

**Resisting Racial Oppression: Ethnic Identity & Critical Consciousness as Pathways to
Thriving for Young Black, Indigenous, and People of Color**

By

Adriana Ariza

Claremont Graduate University

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Approval of the Dissertation Committee

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Adriana Ariza as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology with a concentration in Evaluation.

Dr. Tiffany Berry, Chair
Claremont Graduate University
Dean, School of Social Science, Policy, and Evaluation
Full Research Professor

Dr. Michelle Sloper
Claremont Graduate University
Associate Professor of Evaluation Practice

Dr. Saida Hesmati
Claremont Graduate University
Assistant Professor of Psychology

Dr. Laura Wray-Lake
University of California, Los Angeles
Professor of Social Welfare

Abstract

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Adriana Ariza

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Young Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in the United States continuously defy the odds through resilience, resistance, and the pursuit of liberation, yet they are historically understudied as agents of their own positive development within the context of racial oppression (García Coll et al., 1996). This explanatory sequential mixed-method study examined how 393 BIPOC-identifying youth (ages 18-25) thrive amid racial oppression. Survey results initially indicated that higher levels of perceived racial discrimination were related to higher levels of thriving, as measured by the 5Cs model of positive youth development (Lerner et al., 2005). In alignment with previous theoretical postulations, results demonstrated ethnic identity development and critical consciousness were also related positive youth development (Christophe et al., 2018; Hope et al., 2019). Further, results revealed that ethnic identity development and critical consciousness fully mediated the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and overall levels of thriving. Interview findings ($N = 11$) further explained how the process of developing ethnic identity and critical consciousness functions as a vital form of resilience to racial discrimination. These processes equipped young BIPOC with a critical understanding of racial injustice, a strong sense of connection to their community, and motivation to contribute to social change. Additionally, racial differences were captured by exploring relationships between racial discrimination, ethnic identity, and critical consciousness

individually for groups of Latinx and Black youth. These findings provide evidence for the urgent need to foster the development of ethnic identity and critical consciousness among young BIPOC, while we simultaneously work to dismantle racial oppression.

Keywords: Positive youth development, racism, BIPOC, ethnic identity, critical consciousness

Dedication

Para mí hermano, Alexander Gregory Ariza, quien me dio propósito, resiliencia, y la habilidad de amar.

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**Chapter I. Resisting Racial Oppression: Ethnic Identity & Critical Consciousness as
Pathways to Thriving for Young BIPOC**

“We (Black people) must move against not only those forces which dehumanize us from the outside, but also against those oppressive values which we have been forced to take into ourselves.” — Audre Lorde

Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) in the United States must navigate racial oppression to develop into healthy, thriving adults (Bell 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Freire 1970). The use of the term BIPOC is scrutinized in academic research, however, in this context it is an imperative way to name those who experience racial oppression, the systemic mistreatment of individuals based on their racial identity, and demonstrate solidarity between communities of color against white supremacy (Davidson, 2024). BIPOC in the United States have been plagued by racial oppression *even before* the country’s founding. Thus, the term BIPOC is intentionally more descriptive than “People of Color” to respect and acknowledge the continued impact Black and Indigenous communities face from slavery and genocide (Davidson, 2024; Raypole, 2021). Racial oppression creates several obstacles for BIPOC to receive necessary resources, in addition to having fewer opportunities to thrive physically and emotionally (García Coll et al., 1996; Karlsen & Nazroo, 2002; Krieger et al., 2005; White, 2011; Williams et al., 2019). Police brutality is the most recent byproduct of racial oppression to receive national attention since the unjust murders of two Black Americans, George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, in 2020. The consequences of racism were extreme in these cases, yet powerfully illustrate how the larger social issue of racial oppression is life-threatening to BIPOC. Simultaneously BIPOC are asked to circumnavigate the physical consequences of racism as well as the internal manifestations of racism, like feelings of worthlessness, loneliness, and a lack of belonging (Freire 1970; Neblett

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et al., 2012). Thus, BIPOC overcome cumbersome and unjust barriers to succeed in spite of racial injustice.

Adolescent and emerging adults of color, in particular, navigate various forms of racial oppression that threaten their positive development. Manifestations of the explicit racial oppression youth face include an increase in detention of migrant youth, less access to necessary resources due to parents and/or youths' documentation status, a disproportionate school expulsion rate for Black and Hispanic adolescents, and higher rates of criminalization across racial and ethnic groups (Camera, 2020; Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, 2024; ACLU 2019; Robles-Ramamurthy & Watson, 2019). The school-to-prison pipeline, specifically, has garnered significant attention as an urgent social problem as it severely threatens the livelihood of adolescent BIPOC (Heitzeg, 2009). In addition to these acts of systematic racism, studies show adolescent and emerging adults of color experience racial discrimination in their daily lives, especially Black youth (Grollman, 2012). Racial discrimination is expressed both explicitly and implicitly; from the rise (25%) in hate-based crimes in schools since the Trump administration (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018) to ongoing microaggressions, such as teachers having lower academic expectations for students of color compared to their white peers (Sue et al., 2007). Acts of racial discrimination greatly impact BIPOC, such that experiences of racial discrimination predict the presence of both mental and physical health problems (Hagiwara et al., 2016). Black Americans, specifically, are 20% more likely to experience serious mental health problems than the general population (Woods-Jaeger et al., 2021). While all BIPOC experience racial oppression in one form or another, it is important to note the BIPOC community is not a monolith, and great diversity exists in experiences of racism within and across racial groups. Due to such diverse experiences, racial oppression likely does

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not manifest in the same ways for all young BIPOC. Nevertheless, racial oppression creates a stressful environment under which BIPOC must develop across adolescence and into emerging adulthood.

Although racial oppression affects BIPOC of all ages, adolescents and emerging adults are at a unique stage in development when they start to cultivate skills, strengths, and behavioral patterns that serve as a critical foundation for their lifetime. During late adolescence (i.e., ages 14-19) and emerging adulthood (i.e., ages 19-24), individuals explore and often solidify their sense of self, world view, and values (Benson, 2002; Erikson, 1968; Havinghurst, 1968). During these important years, racial oppression acts as a significant threat to identity development with the power to have a lasting impact on the developmental trajectory of young BIPOC (Fisher et al., 2000; Suarez-Morales et al., 2007; McKinnon et al., 2024). While some scholars view adolescence as an ideal time to intervene with youth who are most “at-risk” of maladaptive development, others argue adolescence and emerging adulthood are also an opportune time to foster irreplaceable strengths and optimize development (Damon, 2004). Adolescence and emerging adulthood offer a unique developmental period where youth are vulnerable yet have newly found agency to self-determine.

For as long as racial oppression has existed there have been young BIPOC who defied the odds through resilience, resistance, and liberation (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Moane, 2000). Those who successfully navigate through barriers perpetuated by racial oppression and become thriving adults are resourceful, adaptive, and resilient, yet historically understudied. Furthermore, BIPOC are disproportionately studied through a deficit-based perspective, as problems to be solved rather than agents of their own development, less is known about the strengths BIPOC possess to resist and challenge such oppressive systems (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018).

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In recent years, many examples of young resilient BIPOC have emerged who have taken action to resist systemic racial oppression. For example, X Gonzalez is a teen activist who garnered national attention for not only surviving a school shooting but raising awareness and activism around the need for gun control measures (Lucero, 2018). In Los Angeles, youth have recently been acknowledged for their engagement in activism and success in changing policies on a local level; the Youth Justice Coalition (comprised primarily of young BIPOC) successfully passed legislation to have police presence removed from Los Angeles Unified School District campuses (Washburn, 2018). These examples illustrate how some young BIPOC are not only able to defy the obstacles set forth by racial oppression, they are also able to engage in their community to create positive social change. Given the BIPOC population is projected to grow by 75% by the year 2060 (Frey, 2018) and the structural changes necessary to eliminate systematic racial oppression will likely not be implemented as quickly, this begs the question of how racial oppression relates to positive youth development and which factors protect young BIPOC from the adverse effects of racism and promote a positive life trajectory?

This chapter provides an in-depth review of the literature to date which examines the impact racism has on the positive development of young (i.e., ages 18-24) BIPOC, as well as posits potential strengths BIPOC can develop to combat the extreme and sometimes life-threatening consequences of racial oppression. As experiences within the BIPOC community vary greatly, relevant literature associated to different BIPOC groups will be referenced when appropriate. First, this chapter will review the field of positive youth development, with an emphasis on the context of racial oppression. Secondly, ethnic identity and critical consciousness will be evaluated as imperative strengths which allow young BIPOC to circumnavigate racism and become thriving adults. Finally, this chapter will underscore the urgent need for further

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investigation and introduce a rigorous explanatory sequential mixed-method study designed to address this gap in psychological research.

Positive Youth Development

Positive youth development (PYD) is a framework which examines and explains how youth can reach their true potential (Benson, 2002; Lerner et al., 2005). PYD arose in response to an overabundance of studies that examined youth through a deficit-based perspective or as problems to be fixed (Damon, 2004). The PYD approach instead, “aims at understanding, educating, and engaging children in productive activities rather than at correcting, curing, or treating them for maladaptive tendencies or so-called disabilities” (Damon, 2004, p. 15). The PYD framework created a fundamental paradigm shift in how we investigate and promote youth development with the intention to better understand how youth develop positively and ways in which interventions can be designed to optimize their development (Lerner et al., 2005).

Theoretically grounded in Developmental Systems Theory, PYD believes youth develop as a product of a constant bidirectional relationship between individuals and their environment (e.g., parents, teachers, schools, neighborhood characteristics) across time (Lerner & Benson, 2003). A cornerstone principle of this theory claims children do not develop in isolation, rather their development is driven by interactions between individuals and the environments where they engage (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Lerner & Benson, 2003; Lerner & Galambos, 1998). Youth interact with their developmental environments at multiple levels that affect their development; from their immediate environment (i.e., microsystem; family, peers, school) to macro-system environments like social norms, media, and culture (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Thus, racial oppression is considered a macro-level societal context that both directly and indirectly impacts the development of BIPOC across time (García Coll et al., 1996; Seaton &

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White, 2024; Lerner et al., 2017). PYD's theoretical foundation called developmental scholars to examine and interpret youth development within the context of the real-world (Fisher & Lerner, 2013; Fisher et al., 1993; Lerner et al., 2010; Sherrod et al., 2004). Scholars then identified several internal strengths youth can gain from interacting with positive developmental environments that are indicative of youth well-being and linked to long-term positive outcomes (Benson, 2006; Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner, 2007).

Although the field is not in agreement about which strengths (or strengths frameworks) are most relevant and applicable to healthy development, PYD for adolescents and emerging adults is often understood through the "5Cs" model of PYD (Lerner et al., 2005). Richard Lerner's 5Cs model offers five specific strengths that contribute to positive youth outcomes: competence, confidence, character, caring, and connection (Lerner et al., 2005). Table 1 provides a brief description for each of the 5Cs. Lerner and colleagues also posited that youth who possess each of the 5Cs may also be more likely to engage in "contribution" (the 6th C), meaning they are more likely to be engaged in their community and the surrounding environment (Lerner & Benson, 2003, Lerner et al., 2005). Together, the 5Cs model of PYD was designed with the goal to help inform youth programs and interventions about which internal strengths and competencies are most critical to foster in today's youth to further promote wellbeing, thriving, and positive life outcomes (Lerner & Benson, 2003).

Table 1

Definition of 5Cs of Positive Youth Development (Lerner et al., 2005)

Construct	Definition
Competence	Positive view of one's ability in domain specific areas (e.g., school grades, sports, work habits).
Confidence	A strong sense of positive self-worth and self-efficacy.

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Connection	Positive bonds with people, organizations, and institutions. These bonds are reflected in relationships and interactions with family, peers, and community members.
Character	A sense of morality, integrity, and respect.
Caring	A sense of sympathy, empathy, and compassion for others.

Empirical evidence demonstrates each of the 5Cs are significantly related to both short and long-term positive outcomes throughout the period of adolescence and emerging adulthood. Studies show the 5Cs are positively correlated with academic achievement (Leffert et al., 1998) and negatively associated with risk-taking behaviors (Lewin-Bizan et al., 2010) for adolescents. Youth with high levels of all 5Cs also had a greater tendency to contribute positively to their family, community, and have higher levels of well-being (Bowers et al., 2010; Lewin-Bizan et al., 2010). Studies with emerging adults (i.e., youth ages 18-24) show similar patterns and suggest the development of the 5Cs led to more positive social contributions later in life (Leffert et al., 1998; Luster & McAdoo, 1996).

There is also empirical support for the 5Cs with young BIPOC samples, specifically. Studies found young BIPOC who possessed the 5Cs were less likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors, struggle with externalizing and internalizing problems, and had higher self-esteem (Holsen et al., 2017; Murry et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2013; Sun & Shek, 2013; Williams et al., 2014; Witherspoon et al., 2009). The original research conducted to validate the 5Cs model found no differences in the structure of their model between racial/ethnic groups suggesting that the 5Cs manifest similarly in BIPOC samples as with white youth (Lerner & Benson, 2003). Together, these studies suggest the 5Cs model of PYD offers inherently important strengths, as well as linkages to important indicators of positive long-term outcomes, for young BIPOC.

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To fully understand the development of BIPOC youth, however, we must study PYD in relation to the racial oppression they experience (García Coll et al., 1996; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Gonzalez et al., 2020; Seaton & White, 2024). In their seminal article, García Coll and colleagues (1996) introduced the Integrative Model of Development (IMD) which is the first model of child development to identify racism as a fundamental factor that shapes the developmental trajectories of BIPOC and therefore demands scientific attention. The IMD states racism (i.e., prejudice, discrimination, and oppression) and social segregation (i.e., residential, economic, social, and psychological) mediates the relationship between social position (i.e., social class, ethnicity and race) and the availability and quality of important promotive environments, such as schools (García Coll et al., 1996). In essence, the IMD argues social factors like racism and classism, in fact, have a direct and prominent influence on environments where BIPOC regularly engage and thus leads to variations in experiences and development (García Coll et al., 1996). The interplay of such powerful social factors is thought to create unique conditions for BIPOC development while these youth are simultaneously situated as a minority in a white, mainstream society (García Coll et al., 1996). To date, the IMD has acted as a theoretical guide for studying BIPOC development due to its emphasis on the impacts of racism.

The IMD is grounded in decades of research (Essed, 1991; García Coll et al., 1995; Innis & Feagin, 1989; McConahay & Hough, 1976; Ogbu, 1991) showing that racism, especially perceived racial discrimination, has a detrimental effect on the development of young BIPOC. In developmental science, the predominant way of operationalizing racism is through experiences of “perceived racial discrimination”, the psychological symptom of racial oppression (Karlsen & Nazaroo, 2002; Krieger et al., 2005; Pachter et al., 2010). Perceived racial discrimination is when

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an individual believes they have been treated unfavorably because of their racial identity (Pachter et al., 2010). In addition to overt forms, racial discrimination can also occur through subtle microaggressions (e.g., a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect discrimination against members of a marginalized group) such as when a teacher interacts with a BIPOC student using a less respectful tone than with a white student (Sue et al., 2007; Tyler, 2020). Perceived racial discrimination has been measured with adolescents by means of self-report; most notably the Perceptions of Racism in Children and Youth Scale has demonstrated both reliability and validity as a measure of perceived racial discrimination (Pachter et al., 2010). Those who reported higher levels of perceived racial discrimination also reported struggling with depression, risk-taking behavior, and negative psychological well-being (García Coll et al., 1996; Karlsen & Nazaroo, 2002; Krieger et al., 2005). Thus, the pervasive and extreme psychological challenges racial discrimination can cause for adolescent BIPOC, undoubtedly impedes the development of positive outcomes like confidence and connection. Together these findings show racial discrimination, especially when experienced often, denies young BIPOC basic physical and psychological safety based on their racial identity, a characteristic well beyond their control (Jemal, 2017; Tyler et al., 2020).

Despite the extensive evidence illustrating the negative impact that perceived racial discrimination has on young BIPOC, racism has yet to be adequately investigated in relation to a validated PYD framework. In fact, the field of PYD has been criticized for this blind spot and PYD researchers have been called to identify ways to promote PYD in the face of racial discrimination (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018). Efforts to integrate the context of racism into studies of PYD have been extremely limited and remain highly theoretical. For example, scholars theorized that engaged citizenship and sense of community are critical components of

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PYD which mediate the relationship between confidence and competence for Black youth (Travis & Leech, 2014). Unfortunately, there has yet to be empirical evidence to substantiate the authors' theoretical claims nor insight into how their hypothesis operates for other youth of color.

Several gaps remain in our knowledge of how BIPOC develop positively due to an oversaturation of studies that analyze young BIPOC through a deficit-based perspective. Black youth, for example, are more frequently studied in relation to negative outcomes, like learning deficiencies, behavioral issues, lack of emotion regulation, and low academic motivation (Neal et al., 2003; Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). Meanwhile the 5Cs model has potential to be a strong framework for promoting thriving among BIPOC, however it has not garnered the empirical attention necessary to illuminate the ways in which the 5Cs uniquely manifests in young BIPOC. Even less attention has been given to examining how BIPOC develop positively in circumstances and contexts that are unique to them, like racial oppression. Although theoretical frameworks have been proposed to begin to address this major deficit in the field (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002), the threat that racism in America poses to young BIPOC necessitates further investigation. Future research must explore important nuances of BIPOC development such as which of the 5Cs are most critical to for young BIPOC positive development, despite the racism they experience. Such information not only has inherent value but also can inform youth programs, higher education, developmental interventions, and policies serving young BIPOC.

Scholars have identified numerous psychological constructs which promote PYD amongst adolescence and emerging adulthood, however, studies failed to identify the extent to which ethnic identity and critical consciousness simultaneously reduce the psychological harm from racism and promote the development of the 5Cs for young BIPOC. Despite the alarming

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threat racism poses to BIPOC, the field has yet to integrate the psychological literature about racism into the PYD literature. This gap in research has resulted in a lack of consensus about which competencies are necessary for young BIPOC to navigate racial oppression. The literature around perceived racial discrimination posits several aspects of psychological resilience, which protects youth from the impacts of racism, including racial socialization, self-concept, acculturation, ethnic identity, and more (Ungar, 2004; Masten 2014; Christophe et al., 2019; Evans et al., 2012; Neblett et al., 2012). However, such constructs have only been theorized and tested as protective factors in relation to externalizing and internalizing behaviors, instead of indicators of 5C framework. On the other hand, the field of PYD posits its own set of protective factors that promote PYD in the face of adversity. Examples include psychological constructs like internal motivation (Larson, 2006), growth mindset (Dweck, 2008), empowerment (Zimmerman et al., 2013) and many more. However, little empirical research has investigated what promotes PYD within the context of racial oppression. After an extensive review of the literature both ethnic identity and critical consciousness show immense potential to act as mediators for the negative impact of racism on PYD in BIPOC youth due to their striking theoretical and empirical associations with both racism and indicators of PYD.

Ethnic Identity as a Critical Strength for BIPOC

Ethnic identity is a critical component to the development of BIPOC and displays potential to be a protective factor against racism, in addition to being promotive of PYD. Ethnic identity is described as an individual's sense of self when navigating their ethnic heritage, racial stigmas which come with such a heritage, and their place within a dominant white U.S. culture (Butler-Barnes et al., 2018; Christophe et al., 2018; Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007). Given that ethnic identity is a multidimensional and complex construct, it is important to distinguish

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ethnic identity as an individual's sense of self, rather than the cultural beliefs, values, or behaviors they may have adopted as part of their ethnic-racial group (Schwartz et al., 2010; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). As one author best illustrated for Latinx youth, "as an ethnic minority within a broader society, U.S. Latinx youth must decide how to navigate the contrasts between mainstream U.S. culture and their Latinx heritage and decipher what influence these contrasts might have on their sense of self" (Gonzalez, 2009; P. 214). A substantial amount of literature has demonstrated that ethnic identity development is a critical process that greatly informs BIPOC's sense of self throughout their life (Neblett et al., 2009; Neblett et al., 2012; Phinney 2003; Tatum, 1997; Umaña-Taylor, 2004; Rivas-Drake et al., 2022).

Ethnic identity is a multifaceted construct that has been theorized to consist of various components. Similar to Erikson's theory of identity formation, ethnic identity is theorized as an internal process comprised of three distinct components: exploration, resolution, and affirmation (Erikson, 1959; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). Exploration is a component of the ethnic identity development process and is operationalized as the extent to which youth explore their ethnicity, often through lived experiences, explicit learnings, and family stories (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). Resolution is a part of the ethnic identity development process that is described as the extent to which youth believe their ethnic identity is important to their sense of self (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). Lastly, affirmation acts as a component of ethnic identity development known as the extent to which youth endorse their ethnic identity as playing a positive role in their life (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). Although there are multiple ways to operationalize ethnic identity—and ongoing debate within the field—recent studies urge developmental psychologists to conceptualize ethnic identity as a dynamic, three-component process (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004; Seaton et al., 2006; Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001). This stands in contrast to earlier

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research that treated ethnic identity as a static construct. Previous studies often aggregated these three components to determine the extent to which individuals had ‘achieved’ an ethnic identity, rather than viewing identity development as an ongoing, lifelong process in which BIPOC continuously engage (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004; Neblett, 2023). Adopting a process-oriented approach allows researchers to explore how each component—and the various ways individuals may simultaneously engage with them—relates to thriving, a direction the field has increasingly emphasized for future inquiry (Carter et al., 2017; Umaña-Taylor, 2015; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004, Seaton et al., 2006). With more nuanced measures of ethnic identity now available, scholars are better positioned to examine which specific components are most beneficial and may warrant targeted intervention (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004).

Ethnic identity development is as a key developmental task for BIPOC as it informs how they carry themselves, as an ethnic minority in America, across their lifetime (Neblett, 2023; Anderson et al., 2022). Due to the cognitive gains, improved abstract thinking abilities, and greater ability to empathize with the experiences of others, adolescence and emerging adulthood is a developmental period that lends itself well for fostering ethnic identity (Neblett et al., 2012). The combination of the physical and psychological changes that occur in late adolescence, as well as the increased socialization that often comes with high school and higher education, promote the formation of ethnic identity (Rew et al., 2015). For BIPOC, a heightened awareness of race and ethnicity occurs naturally during adolescence, in conjunction with the physical and cognitive changes (Neblett et al., 2009). For Black adolescents in particular, a significant amount of research notes that adolescence is a time where they grapple with the meaning of being Black in the US and confront the complex, and often painful, truths that come with it (Neblett et al., 2009; Tatum, 1997; Hope et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2023). Environments (e.g., home, school)

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within our culture also treat adolescents as having greater capacity to explore their uniqueness and role in society, which often sparks the development of ethnic identity for BIPOC (Phinney 2003; Neblett et al., 2008). For example, BIPOC parents navigate complex conversations around racism more frequently when their children reach the age of adolescence or emerging adulthood (Phinney 2003; Neblett et al., 2012). Similarly, recent literature has postulated Latinx adolescents and emerging adults develop their ethnic identity with an understanding of being Latinx within a white supremacist society (Bañales & Rivas-Drake, 2022). Although ethnic identity is viewed as a lifelong journey for BIPOC, adolescence and emerging adulthood is a time in development when it starts to carry significant importance (Umaña-Taylor, 2004; Hope et al., 2020).

A plethora of studies show ethnic identity is related to several positive developmental outcomes for young BIPOC. For example, those who have developed a strong sense of ethnic identity are less likely to exhibit internalizing symptoms (Juang et al., 2006; McHale et al., 2006; Wong et al., 2003; Zapolski et al., 2019) and externalizing symptoms, like depression and anxiety (McMahon & Watts 2002, Smith & Silva, 2011; Yip et al., 2019). Instead, those who have a strong sense of ethnic identity are more likely to have high levels of self-esteem (Bracey et al., 2004; Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2018; Jones & Neblett, 2016), confidence in their identity (French et al., 2006) and are often considered well-adjusted (Neblett et al., 2012; Rivas-Drake et al., 2017,2019). Ethnic identity has been related to a variety of positive outcomes for Latinx (Fuligni, Witkow, & Garcia, 2005; Romero & Roberts, 2003; Meca et al.,2020; Bañales et al., 2024), Black (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2007; Wills et al., 2007; Bañales et al., 2019; Byrd & Hope, 2020; Pinedo et al., 2021; Bañales et al., 2024), Asian (Mahalingam et al., 2008; Umaña-Taylor & Shin, 2007), and Native American adolescents

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(Kulis et al., 2002). Taken as a whole, research has shown BIPOC youth with a strong sense of ethnic identity are more likely to avoid maladaptive behaviors and instead experience long-term positive outcomes.

