to make sure that people just have a seat at the table and something to show for themselves. I think that's what I've also done in my work*

### Oral History of Race in Youth Development

*in terms of journal editing or being a reviewer. You just want to make sure people have a fair chance and you get fair reviews to get the word out, because that's important.* (Michael Cunningham)

*I think it's really important for people to hear [the study of race] is not a phenomenon that just happened. It's not that "mainstream developmental psychology" all of a sudden just got it. There has been a lot of action, political action, whether it's through the SRCDC Black Caucus and other folks banding together to make sure they're on editorial committees and serving as reviewers to make sure that work is published. So, I see developmental [psychology] in many ways as really a leading edge and pushing to make sure that the experiences of Black children are valued in psychology; and valued in a way that makes contributions to our understanding of human psychology.* (Robert Sellers).

The championing of representation within the field enabled an expansion of Black scholar training, and a desire for formal and informal networks emerged. This, in turn, created opportunities for professional leadership throughout the field, though limited in various spaces (i.e., leadership positions, editorial boards, and federal funding review boards). This model allowed Black scholars to build momentum in the use of critical analysis of developmental approaches through the centering of race scholarship.

#### *Centering Culture and Context in Race Research*

For the majority of the early inception of youth development as a field, the focus on race had taken a back seat (Spencer, 2008; Williams & Deutsch, 2016). Despite the expansion of various theories, models, and frameworks, it was clear the role of race was not being adequately explored. As a result, Black scholars began to question the lack of critical analysis on the importance of Black culture within the field. Cunningham supported this criticism in his interview statement, "The race of my participants does not define them, but it is an important part of who they are." Race scholarship as a central focus of youth development continued to spread and is championed by leading Black scholars. These scholars began to provide a robust body of theory that not only assisted in their work but served as an essential framework in understanding youth developmental behaviors in context. It was clear that Black scholars believed many of the current theories were not adequate. Rogers provided a more illuminating understanding of how the contextual environment is not universal and how the need for a more nuanced understanding of the role of race became critical.

### Oral History of Race in Youth Development

*Some constructs are not different. We all have intelligence and language and the ability to form relationships. These are universal capacities and needs and developmental milestones. But as Dr. Spencer talks about in her work, you have to situate these capacities in the context and take into stock that these capacities don't just emerge normatively under all settings and situations. Most of the frameworks in research design presume a universal setting for these capacities, when they develop, and the timing. All of that is predicated on a normative or "White" set of experiences. So then when other groups don't share those experiences, they're deemed deviant as opposed to recognizing that the constructs themselves were built with a set of experiences already in place.*  
(Leoandra Onnie Rogers)

Dominated by White mainstream developmental psychologist approaches, the majority of research in the youth development field focused on longitudinal, quantitative, and individual determinants of White youth with limited diverse samples. Many Black scholars have continued to question this approach and its dominance in the field. Dupree extends this thought further by acknowledging the universality of various theoretical approaches but posits that many are inadequate due to the lack of focus on *how* and *why* racial differences occur:

*I think that [race] has been addressed in evaluations of positive youth development initiatives, you'll see it addressed in terms of looking at racial group differences on one hand. I see mention of the need to consider culture. I see mention of a need to take an ecosystems approach. For me that translates to looking at the broader influences but also looking at the characteristics of the individual and how they may elicit responses from the environment. So, in broad strokes, I can see that. I can't say I've ever thought of positive youth development as being in any way, shape, or form associated with race in any meaningful way. I don't think it's complex enough in application to effectively address race. What I mean by that is I've looked at some reviews on effective programs and what they were able to accomplish, and I've noticed there's often enough diversity to do cross-group analyses, but the use of the social address model doesn't tell you anything about process. It doesn't tell you the why of it all.* (Davido Dupree)

### *Race is a Key Component of Human Development*

With the founding of new journals, professional association sections, research labs and specific academic program focus areas, Black scholars continued to build the literature on the role of

### Oral History of Race in Youth Development

race as a key component of development. As the field became more informed of the importance of race, Black scholars discussed race and culture as part of a more robust critique of the field. Cunningham and Rogers provide an overview of race in research endeavors:

*When I talk about human development, I'm also talking about the biological, socio- emotional, cognitive aspects, but also the cultural aspects too. We can't separate that from someone. With young kids, for example, we have to think about issues of race as being salient to their educational context. I use the hourglass phenomena. I start with the broad idea in terms of the topic and then I narrow it down to the specifics of the sample, and then develop the measures and design. Then I try to bring it back out to the broader picture. So, you can take that sample and that particular study, and you can replicate that with another population. Those are the kinds of things to think about from a human development perspective and how race, culture, and context interact as a core part of who you are, not a separate part of who you are. For example, when I walk down the street, I don't want people to say, "Oh, here comes the Black guy", but at the same time, I don't want you to ignore that I'm a Black person. It doesn't define me but it's an important part of who I am. (Michael Cunningham)*

These sociocultural approaches became prominent in youth development research by Black scholars. Rogers commented that:

*If you're studying human development, in this context, and this time in the world, you have to understand race. Humans, youth, kids, adults, teachers, whatever it is, we all develop within context. We are intimately connected and shaped by and also are actively shaping the environments that we live in. If I'm going to understand how kids learn to read, how they learn to write, how they learn to play on the playground, how they learn basketball; whatever I'm going to study around youth development, race is a part of that. (Leoandra Onnie Rogers)*

### *Reviewers Look for Black–White Comparative Work*

The role of race in youth development began to surge after 2000 in response to critiques of the “at-risk” youth era. Increases in various methods, theoretical approaches, and viewpoints emerged (i.e., CARES, see Bentley-Edwards & Stevenson, 2016; TERS, see Stevenson et al., 2002) and focused on the role of race and ethnicity. Despite literature that illustrated the need to focus on race as part of developmental processes, research discourse on race never dominated the literature. This lack of dominance was evident as the focus on deficit models

### Oral History of Race in Youth Development

became a consistent theme in characterizing Black youth development. This is especially true within the realms of publishing, funding, and even promotion and tenure for Black scholars.

*Even with all the progress that we've made, reviewers are still looking for people of color to do comparative work. People are still looking for deficit framing. So, you really have to be solid in what you're saying in order to be funded. Overall, White investigators are much more likely to be funded. So, I think that while there has been progress, there are still so many barriers for scholars of color.*  
(Stephanie Rowley)

*My dissertation was a study of all Black boys and I had to really argue. I had a lot of pushback of, "What are you going to find? How are you going to have findings if you don't have a comparison group? Why don't you have a sample of Black boys in a predominantly White school or why don't you have a different setting or a different context?" This idea that you can't glean information from what's considered a homogenous group is still a problem.* (Leoandra Onnie Rogers)

*There were generations just before me, and even before that, that had been fighting that fight, so I didn't feel like it was a new fight for me. I felt like I could talk about strength and resilience or start from a strength-based perspective and actually have a rationale for doing so that I could articulate when I got those reviews that would say, "Why don't you compare them to White people?"—you know, that inherent cultural deficiency kind of orientation—that I had language for a theoretical framing and research richness to draw on to respond to those and then build my own work.* (Tabbye Chavous)

### **THEME 2: Issues and Progress**

The amount of research and publishing around race has grown as the field of youth development has expanded. Outley and Blyth (2020) note however that, "The youth development field has begun to change the discourse around marginalized youth but still continues to diminish the role social, political, and economic forces and their related systems, structures, and institutions have had on developmental outcomes" (p.4). The Black scholars interviewed provided their views on the most pressing issues and the progress made thus far.

Oral History of Race in Youth Development

*One-Dimensional View of Black Youth*

Too often researchers categorize racial and ethnic groups into monolithic labels that dilute their diversity and/or ignore the moderating effects of national origin, immigration history, religion, and tradition on normative and maladaptive development (Outley & Blyth, 2020) through an *ethnic gloss* lens (Trimble, 1990).

*When people do research with Black populations and Black kids, they think about them as a monolithic group and lack an understanding of how multi-dimensional they are. Just thinking about teenagers in general, that second decade of life is so full of rapid growth and development. But maybe you are growing earlier. If you appear to be a large person, then your experiences are being shaped by you being a large person and being perceived as an adult. For example, a Black male who's 6'1" and 12 years old, walks down the street. Do people see a young cognitively naive Black male or a 6'1" terrifying man? This impacts how that person deals with things. That guy has to have somebody to help process that: "Yes, you know, you're tall, but you're still a boy." (Michael Cunningham)*

This monolithic view is further exacerbated when studying Black youth developmental outcomes rather than processes. Dupree and Cunningham further discussed the problem with this approach:

*When you look at what's been put forth as the types of outcomes measured in positive youth development research, none of them are specific to race. The closest thing is identity but it's not ultimately about race. It's a privileged position to put forth a manifesto and not have to directly address race. By design you are not addressing the needs of disfavored racial groups. If none of the outcomes you see as central directly address race, then you're missing the experience of a wide swath of people. (David Dupree)*

*One [issue] is putting [all] Black youth in the same category. This is a mistake. There's so much diversity within group. And then to the assumption of if you're exposed to trauma, you're going to have bad outcomes. There are many kids who are exposed to traumatic experiences and have better-than-expected outcomes. Some people call that resilience. Some call that post-traumatic growth. There's a lot of ways of thinking about this stuff but you have got to be open to it. What are the processes that are going on? What are the significant buffers in kids' lives? How are parents socializing kids or helping kids cope with some of these things? (Michael Cunningham)*

Oral History of Race in Youth Development

*Methodological Issues in the Study of Black Youth*

The Black scholars asserted that researchers focusing on Black youth need to apply a cultural perspective to the research process. This included a focus on the overused comparative design where Black youth were held to White standards of normative behavior, the distinct sampling frames utilized, and the oversimplification and pathological use of concepts used to demoralize and erase the humanization of Black youth.

*I think the choices of measures are based on assumptions about what normal development looks like. For instance, PVEST [Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory; Spencer et al., 1997] and Garcia-Coll and colleagues' (1996) Integrative Model for the Study of Developmental Competencies in Minority Children draw our attention to a much wider range of measures than are typically used in the field. What I notice very often is that the measures that are used are not broad enough to tell the story. We think about it from a purely statistical perspective, that the construct we're measuring might show a statistically significant contribution. But those results may not actually explain much in terms of magnitude of the variance explained by the constructs chosen to be measured. (David Dupree)*

*There are reasons why I think we're behind from a measurement standpoint. One of my biggest disappointments in terms of my career is that the MIBI [Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity; Sellers et al., 1997] is still in use. We tend to redefine measures and we tend to conflate the measure with the concepts. The reality is the only way that we're going to move forward as a field is to contest measures and theories that have been long-standing and push the boundaries to create even greater understandings. It's not that we're looking to uncover the finest gem to get an understanding of gem theories. Our job is not like archaeologists, to dig until we find those five gems and those five are the ones that tell us how people lived, and once we uncover that we will know everything. The reality is being African American is very different now than it was in 1998. (Robert Sellers)*

*That's a yes [to requiring for racial demographics to be recorded in research literature]. Then also not just the racial background, but all of the demographics. Are you talking about middle-income Black families versus low-income Black families? Are you talking about a mix of all those kinds of things? And why does that matter? And then how do you use that information in your analysis? If you*

### Oral History of Race in Youth Development

*ask all the information then you control for it, then what is important to you? Do those things contribute to the process that you're talking about? Are you doing some statistical tests to see if there's some uniqueness about your sample? Are there some things about the sample that SES or racial background may impact?*

(Michael Cunningham)

With the advancement in theoretical approaches developed by Black scholars, the field needed a more in-depth look to address comparative research designs that allowed White youth to serve as the norm—the addition of new methodological approaches that focused on qualitative and mixed methods to illuminate the normative development of Black youth. Utilizing an approach that acknowledges the presence of social inequalities that exacerbate developmental challenges within the sociopolitical environment in which they live (Outley & Blyth, 2020), Rowley discussed this movement and its impact on the field:

*Thinking about where you're drawing your samples from and making sure you're not comparing middle class White suburban families to low-income Black [urban] families; it has been really rewarding to see some of those changes come about. There is a lot more research on normative development of Black youth [because of] foundations in theory coming from people like Vonnie [McLoyd] and methodological innovation coming from people like James [Jackson] or Margaret Beale Spencer. (Stephanie Rowley)*

#### *Are We Done With the Use of "At-Risk" Yet?*

Despite the increase in literature that uses varying sampling schemes and methodological approaches to ground the lived experiences of Black youth, there still exists the use of deficit terminology within the field. This terminology is viewed as being contradictory to the shared understanding of “positive” youth development. The Black scholars believe that researchers must begin providing an understanding of terms such as race, ethnicity, risk, and privilege and that the lack of a clear definition and conceptual grounding further oppresses Black youth. Rowley and Chavous explored this notion by discussing challenges with the use of deficit language.

