FROM THE STAGE TO THE STREETS: MINORITIZED YOUTH POETS’ CIVIC ACTIONS

FROM THE STAGE TO THE STREETS: MINORITIZED YOUTH POETS’ CIVIC ACTIONS

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Abstract

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The purpose of this research was to explore the civic actions of minoritized youth spoken-word poets ages 18-21 and the meaning-making by which they constructed civic identities. Conceived within a constructionist paradigm (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) this poetic inquiry (Faulkner, 2009; Leavy, 2015; Prendergast, 2015) explored spoken-word youth poets’ civic identities, the impacts of schools, community centers, and digital contexts on youth poets’ civic actions. The research questions guiding this study were, “In what ways are spoken-word poets ages 18-21 civically active in addition to the performance of poetry and why? How do spoken-word poets construct civic identities? How do schools, community centers, and digital contexts influence teen spoken-word poets’ civic actions and identities?” Participants of this research were fifteen youth who earned the title of the 2016 or 2017 Youth Poet Laureate for their respective city; an honor earned through documented civic engagement and exceptional spoken word performance. The data collected for this research consisted of semi-structured interviews conducted with each participant. Data analysis included inductive coding, thematic, and poetic analysis (Charzman, 2006; Leavy, 2015; Prendergast, 2015). This research found that minoritized youth poets were
civically active in traditional and non-traditional ways that prioritized their intersectional identities. Additionally, minoritized youths’ civic identities were informed by their early socialization and mentoring relationships found in spoken word communities. The significance of this research is that coupled with civic action, youth voice has the possibility of actively participating in the reform efforts to create a more equitable education for minoritized youth.

Keywords: spoken word poetry, civic engagement, civic action, minority youth.
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“Looking Through My Lens”

There are too many cancers in society
A cancer stole my hope tangled up with my spirit sister’s earthly life
At age 28, the same age as me
The same year, I was worried with the words of a dissertation
Ten years after we protested our racist suit mates in the Chicago dorm where we met

This research begged to be about justice
What is justice void of hope?
I investigated transcripts and found more caskets than possibilities
My lens is foggy at best, broken maybe, but earnest for sure

This writing act is atonement and memorial
FROM THE STAGE TO THE STREETS: MINORITIZED YOUTH POETS’ CIVIC ACTIONS
Chapter One: Introduction

This introductory chapter offers the historical background to understand the problem of the under-representation of minoritized youth civic actions. It represents one potential pathway towards an equitable American democracy in the 21st century under neoliberal control. The background information provided in this introduction is distinctive from the literature review because it provides readers with the normative background of youth spoken word theory, youth citizenship, and civic action as prerequisite concepts to understand this specific study.

Problem Statement

The current educational system fails to offer high-quality educational opportunities to all minoritized youth; yet some of these same youth, namely youth poets, still model critical thinking, ingenuity, and innovation beyond the information taught in their schools. The media demonizes their racial identities, which can contribute to their over-representation in school suspensions, incarcerations, and even their deaths through police brutality, yet some minoritized teens still manage to become justice-oriented change makers.

Unfortunately, the students that do excel despite the barriers are a small subset of minoritized youth populations. Many minoritized American youth are trapped in situations that ill prepares them educationally, penalizes them, and disproportionately incarcerates them. For example, research shows almost fifty-two percent of all African American male students fail to graduate from high school (Darling-Hammond, 2010). In 2015, Hispanic youth maintained the highest dropout rate in the nation at 9.2%. Per the U.S. Department of Education (2014), while only 6% of the overall population, young African American males accounted for 43% of murder victims in 2011. In 2012, African American males were six times more likely to be imprisoned
than European American males. Hispanic males were two and half times more likely to be imprisoned (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). These statistics illustrate the greatest educational disparities among minoritized youth and demonstrate the need for an effective educational and social transformation to meet the challenges these youths face. Dropping out of school, failing in school, and incarceration all function to disenfranchise these youths' rights as American citizens, to whom equitable education and access to opportunities should be afforded.

Although apparent disparities exist, the research in this study offers youth poets as one subset of minoritized youth that defeat these odds, thrive academically, and serve as civic agents.

Neoliberalism and its political influence on the institutions of American society is one source of the structural impediments to minoritized youth. These policies influence school reform, housing options, healthcare, and the criminal justice system; all which function to narrow the educational prospects for minoritized youth and in doing so penalize them for systemic failures and inequities to which they are subjected (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Neoliberalism is evident in the privatization of public education in the form of charter schools, public school closures in response to punitive accountability measures, and free market politics applied to schooling through school choice programs (Giroux & Giroux, 2004). Furthermore, neoliberal policies attempt to silence youth and those in the communities where they live and learn. Even though they are the most impacted by such policies, minoritized youth are excluded from developing reform solutions, and instead are seen as the problem (Ginwright, Cammarota, Noguera, 2005). Nonetheless, minoritized youth are vocal about social inequities that disproportionately affect their communities (Stovall, 2006).

Many minoritized youth use spoken word poetry to voice their societal observations and challenge deficit views of their identities in relation to injustices they face. Youth spoken word
poets are starkly articulate about their perspectives on social issues in their communities and country. They make bold political commentary in their poetry that provides a counter-narrative to the mischaracterization of minoritized youth as apathetic, disengaged, and unaware. Youth voice is insightful and necessary in this context, but more significantly youth voice coupled with civic action could reform education to be more equitable (Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011).

Purpose Statement

The extant research suggested that minoritized youths have a host of knowledge to teach educators, community workers, and politicians about engaged citizenship among minoritized youth, yet they have been isolated from the reform discourse that shapes the concerns of their daily lives and futures. Thus, this research sought to amplify the voices of this minoritized youth population through the description of the ways in which youth spoken word poets were active in their communities. Secondly, it explored the characterization of minoritized youth as socio-political agents actively working toward civic and social justice. The purpose of this research was to explore the civic actions of youth spoken word poets ages 18-21 and the meaning-making by which they construct civic identities.

Historical Background of Youth Spoken Word as Art

First, I explain the normative knowledge on youth spoken word communities as the scholarship within which this research is situated. Spoken word poetry as used in this study refers to the fusion of written poetry, theatrical performance, and oratory to bring the poetic alive in performance. Spoken word poets participate in the historical oral literary traditions of African and African American people; namely the African griot and later the African American storyteller, who preserved history through orally presenting folktales, family stories, and ancestry (Fisher, 2003). Additionally, spoken word poetry participates in the same tradition of literary
resistance as enslaved African Americans who were forbidden formal, written literacy by compulsory ignorance laws during the American chattel slavery of the eighteenth century yet learned to read, write, and teach others through an oral tradition (Fisher, 2003). This tradition of resistance is a theme of African American literary traditions that continued from slavery through the Civil Rights Movement. It continued to the hip-hop movement of the American 1980s, in which minoritized youth used words to resist oppression, challenge systemic injustices, and celebrate their own urban identities and lived experiences (Petachuer, 2015). Noteworthy is that today youth poets comprise diverse racial and ethnic groups of youth; not all are African American. Nevertheless, they do all participate in the history of African American literary traditions through the genre of spoken word poetry performance.

Spoken word poetry achieved notoriety outside of African American communities through its use at poetry slams. A poetry slam is a competitive event at which spoken word performances are awarded point values based on a variety of factors decided by judges (Brown, 2011; Bruce, 2000; Gregory, 2008; Jocson, 2011; Stovall, 2006). Slam poetry competitions are credited to Marc Smith a construction worker and poet in 1980s Chicago, who created the Chicago Poetry Ensemble at the Get Me High Jazz Club (Gregory, 2008). The intention behind the creation of poetry slams was to inspire everyday people to express themselves through spoken word poetry. Marc Smith added an arbitrary competitive element to the performance art by allowing audience members to score the poems. The competition was created to be a non-factor part of the audience-performer engagement that inspired the audience to listen to the poems. Typically, no prizes were awarded at poetry slams besides personal recognition; this practice is especially true of youth slams (Gregory, 2008).
This study is concerned with what Weinstein & West (2012) termed youth spoken word (YSW), which can be featured at poetry slams although not exclusively. YSW takes place in schools, community centers, churches, coffee shops, street corners, theaters, universities and in online platforms. In every context, the purpose of YSW is to amplify youth voice. It is an art form that engages a broad constituency of youth from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. YSW exploded as an art form with the creation of national slam organizations such as Youth Speaks Inc. in 1995 and the creation of the largest international youth poetry slam, Brave New Voices, in 1998 (Weinstein & West, 2012).

While YSW includes a diverse group of youth, this research is concerned with youths that have been minoritized. The term "minoritized" is credited to Gutierrez and Rogoff (2003), who argued that negative labeling of youth as "disadvantaged, at risk, or minority" among other socio-political labels conform to an oppressive tradition that demeans these youths and any attempt to rectify the social injustices inflicted on them. YSW communities foster youth agency and personal identity development and therefore serve in this research as an exemplary site to explore youth civic identity development.

Empirical Background: Relevant Scholarship on YSW

YSW originated in a tradition of out of school spaces that were created for and largely by youth in response to the restrictive environments in schools. The YSW space has been called a “third” space in which youth are free to be themselves without the restrictions of home or school. Fisher (2003) studied open mic events, which are locations of spoken word performance, as locations for community-based literacy in the African American community. Fisher found that these spaces functioned as literacy centers organized and orchestrated apart from formal schooling and thereby dispelling myths that African Americans, especially youth, are disengaged
from literature in the 21st century. Further, Fisher (2005) contributed the term *literocracy* as an alternate form of literacy that fuses rap, YSW and slam poetry with democratic youth choice. Likewise, Jocson (2006) studied an after-school YSW program that conditioned YSW as an accessory to traditional literacies.

The extant literature on YSW analyzes its use for youth personal identity construction (Rudd 2012; Somers-Willett, 2005; Weinstein & West, 2012). Youth use the YSW space to think through and challenge their socially constructed identities as well as a tool to investigate their own self-construction of identity (Rudd 2012; Somers-Willett, 2005; Watson, 2013; Weinstein & West, 2012). Somers-Willett (2005) wrote, "One of the most defining characteristics of YSW is the poet's performance of identity and identity politics" (p. 52). Likewise, Weinstein & West (2012) found that the self-making and remaking facilitated through YSW was useful but not without risks. First-person narration about the youth's lived experiences is a common form poems exemplify in order to facilitate the performance and exploration of self-identity. For example, in a study of Latino and African American males' experiences Hall (2007) found that these minoritized youth used YSW as a safe space to construct a healthy self-concept that assisted them in acts of agency and resistance against negative psychological forces in their environments.

Additionally, youth also take on perspectives of the literary other and use the YSW space to explore new identities for themselves or those representatives of their communities (Low, 2011). Smith (2010) conducted a study on the literacy experiences of seventh-grade language arts students and found that YSW helped youth create literary identities. As such YSW in her study allowed youth to create the literary self as an additional identity. This dissertation research expanded from the singularly personal identity of youth into the civic and public identities of
youth poets to improve educator's ability to prepare youth citizens to become civic change agents. To better understand the usefulness of YSW to educators, next I provide an overview of the current uses of YSW in school settings and higher education as the normative background of this research.

In K-12 education, teachers typically use YSW as an engagement tool that acts as a bridge to canonical texts (Aptowicz, 2009; Watson, 2013). For example, Pellegrino, Zenkov, and Aponte-Martinez (2014) explored how middle school students described and illustrated citizenship when given access to slam poetry and technology to illustrate their poems. This study used poetry in a social studies unit on citizenship to engage students in crafting definitions of citizenship unique to their own voices. Similarly, Fisher (2005) found that teachers used YSW to attract and maintain minoritized youth in schools.

Secondly, scholars have studied how spoken word helps youth develop traditional literacy and critical literacy skills in school classroom spaces (Fisher, 2005; Sammy, Baugh, Bucholtz, 2011). In this context, YSW functions as a counter form of literacy that challenges normative uses, authors, and ways of speaking, knowing, and reading the world to offer youth a transformative pedagogy that prioritizes their lived experiences and interests. Ideally, these alternate forms of literacy work alongside traditional methods to help youth succeed academically as well as be critical readers of societal norms and identify injustice.

Across multiple disciplines and education, higher education has also taken notice of YSW as not only a subject of research but also as praxis. The curricula of spoken word classes and English classes that use spoken word pedagogy has been cited as an approach to culturally relevant and social justice-oriented participatory pedagogy in teacher education (Stovall, 2006; Weiss & Herndon, 2001). Brown (2011) discussed the academy’s appropriation of slam poetry to
teach nontraditional university students aspects of poetry. Similarly, Low (2010) found that European American teachers used YSW effectively to discuss race with African American youth in a spoken word elective class.

At the same time, YSW has been contested in traditional school spaces. Low (2010) found that a tension exists between teachers, administrators, and youth culture. In her study of a talent showcase in a diverse high school, she found that students, especially African American males, who used YSW in conjunction with hip-hop music were more readily ridiculed and dismissed than peers who did not. The interjection of alternative literacies has come with challenges and resistance from teachers and administrators as well. Watson (2013) identified an overt tension between youth operating with the verbal agency to speak freely and the mandates of appropriate language use in school spaces. Watson's (2013) study found that adults in schools attempt to regulate and censor youth freedom of expression in ways that inhibit the benefits of YSW.

YSW in schools serve as a tool for engagement, literacy development, and offers teacher pedagogic tools, but few researchers have examined its relationship to youth civic action or civic identities. Exploring the relationships between YSW and youth civic action can improve democratic education through liberatory praxis and thus develop youth as productive, civic agents that serve the progress of the broader American democracy. This study presupposed liberatory education that is dialogic in nature and must acknowledge the voices of youth as important and necessary in the dialogue that concerns youth. Student voice is evidence of student agency, which youth can use to counter oppressive policies that affect them (Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011; Mitra, Serriere, & Kirshner, 2014). Scholars have noted that when youth are
given a platform to speak they offer valuable insights and critiques that enhance the work for educational equity (Mitra, Serriere, & Kirshner, 2014).

**Historical Background on Study Participants**

The specific youth population explored in this research is that of the Youth Poet Laureates. The title of poet laureate is a position backed by the power and prestige of state governments. Granting this title and its historical prevalence to minoritized youth marks a significant shift in the work on YSW as a civic role in society beyond the YSW community space. Youth poet laureates represent the vanguard of the American civic movement in the 21st century. As a population, they are significant and powerful actors of youth activism that recharacterize youth civic action today.

The title of State Poet Laureate has been awarded to adult poets officially and unofficially since 1915 with Ina Coolbrith, named the first Poet Laureate of California by governor’s proclamation (Libraryofcongress.gov, 2016). Since then forty-two of the fifty American states have had a Poet Laureate, most of whom were European American men in accordance with the standards of European American male dominance of the mid-twentieth century. Laureates acquire their title by governor’s act or proclamation by legislative action or by both the governor and the legislature. The duties of the Poet Laureate vary by state and typically include promoting the reading, writing, and appreciation of poetry among the public (libraryofcongress.gov, 2016). There is also a title of United States Poet Laureate that can be earned.

The role of the Poet Laureate is inextricably linked to the state by its proclamation by the governor or legislative action. Its one-hundred-year history marks its significance as something valuable to American cities and states. The celebration of poetry as an art form engaged with civic issues is evident in the notoriety of this title. The Youth Poet Laureate program repositions
the history and power associated with the Poet Laureate title to young, minoritized, youth in America's urban cities. This is not only novel but also potentially transformative as it relates to equitable participation in democracy for this youth population. This study explored this phenomenon in depth.

This research fundamentally questioned in what ways are spoken word poets taking civic action and why? The answer to this question is monumental in addressing neoliberal politics that mischaracterize minoritized youth. If youth poets are speaking critically but not taking any action in response to their own critiques, then spoken word platforms risk promoting a passive subjectivity of youth voice as merely performative, which is indicative of an oppressive force. Freire (1972) noted that verbalism or uncritical activism fails to achieve a liberatory education. This is problematic considering the life or death stakes minoritized youth face in their school, home, and social lives under the neoliberal rule; they need a critical activism capable of producing real equitable change that improves their lives and prospects for the future.

Now that the historical background that is precursory to comprehending the goal of this study has been thoroughly explained. I offer the specific research questions this study addressed. The purpose of this research was to explore the civic actions of youth spoken word poets ages 18-21 and the meaning-making by which they construct civic identities.

**Research Questions**

The questions that guided this study were:

1. In what ways are spoken word poets ages 18-21 civically active and why?
2. How do youth spoken word poets construct civic identities?
3. How do schools, community centers, and digital contexts influence youth spoken word poets’ civic actions and identities?
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Research Design

This qualitative research study was conceived from a constructionist paradigm (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) that employed the methodological tools of semi-structured interviews, thematic, and poetic analysis to design this study as an arts-based qualitative research product (Faulkner, 2009; Leavy, 2015). Snowball sampling was used to invite all Youth Poet Laureates that met the participation criteria to join the study (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The participant criteria included youth ages 18-21, who were named a Youth Poet Laureate during 2016 or 2017 and had a demonstrated interest in civic action. Data was collected through one-hour interviews with each participant about their civic actions and civic identities. Interviews were transcribed verbatim then analyzed in QRS International NVivo 11 Starter for themes. Finally, all data underwent an interpretive, analytic process of poetic analysis.

Positionality

I came to this work as a poet-researcher. I live most fully in the hyphenated space between the spoken word poet trained in the community through fellowship with other artists and the educational qualitative researcher trained in institutions of higher education. Prior to enrolling in my doctoral program, I trained as a spoken word poet for nine years in my local community and through the university-sponsored spoken and hip-hop arts learning community, First Wave, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. My training as an artist developed my keen ability to observe and feel prior to drawing a conclusion. My training as a qualitative researcher taught me to question and listen carefully to what is said as well as unsaid. Both training experiences have converged to position me well to study youth spoken word poets' civic actions.

Further, my lived experience growing up as a minoritized youth in an inner-city community stricken by poverty informs my preference for spoken word poetry. This art form
gave me a voice in a life circumstance where many of my peers felt voiceless and hopeless. At the age of thirteen, spoken word gave me the agency and platform to begin to speak for other marginalized persons in my community, namely teenage mothers. Teenage motherhood was prominent in my community, my own home, and identity as the child of a teen mom.

As a youth, armed with my own voice and ideas, I sought to improve my local community through any efforts I could create. I served frequently at homeless shelters for families and children. I tutored youth and lead workshops in community centers while in high school. I organized a prom for students with physical illnesses that disabled them from attending the school-sponsored prom. I organized a community-based open mic venue for over eighty youth who did not have a safe place to verbally express themselves. I did all these activities with the minor resources and access I collected because there was no existing youth spoken word programming. In fact, as a youth, I snuck into spaces designated for adults just to listen to the craft of the older poet’s works. At the time, I did not think of my actions as civic engagement. I thought of them as a personal contribution to better my community. Although I was young, I felt capable and decided to act. As an adult, licensed teacher, doctoral student, and emerging researcher, I have more language to describe these actions but there is much to be understood about youth spoken word poets as people, their poetry, and forms of activism in which they participate.

Additionally, I approach this study knowing fully that my involvement in spoken word communities as a youth inspired me to take actions that improved my community beyond my poetry. For example, upon returning from a semester abroad in Accra, Ghana as an English literature major during my undergraduate studies, the first place I visited in my hometown was the local open mic. There among poets and friends, I had known my entire life, I realized that our
poetry alone could not impact the many global injustices and poverty I was exposed to in Accra. That moment of my life set me on a mission to identify ways to use my critical thinking, oral presentation skills, and command of an audience to advance social justice within my sphere of influence.

As a result, I applied to an alternative teaching program with a goal to combat educational inequities in urban classrooms in my city. In the urban classrooms, where I taught for five years, my most effective teaching tool was spoken word poetry. When I felt that the confines of my classroom alone were too limited, I co-founded a non-profit organization that took spoken word pedagogies to other schools and communities in my city. Still, I realized that the non-profit was not sufficient to enact larger scale tangible change that expanded beyond a few community centers or schools. This led me to journey toward the doctoral degree during which I sought to learn ways to make my world more equitable and searched for meaning-making tools to advance my current work.

As a poet-researcher, I approached this study assuming I would find something positive about youth spoken word poets' civic action, yet I was prepared to be critical of what I found. My affinity for spoken word did not limit my exploration of this topic as a reflexive researcher; instead, it inspired my pursuit of this topic in hope of expanding the educational researchers' knowledge about spoken word poetry and its relationship to civic action. The stakes are too high to present a non-analytical view of this crucial subset of American minoritized youth.

Significance

Numerous youth organizations, schools, and educators applaud youth poets for giving voice to the experiences of America's most marginalized communities by bearing their hearts on stage. While this is useful and important for the individual if the poets and their audiences are
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convinced that the performance alone is sufficient then local and national progress is stunted. Allowing the conversation and critique to stop at a performance poem projects, a false feeling of achievement that succeeds at only pacification, which allows the oppressive neoliberal forces to persist unchallenged. In turn, a just democracy is inaccessible to minoritized youth under such a system. If the agency young poets develop does not transcend beyond the literary stage to the civic streets, then the work youth spoken word organizations and schools proclaim to do is unfinished at best and unjust at worst. Without action, something grave has been lost.

Furthermore, the evidence of empirical knowledge is in the active response that knowledge instigates. Personal and collective action is indicative of knowledge claims. On the other hand, if these young people are civically active then their actions should be highlighted and deconstructed to identify the ways in which they are becoming civic agents. Their actions could illustrate pathways to engage other youth in civic activity to achieve a truly democratic education system that fulfills the democratic aims of liberty, justice, and freedom for all.

This study sought to identify and describe the ways in which youth poets were taking civic action and identify shortcomings if they exist so that future action can be taken to rectify them to serve these youths equitably. The hope is that the spoken word community is not prostituting young people's pain for applause and funding, but instead truly working to design a more just world that hears and responds to the needs of minoritized youth. Furthermore, youth poets may be the necessary source and model of civic action that propels a more equitable democracy and education system.

Personally, this research challenged me as a youth spoken word educator to account for the tangible outcomes of YSW in forms of civic action to achieve the social justice mission of my YSW programming alongside youth. Practically this research explored the pedagogies and
practices of schools, community centers, and online contexts as sites of civic identity construction to highlight the effective and ineffective among them. This knowledge can assist youth educators in enhancing the effectiveness of our work thus more fully empowering youths to develop as engaged, productive, civic change agents in our democratic society. As an area of scholarship, this research offers a more accurate characterization of minoritized youth civic actions as a counter-narrative to the prevailing literature that employs narrow measures and reports a deficit view of this population's civic actions, which in turn mischaracterizes the expectations placed on them. Further, this study amplifies the often-silenced voices of minoritized youth as expert participants with a wealth of knowledge to teach researchers and practitioners about working alongside and better-supporting youth as civic actors.

Terms

Youth Spoken Word (YSW): Youth spoken word as used in this study refers to the fusion of written poetry, theatrical performance, and oratory created by people ages 18-21 to bring the poetic alive in performance. YSW exists in diverse communities and a subsector of urban youth culture. YSW takes place in schools, community centers, churches, coffee shops, street corners, theaters, universities and in online platforms (Weinstein & Wes, 2012).

Civic Action: The individual and/or collective effort exerted toward creating a more equitable local, national, or global community. Such efforts include but are not limited to raising awareness, writing lessons, interviewing people, writing letters, blogging, giving speeches, developing solutions, interviewing people, organizing resistance, raising money, power mapping, doing research, chairing meetings, advocacy, negotiating interests, volunteering, creating and/or leading organizations with public works missions, participating in electoral politics, and any
other activity that can be explained as meeting the aforementioned goals (Boyte, 2008; Cohen, 2010; Kirshner, Strobel, Fernandez, 2003).

Minoritized Youth: The term "minoritized" is credited to Gutierrez & Rogoff (2003). These scholars argued that negative labeling of youth as "disadvantaged, at risk, or minority" among other socio-political labels conform to an oppressive tradition that demean these youths and any attempt to rectify the social injustices inflicted on them. As used in this researched minoritized youth includes all intersections of marginalized identities including but not limited to: race, class, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, or citizenship status.

Digital Citizenship: A role that is essential to living responsibly online regardless of the civic nature of the online activity. Digital citizenship requires students to use the Internet ethically, take responsibility for their digital actions, and communicate effectively online (Hobbs, 2011). Digital citizenship also involves Internet safety in the global, cross-generational arena of people's everyday lives.

Chapter One Summary

This introduction explained the historical background knowledge on the uses and contexts of youth spoken word poetry, digital citizenship, and explained the constructivist's theoretical framework, which calls on Freire's (1972) liberatory education as a tool to achieve Dewey's (1916) democratic education, needed to understand the narrow focus of this research. Further, this section explained the research problem of youth spoken word poets' civic actions as one possible tool to address neoliberal educational policies that further marginalize minoritized American youth today. The objectives of this research were to identify and amplify counter-narratives of minoritized youth as civic agents capable of leading educators towards educational
equity. Next, is a review of the literature on minoritized youth civic action and conceptions of activism in virtual and physical contexts.

**Chapter Two: Literature Review**

“Necessary Change”

We young, Brown-Black, and talented worry sometimes
Champion voice like microphones for vocal chords
but still get choked up on the politics of our personhood

Can’t afford to forfeit our second-class citizenship
Throw stones at glass houses
Run
Hope they don’t implode
Making shards of our justice
Swallow hard the fear of being
Young, Black-Brown, and intelligent
Different
Among wolves who thirst for our thoughts and limbs
So, we write wars in the veins of our throats
Armor with ancestry
Spit bullets
At the state budget meeting (reserved for white men only)
At the United Nations Delegation
At the leadership council meeting
The mayor’s inauguration, democratic party fundraiser, board meetings, the startup organization meeting
We speak

But I find silence pressed hard against my racing heartbeat
When the first Black First Lady greets me
With smile and tears because she caught me on stage committing the same rebellion my ancestors were murdered for in this house heavy with their souls
Hold my breath when I tell them I’m an immigrant too
Listen close to the rock in my chest cascade to my feet when I say out loud
That I helped those girls in Afghanistan hungry for literacy eat poems in secrecy
Reject my whisper when I pronounce I skipped school to study humanity
Share Gatorade, doughnuts, and poems with men needy of more than food
I linger around libraries
Teaching the illiterate to feel and understand
Cause I believe in the power of words and votes
And resources earned, accessed, and handed out to the children passionate about change
FROM THE STAGE TO THE STREETS: MINORITIZED YOUTH POETS’ CIVIC ACTIONS

I give
Though I am just one pin in a balloon named injustice
One pebble in an ocean of systemic oppression
One small kid
Without privilege to leave a nation that hunts bodies like mine
I speak
and
Act.