Theoretically ethnic identity is a vital protective factor that equips young BIPOC with the ability to combat the severe consequences of perceived racial discrimination. Based on a decade of research, a conceptual model was proposed to explain how youth cope with the harm caused by their lived experiences of racism (Neblett et al., 2012). In essence, this model posits that a strong sense of ethnic identity along with cultural orientation and ethnic-racial socialization operate in tandem to protect BIPOC from the adverse effects of racism (Christophe et al., 2019; Neblett et al., 2012; Cunningham et al., 2018). However, there has been significant debate about *how* ethnic identity allows youth to cope (Neblett et al., 2012; Seaton et al., 2010; Neblett, 2023). Some scholars assert that ethnic identity works to bolster self-esteem against experiences of racial discrimination and therefore allows adolescent BIPOC to cope with the stress resulting from experiences of racism (Brody et al., 2006; Neblett et al., 2012; Romero & Roberts, 2003; Neblett, 2023, Umaña-Taylor & Rivas-Drake, 2021). Others posit that youth with a strong sense of ethnic identity are more likely to attribute acts of racial discrimination to others rather than a personal reflection of their self-worth (Seaton et al., 2010; Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Sellers et al., 2006; Anyiwo et al., 2018; Bañales & Rivas-Drake, 2022). Scholars have recently highlighted the need to investigate the distinct components of ethnic identity development (exploration, resolution, affirmation) and categorize youths' experience engaging in the process of ethnic identity development (i.e., ethnic identity statuses) to explain *how* and for *whom* the formation of ethnic identity acts as a protective mechanism (Seaton et al., 2006; Syed et al., 2007; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004; Kiang et al., 2006; Brittian et al., 2013; Neblett, 2023). Despite these gaps in

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the field, ethnic identity is believed to play a significant role in the lives of young BIPOC especially in relation to the racial discrimination they experience.

Although there are theoretical explanations for how ethnic identity operates as a protective factor, there has yet to be sufficient empirical evidence to confirm these scholars' claims. The few studies that have empirically tested aspects of the relationship between ethnic identity and racial discrimination have produced mixed results (Neblett, 2023). For example, some studies found Latinx adolescents with a strong sense of ethnic identity also exhibited problem behaviors, which contradicts the theoretical claim that ethnic identity is protective in nature (Cavazos-Rehg & DeLucia-Waack, 2009; Rafaelli et al., 2005; Zamboanga et al., 2006; Anderson et al., 2020; Hope et al., 2021). Many studies with Black youth, however, have found that ethnic identity moderates the relationship between experiences of racism and racism-related stress and negative outcomes, allowing some youth to cope effectively (e.g., Brody et al., 2006; Fuller-Rowell et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2014; Jones & Neblett, 2017; Neblett & Carter, 2012; Neblett & Roberts, 2013; Rucker et al., 2014; Seaton et al., 2014). Yet, recent literature has found further mixed results when ethnic identity resolution, or public regard, was found to be protective for young Black women but had an opposite effect for young Black men (Perkins et al., 2022). These discrepancies may be explained through the vast cultural and societal differences between BIPOC populations (e.g., Latinx ethnic identity vs. Black ethnic identity) and other intersecting identities (e.g., gender, sexuality, legal status), however, further study is necessary to hypothesize and test for such differences. Thus, the extent to which ethnic identity buffers adolescent BIPOC from the repercussions of racism requires further investigation to understand and interpret its protective nature.

Similarly, several scholars have pointed to theoretical connections between ethnic

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identity and PYD models, yet the nature of this relationship also remains unclear. As an ethnic-racial minority in America, an inherent part of developing ethnic identity is coming to terms with a sense of “otherness” and as a result BIPOC youth may have a greater sense of caring for others, self-esteem, and other PYD strengths (Evans et al., 2012). Despite the robust conceptual linkages between ethnic identity and PYD, only one study has been published that tested it with a sample of adolescent BIPOC. Results showed that ethnic identity and indicators of PYD (e.g., sense of belonging, confidence) were positively related within a sample of Black and Latinx adolescent boys (see Williams et al., 2014). Moreover, the study found that a two-factor model, with ethnic identity and PYD being the two latent factors, provided an adequate fit to the data which further substantiates a strong positive relationship between ethnic identity and PYD, as related but distinct constructs (Williams et al., 2014). The work of Williams and colleagues (2014) provides significant promise about the relationship between ethnic identity and PYD but the association between ethnic identity and prominent PYD frameworks (i.e., the 5Cs) necessitate further study.

Additionally, a handful of other studies offer hypothesized insights into how ethnic identity might promote indicators of PYD, such that, youth who have engaged in conversations and personal reflection around their race are more likely to stand up for others, care about others’ wellbeing, and participate in civic engagement (Checkoway, 2009; Evans et al., 2012; Spencer et al., 2008). A strong sense of ethnic identity, specifically, has been shown to promote positive outcomes like self-esteem, academic achievement, and self-confidence amongst adolescents and emerging adults of color which are often viewed as indicators of PYD (Butler-Barnes et al., 2018; Christophe et al., 2018; García Coll & Marks, 2009). Similarly, a meta-analysis found an average effect size of $r = .25$ for the association between ethnic identity and aspects of psychological well-being (i.e., self-esteem, global well-being) in adolescents (Smith & Silva,

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2011). Although ethnic identity has yet to be studied in relation to specific PYD frameworks, like the 5Cs, the literature posits ethnic identity as a meaningful promotive factor to the positive development of BIPOC.

Ethnic identity has garnered an impressive empirical backing in relation to other psychological indicators (e.g., depression, internalized behaviors, academic achievement), less is known about the relationship between ethnic identity and thriving, as measured through the 5Cs, for young BIPOC. Additionally, ethnic identity has yet to be empirically tested as a protective factor in relation to the link between perceived racial discrimination and lower levels of other PYD outcomes, despite hypothesized relationships. Further, less is known about how the three components of ethnic identity development (exploration, resolution, affirmation) operate in tandem and the extent to which they relate to PYD. Researchers must also investigate how relationships between ethnic identity development and racial groups vary to best understand when and for whom the promotion of ethnic identity is critical. In addition, further research is necessary to determine how ethnic identity relates with other protective factors (i.e., critical consciousness). To promote the positive development of young BIPOC, it is critical to gain a more nuanced understanding of ethnic identity and how it relates to young BIPOCs' ability to thrive at large.

Critical Consciousness as an Essential Strength for Young BIPOC

In recent years, scholars have emphasized the need to equip young (i.e., ages 14-24) BIPOC with strengths that specifically address larger social issues they experience (e.g., racism, sexism, classism, homophobia; García Coll et al., 1996). Critical consciousness, in particular, is a form of sociopolitical development that has been posited as a liberation strategy and internal strength that helps youth navigate social injustice. Based on Freire's original work, critical

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consciousness is defined as one's capacity for critical reflection and action upon one's sociopolitical environment (Diemer, 2017; Watts et al., 1999). Critical consciousness is grounded in the principle that marginalized people are oppressed by communities who have sociopolitical power and maintain an oppressive structure to uphold that power (Diemer et al., 2017; Freire, 1993; Watts et al., 2011). Critical consciousness is theorized to be imperative for individuals who struggle with any form of oppression, including racism, homophobia, sexism, ableism, and more. Furthermore, activists and scholars believe that critical consciousness is essential for marginalized people to achieve liberation, otherwise known as freedom from oppression (Freire, 1970; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002).

As Freire described, critical consciousness is comprised of two overarching components: critical reflection and critical action. Critical reflection occurs when people identify structural inequalities, perceive those inequalities as unjust, and connect them to discriminatory systems (Freire, 1970). As one scholar powerfully described "it [Critical Reflection] means learning to see, in the mundane particulars of ordinary lives, how history works, how perceived ways of thinking and feeling serve to perpetuate existing structures of inequality" (Hopper, 1999; p. 210). Critical action occurs after one deeply reflects on their experiences with oppression and then acts upon those reflections (i.e., activism, civic engagement; Diemer et al., 2017; Tyler et al., 2020). Some scholars argue that in addition to Freire's two components, critical consciousness also encompasses political efficacy, or ones' perceived capacity to affect change (Watts et al., 2011; Diemer et al., 2016). Due to this recent debate, critical consciousness has been operationalized in a few different ways, however, the Critical Consciousness Scale, a popular measure of critical consciousness in relation to racial oppression, remains true to Freire's two-facet definition and there is substantial evidence of its validity for use with adolescents (McWhirter & McWhirter,

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2014). Together, critical consciousness represents the cognitive capacity and awareness for individuals to question their place within their social order, dispel ideologies that maintain group-based inequality, and motivate them to engage in sociopolitical action to change such circumstances (Diemer et al., 2006; Anyiwo et al., 2018; Diemer et al., 2016; Seaton et al., 2018; Bañales et al., 2019).

Critical consciousness is theorized as a complex, yet promising strength which can help alleviate the consequences of racial oppression, as well as the individual harm caused by perceived racial discrimination. Experiences of racial discrimination are particularly harmful because they dehumanize and force youth to disconnect from their true self (Jemal, 2017; Tyler et al., 2020). After this type of experience, youth are faced with either internalizing the belief that their true self is considered lesser than, or cope through other means. One way youth may adapt to such traumatic experiences is to question what undergirds the racism they experienced, which in turn may foster a greater understanding of systemic racial injustices (Anyiwo et al., 2018; Mathews et al., 2019). BIPOC who have developed critical consciousness may attribute instances of perceived discrimination to an oppressive and unjust society, rather than personal shortcomings. Critical consciousness then may protect youth from harmful psychological consequences associated with perceived discrimination, as well as provide youth with the agency necessary to develop positively (Ginwright & James, 2002; Prilleltensky, 2012; Watts et al., 1999). Thus, scholars describe critical consciousness as an “antidote to oppression” as it provides youth with the social awareness necessary to explore the dynamics of privilege, oppression, and their role within it (Nagda & Zúñiga, 2003) as well as offer a path toward liberation (Freire, 1993; Watts et al., 1999).

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Critical consciousness is positioned as a critical component of the positive development of BIPOC (Seaton & White, 2024; Castro et al., 2022; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). Scholars speculate critical consciousness is most influential during adolescence and emerging adulthood because it is when youth first engage in increased civic and moral development which provides them with the ability to challenge social injustice through tangible action (Wray-Lake et al., 2025; Seider et al., 2017). With such advanced cognitive gains, BIPOC youth have the opportunity to think critically about social structures in more complex ways than ever before. Simultaneously, adolescents and emerging adults often acquire a greater ability to change the environment around them and self-determine than their younger counterparts (Diemer et al., 2017; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). Critical consciousness offers a pathway for youth to impact oppressive systems around them through activism, advocacy, and their own liberation (Watts et al., 2011). Moreover, the transformative nature of critical consciousness has potential to significantly impact the developmental trajectories and deeply shift the world views of young BIPOC (Diemer et al., 2017; Tyler et al., 2020; Watts et al., 2011).

As a leading approach to youth development, PYD frameworks have received a significant amount of criticism for their exclusion of social justice related factors, like critical consciousness. For example, Ginwright and Cammorata (2002) argue that sociopolitical development (i.e., critical consciousness, civic engagement, empowerment) is an imperative component of the wellbeing of adolescents and emerging adults. These authors developed the Social Justice Youth Development (SJYD) framework that emphasizes the development of critical consciousness and engaging in social action. In essence, SJYD asserts critical consciousness and social action are strengths that BIPOC youth use to combat the complex social, economic, and political forces they face (Ginwright & Cammorata, 2002). Similarly, in a

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recent issue of the *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, scholars highlighted the importance of critical consciousness and called for urgent research efforts to better understand the nuanced role critical consciousness plays in the positive development of BIPOC youth (Rapa & Geldhof, 2020). Since this call to action research on liberation strategies like critical consciousness has increased, however, there has yet to be sufficient study and integration of critical consciousness and the 5C framework for young BIPOC, specifically (Fisher & Lerner, 2013; Williams & Deutsch, 2016).

A few studies found that critical consciousness is positively related to PYD outcomes, specifically as operationalized using the 5Cs model of PYD (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016; Heberle et al., 2020; Travis & Leech, 2014). Most studies of critical consciousness and PYD are limited to either qualitative or correlational data and cannot speak to any causal relationships, however, some scholars provide powerful insights about these potential relationships (Heberle et al., 2020). For example, Travis and Leech (2014) argue that the 5Cs model must be expanded to capture the idea of “cultural armor” and suggest engaged citizenship and sense of community are strengths necessary for Black youth. Similarly, Clonan-Roy and colleagues (2016) present results from qualitative ethnographic and interview data that suggest for high school-aged girls of color, critical consciousness supports the development of the 5Cs (i.e., competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring). These studies provide preliminary evidence of empirical ties between indicators of sociopolitical development and the 5C framework, yet the extent to which they are related or relate differently across BIPOC communities remains unclear.

Despite the lack of empirical results directly linking critical consciousness and the 5Cs, studies have found positive relationships with critical consciousness and other indicators of PYD. Evidence suggests that critical consciousness is positively correlated with perceived well-

being (Hope et al., 2019; Luginbuhl et al., 2016), leadership skills (Delia & Krasny, 2018), and a positive sense of self (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016). Of note, one study found critical reflection predicted indicators of PYD (i.e., sense of belonging, well-being) for adolescent BIPOC (Bowers et al., 2010). Sociopolitical development, not exclusive to critical consciousness, has also been found to be significantly related to having basic psychological needs met (Luginbuhl et al., 2016). While the relationship between critical consciousness and the 5C framework have yet to be tested empirically, together, these studies demonstrate that critical consciousness is related to and possibly promotes thriving for BIPOC.

Few studies have tested the relationship between critical consciousness and perceived racial discrimination; however, their results suggest there is a strong positive relationship (Heberle et al., 2020; Hope et al., 2019). In 2020, only four of 67 studies published on critical consciousness amongst adolescents and emerging adults explored critical consciousness in relation to youth experiences of marginalization, oppression, and violence (Heberle et al., 2020). Although these studies did not investigate causal relationships, results showed youth who self-reported personal experiences with oppressive systems were more likely to have developed critical consciousness (Heberle et al., 2020; Kelly, 2018). In particular, one study found a strong positive correlation between critical consciousness and racial microaggressions experienced in school settings (Kelly, 2018). Another study found Black youth who reported frequent experiences with racial discrimination often had a strong orientation toward activism (Hope et al., 2019). Lastly, other scholars found youth who frequently experienced racial discrimination often believed there were social inequalities and viewed U.S. society as highly stratified (Tyler et al., 2020). The results from these studies theoretically posit critical consciousness and ethnic identity as heavily interrelated and sparked recent empirical investigation (Bañales et al., 2024).

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To date, scholars found preliminary evidence of a positive relationship between ethnic identity and critical consciousness, however, gaps in our knowledge remain about the extent to which these processes relate to one another within the context of racial oppression (Bañales et al., 2024; Matthews et al., 2020; Matthews, 2023).

Critical consciousness in and of itself is an intrinsically valuable asset for BIPOC, in addition to serving as a potentially powerful strength to defend against the unjust burdens of being a racial minority in the US. Unfortunately, critical consciousness has yet to be empirically embedded or tested in conjunction with PYD frameworks and several gaps in our knowledge of the role critical consciousness plays in BIPOC development remain unclear (Rapa & Geldhof, 2020). For example, critical consciousness is posited as a liberation strategy, yet it has not been empirically tested in relation to the 5Cs framework when taking experiences of racial discrimination into account. The investigation of these gaps will provide guidance on the extent to which critical consciousness can protect youth from the harms of racism and add insight into how critical consciousness relates to the 5Cs framework for young BIPOC.

The Present Study

BIPOC in the US navigate through a multitude of barriers set forth by societal racial oppression. Unfortunately, young (i.e., adolescents and emerging adults) BIPOC develop in a context that perpetuates racial inequality both implicitly and explicitly. Many suffer from the consequences of such harm, including (but not limited to) criminalization, segregation, internalized racism, and complex trauma. Despite the harm perpetuated by racial oppression, many young BIPOC persevere, resist the notion that they are inferior to the white-majority, and develop into thriving adults. As shown in this review, there is reason to believe young BIPOC develop unique strengths like ethnic identity and critical consciousness that help to ameliorate

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the harm perpetuated by racism while also promoting PYD. Therefore, an explanatory sequential mixed-method study was employed to test the ways in which the life-threatening context of racial oppression relates to the positive development of BIPOC and strengths they develop to protect against the negative psychological impacts of racism.

The first phase of this study included a quantitative investigation of the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and each component of Lerner's 5C model of positive youth development with a comprehensive sample of young BIPOC (i.e., ages 18- 24). Given the prevalence of racial discrimination, and the harm that often comes from it, it is critical to study how experiences of racial discrimination relates to each of the 5Cs. Since perceived racial discrimination is an experience that is often unavoidable for BIPOC, it is surprising how little is known about how those experiences relate to noted indicators of lifelong well-being. Given the substantive literature base linking perceived racial discrimination to negative long-term outcomes (García Coll et al., 1995; Hope et al., 2015; Carter, 2007; Goff et al., 2017, Jones et al., 2020), and the limited research assessing the relationship between racial discrimination and PYD (Travis & Leech, 2013), for the quantitative phase it is hypothesized that youth who had more experiences of racial discrimination will have lower levels of the 5Cs, thus providing impetus to determine factors to reduce the negative relationship between perceived racial discrimination and the 5Cs. This investigation is an important step for the field towards understanding how to bolster strength-based outcomes like the 5Cs, rather than reduce traditional measures of adjustment (i.e., internalizing and externalizing behaviors) for young BIPOC.

Next, this study quantitatively investigated the impact of two potential strengths on the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and the 5Cs. Specifically, the extent to which ethnic identity and critical consciousness buffer the relationship between perceived racial

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discrimination and thriving, as measured by a composite variable of the 5Cs of PYD. Despite clear theoretical impetus, neither ethnic identity nor critical consciousness has been tested as protective factors against perceived racial discrimination and its negative effect on youth development. Additionally, the relationship between ethnic identity and critical consciousness in relation to the 5Cs of PYD has yet to be properly investigated.

Developing a strong ethnic identity is seen as a developmental task for BIPOC, yet little is known of the role ethnic identity plays in their positive development (Umaña-Taylor & Rivas-Drake, 2021). Further, less is known about how the process of engaging in each component of ethnic identity development (i.e., exploration, resolution, affirmation) —and the various ways individuals may simultaneously engage with them—relates to thriving (Carter et al., 2017; Umaña-Taylor, 2015; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004, Seaton et al., 2006). To address this gap in the field, this study built on prior research that employed a process-centered approach which categorizes individuals into “ethnic identity status” types. This framework captured the various configurations of ethnic identity development and identified four primary identity statuses: diffuse, foreclosed, moratorium, and achieved (Seaton et al., 2006; Syed et al., 2007; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004; Kiang et al., 2006). Table 2 explains the theoretical significance of the four most common clusters.

Table 2

Definitions of Previously Examined Ethnic Identity Statuses (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004)

Status Name	Status Description
Achieved Positive	A successful achievement of a sense of identity where the individual had made a commitment to his or her ethnic identity that is characterized by exploration of his or her culture and positive feelings about being a part of their ethnic group.

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Diffuse Positive	Consists of individuals with elevated affirmation, low resolution, and low exploration. General apathy in attitude and behavior, but not in affect, toward their own ethnic identity.
Foreclosed Positive	Is characterized by elevated affirmation and resolution with low exploration. Individuals in this group had a premature and unquestioning adoption of values; they had not explored their ethnicity but had committed to their ethnic identity and had positive feelings about being a part of their ethnic group.
Diffuse Negative	Is characterized by low affirmation, low resolution, and low exploration. This group had a general apathy toward their ethnic identity; they had not explored nor committed to their ethnic identity and had negative feelings about being a part of their ethnic group.

Based on the strong theoretical postulations (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004; Neblett et al., 2012) and emerging empirical evidence (Seaton et al., 2006; Chavez- Korrell & Torres, 2014), it is hypothesized that youth categorized as having an achieved positive ethnic identity status will have higher levels of the 5Cs of PYD than youth in an “immature” or early phase of grappling with their ethnic identity (i.e., Diffused and Foreclosed; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004; Seaton et al., 2006). Additionally, given ethnic identity is heavily theorized as a protective factor (Umaña-Taylor & Rivas-Drake, 2021; Luthar et al., 2000), it is hypothesized all components of ethnic identity development will mediate the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and overall PYD.

Similarly, in recent years there has been a call-to-action demanding immediate investigation of critical consciousness as an essential promotive factor for positive developmental outcomes (Rapa & Geldhof, 2020). Given the meaningful, cross-disciplinary, theoretical impetus (Diemer et al., 2017; Freire, 1993; Watts et al., 2011) and handful of studies (Hope et al., 2019; Luginbuhl et al., 2016; Delia & Krasny, 2018; Clonan-Roy et al., 2016)

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which posit critical consciousness as essential for the liberation of BIPOC, this study hypothesized critical consciousness would not only positively relate to indicators of thriving, as measured through the 5Cs, but act as a mediator for the negative relationships between perceived racial discrimination and PYD. Thus, this study aims to fill these gaps and provide rigorous information on the extent to which ethnic identity and critical consciousness promote thriving among young BIPOC.

The second phase of this study utilized qualitative inquiry to explain the quantitative findings through the voices and lived experiences of young BIPOC. Survey results directly guided the development of the qualitative research questions, sampling method, and interview protocol. Inductive and deductive coding was utilized to develop a codebook and a thematic analysis was employed to determine shared experiences amongst the phenomenon of thriving despite racial oppression. Once themes were determined findings from both the quantitative and qualitative phase were integrated which informed meta-inferences through the use of joint displays.

The investigation of these questions will push the field of PYD forward by providing a more nuanced understanding of how thriving can be promoted among BIPOC youth despite the unjust social context of racism. These empirical investigations provide insight to the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and the 5Cs, how young BIPOC utilize ethnic identity and critical consciousness to navigate the racism they have experienced, and the extent to which ethnic identity and critical consciousness promote thriving. The investigation of these research questions also supports the need for future research to discern the nuances within the BIPOC community (i.e., between racial groups). With this knowledge, important developmental environments (e.g., schools, youth programs) can be structured and implemented to support the

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positive development of BIPOC adolescents while larger social change efforts attempt to eliminate systemic racial oppression.

Hypotheses

Research question one. How does perceived racial discrimination relate to positive youth development outcomes?

H1a. Higher perceived racial discrimination will be associated with lower ratings on the 5Cs (caring, competence, connection, character, confidence, contribution) of PYD.

H1b. The relationship between perceived racial discrimination and the 5Cs will vary by racial group indicators of intersecting oppressions (i.e., gender, skintone, generation American).

Research question two. How do positive youth developmental outcomes vary by ethnic identity status?

H2a. There will be a statistically significant difference in positive youth development outcomes for groups of youth by ethnic identity status. Such that, individuals with an achieved positive ethnic identity status will have significantly higher averages of positive youth development outcomes (5Cs) compared to individuals who are categorized as diffused or foreclosed ethnic identity status.

H2b. The relationship between ethnic identity development (i.e., exploration, resolution, affirmation) and the 5Cs will vary by racial group and indicators of intersecting oppressions (i.e., gender, skin tone, generation American).

Research question three. How does critical consciousness relate to positive youth development outcomes?

H3a. Higher levels of critical consciousness will be associated with higher ratings on the 5Cs (caring, competence, connection, character, confidence, contribution).

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H3b. The relationship between critical consciousness and the 5Cs will vary by racial group indicators of intersecting oppressions (i.e., gender, skin tone, generation American).

Research question four. Does youths' ethnic identity and critical consciousness explain the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and positive youth development?

H4a. All components of ethnic identity development will significantly mediate the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and PYD.

H4b. Critical Consciousness will significantly mediate the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and PYD.

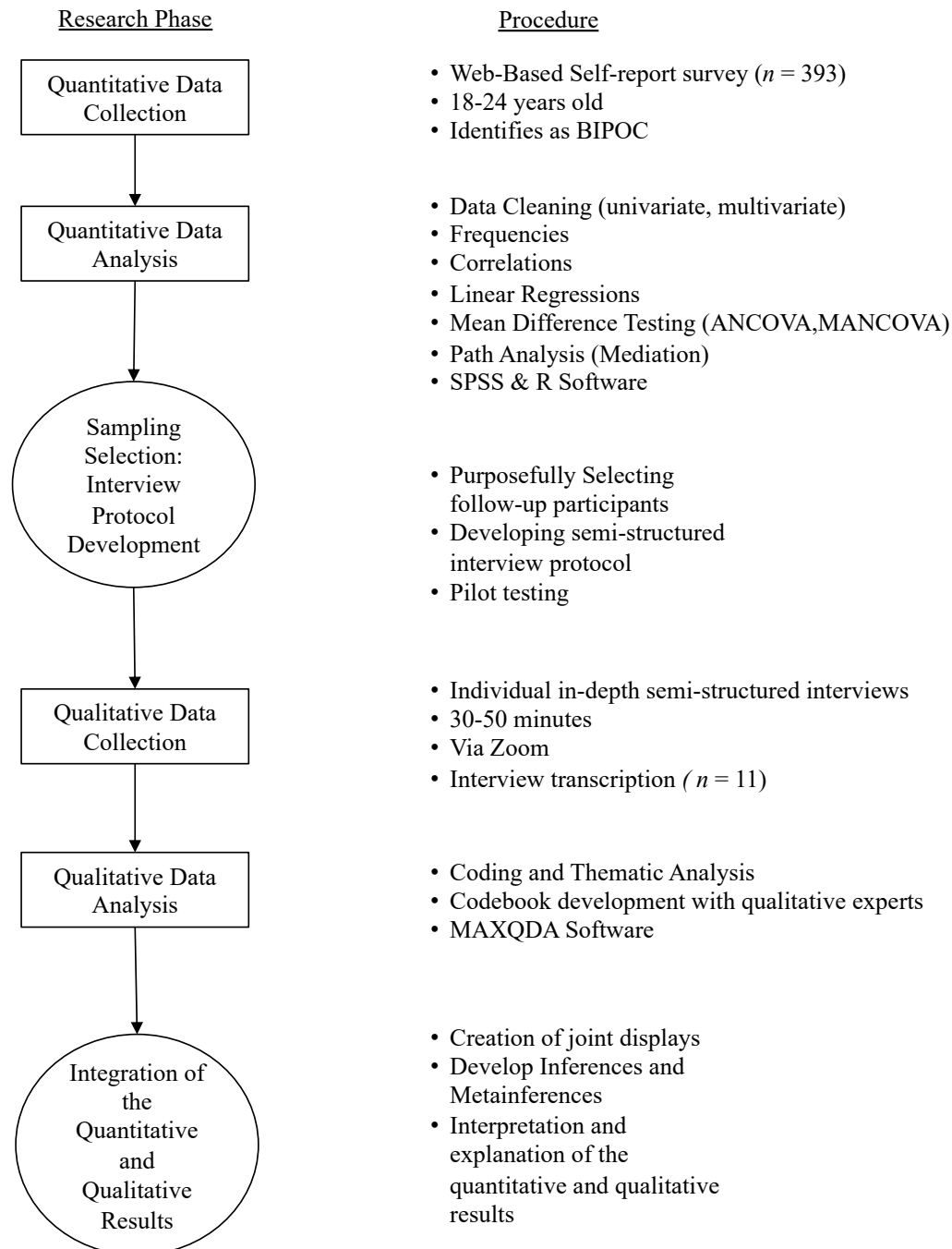
H4c. The mechanisms explaining the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and PYD will vary by racial group indicators of intersecting oppressions (i.e., gender, skin tone, generation American).