*While we've made a lot of progress, it's still the case that when you look at work on Black youth, they're still described in pathological terms. You are rarely going to see a study on teen parenting among White girls. (Stephanie Rowley)*

*The use of deficit terminology is still a challenge. I think there's more subtle deficit language now when people begin to study Black children and youth from*

Oral History of Race in Youth Development

*a problems-based perspective, from a focus of what's wrong with Black children vis a vis a function of their culture or a new maladaptive adaptation to discrimination; rather than, to paraphrase the late colleague James Jackson, "Instead of asking the what's wrong question, given the things that Black families and communities have experienced, why do we see all the things that we see that are right?" We think about all of the indicators of positive adaptation of resilience, and yet still often, the approach to studying Black children and youth is what's wrong versus, how do we understand this positive adaptation that's happening in the context of risk and challenge. (Tabbye Chavous)*

All the Black scholars interviewed supported this viewpoint, but they paid special attention to the historical use of "at risk" in research and on its subsequent perceptions of Black youth and their communities in the general public. Dupree, Cunningham, and Rowley attested:

*I think [at risk] is overused and what I'm happy about is now my students will ask me what made them at risk because that's the real question. So, there's a program here in Philadelphia called Peaceful Posse and that program was designed to reduce violence and aggression in youth. But again, it's here in Philadelphia, so it's really targeting Black youth. The underlying assumption was that when kids are violent or aggressive, it's because they don't have a healthy way to express the emotional tension they're feeling. And they targeted at-risk youth. In their instance what they called at-risk was because of the neighborhood they lived in. So, it wasn't like these were kids who were getting in trouble in school and the vice principal said, "You're suspended, or you go to this program." They weren't at-risk because they were actually fighting. It was because of the neighborhood they lived in. I think that's ultimately problematic because from an evaluation perspective, you want to make sure you're serving the kid that the program is designed to serve. (David Dupree)*

*Let's name what they are at risk for. Are they at risk for academic challenges or at risk for mental health challenges? Why not SES? Because there are kids who are at risk for academic challenges because they attend poor schools due to the education system. Then name that. And if you name that then also know that you're not fixing kids. You're fixing situations. Because kids aren't broken. When people talk about kids who are underprivileged, that's assuming that one has a purpose to make them better. There are kids who are poor, so we say they are underprivileged because they don't have access to the resources that rich people*

### Oral History of Race in Youth Development

*have established. So, we're talking about economic challenges. If you use "at-risk," you need to say what the risk is. (Michael Cunningham)*

*In this moment where so many people are focused on issues of racial justice after the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others, it's been interesting to help people understand the difference between appreciating, understanding, and reflecting on the very problematic histories and experiences of folks of color while also not leaning into that desire to do charity. Oftentimes what happens with these labels is that people are saying "Oh gosh, this poor child. He's at risk," and therefore unable to do anything. What I worry about with the labeling is that it doesn't reflect the full experiences of populations of color. There's often almost an implicit assumption that all ethnic minority folks are also low income. (Stephanie Rowley).*

### *Avoidance of Using the Term "Racism" in Research on Racism*

Black youth well-being is threatened by daily encounters with overt or subtle forms of racial prejudice and discrimination and is often manifested by racial mistrust, marginalization, lowered self-esteem, and generalized anxiety (Fisher et al., 2002). The impact of systemic racism in poor developmental outcomes in youth development as well as its impact on the well-being of Black scholars and their work is still very limited. The inability to address the sociopolitical realities of the lives of Black youth has led to a masking of its impacts. Furthermore, the lack of focus on historical racial and ethnic discrimination factors that should serve as the foundation to youth development research is warranted if we are to fully inform on the well-being of Black youth.

*It [racism] has been ignored everywhere until recently and actually developmental psychology is ahead of most other areas of psychology in terms of it being seen as worthy of studying in the context of experiences of Black youth. Well, first of all, they don't study racism. They study stigma or prejudice or stereotyping or basically everything from the perspective of the perpetrators. It's done in a way that attempts to humanize those characteristics as being basically human characteristics gone a little bit awry; misapplied or over-applied in the wrong situation but not really understanding or even attempting to understand racism and putting it into its historical, political, and social context. (Robert Sellers)*

Oral History of Race in Youth Development

It is the daily psychological trauma that impacts not only Black youth but Black scholars as well.