- Research Poem from Pilot Study

The purpose of this poetic inquiry study was to explore with fifteen minoritized youth poets their civic actions and how they perceived their civic identities. Specifically, I sought to understand how the experiences of these individual participants can inform youth preparation for participation in an engaged youth citizenry characterized their civic action. To carry out this study, it was necessary to complete a review of the current literature. This review was conducted prior to the research design phase of the study.

This literature review explores the interconnectedness of spoken word poetry, youth civic identity, and actionable youth civic action. Considering this, four major areas of literature were reviewed: (a) youth civic action, (b) youth digital citizenship, (c) youth spoken word, and (d) arts activism. A review of the literature on youth civic action provides an understanding of the history, normative views, and traditional types of civic action common to youth. The literature on digital citizenship contextualizes this study in the contemporary moment of youth civic action in the digital age and acknowledges digital media as a mediator of youth civic identity today. The literature on youth spoken word provides contexts and history of how spoken word has engaged with civic issues because this specific research centers on youth poets. Lastly, the literature on arts activism offers an additional lens through which to consider the work of youth spoken word poets as an artists-activists to supplement the sparse literature on youth spoken
word and civic action. These bodies of literature function together to explore the possibility of youth spoken word as one way to develop youth citizenship among minoritized youth.

To conduct the selected literature review, multiple sources including books, professional journals, and periodicals were used. These sources were accessed through ERIC, JSTOR, and ProQuest. The criterion for this review was works published between the years 2000-2017 that focused on urban, minority, or African American youth ages 15-25. This criterion was used for all literature relating to civic actions, digital citizenship, and youth spoken word. An exception to this criterion was used for literature on the history of spoken word, minoritized youth civic actions in the past, and the history of arts activism.

Throughout the review, I point out gaps in the literature and their implications for this research study. In addition, where relevant contested areas are identified and discussed. This review ends with the conceptual framework through which this literature was understood to inform the design of this research. Literature in this review will detail the prevailing scholarship on minoritized youth civic action in the physical and digital lifeworld of youth today. This review will explain the limited research that exists on youth spoken word and minoritized youth civic action as well as include literature on art as activism more broadly. Together these subsections of the literature synthesize the rationale for this research to move the field beyond the personal into the very real, political contexts that beg for a civically engaged youth citizenry.

There is a tension in the civic engagement literature about the terminology that best suits the discussion of participation in a civic activity. The dispute among scholars is the distinction between community service as civic engagement or a more political definition of civic engagement characterized by political participation. In addition to the question of the political nature of civic engagement, Cohen (2006) asked for a broader definition of politics to include
cultural norms of youth of color. In this research, I chose to use civic action as a term over engagement to direct attention to action as an intentional effort exerted toward social change, as opposed to engagement, which can be characterized by passive interest without effort.

As an illustration of the tension among terms, Boyte (1991) argued that community service was an apolitical individual voluntary effort to improve the self, more than society. According to Boyte, community service and service learning courses fail to produce critical learning about the race, class, and systemic inequities that create the need for the intervention and as a result do little to effectively change those structures of inequity. Boyte wrote, "The goal of civic education should be to provide young people with hands-on public experience, with opportunities to practice political skills such as strategic thinking, bargaining, negotiation, listening, argument, problem-solving, and education" (p.628). In contrast, Ferman (2005) suggested that the narrow account of civic engagement as knowledge of government officials, policies, and willingness to vote fails to capture that "civic engagement embodies a continuum of activities that develop over time with the earliest often occurring in the community and having no readily apparent connection to the formal political system" (46). Sherrod (2003) supported the continuum argument by identifying a typology of political attitudes among youth that corresponded to their participation in civic actions. Sherrod's typology of political attitudes functions similarly to the continuum of civic actions by indicating that one type of attitude will result in each action and that these attitudes can shift during the life of a youth.

The terms are significant because if civic engagement is defined as nonpolitical actions then scholars note it as being on the rise with youth; on the contrary, if civic engagement is understood as political then there is more pessimism in the literature demonstrated for example by a decline in voting (Celestine, 2005).
In contrast, scholars also note that youth are civically active although the definition of civic engagement may be different than in previous generations. Millennials (people born between 1985 and 2000) as a generation have been reported to be engaged in unconventional forms of political participation. For example, Aragon (2008) found that Ladyfests, activist-oriented festivals that include art, spoken word, and music provide an alternative network of contemporary cultural activism. Boyte (2008) found youth in the Public Achievement program (PA), which collaborated with teens to create projects to solve issues in their communities, were active in public work. The PA program is political and challenges the paradigm of helping as a tool of disempowerment that "erodes the agency of others" (p. 13). Boyte found these youths wanted to help create social transformation and by asking them about the kind of changes that they can undertake instead of the actions that should be done, youth accessed their own agency.

An additional complicating factor in equitable participation in democracy in the 21st century, where the president of the United States is active on social media sites and citizens can post, comment, and critique policies, openly to a public of millions of internet users, is online contexts as possible locations of civic activity. In this arena, digital citizenship is a subcomponent that is essential to understanding youth civic actions and civic identities today. For example, youth ages 12-25 are daily involved with networked technologies in all sectors of their lives, including their civic lives. For example, a 2012 Pew Research Center report noted that mobile technology has created a revolution in technology use evidenced by 95% of all Americans owning a cell phone of some kind. "Aided by the convenience and constant access provided by mobile phones, 92% of teens report going online daily- including 24% who say they go online ‘almost constantly,’ according to a new study from the Pew Research Center" (Lenhart, 2012). Furthermore, Morimoto and Friedland (2010) explained that digital media and
technologies are so central to the lives of youth that media itself is a form of lifeworld-- the background of all communication used as a sense-making tool. This lifeworld spans digital and physical interactions fluidly, thus clarity about the ways in which technology has affected civic identity and citizenship is needed to accurately understand the civic actions of youth today.

This relationship with technology transforms youths’ perspectives of citizenship and modalities of civic engagement. Isikli (2015) noted that traditional citizenship is a task and responsibility that indicates duties, responsibilities, and expectations from the state. Likewise, Bennett, Wells, and Freelon (2011) proposed contrasting models of citizenship that contribute to the changing definition of citizenship in the current digital era; traditional citizenship was labeled the “dutiful citizen,” which is characterized by group membership in civic organization, awareness of politics, and concern for the civic good of society.

Some scholars posit that digital citizenship in context and effect alters the traditional definition of citizenship to include more freedoms for citizens and multi-centered, multifaceted communication that displaces the traditional hierarchical power systems, and are not bound by nations or traditional governments (Isikli, 2015; Mihailidi, Fincham, & Cohen, 2014). Social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook facilitate an interaction among youth, news sources, and authority that disrupts the top-down model of information dissemination and consumption of traditional citizenship (Mihailidi et al., 2014). Bennett et al. (2011) labeled this newer version of citizenship "actualizing citizenship," which is characterized by creative civic input from many, especially digital, sources as well as sharing over peer networks. Both dutiful citizenship and actualizing citizenship require expression skills to communicate effectively. These include skills needed to join public groups, and the skills needed to act to address a specific policy or issue. Bennet et al. found that the defining traits of a dutiful citizen were reproduced in the online sites
of civic youth organizations and therefore argued that while contrasting, the two models are not explicitly different. The digital landscape of civic engagement among youth impacts the civic skills developed and demonstrated in both virtual and physical worlds.

For instance, youth poets have expanded YSW to the digital frontier through posting videos, recording poetry slams, and having online spoken word communities through websites such as YouTube. Several studies demonstrate the variety of ways in which YSW has been used to engage youth in critical analysis of digital media (Jocson, 2013; McVee, Bailey, Shanahan, 2008). YouTube has become an authoritative source in a YSW curriculum to demonstrate the craft or teach the performance aspects of YSW performance (Weiss & Herndon, 2001). Hughes and John (2009) used a digital storytelling approach to YSW and examined the online phenomenon of youth poetry that went viral internationally due to social media platforms such as YouTube.

Yet some studies cite that youth are becoming more civically engaged even in traditional forms of civic engagement. Carillo (2007) found young African Americans were the most likely to vote regularly, belong to groups involved with politics, donate money to candidates or parties, display buttons or signs, canvas, and contact the broadcast media or print media. Likewise, Ferman (2005) discussed the VOICES program in which Temple University College Students mentor youth ages 14-24 through community projects. This program counters the popular narrative that youth are unengaged and disinterested in civics and politics.

Arguing that young European American kids do not represent the same activist ideas as kids of color, Cohen (2011) called for specific attention to young African American’s opinions as independent from that of a general category of youth perceptions. This line of thinking drives this literature review to consider texts that were specifically focused on only racially minoritized
youth and civic engagement. What follows is a brief review of this literature to argue that minoritized youth voices are being misrepresented or omitted from the civic engagement discourse in ways that this research expanded by situating minoritized youth as experts on their diverse forms of civic action.

**Minoritized Youth and Civic Action**

Historically African American youth have been primary leaders in many social movements for civil rights. Instances include, Barbara Johns a high school student who led a strike at Moton High School in Farmville, Virginia in 1951 to protest the city's segregation policy, the Little Rock Nine who integrated a high school in Little Rock Arkansas in 1957, and the 1963 Birmingham Children's Crusade to name a few (Cook & Racine, 2005). Cohen (2006) amplified youth experiences by noting that during the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, the anti-apartheid movement, and mobilization against mass incarceration, African American youth have been at the center of these efforts, providing leadership, analysis, and energy. These youths interrogated issues of power and access in their own lives and communities and problem solved personal and collaborative actions (Ellis-Williams, 2007). Although Boyte (2008) noted that Americans view the Civil Rights Movement with an idealism that does not inspire civic action, it is worthwhile to position African American youth civic engagement in this historical context as a backdrop of what minoritized youth have done in the past when faced with injustices. Minoritized youth action today can be framed in an activist tradition of youth resistance as realized in the above examples.

The current terminology and tools inadequately capture the reality of this population's civic engagement. Contemporary research on African American youth's civic engagement is mostly descriptive and comparative, detailing African American youth civic behaviors relative to
other races; these studies provide no explanation for differences (Lopez, 2002). "In the youth civic engagement literature with few exceptions, there is a noticeable absence of scholars who closely examine the patterns and consequences of civic engagement of youth of color" (Sanchez-Jankowski, 2002). Scholars seeking to document accurate illustrations of minoritized youth civic engagement call for a conception of civic engagement specifically for minoritized youth due to the mischaracterization of this population as apathetic, deviant, and disengaged. To counter this perception Kim and Sherman (2006) advocated for labeling that promotes positive ways to view teens such as "positive youth development" or "asset-based youth development."

Researchers criminalize this population but too few measure and analyze their attitudes, ideas, wants, desires, and politics. For instance, Cohen (2010) pointed out that deviance and defiance in some instances can be a form of resistance for African American youth. Cohen (2006) argued that if America is to achieve democratic inclusion, justice, and equality that the research predicated on the Civil Rights era, it must attend to these alienated and vulnerable voices. As such, Cohen (2006) argued that methodologists that attempt to capture African American civic engagement may be employing flawed methods that are historically and culturally irrelevant to this population.

Scholars identify alternative forms of civic action that are specific to minoritized youth. Consequently, Cohen (2006) argued that hip-hop is a form of rebellion that characterizes an African American politic as well as political participation. For example, Cohen cited examples of hip-hop influencing traditional politics such as voting campaigns and social justice causes such as world hunger and local issues. She argued researchers cannot begin to study African American youth political engagement until they examine the indisputable factors of marginalization, discrimination, and oppression that can characterize the lives of these youths, as
evidenced by the prevailing statistical evidence of their disproportionate impoverishment, incarceration, unemployment, and murder rate compared to the general population. Cohen contributed the terminology that African American youth are engaged in a politics of survival that she calls "the politics of invisibility," which means these youths make themselves invisible to authority figures such as police, teachers, correctional officers, etc. whom they feel are "out to get them." This practice excludes them from being seen or heard in the American democracy premised on visibility and voice. Contrary to Cohen but in correlation with the idea that Black youth have alternative forms of civic engagement, Kirshner, Strobel, and Fernandez (2003) found that when given an opportunity for meaningful action minoritized youth engaged in a critical form of civic engagement that allowed them to identify resources and challenges in their communities and design solutions to address the challenges.

When culturally relevant measures and terms are used, scholars have noted that African American youth are civically engaged. Ellis-Williams (2007) found that African American youth have a large capacity for activism and the ability to resist. For example, in electoral politics, there has been an increase in young African American voters. In an exit poll analyses by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), Chollette (2007) found a 24 percent increase in young African American votes in the 2006 midterm election. Similarly, young African American voters are credited for largely impacting the election of America's first African American president, President Barack Obama in 2008 (Fisher, 2012). Cohen (2011) noted that President Obama's election proved the power of the young African American vote, showing this group is not apathetic but they show up for a candidate they care deeply about. Additionally, Checkoway (2013) studied youth who took the initiative through community-based programs in economically disinvested and racially segregated areas to
make a positive civic change in their communities. Checkoway cited youth-led community level acts as a model for a new civics education for minoritized youth. Ginwright and Cammarota's (2007) study of youth community organizations' roles as facilitators of collective action towards social justice confirmed Checoway's findings.

Civic education is significant for African American youth because as Hope and Jagers (2014) found, African American youth were more engaged when they had a broad structural understanding of the inequities that exist; thus, African American youth who were exposed to civic education were more civically engaged. A theme in all the literature that reports African American youth as civic agents in their communities cite collective responses to injustice as effective in urban communities (Ginwright, Cammarota, & Noguera, 2005; Kim & Sherman, 2006). Fine, Burns, Payne, and Torre (2004) found that youth attending schools that are poorly funded and have a high teacher turnover rate channel active civic engagement into social cynicism and alienation. Minoritized youth of color disproportionately are subjected to such schools and in turn, are disempowered to participate in civic engagement. Nonetheless, Kirshner & Pozzoboni (2011) employed an asset-based youth development model to collaborate with youth in a participatory action research impact study to explore how youth respond to school closures in their communities. Kirshner & Pozzoboni (2011) found that youth were mature and sufficiently informed to take on meaningful roles in equity-based school reform efforts at the policy level.

Still, scholars seek to identify why African American youth are not as civically engaged as their grandparents were in the Civil rights era. Ellis-Williams (2007) found that one reason is that today’s African American youth are more concerned with intersectionality than youth in the 1960s; being African American is not the only defining characteristic for which they seek justice.
Additional reasons for less activism on the part of contemporary African American youth included: the African American middle-class division, the false notion of inclusion due to sports and entertainment industries, and youth are afraid to take on the system (Celestine, 2005).

**YSW & Civic Action Literature**

Few research studies have focused on minoritized youth and spoken word poetry as this study aims to do, to inquire about civic action, but a small cadre of researchers have used YSW to explore youth perspectives on citizenship in K-12 education. For example, Pellegrino, Zenkov, and Aponte-Martinez (2014) found that students’ poems expressed notions of active, transformative, and cultural versions of citizenship, illustrating that youth do have civic knowledge and concerns. Similarly, by appealing to Freire’s (1972) concept of overturning oppression, Fiore (2015) argued that spoken word has a unique position to create social change by providing students with a platform from which to question the conditions of their lives. Along the same vein, in a conceptual paper on spoken word and civic engagement Ingalls (2012) puts forth the idea of a “poet-citizen” as “one who uses poetry as a rhetorical conduit to inspire civic engagement in society (p.12).” Ingalls analyzed the rhetoric of spoken word as one way to inspire civic action but stops short of investigating action beyond the rhetorical into the physical world informed by injustices. In a similar fashion, Mitra, Serriere, and Kirshner (2014) discussed the connection of student voice for democratic participation in which the emphasis was placed on the critical thoughts of youth as assets although not specifically in the form of spoken word poetry. They wrote, “Student voice is a term that describes the many ways in which youth have opportunities to share in the school decisions that shape their lives and the lives of their peers” (Mitra, Serriere, & Kirshner, 2014, p. 294). These authors concluded that including youth voice in critical issues of citizenship advances participatory pedagogy and research.
In fact, it is normative for YSW to be used as a vehicle to address issues of social justice explicitly. YSW poets are encouraged to analyze society and voice correctives to support their critiques. For example, Stovall (2006) examined how YSW can be used to teach social justice issues through a critical pedagogy lens. Stovall found that YSW is used as a tool for higher level critical thinking that exceeds the expectations of analysis expected in school. Stovall used this as a rationale to push youth to go beyond the poem into becoming better people. Similarly, Bruce (2011) described how teachers used YSW to mitigate violence in a classroom setting. He found students could use poetry to explore issues of violence in their communities in a safe and productive way using YSW. So, it is clear YSW has a relationship to civic and justice issues, yet they have not been linked explicitly to explore youth action as one tool for effective social change that empowers the active agency of youth. Several studies have cited the value of youth voice, but this research inquired if voice alone is sufficient to achieve equity in a neoliberal context (Kirshner, 2007; Stovall, 2006).

While literature explicitly about YSW and civic action is sparse, the related field of art as activism provides important context for this research study in the sense that this research interrogates the intersection of YSW as art and its relationship to activism. The goal of this research is not to suggest YSW is activism, but the literature on arts activism provides context for the environment into which this study enters. Art is a sense-making tool, by which artists reimage, interpret, and challenge the world as they experience it; some youth poets may understand their poetry itself as a civic action. The pilot study conducted to inform this dissertation found that some of the youth poet participants understood spoken word performance as political and thus civic. While the intent of this research was to identify the actions in addition to poetry in which youth poets participate, it is vital to acknowledge that some youth may
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participate in the tradition of *artivism*, which this study explored as a plausible overlapping category of civic action based on how youth perceive this action.

The term “artivism” produced by artists-activists has been used to describe diverse forms of art that are socially engaged, political, and intended to effect change (Felshin, 1995; Nossle, 2016). It is widely accepted that art, in its varied forms, has transformative qualities in the affective sense that it stirs emotions and reflects the significance of the human ability to express creativity (Nossle, 2016). Yet the value and effectiveness of artivism or art as activism is debatable. Noteworthy is that artists and arts-based researchers propose that artivism makes unique and valid contributions to civic discourse and has political consequences. What follows is a brief overview of the art as activism literature.

Since the 1970s artists-activists have engaged in art making specifically designed to catalyze socio-political change (Hawkins and Giroux, 2012). For many protest movements, art has been used as a tool of social persuasion to broadcast the counter views of the public (Dittmar & Entin, 2010). For example, political posters, past and present, exist to invite direct involvement in a social movement and songs of protests to rally the unified call of the people (Dittmar & Entin, 2010). There is no limit to the topics that fit in this category although many topics reflect social and political tensions relevant to local and global society. Felshin (1995) noted arts activism is a response to “the democratic urge to give voice and visibility to the disenfranchised (8).” For this reason, arts activism speaks to one element of democratic living as it relates to advancing citizenship.

**Defining Activism: Rhetoric or Reality?**

Similar to the previous discussion of what counts as a civic action, in the case of art as activism the question remains, what act is validated as activism? Is it the art-making process, the
distribution of the art, the marketing of the event, the act of attending the event, the singing of
the rallying song or standing in solidarity with the cause? Which of these acts is the activist
action? Dittmar and Entin (2010) suggested "if we agree to define activism as the vigorous and
even aggressive action in pursuit of political or social change" then the political poster creation
achieved the activist purpose of organizing interested persons (p. 7). Critical theorists argue that
the action is done when the masses are organized, the impact, and results must be analyzed if the
goal is to achieve equity, justice, or change in the physical world (Delgado & Stefanic, 2000).

Critical race theory proposes that awareness raising is a part of an expansive agenda
towards justice. Other scholars root the definition of activist art in the definition of social justice
as the objective that inspires and informs the art. Dewhurst (2011) used the terms “activist art”
and “social justice art” to describe the artistic cultural practices through which an artist analyzes
structures of oppression and identifies strategies to impact those structures through aesthetic
means” (p. 366). In doing so, Dewhurst fused the goals of critical theorists and arts activists by
offering three lenses - intention, process, and social location- as a set of analytic tools for
scholars to effectively analyze social justice art. Evaluating social justice art through these lenses
can reveal how art making can be a central component of social justice education, which seeks to
use the individual’s experience to liberate the self and one’s community (Dewhurst, 2011).

**Pedagogy of Art Activism**

Using arts activism as a teaching tool aligns directly with teaching strategies that seek to
empower students as citizens (McPherson & Mazza, 2014). The values and goals of arts activism
reflect those of critical pedagogy. Hawkins and Giroux (2012) argued that arts activism has
specific pedagogic practices that allows one to teach the form and should be recognized as a
form of service-learning. In their study, they created a 2D art studio course themed around arts
activism in which students participated in global and national arts projects. Their findings suggested that art making is a service act and a form of civic engagement because through art-making students engaged in a transformative experience that awakened their political unconsciousness. McPherson and Mazza (2014) also found that arts activism is an effective tool to promote engagement and reflection on human rights themes among social work students. Hocking (2010) added that arts can be taught as a means of preparing youth to become actors for whatever causes they want to confront through developing the habits and skills of freedom and self-determination, which allow them to imagine a different and better world (p.55). In this way art is a process that fosters the mindsets that allows one to participate in civic action later, yet the art-making process is also beneficial for the self-development of the individual student in the present moment. Dewhurst (2011) agreed and expanded this notion by referring to Freire (1972), in his writing on critical pedagogy, which sought to instigate a transformed critical consciousness that he termed conscientization. As a tool to achieve conscientization, arts activism is liberatory to the individual in the present and therefore useful as a civic action. Nossle (2016) added "to move an individual makes social change possible" (p. 105). The art that inspires the individual to contribute to the collective direct action, is, in fact, a civic contribution.

Comparatively, scholars that used arts activism as a pedagogic tool found increases in student’s reflection on issues, but no link was made to this sort of education on students practice behaviors (Hawkins & Giroux, 2012; Hockings, 2010; McPherson & Mazza, 2014). Although it is hoped that increased reflection promotes a commitment to action towards human rights and justice, it is not evidenced in the research. Similarly, for Hawkins and Giroux (2012) activist art creation is community service, which relates to Boyte’s (2008) discussion of service learning being void of critical pedagogic analysis. Hawkins and Giroux do not mention if their students
studied the historical or systemic causes of the genocide to which their art project responded. Further, it was an assigned project not one from the students lived experiences or interests, which Dewhurst (2011) used as one criterion of effective arts activism. Thus, the critical theorists must investigate the act, the intention, as well as the effect of both in this context. Likewise, Dewhurst noted that activist art void of a critical interrogation of the systemic power structures that create disparities fails at its social justice aims to dismantle structures of inequality.

The sparse literature dedicated specifically to social justice art and minoritized youth in urban contexts presents a clear gap and perhaps is indicative of a biased view in the arts activism field towards this population. The limited mention of urban arts in this body of literature points to a gap in the scholarship that potentially ignores and thus silences hip-hop artists and classifies them among a lower class of art than visual art produced in an art studio on a college campus. This disparity in representation can participate in an elitist tradition that segregates so-called "high art" from presumed "low art" even while both serve to liberate the oppressed, engage social issues, and disrupt the existing, inequitable power structures. This research contributed a more accurate description of urban arts activism in the discourse about arts activism broadly and minoritized youth poets' civic action specifically. Ultimately, this research converged art in the form of youth spoken word and minoritized youth civic action through a constructionist paradigm to amplify youth voices as knowledgeable civic agents with much to teach researchers and practitioners.

This research sought to amplify youth voice through a constructionist paradigm in which youth and researcher collaborated to create meaning in this study. Further, the theoretical framework upon which this research was designed was a fusion of liberationist theory and theory on democracy and education to achieve educational equity in service of societal justice.
Theoretical Framework

This review of literature combined with my own experiences and analytic interpretation of the literature contributed to the development of a conceptual framework that informed the design, implementation, and analysis of this research. The conceptual framework for this research informed the choice of poetic inquiry as a methodological tool, the data collection tools, and the interpretation of the research findings. As such, this framework provided an organizing structure for the analysis, interpretation, and synthesis of this research presented in chapter five of this dissertation.

Each category of the conceptual framework is directly derived from the study’s research focus on the implications for education when youth are considered as citizens working toward a
just democracy. The conceptual framework begins with Dewey’s (1916) conception of democratic education as capable of preparing an informed citizenry capable of fully realizing the benefits of the democratic society; noting that for Dewey democracy is not only a form of government but instead associated living among diverse peoples working toward mutual interest.

According to Dewey, America fails to meet the criteria for the truly democratic society because it imposes barriers to some based on class, like many other social, political, and economic disparities today that inhibit the enactment of Dewey's democratic idea fully. Thus, the conceptual framework for this research argues for Freire’s (1972) liberationism as one tool to better prepare citizens for a just democracy. In this way, the citizen is not merely a member of the nation-state but is instead a person fully humanized by his/her own social relationship and control employed to liberate him/herself in partnership with other oppressed persons in the society. In turn humanization of the oppressed and citizen are linked in this conceptual framework to position all persons more accurately (even the oppressed) as central to the democratic society by dismantling oppression to achieve equitable humanization for all people that is then evidenced by all persons being able to access and yield the benefits of the democratic society.

The component of liberationism that is most relevant to this research is that the citizen participates in a dialogic with the self-first, then the society evidenced by both reflection and action. Freire (1972) posits that this dialogic is the only route to a true transformation of the society; a society, which for this research is defined as a just democracy. Therefore, this dialogic is on the same plane as politics relating to citizenship because as Boyte (1991) argued citizens capable of transformative civic acts must be critically conscious of the socio-political contexts of the conditions that create the injustice to which their action attempts to respond. This framework
centralizes youth citizens as the population to which this research is concerned and the framework highlights that youth as citizens are located at the crux of transforming America into a just democratic society today through their own yielding of action and reflection informed by their politicized citizen identities.

During the research design, this conceptual framework was employed to select a methodology capable of practicing liberationist research by amplifying participant perceptions and experiences as an expert and allowing youth to self-define their civic actions. Next, this framework informed the interview protocol to be a semi-structured interview tool that allowed for participants to innovate and contribute their own ideas during the interviews. Continually, this framework also informed the data analysis and interpretation by requiring that I as researcher recognize the ways in which democratic living and liberationist tools were employed in participants conceptions of their civic identities and actions.

The theoretical framework that informed this inquiry functioned within a constructivist paradigm in which youth poets construct their perceptions of reality based on their lived experiences and therefore positions empirical knowledge as valuable. The Deweyan (1916) conception of democracy accompanied by a Freirean (1972) framework for liberationist education within said democracy function together as a conceptual underpinning for this study’s rationale.