Chapter II. Methodology

An explanatory sequential design was employed to test the research questions of this timely study (Creswell & Clark, 2018). This mixed methodology design heavily emphasized quantitative data, through the use of advanced statistical analyses, and utilized qualitative data to explain the quantitative results (Creswell & Clark, 2018). As visualized in Figure 1, quantitative methodology was employed first through the form of self-report surveys. The survey data was then analyzed to test the four research questions and subsequent hypotheses. The quantitative results directly informed the qualitative portion of the study, such that, the principal investigator created the interview protocol based on relationships that emerged from the quantitative data that would benefit from additional explanation from the quantitative findings (e.g., how does perceived racial discrimination influence one's sense of confidence?). This current chapter explains the methodology of this study in detail (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Visual of Study's Explanatory Sequential Mixed Method Design



Quantitative Phase

Participants

Survey data were collected in April 2023 by a recruited participant sample from CloudResearch. Many studies substantiate CloudResearch as a reputable source for recruiting research participants and have found effect sizes comparable to community and college student samples (Douglas et al., 2023; Hauser et al., 2022). The inclusion criteria for study participants were youth ages 18-24; who identify as non-white, who are English speaking, and reside in the United States of America. The final sample included 393 participants. All participants were between the ages of 18-24 and the median age was 22 years old. The majority of the sample identified as female (65%; $n = 256$) followed by male (29%; $n = 114$), non-binary (5%; $n = 19$), and transgender (1%; $n = 4$). The majority of participants in the sample self-identified as Latinx (56%; $n = 219$) followed by Black or African American (16%; $n = 61$), AfroLatinx (12%; $n = 46$), multi-racial (10%; $n = 41$), and other (7%; $n = 26$).

Given the nature of the study, it was imperative to collect relevant and rigorous demographic data to disaggregate between the community of BIPOC participants and capture intersectionality. First, this study measured the phenomenon of intersectionality by using two indicators of oppression: (a) a ternary self-report of oppression where participants were asked to rate “*Yes*”, “*Somewhat*”, or “*No*” in response to this prompt:

Oppression is the social act of placing severe restrictions on an individual, group, or institution. The oppressed individual or group is devalued, exploited, and deprived of privileges by the individual or group who has more power. (Barker, 2003) With the definition above in mind, have you experienced oppression?

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and (b) the number of oppressed identities as self-identified from a list of options (i.e., gender, sexual orientation, religion etc.) displayed in Appendix A (Azadi, 2024). The majority of participants (79%; $n = 312$) had experienced oppression in their life. On average, those who reported they had experienced oppression reported being oppressed by two parts of their identity (i.e., their race, sexuality, gender expression).

Secondly, this study employed a self-reported skin tone measure. It is known that racialized inequality in the United States is not only related to self-identified race or ethnic categories, but also by how ones' skin tone is perceived by others (Campbell, Bratter, and Roth 2016; Saperstein 2012; Vargas 2015). Therefore, a measure to capture colorism, the privilege that light-skinned minorities have over dark-skinned minorities, was included in the demographic data as a potential disaggregating variable (Yoo & Pituc, 2013; Chavez et al., 2014). Participants were asked to identify their skin tone on the 10-point visual displayed in Figure 2. On average, participants identified themselves between a four and five on this scale.

Figure 2

Skin Tone Measure Presented to Participants



Lastly, this study employed a self-report generation metric to add to the understanding of oppressions experienced. Most (43%) of the sample identified as a first generation American, meaning at least one of their parents immigrated to the U.S.

Measures

Perceived Racial Discrimination

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Given the complex nature of racism, scholars have operationalized it in a multitude of ways. However, the most used measure is perceived racial discrimination (García Coll et al., 1996; Karlsen & Nazroo, 2002). While a handful of valid and reliable self-report measures exist to capture perceived racial discrimination the scale “Perceptions of Racism in Children and Youth” (PRaCY) was identified as the most appropriate measure for this study (Patcher et al., 2010). PRaCY was developed by leaders in the field of adolescent BIPOC development including, Dr. Cynthia García Coll and others who developed the Integrative Model of Development (García Coll et al., 1996). Substantial evidence has demonstrated that the PRaCY is both valid and reliable for children, adolescents, and emerging adults across a wide variety of racial demographics. Specifically, the model has shown a good fit to the data when sampled with youth of color ($\chi^2(35) = 48.7, p = .06$; CFI = 0.934; RMSEA = 0.056; Patcher et al., 2010). In this study, all factor loadings were significant and ranged from 0.44 to 0.69 (Patcher et al., 2010). Research has also shown adequate internal consistency with Cronbach’s alphas of .78 (Yoo & Pituc, 2013) and .68 -.71 (Park et al., 2017) in previous research. Additionally, there is evidence of convergent validity in that the PRaCY has been significantly associated with depressive symptoms, physiological anxiety, and greater social concerns for youth of color (Yoo & Pituc, 2013). The evidence presented indicates the PRaCY was a valid and reliable measure to test perceived racial discrimination amongst young people of color.

The PRaCY short-version scale consists of 10-items (see Appendix B). First participants were asked to read the following instructions (derived from Marcelo & Yates, 2019):

When people discriminate against other people, it means they treat people badly, or do not respect them, because of the color of their skin, because they speak a different language or have an accent, or because they come from a different country or culture.

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For each of the following situations, think whether you have ever in your life felt discriminated against because of the color of your skin, your language or accent, or because of your culture or country of origin.

Next participants were asked to indicate *yes or no* to whether they experienced each of the situations presented in the 10-items (refer to Appendix B). For example, participants were asked to affirm or deny whether they have ever experienced a time when “*someone made a bad or insulting remark about your race, ethnicity, or language*” or “*People assume you’re not smart or intelligent.*” If participants indicated *yes* to any of the 10-item scenarios, they were asked to answer two-open ended questions that can be found in Appendix B. To accommodate a wide-range sample of emerging adults, two items were slightly modified from the original PRaCY, such that “*been accused of something you didn't do at school*” was changed to “*been accused of something you didn't do*” and “*been treated badly or unfairly by a teacher*” was changed to “*been treated badly or unfairly by an authority figure?*” The data were analyzed as a grand sum (Park et al., 2018; Marcelo & Yates, 2018) for the dichotomous yes/no answers. Data demonstrated normality with skew and kurtosis within the expected range (skew of -0.73 and kurtosis of -.25). In the present sample, the PRaCY measure was highly reliable (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .82$).

Positive Youth Development Outcomes

For the purposes of this study, the 5Cs framework was measured with a combined scale drawing items from a revised version of the PYD Very Short Form for Older Adolescents (PYD-VSF; Su & Johnson, 2022; Geldhof et al., 2014) and the contribution subscale from PYD-Inventory (PYD-I; Arnold et al., 2012). Substantial evidence indicates the PYD-VSF is valid, reliable, and has often been used with ethnically diverse youth. Notably, the PYD-VSF was

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reduced from the 80+ items employed in the often-cited 4-H study where Lerner and colleagues initially tested the 5C model (e.g., Bowers et al., 2010; Lerner et al., 2005). Previous research indicates that the PYD-VSF had acceptable fit (i.e., RMSEA < .08, CFI and TLI > .90) when used with over 7,000 adolescents (Lerner, 2005). The PYD-VSF has also exhibited high convergent validity with other measures including, depression, delinquency and risky behavior (Geldhof et al., 2017). A study recently showed after minor revisions, the PYD-VSF is a strong and valid measure of the 5Cs framework for racially diverse emerging adults (Su & Johnson, 2022). Similarly, the “contribution” sub-scale from the PYD-Inventory has been tested with adolescents from ethnically diverse samples and found to be reliable ($\alpha = .91$; Arnold et al., 2012). Together, both scales are rigorous and were deemed appropriate to use for this investigation.

The PYD-VSF consists of 16 items and 5 subscales (competence, confidence, character, caring, and connection; see Appendix C). All items from the PYD-VSF were anchored from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) on a Likert scale. Examples include: “*I always find a solution to a problem*” and “*when I see someone being taken advantage of, I want to help them.*” Lastly, the PYD- I Contribution Scale consisted of 7-items with a Likert response set from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). See Appendix C for additional information.

For data analysis purposes, responses on the revised PYD-VSF (range = 1-5) subscales and contribution sub-scale (range = 1-5) were averaged separately which resulted in 6 sub-scale composites to test each component of the 5Cs model. In addition, responses from all 23 items (including contribution) were average to create an overall PYD composite score (range = 1-5). Overall, higher scores indicate greater levels of PYD.

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Data demonstrated normality with skew and kurtosis within the expected range (skew of -.23 to -1.3 and kurtosis of -.43 to 1.78). The PYD-VSF measure was highly reliable (Cronbach's α ranged from .51 to .89), as well as the contribution subscale from PYD-Inventory (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$). Confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated an acceptable fit for the expected six-factor model: CFI = .98, TLI = .98, RMSEA = .06. Table 3 displays the factor loadings for all PYD outcomes.

Table 3

Confirmatory Factor Analysis of PYD-VSF and Contribution Subscale

Positive Youth Development item	Factor Loading
Factor 1: Competence	
In difficult situations I will find a way.	.73
I master difficult problems.	.68
I always find a solution to a problem.	.76
Factor 2: Confidence	
I am happy with myself most of the time.	.48
I really like the way I look.	.78
All in all, I am glad I am me.	.81
Factor 3: Character	
I help to make the world a better place to live in.	.72
I accept responsibility for my actions when I make a mistake or get into trouble.	.55
I enjoy being with people who are a different race than I am.	.43
Factor 4: Caring	
When I see someone being taken advantage of, I want to help them.	.86
When I see someone being picked on, I feel sorry for them.	.77
When I see another person who is hurt or upset, I feel sorry for them.	.75
Factor 5: Connection	
I receive(d) a lot of encouragement at my school.	.50
I am a useful and important member of my family.	.67
I feel like an important member of my local community.	.76
I feel my friends are good friends.	.48
Factor 6: Contribution	

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I take an active role in my community.	.68
I am someone who gives to benefit others.	.67
I like to work with others to solve problems.	.61
I have things I can offer to others.	.65
I believe I can make a difference in the world.	.74
I care about contributing to make the world a better place for everyone.	.75
It is important for me to try and make a difference in the world.	.76

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity, an individual's sense of self when navigating their ethnic heritage, has garnered significant attention amongst social scientists (Butler-Barnes et al., 2018; Christophe et al., 2018; Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007). While a handful of self-report scales exist to measure ethnic identity and racial identity, the Ethnic Identity Scale (EIS) developed by Adriana Umaña-Taylor and colleagues (2004) was best suited for this study. This self-report measure (shown in Appendix D) has been empirically validated and shown to be reliable with young BIPOC in previous research. Specifically, Cronbach's alpha was .75 when tested with Latinx adolescents (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2012) and emerging adults (Chavez-Korell & Torres, 2014), and ranged from .83-.91 when tested with Asian Americans, African Americans, and Latinx youth (Brittian et al., 2013). Research supports the convergent validity of EIS and has shown ethnic identity to be positively correlated with self-esteem, familial ethnic socialization (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004), and negatively correlated to depressive symptoms (Douglass & Umaña-Taylor, 2015).

Aligned with the theory of ethnic identity development, the EIS consists of three subscales with a total of 17 items. All response sets are anchored from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The first subscale consists of seven items that measure the extent to which participants have *explored* their ethnic identity (refer to Appendix D). To illustrate, one item

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states “*I have experienced things that reflect my ethnicity, such as eating food, listening to music, and watching movies.*” The second subscale investigates the extent to which ones’ ethnic identity is *resolved* through 4 items. For example, one item states “*I have a clear sense of what my ethnicity means to me.*” Lastly, the EIS includes six items which measure the extent to which respondents feel negatively about their ethnic identity (*affirmation*). For example, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which agree or disagree with the following statement “*I feel negatively about my ethnicity.*”

Subscale scores were obtained by reverse coding indicated items (refer to Appendix D) and responses from items average subscale scores (range = 1-5). Thus, high subscale scores will indicate high levels of exploration, resolution, and affirmation. Data demonstrated normality with skew and kurtosis within the expected range (skew of -1.26 to -.56 and kurtosis of -.29 to .67). EIS was highly reliable (Cronbach’s α ranged from .77 to .87) and a confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated an acceptable fit for the expected three-factor model: CFI = .92, TLI= .90, RMSEA = .13, SRMR = .11 for all ethnic identity latent variables (refer to Table 4)

Table 4

Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Ethnic Identity Scale

Ethnic Identity Scale item	Factor Loading
Factor 1: Resolution	
I am clear about what my ethnicity means to me.	.90
I understand how I feel about my ethnicity.	.79
I know what my ethnicity means to me.	.80
I have a clear sense of what my ethnicity means to me.	.86
Factor 2: Affirmation	
My feelings about my ethnicity are mostly negative. *	.85
I feel negatively about my ethnicity. *	.80
I wish I were a different ethnicity. *	.92
I am happy with my ethnicity.	.89
If I could choose, I would prefer to be a different ethnicity. *	.90

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I like my ethnicity.	.87
Factor 3: Exploration	
I have not participated in any activities that would teach me about my ethnicity. *	.39
I have experienced things that reflect my ethnicity, such as eating food, listening to music, and watching movies.	.72
I have attended events that have helped me learn more about my ethnicity.	.67
I have read books/ magazines/ newspapers or other materials that have taught me about my ethnicity.	.75
I have participated in activities that have exposed me to my ethnicity.	.71
I have learned about my ethnicity by doing things such as reading (books, magazines, newspapers), searching the internet, or keeping up with current events.	.73
I have participated in activities that have taught me about my ethnicity.	.81

*Note. Reverse-coded items are indicated by **

In alignment with the ethnic identity development theory, a cluster analysis was employed to identify ethnic identity statuses instead of using a univariate approach. This allowed for an examination of ethnic identity subscale scores in unison to capture the complexity of the construct. Several researchers have taken this approach and have identified four primary identity statuses: diffuse, foreclosed, moratorium, and achieved (Seaton et al., 2006; Syed et al., 2007; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004; Kiang et al., 2006) as explained previously.

Critical Consciousness

Critical Consciousness, one's capacity for critical reflection and action upon one's sociopolitical environment, has gained a significant amount of attention within the field of psychology in recent years (Diemer, 2017; Watts et al., 1999). While there are a few self-report scales that are commonly used to measure critical consciousness, the Measure of Adolescent Critical Consciousness (MACC; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2014) was used for this study. Unlike

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other measures of critical consciousness, the MACC assesses critical consciousness as it specifically relates to racism and has been tested with both adolescents and emerging adults (Diemer, 2017; Watts et al., 1999; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2016). A few studies have validated the MACC measure with BIPOC populations (Eisinga, et al., 2013; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2016). Additionally, the measure has demonstrated adequate model fit and adequate indicators of internal consistency in previous research (Cronbach's alpha range .61-.80; Eisinga, et al., 2013; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2016). Lastly, the MACC has demonstrated convergent validity where research has shown it was negatively associated with measures of racism, classism, and homophobia (Shin et al., 2016).

The MACC consists of 10 items which are divided between two subscales described as critical agency and critical behavior (see Appendix E). During the development of the MACC, authors first devised items for all three components of critical consciousness (agency, reflection, and behavior), however, results determined critical reflection items did not warrant it's own construct and instead loaded onto the construct of critical agency. Thus, the MACC measures only critical agency and behavior (McWhirter & McWhirter, 2016). Critical agency items measure ones' awareness of racial injustices and commitment to acting on it, whereas, critical behavior items measure actions taken to promote justice and end racism. All items utilized a Likert scale with a response set anchored from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Sample items included: "*It is important to me to contribute to my community*" for critical agency and "*I am involved in activities or groups that promote equality and justice*" for critical behavior.

For data analysis purposes, responses on the critical consciousness subscales were averaged separately which resulted in 2 sub-scale composites to test each component critical consciousness. Given critical consciousness, in relation to racism, is theorized as a construct that

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encompasses both critical action and critical behavior, responses from all 10 items were average to create a critical consciousness composite score (range = 1-5) which was used for hypothesis testing (Cadenas et al., 2024). Overall, higher scores indicate greater levels of critical consciousness.

Data demonstrated normality with skew and kurtosis within the expected range (skew of -.63 to -.44 and kurtosis of -.66 to -.30). Critical consciousness was highly reliable (Cronbach's α ranged from .85 to .88). Confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated an acceptable fit for the expected two-factor model: CFI = .99, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .08. Table 5 displays the factor loadings for the critical consciousness measure.

Table 5

Confirmatory Factor Analysis of MACC

Critical Consciousness Scale item	Factor Loading
Factor 1: Critical Agency	
There are ways that I can contribute to my community.	.74
I am motivated to try to end racism and discrimination.	.78
It is important to fight against social and economic inequality.	.76
I can make a difference in my community.	.73
More effort is needed to end racism and discrimination.	.62
It is important to me to contribute to my community.	.78
In the future, I will participate in activities or groups that struggle against racism and discrimination.	.81
Factor 2: Critical Behavior	
I am involved in activities or groups against racism and discrimination.	.90
I am involved in activities or groups that promote equality and justice.	.89
I have participated in demonstrations or signed petitions about justice.	.88

Qualitative Phase

Measures

In adherence to the explanatory mixed methods design the qualitative approach and research questions were developed during integration, a process of using the survey results to inform the qualitative phase of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A phenomenological approach was used to provide understanding of the “essence of the experience” (Creswell, 2013). Rooted in hermeneutic philosophy, this approach allowed for both a rich description of lived experiences, as well as the ability to interpret the “texts of life” in conjunction with the quantitative results (Creswell, 2013).

The qualitative phase of this study aimed to provide insight into how BIPOC youth experience and understand the role of ethnic identity and critical consciousness in their positive development and how (if at all) young BIPOC describe their experience using their ethnic identity and critical consciousness to cope with racial discrimination. As determined by statistically meaningful relationships between primary study variables and demographic variables, as well as feasible sample sizes, hypothesized relationships explored via qualitative data were only explored for Latinx and Black youth. Thus, an aim of the qualitative investigation was to explore how the experiences of ethnic identity development, critical consciousness, and racism varied for Black and Latinx youth through targeted recruitment of Black and Latinx youth from the survey sample. A semi-structured interview protocol was developed and employed to allow participants to take the discussions in directions they deemed most useful.

The protocol was reviewed by research peers with expertise in qualitative methodology and piloted with two young BIPOC. The semi-structured interview protocol included questions such as, “*In what ways has your culture, or being a part of the [Insert self-described ethnicity]*

community in general, shaped who you are?”, *“How did you overcome this experience [of racial discrimination] and others like it?”* and *“In what ways, if at all, has the concept of critical consciousness helped you cope with discrimination?”* See Appendix F for the semi-structured interview protocol in its entirety. All interviews were conducted and recorded using Zoom. The audio recording was then transcribed by the primary investigator for data analysis purposes.

Interview Participants

Between September of 2024 and January of 2025, 11 semi-structured interviews were conducted, which lasted approximately 40 minutes. Informed by the statistically meaningful correlations between primary study variables and demographic variables, a purposeful sampling method was employed to recruit Black and Latinx youth from the survey sample who opted-in to participate in a follow-up interview. After initial recruitment methods were exhausted (i.e., four recruitment attempts), AfroLatinx and multi-racial participants who opted-in to interview participation were invited to participate in the semi-structured interview. Thus, the inclusion criteria widened to include all BIPOC in the survey sample who opted in to participate in an interview. Given the purpose of a phenomenological approach is to describe and better understand lived experiences, rather than reach saturation and the ability to generalize, a sample size of 3–15 interview participants were considered appropriate (Creswell & Poth 2018; Creswell, 2018). See Table 6 for a description of interview participants by self-reported demographics from the survey.

Table 6

Interview Participant by Self-Reported Survey Demographics

Participant Number	Race	Age at time of survey	Gender Identity	Skin Color Rating	Ethnic Identity Status
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1	Latinx	19	Female	2.0	Achieved Positive
2	Black	24	Male	6.8	Achieved Positive
3	Latinx	22	Female	3.8	Achieved Positive
4	Black	24	Female	8.3	Achieved Negative
5	Latinx	22	Male	3.3	Achieved Negative
6	Latinx	18	Female	2.5	Diffuse Positive
7	AfroLatinx	23	Female	2.8	Achieved Negative
8	Latinx	19	Non-Binary	2.0	Achieved Positive
9	Multi-racial	23	Female	6.4	Achieved Negative
10	Latinx	18	Male	5.4	Achieved Positive
11	Latinx	18	Male	1.6	Diffuse Positive

Qualitative Data Analysis

Inductive and deductive coding was utilized to develop a codebook. This approach allowed for the principal investigator to create minimal codes expected to appear as informed by the literature (e.g., indicators of positive youth development) while also allowing for codes to emerge from the participants' voiced experiences. Next, a thematic analysis was employed to determine shared experiences amongst the phenomenon of thriving despite racial oppression. The principal investigator worked alongside two qualitative researchers to refine and validate the codebook.

Researcher Positionality

The primary investigator who developed this study, and conducted all interviews, identifies with many oppressed identities including Latina, first-generation American, and bisexual. She was raised by a Mexican immigrant father and a first-generation white mother which

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influenced her own ethnic identity development, especially while navigating being a “no sabo kid” (i.e., someone of Hispanic descent who is not fluent in Spanish) in Southern California. This background informs her orientation to this study. Her feminist approach is influenced by her own experiences as a woman of color and having the privilege of being lighter skinned, therefore, she was mindful about centering participant voices.

Several strategies were implemented to mitigate researcher bias and subjectivity. First, a reflexive journal was utilized throughout the research process to document methodological decisions and rationales, along with personal reflections and insights that emerged during the data analysis process. This process served as a critical step to establish an audit trail providing step-by-step details of codebook refinement (Nowell et al., 2017). Second, the principal investigator regularly communicated and debriefed with research peers with expertise in qualitative research, yet not directly involved in this study. Engaging in detailed discussions with peers about the interviews, transcripts, and findings helped the principal investigator maintain objectivity and minimize potential biases, errors, or misinterpretations of findings (Nowell et al., 2017). Finally, to boost credibility of findings, the principal investigator also utilized member checks where results and supporting quotes were presented to two interview participants, giving them the opportunity to comment on whether findings accurately represented their perspectives and whether they would like to challenge any interpretations made by the primary investigator.