*If you come home and you watch the news and you see a police officer murdering a Black man by putting his knee on the person's neck, and you just got followed around the store, that adds to that [trauma]. Being able to talk about that in terms of our research is really important.* (Michael Cunningham)

Despite leading Black scholars' attempts to address the impact of racism and systemic discrimination on Black youth developmental outcomes, a discourse still exists in the field that these lines of inquiry are not welcome unless it is contributing to the larger mainstream body of literature. Our Black scholars decry this notion and attempt to reclaim the belief that not only is the study of Black youth noble and just, but their unique experiences are warranted. Rogers provided an overview of how past scholars of color (and current scholars) have had to push against these ideas:

*I think race has been addressed in a lot of different ways. As I was coming in and getting familiar with the literature, with the work of Margaret Beale Spencer and obviously even models like Cynthia Garcia-Coll, and this idea of centering culture in contexts, that became increasingly relevant. I did my graduate work at NYU and worked with Niobe Way and Diane Hughes, and they were in the mainstream pushing [scholars] to think about racially diverse youth as part of human development, as opposed to its own set of studies. I think one of the things I've noticed and that has been pushed against is that if you study Black kids and you're only studying Black kids, then you're not studying child development. So, anything you do with Black kids is interesting for that, but it's not contributing to our larger theory or it's not pushing our larger questions and understandings of human development. I feel like there's been a continual push to shift that conversation to recognize that Black kids are human.* (Leoandra Onnie Rogers)

### ***THEME 3: Faculty of Color Challenges: The Cultural Labor Taxation***

The role of a Black scholar is multifaceted and complex and is often filled with feelings of isolation and marginalization throughout their graduate training and in academic spaces (Benton, 2001; Zárate et al., 2017). For example, in the field of psychology, a field heavily inhabited by youth development researchers specifically, only 3% of tenured or tenure-track faculty at high-output research universities are Black in comparison to 73% White faculty (Myers, 2016). The lack of representation among tenured or tenure-track faculty has led to increased challenges and added demands that White faculty counterparts are rarely faced with.

### Oral History of Race in Youth Development

More specifically, for Black scholars these demands include but are not limited to increased expectations for student mentoring, especially students of color; feeling demands to represent their racial group and community; increased demands to serve as the sole source for diversity, particularly around departmental, college, and university diversity committees and initiatives; and research expectations regarding the representation of race in their research endeavors. Padilla (1994) stated that this “cultural taxation” (p. 26) results from the amount of time and effort that is taken away from research productivity due to increased committee work to ensure representation within academia. Cunningham provided an overview of early career Black faculty and the multiple demands experienced:

*I think being an assistant professor of any background is hard in the best of circumstances. So, when you have a BIPOC [Black Indigenous Person of Color] professor doing this, you also have the additional challenges of representation, especially if that person is at a predominantly White institution. You have BIPOC students wanting to talk with you. My first year at Tulane, I just remember how Black students would walk by my office and say, "excuse me, sir. Do you work here?" And I would say yes. They'd come right in, "Oh my gosh, so happy to see you." So, you get pulled in those types of directions or you get asked to be on committees. One of the things that a lot of research institutions try to do is protect assistant professors from being on university-wide committees. I was on university-wide committees my first year. I got hired with other people in my department who were White, and they were like, "Mike, why are you on this committee?" and I said, "Well people aren't asking you? What's going on?" Finally, I got to a point of saying, if my expertise is not needed, I can't be on this committee because it's going to interfere with my research. (Michael Cunningham)*

This statement was supported by our participants and is evidence of Padilla’s (1994) discussion on faculty of color being pigeonholed in service activities and often penalized for this labor, while simultaneously being perceived as incompetent, not as productive, and having decreased levels of respect by colleagues. Cunningham further focuses in on these multiple demands due to the ethnic labor tax and how it is further complicated by the intersecting identities held by Black female scholars:

This is especially hard for BIPOC women, for women of color. Because they have the gender roles as well as the minority role and they're both underrepresented in certain ways. You have some students who've never really seen women of color in a powerful position and think about them as somebody who cleaned the

### Oral History of Race in Youth Development

house and who's there to service them in terms of their, sort of, "Give me my grades" or "Bring my food." And so, they start challenging them. Women of color have a distinct experience from men. I think as a BIPOC man I still have that privilege. (Michael Cunningham).