Dewey (1916) held that the broad goal of education in a democratic society is to create an informed citizenry that served democracy. To achieve this aim under non-democratic policies, such as neoliberal rule today, requires educational inequities be prioritized. For the purposes of this study equity (distinct from equality) is defined as the policies and conditions that make
society fair by intentionally countering the systemic injustices that disable some citizens from having the same quality of life and opportunities as others (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Equity will improve upon democracy such that freedom, liberty, and equal opportunity are fully realized for all citizens, including those who are oppressed. Youth, especially minoritized youth, are oppressed as evidenced by statistical data of their disproportionate poverty, discrimination, and violence imposed on them, which chronicles a clear system of inequities in place (Cohen, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2010). The democracy that is void of equity fails because inequity limits all people from being informed citizens that contribute (Cohen, 2006). Freire (1972) posits that equity serves everyone; it frees the oppressed and the oppressor. This is especially significant when minoritized youth are considered as citizens.

Thus, this study appealed to Boyte’s (2008) claim that youth are citizens now not in preparation (Boyte, 2008). He wrote, “We regard young people as citizens today, regardless of age, not citizens in preparation” (Boyte, 2008, p.12). This study recognized minoritized youth who participate in spoken word poetry as citizens on a continuum of civic development. The definition of citizenship employed in this study requires a politic that wrestles with power, agency, and inequity (Boyte, 1991, 2001, 2003, 2008). Otherwise, the Deweyan account of democracy is merely utopian and likely oppressive. Additionally, a definition of citizenship that considers political factors is mandatory because systemic inequity among citizens sustains racial discrimination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). As such to interrogate inequity this framework incorporates the racial and class-based structures that create oppression.

Boyte (2003) argued for a definition of citizenship that embraced politics- “a method humans have developed to negotiate different, sometimes conflicting interests, and views to avoid violence, contain conflict, and achieve beneficial public outcomes” (Boyte, 2003, p. 11).
Boyte (2003) maintained that Dewey’s definition of citizenship while valuable is unachievable without the enactment of politics. Boyte argued against apolitical citizenship that asks citizens to volunteer and leave policy making to “experts” such as elected officials. Although Boyte did acknowledge that service learning and community service can be bridges into political involvement, service is not political and ultimately not useful to improve society. Boyte (2003) defined a politically minded person as “someone able to negotiate diverse views and interests for the sake of accomplishing some public task” (p. 4).

Liberatory education is a tool to achieve an equitable form of democracy. Equity requires a leveling of the proverbial playing field for all American citizens especially those who are marginalized and systemically oppressed. This leveling will not take place passively instead it will require an engaged action on the part of the oppressed and their allies. Liberatory praxis is one way to prepare the oppressed and their allies to engage in the fight for equity. Liberatory praxis requires an epistemology rooted in culturally relevant content, a belief that all people can learn, valuing multiple forms of knowledge, and viewing learning as a process of mining for knowledge (Freire, 1972; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Furthermore, a Freirean (1972) definition of liberatory education is dialogic in nature. Freire argued that a liberationist pedagogy for the oppressed is rooted in dialogue among the educator, society, and the student. He defined dialogue as the word, which is a praxis rooted in work. For Freire dialogue required both reflection and action together. The word with only reflection without action was mere chatter. The word with only action void of reflection was dangerous and uncritical activism. Most importantly, Freire stated clearly, "there is no transformation without action" (p.87). Freire’s statement brings this research to consider YSW as a form of dialogue that specifically amplifies youth voice in a forum authentic to contemporary
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youth. Similarly, Fiore (2015) argued that "spoken word may be in a unique position to facilitate
unprecedented social change through a dialogic process by providing students with a platform
from which to question and negotiate the conditions of their lives" (p.12). The relevance of
spoken word as a form of dialogue is evidenced in the exchange of energy and knowledge from
performer to audience and vice versa (Aptowicz, 2009). Spoken word poetry is not performed in
isolation, instead, it is a craft that engages audience and artist alike.

Similarly, Freire (1972) wrote, “Human beings are not built in silence but in word, in
work, and in action-reflection” (p. 88). Spoken word poetry acknowledges the word in which
humanity is rooted and creates adequate space for work and action-reflection. The reflection on
social issues and injustices is evidenced by the advanced political critique in the poems youth
write (Hall, 2007; Jocson, 2011; Stovall, 2006). Youth poems frequently chronicle first-person
encounters with discrimination, inadequate educational resources, poverty, or abuse among other
topics. Moreover, Freire (1972) posits that the a priori structure of dialogue is constituted by
love, humility, faith in humanity, hope, and critical thinking that are all working in tandem to
build mutual trust among those engaged in dialogue. Each of these components is realized in the
youth experience of spoken word poetry (Gregory, 2008; Hall, 2007; Low, 2011; Rudd, 2012).
For this reason, this study proposed that since spoken word poetry can be conceived of as a
dialogue among the artist, the community that they represent, and the audience, then spoken
word should also be a fusion of reflection and youth action. This study sought to inquire into the
actions youth poets perform that exemplify reflection in action.

Spoken word has been researched with teen populations to study the personal benefits of
the aesthetic for identity, curricula, and as a critical literacy pedagogy (Jocson 2011 & 2013;
McVee, Bailey, & Shanahan, 2008; Rudd 2012; Somers-Willett, 2005; Watson, 2013; Weinstein
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& West, 2012). Critical literacy allows teens to write and perform articulate critiques of social and political issues (Stovall, 2006; Fisher, 2005). Teens are celebrated for their personal agency and the ability to critique social problems, but the literature does not expound on how teens apply their agency beyond the performance poetry in the form of civic actions.

Nonetheless, youth poems remain as valid and important forms of counter narratives when viewed from a critical theory lens (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). For example, “critical writers use counter stories to challenge, displace, or mock these pernicious narratives and beliefs” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. 430). Similarly, the poem functions like a story in that it affirms the oppressive experiences of minoritized youth, can begin the process of adjustment in the audience's beliefs and reminds listeners of their common humanity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Nevertheless, a Freirean definition of dialogue in a liberationist pedagogy voice (verbalism) alone is not sufficient to achieve liberation. The goal is for voice to inspire action to create change. Likewise, critical theories note, “Stories can name a type of discrimination; once named, it can be combated” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p.43). In other words, this study presumed that naming is only a piece of the work, as reflection is only a piece of dialogue; combating discrimination, and by extension oppression, requires action.

Chapter Two Summary

Spoken word has been researched with teen populations to study the individual, personal benefits of the aesthetic for identity, curricula, and as a critical literacy pedagogy (Jocson 2011 & 2013; McVee, Bailey, & Shanahan, 2008; Rudd, 2012; Somers-Willett, 2005; Watson, 2013; Weinstein & West, 2012). Critical literacy allows teens to write and perform articulate critiques of social and political issues (Stovall, 2006; Fisher, 2005). Teens are celebrated for their personal agency and the ability to critique social problems, but the literature does not expound on how
teens apply their agency beyond the performance poetry in the form of civic actions. Several studies have cited the value of youth voice, but this research explored if voice was sufficient to counter the socio-political marginalization that neoliberal context engenders (Kirshner, 2007; Stovall, 2006).

Diverse locations of activism for minoritized youth today were explored. The lifeworld of youth in this digital era has also been discussed as a necessary tenet of youth civic activity. Arts as a possible location of youth spoken word activism was reviewed for context but it remains that this study is most interested in the actions youth poets participate in beyond the poetry performance.

Existing literature is deficient in understanding youth spoken word poets' civic actions because it focuses on the personal identity development of the student or the practices and pedagogy of the art form. This study moved the research beyond aesthetics and the identity of the artists into the connection between the art, aesthetics, and the broader community from which the art comes. This study investigated the relationships of spoken word poetry to the construction of youth civic identity that extended beyond the self into the civic sector in the form of action.

In conjunction with the above foci, diverse forms of civic action were considered and not prescribed; Ferman (2005) suggested that the narrow definition of civic engagement as knowledge of government officials, policies, and willingness to vote fails to capture that "civic engagement embodies a continuum of activities that develop over time with the earliest often occurring in the community and having no clear connection to the formal political system" (46). The continuum of actions is relevant to this study because youth are also on a spectrum of personal development that is incomplete. The goal of this research was to explore what actions youth took and how they constructed civic identities to provide tools to youth educators,
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researchers, and politicians as ways to transgress and combat inequity of the neoliberal onslaught in society broadly and education specifically.
Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter explains the research design employed in this art based poetic inquiry to achieve the research goals. It includes a brief review of the history and usefulness of poetic inquiry, description of the study participants, data collection, analysis, and evaluative criteria employed.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study was to amplify minoritized youth voices and propose a counter-narrative to existing deficit-based views of minoritized youth civic actions as one way to develop an engaged youth citizenry in the democratic society.

Working from a constructionist paradigm, this study design answered the following research questions:

1. In what ways are spoken word poets ages 18-21 civically active and why?
2. How do spoken word poets construct civic identities?
3. How do schools, community centers, or digital contexts influence youth poets’ civic actions and identities?

The use of poetic inquiry as a method of analysis and re-presentation is exploratory in nature and will expand the existing body of research by engaging in a deeper investigation through qualitative methods in a field dominated by quantitative survey methods. The existing quantitative research methods used to measure youth civic action often employ restrictive tools that limit data and run the risk of misinterpretation of minoritized youth actions (Celestine, 2005). Poetic inquiry amplified minoritized youth perspectives as sources of expert knowledge to characterize youth civic action more appropriately among youth poets.
Methodological Literature

The content and goals of this research to amplify minoritized youth voices and more accurately characterize their civic identities called for an interpretive, exploratory methodology. To accomplish this task, I employed poetic inquiry as a tenet of arts-based qualitative research. Arts-based research is a postmodern form of research that pushes the qualitative inductive model further into openness and the spontaneous of the unknown (Leavy, 2015). Epistemologically arts-based research assumes that art can (and should) create and convey meaning and as such is based on aesthetic knowing (Leavy, 2015). Aesthetic knowing is inherently subjective; poems capture this intensely subjective truth and therefore it is fitting for the constructionist worldview in which this study is framed.

Poetry as research was sufficient for this research study because it was a response to a research inquiry that sought alternate ways of knowing and accessing subjugated voices (Leavy, 2015). Furthermore, the history of poetic inquiry as a methodology developed from feminists and multiculturalists calls to include the voices of narrators, participants, and diverse researchers in the 1990s positioned it as useful to this research study. In a similar tradition, I as an African American female, working with a minoritized youth population around issues of equity, captured my own unique voice and those of my participants in ways that amplified populations that are often silenced in academic research. Lastly, poetic inquiry can transgress stereotypical ways of thinking about certain groups and therefore serve social justice motivations, such as the attempt of this research study to explore the ways teen poets are civically active to reimage routes toward an equitable democracy.

Poetic inquiry includes a rigorous inductive research process characterized by crafting poetry. Prendergast (2009) grouped research poetry into three categories, which include:
researcher-voiced, participant-voiced, or literature-voiced. The voice of the poem indicates where the ideas and text from the poem originate. Poetic data analysis is an approach derived from grounded theory in which the codes develop inductively from the data. The poet-researcher employs extensive thematic coding to the data collected to uncover the poem in the existing data set. The final data presented in poetic form, which helps readers access the subtexts that shape human experience and democratize the use and understanding of the findings (Leavy, 2015).

This study exists to illuminate the specific experiences of these participants as one example of youth poets’ civic action thus the data was not generalizable in the traditional use of the term. The minoritized youth participants in this study had unique civic experiences relevant to their diverse contexts. At the same time, poetic inquiry provided a way to simulate universality of the findings (Faulkner, 2009). Furman, Langer, Gallardo, and Kulkarni (2007) noted, the poet uses personal experience to create something, which is universal or generalizable because the readers see the work as if it were their own. As such, the goal of this research method was to provide a clear synthesis of these specific youth experiences from which educators and researchers can begin to better understand how minoritized youth civic action can be conceived of as one effective response to educational inequity.

Participants

Participants in this research were the 2016 and 2017 Youth Poet Laureate (YPL) for their respective cities. The YPL program provided access to exemplary participants for this study because the program has a culture rooted in spoken word and a mission focused on identifying youth who are civically active. As evidenced by the program's vision statement that, "Our program model identifies powerful youth poets that have a history of artistic success, civic and community engagement, and youth leadership" (youthlaureate.org, 2016). The National Youth
Poet Laureate initiative is a program of Urban Word, an award-winning youth literary arts and youth development organization, in collaboration with local youth literary arts organizations across the country; and championed by the leading national literary organizations, including the Academy of American Poets, Poetry Society of America, PEN Center USA, and Cave Canem. In 2008, Urban Word launched the nation's first-ever Youth Poet Laureate program, in partnership with the NYC Voters Assistance Commission and the NYC Mayor's Office. Since its inception, the YPL program has collaborated with thirty-five different cities nationwide to identify youth to reign as local, regional, and national Youth Poet Laureates. This study received institutional from support the YPL program. See Appendix D for a copy of the letter of support.

**Sampling**

Snowball sampling was used to invite fifteen youth spoken word poets who have earned the title of the Youth Poet Laureate (YPL) in the 2016 or 2017 and were ages 18-21 to participate in this research. Youth ages 18-21 comprised the most experienced youth poets eligible to participate in the YPL program. Furthermore, the older youth poets engaged with the YPL program historically participated in spoken word programs for several years and were most likely to have an expansive knowledge and experience as civically engaged youth poets.

A systematic approach was used to contact and select participants. I used the list of organizational partners and the names of the YPL winners listed on the YPL website to develop a list of potential participants and their home spoken word organization. I contacted the host organizations of the youth poet laureates, invited participants, and scheduled interviews with participants. After each interview, I invited YPL participants to share the study information with other YPLs in their networks.
I accepted all participants that met the study criteria and could do the interview prior to the end of the data collection period. I informed all participants of the closing date for data collection for time-bound dissertation research project.

Data collection was conducted May – July 2017. Two weeks prior to the close of the data collection I emailed a final notice to all YPL organizations and youth. I sent this final notice to ensure that every YPL possible had been given the opportunity to participate in this study.

I contacted each of the thirty-five YPL partner organizations listed on the official YPL website. The participants of this study were fifteen youth poet laureates from Washington, DC; Atlanta, Georgia; Los Angeles, California; New York City, New York; Denver, Colorado; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Baltimore, Virginia; Norfolk, Virginia; and Prince George County, Virginia. Participants were from a diverse array of ethnic and racial identities.

**Historical Context**

The context for this research study was urban communities where minoritized youth are living and learning under neoliberal domination in schools (Giroux & Giroux, 2004). The study explored minoritized youths’ experiences during 2016; the final year of the first Black president’s second term in office. The hopefulness ushered in by President Obama’s presidency is contrasted against a contemporary context of highly publicized police brutality against Black bodies (Cohen, 2011) and the political and physical attacks on minoritized persons during the current Trump administration such as the immigration ban in 2016 and overtly racists remarks. Youth poets responded viscerally to these national and local issues through spoken word poetry performance.
Also, in 2016, the flagship national youth spoken word program, Youth Speaks in Los Angeles, celebrated its 20th year of programming. Other leading national spoken word organizations such as Urban Word in New York City and programs such as the Brave New Voices International Youth Spoken Word Festival have been thriving for almost twenty years now. Collaboratively these organizations create a nationwide pipeline of high quality, social justice oriented spoken word programming in schools and communities. Twenty years marks a significant contemporary moment in the life of these organizations and their impacts on the construction of youth civic identities. There is a generation of youth poets under the age of 20 that have been socialized into YSW; it has always existed in their lives. Also, noteworthy is that these organizations have created a route to higher education for youth poets through the First Wave Hip Hop Arts and Learning Community at the University of Wisconsin. In 2016, First Wave welcomed its tenth cohort of scholars to study diverse majors, engage in social justice efforts on campus, lead student organization, and tour nationally as artists. These milestones substantiate the sustainable youth culture created around spoken word as an art form, a field of scholarly study, and relevance as a civic tool.

This research study was located at the intersections of the political, the racialized, and the artistic, for young minoritized Americans. A void exists in the limited exploration of the actions minoritized youth take in response to their social conditions in this context. This research asked how did youth spoken word poets attempt to rectify their local and historical contexts given their identities as minoritized, young, and gifted performers, writers, and civic agents.

**Research Process for Arts-Based Poetic Inquiry**

Arts-based poetic inquiry as a methodology addressed the objectives of this research project to explore and amplify minoritized youth voices because crafting poetry was an
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inductive, interpretive process that called on participant's voices and researcher creative intuition to craft an accessible work of quality research that expanded knowledge claims (Faulkner, 2009; Leavy, 2015). As it concerns this specific study of youth spoken word poets' civic action, this method was appropriate as the participants themselves made meaning through metaphor, which is an essential element of the poetic method. Leavy (2015) articulated that "poetry is a way of interpreting and thus understanding." As this is the case, I used poetic analysis and poetic re-presentation to evoke meaning from the data collected and to ultimately craft a counter-narrative of minoritized youth civic engagement (Leavy, 2015; Stefancic & Delgado, 2000).

Data Collection

To grant participants’ agency as they co-constructed the knowledge of poets’ civic action, the data collected consisted of semi-structured interviews with fifteen youth poets (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The interview protocol in Appendix A includes the interview procedures and questions, which asked participants about their civic actions, roles as a youth poet laureate, rationales for their civic actions, and how they developed their civic identity. One hour long semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant.

The steps of the data collection process included first contacting the youth poet laureate sponsor organizations to invite participants for a one-hour semi-structured interview. After each interview, I spent thirty minutes writing analytic memos with my initial interpretations of the interview. After all, interviews were completed, I transcribed all the data. Then I used QRS International NVivo 11 to code and organize data to facilitate thematic and poetic analysis (Charzman, 2008; Faulkner, 2009; Leavy, 20015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Then I wrote the research report.
This study was open to a national pool of participants and thus online video conferencing provided the most accessible and cost-effective, way to engage in face to face dialogue with participants. Face to face communication was preferred as it allowed me to engage in nonverbal communication that facilitated the most welcoming and natural alternative to being physically present (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007). This method allowed participants to feel a connection to me and thus increase trust and willingness to share information (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). When video conference was unavailable, interviews were conducted via phone.

After obtaining participant consent, interviews were audibly recorded using zoom.com. At the completion of the interview, audio files were automatically downloaded to my private desktop computer and given a password protected file name. Immediately following each interview, I spent thirty minutes reflecting on the interview and writing analytic memos of significant themes emerging in the data (Charmaz, 2008; Davidson, 2009). Memo writing was employed frequently throughout this study as a source of detailed reflexivity to guide decision making during the study conduct and report writing (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007; Creswell, 2013).

**Ethical Considerations**

This study received an IRB exempt status (1068944-1). Once interested participants contacted me, I explained the study using the recruitment script provided in Appendix B. I then emailed the consent form to participants along with an invitation to schedule a specific date and time for the interview. Participants were expected to print, sign, and return the consent form to me electronically via email prior to the interview. These forms of documentation provided the most ethical and convenient formats available to participants at a distance.
After interviews are conducted, all data interview recordings were stored and saved on my personal home office computer as password protected, encrypted files. Participants were given a choice of using their real names or a pseudonym, in the research report. Most participants preferred to use their real names in the documentation of this study. Two participants chose pseudonyms. All data were recorded using the preferred pseudonyms. Real names and consent forms were locked in a separate file cabinet than the raw data to protect participant confidentiality.

**Quality Criteria**

Poetic inquiry has its own unique evaluative criteria that distinguish its objective and form from other methodologies and thus offers a more appropriate criterion than trustworthiness addressed in other forms of qualitative research.

“The measures of trustworthiness used to evaluate qualitative research and those used to judge the quality of artistic work merge in poetic criteria. In this way, “poetic criteria” do not privilege social scientific or artistic ways of creating and knowing “truth(s)”; rather proposing the hybridization or merging of the two creates a *third space* for contemplating what counts as knowledge…” (Leavy, 2015, p. 97).

In this study, I produced meaning in this *third space* through a rigorous execution of poetic criteria, which includes artistic concentration, embodied experience, discovery, narrative truth, and transformation (Faulkner, 2009).

Artistic concentration requires an execution of the craft of poetry creation that is true to the form of the genre, which Sullivan (2007) suggested concreteness, emotion, and ambiguity as criteria. I adhered to these criteria through the craft of free verse poems that employed metaphor
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as a method and using the same imagery present in the transcripts in the poems. I documented my emotion through a detailed process of writing analytic memos as I read, edited, revised, and rethought each stanza I wrote. Ambiguity speaks to the art of invoking the reader into the work by not answering every question through the poem itself. Finally, as it concerns artistic concentration the research poems were open to interpretation of the reader while also as effective research poetry that inspires a response from the reader.

I embodied the experience of conducting this study as well as the experiences of my participants by rooting each poem in the lived experiences present in the transcriptions data. I interpreted but did not add to or modify the data. I used poetry to explore and amplify participant experiences and to present participant voices as both individuals and a collective of participants in this study. To enhance my ability to embody participant experiences, I used reflexivity as a tool to track how I understood and engaged in the data analysis processes. Discovery was directly connected to embodied experience because as I embodied the data I discovered the words and organization of the poems. The poems were in the transcriptions waiting to be carved from among the conversation. This discovery process required me as a poet-researcher to read and re-read the data from many angles, lens, and organizational structures. I viewed the data in several different groupings and crafted poetry in response to each. Through this process, I discovered the meanings most significant to this research project.

I maintained narrative truth by crafting participant voiced poems through which I demonstrated interpretive control. Many of the lines of the poems were direct quotes from the data and each of the metaphors and images came from the participants' words. The poetry creation process relied heavily on inductive coding to group ideas. From the codes, I wrote poems that captured the lessons learned in the data. I also re-wrote and revised the poems once I
identified the themes to crystallize the narrative truth of the poetry. Poetic inquiry requires a process of crystallization true to poetic criteria in place of the triangulation common to scientific research methodologies (Faulkner, 2009; Leavy, 2015).

Furthermore, Leavy (2009) noted that trustworthiness is added to arts-based research data using analysis cycles during which a researcher cyclically revisits the data throughout the analysis. Thus, crafting the poems required several re-readings and revisions of arranging quotes and phrases from the transcriptions. This relates to the notion that poetry, like all qualitative research data, is a living breathing narrative that aims to inspire an intellectual and emotional response from the reader (Leavy, 2015). In this way, this poetic re-presentation allowed for researcher reflexivity as well as amplified the voices of the participants as a counter-narrative in a creative form that honored the spoken word tradition that contextualized this study. Furthermore, this presentation format functioned to make the data collected in this study accessible to the participants, their communities, and other communities to which this data could be useful (Leavy, 2015). Lastly, I conducted a critical thematic analysis of the poems to ensure the poems captured the themes apparent in the raw data and were accurate counter-narratives of minoritized youth civic actions. Together these aspects of quality criterion specific to the mode of inquiry of poetic inquiry were addressed to strengthen the reliability that the findings of this research.
Limitations & Delimitations

One limitation of this data is that due to snowball sampling there is a large representation of YPLs from the East Coast. Participants from the East Coast all knew each other and referred this study to one another. Furthermore, Urban Word in New York City is the founding organization of the YPL program and has a very well-established record of programming and participants.

Another significant point is that I decided as a researcher not to research my participants online during the data collection, data analysis, or report writing phases of this research. Due to their status as YPLs, most of them have media coverage and active social media sites that follow their community and artistic works. I chose not to read journalists, organizations, or other people’s thoughts about the YPL in any other form of media. I made this choice to ensure that the data analysis was free of outside interpretations or descriptions of the participants (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

Designing this dissertation study as an art based poetic inquiry project was a resolution to a visceral tension I felt in designing the pilot study as a case study. I wrestled with the true form of case study and the data as it emerged through my interviews. The data itself seemed to beg to be a poem. Metaphor was very apparent in every participant's responses and it became very clear that I as the researcher was forcing this data to fit into the preconceived notions I had about the project I wanted to pursue.

To resolve this dilemma, I returned to the foundation literature on qualitative research methods (Creswell, 2013) and I found that the data collection, analysis, and interpretation process in qualitative research is reciprocal and transformative. The data has a life of its own in many ways and the researcher is the instrument through which the data passes and is interpreted.
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I realized that the case study method was inappropriate for this specific project because I did not have the multiple data sources to build an extensively detailed case; not to mention my attempts to find such sources resulted in data that did not accurately answer the research questions or intended goals of this project. Furthermore, my grasp to achieve a case study was a misconception I held about rigor in qualitative research.

Chapter Three Summary

This research design consisted of art based poetic inquiry to explore youth poets’ civic actions. The goals of this research were to amplify minoritized youth voices and thereby re-characterize the understandings of their civic action. Data for this study was collected using semi-structured interviews with fifteen youth ages 18-21 who earned the title of city Youth Poet Laureate during 2016 and 2017. The historical context of the post Obama Presidency was described to inform the reader of the need for and conditions surrounding minoritized youth activism when this study was conducted. The methods of analytic transcription, inductive coding, poetic analysis, and poetic re-presentation were explained as elements of the poetic inquiry research process used in this study. The execution of criterion specific to poetic inquiry including concreteness, emotion, and ambiguity was explained to demonstrate how this study adhered to a rigorous design, data collection process, and analytic schema.
Chapter Four: Findings

The findings of this study are presented using thematic analysis to capture the prevailing themes that answer the research questions. In this chapter, first the data analysis procedures are explained, then the coding process is described, followed by a presentation of the themes with evidence from the transcription data. Next, procedures for completing a poetic analysis are shared and the participant voiced research poems are presented in a meta chapter four.

Data Analysis Procedure

After all interviews were conducted, audio files were transcribed using an analytic transcription method characterized by omitting off-topic conversation and verbal pause phrases such as excessive repetition (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). This strategy prioritized clarity of meaning in the transcription that allowed me to best identify themes (Davidson, 2009). The transcription process was analytic in that I wrote memos during transcription noting the flow of the conversation and significant points that related to the research questions.

Once all transcriptions were complete, I used QRS International NVivo 11, a computer-assisted data management tool, to sort, store, and view data in different matrix configurations. I conducted inductive coding using NVivo 11 to organize emerging codes and label data. An example of the code list and a data sorting matrix I created during the data analysis can be found in Appendix E.

Themes were identified from the codes by analysis all data sharing a code. After data was coded and sorted poetic inquiry was employed as an interpretive strategy. Poems were designed from the data in each code. As Leavy (2015) suggested, I worked to uncover the poem already present in the transcription data by chiseling away the “rock” and allowing the poem to emerge. I
revisited the raw data to highlight specific short phrases or single words, metaphors, or images participants said and used these devices to craft researcher generated, participant-voiced poems (Faulkner, 2009). I created seventeen researcher poems that answered the research questions. The process of analyzing and reshaping the data into poetic form allowed me to hone in on the most salient themes present in the data.