Chapter III. Results

Quantitative Phase Findings

Descriptive Statistics for Primary Study Variables

Means for the majority of study variables were relatively high ranging from 3.78 to 4.47 on a scale of 1 to 5. On average, rates of perceived racial discrimination were slightly above the middle of the range averaging a mean of 6.75 on a scale of 0 to 10, consistent with the purposive sampling of racially minoritized participants. The data showed moderate variability, with most scales showing an average standard deviation between .52 and .95 (for five-point scales). Perceived racial discrimination ($SD = 2.72$) and critical behavior ($SD = 1.14$), however, showed higher variability as might be expected given the nature of the survey items. Missing data was handled by listwise deletion of 151 cases. Means, standard deviations, and correlations between primary study variables are found in Table 7 and 8.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for Primary Study Variables (N = 393)

	Alpha	#Items	Range	M (SD)	Skew	Kurtosis
Positive Youth Development	0.897	23	1-5	4.03 (.525)	-0.230	-0.430
Competence	0.693	3	1-5	4.03 (.664)	-0.379	-0.320
Confidence	0.806	3	1-5	3.85 (.955)	-0.778	-0.095
Character	0.510	3	1-5	4.17 (.621)	-0.785	0.791
Caring	0.736	3	1-5	4.47 (.621)	-1.30	1.782
Connection	0.629	3	1-5	3.78 (.738)	-0.327	-0.392
Contribution	0.810	7	1-5	4.00 (.643)	-0.410	-0.251

Ethnic Identity

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Resolution	0.835	4	1-5	4.42 (.649)	-1.010	0.189
Affirmation	0.878	6	1-5	4.37 (.823)	-1.260	0.673
Exploration	0.771	7	1-5	3.98 (.722)	-0.559	-0.300
Critical Consciousness	0.876	10	1-5	3.98 (.711)	-0.402	-0.542
Critical Agency	0.845	7	1-5	4.21 (.640)	-0.629	-0.273
Critical Behavior	0.849	3	1-5	3.45 (1.14)	-0.441	-0.667
Perceived Racial Discrimination	0.817	10	0-10	6.75 (2.72)	-0.737	-0.246

Table 8
Pairwise Correlations for Study Variables (N = 393)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Perceived Racial Discrimination	--													
2. PYD Composite	.17**	--												
3. Competence	.12*	.72**	--											
4. Confidence	.06	.70**	.52**	--										
5. Character	.16**	.70**	.49**	.18**	--									
6. Caring	.15**	.54**	.26**	.52**	.36**	--								
7. Connection	.05	.80**	.49**	.44**	.44**	.28**	--							
8. Contribution	.19**	.88**	.53**	.25**	.54**	.48**	.66**	--						
9. EI Resolution	.17**	.33**	.26**	.23**	.27**	.24**	.23**	.25**	--					
10. EI Exploration	.21**	.42**	.30**	.18**	.28**	.26**	.34**	.39**	.39**	--				
11. EI Affirmation	.004	.15**	.12**	.32**	.18**	.19**	.05	.05	.39**	.22**	--			
12. Critical Consciousness	.33**	.62**	.36**	.32**	.46**	.37**	.46**	.65**	.33**	.43**	.07	--		
13. Critical Agency	.28**	.63*	.37**	.32**	.49**	.47**	.43**	.66**	.36**	.43**	.19**	.93**	--	
14. Critical Behavior	.31**	.45**	.26**	.26**	.32**	.14**	.39**	.48**	.21**	.33**	-.09	.87**	.61**	--

Note. Significance is indicated by * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Perceived racial discrimination was significantly positively correlated with the PYD composite ($r = .17, p < .01$), critical consciousness ($r = .33, p < .01$), ethnic identity resolution ($r = .17, p < .01$), and ethnic identity exploration ($r = .21, p < .01$). Perceived racial discrimination was not significantly correlated with ethnic identity affirmation ($r = .004, p = .18$). The PYD composite was significantly positively correlated to all primary study variables. Of note, the PYD composite was significantly positively correlated with critical consciousness ($r = .62, p < .01$). Ethnic identity exploration ($r = .43, p < .01$) and ethnic identity resolution ($r = .33, p < .01$) were both significantly positively correlated with critical consciousness. Ethnic identity affirmation was not significantly correlated with critical consciousness ($r = .07, p = .32$). See Table 8 for additional detail.

Descriptive Statistics for Primary Study Variables by Intersecting Oppressions

To explore racialized differences among the study constructs, pairwise correlations were conducted between the primary study variables and participants' self-reported racial identity. Additionally, mean difference tests were employed to determine levels of primary study variables disaggregated by racial group. As shown in Table 9 and 10, data shows Black youth reported higher levels of the PYD composite ($r = .23, p < .01$), resolution ($r = .19, p < .01$), and critical consciousness ($r = .13, p < .01$) compared to non-Black identifying youth. Data shows Latinx youth reported higher levels of perceived racial discrimination ($r = .22, p < .01$), the PYD composite ($r = .24, p < .01$), resolution ($r = .12, p < .05$), exploration ($r = .12, p < .05$), and critical consciousness ($r = .22, p < .01$) compared to youth who did not identify as Latinx. AfroLatinx youth, those who identified as both Black and Latinx, reported moderately higher levels of perceived racial discrimination ($r = .12, p < .05$) and the PYD composite ($r = .12, p < .05$) than those who did not identify as AfroLatinx. Lastly multi-racial youth, those who selected more

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than one race (and were not AfroLatinx), reported moderately higher levels of ethnic resolution ($r = .13, p < .05$) compared to those who identified as Latinx, Black, or AfroLatinx. Refer to Table 9 and 10 for additional details.

Table 9*Point-Biserial Correlations Between Study Variables and Racial Identity (N = 393)*

	Self- Report Racial Identity				
	Latinx	Black	AfroLatinx	Multi-racial	Other
	<i>n</i> = 219	<i>n</i> = 61	<i>n</i> = 46	<i>n</i> = 41	<i>n</i> = 26
Perceived Racial Discrimination	.22**	.08	.12*	.08	.00
PYD Composite	.24**	.23**	.12*	.09	.02
Ethnic Identity Resolution	.12*	.19**	.02	.13*	.03
Ethnic Identity Exploration	.12*	.08	.10	.02	.09
Ethnic Identity Affirmation	.08	.05	.02	-.06	.01
Critical Consciousness	.22**	.13**	.09	.07	.01

Note. Racial identity variables were coded (0,1) with 1 being “yes.” * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

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Table 10

Means and Standard Deviations of Primary Study Variables by Racial Group

	Latinx <i>n</i> = 219		Black <i>n</i> = 61		AfroLatinx <i>n</i> = 46		Multi-racial <i>n</i> = 41		Other <i>n</i> = 26	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Perceived Racial Discrimination	6.22	2.72	7.26	2.66	7.57	2.81	7.49	2.23	7.35	2.64
PYD Composite	3.92	.50	4.31	.53	4.18	.50	4.10	.57	3.98	.39
Competence	3.89	.64	4.34	.66	4.29	.56	4.02	.70	4.03	.63
Confidence	3.68	.93	4.19	.92	4.17	.97	3.98	.99	3.76	.85
Character	4.08	.63	4.34	.63	4.20	.57	4.30	.60	4.22	.50
Caring	4.44	.63	4.61	.60	4.40	.57	4.50	.64	4.45	.59
Connection	3.66	.71	4.05	.82	3.94	.75	3.83	.64	3.81	.67
Contribution	3.88	.62	4.34	.62	4.16	.61	4.07	.68	3.84	.53
EI Resolution	3.92	.70	4.11	.72	4.18	.72	3.99	.71	3.92	.84
EI Exploration	4.36	.68	4.70	.45	4.38	.69	4.37	.65	4.47	.56
EI Affirmation	4.43	.77	4.28	.95	4.33	.86	4.21	.92	4.42	.69
Critical Consciousness	3.84	.73	4.20	.68	4.16	.69	4.17	.62	4.01	.60
Critical Agency	4.08	.66	4.43	.58	4.36	.55	4.34	.59	4.24	.61
Critical Behavior	3.29	1.12	3.66	1.18	3.67	1.24	3.77	1.01	3.46	1.03

Correlations were also conducted between the primary study variables and other indicators of oppression, including skin tone, immigration status, and cumulative number of oppressed identities (see Table 11). Data shows the sum total of oppressions experienced was significantly positively correlated with perceived racial discrimination ($r = .36, p < .01$), ethnic identity exploration ($r = .11, p < .05$), and critical consciousness ($r = .20, p < .01$). Skin tone was significantly positively correlated with perceived racial discrimination ($r = .17, p < .01$), the PYD composite ($r = .19, p < .01$), and critical consciousness ($r = .14, p < .01$). Skin tone, however, was significantly negatively correlated with ethnic identity affirmation ($r = -.11, p < .05$). In general, there were few strong relationships found between generation American and the primary study variables. However, youth not born in the United States reported higher levels of the PYD composite ($r = .14, p < .01$) than youth born in the United States, whereas first-generation American youth reported lower levels of the PYD composite ($r = -.16, p < .01$) than non-first-generation American youth. Considering the small sample sizes and the few meaningful and consistent relationships between primary study variables and indicators of oppression (e.g., oppressed identities sum, skin tone, generation American), only racial group differences in study hypotheses were explored throughout the remainder of this study, specifically exploring the unique relationships of study variables for Black and Latinx youth. For future studies, it is advised to further investigate the phenomenon of intersectionality and how relationships vary between the number of intersecting oppressions individuals hold.

Table 11*Pairwise and Point-Biserial Correlations Between Study Variables and Intersecting Oppressions (N = 393)*

	Number of Oppressed Identities	Skin Tone	Generation American				
			Not Born in U.S.	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th or more
	N = 393	N = 393	n = 37	n = 170	n = 84	n = 33	n = 69
Perceived Racial Discrimination	.36**	.17**	.00	-.09	.08	.02	.01
PYD Composite	-.02	.19**	.14**	-.16**	-.03	.01	.12*
Ethnic Identity Resolution	-.04	.09	.05	-.05	.05	-.03	.01
Ethnic Identity Exploration	.11*	.01	.02	-.02	.07	.07	-.07
Ethnic Identity Affirmation	-.05	-.11*	-.03	-.08	.01	.02	.06
Critical Consciousness	.20**	.14**	.09	-.11*	.02	.03	.04
<i>Note.</i> The generation American variable were dummy coded (0,1) with 1 being “yes.” Significance is noted by: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < .001$.							

Hypothesis 1: Perceived Racial Discrimination Predicts Positive Youth Development

To test the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and positive youth development, single model regression analyses were conducted predicting the PYD composite variable and each of the 5Cs, including contribution, independently from perceived racial discrimination. Contrary to the hypothesis, perceived racial discrimination significantly positively predicted overall positive youth development, meaning that higher levels of perceived racial discrimination were linked to higher levels of the 5Cs of PYD: $\beta = .16, t = 3.31, F(1, 391) = 10.93, p < .01, R^2 = .027$. For the individual composites, perceived racial discrimination was positively associated with competence [$\beta = .118, t = 2.34, F(1, 391) = 5.49, p < .05, R^2 = .014$], character [$\beta = .162, t = 3.24, F(1, 391) = 10.52, p < .01, R^2 = .002$], caring [$\beta = .154, t = 3.08, F(1, 391) = 9.50, p < .01, R^2 = .024$], and contribution [$\beta = .192, t = 3.87, F(1, 391) = 14.98, p < .01, R^2 = .192$]. Perceived racial discrimination did not significantly predict confidence or connection. Higher levels of perceived racial discrimination positively predicted higher levels of young BIPOCs' overall indicators of positive youth development (see Table 12).

Table 12*Linear Regression Predicting the 6Cs from Perceived Racial Discrimination (N = 393)*

Predictor Variables	Model F	R^2	β	SE B	t
PRD → PYD Composite	10.93**	0.027			
Perceived Racial Discrimination			0.165	0.032	3.31**
PRD → Competence	5.49*	0.014			
Perceived Racial Discrimination			0.118	0.029	2.34
PRD → Confidence	1.41	0.001			
Perceived Racial Discrimination			0.06	0.021	1.187
PRD → Connection	0.82	0.002			
Perceived Racial Discrimination			0.046	0.012	0.907
PRD → Character	10.52**	0.002			
Perceived Racial Discrimination			0.162	0.037	3.24**
PRD → Caring	9.50**	0.024			
Perceived Racial Discrimination			0.154	0.035	3.08**
PRD → Contribution	14.98**	0.037			
Perceived Racial Discrimination			0.192	0.045	3.87**

Note. Significance is noted by: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < .001$.

Racial Group Differences in the Relationship between Perceived Racial Discrimination and PYD

Given the aforementioned significant relationships between Latinx and Black racial identity and the primary study variables (see Table 13), the relationships between perceived racial discrimination and positive youth development were assessed for both disaggregated racial groups. For Latinx youth ($n = 219$), perceived racial discrimination was positively associated with character [$\beta = .05$, $t = 2.95$, $F(1, 391) = 8.69$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .04$], caring [$\beta = .04$, $t = 2.28$,

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$F(1, 391) = 5.20, p < .05, R^2 = .02$], and contribution [$\beta = .04, t = 2.64, F(1, 391) = 6.95, p < .01, R^2 = .03$]. Perceived racial discrimination did not significantly predict the positive youth development composite or competence, confidence, and connection. Higher levels of perceived racial discrimination positively predicted higher levels of the following PYD indicators only: character, caring, and contribution in Latinx emerging adults (see Table 13).

Table 13

Linear Regression Predicting the 6Cs from Perceived Racial Discrimination for Latinx Youth (N=219)

Predictor Variables	Model F	R^2	β	SE B	t
PRD → PYD Composite	2.22	.01			
Perceived Racial Discrimination			.02	.10	1.49
PRD → Competence	1.15	.00			
Perceived Racial Discrimination			.02	.07	1.07
PRD → Confidence	.63	.00			
Perceived Racial Discrimination			-.02	-.05	-.79
PRD → Connection	1.75	.01			
Perceived Racial Discrimination			-.02	-.09	-1.32
PRD → Character	8.69**	.04			
Perceived Racial Discrimination			.05	.20	2.95**
PRD → Caring	5.20*	.02			
Perceived Racial Discrimination			.04	.15	2.28*
PRD → Contribution	6.95**	.03			
Perceived Racial Discrimination			.04	.18	2.64**

Note. Significance is noted by: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < .001$.

For Black youth ($n = 61$), perceived racial discrimination was positively associated with caring [$\beta = .07, t = 2.36, F(1, 391) = 5.55, p < .05, R^2 = .09$]. Perceived racial discrimination did

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not significantly predict the positive youth development composite or competence, confidence, connection, character or contribution. Higher levels of perceived racial discrimination positively predicted higher levels of caring for Black emerging adults (see Table 14).

Table 14

Linear Regression Predicting the 6Cs from Perceived Racial Discrimination with Black Youth
(*N*=61)

Predictor Variables	Model <i>F</i>	<i>R</i> ²	β	SE B	<i>t</i>
PRD → PYD Composite	1.69	.03			
Perceived Racial Discrimination			.17	.02	1.30
PRD → Competence	.85	.01			
Perceived Racial Discrimination			.12	.03	.93
PRD → Confidence	.01	.00			
Perceived Racial Discrimination			.01	.04	.09
PRD → Connection	1.16	.02			
Perceived Racial Discrimination			.14	.04	1.08
PRD → Character	.01	.00			
Perceived Racial Discrimination			-.01	.03	-.06
PRD → Caring	5.55*	.09			
Perceived Racial Discrimination			.29	.028	2.35
PRD → Contribution	.03	2.00			
Perceived Racial Discrimination			.18	.03	.16

Note. Significance is noted by: **p* < 0.05, ***p* < 0.01, ****p* < .001.

Hypothesis 2: Ethnic Identity Status Relates to Positive Youth Development

For Hypothesis 2, K-means cluster analyses were utilized to identify homogenous ethnic identity status (EIS) groups among standardized ethnic identity exploration, affirmation, and resolution variables. K-means analyses were determined as the most appropriate cluster analysis

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technique because there is a theoretical rationale for a pre-specified number of clusters (Hair & Black, 2000; Seaton et al., 2006, Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). Previous research has identified eight possible EIS groups based on scores across the three EIS subscales (i.e., all possible combinations of high/low affirmation, high/low exploration, high/low resolution; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). The K-means function was conducted using *SPSS 25.0* (IBM Corp., 2017) and determined four optimal number of clusters existed in the data.

Cluster membership was defined in alignment with the previous research of Umaña-Taylor and colleagues (2004) Ethnic Identity Status (EIS) model. As expected, this resulted in one cluster ($n = 170$) that had significantly higher scores ($p < .01$) on all subscales (i.e., exploration, resolution, and affirmation) which was defined as “Achieved Positive.” A second cluster ($n = 84$) had significantly lower scores ($p < .01$) on resolution and exploration which was defined as “Diffuse Positive.” A third cluster ($n = 73$) had significantly lower scores ($p < .01$) on exploration and significantly higher scores ($p < .01$) on resolution and affirmation which was defined as “Foreclosed Positive.” As expected, the final cluster ($n = 66$) had significantly lower scores ($p < .01$) on affirmation and significantly higher scores on resolution ($p < .01$) which was defined as “Achieved Negative.”

Pearson’s chi-square tests were conducted to examine associations between EIS and participant demographics (i.e., gender, race, oppression sum). Results indicated EIS significantly varied by race, $\chi^2(12, N = 393) = 23.22, p < .05$. Information on the distribution of ethnic groups is presented in Table 15. The chi-square tests showed no statistically significant association between EIS and gender or the sum of self-reported oppression.

Table 15*Distribution of Racial Groups by Ethnic Identity Status*

	<i>Latinx</i>		<i>Black</i>		<i>AfroLatinx</i>		<i>Multi-Racial</i>		<i>Other</i>	
	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)
Achieved Positive (<i>n</i> = 170)	86	51%	33	19%	22	13%	16	9%	13	8%
Diffuse Positive (<i>n</i> = 84)	62	74%	2	2%	9	11%	8	9%	3	4%
Foreclosed Positive (<i>n</i> = 73)	39	53%	14	19%	5	7%	9	9%	6	8%
Achieved Negative (<i>n</i> = 66)	32	48%	12	18%	10	15%	8	12%	4	7%

Next, seven one-way analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) were conducted to determine whether individuals' PYD scores varied based on their EIS, while controlling for race. As expected, results indicated that individual scores on the PYD composite, character, confidence, competence, connection, caring and contribution significantly varied by EIS ($p < .05$ for all). Bonferroni's post hoc analyses were conducted to follow up the significant main effect found for EIS groups on the individual PYD indicators. Refer to Table 16 for means and standard deviations for each PYD indicator by EIS as well as for the overall PYD composite, when controlling for race. Results indicated that individuals who were categorized as achieved positive reported significantly higher levels of confidence ($p < .001$), competence ($p < .001$), and contribution ($p < .001$) than individuals who were classified as foreclosed positive, diffuse positive, or achieved negative. As expected, results demonstrated those categorized as achieved positive reported significantly higher levels of character ($p < .001$) than youth categorized as diffused positive and achieved negative. Individuals categorized as achieved positive reported

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significantly higher levels of connection ($p < .001$) than youth categorized as foreclosed positive and diffuse positive. Lastly, results indicated that youth categorized as achieved positive reported significantly higher levels of caring ($p < .05$) than youth categorized as achieved negative.

Table 16

Means and Standard Deviations of Positive Youth Development Indicators by Ethnic Identity Status Type Controlling for Race (N = 393)

	<i>F(df)</i>	<i>Achieved Positive</i>		<i>Foreclosed Positive</i>		<i>Diffuse Positive</i>		<i>Achieved Negative</i>	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
PYD	13.22(3)***	4.21 ^{abc}	.46	3.89 ^a	.51	3.88 ^b	.46	3.90 ^c	.62
Composite									
Character	9.06(3)***	4.34 ^{ab}	.59	4.13	.59	4.00 ^a	.58	3.98 ^b	.74
Confidence	8.51(3)***	4.11 ^{abc}	.86	3.76 ^a	1.09	3.66 ^b	.83	3.52 ^c	1.02
Competence	8.53(3)***	4.22 ^{abc}	.66	3.92 ^a	.65	3.87 ^b	.61	3.87 ^c	.73
Connection	7.26(3)***	3.96 ^{ab}	.71	3.57 ^a	.70	3.62 ^b	.60	3.73	.88
Caring	3.07(3)*	4.47 ^a	.61	4.56	.53	4.40	.66	4.31 ^a	.66
Contribution	10.63(3)***	4.19 ^{abc}	.60	3.76 ^a	.60	3.85 ^b	.60	3.98 ^c	.70

Note. Values in same row with same superscript are significantly different from one another, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Racial Group Differences in the Relationship between EIS and the 5Cs of PYD

Due to the small sample sizes across ethnic identity status types, an alternative analysis was utilized to examine racial group differences. To test the relationship between ethnic identity and positive youth development among Latinx youth ($n = 291$), a series of single-model regression analyses were conducted. In these analyses, the positive youth development composite variable and each of the 5Cs were regressed onto the three ethnic identity subscales (exploration, resolution, and affirmation). This approach is consistent with prior research that has employed the EIS subscales to examine the relationship between ethnic identity formation components and relevant developmental outcomes (Umaña-Taylor & Guimond, 2010; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2012).

For Latinx youth ($n = 291$) all three components of ethnic identity development positively predicted the PYD composite [$F(3, 215) = 21.26, p < .001, R^2 = .23$] (see Table 17). Ethnic identity exploration positively predicted competence [$\beta = .18, p < .05, t = 2.60, F(3, 215) = 10.70, p < .001, R^2 = .13$], character [$\beta = .20, p < .01, t = 2.90, F(3, 215) = 15.51, p < .001, R^2 = .18$], connection [$\beta = .22, p < .01, t = 1.77, F(3, 215) = 9.31, p < .001, R^2 = .11$], and contribution [$\beta = .29, p < .001, t = 4.19, F(3, 215) = 12.90, p < .001, R^2 = .15$]. Ethnic identity exploration did not predict confidence or caring amongst Latinx youth. Ethnic identity resolution did not significantly predict the 5Cs, with the exception of caring [$\beta = .16, p < .05, t = 2.14, F(3, 215) = 11.05, p < .001, R^2 = .13$]. Ethnic identity affirmation positively predicted competence [$\beta = .18, p < .05, t = 2.42, F(3, 215) = 10.70, p < .001, R^2 = .13$], confidence [$\beta = .18, p < .05, t = 2.37, F(3, 215) = 7.42, p < .001, R^2 = .09$], character [$\beta = .24, p < .01, t = 3.34, F(3, 215) = 15.51, p < .001, R^2 = .18$], and caring [$\beta = .22, p < .01, t = 2.99, F(3, 215) = 11.05, p < .001, R^2 = .13$] for Latinx youth. Together, these findings show Latinx with higher levels of ethnic identity exploration and

affirmation demonstrated higher levels across PYD indicators than Latinx youth with low levels of ethnic identity exploration and affirmation.

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Table 17

Regression Pathways (Beta-Weights) for PYD Indicators Regressed on EIS Subscales for Latinx Youth (n = 219)

	PYD Composite		Competence		Confidence		Character		Connection		Caring		Contribution	
Predictors	β	SE B	β	SE B	β	SE B	β	SE B	β	SE B	β	SE B	β	SE B
Exploration	0.24**	0.17	0.18*	0.17	0.03	0.05	0.20**	0.18	0.22**	0.22**	0.06	0.05	0.29**	0.26
Resolution	0.17*	0.12	0.10	0.10	0.15	0.21	0.10	0.09	0.14	0.15	0.17*	0.15	0.09	0.08
Affirmation	0.21**	0.13	0.18*	0.15	0.18*	0.22	0.24**	0.20	0.07	0.07	0.22**	0.18	0.10	0.08

Note. Significance is noted by: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < .001$.

To test the relationship between ethnic identity and positive youth development among Black youth ($n = 61$), a series of single-model regression analyses were conducted. In these analyses, the positive youth development composite variable and each of the 5Cs were regressed onto the three ethnic identity subscales (exploration, resolution, and affirmation).

For Black youth ($n = 61$) only ethnic identity exploration [$\beta = .55, t = 4.99, p < .001$] and affirmation [$\beta = -.26, t = -2.48, p < .05$] significantly predicted the PYD composite [$F(3, 57) = 11.98, p < .001, R^2 = .39$]. Refer to Table 18. Ethnic identity exploration positively predicted competence [$\beta = .45, p < .001, t = 3.63, F(3, 57) = 5.44, p < .01, R^2 = .22$], confidence [$\beta = .31, p < .05, t = 2.42, F(3, 57) = 4.03, p < .05, R^2 = .17$], connection [$\beta = .44, p < .001, t = 3.74, F(3, 57) = 7.80, p < .001, R^2 = .29$], caring [$\beta = .45, p < .001, t = 3.72, F(3, 57) = 6.11, p < .001, R^2 = .24$] and contribution [$\beta = .50, p < .001, t = 4.39, F(3, 57) = 9.50, p < .001, R^2 = .33$]. Ethnic identity exploration did not significantly predict character amongst Black youth. Ethnic identity resolution did not significantly predict any of the 5Cs. Ethnic identity affirmation, however negatively predicted connection [$\beta = -.29, p < .05, t = -2.52, F(3, 57) = 7.80, p < .001, R^2 = .29$] and contribution [$\beta = -.31, p < .01, t = -2.78, F(3, 57) = 9.50, p < .001, R^2 = .33$] amongst Black youth. Together, these findings show Black emerging adults with higher levels of ethnic identity exploration were related to higher levels across PYD indicators compared to Black youth with lower levels of ethnic identity exploration.

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Table 18

Regression Pathways (Beta-Weights) for PYD Indicators Regressed on EIS Subscales for Black Youth (n = 61)

	PYD Composite		Competence		Confidence		Character		Connection		Caring		Contribution	
Predictors	β	SE B	β	SE B	β	SE B	β	SE B	β	SE B	β	SE B	β	SE B
Exploration	0.55**	0.40	0.45**	0.41	0.31*	0.39	0.24	0.21	0.44**	0.50	0.45**	0.38	0.50**	0.43
Resolution	0.12	0.14	-0.02	-0.02	0.20	0.42	0.06	0.08	0.13	0.23	0.09	0.12	0.05	0.07
Affirmation	-0.26*	-0.15	-0.20	-0.14	-0.01	-0.01	-0.11	-0.07	-0.29*	-0.25	-0.15	-0.10	-0.31*	-0.20

Note. Significance is noted by: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < .001$.