#### *Decisions Only Scholars of Color Have to Make*

Black scholars also find themselves on the margin in the field of youth development. Being a Black scholar studying Black youth leaves many on the border between two worlds; where they don't have enough background (based on race, gender, or even ideology) to be fully admitted into the more powerful academic group historically produced and maintained by White scholars. As a result, Black scholars' research on Black youth is constantly criticized, trivialized, and even dismissed.

*Black scholars are still battling for legitimacy. They're challenged for being Black scholars who study Black youth. It's connected to this notion of objectivity, that's applied to Black scholars, but not to White scholars who study White children and youth. (Tabbye Chavous)*

This further diminishes the role of Black scholars and leads to notions of legitimacy in academia as researchers, educators, and mentors. The lack of centering Black scholars has led to the marginalization (and often tokenism) of their lives and research endeavors due to perceived affirmative action initiatives. Research has also shown that Black scholars whose research focuses on race, ethnicity, or diversity science may also have fewer opportunities for publishing in mainstream journal outlets, which in turn reduces their ability to be cited, due to the nature of their work (Zárate et al., 2017). Thus, where you publish and the number of citations can have a real effect on how impact is measured within the field (i.e., *h* impact) if publications are not submitted to the right journals and ultimately impact promotion and tenure.

*I recognize that I'm a junior scholar standing on the shoulders of giants who have paved the way for me to be able to push and ask questions and do things in a different way. But I think there's a real tension depending on your department and contextual factors. There are compromises and decisions we have to make that put us in positions where we feel like we have to compromise on important things in order to sustain in the space. I lean more towards being who I am in the space and not holding the space itself so coveted. But I get the tension, I've had faculty tell me "Oh I didn't study race at all until I got tenure." (Leoandra Onnie Rogers).*

### Oral History of Race in Youth Development

*Early on I published a lot in ethnic specific journals, so I had to justify to my colleagues about why I published in these areas, who the reading audience was, and the impact of these types of journals. I had to educate them on that process. . . . So, I felt like when I came up for tenure you know, going up for tenure is nerve-racking in the best of circumstances. I was the first Black person they had in my department. So, I was the first Black person who they were going to be reviewing for tenure promotion. Okay, I do all this Black stuff and my colleagues are like "Mike, you have enough publications. You'll be okay." But they'd never had anybody like me before. (Michael Cunningham).*

#### *Strategies to Combat Challenges: Being Unapologetic*

Despite all of the challenges in *being* a Black scholar and *doing* research on Black youth, these scholars have persisted. Each traveling a journey toward personal empowerment that includes finding their authentic voice and combating the institutional challenges that they were confronted with. Finding the spaces where Black scholars could recognize and celebrate their journey and research focus on Black youth was viewed as vital to survival and served to legitimize their role within academia. Chavous and Cunningham made clear the ability to claim your personal power as a Black scholar:

*Black scholars are still questioned when they're evaluated, "How is the study of Black youth applicable to broader human behavior?" We have to make sure that when we enter the description of our own work, we are unapologetically saying, the study of Black people in itself is important, and it gives us unique insights. Here is how the study of Black people can help you understand things about humans. More broadly, here's how it fits into the broad swath of human behavior. Then we have to push when despite us doing that, we are still put into a box of like, "Oh you're studying culture. I'm studying human behavior." There's no human behavior without culture and context. (Tabbye Chavous)*

*I'm not apologetic about who I am. When I was on the interview circuit, gosh, years ago now, I would get asked questions, "Oh, do you compare Black kids to White kids?" And I was just like, "Well, if you want somebody who does comparative work, that's not what I do. I really focus on Black kids, and I think about comparing some of the differences within Black communities." I didn't try to present as somebody who I was not. (Michael Cunningham).*

#### ***THEME 4: Future of Race Research in Youth Development***

The Black scholars envisioned the future of race in the field of youth development over the next 10, 15, and 20 years. Each scholar was filled with hope as they reflected on the richness of the past, current, and future research on Black youth.