**Coding Strategy**

Transcripts of semi-structured interviews were the raw data for this research. The fifteen interviews were transcribed verbatim omitting verbal pauses and restatement of the questions being asked. First, the transcripts were coded by hand using Charmaz’s (2008) grounded theory process to inductive coding in which the researcher reads the transcriptions closely in search of what is happening in the data. I decided to do this initial phase of coding by hand to remain close to the participant voices and to use analytic memo writing and transcription annotation to derive meaning from the transcripts. I noted the prevailing idea being expressed in each line of the transcript and from the individual lines developed a code that synthesized chunks of the transcript. In the margins of each transcript, I cataloged the codes present in each individual transcript.

Next, I used QRS International NVivo Starter 11 as a data management and organization tool. I loaded digital files of the transcripts into the NVivo 11 and entered the codes from the hand-written coding into the software. During this entry, I re-analyzed chunks of the data and clarified the meaning of each specific code as more codes were shared across transcripts. This process also allowed me to synthesize codes that were similar and to truncate minor codes under larger codes in NVivo using the nodes feature. NVivo 11 tracked, organized, and sorted which codes were relevant to multiple transcripts (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007; Savin-Baden & Major,
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2013) and the number of references each code had collectively in the data set as well as in individual transcripts. I used the number of sources and references to identify the codes that were significant across the data. Because this research was conceived as a constructionist's project it was important that the collective voices and meaning of all the participants together along with my own interpretations and reflections contributed to the findings (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). My participants and I used this research act to create a collective meaning of the civic action among the nation’s youth poet laureates from their experiences. Thus, I focused heavily on the codes that appeared in the most sources and had the highest amount of references indicating significance across the body of data.

Codes with a minimum of ten sources were identified as significant and thus compromised major themes (Ryan & Benard, 2003; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; Taylor & Gibbs, 2010). Codes with less than ten sources were also analyzed for themes and distinguished as minor themes. NVivo 11 pulled all the references for each code and I used this data to develop themes. In identifying themes, I asked what meaning participants were making of the idea and in what ways did a reference under a specific code respond to the research questions. While distinguishing theme statements, I also chronicled the characteristics and meanings of each of the terms in the theme statements as used by participants in their transcriptions to clarify how participants and I made meaning of the code. Next, the major themes are presented with quotes from the transcripts as evidence of them, followed by minor themes and significant outliers.

The research questions that this research answered were:

1. In what way are poets ages 18-21 civically active and why?
2. How do teen poets develop civic identities?
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3. What roles do schools, community centers, and digital context play in developing teen poets' civic identities? The following themes respond to these points of inquiry.

Themes

The themes of this research are organized in categories that answer the research questions. The categories for the theme presentation that follows are a) Terms, Tools, and Actions, b) Community as Context, c) Civic Identity Development, and d) Rationales for Civic Action.

Terms, Tools, and Actions Themes

ACTIVIST PREFERRED OVER CIVIC ACTION.

Overwhelming participants in this research, preferred the term activism to civic action as traditionally defined, suggesting that the idea of an activist participating in activism is more culturally relevant for minoritized youth than civic action terminology. An activist is “a person who campaigns to bring about political or social change” (Mariam-Webster, 2017). Thus, for participants, their civic action is perceived as a change-oriented youth activism. For example, participants sought to change the prevailing narratives in society and in traditional school curricula to be more inclusive of people of color. They also sought to improve the well-being of the community and the self. Participants described themselves as community leaders, activists, artist-activist, and other terms that highlight their identities as activists. For example, Ayla, a college student at a major state university, who worked three jobs participated in activist work. Ayla, who is also a transgender, Black-Vietnamese American person, explained,

“I think that we're under a lot of fire for being the right kind of activists. I think that a civically engaged activists can be a person who deeply cares about changing their climate wherever they are…” (Ayla, Age 20).
Dayonna, an African American woman, a college student from a low-income community in a large urban city stated,

“I would call them… activist is a word that we say back home and that's kind of like someone who is vocal not with just their voice but with their action and I think that's very important. I think that's the best way to define it because I think someone who is truly active in the community is not active vocally, but they are active with their actions as well. That's someone who speaks out against stuff that they think is unjust and just wrong. It's someone who takes action and takes certain steps to correct and fix what is in their communities.” (Dayonna, Age 19).
Among minoritized youth civic action is personal.

There are multiple layers to the notion of action as personal and each is described in detail in the following paragraphs. Participants' activism was concentrated primarily on youth's local community contexts, which included neighborhoods where they live, attend school, as well as the local government. Participants discussed how the need to recognize themselves as a
member of the community, inspired them to act because the work was contributing to people and places they valued. Additionally, they noted that as community members their work for the community benefited them as individuals as well. While acting within the local community context participants responded to the specific needs of their community, which required an acute awareness and involvement in the local community. Among the determined needs, participants prioritized urgent needs.

Furthermore, this study found that minoritized youth activism is also personal because it is a response to individual youth’s personal experiences with injustices or trauma. They understand the personal as a part of the systemic injustice. As a demonstration, Brittany an African American woman, college student, and resident of a low-income community explained,

“It makes me think about the phrase the personal is political I think a young person who's civically active realizes that everything personal to them is also political and I think sometimes it's simple as waking up in the morning. Like how do you wake up? That's like a political act and a radical act depending on how you identify rather its Black, Mexican, Muslim, anything Vietnamese.”

Participants cited experiences such as being harassed by the police, being sexually assaulted, being racially profiled, or attacked for religious affiliations as instances that inspired them to take civic action in their communities. To address these issues in community with other concerned people participants noted that their specific types of civic action required vulnerability and sharing sensitive parts of their identities and experiences. To be prepared as civic agents youth felt interpersonal interactions in personal and formal discussions were a mandatory part of their preparation as well as one type of action as well.
For example, Dayonna stated,

"I had brothers and an older sister and we all lived in this house and it was a lot of things happening in the house at the time. And it gets hard. My dad was on drugs at one point. I've had 3 different, well two stepmoms, my mom, my dad. You know so it's just been a lot for me. And I was very timid. I didn't really know how to express myself in any kind of way, and I was in a house that had a lot of domestic violence happening all the time. I was like yo I need some way to cope and so writing seemed to be the best way. And then when I got to TWP, the teen center, I was like yo it's a million other kids out here that are like me! some are worst. It's like I need to be able to help them to help myself."

Similarly, participants in this study described a civic action as a personal because they understood being an activist as a calling or purpose granted to them by a higher power or being. This concept instigated a deep respect and passion for the issues and actions participants took in response to those issues. Participants were willing to endure hardships and continued to pursue actions despite the risks because they felt deeply purposed to do this work. For instance, Dominique, an African American woman, a college student from a low-income urban community in a large East Coast city stated,

“I'm really passionate about these things and especially about helping other people. It's just innate. It's like it's no it's just innate. It brings me joy. It makes me. It feels like a purpose; it feels like my purpose.” (Dominque, Age 20).

“Because I believe in my ancestors that this is a right and a blessing that I have to protect: being an activist. When you're an activist there should be some level of care and
honor associated with it. If you truly want to keep yourself and your community safe. If you want to believe in your community, it has to be sacred. That your war has to be poetry.” (Ayla, Age 20).

MINORITIZED YOUTH PARTICIPATE IN MANY FORMS OF CIVIC ACTION.

A significant finding of this research is that minoritized youth participants in this study demonstrated a record of diverse types of civic actions that included traditional actions – those readily accepted and celebrated in Eurocentric paradigms of civic actions as well as non-traditional actions- those more pluralistic, diverse civic actions informed by participants politicized identities and the roles those identities play in the socio-political contexts. Table 1 lists the different types of civic actions participants were involved in and categorizes them under broad headings.

*Table 1 Participants’ Civic Actions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRADITIONAL CIVIC ACTIONS</th>
<th>NON-TRADITIONAL CIVIC ACTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Organizing</td>
<td>Youth Poet Laureate Role- Promoting Literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit Organization Leadership</td>
<td>Creating &amp; Protecting “Safe Spaces” for Minoritized Persons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing Resources (food, services, etc.)</td>
<td>Being a Peer Role Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness Raising (digital, news, local)</td>
<td>Community Outreach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petitioning</td>
<td>Poetry Performance as Protest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition Building</td>
<td>Personal Writing &amp; Publication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educating</td>
<td>Poetry in Non-Poetic Spaces</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## FROM THE STAGE TO THE STREETS: MINORITIZED YOUTH POETS’ CIVIC ACTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fundraising &amp; Donating</th>
<th>Digital Community Building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>Civic Habits: discussions, encouraging, correcting,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report Writing</td>
<td>Self-Care/ Self-Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Speaking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving with Civic Organizations/ Boards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protesting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral Politics: lobbying, phone banking, working polls, campaigning, voting, canvassing,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Disaster Relief</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-faith Organizing</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3 Wordle for Types of Actions NVivo11

This word image was created in QRS international NVivo 11 as a representation of the code “types of civic action” as it appeared in the interview transcription data. This query illustrates the top fifty words, at least five letters in length, used across all fifteen participant transcripts that were coded as types of civic actions. The size of the words is indicative of how frequently the word appeared in the data. The larger the text the more frequently the term appeared.
MINORITIZED YOUTH’S PARTICIPATED IN NONTRADITIONAL CIVIC ACTION.

Non-traditional civic actions included actions that were personal, interpersonal, literary, or otherwise not considered civic in nature. For example, participants discussed self-care through mental health, personal affirmation, waking up daily, and surviving as civic actions. Participants defined self-love as protecting their emotional, mental, and bodily safety by choosing what they needed to be healthy.

“Lately, I think self-care is choosing how I’m going to be an activist today. And that being an activist is something that I can take on and take off. But being a person in this world in the identities that I carry, I can't take those off. And If I have to protect myself by not being vocal once then I will. But if I have to protect myself by being an activist in that moment I will. And it's all about safety still.” (Ayla, Age 20).

“Because like certain words like selfish, like I say I'm selfish and people are like whooo? I'm like selfish doesn't have to be a bad thing you know. You need to care about yourself and your own wellbeing. Cause I think once you care about yourself and your own well-being then you'll want other people to get to that point, yet you know yal can care for each other.” (Brittany, Age 20).

Also, Ninel, a Jamaican- American, entrepreneur, organizer, and multifaceted artist, from a low-income community in a major urban city explained,

“So, I do things here because we need it. If I don't then who will. So, it's sacrifice but at the same time, I'm learning to love myself regardless of all of the ugly things in the world. That's the hardest struggle for me right now. Is learning to love myself through the
depression. Through the friends having their issues. Through the world being as chaotic and? as it is through the names that get released in the press every couple of weeks, like through all of that stuff I still have to love myself. And that's been the biggest lesson to learn." (Ninel, Age 19).

In these quotes, participants explained that caring for themselves prepared them to best serve and care for others in healthy ways and allowed them to nurture their own self-efficacy. Most importantly, several participants identified that self-care was an essential act that allowed them to survive the exhaustion of the more traditional civic actions.

To continue, minoritized youth participated in actions they felt they had access to and could yield. This is mediated by their holistic cultural identities, which include but are not limited to age, race, class, SES, geographic location, country of origin, and religion. Due to systemic barriers such as poverty some actions were not accessible to participants. Also, participants had to evaluate the personal, financial, physical, and emotional risks as minoritized people in taking certain actions depending on their holistic, cultural identities. For example, participants living and working on college campuses had to evaluate if certain actions would jeopardize their financial aid and if they could literally afford to take such an action. For example, Brittany explained,

"I didn't plan to go just because the thing with protesting here on campus is it's a PWI, predominately white institutions, and then for me, it's just like I'm a first-generation college. I'm here on scholarship and things like that so I'm not going to walk out of class. Then the time it happened...I was like darn it's right when class starts."

Likewise, work-life balance was a concern. These youths are people with full lives and competing priorities not always afforded the unlimited time, resources, or other privileges to
participate in civic action.

**MINORITIZED YOUTHS ADEPT AT DECIDING WHICH TOOLS WERE MOST EFFECTIVELY ACHIEVED A DESIRED CIVIC OUTCOME.**

Youth were aware and able to select the social, physical, and digital tools that best served the purpose for civic action. For example, some youth used social media as an awareness-raising tool and others used door to door canvassing and interpersonal discussions to raise awareness, the determining factor on which method to use depended on the necessity and urgency of the issues in the community.

For instance, Jolie, a European American, middle-class college student, from a moderate sized rural community commented,

> “I talk a lot about Black Lives Matter and I talk a lot about, with Trump in office, I've been talking a lot about immigration and things like that because those issues feel like more on the front line. That's very immediate. That's something I try to be conscious of to keep talking about those things even though it doesn't feel as personal because I'm White and a citizen so I'm not really facing those issues directly, but I still try to keep that, spread that message.”

Most participants noted that digital actions and social media campaigns have their place as well as does "boots on the ground" physical actions. As for boots on the ground activists, racially minoritized youth pulled on historical archetypes of effective communities and community leaders to model their own communities and civic identities after. For example, participants related their own actions and identities to the Black Panther Party, Malcolm X, The Prophet Muhammad, James Baldwin, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Additionally, as a group of performance poets, the participants understood public
speaking was needed yet were conscious of when to be silent and listen. Participants were conscious of conserving their energies for the actions they felt were needed. For example, participants discussed not arguing online when they could be physically serving in the community. Time and energy were limited resources thus these youths protected and prioritized their use when doing civic action.

For example, Rhiannon, a European American, Jewish, a woman from a middle-class community in a major urban city stated,

"This is my thing, is that like that online activism has made it very accessible for people to become involved and that's good if you're disabled. I'm going to be straight up. Some of my friends have anxiety disorders, so they're not able to go out in the streets to protests as much as I can. My issues, my brain, function a different way. It's easier for wheelchair users and tons of people across the spectrum to be more active online than, I'm not going to say in the real world, but like in the streets at local centers and stuff. That said, if you can get out in like public spaces then you should." (Rhiannon, Age 20).

DIGITAL CIVIC ACTION AND DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP WAS NOT VALUED AS A CIVIC TOOL. The terminology of digital citizenship and digital civic action were foreign to all but one participant, Sharon, a first-generation immigrant, Buddhist, Fujianese Chinese American woman, who was a rising freshman at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology studying digital literacy at the time of this interview. Leaning on the constructionist framework of this research design, participants were encouraged to create and describe their own meaning of digital citizenship even though the term was new to most. Sharon confidently shared her definition of digital citizenship as,
Around the world and one of the things that you sort of carrying with this ability to be connected around the world. Is this responsibility to be a digital citizen. To be someone that is represented on the web. Definitely I have different social media channels on practically every platform and the way I interact with other people defines my footprint that I make digitally, and I think that the decisions that you make online and the actions that you take and the things that you sort of talk about online makeup who you are online and that's what sort of makes up your persona as a digital citizen.

Most participants acknowledge they were active in digital spaces via social media platforms, even if they did not view themselves as digital citizens. Participants valued social media and digital platforms as being indicative of real people’s mindsets and intentions in the physical world thus they did not see the physical and digital world as separate spaces. For example Rhiannon stated,

"I don't consider myself a digital citizen. If I may say so. That's like cause there are people who create this barrier between online and the real world. But it's all real. You're not in the matrix when you're on your phone! So, I don't know I would just consider myself a human with a smartphone, I guess."

Participants saw online and physical interactions working together and demonstrating one another in important ways. Within this theme, the research also suggested that social media actions especially required peer accountability and self-checking to facilitate learning rather than unproductive debating about social ills.

Additionally, participants identified that social media had an ecosystem (structure) through which real lives are taking place and being affected. For example, most participants
described a distinction between what they post on different social media platforms and why; this indicates the ecosystem. Some platforms were used for political commentary like Twitter, while others were for social engagement such as Facebook. While participants did not see these spaces as mutually exclusive they did indicate that they participated in a type of digital code-switching, which calls upon notions of minoritized persons employing Eurocentric dialects and appearances to better assimilate and survive in Eurocentric environments. Likewise, participants in this study were less political on platforms that may be viewed by a potential employer or grandparent than they were on platforms reserved for peers and activists' communities.

While many participants did not identify with the term digital citizen, they understood social media as one tool and location from which to gain a civic education or act as a part of a larger plan of civic action. Participants articulated a focus on people as a rationale for social media presence: connecting with and checking on friends, family, and people that follow their artistic work. Some participants cited using digital platforms for promoting their own art and marketing for employers. This was expected as these social media sites were created to connect people and market products. Participants valued social networking sites because they allowed them to control their own images and narratives about their identities and communities.

Also noteworthy is that although the academic terminology of digital citizenships was foreign to most participants in this study, participants nonetheless demonstrated knowledge of the unspoken digital norms, expectations, uses, and of diverse digital platforms. For example, Dominique noted,

We're kind of all digital citizens. If you are on social media you are a digital citizen cause now I'm like oh wow I can't curse because jobs...future employers are going to look at my page so it's like I would say yeah, I'm a digital citizen because like I have a digital
identity. So, I'm like I can't get away from that unless I were to delete all my stuff, which I'm not going to do so now I'm just like now I have to be politically correct. I have to sometimes censor myself digitally because with adulthood comes that responsibility that like I don't want to post "F the police" and have a job offer be like "oh we saw... just doing some background research on ya." So, I would say I'm a digital citizen and with that digital citizenship comes you know your freedom of speech but then your consequences of freedom of speech.

Participants were aware of navigating freedom of speech with consequences of freedom of speech for current and future obligations. Lastly, as the youth coming of age in the 21st-century participants have been socialized to use digital platforms most of their lives and see social media as a place for social interaction and fun such as making YouTube cooking videos.

One outlier to the prevailing view of social media as one tool among many for youth civic action, was one participant. Jolie, who identified as a queer, gender conforming, European American woman noted that for her social media platforms like Tumblr were significantly educative in her civic identity development. She felt she was able to speak more candidly and ask difficult questions in online platforms than in face to face physical interactions with people.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS TAUGHT MINORITIZED YOUTH THE LANGUAGE, THEORY, SKILLS, AND PEDAGOGIES, TO DO CIVIC ACTION.

Community organizations, most notably youth spoken word programs, but also non-profit organizations prepared participants to do civic action by explicitly teaching them the language, theory, skills, mindsets, and effective pedagogies needed to do effective civic action. By nature of their role as YPLs, most all participants received poetic coaching, which often included studying social justice theorists such as bell hooks and Paulo Freire. Participants also attended
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workshops held by the center’s staff on topics such as: how to organize, how to lobby, how to teach other youth, developing public speaking skills, how to use art as a community tool, the business of being an artist, and how to enhance interpersonal communication. For example,

“Then I would say definitely Teens with Purpose, the teens organization because coming to that organization there was things I didn't know I could do as a youth that they opened me up to. Like there's a whole different spectrum of things that I experienced. That's whether it was walking in the community. Whether it was teaching camps. That was traveling. They were the first teen organization to take me out of Virginia. And make me get on a platform and perform and share my voice and tell my story. So definitely have to pay homage to them.” (Dayonna, Age 19).

Next, Jolie explained how her community center prepared her to navigate difficult conversations.

“I was involved in Forward Arts in high school and they're the local poetry organization. The focus a lot on making sure kids, without trying too hard to push certain stances, they try hard to make sure kids are aware of the social issues around them and different public events that are going on. I was already very argumentative and strongly opinionated person at that point so to have a space that would foster that but also remind you to empathize with other people and meet them where they are. To think of things all the way through and say this is how you would engage with that rather than just going off on someone and fighting with them. That kind of reigned me in a little bit and made me think like ok so I can like care about these things but take it on in a way that won't ostracize other people. I think Forward Arts has been a large part of it. (Jolie, Age19).

Additionally, community centers not explicitly focused on youth spoken words such as the Boys and Girls Club of America Metro Atlanta, prepared youth with workshops on how to
network with corporate adults, deliver formal speeches, and providing platforms to advance the organization’s mission. Other organizations developed youth’s civic identities by preparing them to do the specific work the organization was designed to do. For example, crisis centers trained youth on how to work with people who have experienced trauma.

Lastly, religion as an organization prepared some participants with justice-oriented mindsets that inspired them to participate in civic action. For example, Hajar, an Afghan-Kurdish American woman, and college student, from a working-class community explained that her Islamic faith was rooted in justice and compassion for all people, which instigated her to do the civic action that combated homophobia and anti-Black racism. “So, at the core, my urgency lies with justice and compassion and finding a good medium between the two. and understanding that if I am to care for people I have to fight for them too. And it is those are two core aspects of my religion as well. Islam is a religion of justice as much as it is of compassion and peace. and so that's a core for me to be a good person but also a good Muslim.”

In addition to teaching youth overt social justice themes parents developed participants’ civic identities by teaching them the importance of moral character. Mohammed, a Guinean immigrant, college student and Black Muslim, from a low-income community, living in an urban American city explained:

“I'd have to attribute all of these things to my mother who instilled in me and my older and younger siblings the importance of people and the importance of ourselves and that we had a sense of value. Including that value within our religion. Cause I'm Muslim. And making and instilling in us this type of confidence to where it's like cause I’ve already told you I'm Muslim three times. And feeling that sense of self-worth and pride within that and in like this is where I come from and your name is Mohamed you were named
Mohammed discussed in detail how his mother named him and constantly taught him to care for other people and have the self-worth that he felt prepared him to be a civic leader as an African male immigrant living in America. His moral education, rooted in Islam, taught him an ethic of justice.

Figure 4 Preparation for Civic Action Wordle Nvivo11

This word image was created in QRS international NVivo 11 as a representation of the code “preparation for civic action” as it appeared in the interview transcription data. This query illustrates the top one hundred words, at least five letters in length, used across all fifteen participant transcripts that were coded as types of civic actions. This query included one hundred
words to reflect breathe of chunks of data categorized with this code. The size of the words is indicative of how frequently the word appeared in the data. The larger the text the more frequently the term appeared.

**Community in Context Themes**

**CIVIC ACTION IS AN EXPECTATION OF YOUTH IN YSW COMMUNITIES.**

Participants overwhelming suggested that civic action as activism was not extra or addictive, but characteristic of the youth spoken word community. As a result, their slam poetry coaches, mentors, and peers all expected them to engage in purposeful community work around themes they were passionate about. Thus, the community spaces where they did poetry were also pivotal in accessing the skills and tools to participate in civic action. For example, Dayonna explained, “one thing about where I'm from and my city we don't just spit poems. We activists too.”

Similarly, Ogechi, a first generation Nigerian American, college student, entrepreneur, and recording artist from a working-class community, currently living in a major urban city described that,

> “Also, with Poetry for Personal Power is connected with KC Poetry so the civic engagement that we do there was just like a part of being on the team. You didn't really see it as another project. So, the mentor side garners from there Douglass Rosenbook, Sherrie Purpose Hall, Beyond Payne, those women, and men really did open my eyes in the sense of what I could actually do right now not even like 5 years down the line or 10 years when I'm an adult but what I can physically do right now.”

These quotes illustrate how participants felt their civic action was connected to their YSW community and the expectation of being civic leaders in this community by having a role on the slam team. Kenny, an African American young man, working in information technology, and
living in a middle-class community in a major urban city explained, “I feel like that's very necessary as a performance poet and it separates the people who are just gaining something from this oppression and those who are working to stop it.” This point from Kenny acknowledged that youth are keenly aware of the socio-political context their literary work exists in and as poets respond to a community expectation that they act. Likewise, civic habits such as talking to someone, smiling at a neighbor, or waking up can be civic actions if youth’s critical comprehension of the socio-political and specific local context informs the action.

A COMMUNITY OF ACCEPTANCE & BELONGING WAS REQUIRED FOR ACTION TO TAKE PLACE.

A strong sense of belonging to a specific community was a reoccurring theme in each participant interview. To better understand this theme, I searched the data to define how participants understood community. The data demonstrated that community for these participants meant a shared experience, identity, and or social justice goal. An inclusive environment in which all members felt accepted and celebrated was essential to defining community. Alongside acceptance was a deep interpersonal connection to other members of the group meaning they knew personal information, experiences, and care about the holistic wellbeing of members of the community. For example, Kenny described his YSW community in the following way:

“Words, Beats, Life, it was really cool because we're all really like a big family the adults even they want to hear what we have to say. They're working for us essentially. It's definitely different environment. We talk about things that kids might be scared to talk about in school because they feel like no one will help them, or they'll just get all this advice that's real, like if you ever go to a school counselor they're going to tell you all these things that they were told to say. It almost feels like nobody really cares but Words,
Beats, Life is definitely a place where some of my friends have found comfort in. I've gotten really close to my coaches. So, it’s really close-knit family environment. rather than public spaces because they have so many heads to worry about that it's not really personal.” (Kenny, Age18).

The YSW community required a mutual respect between adults and youth and a significant amount of youth leadership, youth autonomy, and lack of censorship in the community. Most participants noted that joining a YSW community was their first time experiencing this type of adult-youth relationship and peer acceptance. For example, Ogechi stated, “A couple months later I had joined KC Poetry, which is my Kansas City poetry team. That was the first time that I was accepted by people just for me in everything that I had went through for every bad, good, mental illness, everything. They just accepted, and I never had felt that before.”

Participants frequently referred to these types of communities as “safe spaces.” According to participants safe spaces were inclusive, welcomed uncensored youth voice, promoted youth leadership, and offered a structured time for developing interpersonal relationships. Participants clarified that safe spaces, especially in the YSW community, should distinguish diverse voices and avoid not assimilating all voices into one prevailing agreed upon voice of social justice. Jolie, a European American participant explained that in safe spaces, members of dominant groups such as European Americans, while welcome should be mindful of when to speak and when silence is necessary. Lastly, for YSW, safe spaces were those that allowed all persons to be present in their emotions as one entry into empathetic listening and coalition building.

Some communities require coalition building across lines of difference, when this was
the case participants discussed a strong commitment to a shared social justice goal or cause. The fight for a shared cause unified the diverse community. Community for participants mandated an intentional gathering together on a targeted task or civic agenda such as problem-solving how to respond to hate speech on a college campus. Community members supported the individual in their pursuit of other causes even if it was not the one cause for which they were gathered.