Hypothesis 3: Critical Consciousness Predicts Positive Youth Development

To test the relationship between critical consciousness and PYD, single model regression analyses were conducted predicting the PYD composite and each of the 5Cs, including contribution, from critical consciousness. Critical consciousness was positively associated with the PYD composite: $\beta = .62$, $t = 15.50$, $F(1, 391) = 240.08$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .38$. Critical consciousness was positively associated with competence [$\beta = .36$, $t = 7.51$, $F(1, 391) = 56.46$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .13$], confidence [$\beta = .32$, $t = 6.77$, $F(1, 391) = 45.81$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .11$], connection [$\beta = .46$, $t = 10.18$, $F(1, 391) = 103.55$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .21$], caring [$\beta = .37$, $t = 7.81$, $F(1, 391) = 60.99$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .14$] and contribution [$\beta = .65$, $t = 16.87$, $F(1, 391) = 284.49$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .42$]. Higher levels of critical consciousness were related to higher levels of all indicators of PYD for young BIPOC (see Table 19).

Table 19

Linear Regression Predicting the 6Cs from Critical Consciousness (N = 393)

Predictor Variables	Model F	R^2	β	SE B	t
CC → PYD Composite	240.08***	0.38			
Critical Consciousness			0.62	0.46	15.50**
CC → Competence	56.46***	0.13			
Critical Consciousness			0.36	0.33	7.51**
CC → Confidence	45.81***	0.11			
Critical Consciousness			0.32	0.44	6.77**
CC → Connection	103.55***	0.21			
Critical Consciousness			0.46	0.48	10.18**
CC → Character	107.12***	0.22			
Critical Consciousness			0.46	0.41	10.35**
CC → Caring	60.99***	0.14			
Critical Consciousness			0.37	0.32	7.81**

CC → Contribution	284.49***	0.42			
Critical Consciousness			0.65	0.59	16.87**

Note. Significance is noted by: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < .001$.

Racial Group Differences in the Relationship between CC and the 5Cs of PYD

To test if the relationship varied by racial group, single model regression analyses were conducted predicting the PYD composite and each of the 5Cs, including contribution, from critical consciousness for Latinx and Black youth. For Latinx youth ($n = 219$), critical consciousness was positively associated with all indicators of PYD including: PYD composite [$\beta = .40$, $t = 10.62$, $F(1, 391) = 112.87$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .40$], competence [$\beta = .26$, $t = 4.57$, $F(1, 391) = 20.95$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .09$], confidence [$\beta = .29$, $t = 3.47$, $F(1, 391) = 12.08$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .05$], connection [$\beta = .40$, $t = 6.62$, $F(1, 391) = 43.88$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .17$], character [$\beta = .40$, $t = 7.50$, $F(1, 391) = 56.22$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .21$], caring [$\beta = .33$, $t = 6.02$, $F(1, 391) = 36.26$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .14$], and contribution [$\beta = .55$, $t = 12.29$, $F(1, 391) = 150.99$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .41$]. Higher levels of critical consciousness were related to higher levels of PYD across all indicators among Latinx emerging adults (see Table 20).

Table 20

Linear Regression Predicting the 6Cs from Critical Consciousness for Latinx Youth ($n = 219$)

Predictor Variables	Model F	R^2	β	SE B	t
CC → PYD Composite	112.87 ***	.34			
Critical Consciousness			.40	.58	10.62***
CC → Competence	20.95***	.09			
Critical Consciousness			.26	.30	4.57***
CC → Confidence	12.08***	.05			
Critical Consciousness			.29	.23	3.47***
CC → Connection	43.88***	.17			

Critical Consciousness			.40	.06	6.62***
CC → Character	56.22***	.21			
Critical Consciousness			.40	.45	7.50***
CC → Caring	36.26***	.14			
Critical Consciousness			.33	.38	6.02***
CC → Contribution	150.99***	.41			
Critical Consciousness			.55	.64	12.29***

Note. Significance is noted by: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < .001$.

To test the relationship between critical consciousness and PYD for Black youth ($n = 61$), single model regression analyses were conducted predicting each of the positive youth development composite variable and each of the 5Cs from critical consciousness for each group. For Black youth ($n = 61$) critical consciousness was positively associated with all indicators of PYD including: PYD composite [$\beta = .57$, $t = 8.27$, $F(1, 391) = 68.44$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .54$], competence [$\beta = .45$, $t = 3.99$, $F(1, 391) = 15.94$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .21$], confidence [$\beta = .71$, $t = 4.68$, $F(1, 391) = 21.92$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .71$], connection [$\beta = .69$, $t = 5.34$, $F(1, 391) = 28.47$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .69$], character [$\beta = .42$, $t = 3.85$, $F(1, 391) = 14.83$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .42$], caring [$\beta = .35$, $t = 3.28$, $F(1, 391) = 10.77$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .35$], and contribution [$\beta = .65$, $t = 7.77$, $F(1, 391) = 60.39$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .65$]. For Black emerging adults, higher levels of critical consciousness predicted higher levels of PYD across all indicators (see Table 21).

Table 21

Linear Regression Predicting the 6Cs from Critical Consciousness for Black Youth ($N = 61$)

Predictor Variables	Model F	R^2	β	SE B	t
CC → PYD Composite	68.44***	.54			
Critical Consciousness			.57	.73	8.27***

CC → Competence	15.94***	.21			
Critical Consciousness			.45	.46	3.99***
CC → Confidence	21.92***	.27			
Critical Consciousness			.71	.52	4.68***
CC → Connection	28.47***	.33			
Critical Consciousness			.69	.57	5.34***
CC → Character	14.83***	.20			
Critical Consciousness			.42	.45	3.85***
CC → Caring	10.77*	.15			
Critical Consciousness			.35	.39	3.28*
CC → Contribution	60.39***	.51			
Critical Consciousness			.65	.71	7.77***

Note. Significance is noted by: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < .001$.

Hypothesis 4: Ethnic Identity, Critical Consciousness, and Perceived Racial Discrimination Predicts Positive Youth Development

To test whether ethnic identity and critical consciousness mediated the relationship found between perceived racial discrimination and the PYD composite, two mediation models were tested using Model 4 of the *PROCESS* macro for *SPSS* (Hayes, 2013). First, to determine the extent to which the process of ethnic identity development mediates the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and positive youth development, all three components of ethnic identity were tested as mediators. Refer to Table 22 for mediation results. Exploration [$\beta = .33$, $t = 6.55$, $p < .001$, CI: [.16, .31], R^2 -change = .21] and Resolution [$\beta = .19$, $t = 3.59$, $p < .001$, CI: [.06, .23], R^2 -change = .21] significantly and fully mediated the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and thriving (as measured by the PYD composite). Affirmation, however, did not significantly mediate the relationship between racial discrimination and thriving: $\beta = .00$,

$t = .15, p = .88, CI: [-.06, .06], R^2\text{-change} = .21$. Therefore, the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and thriving is fully mediated by engaging in ethnic identity exploration and resolution; this mediation explains 21% of variance in BIPOC thriving. The mediation model is visualized in Figure 3 below.

ETHNIC IDENTITY AND CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS PROMOTE THRIVING

Table 22

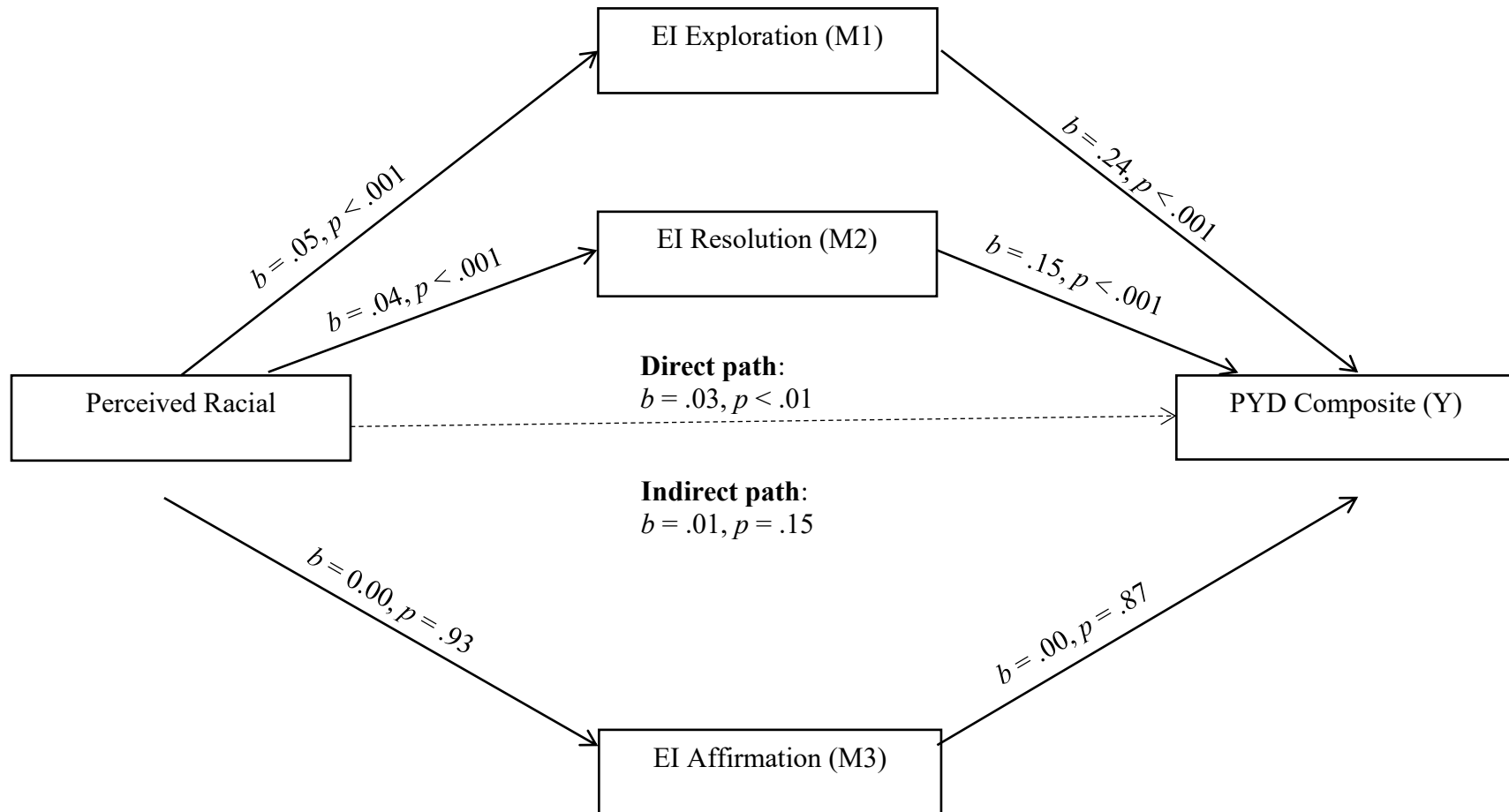
Mediation Analysis of Perceived Racial Discrimination, Ethnic Identity (exploration, affirmation, resolution), and PYD Composite (N = 393)

	Model 1 Predicting PYD (Y)			Model 2 Predicting Ethnic Exploration (M1)			Model 3 Predicting Ethnic Resolution (M2)			Model 4 Predicting Ethnic Affirmation (M3)			Model 5 Predicting PYD (Y) with Mediators (M)		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
Intercept	3.81	.07	54.43***	3.62	.09	37.85***	4.16	.09	47.99***	4.36	.11	39.18***	2.30	.20	12.00***
Perceived Racial Discrimination	.03	.00	3.30***	.05	.01	4.14***	.04	.01	3.30**	.00	.01	.08	.01	.00	1.44
EI Exploration													.24	.04	6.55***
EI Resolution													.15	.04	3.59**
EI Affirmation													.00	.03	.15
	<i>F</i> (1,392) = 10.93 <i>p</i> < .01; <i>R</i> ² = .03			<i>F</i> (1,392) = 17.20 <i>p</i> < .001; <i>R</i> ² = .04			<i>F</i> (1,392) = 10.88 <i>p</i> < .01; <i>R</i> ² = .03			<i>F</i> (1,392) = .006 <i>p</i> = .93; <i>R</i> ² = .00			<i>F</i> (4,389) = 25.79 <i>p</i> < .001; <i>R</i> ² = .21		

Note. Significance is noted by: **p* < 0.05, ***p* < 0.01, ****p* < .001.

Figure 3

Statistical Model of Ethnic Identity Development as a Mediator of the Relationship Between Perceived Racial Discrimination and PYD (N = 393)



ETHNIC IDENTITY AND CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS PROMOTE THRIVING

Second, the mediating effect of critical consciousness between perceived racial discrimination and the PYD composite was tested. Refer to Table 23 for mediation model results. Critical consciousness significantly, fully mediated the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and the PYD composite: $\beta = .46$, $t = 14.96$, $p < .001$, CI: [.40, .52], R^2 -change = .38. The relationship between perceived racial discrimination and thriving (as measured by PYD composite) is fully mediated by developing critical consciousness; this mediation explains 38% of variance in BIPOC thriving. The mediation model is visualized in Figure 4 below.

Table 23

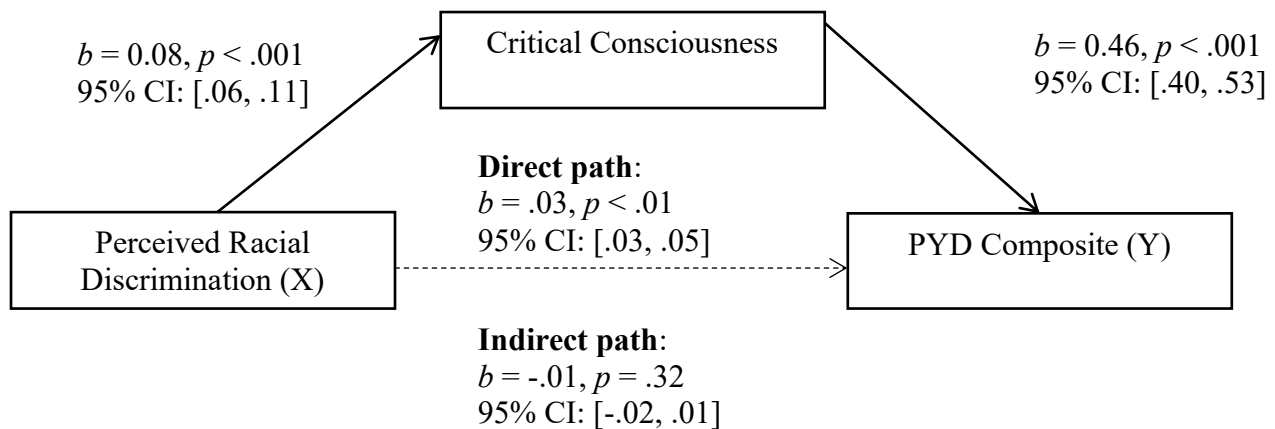
Mediation Analysis of Perceived Racial Discrimination, Critical Consciousness, and PYD Composite (N = 393)

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Predicting PYD (Y)			Predicting Critical Consciousness (M)			Predicting PYD (Y) with Mediator (M)		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
Intercept	3.81	.07	54.43***	3.40	.09	37.46***	2.23	.12	18.60***
Perceived Racial Discrimination	.03	.00	3.30***	.08	.01	6.85***	-.01	.01	-.98
Critical Consciousness							.46	.03	14.96***
	$F(1,392) = 10.93$			$F(1,392) = 46.94$			$F(2,391) = 120.52$		
	$p < .01$; $R^2 = .03$			$p < .001$; $R^2 = .11$			$p < .001$; $R^2 = .38$		

Note. Significance is noted by: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < .001$.

Figure 4

Statistical Model of Critical Consciousness as a Mediator of The Relationship Between Perceived Racial Discrimination and PYD



Racial Group Differences in the Prediction of Positive Youth Development from Ethnic Identity, Critical Consciousness, and Perceived Racial Discrimination

To test whether ethnic identity and critical consciousness function as indirect pathways between perceived racial discrimination and the PYD composite two mediation models were tested using Model 4 of the *PROCESS* macro for *SPSS* for both Latinx and Black sub-groups of youth (Hayes, 2013). To examine whether ethnic identity development mediated the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and positive youth development among Latinx emerging adults, all three components of ethnic identity were tested as potential mediators. As presented above, the direct relationship between perceived racial discrimination and positive youth development was not statistically significant for this sub-group of youth. Mediation was still explored to understand whether these concepts (components of ethnic identity development, perceived racial discrimination, and the PYD composite), were related to each other in this group of individuals, despite the lack of direct relationship between racial discrimination and PYD.

Refer to Table 24 for mediation results. Ethnic identity exploration [$\beta = .24, t = 3.68, p < .001$, CI: [.08, .27], R^2 -change = .22], resolution [$\beta = .16, t = 2.25, p < .05$, CI: [.01, .23], R^2 -change = .22], and affirmation [$\beta = .20, t = 2.93, p < .01$, CI: [.04, .22], R^2 -change = .22] significantly mediated the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and thriving (as measured by the PYD composite). Although the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and positive youth development (thriving) was not significant, ethnic identity development, including exploration, resolution, and affirmation, was positively associated with both the PYD composite and racial discrimination. The overall mediation model accounted for approximately 22% of variance in thriving for Latinx emerging adults. The mediation model is visualized in Figure 5 below.

ETHNIC IDENTITY AND CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS PROMOTE THRIVING

Table 24

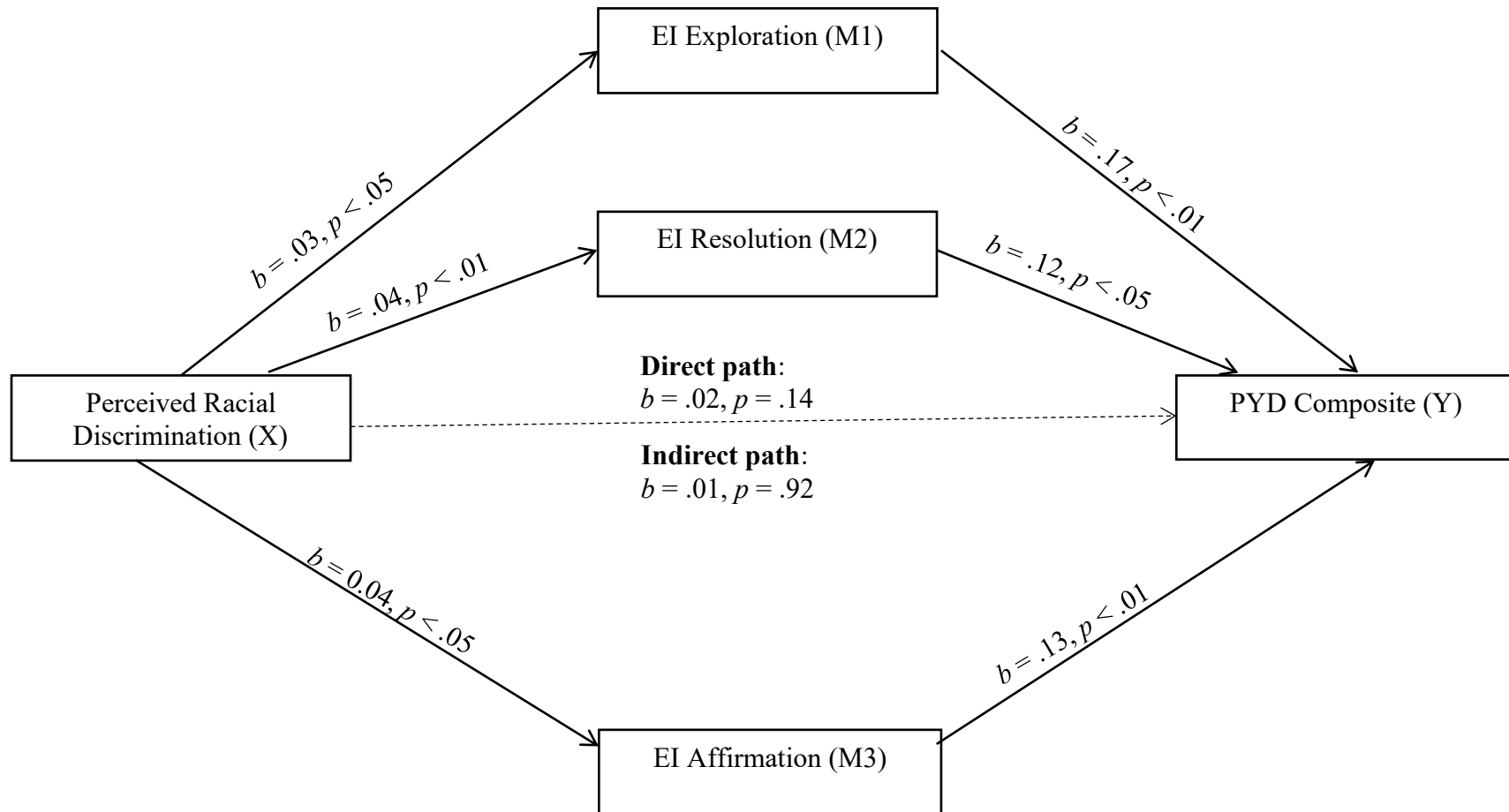
Mediation Analysis of Perceived Racial Discrimination, Ethnic Identity (exploration, affirmation, resolution), and PYD Composite for Latinx Youth (N = 219)

	Model 1 Predicting PYD (Y)			Model 2 Predicting Ethnic Exploration (M1)			Model 3 Predicting Ethnic Resolution (M2)			Model 4 Predicting Ethnic Affirmation (M3)			Model 5 Predicting PYD (Y) with Mediators (M)		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
Intercept	3.80	.08	44.92*	3.69	.12	31.23*	4.06	.11	35.82*	4.19	.13	32.35*	2.10	.23	9.06*
Perceived Racial Discrimination	.02	.01	1.49	.04	.02	2.13*	.05	.17	2.94*	.04	.02	1.98	.01	.01	.09
EI Exploration													.17	.05	3.68*
EI Resolution													.12	.05	2.93*
EI Affirmation													.13	.05	2.93
	<i>F</i> (1, 217) = 2.22 <i>p</i> = .14; <i>R</i> ² = .01			<i>F</i> (1, 217) = 4.53 <i>p</i> < .05; <i>R</i> ² = .02			<i>F</i> (1, 217) = 8.62 <i>p</i> < .01; <i>R</i> ² = .04			<i>F</i> (1, 217) = 3.94 <i>p</i> < .05; <i>R</i> ² = .02			<i>F</i> (1, 217) = 15.87 <i>p</i> < .001; <i>R</i> ² = .23		

Note. Significance is noted by: **p* < 0.05, ***p* < 0.01, ****p* < .001.

Figure 5

Statistical Model of Ethnic Identity Development as a Mediator of the Relationship Between Perceived Racial Discrimination and PYD for Latinx Youth ($n = 219$)



ETHNIC IDENTITY AND CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS PROMOTE THRIVING

Next, the mediating effect of critical consciousness between perceived racial discrimination and the PYD composite was tested for Latinx youth. Refer to Table 25 for mediation model results. As previously mentioned, the direct relationship between perceived racial discrimination and thriving (as measured by the PYD composite) was not statistically significant, suggesting that perceived racial discrimination alone does not directly predict PYD among Latinx youth. Critical consciousness significantly mediated the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and PYD: $\beta = .46$, $t = 14.96$, $p < .001$, CI: [.40, .52], R^2 -change = .38. This finding indicates that the development of critical consciousness accounts for the indirect link between perceived racial discrimination and thriving; this mediation explains 38% of variance in thriving for Latinx youth. The mediation model is visualized in Figure 6 below.

Table 25

Mediation Analysis of Perceived Racial Discrimination, Critical Consciousness, and PYD

Composite for Latinx Youth (N = 219)

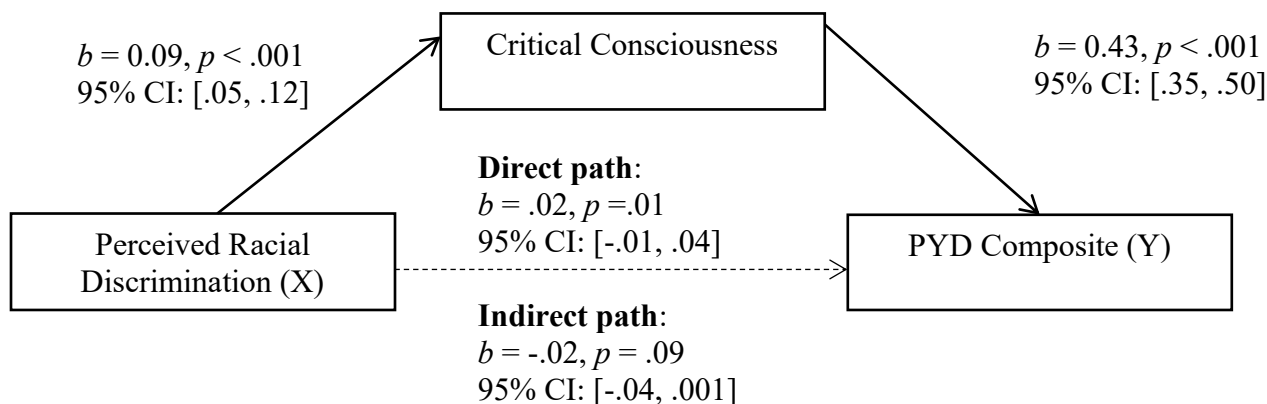
	Model 1 Predicting PYD (Y)			Model 2 Predicting Critical Consciousness (M)			Model 3 Predicting PYD (Y) with Mediator (M)		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
Intercept	3.80	.08	44.92***	3.31	.12	28.40***	2.39	.15	16.02***
Perceived Racial Discrimination	.02	.01	1.49	.09	.02	5.05***	-.02	.01	-1.72
Critical Consciousness							.43	.04	10.65***
	$F(1,217) = 2.22$ $p = .14$; $R^2 = .01$			$F(1,217) = 25.51$ $p < .001$; $R^2 = .11$			$F(2,216) = 58.42$ $p < .001$; $R^2 = .35$		

Note. Significance is noted by: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < .001$.