##### *Celebrating Race Research in the Future*

The belief that critical race research would leave the shadows and become more prominent in the field through greater creativity was viewed as exciting. The scholars believed that race would become more routinized and celebrated in comparison to its current use. Sellers commented:

*New models, new measures, new methodologies, new approaches that are all rooted in the lived experience of Black youth. And for psychology, the larger understanding that the study of Black youth or people that have traditionally been marginalized is necessary for the study of human behavior. That is the only way that we're going to get a true measure or true picture and understanding of human behavior. Human behavior can't be focused on a small segment of the population and assumed to be the "norm." When we begin to see journals and articles citing work on Black kids, work on Latino kids, work on LGBTQ kids from the perspective of their experience, when that work is naturally cited in "traditional mainstream," not just in race work but work that is developmentally fundamental to "normative" development, then we will arrive. (Robert Sellers).*

This mainstream focus on race was not just limited to the research halls of academia, but with the communities that partner with scholars. Dupree expressed similar hopes but discussed that the impact of race-focused youth development research on the lives in those communities carries a level of responsibility:

*When people share their data with us, they are trusting us to accurately represent them. We are giving voices to their experiences. There's a certain responsibility there. So, when I think about the future of youth development research, I really think about the need to do work that reflects an understanding of the complex interactions between physical and psychological functioning. (Davido Dupree)*

Along with these hopeful predictions of the future, the Black scholars also expressed caution in the future. This included an understanding of race as a social construct and the role of context in any study on race, as well as a challenge for future scholars.

Oral History of Race in Youth Development

*Advice to Scholars Who Want to Study Race*

The scholars concluded the interviews by sharing key insights on best practices in navigating research on race for scholars and practitioners desiring to advance the study of the humanity of all children in youth development science. Suggestions included branching outside of the field, an emphasis on conceptualizing race as a social construct, and creating innovative measures and methodologies that are relevant to the current lived experiences of Black children.

*I challenge us as a people in the next generation of folks to push beyond what has already been done. It's important that people know what happened before them, to greatly appreciate and respect it, but not be beholden to it. So, if someone needs to use the MIBI or the MMRI [Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity; Sellers et al., 1998] as an initial starting point to view the world, great. But that should not be the anchor and the limit we're building on top of. (Robert Sellers).*

*For anyone who wants to study race in youth development research, one thing to always remember is race is a social construct. It's not a biological construct. But how people include race is very different depending on who the person is. You can think about Robert Sellers' work in terms of a multidimensional perspective, understanding race and identity and its link to context and situation. If I'm in a room with all men and I'm the only Black person, then race becomes much more salient. But if I'm in a room of all Black people and I'm the only man, then my gender becomes the most salient. So, you can't study race without context. (Michael Cunningham)*

*Read broadly. It is really hard to study Black children, youth, and families purely within the discipline of psychology if you think about the need to understand context and history and structure and how that may impact developmental processes. I say read broadly but enjoy reading about people in a variety of genres; there's sociology or historical literature but also the arts and thinking about representations of Black people and youth, if you think about really appreciating the complexity and richness of Black children and youth and again the history and culture and structures that kind of inform that. Don't feel like you're an island. Create networks that will support the richness of your thinking and provide you with a sense of community and affirmation while you're doing this work and fighting the fight. (Tabbye Chavous)*

## Discussion

This commentary paper illustrates the role of race in youth development research through the perspectives of leading Black scholars. Their insights challenge youth-serving researchers and practitioners to dissipate the reproduction of antiblack tendencies that not only situate Black scholars and youth as subhuman, but that also perpetuate one-dimensional conceptualizations of a unified Black experience. One Black person's story is not representative of all Black people. The scholars also spoke to the importance of studying the developmental processes of Black youth as a normal part of human development research. Such perspectives challenge the notion that the development of White youth is the standard to which all other youth should be compared. This ideology contributes to an antiblack tendency to perceive the abilities and livelihood of Black and racially minoritized youth as inferior to that of their White peers. Antiblack tendencies simultaneously shape the experiences of Black scholars who study Black youth. Each of the six scholars shared experiences of receiving criticism for recruiting participant samples of African descent without including a White participant pool as a comparison group. This criticism perpetuates a narrative that the developmental processes of Black youth are not valued in absence of a White peer group standard of which to understand their experiences in developmental science.