The geographic location of the community space was significant in that participants largely discussed feeling at home in their community spaces, which were indicative of a community gathering being in their local neighborhood or school as well as providing structures that protected and nurtured all members. The geographic location suggested a very clear asset-based view of underserved neighborhoods. Participants discussed neighbors with public housing, frequent violence, and other conditions of urban poverty by illuminating the positive experiences, people, and spaces in those communities. At the same time, several participants commented that they had to reconcile their racial identities in racialized spaces, dominated by majority groups, such as predominantly European American college campuses built on the land of Indigenous peoples. For example, Hajjar, an Afghan-Kurdish woman, stated,

“I do think it's this sense of it's a college town and that violence extends on many different mediums … I think that that mixture of overwhelming whiteness and also it being a college town and drunk whiteness and the state itself and the statistics around it being the worst place to live for Black people and half of its Black neighborhoods are in prison and things like that.”

In the same vein, Ayla commented,

“So, I think if we constantly have a space that's accountable, that keeps each other accountable, that's awesome but just remembering that the people that might be on your
side are also perpetuating their own privilege and that like how do you perpetuate violence and are you willing to recognize that even if you are a minoritized person. Being me, living in Boulder, going to school in Boulder, I'm still engaging in violence against native folks that I have to reconcile every day. I'm still engaging in violence that keeps certain people from living here that have always lived here.”

These quotes demonstrate that participants are conscious of the historical and sociopolitical context of the spaces they inhabit, which impacted how and where they built purposeful communities. A key characteristic of community for participants was that online communities invested human capital, time, and resources into the youth through personal development, civic identity development, nurturing, and caring for them. In return, the youth gave back to these communities in a spirit of shared responsibility for the future of the community and return on investment. Youth worked to improve, empower, inspire the communities in which they held ownership.

Lastly, the trust and respect built in these communities required an accountability among members. For participants, community members called out bias and injustice when it appeared within the community. Lack of accountability also inspired youth to create new community spaces, start nonprofits, and lead workshops to educate community members and outsiders about the dangers of unaccountable spaces. A strong sense of belonging to a community prepared and empowered minoritized youth to act. For example, due to a lack of a sense of community Kenny did not confront the racism he experienced in the form of racist jokes or microaggressions in his predominantly white school. Additionally, Jolie went to a potentially dangerous rally to support the LGTB community she loved to prove to opponents that this community was both visible and valuable. Similarly, Hajjar assumed responsibility to educate other Muslims on homophobia and
anti-black sentiments. These actions were all responses instigated by the participants’ concern
and care for the communities they were members of. They acted because they loved their spaces
and the people with which that they co-create those spaces. Participants aimed to enhance the
community not just sustain it.

Critique on YSW Communities

SLAM POETRY CAN GLORIFY YOUTH TRAUMA.

Due to the open and inclusive space of youth spoken word communities generally and
competitive slam poetry particularly, youth felt comfortable writing, speaking, and performing
about traumatic life events. While there were many personal benefits to this type of radical truth-
telling, participants cautioned that the invitation to share, often silenced personal stories of
trauma, can inadvertently glorify traumatic experiences as the staple of good slam poetry.
Participants discussed how trauma as a theme of youth open mics and poetry slams can become a
part of the ethos of these spaces and as a result trigger youth to create from trauma and/or feel
they must invent traumatic narratives to be validated as good writers. Poems about trauma can
become the currency to afford respect, acceptance, and notoriety as a minoritized youth poet.
Participants exposed that this practice can be dangerous because it promotes an unhealthy
environment in which youth are not healing but instead sitting in pain and emotionally reliving
trauma repeatedly for the sake of applause.

Additionally, participants questioned the accountability structures and who is permitted
in YSW spaces. Ayla demonstrated this sentiment in the following comment, "The poetry
community is amazing it's also scary. In that, all activist space should always be clear on who
they're allowing into their space. That if there are statistics of how many people are certain
trauma survivors and it's usually like 1 in 5 and 1 in 4 so it's more likely that you have at least 1 abuser where ever you are." Participant's identified the risks of the YSW space as something to be leery of and trauma as something to outright reject. For example, Mohammed stated, "Just because I don't come out to every open mic and I'm not at every protest spitting a new poem about how anther Black man just died because I don't want to deal with that. I don't want to keep creating from that trauma, from that tragedy. Like I'm done with that. I want to create from something positive. I want to create from something spiritual. Something that's deeper than death. Something that will last longer than death and that's love."

EMPATHY INSTIGATES CIVIC ACTION.

Participants defined empathy as an engaged concern for the other that makes visible the life obstacles of others. As a result, participants stated that empathizing with someone's struggle and not ridiculing them but partnering with them to achieve the improvement the victim views as necessary is one way to build effective coalitions across lines of difference that advance civic action.

For example, Ninel explained,

“I think that purpose of putting poetry there [in non-poetic spaces] is empathy. I think that poets teach empathy very very well. I think that for one empathy to me, it can't necessarily be taught but it can be triggered. I think that poets do a beautiful job of writing things in a way that reaches the soul before it reaches the mind. It makes you feel before you can even think about what you're feeling, and I've been in spaces...I go up to? vile, GA is a very southern redneck area. I grew up in a space where people didn't see eye to eye. I've done poems at the sheriff's department where I have old white men crying about poems about Black boys, about poems about Black women, about poems about
people who are like me. Those are important moments. Those are the things that drive me. Because if I am not causing you to empathize with what I'm saying, I'm really not saying anything. These spaces where everyone's all suit and tie, badge on chest and in these spaces where people are dressed up to fit their roles, they are forgetting to feel first, so in this nonprofit, in these businesses, these Sheriff’s departments, to spit these pieces about real things that people of color are feeling and going through and to get a response, I think that's where the change starts! The change starts in feeling for other people instead of directing other people or policing other people or trying to help other people without understanding.”

Participants articulated a concern and passion for people across lines of difference that caused them to fight for and with others. The "others" are not strangers but instead, people participants have intentionally decided to build community partnerships with. For example, participants engaged in civic actions that invited people with potential opposing views such as European American males, politicians, or police offers to interrogate an issue from a minoritized youth perspective. A key factor in developing youth's ability to access and instigate empathy was mentors modeling empathy for youth across communities of difference. As a result, in their civic actions, participants prioritized being empathetic, teaching the value of empathy, and triggering empathy in others.

Additionally, empathy is implicated in this research because youths' past experiences with similar life obstacles made them act on behalf of people currently experiences those life obstacles. For example, Ninel, noted "my home life was never great. Ever. And now it is. I can say that. That's why I'm so passionate about people who don't have great home lives and making sure that I can give them what I did not have and make sure that I can step in and intervene and
provide them some support because I know what it is to be afraid to go home." Likewise, Naijahn, an African American man, college student, and activist from a low-income community in a large urban city commented,

"Cause it's some people out here like every time I come to the teen center there's a homeless, there's this old white guy that I always walk past and he always kind of be in the cut. Like he be getting beat and all kinds of stuff and sometimes if I have it I'll give him a dollar or two because I don't know what he's going to use it for, but I know that if I was in that situation I would want somebody to give it to me. I would want help. Cause my families been in a situation where we didn't have a place to stay multiple times. I have a real weak spot for people out in the community that really need help.

MINORITIZED YOUTH EXPERIENCE CIVIC ACTION AS EXHAUSTING YET REWARDING.

When initially asked to describe how participating in civic action made them feel participants used descriptors such as overwhelmed, tiring, frustrating, weary, mentally, and physically exhausting, daunting, anxious, draining, and challenging. These negative emotions were attributed to the work of educating others, which required countering views and combating people opponents. Participating with people across lines of difference that refused to engage in dialogue or enact empathy made the participants feel exhausted. The risks of oppositional perspectives and counter-protestors at public events also instigated a sense of fear of possibly being harmed, abused, being unsafe at marches, protests, or in certain types of spaces for some participants. The youth called out fear and pushed past it to prove to oppressors they would not be silenced. Many of them articulated a keen awareness that choosing to be an activist may result
in life or death risks, but they stated they were willing to endure the danger to advance justice. Participants spoke about confronting death for their civic ideals and beliefs and were not afraid to face death to defend what they believed. Ayla sought to ensure that communities were safe yet understood that sometimes circumstances called for confronting danger.

Additionally, the sheer amount of work participants did do daily led to physical exhaustion as well. Dayonna explained that a typical day for her included teaching workshops for other teens, attending school, facilitating the community camp, going out into her community canvassing for a local event, and participating in poetry slam team rehearsal in the evening. The volume of work contributed to the exhaustion youth felt. Lastly, as it concerns the empathy triggering work of writing, rehearsing, and performing spoken word poems about traumatic life events, youth reported that this action can be emotionally draining. They had to relive their own trauma and deal with it daily as well as consider the emotional and psychological impact the performance had on the audience.

Nonetheless, youth overwhelmingly accepted the exhaustion as a necessary element of their civic action that was coupled with rewarding feelings of joy, honor, and empowerment. While the day to day routine was exhausting at times, participants stated that they continued their civic actions because it made them feel alive, like they matter, and brought them joy. Ogechi noted genuinely feeling joy when she saw a change in other teens at a local prison after their workshop. Dayonna mentioned the smiles on her neighbor's faces when she went door to door passing out food. Participants mentioned that knowing they can access civic actions and make a difference gave them a deep sense of purpose that they fulfilled by doing even more civic action. For example, Sharon stated, "for me, I think it's actually very empowering to be civically engaged because you can see the effects of yourself actually talking about these different issues with
people who may not have had exposure to these issues before." The participants demonstrated a
critical hope that by doing certain necessary, urgent, local civic actions in the present that would
improve the future. The participants demonstrated a hope that their actions would instigate
change and improve the future of their communities.

Themes on Civic Identity Development

MINORITIZED YOUTH CIVIC IDENTITY IS MEDIATED BY THEIR OTHER
INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES.

Participants demonstrated that their civic identities were mediated by the intersections of
multiple other identity qualifiers such as age, phase of life, gender, sexual orientation, race, class
(SES), geographic location, nation of origin, citizenship status, religion, family structure, and
language. For example, Brittany explained how she had to consider her politicized identity as a
first-generation, African American, female, financial aid recipient, and college student prior to
decide if she could personally, financially, academically, or emotionally afford to participate in a
walk out on her predominately European American college campus. Thus, civic identity is not a
separate category based solely on political efficacy for this youth population, instead civic
identity is one among many multifaceted aspects of identity that they must develop
simultaneously.

Overall participants were still in the process of discovering their intersectional identities
and naming them. The life phase of being youth ages 18-21 is significant here. Most
participants were young adults in their late teens experiencing their first time exploring identity
separate from their parents post high school graduation by living on a college campus or away
from home. Participants discussed contemplating what parts of their identities to make visible
and which identities to name. Through community workshops and college coursework, they
reported recently learning the terminology to accurately name their intersectional identities. YSW and community spaces provided youth with the rhetoric, critical thinking to understand, and developed intersectional identities. Additionally, YSW communities served as an affirmation of those identities that countered how peers, community, and family saw participants. Relationships to other people defined, affirmed and helped them to name, thus own, their identities.

**CRITICAL SELF-AWARENESS IS A PRECURSOR TO CIVIC ACTION.**

Participants in this research noted that once they realized who they were and that they did hold power they could employ that power in the form of civic action. Participants also mentioned that in order to serve effectively in different spaces they had to know themselves deeply and what they required to be activist. For example, Hajjar stated,

“I think that there are a lot of people that whether it was like taken upon themselves or something that they found themselves upon there needs to be a certain level of self-awareness before we can brand anyone person as doing something for a community outside of themselves.”

**DIGITAL CONTEXTS SERVED AS AN EDUCATIVE RESOURCE TO DEVELOP CIVIC IDENTITY.**

This research found that participants used digital technology, specifically social media platforms such as Twitter and Tumblr as educative sources. Participants used Twitter and Tumblr for news gathering, exposure to new information, rhetoric, and terminology around social issues and as a launching pad to do additional research. A key draw of social media platforms was the immediacy of the information and the ability for youth and other activists to shape the narrative
reported in ways more inclusive of their identities and social justice interest. For example, Dominique stated that the ability to control news through social media was one opportunity to change the prevailing narrative.

"I remember Twitter and once I started to see the hashtags and I started to be like oh wow police brutality is real... I mean sometimes people kind of stop at Twitter, but it basically was like a ding-ding-ding there's something wrong yet like because once we started to control our own media. Because media is so influential in our society. Once we started to be in control of the media using Twitter and social media platforms to share information between each other it just...just the narrative really started to shift."

Also, social media provided an additional community to learn and discuss difference and find comraderie for youth with minoritized identities. For example, Ayla explained how social media provided a community for these identities when none existed in the physical space. Because Ayla lived in a small town and was the only biracial person in their family Ayla thought that no other people shared their biracial identity until Ayla identified others that showed the same identity online. After identifying more people like them online, Ayla acknowledged that social media was a key tool in affirming these identities.

Similarly, Jolie, a middle-class, European American, a lesbian participant identified that social media was a platform for her to engage in critical dialogues with people across lines of difference and asked candid questions she was not comfortable asking in face to face conversations. She explained that social media allowed for editing and clarifying void of the emotional immediacy present in face to face conversations. Jolie noticed that even when infighting did occur online she felt that when people chose to struggle through the difficult conversation and make it to the other side they were able to learn and ultimately be changed
One significant finding that reoccurred in the data was that "call out culture" (when someone names the wrongdoing of another without providing any productive guidance on how to improve the wrongdoing) was a risk in online and social media platforms. Participants reported that call out culture created a toxic place in which empathy could not grow. This was a common rationale why some participants chose not to participate in online dialogues or did not consider themselves digital citizens.

**LIFE OBSTACLES DEVELOPED RESILIENCY TO DO CIVIC ACTION.**

Many of the participants in this research had experienced personal life obstacles such as living in poverty, being ostracized because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or religion to name a few. Participants used the resiliency these life obstacles taught them in service of civic action, especially as an attempt to respond to the obstacles they faced. For example, Brittany decided to mentor other youth living in urban poverty and crime-ridden areas because she experienced the death of her brother. Nijahn noted that his experience walking far distances because he had no other form of transportation taught him what it took to be successful, so in turn, he felt prepared to lead community walks and spend long hours serving in his community. Experiencing bias, discrimination, and prejudice prepared participants to act against oppressive forces.

An additional way life obstacle served as preparation for civic action was youth decided to be engaged in activism as a response to low expectations prescribed to them. For example, Dayonna explained that the teachers and administrators at her school, located in a low-income community, doubted that she would ever succeed. As a result, she chose to serve as a leader in
her own community and beyond in an attempt to prove those school officials wrong. In this way, some minoritized youth were used civic action to create change in areas of their lives they experienced obstacles as an act of redemption.

Finally, participants from middle-class backgrounds or identified as European American (but possessed other minoritized identities) noted that witnessing other’s experience of life obstacles helped them identify injustice and instigated a desire to respond through civic action. This act of witnessing was significant only in communities where participants had interpersonal relationships with the persons being impacted by the injustice. For example, Jolie expressed concern for her racially minoritized, non-binary gender friends while attending a PRIDE protest. Jolie explained that witnessing the verbal attacks on her friends angered her in such a way that she chose to act in solidarity with them. Likewise, Ayla discussed witnessing police brutality against African American males and acknowledged that it was unlikely to personally be inflicted on Ayla’s identities. Witnessing within communities one cares about and is deeply connected to is capable of instigating civic action.

MENTORS AND FAMILY MEMBERS HAD THE STRONGEST IMPACT ON MINORITIZED YOUTH CIVIC IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT.

Mentors were caring adults that engaged with youth in one on one interactions and offered youth positive affirmation, accountability, and interpersonal adult-to-youth relationships of mutual benefit over the course of multiple years. Many of the participants’ mentors were their slam poetry coaches, writing mentors, or former high school teachers. A key characteristic of the mentoring relationship was that these adults were active in youths lives beyond the parameters of their designated role as coach or teacher. Participants reported that their mentors helped develop their civic identities by helping youth identify the power and agency they had in the present to
use. Mentors also acted as role models demonstrating through their own civic action things youth could do as well as the importance of taking civic action. It’s noteworthy that most participants felt that in youth spoken word communities civic action was an expectation of their mentors and peers, so it was a seamless process to get engaged. Mentors also modeled empathy and how to build coalitions across lines of difference in both their professional and personal lives and they shared these lives with participants. Likewise, participants mentioned that is was important that their mentors were also engaged in the day to day events of their lives beyond civic action such as giving them advice about dating.

Mentors introduced youth to key social justice literature, helped them think critically about the literature, and provided a soundboard for youth to pose questions and be challenged. Ayla spoke similarly about mentors,

“Also of course you know we have amazing coaches who have lit theory, queer theory, in their back pocket and like hey you want to learn something about this here is this, would you like some bell hooks? here we go! or hey did you read this cool thing about being two spirits or whatever, I am a two-spirit person here we go! Like we just have a lot of really good connections with the whole city because of that and because all of our coaches are also activist. We always got to be in different activist spaces and learn from each other.”

One significant outlier as it concerns mentors was Sharon’s experience of having mentors that were deeply rooted in electoral politics. Sharon is a first generation Fujianese-Chinese American, and high school senior at the time this research was conducted. Although she was a poet and a YPL, her mentors were much more aligned with traditional civic actions than most other participants. She explained,
"Also working on different political campaigns for instance, New York state senator Cobby Ann Skavenski taught me a lot of the skills of life canvassing and phone banking and just sort of the raw energy that sort of goes into advocacy work besides just the idealistic parts of trying to change legislation and trying to make a difference in communities. Youlang New was a politician in New York City who ended up being a huge role model for me as well. Primarily because of her support for immigrants in New York City." (Sharon, Age 18).

Additionally, participants noted that they found a form of mentorship in literary texts. Historic social justice-oriented authors such as Toni Morrison, Audrey Lorde, James Baldwin as well as contemporary slam poets such as Danez Smith and Jasmine Mans were all mentioned as archetypes of artistic activist identities that youth attempted to model themselves after. This aligns with participants identities as writers and creatives and is significant because it demonstrates that youth are employing literary tools to craft a civic identity that prepares them to take civic actions.

Next, another key source of civic identity development was immediate family members. Participants explained that close family members such as parents and grandparents significantly informed their civic identities by teaching them the racialized history of their community and about activists' movements from the past such as the Civil Rights Movement, Feminist Movement, and Gay Rights Movement. Some participant's family members were directly engaged in these former movements and others followed the movements closely. In both cases, parents and grandparents activated participants' agency early on in life by teaching them to be non-complacent to systems of injustice.

"He [my father] talks a lot about Black Panther stuff and how he was riding with
Malcolm when everybody else wasn't, I mean not riding with but in the spirit. That's what he was feeling." (Kenny, Age 18).

“So, the way I was brought up my great grandfather was a Panther, like one of the OG panthers. I think the context he gave me then when I was younger. He gave me all of this contexts like all of this story about my people. All this history about everything that went on back then and how it applies to now and I was getting that when I was like 6, 7, and 8. So that was really big.” (Naijah, Age 19).

"I was raised by a single mother so obviously she's the most important person in my life. She's my sole family member as a kid. So, my mother is the most important family member in my life of course and she was like a crazy second waver Freirean. At dinner parties after a couple glasses of wine, she'll corner any young women in the room and give us a lecture on the history of reproductive rights. So obviously that. She was bringing me to protest when I was tiny." (Rhiannon, Age 20).

**Rationales for Civic Action**

**A DEEP CONCERN FOR PEOPLE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES MOTIVATES MINORITIZED YOUTH TO DO CIVIC ACTION.**

Every participant articulated a desire to protect, empower, or enlighten other people as rationales for their civic acts. To begin, a desire to protect other people from experiencing the same life obstacles they had and a desire to teach others how to navigate similar obstacles was a
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key rationale for this data. For example, Ayla explained how they can work to prevent any other person from experiencing the pain they felt then they would do whatever was required.

"It feels like I have to. It just feels ... why would I continue to hide from myself and hide from my history when I could make it possible for no one else to feel the way that I've felt. And to make it possible for no one else to die, for no one else to experience grief that isn't natural. I mean grief is natural but grief that just comes from ridiculous circumstances. Why would I sit here and just let it happen and have this language and not want to end the pain for other people? I think that's why I choose to be an activist.” (Ayla, Age 20).

Additionally, many participants discussed feeling responsible to be a role model for other youth like themselves as a rationale.

To illustrate Dayonna described,

“I worked with these little girl scouts. They're like these little black girls and I got to be the Key Note speaker. That was so magical for me because I could see myself in all of these little girls. They were like 5 and 6 up until being seniors in high schools. So, I'm like yo it's like a bunch of little me’s, I can see myself in them. And so, I want to say that's probably one of the most important experiences I had. Because as you get older you’re really started to see what's important and you really start to see a lot of yourself in different people. And I think that that's really important. And just being able to talk to them and seeing how excited they get just be me talking and I'm like I'm not anybody. I'm just like you. I'm just a little Black girl.” (Dayonna, Age 20).

Likewise, participants also identified that helping other people and changing the mindsets of those inside and outside of their communities as a worthy cause to take civic action.
“I really think that people are worth it. And the things that we learn from other people. and that second of shared moment with other people. I think that it like I explained earlier about my identity and my background, I think that any sort of hole that I feel inside of not being able to identify with a certain thing is patched a little more with the experiences that I've had with really good people. (Haijar, Age, 20).

Lastly, every participant described a deep love for their community spaces such as community centers and youth spoken word programs. As a result, they took actions that would reflect positively on their communities as they wanted to represent their organizations well. Because they deeply cared about these spaces and the people they created the spaces with they were inclined to enhance these same spaces through participating in civic actions.

This focus on community also demonstrated an asset-based perspective of participants’ under-resourced communities. Participants described the assets in their communities and worked to sustain and expand "the good" they saw in their communities. Participants responded to the prevailing narrative of the underserved community as not enough by amplifying the good. Brittany remarked, "So I think a lot of times for me it's like civic action is just like keeping the good alive." Also, Nijahn described his work as seeking to "break the bucket mentality," which symbolizes a tendency of the community to hold itself down by not allowing people to excel, in his community and expose all the talent and positive things youth were doing in the same community.

Similarly, people were at the core of participants’ rationales for actions in that some participants chose to do civic action as a form of redemption. For example, Kenny explained how he regretted not confronting the racism and microaggressions he experienced as an African American male student in a predominantly white school. His regret inspired him to “do better” as
he said. Also, Nijahn shared a story about how he was kicked out of high school for smoking weed on the school premises, which lead to a spiral of negative actions that resulted in him being sent to the local teen center as punishment. The teen center was a catalyst in changing his life and in return he understood his activism as a part of his redemption from being labeled a troublemaker at school.

Furthermore, many participants named purpose or calling from a higher being as a rationale for their civic action; they felt they were chosen to be activist. So, they had a high amount of self-efficacy and argued because they can act then they should. Along with this "call" is the desire to be a bridge for the next generation of the youth activist. For example, Mohammed stated "I'll want a type of legacy that no man has ever had so I constantly try to leave that or to impart something to other people. Cause even when I'm dead it will still exist within them and if they impart that to somebody else, then I'm never dead. Similar Nijahn mentioned,

“...You want to be able to, cause other people to have to have their moment, we want to be able to comfort them and support them when they have their moment. I’m proud to be a part of the moment we live in. I'm proud to be at this in the moment that we're in now and I'm excited to guide those who are preparing for their moment.”

In closing, a key rationale for most participants that engaged in non-traditional, literary civic actions, was that poetic actions were motivated by feeling silenced and isolated in their families, schools, or communities prior to engaging with youth spoken word communities. Participants reported having a lot to say but being silenced by negativity or insecurities, but YSW provided an outlet and opportunity for them to develop as individuals.

“...Now I worked Hella fucking hard to work for this voice so now I want to put it in places so as exhausted as I may get. As tired as I may get in pain. I don't really care...
because I feel like I am, (this is going to sound pretentious) I try not be...I don't know I have something that the world needs, and I have the capabilities” (Ogechi, 19).

Thus, participants felt that because they did the work to develop their voices then they felt they had to share it with others to liberate themselves and others.

So far, this chapter has detailed the prevailing themes that emerged from the thematic analysis that employed grounded theory, inductive coding to organize similar chunks of transcription data and identify how participants understood of each code topic in relation to the research questions. Next, I explain the process of the poetic analysis, which was conducted with the same data and codes. The poetic analysis served to amplify participants voices and synthesize the thematic analysis of the transcripts to the most salient points through poetic representation. What follows is a description of the poetic analysis process and presentation of the research poems.
Meta Chapter Four: Poetic Analysis Findings

A critical poetic analysis was conducted following the thematic analysis that employed the process of analyzing the transcription data for poetic literary devices, resonance, and significant themes (Faulkner, 2009; Leavy, 2010; Prendergast, 2015). Words and phrases were highlighted in each individual transcription by hand that fit the poetic analysis criteria. Additionally, each word and phrase were then coded as poetic in QRS International NVivo Starter 11 to organize these phrases in a separate category to be used to write free versed, participant-voiced research poems. Several poems were created to align with the codes from the thematic analysis. The poetic analysis served as an analytic method for me as researcher to identify and interpret the meaning of participant interview responses individually and collectively as one data set.

The series of poems underwent multiple revisions to sharpen the language and images to be effective poetry. Each poem was workshopped in a creative writing collective with three other poets and analyzed for its poetic fidelity as art separate from the research project; participant names, the nature of the project, nor the raw transcription data were shared in this poetry collective. The purpose of this revision was to enhance the quality of this poetic analysis (Faulkner, 2009). In all arts-based research quality and trustworthiness of research is validated in part by the ability of the artistic product to stand alone as aesthetically effective art.

As a point of clarity, writing these research poems was foundational to the meaning making strategy employed in this research act. The project of creating the research poems was an exercise in synthesis and concision that illuminated the most salient points in the transcription data through an analytic interpretive lens. Through using poetry as a research tool, I interpreted
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the collective data set across all participant transcripts, within the contemporary climate of the Trump administration (2017-2018), as well as the national ethos of this subset of minoritized American youth coming of age in an era of social, economic, and political polarization that characterize attacks on the democratic ideal broadly and minoritized communities specifically. This research act and my identity as a poet-researcher rejected the tools that can sanction white supremacy and eurocentrism by selecting culturally specific research tools that participate in the activists’ tradition of broadening visibility and voice to communities that are most often silenced (Prendergast, 2015). In many ways traditional forms of youth civic action research remain complicit with white supremacists’ narratives of youth by employing the tools of the oppressors to describe and measure minoritized communities without acknowledging the limitations of those tools (Lorde, 1984). On the contrary, this artistic research act called out eurocentrism and white supremacy in form and content by offering the words, experiences, and meaning making tools of minoritized youth poets as new tools appropriate for this research task and mandate toward a more just democracy. Further, this research act fostered a public sharing of knowledge that was both accessible and comprehensible to all concerned persons; as opposed to harboring the findings for the academic audience.