Figure 6

Statistical Model of Critical Consciousness as a Mediator of The Relationship Between

Perceived Racial Discrimination and PYD for Latinx Youth (n = 219)



To examine whether ethnic identity development mediated the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and positive youth development among Black emerging adults, all three components of ethnic identity were tested as potential mediators. As you recall, the direct relationship between perceived racial discrimination and positive youth development was not statistically significant for this sub-group, as shared above. Mediation was still explored to understand whether these concepts (components of ethnic identity development, perceived racial discrimination, and the PYD composite), were related to each other in this group of individuals, despite the lack of direct relationship between racial discrimination and PYD. Refer to Table 25 for mediation results. Exploration [$\beta = .57, t = 5.07, p < .001, CI: [.25, .58], R^2\text{-change} = .37$] and affirmation [$\beta = -.29, t = -2.65, p < .05, CI: [-.28, -.04], R^2\text{-change} = .37$] significantly mediated the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and thriving (as measured by the PYD composite). Resolution did not significantly mediate the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and positive youth development. Although the relationship between

perceived racial discrimination and positive youth development (thriving) was not significant, ethnic identity exploration and affirmation were related in a statistically significant way to both the PYD composite and perceived racial discrimination. The overall mediation model accounted for approximately 37% of variance in thriving for Black emerging adults. The mediation model is visualized in Figure 7 below.

ETHNIC IDENTITY AND CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS PROMOTE THRIVING

Table 25

Mediation Analysis of Perceived Racial Discrimination, Ethnic Identity (exploration, affirmation, resolution), and PYD Composite for Black Youth (N = 61)

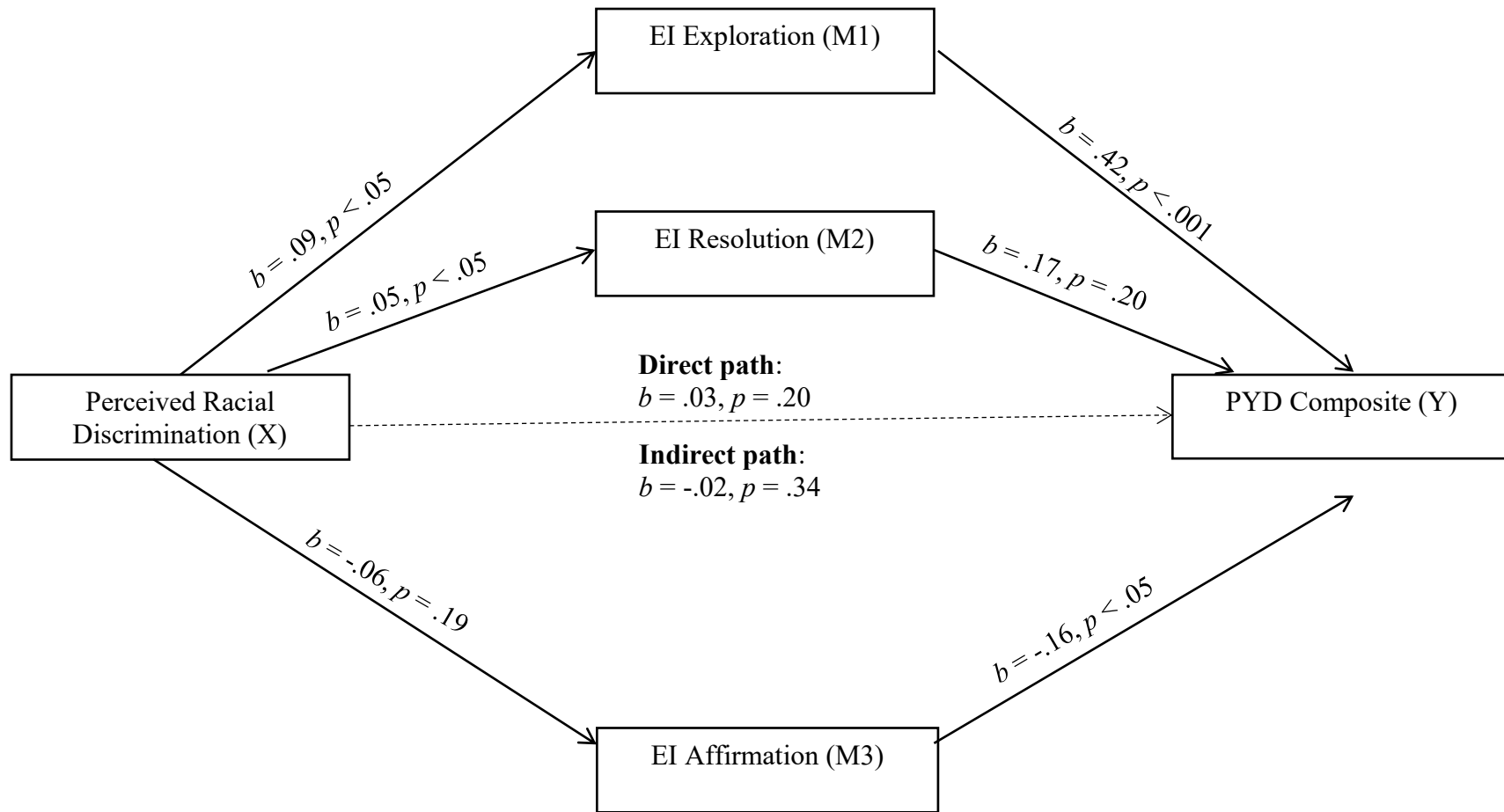
	Model 1 Predicting PYD (Y)			Model 2 Predicting Ethnic Exploration (M1)			Model 3 Predicting Ethnic Resolution (M2)			Model 4 Predicting Ethnic Affirmation (M3)			Model 5 Predicting PYD (Y) with Mediators (M)		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
Intercept	4.06	.20	20.71***	3.47	.26	13.40***	4.36	.16	26.78***	4.73	.36	13.30***	2.62	.60	4.33***
Perceived Racial Discrimination	.03	.03	1.30	.09	.03	2.65*	.05	.02	2.26*	-.06	.05	-1.33	-.02	.02	-.97
EI Exploration													.42	.08	5.07***
EI Resolution													.17	.14	1.27
EI Affirmation													-.16	.05	-2.65*
	<i>F</i> (1, 59) = 1.70 <i>p</i> = .20; <i>R</i> ² = .03			<i>F</i> (1, 59) = 7.03* <i>p</i> = .01; <i>R</i> ² = .11			<i>F</i> (1, 59) = 5.13* <i>p</i> < .03; <i>R</i> ² = .04			<i>F</i> (1, 59) = 1.76 <i>p</i> = .19; <i>R</i> ² = .03			<i>F</i> (4, 56) = 9.21*** <i>p</i> < .001; <i>R</i> ² = .40		

Note. Significance is noted by: **p* < 0.05, ***p* < 0.01, ****p* < .001.

ETHNIC IDENTITY AND CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS PROMOTE THRIVING

Figure 7

Statistical Model of Ethnic Identity Development as a Mediator of the Relationship Between Perceived Racial Discrimination and PYD for Black Youth ($n = 61$)



ETHNIC IDENTITY AND CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS PROMOTE THRIVING

Lastly, the mediating effect of critical consciousness between perceived racial discrimination and the PYD composite was tested for Black emerging adults. Refer to Table 26 for mediation model results. The direct relationship between perceived racial discrimination and thriving (as measured by the PYD composite) was not statistically significant, suggesting that perceived racial discrimination alone does not directly predict PYD among Black youth. However, critical consciousness was related in a statistically significant way to both the PYD composite and racial discrimination: $\beta = .76$, $t = 8.09$, $p < .001$, CI: [.44, .74], R^2 -change = .52. This finding indicates that the development of critical consciousness accounts for the indirect link between perceived racial discrimination and thriving; this mediation explains 52% of variance in thriving for Black emerging adults. The mediation model is visualized in Figure 8 below.

Table 26

Mediation Analysis of Perceived Racial Discrimination, Critical Consciousness, and PYD Composite for Black Youth (N = 61)

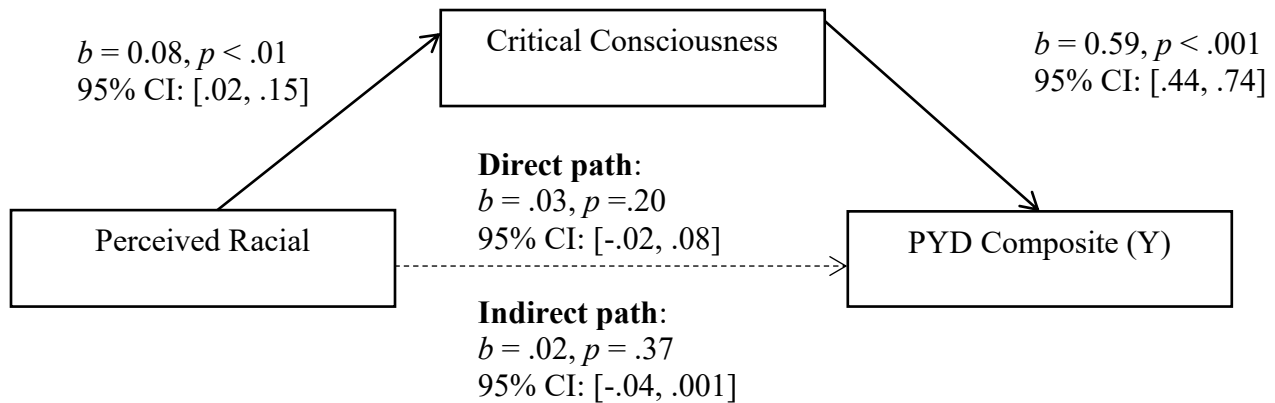
	Model 1 Predicting PYD (Y)			Model 2 Predicting Critical Consciousness (M)			Model 3 Predicting PYD (Y) with Mediator (M)		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
Intercept	4.06	.20	44.92***	3.59	.24	14.82***	1.95	.29	6.61***
Perceived Racial Discrimination	.02	.01	1.49	.08	.03	2.69**	-.01	.02	-.89
Critical Consciousness							.59	.07	8.09***
	$F(1,59) = 1.69$ $p = .19$; $R^2 = .02$			$F(1,59) = 7.25^{**}$ $p < .01$; $R^2 = .11$			$F(2,58) = 35.51^{***}$ $p < .001$; $R^2 = .54$		

Note. Significance is noted by: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < .001$.

Figure 8

Statistical Model of Critical Consciousness as a Mediator of The Relationship Between

Perceived Racial Discrimination and PYD for Black Youth (n = 61)



Qualitative Phase Findings

This qualitative investigation aimed to provide a rich understanding of how young BIPOC thrive despite racial oppression and to inform the interpretation of the findings from the study's quantitative phase. The findings presented below were derived by a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with 11 young BIPOC recruited from the survey sample. The interviews explored three main topics (a) ethnic identity as a tool to thrive (b) perceived strengths to combat racism (c) the role of critical consciousness in positive youth development.

To provide readers with an understanding of the frequency of code occurrences while avoiding a misleading sense of precision (Maxwell, 2010), the following categorical labels were applied in accordance with Patton's (2015) recommendations: "Most" refers to findings mentioned by least two-thirds of participants (7 or more participants), "Many" denotes findings discussed by 50-65% of participants (5/6 participants), "some" refers to findings mentioned by 25-50% of participants (3/4 participants), "a few" for findings highlighted by less than 25% of

participants (2 participants) and “Rarely” and “occasionally” were used to denote infrequent mentions.

Fostering PYD Through Ethnic Identity & Critical Consciousness

In response to how young (i.e., ages 18-25 years) BIPOC experienced and understood their positive development, findings suggest that most young BIPOC believed their ethnic identity and critical consciousness played a role in fostering: (a) contribution (b) connection (c) confidence and (d) caring. These four emergent themes are discussed in greater detail below.

Contribution (10 participants, 22 instances)

Contribution emerged as a prominent theme that most young BIPOC described as interrelated to their understanding of racial oppression. Contribution encompassed, the desire and motivation to “give back” to their community, challenge racist stereotypes, and change unjust societal structures. This theme emerged across a variety of points during the interviews, which may speak to the nature of how interrelated BIPOC youths’ desire to contribute is with their understanding of racial discrimination, their ethnic identity, and critical consciousness. When describing contribution, many participants responded with phrases such as, “I want to be able to do my part somehow...and maybe that will help the environment around me,” and, “in the US unfortunately, we are the ones who have to make a change or at least speak up for those who were unfortunately done wrong.” One Latinx participant described how their desire to become a teacher was influenced by their understanding of the education system centering the success of the white-majority students:

I plan on being a teacher or would like to be a teacher, I think about students that are like me or some that may not be like me. They could be just...a minority in general, but just helping them try to be successful by accommodating to their needs and understanding

what they need in order to be successful. Because sometimes like the layout, like a traditional layout in education and how like, the school system set up for is, is a lot more beneficial for white students than it is for minorities...It's understanding about how can I help these students in terms of, like, their learning styles, you know, because a lot of the times we don't really think about this or, you know, people don't consider it. But a lot of the learning styles that are adjusted in education tends to be, I think, in my opinion, directed towards white students. Granted, they can help minorities, but not, not really, especially if it's not coming from their background and where they're from...and I think it's important for also minority students or people to be teachers that represent minorities.

(Participant 6)

Some participants shared that their deep desire to contribute stemmed from recognizing the dehumanization, self-doubt, and other forms of harm caused by racial oppression. As one Latinx youth powerfully said:

It definitely makes me want to make sure there's some change, you know, being made either now or in the very near future, because I don't want my kids to feel like they're too much in society or kind of life that doesn't favor them and makes them feel like they're less of a person than they really are. (Participant 10)

Connection (8 participants; 28 instances)

Connection emerged as an overarching theme when BIPOC youth reflected on how identifying with their ethnic group related to their positive development. Connection encompassed descriptions of positive relationships with others, a sense of belonging to a community, and feeling understood by others who had similar lived experiences. When asked what positive attributes, if any, youth gained from identifying as BIPOC, most participants

responded with comments like “my culture does feel like a family, a community” and “it strengthens the connections that you have with other people in a similar situation from a similar background as you.” This Black-identifying youth summarized the important role that identifying with their Blackness played in fostering connection:

There really is no difference once you come to America between, like, between Blackness. It's like you're just, you're all Black. And I feel like a lot of the struggles that we saw happening during that time, like, there was a lot of police brutality during that time. I know Trump was just elected for the first time. I feel like it definitely brought us more together because we were all able to relate about the same struggles at the time, regardless of where our, like, our family's backgrounds are. I feel like that definitely, I learned a lot, about being Black and about myself during that time and about community as well. (Participant 2)

Many participants described the significance of belonging to a “close knit community” within their ethnic group. Some participants viewed their connection as a strength; for example, this AfroLatinx participant said, “finding, like, the right people and just the right environment. It can definitely help you find who you are,” while another Latinx participant highlighted, “that is one strength, like sticking to those who are close to you.” One participant further explained “connecting with each other...that is what really matters.”

Confidence (7 participants, 16 instances)

Confidence emerged as a theme when BIPOC youth reflected on how critical consciousness impacted their sense of self. Confidence encompassed reflections of self-worth, self-efficacy, and strength to stay true to themselves in the context of resisting racial oppression. When asked to describe in what ways, if at all, the concept of critical consciousness shaped how

they viewed themselves, most participants shared sentiments like “that has helped as well, just to make me confident” and “I know who I am, and it's like I can't do anything about the fact that I'm Black.” One Latinx youth summarized how their awareness of racial injustice related to their confidence:

It kind of made me think that, you know [contemplative pause] like, who cares if I'm Hispanic, or if that's how society and also people in reality kind of perceive me by. Because, you know, at the end of the day, it's what I do to accomplish myself. Like, I just have to be a realist. About, you know, my situation and how there is things that are going to be unfair to me, unfair for my population and whatnot. And, you know, I would say it's not fair. It's not okay. But a lot of things are unfair in life. But the thing is, you don't let that discourage you in your sense of self. (Participant 6)

Many participants described the phenomenon that being aware of racial injustice helps them maintain their conviction to their self-worth and shared sentiments like, “it’s not something that dictates me, like on how I’m going to be successful or where I want to reach in my life.” and “knowing that stuff is going to be against you, you just have to at least be proud of who you are.”

Caring (7 participants; 20 instances)

Caring emerged as an overarching theme when BIPOC youth reflected on how identifying with their ethnic group related to their positive development. Caring encompassed a sense of empathy for other people, acceptance for different cultures, as well as kindness towards those within and outside of their community. When asked what positive attributes, if any, youth gained from identifying as BIPOC, many participants responded with comments like it “instilled a lot of...respect and consideration for each other” and “I try to be as nice as possible to others.”

This Latinx youth summarized the important role that ethnic identity exploration played in fostering a deep sense of care for others:

Knowing where my roots are from...it's a way that I keep my heart open to people from my community. So knowing that, like, uhm I know people that are immigrating to the United States from Venezuela and even though that is not my country where I come from but because I have connection and a love for my Hispanic roots, it is a great way that I keep empathy and that I just have my heart open to the community. (Participant 8)

Many participants emphasized the importance of caring through respecting their elders and honoring their community. Participants described “a whole lot of respect” that extended to “elders”, “parents”, and “the community.” Some participants further highlighted extending care to “those who might not have been so nice to you” and that “two wrongs don’t make it right.”

Coping with Racial Discrimination via Ethnic Identity & Critical Consciousness

In addition, this qualitative investigation explored how young BIPOC use their ethnic identity and critical consciousness to cope with racial discrimination. In response to this question, most young BIPOC believed (a) ethnic identity exploration activities and (b) resilience helped them combat living in a racially unjust world. These two themes are discussed in greater detail below.

Ethnic Identity Exploration Activities (9 participants, 27 instances)

Activities which allowed young BIPOC to explore their ethnic identity and heritage emerged as a theme when they described ways to navigate racial oppression. Ethnic identity exploration activities encompassed feelings of gratitude for visits to their ancestral country, engaging in cultural traditions, and simply learning about their family history. When BIPOC youth were asked how (if at all) being Black, Latinx, or multi-racial helped them cope with racial

discrimination many participants explained activities like, “it’s helpful knowing where I come from and knowing where my roots are from,” and, “I’ve taken the time, too, to, like, actually understand, like, my ancestors and, like, people that are from my family, both in Mexico and here.” One AfroLatinx youth summarized the importance of learning about your culture:

Well, from just from my experience, I do know that both, like, the Latino and African American cultures are really big on supporting others in your group. Like, there's a lot of, like, pride in your identity or pride in your group and sticking to your people. So I feel like that is one strength, like sticking to those who are close to you. But in my case, since I have, since I'm both races, it kind of extends beyond just one group. (Participant 7)

In response to how being a part of their ethnic group helped them cope with racial discrimination, some participants connected their ethnic identity exploration activities to increased feelings of pride and motivation to persevere. This was exemplified when one participant shared, “just knowing a little bit of Latin American history and knowing how resilient our people are and how hard working they are and how ambitious they are. And it's, it's also a source of pride knowing that I have connections to that.”

Resilience (8 participants, 33 instances)

Resilience emerged as a significant theme when young BIPOC described their experience utilizing critical consciousness to navigate racial discrimination. Resilience encompassed perseverance, critical reflection, and a motivation to “keep fighting” in response to racism. When BIPOC youth were asked how, if at all, the concept of critical consciousness helped them cope with racial discrimination most participants responded with sentiments like, “it helped me kind of open my eyes”, “it's understanding those things and just trying to work it in your favor,” and,

“even though I felt like I wasn't being taken seriously, I still didn't give up.” One Latinx youth described how critical consciousness helped them process racism:

I mean, I think it's just any problem is easier to tackle when you understand, or you can see how it moves, how it functions, how it works, like a computer. You can pull it apart, see the pieces and see what does each thing, why what causes another thing to happen. Just makes it easier. (Participant 11)

Another Latinx participant described how critical reflection protected their sense of self:

I think it impacted my sense of self more, kind of making me remember that, you know, it's kind of a weird wording this way, but like, the system that we're in is not meant for everybody. And there's gonna be times where others feel like they have either more right, or are better than you just because of skin color or race, like how they identify us. So it just kind of made me feel like a bit of self-awareness, like to be more mindful of like, who I am and not to put myself down, but more so remembering of like, who we are and what this kind of society still is. (Participant 10)

Many participants acknowledged racial injustices and described resistance and perseverance as important strengths to overcome it. This was exemplified by one participant who shared, “are you gonna follow like those things held against you [by society], or are you going to continue despite that, have perseverance?”

Integration of Qualitative & Quantitative Findings

Table 27 presents a joint display integrating the quantitative and qualitative findings to explain the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and PYD. The quantitative results indicated that perceived racial discrimination positively predicts competence, character, caring, and contribution for young BIPOC. To contextualize these findings, qualitative data

revealed that resilience emerged as a key explanatory mechanism. Specifically, most participants described their resilience in response to racial discrimination through increased awareness of racial injustices, perseverance, continuous effort, and hopefulness. Additionally, qualitative findings highlight the motivation to contribute to social causes, supported by themes of community engagement and a desire to make a difference. These themes suggest critical consciousness, and critical action more specifically, is related to the process of being resilient to experiences of racism. Furthermore, positive role models, particularly family members, played a role in fostering resilience, as evidenced by codes related to parent modeling and family influence (See Table 27). It is possible young BIPOC learn from their family members, and other individuals who identify with their ethnic group, how to resist systemic racism.

Quantitative results also demonstrated that youth with an achieved positive ethnic identity status exhibit higher levels of PYD outcomes compared to all other ethnic identity statuses. The qualitative data reinforces this finding by emphasizing the role of connection and familism in ethnic identity development. Moreover, ethnic identity exploration emerged as a critical process contributing to PYD, as illustrated through engagement in exploration activities, family history exploration, and expressions of ethnic affirmation and pride. These qualitative insights suggest that ethnic identity exploration and affirmation foster a strong sense of self and contribute to thriving for emerging adults of color.

Finally, the quantitative results indicated that when critical consciousness and ethnic identity status are introduced, racial discrimination is no longer a significant predictor of PYD. Further, results demonstrated critical consciousness and ethnic identity are constructs that serve as mediators in the relationship between discrimination and PYD. The qualitative data further elucidated this mechanism, highlighting the role of critical consciousness in fostering resilience,

awareness, and critical reflection. Additionally, participants expressed confidence in their ability to navigate adversity and a sense of caring for others, reinforcing the protective effects of ethnic identity and critical consciousness. Collectively, these findings underscore the importance of ethnic identity formation and critical awareness in mitigating the negative impacts of racial discrimination and promoting thriving amongst young BIPOC.

Table 27*Joint Display Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Results*

Quantitative Results	Qualitative Follow-up Interview Explaining Quantitative Results	How Qualitative Findings Helped to Explain Quantitative Results
Perceived Racial Discrimination positively predicted, competence, character, caring, and contribution (for entire sample).	Theme of resilience supported by these codes: • Resilience – awareness (16 instances) • Resilience – perseverance (14 instances) • Resilience – keep fighting (12 instances) • Resilience – hopeful (5 instances) Theme of motivation to contribute to the cause supported by these codes: • Contribution – motivation to contribute (10 instances) • Contribution – community (12 instances) Theme of support from positive role models supported by these codes: • Resilience--Positive Role Models (6 instances) • Modeled by family (8 instances) • Response to racism--parent modeling (3 instances)	Resilience emerged as the primary explanation for the positive relationship discovered between perceived racial discrimination and PYD. Youth described resilience in many ways and qualitative data supports critical consciousness as a key component to the internal strength that allows youth to thrive in an unjust environment.
Achieved Positive EIS had higher levels of PYD compared to all other ethnic identity statuses.	Theme of connection supported by these codes: • Connection (28 instances) • Familism (9 instances) Theme of Ethnic Identity exploration and pride supported by these codes: • Exploration activities (27 instances) • Exploration – family history (9 instances) • Affirmation – pride in identity (11 instances)	The process of developing an achieved positive ethnic identity status, through exploration activities especially, is related to critical components of PYD including connection and a strong sense of self.
When critical consciousness & ethnic identity status are added to the model, racial discrimination is no longer a significant predictor of PYD.	Ethnic identity and critical consciousness are powerful contributors to PYD • Resilience – awareness (16 instances) • Critical Reflection (19 instances) • Confidence – strength (9 instances) • Caring (18 instances)	Racial discrimination does not have a positive impact on PYD, instead critical consciousness and ethnic identity status powerfully mediate the relationship between racial discrimination and PYD.