## *Implications for Practice*

Across interviews, the scholars highlight challenges and suggestions for research designs that inform how youth-serving programs and organizations are developed. They believed that one of the most common challenges that youth development programs face is a deficit-based program design that regards all Black youth as "at risk." Dupree discussed a program in Philadelphia designed to reduce problem behaviors, that targets all Black youth residing in a low-income neighborhood of the city rather than specifically reaching youth that experience high detention and suspension rates. How might a Black adolescent who is high achieving perceive their participation in this program if they attend school regularly, have never been suspended, and/or are on track to graduate? This example helps practitioners and researchers understand the potential damages that deficit-oriented programming can have on a young person's self-efficacy, well-being, and even life outcomes. Programs designed to support the out-of-school experiences and life outcomes of Black youth should implement strategies to highlight the cultural and socioeconomic diversity within the lives of Black youth, and youth of color more broadly. Youth-serving organizations can develop culturally relevant programming that builds upon the existing strengths of racially minoritized communities. For example, youth-serving centers, such as the Youth Research Advisory Board (YRAB) of UPMC Children's Hospital of

### Oral History of Race in Youth Development

Pittsburgh, invest in youth leadership in which youth serve as thought partners in developing activities and programs that are relevant to their cultural values and serve their communities (Ragavan et al., 2021).

Practitioners and evaluators have the positionality and power to eradicate antiblack narratives throughout program development, implementation, and evaluation. A commitment to an antiracist agenda through program practice requires an expectation for all youth serving staff and administrators to learn about the negative effects of racism on all youth, especially those who are racially minoritized, and must include strategies and supports to ensure program staff are competent to deliver culturally appropriate programs, informed by the youth in which programs serve (Outley & Blyth, 2020). We provide discussion questions below to facilitate development of an antiracist agenda for researchers, practitioners, and evaluators.

- How do we create a culture that welcomes an antiracist lens throughout the research and evaluation process?
- How does the lens of race shape and affect our understandings and actions as we design youth-serving programs?
- What methods and measures fairly capture and communicate the lived experiences of Black youth?
- Where do we as researchers/evaluators look for guidance in matters of race and racism?

### ***Limitations***

The uniqueness of interviewing Black scholars has made these narratives valuable sources of information with the goal of understanding participants' own meaning making surrounding the study of race in the youth development field. The narratives are a reflection of cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds across the African diaspora of Black scholars, as well as their personal experiences, training, and scholarship within academia. We believe that the transferability of the information and knowledge gained should be carefully analyzed with the original context in mind. In other words, we ask the reader to acknowledge the varying Black scholar experiences in American academia that exist in these findings by situating the study within the current sociopolitical climate around race as well as its location within a predominantly White hierarchical academic system that so often dismisses, tribalizes, or misrepresents the voices of Black scholars, as well as their research and outreach to Black communities. By "naming their reality" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 12) as Black scholars conducting research in the field of youth development, the reader has an opportunity to challenge dominant ideology surrounding Black youth and further explore similarities and differences in perspectives put forth by other scholars studying race in youth development.

## **Conclusion**

Society's traditional view of youth development has categorized normal human development as that which occurs within the biological, psychological, and social domains of European American (or White) children and adolescents. Any lived experience that exists outside of this realm has been delineated as deviant, underprivileged, or at risk for what appears to be a less favored value of human life. This problematic perspective of conceptual thinking is racism. It is the belief that those with European heritage withhold a set of experiences and knowledge of the ways in which a society should operate—or in this case, what and how science should be studied—that is superior to the culture and knowledge base of any other group of people. The scholars who have graciously offered their hearts and minds on the existence of racism in the field of youth development for this paper have charged youth-serving scholars and practitioners at all levels of their careers to use the current sociohistorical time period as a moment of scientific reckoning. As racial tensions rise across the globe, this is a time to rise to the occasion of scientific leadership and produce scholarship, programs, and policies that appropriately and accurately depict the current lived experiences of all human beings. The study of youth development in the United States is the study of Black, Latino, Asian American and Pacific Islander, Native American, and White children and adolescents within culture and context. For we can only move forward as a field if we acknowledge the full nature of human phenomena among the youth of all heritages.

We would like to close by expressing our heartfelt gratitude to Professors Tabbye Chavous, Michael Cunningham, Davido Dupree, Leoandra Onnie Rogers, Stephanie Rowley, and Robert Sellers for the wisdom and openness they have provided to us for this commentary and to the field at large. Thank you for committing so much of who you are to something that is bigger than yourselves.

## **Author Note**

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Oral History of Race in Youth Development

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