Next, the poetic analysis from this research is presented as a series of research poems.
Poems on Tools, Terms, and Actions

“Martyr Work”

Worms and time will erode the fatty carcass of my existence
but the worn knuckles of my protest will be marble
I stand at front lines in the nudity of my own fear
I am not afraid to weaponize this body with vulnerability
To battle bullets with bare skin
My humanity will drip from my wounds
Reminding me this moment is finite
It is heavy armor, for strength this young
but I am not afraid to be mortar.
“Youth Activist’s Portrait”

You so bold
So much history tied up in teens
So many stories harbored, stole, and retold
Sojourner in your bones, no wonder in your soul
So Black, Black Panther Party, Black savior, Black Moses,
Harriet Hair cut
No knife
at wrist but labeled at risk like Atlas
Carry the hood, as if, heaven begat this
Survival is tactic

You so contemporary canvas
Canvassing at the doors of mediated screens asking for humanity
Like a bad flu, contagious and dangerous
Virus written in pages
that pronounce you victor not victim
Weaponized body like vixen
Dare to speak
Then be
So, action oriented
Everyday picketing
At white supremacist picket fences next to public housing
Say they can sale yo whole hood to yuppies but can’t commodify yo soul
Hell no, you won’t go!
Demand entrance
Smile then spit this nonconformist rhetoric
Build platforms like pulpits
Humble yet brilliant
Reach billions with retweets and hashtags
Make currency of questions asked
Altered mindsets
is the task
“The Solidarity Meeting”

The police force is invited to the urban teen center for a dialogue
I walk to this white man hiding behind his bronze badge
Look him in his red face with compassion and ask plainly why don’t you put your hands up?
   See what it feels like
   I ask, does fear hold up your forearm?
   Sweat begin to strangle your neck?
   Chest heave heavy, saving breath like a lay away purchase?
He grimaces, denies my request even though this is a solidarity meeting
He, too afraid of all this black boy mass in front of him
Can’t see I’m Gandhi in a leather beret in 1970 and King in Js in 2017.
“The Ecosystem of Social Media”

I didn’t cross a border to get here won’t pledge any allegiances to stay
Trying to stay connected
There are hammers in these keystrokes
Nails in each click
Are we destroying or building?
“On Digital Citizenship”

We are sharks in shallow waves
Can’t see nor smell water
Marine biologists analyze
Ascribe words to us and our living
Give us identities that sound sharp and coarse in our mouths
As we attempt to pronounce ourselves as they see us
“Protest as Performance”

Balled fist, sweaty brow, calloused feet
Words laced with shrapnel and first aid kits
Labored discussion to teach justice to old souls set in ways
Innovation on the block
Hello brigades and change
Displaying more mirrors than picket signs
Washing in self-awareness daily and stuffing empathy into the spaces between teeth so that when you speak it is clear you stand for humanity.
“On Activism”

I am dirty fingernails clawed at forgotten lawns
Like tectonic plates at hardwood dinner table
Shifting contexts
Knowing if I shift so does every other hinged door on this block
Activism is my right and blessing, to know my neighbor by name
Searching the tool shed and finding a mirror on the door
Me peering through these eyes into a cacophony of love masked as anger
I search still looking for tools that weaponize my protest of waking up as me today
Activism is scratching the rust from the saw and noticing how sturdy it still is
Although the blade is jagged
Activism is knowing what my war is and the necessity to sound an alarm
Activism is painting glue on the ceiling and putting a trampoline in the basket then inviting neighbors for a jump
Taking the corpses from my closet (dusty brown, decaying bodies, twisted mouths with deadbolts for lips) and sitting them on the side walk like jack-o-lanterns
Inviting neighbors for tea, cool-aid, and word play
Deep frying my issues and carving them open with a slender knife
Becoming fuller of self-certainty with each bite
Making rubber gloves from old poems and going to recycle all that trash on the lawn.
Poems on Community as Context

“The Happy Moments”

I’m from 12th and Brookland
Right by the court with the single metal ring, standing like a halo
Where I learned to pop a wheelie down open concrete, like rite of passage and ritual
See the aluminum pans filled with candied yams soaked with pride
The champion spades players sit regal on their plastic lawn chair thrones
Near the black top lot in the middle of our public housing complex
The one momma pays rent for all on her own
Hear the bouncing of masculinity; the making of manhood as boys hoop
Hand to rim, no net
Leon lets the bass blast from the trunk of his baby blue Cutlass Deville
Like we each have our own theme song
Shoulder shrug, play nonchalant, flash the pearly whites
I see the sun beaming down on us like we matter
and dream of how I’m building a ladder to help my community climb out of itself
A ladder of affirmation and amber colored wood graffitiied with our hopes and desires
If we climb we can get free enough to save ourselves
I’m burning the impurities with pure fuel cause anger don’t burn as hot and blue
as this love
“For Community Sake”

Don’t go to the rally unless you know your neighbor’s name
No point in marching if you are not building in your own community
How can you care about the nation if you don’t even care for the person who shares the block with you?
What roots grow close to your feet?
Who fed you?
Go care for them
Hold up that which built you strong and fearless.
Poems on Civic Identity Development

“Archival Activists”

Black bodies make damn good protest posters
No casket, leave the bloody pulp of flesh in full view of cameras
Emmett Till’s disfigured face left meaty and rotten on a platter
This print and copy campaign will rip you from youth’s sheets
Kill you in your own home where you loved earnestly and worked endlessly
Like Edris Cleaver, Huey P, Fred Hampton, all sound so bullet worthy
Names that slide easy off the tongue into megaphone
Like Treyvon Martin, Chris Gardner, Alton Sterling
Each generation has their black boy poster
For a movement for a movement for a movement yet and still
 some are called with destiny as pallbearers
The poets and prophets have so much in common
eating meager meals and harboring other people’s sorrows
They say you know when you’re still young enough to dream
Onlookers will give you affirmations like “leader” or “independent thinker”
You learn later that it’s a stamp that you are ready for slaughter but understand this as privilege
to go down in history to have young faces who never grew gray beards or had balding heads be the wisdom for the next generation it's romantic… almost… just almost

Romance will forget the women not afraid to be pulpit or graves at any moment knowing history will rob them of symbolism and instead carve her as mythic, as wisps of smoke, just like Sandra or attribute her strength to black magic like Assata remove hips, breast, womb, and the power of life and death from the movement, movement, movement
But this is no eulogy, it is hope stuffed tight between the ribs before crucifixion
Knowing with one pierce to the side love will run pure from flesh to feed the people and the soil
“On Validation”

I scribe eulogies for friends and welcomes for new babies, yet the earth rotates unwaveringly as we struggle to live here so I ask, does any of it matter? Does it matter that Brittany’s brother was murdered and they had the visual? Does it matter that his homegirl Neborah went missing and they had the rally? Does this blood and all these lives that line the pages of books overweight with my worry stacked like skyscrapers on my side of the bedroom matter?

It must
It must because it is their reason to wake up in the morning
Waking is radical when you sleep in a casket with your nose pressed tight against the suffocating fallacy that you don’t belong here in your own nation
They cry tears made of gasoline and breath fire
Reject my premise, say their very existence is proof

Mohammed, said his mother gave him a name that mattered so he, born in charcoal hue, would never wonder about worth

Dayonna, said her mother’s abandonment gave her rubber for skin to battle the abuse so these politicians’ slurs ain’t no match for her

Ogechi, said she’s ready for wars should the hood need a savior, enlisted, created the list herself

Ninel, spoke more like the dragon than the damsel
became her own hero first then wrote the lifeboat like scripture should we choose to follow

Kenny, said it was his hood, where he was never afraid but sure he belonged because he knew everyone’s name, played ball for days, yet spoke kinda white, had to dis assimilate himself daily after the school bell rang just to remember who he was and that he belonged there among cousins and dropouts though he was always more scholarship than bail bond money, he spits poems in prisons for that very reason

Thus, it matters
It must all matter
For them

I ask myself between all this cliché what to do with my shallow metaphor of the white girl that cares and works and gives and manages to survive so she can go back and empathize

Rhiannon, reminds me that in the capsule of space they’ve created together her absentee father’s Yakama is minor cause they have wars to win and no time to waste, campaigns to organize in the name of all they love

They tell me this is fearless work about survival
The cost is life
My job is to bear witness not to worry if it matters.
“Manufacturing Civic Identity”

There are pistons and pedals levers and pulleys in my spirit
Jerking weariness and exhaustion into knots smoothed out by purpose
Anger greases the axles and smooth moving pistols trudge forward
Fear gets lodged in the levers and slows my steady
Radical love jolts me upward
Thrusts me toward destiny.
“House of Cards”

Shatter to grow and leave the loose ends poking out like shards

Can’t fit all of me in this space

Cross dressing and praying/ I am global yet struggling to understand my local reality/ hunted by the fact that I think in English and all of my history is written in a dialect I can’t speak/ wanting to know me beyond stereotypes so I study/ wish it was as simple as sitting at the kitchen table of my consciousness and knowing/ meeting with grandmother and the ocean/ learning the salty truth about how I got here/ torn and tossed with the tide caught up in the lies of a generation who feels it’s free to choose/ I keep coming back to this question of if I’m Black/ even though I want it not to matter it must/ asking me to shuck and jive through microaggressions just to make my Black easier to sit next to in class/ be all Tyler Perry and Richard Pryor yet they say assimilation doesn’t sting / I’m still treating the wound, trying to use this community work as bandage for all that internalized oppression/ don’t want to speak about the systemic nature of my experience it feels too dirty (to discuss in public).
“Black Boy Joy”

Call me Greek God, Luke Cage, or urban legend
Carry the sun on my shoulder like Atlas
Bringing light to my community like Hebrew God
Like Black Tea leaves steamed over the struggle
Dare I smuggle luminosity to the cracks between concrete pull up the weeds and grow
Water and light shine in the dark places
Moving Earth so life can happen
We grow beneath these circumstances
We’ve been buried under
So, don’t blame us for the dirt on our feet
Poems on Rationale for Action

“Divinity”

It must be sacred
that my war is poetry
People are the altars
I am dutiful servant
Responsible to protect
“On Rationale”

I worked hella hard for this voice
For every injustice done to me
The hungry that clawed through tiredness
The conformity forced upon me
The war to wear my hijab
A body of moments
    I responded to in action and deed
Gave back and tightened up where the bolts were loose
    Went to the scene of the damage and repaired it for the children coming
We cannot leave them this same raggedy our fore parents left us
New moments are coming and ours will pass away
We will have no cream-colored boxes to store them beneath the earth
    No candles to light in their honor
Today is urgent with legacy.
“On Self Love”

Do not allow other people to suck up all your salvation
Sacrifice, but save enough for self
Count how many spoons you have to give each day
Do not digest too much ugly all at once, even if it slurps up easily
Salivate at your own sanity
Save one silver spoon for self, shine it until you can see your reflection in its bent next
Carry it in your pocket
So, you are never left hungry for yourself
“The Get High”

Can’t peroxide the blood stains out of this poem

Slam poets fight to the death with genetically inherited trauma

What you got?

The point is the points, put up or bleed

Got a poem that will bastardize your unborn children so fast you forget the baby daddy’s name before the first stanza

Got a poem that will show you the best depiction of black injustice and fear all laced with a razor-sharp edge of narcotic that will have you high off depression for days

Got a poem that will pull blood and tears from you like a drained sponge leave you empty and dry on the sink of your emotions

Got a poem that will put a barrel to your cranium and dare you to ask it any questions

This shit is real

Will go all the way back to 1619 and violate your black nappy ass ancestors and all they freedoms stole and lay their flesh bare for us to marvel at will tell you that black skin has always been commodity will rob you of self-worth and value and leave you filthy and hung out to dry for a few opinions stabbed into your potential as a performance poet holding you up to a bulletin board that says you matter for this 2 mins and 10 seconds

Got a poem that will rip your preadolescent body naked and leave you with a grown man’s memory of penetration will scare you and fuck you and leave yo momma dead on the steps of your living room floor

Call you a sucka bitch just for shock value

Got a poem that will nail you to a stage impaled on a microphone you will suffocate on grief until lungs collapse for applause

Leave you squiring in pain to pay for more venues

But the prophetic poets say sit down and write more honest
Stop creating from tragedy and find raw materials that will outlive death.
Meta Chapter Four Summary

In conclusion, this chapter has discussed the key findings of this research on the nation’s youth poet laureates. Findings were organized according to themes within the categories of a) Tools, Terms, and Actions, b) Context as Community, c) Civic Identity Development, and d) Rationale for Action. Data from semi-structured participant interviews as well as research poems resulting from a poetic analysis were presented. As typical of qualitative research extensive participant quotes from interview transcriptions and Wordles created in NVivo 11 were provided as evidence of the findings, followed by participant voice research poems created from the same transcripts. By using participants words this report amplified participant voices in the tradition of critical arts-based research methodologists.

The findings discussed demonstrate that this population of minoritized youth were civically active in diverse settings and contexts in ways that improved the local communities in which they lived and worked. This population viewed civic action as a personal and political project through with their diverse intersectional identities were mediated. Also, these findings prioritized people and interpersonal relationships as the rationale for youth’s civic actions as well as the primary mode of preparation for civic action. Together these findings recharacterize minoritized youth as civically active, politically adept, leaders in their communities. Research poems and participant direct quotes from the transcriptions worked together to demonstrate evidence of the findings and indicate the quality of this research. An in-depth interpretation and analysis of these findings for implications is provided in chapter five.
Chapter Five: Interpretation of Findings

The purpose of this research was to describe the ways in which minoritized youth were civically active and explore how they developed civic identities. This purpose served the broader goal to discover how to develop an engaged youth citizenry of minoritized youth in the contemporary moment of civic injustice evidenced by the privatization of public goods, most notably public schools as well as the subpar treatment of minoritized youth in American society. This research used poetic inquiry as an art based qualitative research methodology with semi-structured interviews with participants as data. This research identified minoritized youth as experts on their own lived experiences and thus amplified their experiences and civic work as one counternarrative to the prevailing idea that minoritized youth are civically and politically inept. Youth poets were identified in this study as an exemplar subset of minoritized youth to serve as participants for this research due to their demonstrated concern for civic issues in their spoken word performances.

The research was based on the following three research questions:

1. In what ways are youth poets ages 18-21 civically active and why?
2. How do youth poets develop a civic identity?
3. What role do schools, community centers, and digital contexts play in developing youth poets’ civic identities?

To synthesize the findings for this discussion, I used the systematic process of inductive coding in NVivo 11 to organize data. Then, I analyzed each code for the thematic meanings of participants. The research interpretations derived from the thematic and poetic analysis are discussed next in relation to relevant scholarly literature.
The Case for an Embodied Democracy

This research explored the civic actions of minoritized youth poets in search of the forms of civic actions they participated in and clarity on how they developed civic identities. The youth poet laureates served as one group of civically active and politically adept minoritized youth participants in this research. The findings of this research demonstrated evidence that supports an argument for a re-imagining of the American democratic ideal in the 21st century to be redefined as an embodied democracy.

The youth poet laureates of America are the physical manifestation of liberationism in the 21st century and as such represent the most significant contemporary example of a liberated minoritized youth population working toward a just democracy. They lead the dialectic with peers, teachers, and oppressors to demand the tangible enactment of democracy beyond what has yet to be accomplished. Youth poet laureates leverage 21st-century technologies as organizing tools, platforms, and access to broad audiences, and knowledge that they used to engage in and promote discourse on civic action that asserted a reckoning of their identities. This youth population embodies and extends critical theory and liberation by taking it to the streets.

America's youth poet laureates inhabit diverse, intersectional identities that position them as minoritized persons and based on the ways their identities politicize their life as citizens they demand visibility by yielding diverse forms of civic action. They engage in traditional and nontraditional civic actions that exemplify an embodied democracy capable of preparing an engaged youth citizenry of minoritized youth. This proposed form of democracy as embodied is characterized by a democracy that recognizes and reconciles black and brown bodies as central, not additive, to the American democratic ideal. It is achieved through critical self-awareness, authentic engagement in politically conscious communities, and mentorship.
Based on the findings of this research, I argue that an embodied democracy be employed for all citizens to advance a just democratic society. Central to this argument is that the concept of the American democracy is transformed from a narrow Eurocentric definition of citizenship that is complicit with white supremacy in rhetoric, policy, and treatment of minoritized persons. An embodied democracy makes visible all of America's diverse youth citizens. In this interpretation and discussion chapter, the findings of this research explain the necessity and benefits of an embodied democracy by employing the theoretical framework used in this research as an analytic and organization tool to demonstrate the logic of this argument for an embodied democracy.

**Democracy Defined**

To begin, the meaning of democracy as treated in this research and theoretical framework is discussed. Dewey’s (1916) explained, “A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men form perceiving the full import of their activity” (p. 93). Dewey's definition is employed in this research in that it mandates an associated living evidenced by mutual interest and the consideration of one individual's actions to that of another. The concern for others facilitates an environment in which barriers of race, class, and national territory that may inhibit or benefit one group disproportionately are identified and able to be negotiated. In Dewey's democracy, there is a clear call for deliberate engagement with others required to have a functional desirable society. For this research, democracy as associated living that extends
beyond a mere system of government is essential to building a just democratic society. Although democracy, as used in this research, prioritizes associated living among diverse persons, it acknowledges as Dewey did that the democratic government facilitates a way to achieve a desirable society.

Dewey (1916) provided criteria for the democratically constituted society that the youth poet laureates in this research embodied. Dewey's democratic criteria include a) numerous and varied points of shared common interests as a factor in social control and b) change in social habit through its continuous readjustment through meeting the new situations produced by varied intercourse. So as used in the analysis of this research the intercourse of diverse persons, namely minoritized youth with intersectional identities, was concerned with the common interests of advancing justice by demanding change in social habit. The civic actions they posed allowed them to adjust and demand society adjust to meet them more equitably in the politicized situations as minoritized youth.

The goal of the democratically constituted society is a functioning society in which all persons are recognized by the society and have their concerns considered. Dewey (1916) argued a political democracy is the best way to achieve the functional society. He offers democratic education as one tool to prepare the populace for engaged citizenship in the political democracy. As it exists, riddled with injustice created by histories of forced slavery, economic disparity, and policies that disenfranchise most non-white citizens, the American political democracy needs a mediating force to equitably distribute the democratic ideal.

In this research, when asked to define democracy America’s youth poet laureates responded with a call for justice. Democracy as a form of government that ensures equal representation and distribution of the material goods of society did not appeal to these youth
activists. They stated that they had never seen, experienced, or seen a true democracy lived out as they learned about it in school books. This research explored how to advance an equitable democracy, yet participants asked for equity not concerned fully with the democratic ideal. Yet their actions (the central focus of this research) exemplified Dewey’s democratic criteria.

In the theoretical framework for this research democracy is the ideal location for education void of societal injustices. This research employed liberationism to bridge the chasm inequity erects in democracy. Democracy as a system of government was difficult for participants to define and hard for them to connect with as an abstraction that manifests itself in societal injustices for Black, Brown, female, immigrant, and queer bodies. Yet participants worked as activists to improve society, yet their aggressive commitment to activism that expanded justice evidenced the core principles of democracy. They worked to raise awareness, garner resources, promote dialogue across lines of difference, and practiced organizing around mutual interests in community spaces. Though located in the personal necessity of survival their efforts served the grander democratic ideal.

Notably, the youth poet laureates did not demonstrate a desire to silence, hurt, or inflict injustice on others. Instead, they worked in their local communities toward a holistically inclusive society that rendered them able to access resources equitably. Moreover, their station as American citizens and immigrants living in the American context afforded them the opportunity, (though hard fought for) to yield the tools of civic action. Participants like Sharon, Rhiannon, and Nijahn were trained in skills related to the electoral process, connected to the democratic principle as capable of achieving their civic goals. For example, Rhiannon spoke about how she worked the polls to stop a piece of legislation from passing in her local district. Similarly, Nijahn spoke about how he led his peers in helping elect his counties first young, Black delegate for
office. This election was pivotal as both proof of Nijahn and other youth's power in the political process but also this future delegate's ability to advocate for other Black people in his role as an elected official. Thus, these examples prove a value and concern for the American democratic ideal although for these participants the rhetoric was not one for democracy but instead for justice. As used in this study true democracy is defined as operationalizing justice to serve all persons. Thus, the assumption of majority rule in a democracy is disrupted by the aims of justice and equitable distribution of the benefits of democracy.

Furthermore, this theoretical framework prioritized justice as an essential element of the democratic ideal. As it concerns this research, Dewey's (1916) conception of democracy is one that can be operationalized in education as the catalyst to self-definition and reformation of the society through the public-school project. The schoolhouse is a place where society's injustices can be sanctioned and repeated or challenged and rectified. The premise of individual choice tied into the democratic ideal allows schools to advance democracy fully, yet the inequalities riddled into the structural framework of society, and by design schools, limit possibilities. Which brings this research to liberationism as a tool to mediate democracy for a minoritized youth citizenry.

**Definition of Embodied Democracy**

The findings of this research lead me to argue that an embodied democracy can prepare an engaged youth citizenry of minoritized youth. To embody is to be an expression of or give a tangible or visible form to a concept. Democracy, as used this theoretical framework, is associated living among diverse people. An embodied democracy is a term I offer to reflect a version of the democratic ideal that recognizes and reconciles minoritized youth identities as central to the American democratic society. The minoritized youth poets in this research
embodied or became physical representations of Dewey's democratic criteria for the society through their actions and mindsets.

**Empathy as Evidence of an Embodied Democracy**

Dewey's criteria required numerous and varied points of shared common interests as a factor in social control. Participants in this research identified shared a common interest with others in their communities about silence and invisibility of their experiences to the prevailing narratives and positioned themselves to access social control by being vocal and an increased visibility. For example, Ayla was adamant about sharing the experiences of being a transgender, biracial youth in a predominately white town and family to build coalitions and strengthen shared interests in the idea of just acceptance of those identities. One way several participants did this was through weaponizing their bodies with vulnerability.

Participants in this research embodied the Dewey’s (1916) democratic criteria by enacting empathy and vulnerability as civic tools. Participants spoke about responding to violence with vulnerability; an embodied response that asked opponents to acknowledge their shared humanity as one way to build empathy across lines of difference capable of instigating coalitions. Freire (1972) noted that for a society “to glorify democracy and to silence the people is a farce” (p. 91). As a result, being vocal and vulnerable with what is shared aloud is one-way participants in this research embodied democracy through the liberationists tool of voice.

Empathy is the work of people in interconnected relationships of shared communities. Participants explained that listening to and sharing personal stores through poetry developed close interpersonal relationships that fostered empathy among and across different communities. Empathy was operationalized to instigate civic actions. This finding is supported by Nossle (2016) argument that to emotionally change an individual is what makes social change possible.
In this research, poetry writing in a community context emotionally changed participants in such a way that they took civic actions. They also used poetry as a tool of civic action and placed it in non-poetic spaces to raise awareness and foster empathy in others, notable people likely to oppose their social justice stances. Participants noted that spoken word performance placed in the non-poetic spaces created important moments to develop human empathy and solidarity. For instance, Ninel explained that she had witnessed poetry teach empathy well because it speaks to a person's emotions before they can rationalize it away.

Empathy developed an embodied democracy because it equipped participants to internalize the democratic ideal of being concerned for others. Participants experienced empathyproducing encounters in their local community centers, non-profit organizations, and youth spoken word. In these spaces, they shared personal narratives through poetry, community building, and mentorship. To develop empathy they learned critical self-awareness, to love themselves, then to radically love others' intersectional identities. They learned how to operationalize that love in the form of diverse civic actions. Similarly, Cornell West (1994) noted that justice is what love looks like in public. Love as a catalyst for action embodies empathy and uses it to fuel action. The type of love capable of transforming shared living spaces was evident in participants articulation of why they choose to do civic action. All participants attributed action to love: a love for self, a love for their mentors, a love for their communities, or a love for their home organizations.

A conception of an embodied democracy expands the democratic ideal to be more inclusive and practical for minoritized youth today. They see themselves as part in parcel with the society and in turn, all their work seeks to positively transform the society. The work of social uplift is done in collaboration with and in honor of the communities they are connected to.
Each participant identified that they worked to improve the lives of those they loved most for in their communities. Freire (1972) argued that the love of community makes dialogue possible when he noted, "If I do not love the world – if I do not love life- if I do not love people, I cannot enter into dialogue" (p. 90). Likewise, the participants in this research demonstrated a love for themselves, for life, and for the world through a deep concern for the improvement on their local communities. For example, Dayonna worked in her community going door to door inviting neighbors to community gatherings, donating food items, and beautifying public housing complexes with neighborhood children. In her interview, she explained the love she had for herself and her community as regenerative and recursive. One inspires the other and therefore she embodied a liberationist dialogic between the self and society that effectively allowed her to embody the democratic ideal of shared concern for her actions in association with the conditions of others in her community. Dialogue is crucial to liberationists praxis, which requires reflection and action together to transform the self and society.

Furthermore, inspiring empathy in others, especially across lines of difference prepared participants to participate in a broader dialogue with the society that evidences liberationists praxis.

**Collectivism in the Embodied Democracy**

Embodying an idea could be a singular individualistic act, but on the contrary, Dewey noted that in the democratic society individualism is merely a mask because all actions by the individual impact the society. Therefore, as people live in association with one another working toward mutual interest the commonalities of all persons must be in centralized. Participants in this research employed collectivism as a tool to enact an embodied democracy in which the democracy is inclusive of all and social uplift is a concern for all.
Youth-led communities in rejecting polarization and privatization through community organizing. Community as a prominent theme in this research suggested that when minoritized communities are attacked socially, physically, and politically through policy and rhetoric that targets them they bind together and garner a collective strength. This strength manifested in the training of youth workers to take civic actions that improved the lives of the local community while at the same time participating in a broader fight for a more pervasive equity and justice. The people specific to each community, both youth as well as mentors and other civic leaders, were at the forefront of developing an engaged community that held itself and its oppressors accountable.

Community as the context has been a historical conduit for youth activism (Ellis-Williams, 2007). Collective action among youth in spoken word spaces served as training grounds for participants in this research. Collectivism was very clearly implicated in the data suggesting that because youth participants learned activist strategies from their communities they returned to those same communities to teach others. Through community centers, nonprofit organizations, and school clubs, participants had access to expert training on social justice and civic processes that prepared them to participate in civic action effectively. For instance, Nijahn's participated in a series of workshops on how to lobby legislators held at the teen center he attended. Dayonna learned to organize community events. Kenny learned how to canvas and advocate for global justice. Rhiannon was trained as a poll worker and informant about local issues on the ballot. Ninel learned to network as a fundraising tool. These tools of traditional civic action are not innate skills nor are they formally taught in American public schools, thus the YSW space offered minoritized youth access to tools historically forbidden to them. These community spaces were essential to the civic identity development of youth because they
demonstrated to youth that they could take actions using their own agency as tools in the current moment. In this way, these centers became a type of civic center and alternative educative space in which civic interests and education of youth were prioritized and mobilization around civic issues was energized. Projects were youth-led and adults taught them how to access the tools needed based on the youths’ interest. As a result, youth to cared about these issues more.