Table 28 presents a joint display examining the relationship between ethnic identity status and critical consciousness, focusing on critical reflection and critical action. The qualitative data provided insights into how youth in different ethnic identity statuses, as categorized by their survey responses, described their awareness of social injustices and their engagement in activism.

Youth with an achieved positive ethnic identity provided the most detailed descriptions of critical consciousness. Their narratives often reflected deep personal experiences with systemic barriers and a strong motivation to advocate for social change. They described moments of critical reflection in which they recognized structural inequalities, often accompanied by emotional responses such as frustration or determination. Additionally, these individuals actively engaged in various forms of activism, ranging from in-person advocacy to online awareness campaigns. The richness and depth of these responses suggested that critical consciousness was an integral part of their identity development process.

In contrast, youth with a diffuse positive ethnic identity demonstrated a more limited awareness of social inequities. Their descriptions of critical reflection were less detailed and often framed as newfound realizations rather than deeply ingrained understandings. Similarly, their engagement in critical action was less frequent, though some expressed a willingness to contribute to social change in the future. These findings suggested that youth in this group might have been in an earlier stage of developing critical consciousness, with limited prior exposure or engagement.

Finally, youth with an achieved negative ethnic identity expressed the least engagement in critical consciousness. Their reflections on social issues were often brief and lacking in depth, with some responses indicating apathy or detachment. While they acknowledged systemic issues,

their responses suggested a more cynical or indifferent perspective. Critical action was described infrequently, and when mentioned, it was often framed as a passive or uncertain commitment rather than an intentional effort toward change. These findings suggests that negative beliefs about ethnicity may have hindered the development of critical consciousness, potentially influencing one's motivation to engage in activism.

Overall, the joint display in Table 28 highlighted a pattern in which the development of an achieved positive ethnic identity appeared to be associated with a greater depth of critical consciousness, both in reflection and action. In contrast, those with diffuse or negative ethnic identity statuses demonstrated more limited engagement with these concepts. These findings underscore the importance of fostering positive ethnic identity development as a means of promoting critical awareness and social action among young BIPOC

Table 28

Joint Display Integrating Quotes Coded as Critical Reflection and Action by Ethnic Identity Status Participant Group

Ethnic Identity Status of Interviewees	Critical Reflection	Critical Action	Integration Inferences
Achieved Positive (<i>n</i> = 5)	“And it's just that like sadness and anger of like, you know what, after four long years of, of school, I can't get the job that I really wanted and have to go back to my hometown. It's just like, a way of suppressing us.”	“I would say activism, because it at least, like, you're getting your voice out there and you're making an effort to see change. So I would say activism is the biggest way that helps me cope.”	Descriptions of critical consciousness from achieved positive youth are detailed and often grounded in their own experience.
	“I don't even remember how old I was when I started to kind of get more into, like, activism. I've always been the kind of person where I've always been inclined sort of to, like, feel for the little guy, you know, the underdog, that kind of the idea.”	“It's not an easy situation for me to necessarily go out and protest or to make big statements and big shows of it, but definitely, like an online space or like, signing petitions... on social media, reposting information that I feel like people that, you know, follow me and are close to me should know.”	This may indicate critical consciousness is related to the process of developing an achieved positive ethnic identity.
Diffuse Positive (<i>n</i> = 2)	25 Instances	8 Instances	
	“And it felt kind of messed up because you realize like, oh, these things are kind of against me even if I didn't think so because...I'm gonna be honest, I was blindsided to it ...Blindsided to it or either I had an oblivious and I just never realized.”	“And you know, I was also thinking, with everything that's happening in politics right now, when I graduate, someone's gonna have to fix all of this, so might as well join the effort.”	Diffuse positive youth described critical consciousness in simple terms, and less frequently, which may suggest less time developing critical consciousness.
Achieved Negative (<i>n</i> = 4)	7 Instances	2 Instances	
	“Well, it could stand a few improvements that there needs to be more gender equality at best.”	“But right now, if I was to do something, I think it will more so be in a talking, communicative type of space...But I think it probably will grow because it's the only thing it can do unless I stop. So. But I just think it won't. I don't know. That's a good question.”	Descriptions of critical consciousness from achieved negative youth were brief, infrequent, and at times apathetic. The negative beliefs held about themselves and ethnicity may impact CC development.
	19 Instances	1 Instance	

Chapter IV. Discussion

“I am more concerned about the repression, the police brutality, violence, the rising wave of racism that makes up the political landscape of the US today. Our young people deserve a future, and I consider it the mandate of my ancestors to be a part of the struggle to ensure that they have one.” – Assata Shakur

Racial oppression is a harsh, unjust, reality woven into the fabric of American society which requires young BIPOC to adapt, resist, and liberate themselves, where possible, in order to thrive while we simultaneously work to eradicate systemic inequities. Scholars agree that human development does not occur in isolation but rather through multitudinous, iterative, interactions between the individual and their environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Lerner & Benson, 2003; Lerner & Galambos, 1998). Racism, defined by Audre Lorde (p.114), is the “belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance,” and has been perpetuated through systemic and institutionalized racial inequity (i.e., racial oppression) since the founding of the United States. As a result, it remains deeply entrenched in the societal structures that shape the environment in which BIPOC are meant to positively develop within.

With the rise of white supremacy and white supremacist propaganda, the current political climate in America has intensified racial oppression, making it even more life-threatening to young BIPOC. In 2023, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) found a 50% increase of white supremacy hate groups, the highest increase recorded in the history of SPLC (Murry, 2023). Subsequently, Donald Trump signed two executive orders within hours of his second term (January 2025) which ceased all government spending to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs, which have roots in the civil rights movement and work to ameliorate systemic,

racially unjust, barriers for BIPOC people in the United States (Mahdawi, 2025). These recent examples of racial oppression result in physical, emotional, and traumatic experiences that ultimately threaten the optimal development of BIPOC (Azadi, 2024). Despite living in a society that does not promote their optimal development, many BIPOC – albeit historically understudied – have defied the odds to develop into emotionally healthy, self-actualized adults making positive contributors to their communities. Thus, the purpose of the present study was to contribute to our collective understanding of what strengths BIPOC youth utilize to resist racial oppression and develop into healthy, thriving, adults.

An explanatory sequential research design was employed to empirically test the inquiries of this timely study (Creswell & Clark, 2018). This mixed methodology design heavily emphasized quantitative data, employed advanced statistical analyses, and also utilized qualitative data to explain the quantitative results (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Specifically, this study employed a survey to 393 BIPOC identifying emerging adults and interviewed 11 youth, utilizing a purposeful sampling method to illuminate how, and the extent to which, BIPOC youth thrive amid racial oppression (i.e., racial discrimination). Together, these data were analyzed to investigate (a) how perceived racial discrimination relates to positive youth development, (b) how the process of ethnic identity development relates to positive youth development, (c) the relationship between critical consciousness and positive youth development, and (d) how young BIPOC utilize ethnic identity and critical consciousness to navigate their experiences with racial discrimination.

Thriving Despite Racial Oppression

This study contributes to the growing body of research that demands the development of BIPOC be studied within the context of racial oppression. Human development does not occur in

isolation, instead we develop over time through ongoing interactions with our environment including the sociopolitical context of our society (Lerner & Benson, 2003; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Lerner & Gambos, 1998; Travis & Leech, 2014). Dr. Cynthia García Coll and colleagues (1996) pioneered the Integrative Model of Development which asserts racial oppression influences the development of BIPOC in every facet. Thus, racial oppression is a context engrained in the fabric of our society which young BIPOC must resist to thrive.

This study found on average, young BIPOC reported experiencing 6–7 types of racial discrimination (out of 10 possible experiences) within their lifetime, thus far. This was supported by many voices of young BIPOC (8 out of 11) interviewees who acknowledged the current political climate which has brought the life-threatening impact of racial oppression to the forefront of their lives. To illustrate, one Latinx emerging adult reflected on the recent rise in deportations set forth by the Trump administration and said, “I’ve seen protests now to try to speak up against deportations of those who are just trying to get a better life here.”

Further, the majority of participants reported experiencing oppression. On average, those who reported they experienced oppression, claimed they held two oppressive identities (i.e., their race, sexuality, gender expression). Meaning, on average, young BIPOC recognized the oppressive context they lived in and likely were also oppressed in ways that extend beyond their race. These findings not only support the need to study the development of BIPOC youth within the context of racial oppression but provides impetus and urgency as young BIPOC’s experiences of oppression are vast.

This study added to the limited amount of research studying the positive development of young BIPOC amidst racial oppression. Despite the developmental disruptor (Azadi, 2024) placed on youth by racial oppression, this study found high levels of thriving indicators, as

operationalized by the 5C model of development (Lerner et al., 2005). On average, young BIPOC demonstrated high levels of caring, character, and competence. Young BIPOC also demonstrated moderately high levels of connection and confidence. Research suggests youth who display high-levels of these internal strengths often thrive in adulthood by having a greater tendency to contribute positively to their family, community, and have higher levels of well-being (Bowers et al., 2010; Lewin-Bizan et al., 2010). Similarly, studies found young BIPOC who possessed the 5Cs were less likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors, struggle with externalizing and internalizing problems, and had higher self-esteem (Holsen et al., 2017; Murry et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2013; Sun & Shek, 2013; Williams et al., 2014; Witherspoon et al., 2009). Young BIPOC in this study sample also demonstrated high levels of contribution which suggests they are likely to positively contribute to their community (Lerner & Benson, 2003, Lerner et al., 2005). Together, these findings support the importance of taking a strengths-based perspective when examining the development of BIPOC. Rather than treating the empirical investigation of BIPOC as “problems to be fixed” this study adds to the limited body of research that investigates the strengths young BIPOC possess and their ability to thrive (Damon, 2004; Benson, 2002; Lerner et al., 2005) while also examining what thriving looks like within a context of racial oppression.

Interestingly, hypothesis one was disconfirmed, which hypothesized that higher levels of perceived racial discrimination would predict lower levels of PYD. Instead, higher levels of perceived racial discrimination predicted higher levels of overall positive youth development. Young BIPOC who reported experiencing high levels of racial discrimination were more likely to also demonstrate high levels of competence, character, caring, and contribution. Although the hypothesized relationship was not supported and subgroup differences (i.e., Latinx and Black

youth) emerged, this finding offers fundamental insight into how a form of racial oppression relates to thriving among young BIPOC. Thus, these results address a significant gap in the literature and highlights the need for further investigation.

Results from this study meaningfully contribute to our understanding of how BIPOC youth survive racism and continue to thrive despite it. First, aligned with the study hypothesis, ethnic identity development fully mediated the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and overall positive youth development. Meaning, the positive relationship initially found between racial discrimination and positive youth development can be explained through BIPOC engagement in ethnic identity exploration (e.g., learning about their ethnicity) and resolution (i.e., believing ethnicity is an important part of your identity). These results suggest that when faced with racism, BIPOC youth are more likely to explore their ethnicity and feel firmly that their ethnicity is foundational to their sense of self, which in turn is related to overall levels of thriving. Interestingly, affirmation, the extent to which BIPOC feel positively about being a part of their ethnic group did not explain the relationship between racism and positive youth development. These findings add evidence to the primarily theoretical literature that posit ethnic identity development acts not only as a developmental task for BIPOC youth, but an essential protective factor (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2015; Yip et al., 2019; Toomey et al., 2013). Additionally, this study provides preliminary evidence asserting ethnic identity exploration and resolution act as important mechanisms for resilience amidst the context of racial oppression.

Secondly, this study provides preliminary evidence which posits critical consciousness as an essential form of resilience for BIPOC youth. Aligned with the study hypothesis, critical consciousness significantly explained (i.e., mediated) the relationship between perceived racial

discrimination and higher levels of positive youth development. These results suggested that when BIPOC youth are faced with experiences of racism they are more likely to develop the skills of critically examining social injustice in our society (i.e., critical agency) and participate in change-making behaviors (i.e., critical behavior) which in turn are associated with high levels of thriving. This finding significantly contributes to the field by providing quantitative evidence of the crucial role critical consciousness plays in the lives of BIPOC youth.

A significant strength of this study was the ability to leverage the qualitative phase to integrate and explain this unexpected relationship between greater PYD for youth experiencing more racial discrimination. Resilience emerged as a significant theme where many BIPOC youth described a deep, multi-faceted, strength that allowed them to be their authentic selves and thrive. One participant described their resilience and said, “it takes a lot to be able to look at the news and see what's going on in the world and just get up every day and say, I'm just gonna keep going.” Racial oppression, and in turn racial discrimination, creates a stressful, dehumanizing, and unjust environment under which BIPOC must persevere to become healthy, thriving, adults. The resistance to racial oppression described by many participants, acts as a pivotal form of resilience for Black, Indigenous, and other young (i.e., adolescents and emerging adults) People of Color as they are tasked with solidifying their sense of self, world view, and values (Benson, 2002; Erikson, 1968; Havinghurst, 1968). One participant emphasized the importance of resilience for their sense-of-self and believed, “it’s important for us not to lose ourselves in that [racism] because when we lose ourselves, we lose our souls.” While understudied in psychology, the theme of resilience in the context of racial oppression is aligned with liberation and feminist theories who posit resistance, which theoretically encompasses resilience, is a life-long pursuit

for BIPOC and is required to thrive as a racial minority in the United States (Angelou, 1969; Davis, 1981; hooks, 2000; Lorde, 1984).

Ethnic Identity as a Developmental Task for Thriving

This study meaningfully adds to the robust body of literature that asserts ethnic identity formation is a complex process that BIPOC *must* grapple with to understand, and in doing so internalize, what it means to be an ethnic minority in the United States (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2009; Seaton et al., 2006; Syed et al., 2007; Kiang et al., 2006). As previously discussed, the process of ethnic identity development is comprised of three distinct components including: (a) exploration, the extent to which individuals engage in exploring their ethnicity through a wide variety of behaviors (e.g., learning, partaking in traditions, visiting ancestral home), (b) resolution, defined as the extent to which youth believe or commit to their ethnic identity as a central tenant to their sense of self and, (c) affirmation, known as the extent to which individuals endorse their ethnic identity plays a positive role in their life (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). Examining ethnic identity as a dynamic three-component process differs from previous research that conceptualized ethnic identity as a static construct. Prior studies often aggregate the three components to assess the extent to which individuals had ‘achieved’ an ethnic identity, rather than considering identity development as an ongoing process in which BIPOC engage throughout their lifespan (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004; Seaton et al., 2010; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2012). The benefit of taking a process approach with the entire sample is to elucidate how each component of the process, and the multiple configurations of simultaneously engaging in each component, relates to thriving, a perspective that has the field has urged further research to explore (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004).

Young BIPOC in this sample reported having developed a solid foundation of how their ethnicity informs their sense of self, had a strong affect (negative or positive) about their identity as an ethnic minority in the US, and had moderately engaged in activities where they explored what it means to be a part of their ethnic group. All components of ethnic identity were strongly correlated with indicators of thriving and positive development in this study sample as well, which is aligned with the emerging body of literature which has related ethnic identity development to positive outcomes for adolescents and emerging adults (Umaña-Taylor & Rivas-Drake, 2021). This finding contributes to the field by acknowledging inherent value in the cognitive and behavioral processes of ethnic identity development (i.e., exploration, grappling with affect/affirmation) and further provides evidence that engaging in the process of ethnic identity formation relates to thriving for BIPOC emerging adults.

This study adds to the emerging body of literature that has examined ethnic identity through ethnic identity statuses, a categorical way to capture the varying nature and complexity of the three components of ethnic identity, and provides evidence for how it relates to thriving for emerging adults of color. As hypothesized, this study identified distinct EI statuses that aligned with previous ethnic identity research (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004; Seaton et al., 2010; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2012). Specifically, the following four distinct ethnic identity statuses emerged: (a) Achieved Positive, which categorized individuals who explored their ethnic roots, made a deep commitment that their ethnicity is a central tenant to their sense of self, and feel their ethnic identity positively contributes to their life (and sense of self), (b) Diffuse Positive, which was defined as individuals with elevated affirmation, low resolution, and low exploration which result in general apathy in attitude and behavior, but not in affect, toward their own ethnic identity, (b) Foreclosed Positive, which was defined by elevated affirmation and resolution with

low exploration, individuals in this group had a premature and unquestioning adoption of values; they had not explored their ethnicity but had committed to their ethnic identity and had positive feelings about being a part of their ethnic group and (d) Achieved Negative, which was defined as a sense of identity where the individual made a commitment to his or her ethnic identity that is characterized by exploration of their culture, however, has persistent negative feelings about being a part of their ethnic group. Exploring these four ethnic identity statuses provided insight into how different forms of ethnic identity development relate to youth thriving.

Results demonstrated statistically significant differences in indicators of thriving based on EI status. As expected, youth with an achieved positive EIS had significantly higher levels of overall thriving than those with an achieved negative EIS. In support of the study hypothesis, youth with an achieved positive EIS also displayed significantly higher levels of thriving compared to youth with a diffused positive or foreclosed positive. There were no significant differences in overall thriving for youth who belonged to foreclosed positive, diffuse positive, or achieved negative EIS. These results align with the literature that posit an achieved positive EIS is the ultimate formation of ethnic identity and that individuals in a diffused or foreclosed EIS, regardless of affect, are in an “immature” or early phase of grappling with their ethnic identity (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). This finding also meaningfully contributed to the emerging body of research that asserts ethnic identity affirmation, an individuals’ affect about their EIS, must be teased apart because “achievement” may be still detrimental BIPOC ability to thrive when they have a negative affect about their EIS (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004).

Results from the interviews further confirmed the important role ethnic identity development plays in young BIPOC’s ability to thrive. First, a theme of connection emerged where most participants described feeling a strong sense of connection to their ethnic community

(i.e., ranging from immediate family to their larger ethnic group) when describing how their ethnic identity related to thriving. Many participants described prioritizing community, and the greater collective, adopted in part due to their commitment to being a part of their ethnic group. This was illustrated best when a Latinx young person shared:

I feel like Latin American culture is very centered around family. And I feel like a lot of times knowing people that even though they're not directly tied to my culture, it does feel like a family, like a community. It's one that [identifying as Latino] has also helped to shape my experience and identity as part of that community.

These qualitative findings may speak to the strength of the process of ethnic identity formation, that those who have an achieved positive status engaged in the same process as those with an achieved negative status but arrived at a different final result (negative or positive feelings about it). This helps to explain why youth with an achieved positive EIS had significantly higher scores on connection than foreclosed or diffused EIS, who are theoretically more at an “immature” stage in their ethnic identity formation. It is possible that exploration and resolution are in fact the drivers of connection for BIPOC and affect, whether they feel positively or negatively about identifying as a certain ethnic group, is less important. Although several gaps remain in our understanding of how ethnic identity formation impacts positive youth development, a few studies have similarly found youth have gained greater connection to their community, and sense of belonging, through engaging in ethnic identity formation (Morgan-Consoli et al., 2023; Sladek et al., 2020).

Results from the qualitative investigation of this study explained engagement in ethnic identity exploration activities led to a plethora of positive outcomes. Most BIPOC interviewees described how engaging in activities that increased their understanding of their ethnic group

provided meaningful experiences that strengthened their sense of self, confidence, and pride in their ancestry. This was exemplified when a Latinx emerging adult shared, “I’ve taken the time to...understand my ancestors and people from my family, both in Mexico and here. I really tried to make sure that I understand who I am, which is being a Mexican, and why it means so much to me.” Through the integration of qualitative findings and quantitative findings, we see that ethnic identity exploration acted as a mediator between perceived racial discrimination and thriving; it is clear the process of exploring ones’ ethnic heritage as it relates to their sense of self is a critical process for BIPOC. Additionally, this may help to explain why youth with an achieved positive EIS consistently demonstrate higher levels of thriving than youth in diffused or foreclosed EISs, who have not engaged in the process of exploration as comprehensively.

Together, this study also provides evidence to support the value in investigating ethnic identity development through a person-centered approach (i.e., cluster analysis for EIS). By examining ethnic identity formation through ethnic identity statuses, it provided an opportunity to tease apart which components of the ethnic identity development process are pivotal for thriving and the extent to which a negative affect towards one’s ethnic identity hinders positive developmental outcomes. Indeed, these findings support a limited body of research that suggest achieved positive EIS is strongly linked to thriving for BIPOC (Seaton et al., 2006; Chavez-Korrel & Torres, 2014). In turn, it emphasizes the need for interventions to provide youth with diffused positive and foreclosed positive EISs to engage further in ethnic identity exploration. Additionally, these findings speak to the pervasive impact having a negative affect towards one’s ethnic identity and the role it plays in their lives. To bolster opportunities to thrive, it is essential there are opportunities for youth with a negative ethnicity identity affirmation, regardless of

where individuals are in the process of ethnic identity formation, to receive guided interventions to reframe how they have internalized the meaning behind their ethnic identity.

This study importantly contributes to the field by illuminating how ethnic identity contributes to thriving when taking into account young BIPOC experiences with racism. Together, these findings suggest that for emerging adults of color the process of ethnic identity development protects them from racism only when youth have grappled with the process, have explored, and resolved what their ethnicity means to them. These data substantiate the theoretical claim and preliminary evidence that ethnic identity development provides a psychological buffer for young BIPOC from racism (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2016; Yip et al., 2018; Romeo et al., 2014). However, this is the first study to our knowledge that tests how the process of ethnic identity development relates to the 5Cs framework. As such, this study provides substantive preliminary evidence that through successful engagement of the process of ethnic identity formation, BIPOC youth are able resist racial oppression and continue to thrive. Lastly, this study aided to our limited knowledge of how ethnic identity development relates to critical consciousness which is discussed in detail below.

Critical Consciousness as a Form of Resilience

This study provides answers to a recent call-to-action which demands applied developmental scientists investigate the role critical consciousness plays in the development of young BIPOC (Rapa & Geldhof, 2020). Results demonstrated levels of overall critical consciousness were moderately high, on average, amongst this sample of BIPOC-identifying emerging adults. Specifically, young BIPOC critical agency or awareness of racial injustices and commitment to action were high (Diemer et al., 2017; Freire, 1993; Watts et al., 2011). Critical behavior, a component of critical consciousness that measures actions taken to promote justice

and end racism was moderately high (Diemer et al., 2017; Tyler et al., 2020). In addition, critical consciousness was strongly associated with every primary study variable (i.e., 5Cs of PYD).

These findings add to the body of literature which supports adolescence and emerging adulthood is a ripe time in development to foster critical consciousness amongst BIPOC.

To our knowledge, this study is the first to employ an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to investigate the extent to which young BIPOCs' understanding of societal racial injustice, and desire and ability to act on it, promotes thriving as measured by the 5Cs positive youth development framework (Diemer, 2017; Watts et al., 1999; Hope et al., 2020; Seaton & White, 2024). As expected, critical consciousness acted as a strong predictor of youth thriving. Further, critical consciousness strongly predicted youth's competence, confidence, connection, caring, and contribution. This supports the limited body of research that have substantiated critical reflection and agency as positively related to outcomes of well-being for youth experiencing marginalization (Heberle et al., 2020; Bowers et al., 2020; Bowers et al., 2021). Interestingly, these findings contradict two studies that found critical racial reflection was not related to the 5Cs for white students (Kelly et al., 2019), Black youth from low-income schools (Kelly et al., 2019), and that these relationships varied for Asian youth (Ni et al., 2022), which adds urgency to additional research studying the pathways of how critical consciousness leads to thriving, for whom, and under what conditions.

Results from this study support the theoretical impetus that critical consciousness is a critical skill for young BIPOC not only because it acts as a driver of thriving but also protects BIPOC youth from harm caused by their lived experiences with racism. These data demonstrated critical consciousness acted as a mediating variable, thus, explaining the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and positive youth development. This result supports the

theoretical postulations that critical consciousness protects youth BIPOC youth from the harm caused by their experiences with racism and indeed may be an “antidote to oppression” and offer a path toward liberation as Freire proposed (Nagda & Zúñiga, 2003; Freire, 1993; Watts et al., 1999).

When young BIPOC in the sample were asked to describe the phenomenon of how critical consciousness allowed them to navigate racial discrimination, a prominent theme of resilience emerged. Many young BIPOC shared the awareness of societal injustices allowed them to make sense of racial oppression, which in turn, helped youth attribute the harm caused by their experiences with racism to larger institutionalized and historical social injustices rather than coping through internalized self-hatred. These sentiments were exemplified as one Latinx youth shared:

It's kind of a weird wording this way, but like, the system that we're in is not meant for everybody. And there's gonna be times where others feel like they have either more right, or are better than you just because of skin color or race, like how they identify us. So it just kind of made me feel like a bit of self-awareness... and not to put myself down, but more so remembering of like, who we [Mexican Americans] are and what this kind of society still is.

The integration of the quantitative and qualitative explanation of this phenomenon provides robust support to the limited body of research that theorizes that the cognitive ability to question what undergirds racism allows young BIPOC to cope and positively adapt to the trauma caused by racism (Anyiwo et al., 2018; Mathews et al., 2019). Critical consciousness has long been recognized by Black feminist scholars, philosophers, and activists as a key mechanism for the liberation of BIPOC, albeit with limited research in psychology.