**Citizenship in the Embodied Democracy**

Citizenship in the embodied democracy must be reimagined to include minoritized youth as central to the democratic society. For participants in this research, community membership came with responsibility, roles, and accountability. Similarly, Isikli (2015) defined traditional citizenship as a task and responsibility that indicates duties, responsibilities, and expectations from the state. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that participants in this research located their commitments as citizens in their local communities more so than with the state suggesting again that terms may be an impediment to fully capturing the robust nature of minoritized youth civic action. Through a constructionist, qualitative research design this study captured elements of minoritized youth citizenship that maybe other wised overlooked as non-civic.

Next, in an embodied democracy the role of the citizen broadly and the youth citizen specifically is reconditioned to recognize all persons as fully human through a citizenship mediated by politics. Citizenship inclusive of politics is what enables the embodied democracy to recognize first then serve as a tool of reconciliation for black and brown bodies. For people that live in marginalized bodies, the personal must be political because they must confront the historic and systemic barriers associated with their identities daily (West, 1993). Identities are prescriptive (Alcoff, 2006) and as a result, the actions against societal and historical oppression
becomes embodied. Also, personal, and civic identities can never be separated. In fact, each of the participant's identities informed the civic identity choices and actions they felt were permissible for them to yield. Thus, civic identity development and education must be personal and specifically connected to the holistic cultures and intersectional identities youth possess. This finding confirms Hope and Jagers (2014) argument that when educated on the broad structural inequities that exist African American youth were more civically active; this research expanded this finding by suggesting that civic education not only illuminate the structural inequities but also intentionally and accurately position youth experiences as central to unpacking those structural inequities. Because oppression is personal—its consequences though systemically structured have a profound negative impact on the physical body and psyche of the oppressed as well as the oppressor (Freire, 1972).

Thus, liberation of youth citizens in the democracy is achieved first by allowing youth citizens to name themselves as one element of social control in their own lives and society. Freire (1972) argued that in the fight for liberation the oppressed must name their own realities and conditions as evidence of being both autonomous and fully human. For example, participants in this research, preferred the term activism to describe their civic actions and activist to describe their acts as citizens. This finding suggests that the idea of an activist participating in activism is more culturally relevant for minoritized youth than normative civic action terminologies such as citizen engagement, civic engagement, civic duty, public service and others.

The activist is a term that conveys a social justice stance characterized by the vigorous action in pursuit of political or social change (Dittmar & Entin, 2010). This term is historically associated with many movements led by minoritized groups such as African Americans, women, and members of the LGTBQ+ community. Thus, this finding suggests that tools seeking to
measure civic actions void of activist terminology may be limited in capturing the data this study captured when allowing youth to self-identify as activists. Similarly, this finding confirms the work of scholars that call for culturally specific civic action research for minoritized youth that validates their unique civic identities as opposed to compare them to European American youth (Cohen, 2006; Kim & Sherman, 2006; Kirshner, Strobel, & Fernandez, 2003).

The activist identity as an archetype of the citizens calls upon the sociopolitical context, Boyte (1991) argued a politized citizen capable of being civically adept requires. Furthermore, activist as a term is different in shape and tone than civic action because civic action operates within a traditional, Eurocentric paradigm of society with a conception of the citizen and civic agent in American society that rationalizes white male, heterosexual identity as normative. Thus, minoritized youth participants viewed themselves as more activist in nature because they do not inhabit the bodies of the “normal” citizen in the American imagination. The terminology participants favored was significant because terms suggest who and what is visible in society. By perceiving themselves as activist they rebel against the politics of invisibility capable of silencing and erasure of their diverse identities.

Terms also have racial implications and value implications. The activist is a rebel and seen as civically disobedient as opposed to the civic actor who is typically seen as a protector of the civic status quo or civically obedient. This image of the normative citizen can participate in white supremacist, the Eurocentric tradition that adheres to racists, sexist paradigms that exclude non-white and non-male persons from civic discourse. Participants in this study rejected Eurocentric heteronormativity and used their activism as tool and weapon to respond to the silencing and invisibility inflicted on the communities with which they identified. Lastly, there is a certain amount of vanguard and mythic notoriety that is associated with the term activist which
could contribute to its use as well. Especially in artistic mediums led by minoritized persons such as hip-hop and graffiti art, the activist terminology is associated with rebellion against the status quo with which many youth movements identify (Cohen, 2006; Hill, 2009; Low, 2011; Petachuer, 2015).

Noteworthy is that in the normative American imagination activism has been criminalized. Now that this data has made these apparent that some minoritized youth characterized their citizenship through the activist identity inclusive measures and tools can be put in place to acknowledge youth activist as serving the democratic society. By understanding activist work as a civic action that upholds instead of jeopardizes the principles of a just democratic society, minoritized youth civic acts are made more visible and prescribe more value that positions their unique citizenship as essential to what it means to be a thinking, acting, fully human citizen in a democratic society.

Notions of citizenship and activism question the value of citizenship status to the civic identities of persons living and doing justice work in America. Ideas and terminology of citizenship status are challenging in this contemporary moment under the Trump administration when hate crimes and overt political injustices are being permitted against immigrant communities. Some participants in this research identified as immigrants and disputed the relevance of citizenship to their justice work. This idea relates to Pellegrino, Zenkov, and Martinez’s (2014) finding that youth poets express cultural notions of citizenship, which begs the question how do minoritized youth poets understand their roles as citizens? The definition and qualifications of the American citizen negatively impacted participants' discussion of the democratic ideal. For participants in this research, notions of citizenship status complicated their expression of concrete civic identities. For example, Haijar who identifies as an Afghan-Kurdish
American mentioned that the idea of citizenship in any context made her uncomfortable because it made her feel that it's a label that must be earned. As if being human is not enough to qualify for equitable treatment. To this point, an embodied democracy also includes immigrants living and working to improve the democratic society as valued and benefactors of a just democracy.

While not all citizens may view themselves as activists, as it concerns civic action among minoritized youth that serves to liberate this population for full inclusion in the democratic society, the activist terminology is a useful tool. Freire's (1972) dialogic for a transformation of the self and the society mandates a reflection and action, therefore, making relevant that all citizens working to advance liberation must take some form of action thus participate in activism.

Freire’s Dialogic in an Embodied Democracy

Freire (1972) argued that to exist fully we must dialogue; the dialogue is constituted by action and reflection addressed to the world. In turn, the liberation of the oppressed to be fully human in the democratic society requires they engage in dialogue that incorporates action and reflection together. The primary goal of this research study was to explore the ways in which minoritized youth poets were civically active in addition to the clear evidence of reflection provided by their poetry writing and performance.

The YPLs created platforms for dialogue where none existed and make platforms for their issue to be made visible where power holders denied access. For example, Ninel described how she was the poster child for her youth organization but they did not want her to share racially charged poems in board meetings with predominately European American, male
FROM THE STAGE TO THE STREETS: MINORITIZED YOUTH POETS’ CIVIC ACTIONS

audiences, still, she did it because she thought it was necessary for them to experience. Similarly, many participants discussed how they worked to create dialogues in their communities and in cross-cultural contexts to begin difficult conversations about human oppression and difference. Freirean (1972) liberationist theory argues for creating spaces for shared dialogue to in turn advance other actions in service of justice.

Youth spoken word space created platforms for true dialogue inclusive of reflection and action. The reflective act of poetry writing, reading critical scholarship on social justice issues, and engaging in conversations about these texts with peers and mentors was a regular practice of youth participants in their community centers. Additionally, the YPLs created platforms where none existed and make platforms for their issue to be made visible where power holders denied access. For example, Ninel described how she was the poster child for her youth organization but they did not want her to share racially charged poems in board meetings with predominately European American, male audiences. Still, she share the poems because she thought it was necessary for the audience to experience. Similarly, many participants discussed how they worked to create dialogues in their communities and in cross-cultural contexts to begin difficult conversations about human oppression and difference.

The purpose of the conversations, often instigated by poetry performance, was to raise awareness and inspire audiences to take other actions beyond the act of watching the performance. Thus, literary actions can be considered as a civic action that fulfills the action-reflection form of dialogue. YPLs were intentional about putting socially conscious poetry in non-poetic spaces to raise awareness and develop empathy in audiences. As Delgado and Stefancic (2000) noted awareness raising is an effective part of an expansive agenda towards justice. Further, by using poetry to raise awareness participants engaged in arts activism which
gives voice and visibility to the disenfranchised (Felshin, 1995; Ingalls, 2012). The people in the nonpoetic spaces such as corporate fundraisers, budget meetings, and policy meetings are likely to have never been exposed to participants personal narratives in this way. In this way the YSW space, allowed participants to embody democracy by rebelling against silencing minoritized youth. As a result, placement of the poetic in traditional civic spaces could awaken other people’s political unconsciousness in service of social justice (Hawkins & Giroux, 2012).

Youth poet laureate’s love of “the world and people” evidenced in their commitment to their local communities, enabled them to create and name the world through a dialogue with the world that liberated in alignment with Freire’s claim that “because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others” (p. 89). Participants noted that civic action was time consuming and difficult work. They were willing to do the work and were even cognizant of risks such as physical violence and even death. Participants understood their physical presence as temporal but their civic actions and the results of those actions to be longstanding. Nonetheless, they continued to act. The reward extended from feeling they were helping people and contributing positively to their communities, which points to the value of people to developing an engaged youth citizenry.

Also, liberationism is evident in this research in the nontraditional tools participants yielded as civic actions. Freire (1972) argued for conscientization as a precursor to liberation. These participants discussion of self-awareness, self-love, self-care, and being fully present in their under-served communities using asset-based lenses demonstrated a form of conscientization. Participants demonstrated learning about who they were, what they were capable of, and how to use those truths in service of community needs they viewed as urgent.
Furthermore, YPLs engaged in a dialogue with the society that moved from the community context to the broader society; that moved from the personal, local community to the public, politicized stage. This finding opposed the original assumption of this research that youth would extend from the performance into their home communities. The data demonstrated that participants took their personal home experiences and put them on a stage to be made public as civic act and opportunity for discourse. The associated living, they did in their communities was less performative. The stage was the place of the politicized civic act that allowed participants to dialogue with the society and to make visible to the society the lived experiences they faced daily. Freire (1972) articulated that this type of dialogue led by the oppressed for the public is not meant to be consumed by audiences for sport, but instead shared to create more opportunity for empathy and shared action that transforms society.

Types of Civic Action in Embodied Democracy

Embodied democracy allows youth to engage in a dialogic between the self and society that fosters nontraditional civic actions. This research expanded the prevailing narrative about minoritized youth civic actions by qualitatively analyzing the attitudes, ideas, wants, and desires of this youth population (Lopez, 2002). In doing so, this research found that minoritized youth were engaged in many forms of civic action and they had a clear, critical rationale for which actions they prioritized. For minoritized youths’ nontraditional civic actions such as self-care, self-love, and every day civic habits like intentionally building community were reported as a form of survival (Cohen, 2006). Thus, these acts did not have to be taught as they were requirements of living in racialized, gendered, and sexualized bodies. Yet framing nontraditional civic actions through a liberationists paradigm that values self-preservation was overtly taught as
a social justice tactic (Freire, 1972). For example, the act of waking up is not explicitly taught but the understanding of waking up as a rebellion against the society that threatens Black and Brown bodies with death daily in communities riddled with an influx of poverty and violence was taught to participants. While all participants did not describe their communities as violent, they were acutely aware that violence could easily be enacted upon them in many different spaces based on their racial or gendered identities.

Some participants limited engagement in traditional civic actions was an informed choice, not apathy or ignorance as some research may suggest. Historically European Americans have been able to more easily access and participate in electoral politics such as canvassing, voting, or working the polls. Participants mentioned electoral politics as one valid civic tool and equally they also spoke about their existence, self-care, and raising awareness by speaking their truths as forms of civic action; all of which offered a more embodied response to civic action that asserted being vocal, and visible unapologetically was a civic action because their minoritized identities politicized them in essential and specific ways.

Additionally, racially minoritized participants explained that they avoided some forms of civic action because they distrusted Eurocentric spaces and systems to protect them as people of color who understand historical and contemporary racial victimization as a condition of being non-white in America. Thus, this research disrupted the narrative that minoritized youth are disengaged because they may not be leaders in traditional civic actions by acknowledging that by choosing not to be engaged in those ways they are participating in a type of politics of survival (Cohen, 2006). Contrary to Cohen participants in this research did not engage in what Cohen termed “the politics of invisibility,” which she argued makes African American youth less visible, instead they applied a politic of survival characterized by being more visible and vocal
on alternative platforms. For example, creating counter-events, protests, or art to oppose potentially dangerous traditional civic platforms.

More so, this finding makes evident that because minoritized youth are in fact engaged in reflection and action in ways that call on their personal and political identities as essential, an embodied democracy can equip them as citizens because it makes accessible a holistically, culturally responsive definition of civic identity that includes their intersectional identities. By doing nontraditional civic actions minoritized youth disrupt passivity that allows them to fail. As well as the colorblind racism that systemically says youths’ identities as racialized, gendered, economically disenfranchised persons does not matter when teaching and learning. Instead, it calls on all the socio-political factors at play in youths’ lives and makes them visible and positions them as opportunities to do justice work. Furthermore, youth are a centralized as part of the reform strategy not peripheral. Freire makes clear, liberation is not done on the oppressed person’s behalf it is led by them in partnership with other stakeholders that choose to join. Even if they lack partners, the oppressed can continue with their own assets.

**Embodied Democracy and Digital Actions**

True liberation requires the oppressed yield their own tools and agency to respond to oppression, therefore for youth in the 21st century digital technologies offer one potentially powerful civic tool. Physical realities mediated by digital and media technologies are the lifeworld of youth today and consequently the context in which this research is positioned. Thus, it was essential that I invited participants to share how their civic actions engaged with technologies and for what uses.

Participants noted that social media as a tool had its place in the activist’s life, which often was to spread awareness, promote an event, or serve as a reference source for education
about civic issues. On the other hand, some participants identified that some civic goals required a return to physical, face to face interactions such as delivering food to neighbors in need. This finding correlated well with the research on youth civic action and social networking sites but expanded beyond what has been previously documented to include that youth’s own rationale and ability to assess the need for digital and physical actions.

There is an ongoing debate about the significance of the civic engagement youth participate in online and to what extent it can be considered real civic action due to its virtual nature. Miller (2013) contrasted the stereotype that millennials use technology for narcissistic personal promotion and entertainment; his survey study found that African American millennials ages 18-22 had a greater political knowledge than expected. Yet Miller also found that technology was linked to more breadth of information and less depth due to the subjective framing, peer sharing, and abbreviation of news in online environments where personal opinions are promoted more than facts. Participants in this research confirmed that they used social networking sites (SNSs) like Twitter to access most of their news through following other activists and reading friend’s retweets. Yet they also noted that Twitter is a first step in a process of continued research they do about topics of interest to them and their activism.

While the depth of political knowledge is a valuable measure of youth civic awareness, which may be considered one form of engagement, it does not fully describe youth’s civic agency or ability to embody democracy. Similarly, Lenzi, Vieno, Altoe, Scacchi, Perkins, Zukauskiene, and Santinello (2015) advocated for a theoretical model for linking the informational use of Facebook with civic competencies and intentions for civic action. They found that characteristics of (SNSs) make them suitable for promoting civic engagement through
awareness of local and global civic events. Likewise, the participants of this study did note that SNSs were most useful for promoting events and raising awareness about ideas.

YouTube and other SNSs are increasingly integral to the facilitation and organization around civic causes, but activists and scholars critique if youths “point and click” engagement through online viral campaigns, online canvassing, or news sharing constitutes genuine civic participation or if it is merely “slacktivism” (Mihailidi, Fincham, & Cohen, 2014; Walsh, 2012). Slacktivism is a fusion of the terms activism and slacker used to describe exerting little effort and support for a cause through public display usually online, that arguably achieves little change. Like the slacktivism argument, Vitak, Zube, Smock, Carr, Ellison, and Lampe (2011) found that young people's civic engagement online was somewhat superficial; actions that required greater commitments occurred less frequently than information gathering and sharing activities. Slacktivism does not achieve the goals of the embodied democracy because it allows youth to operate at the surface and superficial level without confronting their own personal identities and roles in the democracy as citizens.

In contrast, Kaufman (2016) argued slacktivism as a term is flawed because the youth it attempts to describe do not intend to be activist nor politicians; instead online activity is just one way to support the movements they find valuable and raise awareness. Walsh (2012) added that labeling youth as slacktivists is dismissive and demeaning to the innovative ways youth do engage online and thus transform the social and civic spheres in ways that do not register on the traditional radar. For example, online campaigns around civic issues have increased the public's knowledge of events and galvanized support and monetary resources for issues such as the Invisible Children campaign against war Lord Joseph Kony, raised millions of dollars for chronic diseases like Lou Gehrig’s Disease (ALS), and increased the visibility of the Standing Rock
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protests (Kauffman, 2016). Walsh also cautioned readers to consider that the Black Lives Matter movement began on a SNS and manifested into thousands of physically protests and legislative appeals. Even so, the participants in this research made a clear distinction about the time and place to post online and to show up in person; they distinguished which approach was best based on the urgency of the issue. For the participants in this research the immediacy of digital platforms was not a replacement for being present, serving, and working with people in their communities and with organizations to advance justice such as specialized local, nonprofit organizations. Participants overwhelmingly explained that because they cared about their own communities they went beyond digital action and worked to make an impact in the physical world as well, which is indicative of participants embrace of an embodied democracy that makes their physical presence essential.

While SNSs have been considered to empower civic possibilities, they have more commonly been found to serve youths’ need for connectivity, intimacy, and self-expression (Mihailidi et al., 2014). This finding emphasized that SNSs are mostly a tool of dialogue and communication, while valuable, it remains communicative and does not necessarily achieve change. This reality drives this research to conclude that dialogue as verbalism alone, is not enough alone to combat oppression. Participants expressed a desire for physical presence with people in real-world contexts to build coalitions, community, and develop empathy that can more effectively foster lasting change. All of which is illustrative of the embodied democracy argued for here.

At the same time, while SNS may distance youth from the activism it does achieve one element of democratic criteria because digital media democratizes social control of the narratives and images presented about the oppressed. It allows the oppressed to name present their own
narratives in their own voices to the public in a way that adds an often-silenced voice to the discourse that may not otherwise be heard. For example, Jolie explained how she learned about critical race theory and white supremacy through social media. Topics that her middle class, European American community did not expose her to.

Additionally, Dominique explained that Twitter has allowed Black women to own their representation and call out oppression targeted at them through social networking. The presentation of the body via social media sites acts as a mirror and serves as an amplification of the embodiment done on mental and physical levels in an embodied democracy. Similarly, making the private, personal, and political nature of the embodied democracy public is one form of reflection in Freire's (1972) model of dialogue but the passive nature limits its ability to serve as action. In conclusion, digital actions are tools of citizens in an embodied democracy to engage in conversation and re-present their embodiment of democratic principles but used singularly as the civic action is limited in its ability to transform society.
Contesting the Continuum of Civic Action

Youth participants could decide which tools would best serve the needs of a specific civic goal. Noteworthy is that participants engaged in a wide variety of types of actions including those related to traditional electoral politics as well as the nontraditional acts of self-care. Participants in this research employed a creative yielding of both the traditional and nontraditional tools of civic action. As a result, this data demonstrates that action towards a just democracy requires the public march, the poem, and the political campaign to collaborate. Sherrod (2003) argued for a conception of youth civic action as a continuum.

The findings of this research contrast with the notion of a continuum and are more illustrative of minoritized youth civic action as cyclical. A visual representation of this idea presents all the civic actions identified in this research as a circle to illustrate that this data had
with no extremes or hierarchical order to civic actions because the significance and relevance of each type of action are prioritized based on the individual youth's rationale of the specific action. For example, Boyte (1991) argued that service acts such as tutoring are not adequate as civic actions, but participants in this research explained that a service act like tutoring done to rectify the injustice of illiteracy in an educationally disenfranchised community is a civic action capable of transforming society. The same is true of self-care as civic action, void of a clear critical rationale founded in the socio-political and historical context, self-care does little to advance justice. This research confirmed Cohen’s (2006) findings that minoritized youth participate in nontraditional civic actions but extended that finding to clarify that youth must be critically aware of the rationale behind their actions for them to serve as civic actions. Void of the participant’s critical understanding and intention behind their everyday civic habits not much is achieved. In conclusion, the action itself is equally as important as the contextualization of the action.

Additionally, in an embodied democracy critical self-awareness is central, repetitive, and regenerative. The citizen in this model must constantly reflect on how the self as citizen engages with issues in the society, interprets justice, and perpetuates violence and bias on others. The recursive dialogue between the self and the society that Freire (1972) championed is what enables just action to continue without creating new oppressors and oppressed groups. Self-reflection is both the starting place and the ending place for civic action in an embodied democracy, thereby making civic identity development forever unfinished.
How to Prepare Youth for an Embodied Democracy

Up to this point, an embodied democracy has been identified, defined, and its benefits have been clarified. Now, this analysis offers ways in which to effectively prepare minoritized youth to access the embodied democracy.

This research found that oppressed living conditions can present youth with the ability to respond to civic injustices in civically empowered ways. The participants of this research did not allow their marginalization to stunt their civic action but instead analyzed the injustice responsible and identified ways to use their skill sets to respond. For example, Nijahn’s lack of access to adequate transportation to school taught him that it took extreme effort on his part to excel. He took personal responsibility to respond to the systemic inadequacies of poor and nonexistent transportation in his community. Likewise, Dayonna being doubted by educators at her school conversely motivated her to excel beyond their expectations. The point is not to excuse the puppeteers of injustice, but to illuminate the ingenuity and resiliency minoritized youth demonstrate in the face of such injustices. Furthermore, Cohen (2006) argued that researchers cannot begin to understand minoritized youth political engagement until they examine and contend with the structural factors of discrimination, marginalization, impoverishment, and incarceration that disproportionately affect them. This research added that youth do not need researchers or educators to inform them of these realities because they are keenly aware of them. In no way does this excuse the systems that create such oppression but the participants of this study model one engaged response to oppression. By going through the oppression that positions them as minoritized youth, participants were prepared to yield an embodied democracy because they used their struggle as fuel to respond to oppression.
Consequently, adults that work with minoritized youth can help youth view their life obstacles as opportunities to develop resiliency capable of combating those same injustices.

One critique of this argument is that black and brown bodies have always historically been tasked with paying the penalty for the oppression forced upon them and if an embodied democracy attempts to reconcile their identities with the democratic ideal this burden should be lifted. While valid, it must be noted that true liberation is the task of the oppressed. Oppressors will not and truly cannot grant liberation to the oppressed without offering a newly fitted form of oppression. Acknowledging that injustice shapes the structures of the society is what enables those invisible structures to be identified and dismantled fully, unfortunately, this charge must be led by the oppressed (whom can see it most clearly). This argument for resiliency developed while living under oppression honors the longstanding ingenuity of the oppressed that has allowed them to survive and asks them to use it in service of their own liberation.

An additional tool to prepare youth to yield an engaged democracy is liberationist pedagogy that centralizes youth leadership and adult-to-youth mentorship. Participants discussed mentoring relationships as essentially responsible for their civic identity development. Their mentors spent one on one time with them in dialogue and interpersonal community building as liberationists tools to teach them. The participants’ mentors engaged youth, were concerned about who they were as people, and used cultural and historically relevant texts (online resources, books, as well as lived experience) to teach.

Thus, teaching in this research took a new shape and the traditional role of the teacher was disrupted and replaced with a mentor that was more of a mother than an instructor. The participants’ mentors interrogated their pain and prepared them to respond with their own resources. For example, Dayonna explained how her mentor, Momma D, taught her to be a better
person, which prepared her to be a better activist. This points to the role of the teacher shifting from content specific expert to someone concerned with the development of the whole student. Likewise, Dewey’s (1916) conception of democratic education as growth is achieved in this model; the student grows as citizen and scholar.

Liberationism makes visible injustice and equips the minoritized persons of society to respond. Freire (1972) argued that education can be the device that equips all persons to use self-agency to develop critically informed self-efficacy in response to the structural disenfranchisement of the oppressed. Freire’s model allows the oppressed to identify within themselves the justice tools at their disposal. In this research youth experienced this liberationist pedagogy outside of school spaces that prepared them to do civic action. So, the community effect was recursive and regenerative.

Calling on Boyte’s (1991) politicized citizen that is aware of the history and the contemporary political climate and how the teacher’s many identities exist within those climates, I propose a conception of the teacher as citizen-teacher to prepare youth to embody democracy. The teacher part of the citizen-teacher calls on hooks (1994) conception of teaching as an act of liberation; so not only is the teacher critically aware she also is equipped to advance liberation in her response to the history and current climates. Thus, in this model teaching is fully understood as a political act with the responsibility of promoting justice through the educational experiences of all learners. This citizen-teacher model asks the teacher to view herself as first a citizen responsible for the civic identity development of all learners.

Citizen-teachers will then facilitate a holistic, cultural civic identity development. This terminology attempts to acknowledge that concepts of culture have become narrowly equated with race and linguistic diversity, which implicates citizenship status. For example, Ladson-
Billings (1994) “culturally relevant pedagogy” and Gay’s (2010) “culturally responsive pedagogy” and other scholars “culturally reflective, sensitive” and many other terms highlight a focus on racial and linguistic identity in pedagogy and instruction. While race and language remain central in understanding civic identity, since we live in a society that is racially unjust by design, race is not the only factor relevant to civic identity development. Additionally, intersectionality among race and other identities such as socio-economic status, nation of origin, gender, and sexual orientation, function together to inform how participants in this research developed their civic identities and the civic actions they took. This finding expanded Ellis-Wille’s (2007) finding that intersectionality may be one reason for a decline in African American youth civic action since the Civil Rights Movement; youth have more than one identity to which they respond civically. Participants in this research used their intersectionality as a rationale to participate in multiple forms of civic action on diverse issues. As a result, educators striving toward democratic education using liberation as a vehicle must welcome and analyze all of youth’s intersectional identities.