In addition to the value seen in young BIPOC's ability to greater understand systemic racial oppression, many interviewees shared their commitment (i.e., critical agency) and activism (i.e., critical behavior) taken to challenge racial stereotypes, unjust societal structures, and systemically fewer opportunities strengthened their ability to thrive amidst racial discrimination. One Black youth expressed that critical reflection on its own was not enough and emphasized critical action as a key component to navigating racial discrimination as illustrated when they shared:

I don't think that's necessarily helped me cope with discrimination because I think back to instances of, George Floyd, for example. The idea of critical consciousness does not make it any better for me... I would say activism, because it at least, like, you're getting your voice out there and you're making an effort to see change, is the biggest way that helps me cope.

As expected, young BIPOC's awareness of racial inequity coupled with commitment and taking action toward a more racially just world work together to allow youth to process racial oppression, reduce the harm caused by racism, and in turn garner the strength to persist and thrive. Together, these results support the Social Justice Youth Development (SJYD) framework that emphasizes the development of critical consciousness and engaging in social action as essential to BIPOC development (Ginwright, & Cammarota, 2002)

In addition, this study's novel multi-disciplinary approach adds to the few studies that have explored the relationship between critical consciousness and ethnic identity development amongst young BIPOC. Through integration, it is clear that the internal processes BIPOC engage in to develop ethnic identity and critical consciousness are naturally intertwined. The

entanglement of critical consciousness and ethnic identity is best illustrated by the voice of a Latinx emerging adult who shared:

I've seen a lot of my peers' post and share the message that there's going to be certain protests and rallies for justice and change. I could see that they're really trying to fight for the rights of those who cannot really raise their voices or those who are oppressed. I think I could speak for most of my peers and those who identify with my race that...we're really proud to be who we are.

To our knowledge, only one other study has explicitly tested the relationship between critical consciousness and ethnic racial identity and found Black and Latinx youths' engagement with critical consciousness may initiate ethnic racial identity formation (Bañales et al., 2024). Given the important role critical consciousness and ethnic identity play in fostering thriving in a racially unjust context, further research is urgently needed to understand the interrelated nature of critical consciousness and ethnic identity.

Variations in Pathways to Thriving Between Racial Groups

Although there are salient similarities in how BIPOC experience and are resilient to racial oppression it is important to investigate the nuances of how experiences vary by, and within, racial groups. Each racial group have unique histories of racial oppression, cultures, and values that may lead to varying processes and outcomes of youth development across People of Color in the United States. Unfortunately, the empirical investigation of the nuances between racial groups in positive youth development is limited. To contribute to the efforts to close this gap in research, this study took an explorative approach to investigate how pathways to thriving vary by racial groups. Below findings are discussed in relation to Latinx and Black youths' resilience to racism and positive youth development.

Latinx Emerging Adults Pathways to Thriving

To date, the mechanisms in which Latinx youth use to thrive amidst the unjust context of racial oppression is limited. Research has shown racism, one of the few consequences of racial oppression studied extensively, is often related to higher rates of depression, risk-taking behaviors, and physical health problems for Latinx youth (Hagiwara et al., 2016; Karlsen and Nazroo, 2002; Krieger et al., 2005). In the current study sample, Latinx youth reported, on average, experiencing six different types of racism speaking to the pervasiveness of racism Latinx youth must survive. Given the strong link between racism and negative internalized behaviors (i.e., depression, low self-esteem) that are known to often prevent PYD, it is interesting that for Latinx youth in this sample, higher levels of perceived racial discrimination predicted higher levels of character, caring, and contribution (3 out of the 6 Cs of PYD) and not competence, unlike the entire BIPOC sample. However, it is important to note that the research of PYD for Latinx youth remains exploratory, as its research base is still emerging.

Ethnic identity, however, has a substantial amount of evidence as a critical developmental process that plays a significant role in Latinx sense of self in the U.S. However, the extent to which ethnic identity acts as a buffer to common consequences of racism (i.e., depression, self-hatred, risk-taking behaviors) has been notoriously mixed leaving it unclear the extent to which ethnic identity development acts as a protective factor for Latinx youth (Umaña-Taylor & Rivas-Drake, 2021). The research explaining the relationship between ethnic identity development and PYD is even more limited for this sub-group. The current study adds to the emerging body of literature by presenting evidence that Latinx youth vary in how they engage in the process of ethnic identity development with 40% of the sample categorized as achieved positive ethnic identity status, the configuration of resolution affirmation and exploration that is most often

associated with positive developmental outcomes. Further, all three components of ethnic identity development predicted overall PYD in the Latinx study sample, which confirms that engaging in all parts of the process of ethnic identity development is associated with indicators of thriving (Smith & Silva, 2011; Rivas-Drake et al., 2014; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). For Latinx youth the process of exploring their Latinidad (i.e., ethnic identity exploration) predicted most of the 6Cs, with the exception of confidence and caring. The importance of exploration was similarly highlighted in Latinx responses to the interview questions. These findings support a handful of studies that found exploration is a critical component of the ethnic identity development process which helped Latinx youth be resilient to racial oppression (Bañales et al., 2024, Morgan-Consoli et al., 2023). Interestingly, ethnic identity affirmation strongly predicted most of the 5Cs in this group with the exception of connection and contribution. This is a particularly interesting finding that warrants further investigation as affirmation is an often-understudied part of ethnic identity development, yet is garnering evidence as critical to PYD. Affirmation, may be particularly complex for Latinx youth as it theoretically may relate to colorism, a prejudice that privileges lighter skin tone over darker skin tones (Hunter, 2007). Some Latinx with a lighter skin tone who may be considered “white passing” may navigate conflicting feelings of owning their Latinidad given how others may treat them, which warrants further investigation. Together, these findings further substantiate ethnic identity as a pivotal developmental task for Latinx youth and emerging adults that is connected to their ability to thrive and provides value in the investigation of ethnic identity as a developmental process rather than content (achieved vs not).

This study meaningfully adds to the literature and asserts ethnic identity development is essential for Latinx to thrive by providing evidence that ethnic identity development is predicted

by perceived racial discrimination and, in turn, predicts PYD. Interestingly, for Latinx youth perceived racial discrimination positively predicted character, caring, and contribution (3 out of the 6 Cs of PYD), however, the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and overall positive youth development was not statistically significant. Yet similar to the overall BIPOC sample, ethnic identity exploration and resolution acted as developmental pathways which promote thriving despite personal experiences with racism. Counter to the overall sample, results demonstrate affirmation was a statistically significant predictor of both perceived racial discrimination and PYD. These explorative findings provide preliminary evidence that engaging in the affirmation process is particularly important for Latinx youth and they may require positive affirmation to achieve thriving. These findings provide direction for future research.

Additionally, this study provides preliminary evidence for critical consciousness as strongly associated with indicators of thriving for Latinx youth. Similar to the overall sample, critical consciousness predicted all indicators of PYD for Latinx youth. Critical consciousness most strongly predicted contribution for Latinx youth, which may indicate critical consciousness is a precursor to long-term thriving for Latinx. Lastly, this study adds to the emerging body of literature that critical consciousness is an important strength for all BIPOC (Rapa & Geldhof, 2020; Bañales et al., 2024). Critical consciousness also fully mediated the relationship, albeit indirectly, between perceived racial discrimination and PYD for Latinx youth. Given both ethnic identity and critical consciousness development are meaningful pathways to thriving, yet the relationship between perceived racial discrimination and overall thriving is statistically insignificant, it may indicate there's a threshold of perceived racial discrimination that triggers the resilience process. Together these explorative findings emphasize the need for additional

research, both theoretically and empirically, to understand the nuances behind the importance of critical consciousness and ethnic identity development in the lives of Latinx youth.

Black Emerging Adults Pathways to Thriving

The detrimental impact racial oppression has had on the lives of Black youth has been extensively documented, yet less is known about the mechanisms Black youth utilize to thrive within this life-threatening context (Travis & Leech, 2013). Unfortunately, the empirical investigation of Black youth has been far too heavily deficient-based rather than strengths-based (Travis & Leech, 2013; Jones et al., 2023; Anyiwo et al., 2018). While this study aimed to counter the historical narrative and study of Black youth with an intersectional strengths-based approach, it is important to emphasize that the onus of survival and resilience should not rest on Black youth. Instead, we as scientists have a moral duty to investigate and advocate for structural changes to eliminate racial oppression. Simultaneously, it is essential to understand the strengths Black youth use to resist racial oppression to be able to design environments (i.e., school, out of school time programs) that work to optimize their development and allow them to become thriving adults.

This study adds to the body of literature that highlights the immense strength of Black youth. Black youth in this sample demonstrated remarkably high-levels across all indicators of thriving (all above 4 on a 5-point scale) coupled with experiencing a high level of perceived racial discrimination. This is especially important to highlight to counteract the literature that often-measured internalizing behaviors and negative developmental outcomes for Black youth (Travis & Leech, 2013). Counter to the full sample, perceived racial discrimination did not predict positive youth development in the Black youth sample, with the exception of caring. Given the high rates of racism Black youth endure, and the historical link between racism and

detrimental effects, the weak associations between perceived racial discrimination and PYD provide preliminary evidence of resilience.

Historically, ethnic identity has been operationalized in many ways with Black youth, however, rarely has it been tested as a pathway to thriving for Black youth. This study provides preliminary evidence of the utility of investigating ethnic identity through categorized ethnic identity statuses. The majority (54%) of Black youth in the sample were categorized as achieved positive youth, meaning they successfully understood what their Blackness meant to their sense of self and found it a positive and important component of their being. It is important to note some Black youth were categorized as achieved negative, meaning they went through the same developmental processes as achieved positive youth yet came to a different conclusion as to whether their Blackness was a positive aspect about themselves. The importance of further investigation around the multiple configurations of the ethnic identity development process became even more clear when a Black youth who was categorized as achieved negative shared in their interview “After what happened [racist experiences], I’ve hated myself more than I could ever know in the worst way possible.” Thus, the conclusion Black youth reach about themselves after engaging in a successful process of ethnic identity development may be especially important for Black youth suggesting adolescence and emerging adulthood may be a critical time for intervention. Indeed, the multiple configurations of how youth go through and arrive to conclusions about what their ethnic identity means to them and their life may help explain the mixed findings in the literature about the extent to which ethnic identity acts as a buffer for racism for Black youth in particular.

In addition, this study explored the relationship between each component of the ethnic identity developmental process as it relates to indicator of thriving for Black youth. Results

demonstrated ethnic identity exploration was strongly associated with all indicators of PYD with the exception of character for Black youth. These findings add to the limited body of research that emphasizes ethnic identity exploration as a particularly salient process for Black youth (Bañales et al., 2024). Similar to Latinx youth, the direct relationship between perceived racial discrimination and PYD was not statistically significant in this group, however, the indirect effect through ethnic identity exploration and resolution was significant for both racial discrimination and PYD, suggesting that ethnic identity development may buffer or transform the impact of discrimination into more positive developmental outcomes. Together these findings highlight the grave importance of the ethnic identity process as a whole and specifically the act of exploring and determining the extent to which Blackness is an important part of their sense of self is a developmental mechanism that Black emerging adults engage in to resist racism and optimize their own development.

Lastly, this study meaningfully adds to the limited empirical literature which advocates critical consciousness is essential for Black youth to thrive in the United States. Results demonstrated critical consciousness, the ability to grapple with racial injustice and advocate for a more socially just world, was strongly associated with each indicator of PYD for Black youth. These results provide empirical evidence of the promotive nature of critical consciousness for Black youth, in particular. Further, results demonstrated critical consciousness is predicted by perceived racial discrimination and, in turn, predicts positive youth development. Similar to Latinx youth the direct relationship between perceived racial discrimination and PYD was not statistically significant, however, the indirect effect through critical consciousness was significant in meaningful ways, suggesting that critical consciousness counteract the impact of racial discrimination and promotes thriving. As Black feminist scholars theorized for decades,

critical consciousness acts as a pathway to liberation for Black youth in many ways (Angelou, 1969; Davis, 1981; hooks, 2000; Lorde, 1984). Not only does critical consciousness promote PYD, but these data suggest it acts as a critical protective factor which allows Black youth to be agents in their own development and find ways to thrive despite the unjust racial oppression embedded in the context around them.

Limitations

When interpreting the results of this study it is important to acknowledge the methodological limitations. First, this study quantitatively investigated the relationships between primary study variables at one point in time. Thus, interpretations of causal relationships are not possible and could be strengthened in future research through the use of longitudinal studies. Second, it is a relatively small sample for a sample obtained via an online platform and little variability in some study variables (i.e., 5Cs of PYD) which together limits our knowledge to the generalizability to a wider sample. Additionally, small sample sizes for our sub-groups may have limited our power to detect meaningful relationships among study variables. Third, while the cluster analysis employed to determine EIS was chosen for its person-centered nature (Seaton et al., 2006), it is sample dependent. Despite employing a variety of techniques to test the reliability of our EIS categories, it is possible that these clusters are specific to the sample and therefore limits the extent to which findings about EIS can be generalized. Lastly, the purposeful sampling method of recruiting interview participants did not glean the amount of participation originally intended (10 Latinx and 10 Black youth). Despite increases in incentives and sending four follow-up recruitment attempts, we were forced to open the criteria for participation to AfroLatinx and multi-racial survey participants.

Given this study was conducted across 2023–2025 it is important to acknowledge the contentious political climate within the United States at this time. Since the start of this study, Donald Trump was elected for a second presidential term, white supremacy has been substantially more visible, and deportations of undocumented children and families have increased. While these circumstances provide even greater urgency for this study, and others like it, it also directly impacts the environment in which BIPOC who participated in this study exist. Therefore, it is possible their answers to the survey and experiences shared in the interviews were altered by the active rise in racial oppression at the time of this study.

Implications For Public Policy

Up to this point, this study has spoken to the resilience and insurmountable strength of young BIPOC who have cultivated resistance to the racial oppression that is embedded in American society; however, it is crucial to recognize that the burden of overcoming racial oppression should not rest on the individual (i.e., “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” mentality). Instead, it is the moral imperative of public policy to dismantle systemic racial oppression, as it constitutes a fundamental violation of human rights.

In recent years, as white supremacist ideologies have gained visibility, critical race theory – a framework designed to examine and address racial oppression – has been under attack. Over 20 states have either introduced or passed legislation that restricts the discussion of racial oppression in public schools (Schwartz, 2025). The findings of this study provide substantial evidence to refute such legislation, emphasizing that legislation to remove comprehensive discussions of racial inequity not only misrepresent historical and contemporary realities but also directly harm the developmental outcomes of BIPOC.

Similarly, efforts to defund DEI initiatives, restrict ethnic studies programs, and curtail research addressing racial injustice must be challenged. Such actions serve to reinforce systemic inequities and create barriers to the development of critical consciousness, which is necessary for BIPOC to navigate and resist the dehumanizing reality of racial oppression. Public policy must prioritize the advancement of equitable education frameworks, promote historically accurate educational curriculums, and ensure BIPOC communities have access to the resources and support necessary to thrive in the United States. Research, conducted in a similar vain to the current study, can serve to inform these policies to advance widespread efforts to promote positive development and thriving among BIPOC, young and old.

Implications For Developmental Sciences

With the foundational knowledge of human development and the skills necessary to employ rigorous scientific research, developmental scientists are at a unique position to understand, address, and provide potential solutions for the most pressing social issues. Yet, historically, the field has underutilized social justice frameworks of development in both basic and applied research. In fact, the field of PYD has been criticized for this blind spot and this study adds to the call-to-action to address this imperative gap in exploring positive development in typically under-studied groups, particularly people of color (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2018; Rapa & Geldhof, 2020).

These results provide further impetus for the need to conduct research of BIPOC development using frameworks like the Integrative Model of Development and the Social Justice Youth Development framework. Additionally, this study highlights the strength of a multi-disciplinary approach to understanding BIPOC development. Specifically, developmental scientists must incorporate knowledge from feminist scholars, activists, grass roots organizers,

and other experts who have spent decades studying the unjust context under which young BIPOC develop.

Directions for Future Research

Results from this study have several implications for the direction of basic and applied developmental science research. First, this study employed a process-centered approach to operationalizing ethnic identity development which led to interesting findings that speak not only to the utility of ethnic identity statuses as a methodological approach but also provides impetus for future research to investigate the nuances of affirmation, the extent to which individuals feel positively or negatively about identifying as their ethnic group. This especially warrants further investigation across different racial groups. Secondly, this study provides preliminary evidence of how critical consciousness, taken as a whole, relates to thriving. Future research must further investigate the relationships between critical consciousness and positive youth development to understand the mechanisms of the components of critical consciousness, critical agency and behavior. Third, these findings provide urgency in the empirical investigation of contexts, interventions, and environments which foster both ethnic identity and critical consciousness development for young BIPOC. Lastly, while this study took a novel approach to capture the phenomenon of intersectionality further research must be conducted to understand how ethnic identity and critical consciousness development operate amongst a myriad of intersecting oppressions (i.e., gender, legal status, number of oppressed identities etc.).

Appendix A

Demographic Survey Items

- Gender Identity:
 - What best describes your gender identity?
 - Male, Female, Transgender, Non-Binary, Prefer not to say
- Racial Identity:
 - Which of the following would you say best describes you?
 - White; Black or African American; American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian/Asian-American; Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander; Latino(x); Middle Eastern or North African; Other (please describe)
- Age:
 - What is your year of birth?
- Oppression Variable (Azadi, 2024)
 - After being prompted with a definition of oppression: Have you experienced oppression?
 - *Yes, Somewhat, or No*
 - Please indicate which identities you have experienced oppression for possessing (select all that apply)
 - race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, socioeconomic status, immigration or citizenship status, other.
- Self-Report Skin Color (Yadon & Ostfeld;2021)
 - As you know, human beings have a wide variety of skin colors. Displayed in the image is a skin color scale that ranges from 1 (representing the lightest skin color) to 10 (representing the darkest skin color). The 10 shades of skin color are represented by a hand of identical form, but differing in color.
 - Please indicate which hand depicted comes closest to your own skin color.



Appendix B

Perceptions of Racism in Children and Youth (Patcher et al., 2010)

When people are racially discriminated against, they are treated badly, not given respect, or are considered inferior because of the color of their skin, because they speak a different language or have an accent, or because they come from a different country or culture.

For each of the following situations, think whether you have ever in your life felt discriminated against because of your color, language or accent, or because of your culture or country of origin, and answer the following: (Marcelo & Yates, 2019)

<i>Item</i>
1. Watched closely or followed around by security guards or store clerks at a store or the mall
2. Were treated unfairly by a police officer
3. Accused of something you didn't do
4. Treated badly or unfairly by an authority figure
5. You had the feeling that someone was afraid of you
6. Someone called you an insulting name
7. Someone made a bad or insulting remark about your race, ethnicity, or language
8. Someone was rude to you
9. People assume you're not smart or intelligent
10. Have you ever seen your parents or other family members treated unfairly or badly because of the color of their skin, language, accent, or because they come from a different country or culture?

If participants indicate "yes" for any statements above they will asked to indicate the frequency in which the instance has happened (once, twice, about once a year, about once a month, weekly).

If participants indicate "yes" for any statements above they will asked to respond to the following open-ended questions:

How did these situations make you feel? (e.g., angry, mad, hurt, frustrated, sad, depressed, hopeless, powerless, ashamed, strengthened, other-describe)

How did you deal with these situations? (e.g., I ignored it, accepted it, spoke up, kept it to myself, lost interest in things, prayed, tried to change things, hit someone/something, tried to forget it, worked hard to prove them wrong, other).

Appendix C

PYD Very Short Form for Older Adolescents (Su & Johnson, 2022; Geldhof et al., 2014) and the **Contribution subscale from PYD-Inventory** (Arnold et al., 2012).

Subscale	Item Stem
Competence	In difficult situations I will find a way.
	I master difficult problems.
	I always find a solution to a problem.
Confidence	I am happy with myself most of the time.
	I really like the way I look.
	All in all, I am glad I am me.
Character	Helping to make the world a better place to live in.
	Accepting responsibility for my actions when I make a mistake or get into trouble.
	Enjoying being with people who are of a different race than I am.
Caring	When I see someone being taken advantage of, I want to help them.
	When I see someone being picked on, I feel sorry for them.
	When I see another person who is hurt or upset, I feel sorry for them.
Connection	I receive(d) a lot of encouragement at my school.
	I am a useful and important member of my family.
	I feel like an important member of my local community.
	I feel my friends are good friends.
Contribution	I take an active role in my community.
	I am someone who gives to benefit others.
	I like to work with others to solve problems.
	I have things I can offer to others.
	I believe I can make a difference in the world.
	I care about contributing to make the world a better place for everyone.
	It is important for me to try and make a difference in the world.

Appendix D

Ethnic Identity Scale (Umaña-Taylor, 2004)

Subscale	Item Stem
Exploration	I have not participated in any activities that would teach me about my ethnicity.
	I have experienced things that reflect my ethnicity, such as eating food, listening to music, and watching movies.
	I have attended events that have helped me learn more about my ethnicity.
	I have read books/magazines/newspapers or other materials that have taught me about my ethnicity
	I have participated in activities that have exposed me to my ethnicity
	I have learned about my ethnicity by doing things such as reading (books, magazines, newspapers), searching the internet, or keeping up with current events.
	I have participated in activities that have taught me about my ethnicity.
Resolution	I am clear about what my ethnicity means to me.
	I understand how I feel about my ethnicity.
	I know what my ethnicity means to me.
	I have a clear sense of what my ethnicity means to me.
Affirmation	My feelings about my ethnicity are mostly negative.
	I feel negatively about my ethnicity.
	I wish I were a different ethnicity.
	I am not happy with my ethnicity.
	If I could choose, I would prefer to be of a different ethnicity.
	I dislike my ethnicity.

Appendix E

Measure of Adolescent Critical Consciousness (McWhirter & McWhirter, 2014)

Critical Agency	There are ways that I can contribute to my community.
	I am motivated to try to end racism and discrimination.
	It is important to fight against social and economic inequality.
	I can make a difference in my community.
	More effort is needed to end racism and discrimination.
	It is important to me to contribute to my community.
	In the future, I will participate in activities or groups that struggle against racism and discrimination.
Critical Behavior	I am involved in activities or groups against racism and discrimination.
	I am involved in activities or groups that promote equality and justice.
	I have participated in demonstrations or signed petitions about justice.

Appendix F

Interview Protocol

Introduction/Background

To begin, I would like to learn a little more about you, your background, and how you grew up.

- Please describe your racial and ethnic background.
 - What race and/or ethnicity would you describe yourself as?
 - How would you describe the racial and ethnic diversity of people in the city you grew up in?

Ethnic Identity as a tool to thrive:

Next, I'm going to ask some questions about how your ethnic and racial background has shaped your identity and how you see yourself.

- In what ways have you meaningfully “explored” your connection to your ethnicity?
 - Probe: For example, participating in family gatherings, attending church, explicit readings, school etc.
- In what ways has your culture, or being a part of the [insert self-described ethnicity] community in general, shaped who you are?
 - Probe: Confidence, Character, Connection, Caring, Competence, Contribution
- What positive attributes or qualities about yourself, have you learned from being [insert self-described ethnicity]?
 - Probe: Loyalty, Family first, togetherness

Strengths to combat perceived racial discrimination:

*Thank you for all of your thoughtful answers so far. Now I'm going to ask some questions about how you have been impacted by either implicit or explicit racial discrimination. Please take a moment and think of the **most impactful experience** you've had where you felt discriminated against because of your race/ethnicity. I will not ask you to recount that experience but will ask you questions related to your thoughts, reactions, and feelings in response to that experience. If you feel a brief explanation of the experience is important context, I am happy to hear it but it is not required.*

- How, if at all, did this experience impact your sense of self?
 - Probe for confidence, character, competence, connection, caring, and contribution
- How did you overcome this experience and others like it?
 - Probe for internal strengths (e.g., confidence, ethnic identity, CC, community, resilience)
- How, if at all, does the discrimination you've experienced influence your desire to contribute to something beyond yourself?
 - This could be family, school, society, etc.

The role of Critical Consciousness:

Thank you for sharing your experiences and perspective with me. Next, I'm going to ask some questions about a concept called critical consciousness. Critical Consciousness refers to the ability to critically reflect on society and the political environment and understand how that has impacted your life and experiences. This includes the belief that there are structures in our society (i.e., school to prison pipeline, redlining, etc.) that oppress people to uphold power for certain communities and reduce power for others.

An example of this is being aware of a gender pay gap in the workplace. One might notice women in similar roles are consistently paid less than their male counterparts, or that there are fewer women in leadership roles despite being qualified. Critical consciousness is understanding there are societal structures in place that create the gender pay gap to oppress women and in turn uplift men disproportionately, which speaks to a larger problem of gender inequality in our society. With this knowledge, folks might become inspired to take steps to challenge and change the situation through advocacy. Do you understand what I mean by critical consciousness and do you have any questions?

- In what ways, if at all, has the concept of critical consciousness shaped your world view?
 - ...helped you cope with discrimination?
 - ...shaped how you view yourself as a [insert ethnicity]?

Closing

Those are all the questions I have for you today. Thank you for being a part of this interview! Your perspective and answers have been really helpful and I enjoyed speaking with you.

- Is there anything else you'd like to add?

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