Thus, citizen-teachers in partnership with other citizens in the community must help youth learn the socio-political context through interpersonal relationships and training to prepare them for this task using a liberationist pedagogy to allow youth to lead in ways that best serve youths’ interests and needs. When youth are positioned as leaders in their own civic education and education is offered as one tool to respond to oppression, civic identities are also strengthened. For example, Mohammed discussed feeling that his presence was deeply valued when he led his after-school poetry students in an affirmation circle in which everyone gave positive praise to someone in the circle. Mohammed explained how one of his students said he wanted to thank him for just being there for him. Mohammed shared this story as one example of
the impact of his civic action. A youth-led affirmation circle is one pedagogic tool found in this data to be effective at developing civic identities and efficacy among minoritized youth. Scholarly activities of reading, writing, analyzing, and having critical dialogue are key pedagogic tools of the YSW spaces when used intentionally for this purpose can adequately prepare youth citizens. The personal, culturally relevant pedagogies that acknowledged youth intersectionality can be one lesson to educators from this research.

Next, this study found that interpersonal relationships with other people in real-world contexts had the greatest positive impact on participants civic identity development for an embodied democracy. This aligned with the developmental theory that noted that children are socialized into their society by watching and behaving like other people in their lives (Delgado & Sensoy, 2012). As it concerns civic identity specifically, which as Boyte (2008) argued, requires an in-depth understanding of the socio-political contexts of where an action takes place as well as how the individual moves in the socially negotiated world, the mentorship of older adults was key in the formation of a strong civic identity.

The parental roles performed by participants’ biological parents, teachers, and mentors served as a significant factor in developing youth civic identity development. Parental figures served as guides in participants’ lives leading them along a path of self-discovery as well as explicitly teaching youth the politicized history of their own communities and the histories of people that share their marginalized identities. An additional explanation is that most, but not all, participants came from families that were civically active. The significance of this finding is that youth compiled civic identities from multiple youth-to-adult relationships as opposed to merely arriving at a civic identity or finding isolated resources for civic identity development. The key here is that people are essential to the development of youth civic identity. Youth must see civic
action and character modeled up close and personal by people they respect and value to develop their own civic identities. The interpersonal nature of the relationships that effectively developed civic identity in this research, supports the argument for an embodied democracy because civic identity development centralizes the relationship of the self to the society. Embodied democracy reframes the self (especially for minority youth) as integral to the society. When minoritize youth understand themselves as closely connected to the society, through deep interpersonal relationships, they are eager to serve as change agents in the society.

Next, a significant tool from this data to prepare youth to yield an embodied democracy is accepting civic identity development as a recursive process. Participants' civic identity development was unfinished because they were constantly learning new knowledge about who they were, and which issues concerned them. This theme is a prevalent reality of doing social justice work; all persons must be critically aware of their own identity, bias, and the socio-political context prior to engaging in activities related to social justice (hooks, 1994; Sensoy & Delgado, 2012). This is significant because youth are especially in flux and continually adding and learning about themselves but YSW allowed participants to delve into their lived experiences and granted permission to continually reinvent the self through a recursive process. As a result, an embodied democracy requires room to grow. As Dewey (1916) argued growth is evidence of true learning and the cornerstone of the democratic society – one capable of changing to meet the needs of diverse mutual interests. As youth citizens develop, flourish, and grow so does the society in an embodied democracy.

Lastly, preparing youth for an embodied democracy requires membership in a close-knit community. In this research, a strong sense of belonging to a community motivated minoritized youth to do civic action. Dewey (1916) argued that the terms community and society when
considering the democratic society are ambiguous synonyms. A society is many communities. Participants identified their local neighborhoods as strong sources of community. They demonstrated a very clear asset-based view of their underserved communities. Nijahn described that although his community was flawed he wanted to be present in his community and use his own resources to make it better. Also, Kenny mentioned that while some violence was apparent in his community, he felt safe and was never afraid to be among his community members. This research suggested an asset-based view of underserved communities is needed to effectively prepare minoritized youth as citizens. The rhetoric of "at risk," "underprivileged", and "minority" needs to be replaced with asset-based mindsets, language, and pedagogies to effectively prepare minoritized youth as citizens.

Art making is one effective tool to develop critically aware communities that can foster civic identity development that prepares youth to act in the embodied democracy. Most participants noted that joining a YSW community was pivotal to how they understood civic issues and their roles as activists. The YSW communities in this research in which youth practiced poetry writing confirmed Hocking's (2010) assertion that arts can be taught as a means of preparing youth to become actors for whatever causes they want to confront through developing the habits and skills of freedom and self-determination, which allow them to imagine a different and better world (p.55). Consequently, poetry writing is a process that fostered the mindsets that allowed participants to engage in civic action later; yet the art-making process was also beneficial for the self-development of the individual student in the present moment (Hocking, 2010; Nossle, 2016).

Also, noteworthy is that participants understood digital platforms such as social networking sites as a location for community building. For example, Jolie stated that she first
engaged with ideas related to social justice online through Tumblr and from there found her way to the YSW community. Similarly, Ayla identified race and gender-specific communities online when none existed in Ayla's physical community. This finding further confirmed youth's use of SNSs as a location for connectivity (Mihailidi et al., 2014). This finding is complicated by the fact that several participants noted that "call out culture" in online communities can often result in the detrimental promotion of hatred, bias, and unproductive name calling. To develop purposeful communities online youth must be trained in democratic discourse and critical self-awareness, as well as be able to acutely distinguish facts from fake news (Hobbs, 2011; Ribble, 2015).

**Risks of an Embodied Democracy**

The benefits of an embodied democracy, the types of actions possible within it, and how to prepare youth for such action in the embodied democracy have been made apparent. While an embodied democracy can advance an engaged minoritized youth citizenry, it is important to note that this model is not without risks. This section will analyze the potential risks and possible responses in the embodied democracy.

One risk of an embodied democracy is that seeing oneself as the embodiment of democracy caused participants to narrowly focus on their social justice actions in ways that made it challenging to give adequate time to other priorities. Except for Denver, all the host YSW spaces did not offer tangible resources like money for living expenses or tuition assistance. They offered youth titles such as youth poet laureate or slam champion, as a result, youth had to balance civic actions while also sustaining their livelihoods. This factor limited the time some participants could spend on their civic actions. While sustaining one's day to day living needs is a basic requirement of adulthood, it is significant here because in some cases these youths' civic
actions limited the time they could give to their academics and jobs. Participants felt responsible to their communities and therefore committed a lot of time to their poetry and other efforts but acknowledged that once they left high school and their parents' homes sustainability became a real obstacle. When youth are asked to put their physical bodies, mental and emotional capacities on the front line for social justice, other sectors of their lives are affected.

Secondly, in an embodied democracy the lives and bodies of minoritized youth can be very real casualties. Several participants discussed their willingness to give everything to advance social justice, even their lives. A theme of martyrdom literally or just working each day to the point of exhaustion was discussed as a necessary fact of the activist life and perhaps even an expectation in social justice YSW spaces. This is problematic if is not contrasted with the willingness to rest or participate in critical self-care that many participants mentioned. Without self-care, acceptance of martyrdom as tenant of youth activism is fatalistic in a way that perhaps unintentionally achieves similar goals as the oppressive forces that seek to silence, disenfranchise, or murder minoritized youth. A dead activist does little for the cause except become memorialized as a symbol of the movement. Symbolism achieves little beyond of the affective.

Lastly, an embodied democracy, which makes visible the black and brown bodies of minoritized youth can risk promoting youth trauma as merely performative. Black trauma was reported to be a challenge, barrier, and mediator to the types of actions participants felt were accessible in YSW spaces. Some participants mentioned that the ethos of YSW can glorify traumatic life events such as rape, death, or attempted suicides. Participants explained that poems eloquently describing these life events tend to earn more applaud, points, and notoriety in YSW spaces. Weinstein and West (2012) cautioned audiences and organizations not to create a culture
that glorifies the pain of young people. Participants in this research expanded this point, by specifically identifying that Black trauma has been commodified in YSW spaces that mimic the same trend in television and social media. Dominique stated, “Black trauma sales, it really does.” Similarly, Mohammed explained that he made an intentional choice to stop writing about Black male death because he did not want to continue to create from a place of trauma. Participants discussed the effects of a celebrating trauma as becoming stuck in their own pain or the residual pain of their friends through poetry sharing. This environment risks youth being unable to move toward complete healing. This finding validated Weinstein and West’s (2012) critique of youth YSW spaces that asked organization leaders to contend for the negative social issues youth express in their poems. Further, they argue that someone needs to be accountable to get these youths the social and psychological treatment they need to become healthy adults beyond the therapeutics of performance and public speaking.

These risks can be addressed, and the benefits of an embodied democracy preserved through the development of critically accountable communities. Dewey (1916) argued that widening the area of shared concerns and the liberation of a greater diversity of personal capacities, which characterize a democracy requires a deliberate effort to sustain and extend (p. 93). Therefore, a critically accountable community that utilizes the tenets of political citizenship to identify and call out impediments to the embodied democracy can protect it against risks.

Participants in this research felt peer-to-peer and adult-to-youth accountability in the community context challenged them to continually grow as both artists and activists. Critical awareness and inclusive mindsets that allow youth to speak and think freely are mandatory for effective accountability in the community. Accountability manifested as mentors challenged youth to work harder, explore their own privileges that sanction injustice towards others, and
tough conversations with their peers when they made mistakes. For example, Ogechi explained how she learned a lot from a transgendered friend that publicly acknowledged gender bias in a womanist article that Ogechi published online. The friend acknowledged the error, engaged in a challenging conversation about difference, and educated Ogechi on her bias. Ogechi stated that this was a necessary and productive experience for her own development as a womanist and activist. Accountable communities effectively manage the risks of an embodied democracy by recursively returning to the interests of all persons in the associated living space and evaluating their concerns (Dewey, 1916). Additionally, the continuous, regenerative dialogue (reflection and action) between the self and the society had among community members inhibits new forms of oppression from being introduced.

A critically accountable community as a location of and mediator for the risks of an embodied democracy is significant because today's traditional public classrooms are not communities in the way participants defined community in this research. Many public schools in America today have structures that foster competition, conformity, and mindless efficiency (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Not to mention that many public schools in urban cities are physically structured to resemble prisons and assembly lines (Cuban, 1993; Darling-Hammond, 2010). To combat these forces and adequately prepare youth that embodies democracy, educators are tasked to make students feel like they are in a community, not a prison when they enter school environments. The type of community this research described went beyond pleasantries toward inclusivity, critical accountability, and calling each other out through respectful concern for one another. When youth felt valued, safe, and heard they, in turn, contributed to and protected the accountable communities to which they belonged.
Risks of a Disembodied Democracy

Finally, void of an embodied democracy minoritized youths are left to continue a fragmented existence in a disembodied democracy that sustains their oppression. Minoritized people, and youth specifically lack the social, political, and economic power that limits their life prospects while sustaining the wealth and prosperity of the oppressor. In this system, minoritized identities are marginalized to centralize someone else and by nature of being different have no access to the full benefits of the democratic society. Freire (1972) argued that the marginal existence is inhumane. The analysis of this research adds that the disembodied democracy is merely rhetorical and stoic. In it democracy becomes the form of governing disassociated from the daily lives of citizens that participants described learning about in history textbooks; its usefulness limited to those textbooks lying dormant on classroom shelves.

In a disembodied democracy minoritized youth experience a disembodiment that compartmentalizes their identities in ways that segregate the mind from the body. For example, the student in a classroom is made a passive repository of teacher knowledge and the lived experiences of their racialized bodies are compartmentalized as irrelevant to the education. Intellectualism void of practicality operates without the human body and for minoritized populations thereby becomes useless to their daily task to survive in bodies afflicted with physical and ontological violence. The minoritized are silenced through automation and tools that foster efficiency void of critical thinking. Silencing aids in constructing a politics of invisibility (Cohen, 2010) that erases minoritized identities from the functioning of the democratic society and in turn is complicit with white supremacy as normal and non-white identity as less than human; less worthy to yield and inform democracy.
In conclusion, in a disembodied democracy, like the one most minoritized youth experience today, what appears as disengagement in civic action is more accurately an evidence of a disembodied democracy that has been offered to them by the oppressor. An embodied democracy, on the other hand, centralizes minoritized youth identity as central, not peripheral, to the liberation strategy to achieve a just democratic society.

Summary of Argument for Embodied Democracy

The analysis of this dissertation study on minoritized youth civic actions and identities offers the conception of an embodied democracy as necessary to develop an engaged minoritized youth citizenry for the 21st century. Dewey’s (1916) notion of democracy as associated living of conjoint communicated experience with concern for mutual interest was employed to define the how embodiment fulfills the criteria for the democratically constituted society. Then embodied democracy as term and model was presented through a liberationist lens that recognized the politicized citizen as fully human and central to the democratic society. Significant is that the embodied democracy was explained as functioning in dialogue with the society and thus served collectivism and disrupted individualized embodiment, which is capable of isolation and furthering oppression.

The new tools and terminology made possible by the embodied democracy were discussed to redefine the civic actor and citizen as critically conscious activists participating in social justice work. Participants’ use of Freirean dialogue characterized by reflection and action were analyzed to explicate how this data countered the assumption of this research design that the participants went from the performance stage to the streets to demonstrate that they traversed
the dialogic by starting with their home communities (streets) and re-presenting their experiences on the stage.

Lastly, the tools of liberationists pedagogy, student-centered mentorship, and the development of interpersonal community relationships were presented as tools to prepare an embodied democracy that activates youth citizenry. The risks of an embodied democracy were analyzed and argued to be countered by critically accountable communities.

Critical Poetic Inquiry as Culturally Responsive Methodology

Next, I argue that the critical poetic inquiry methodology employed in this research is a culturally relevant methodology that dismantled oppression in the research activities and amplified the voices of minoritized youth through producing a counter-narrative in form and content. First, the theoretical framework's connection to the methodological paradigms employed in this research are explained to clarify the ways in which it is culturally relevant. Then, each part of the poetic inquiry construction is discussed in relation to elements of the theoretical framework as evidence of this method's amplification of counter-narratives.

**Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

The theoretical framework used to design this research exists on a plane above the methodological paradigms that guided the specific tools of the data collection and analysis. Dewey’s (1916) democratic education for service in developing citizens for the democratically constituted society is improved upon by Freire’s (1972) call for liberationism that recognizes the oppressed as fully human thus capable of being full citizens in the democracy through liberation achieved in part by a dialogic of reflection and action. Then for this specific research topic of minoritized youth civic identity and action, Boyte’s (1991) politicized citizen is employed to position youth as citizens in the present moment, not in preparation, for engaged citizenship in
the 21st century. This framework allowed for the research design to utilize critical race theory, constructionism, and poetic inquiry to develop a method that was culturally relevant and capable of effectively amplifying minoritized youths’ counter stories. The theoretical framework hovers over the methodological paradigms to produce a double planned theoretical framework that includes the methodological tools.

Figure 3 Theoretical Framework & Methodology Diagram

First, critical race theory links to Freire's call for the oppressed to be fully human by dismantling the oppressed to oppressor power differential. The notion of the researcher as positivist, objective knower projects violence upon the participant as merely subject or informant (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Freire (1972) argued, "one cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program, which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding" (p. 95). This research study considered the research act as a political program,
which critical theorists acknowledge is a decidedly political for researchers of color especially (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Thus, in the political act of researching the objective, positivist researcher engages in the oppression of the participants by silencing them and yielding control of the reality that is presented about their lives. On the contrary, this dissertation research rejected this notion and instead embraced critical race theory as a tool to position me as a participant in the relationship with the topic of research and the research participants as co-constructors of meaning through poetic inquiry.

Constructionism (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) as a paradigm capable of allowing the researcher and participant to engage in a collaborative meaning making was evidenced through critical poetic inquiry process and product. Prendergast (2015) articulated the power of poetic inquiry to be a culturally relevant research tool when she wrote, “Critical poetic inquiry invites us to engage as active witnesses within our research sites, as witnesses standing beside participants in their search for justice, recognition, healing, and a better life” (p. 683). My positionality as African American woman, researcher, and poet allowed me to expand on the critical poetic inquirer as a witness and join my participants fully as a participant in search of meaning about minoritized youth civic action and identity. For example, analytic process of poetic inquiry served as a vehicle for me to write through my own bias and assumptions in the data to arrive at an accurate, participant-voiced re-presentation of the findings through the creation of research poems.

Illustrative of this point is my initial search for the meaning of civic action and identity beyond the poetry performance and writing of participants. I probed for them to tell me what else besides the poetry writing act was relevant but in analyzing the data of this research and writing through the themes in the transcripts it was overwhelmingly clear that the poem was essential to
the protest and politics of this minoritized youth populations’ civic identity. The poems “On Validation,” “Youth Activist’s Portrait,” and “Rationale for Action” evidence the words and sentiment of participants that their poetry was a civic tool. In writing through my own bias towards this reality, I identified myself as a subjective participant in this search for meaning. The multi-vocal perspectives captured in the shifts between first person and third person points of views in the poems make visible my presence as a researcher making meaning alongside participants. As a result, the counter-narrative that is established in the research poems are more accurate than any tool that cloaks the researcher in anonymity.

Furthermore, the analytic process of poetry writing espouses a culturally relevant methodology that fulfills liberationism because it became a type of dialogic between myself as a researcher and the data, as well as myself and the society in which the research exists and responds. In these dialogues participant perspectives and ability to name their realities were amplified through the data because all the images, metaphors, and themes in the poetry are mirrored from the data. Next, the writing act became a form of action in response to the analytic reflection done in data analysis thus, critical poetic inquiry fulfills the action-reflection paring in Freirean dialogue and serves to illustrate participants own liberationist acts. In this way, poetic inquiry does not constitute cultural invasion because it makes evident participant cultural ways of knowing, through poetic processing and product.

Counter-narrative as tenant of critical race theory is apparent in both the topic of the poems (minoritized youths’ own perceptions of their civic identities and actions) and in the form of the poem itself. Poetry is not a typically accepted form of scholarship but as a graduate student in a traditional educational research department, I had to demonstrate my ability to analyze data effectively through thematic analysis and as a critical qualitative researcher also find a tool to
elucidate my own positionality and ethnic epistemological claims (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Critical poetic inquiry situated through liberationists and critical race theory allowed me to position myself and my participants as capable of naming our own realities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). These methodological tools amplified the realities of minoritized youth in more accurate ways than other research might. For example, accepting nontraditional actions such as self-care as civic actions required the qualitative tool of explanation and story in data to be central in identifying the actions.

This research offers a culturally relevant methodology informed by theories and paradigms that sustain liberationism in the research act capable of expanding minoritized youths' fight for full inclusion in the democracy to the field of research methods. This means that qualitative research can also participate in civic discourse as activism itself and not just a tool to measure issues related to civic action and identity. The research act can democratize knowledge, present counter-narratives, and rebel against euro-centric norms in the academy to make more explicit cultural ways of knowing as significant. Therefore, as it concerns civic action and democracy in the 21st century the critical qualitative researcher can be positioned as a citizen serving the democracy through the research act.

Research Reflections

The lessons I learned from this research were that youth perceptions of their actions differ from the prevailing meanings of civic action in a Eurocentric model of civic engagement. This is reflected in the actions that merit notoriety being those that are associated typically with white male power dominated spaces such as electoral politics. I wrestled with this in my own analysis of this research. I wanted to look beyond the poem for civic actions because I carried the assumption that the poetic act itself did nothing to respond to neoliberalism in society broadly
nor education specifically. Yet a constructionist research paradigm in which participants and I created meaning together alongside my claim to employ critical poetic inquiry, which allowed me as a researcher to bear witness to participants struggle for visibility (Prendergast, 2015), I had to contend with my own preconceived assumptions and address what was apparent in the data. These participants viewed their daily habits and poetic work as one essential component of their civic actions. So, in response to the initial inquiry that inspired this study, "is youth voice in the form of youth poetry enough" I answer that youth poets command a spectrum of civic actions upon which their own voices are a pivotal early step. Every participant articulated that their youth spoken word poetry performance was a catalyst for the other actions they took. The poetry is no less important or valued than the political campaign.

While these non-traditional actions like self-care and self-love were positive they can be contended as not being related enough to the broader public or political wellbeing to count as civic actions. On the contrary, participants in this research understood their actions of self-care as responding to the historical and political systems of white supremacy, homophobia, Islamophobia and other types of oppression. Upon rejecting the Eurocentric view of the civic action that identities only actions relevant to electoral politics and governmental policies as worthy actions, it can be argued that these actions are extremely political. Furthermore, in the contexts of white supremacist's structures minoritized youth caring for themselves and others is a radical civic action. These civic systems are sentencing them to death by police, subpar living conditions, etc. and they resist by waking and intentionally caring for themselves and their communities in ways that reject oppression. These actions characterize a fight for freedom and liberation, which is arguably as important, if not more important, than legislation. The personal responds to the institutional in a way that asks for a reckoning.
Equally all but one participant linked poetry to their other civic actions and noted that they felt responsible to act in other ways to address the issues they raised awareness about in their poetry. For example, Kenny discussed how a poet that does not serve in other ways in addition to the poem benefits from the oppression discussed in their poetry and therefore is a part of the problem, not the solution. Similarly, Nijahn discussed practicing what you preach as essential to his understanding of what it means to be civically active; the poem and the protest are not separate entities but function together to serve the greater good. Also, noteworthy is that Mohammed declared that poetry is a protest, and explained that protest is only one piece of a broader movement, therefore, the value of youth spoken word poetry cannot be dismantled from the other actions on the continuum of actions created by youth. This is important to note because the poetic could be easily overlooked as additive or precursory, but for these participants specifically the poetic is essential to their civic identities and actions.

One outlier as it concerns this point of poetry being civic is Yellow, who noted that she did not participate in any civic action. Yellow noted that her art was for aesthetic sake. The creation process was not intended to serve purposes beyond the artistic. Yellow is an outlier in that her program was the only YPL program in this study that did not require documented civic leadership or community service. Yellow's YPL application only required written poetry to be submitted as a premise of earning the title thus Yellow's title and the position was not distinctively related to civic action in any way.

In addition, it's important to illuminate the fact that participants in this research were all youth poets who had accomplished the distinguished honor of being a youth poet laureate. Due to this role and the nature of their identities as poets prior to engaging in this research, it is relevant that they would value literary arts, although they do not have to understand the arts as
civic. The distinction and contribution that this research makes to the existing literature are that participants advanced their poetry performance into the political arena of being a civic action and argued for that not to be refuted.

**Summary of Interpretation of Findings**

In conclusion, this dissertation research found that minoritized youth civic actions are mediated by their holistic, cultural identities. A critical comprehension of the current and historical, socio-political contexts of participants' identities allowed them to yield specific civic actions that were both traditional and nontraditional. Allowing youth to construct their own perceptions of an equitable American democracy and their roles within it demonstrated that these participants chose a collectivist model of community organizing in response to neoliberal politics that impacted their day to day lives. Expanding Eurocentric definitions and parameters of what counts as civic action allowed for this research to expand the narrow assumptions about minoritized youths' civic interests and efficacy. Youth spoken word was singled out as a significant and necessary civic action for participants among many forms of civic actions. As an implication of the findings, this chapter deconstructs an argument for an embodied democracy that counters the prevailing definition of democracy that is implicit with white supremacy, to instead advance a form of democracy capable of recognizing and reconciling the intersectional identities of minoritized youth as essential to the conception of democracy in the 21st century. Then, an argument for critical poetic inquiry methodology employed as a culturally relevant methodology that dismantled oppression in the research activities and amplified the voices of minoritized youth through producing a counter-narrative in form and content is explained. Lastly, significance researcher reflections are provided that expose my own reflexivity in the research analysis and interpretation process.
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FROM THE STAGE TO THE STREETS: MINORITIZED YOUTH POETS’ CIVIC ACTIONS

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FROM THE STAGE TO THE STREETS: MINORITIZED YOUTH POETS’ CIVIC ACTIONS


FROM THE STAGE TO THE STREETS: MINORITIZED YOUTH POETS’ CIVIC ACTIONS


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FROM THE STAGE TO THE STREETS: MINORITIZED YOUTH POETS’ CIVIC ACTIONS


doi:10.1177/0042085908322713


FROM THE STAGE TO THE STREETS: MINORITIZED YOUTH POETS’ CIVIC ACTIONS

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Study Title: From the Stage to the Streets: Minoritized Youth Poets’ Civic Actions

Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:

Project Description: This study is a study of youth poets’ civic actions and how they construct civic identities.

Procedure

- Obtain parental or participant consent forms prior to beginning interview.
- Explain the study and answer any questions.
- Introduce myself as a poet, researcher, and graduate student.
- Re-read the title of the study and state it’s goals.
- Ask permission for audio recording interview. Explain the security process for all collected data. Begin recording.
- Begin Interview.

Semi Structured Open Ended Interview Questions

1. Tell me an about yourself. Who you are and what you do.
2. How do you define a young person that is civically active?
   - Probe: You mentioned ___________; could you tell me more about that.
3. How does your definition of civic action extend beyond performance poetry?
4. Tell me more about what that looks like in your local community specifically?
5. Thinking back to a time when you were civically active, what was that like for you?
6. Why do you choose to be civically active?
7. What experiences, people, institutions, digital contexts or organizations have prepared you to be civically engaged?
8. In what ways, do you consider yourself a digital citizen?
9. Are you civically active digitally? If so, in what ways?
10. How do you feel your civic actions have impacted your life or your community?
• Probe: You mentioned ____, could you describe in detail what happened?

11. What does democracy mean to you?
12. Tell me about your role as Youth Poet Laureate? How did you earn the title?
13. What did you do with your title as Youth Poet Laureate?
   • Probe: What experiences have you been granted as YPL?
14. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your civic actions or experience as a spoken word poet?

After the interview:
• Provide interviewee with my name and contact information. Explain any future contact that will be made.
• Thank participant & formally end interview.
• Use 30 minutes to write reflective observations from the interview and any initial analytic notes.
Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Dear Youth Poet Laurette Winners,

Hello, it is a pleasure to virtually meet you. My name is Camea Davis. I am a spoken word poet, educator, and researcher at Ball State University. I’m conducting a study titled, *From the Stage to the Streets: Minoritized Youth Poets’ Civic Actions*, on teens ages 18-21 spoken word poets’ civic actions and you are invited to participate.

There are no benefits or risks for participating in this study. Your participation is voluntary. If you would like to participate I will interview you regarding your spoken word poetry and the actions, you take in your local and/or national communities.

If you are interested, please reply to this email with your contact information and availability to meet for a video conference.

In kind regards,

Camea Davis

Ball State University

Educational Studies Department
Appendix C: Consent Form

**Study Title**  
From the Stage to the Streets: Minoritized Youth Poets’ Civic Actions

**Study Purpose and Rationale**  
I am interested in youth poet’s civic action beyond the performance of their poems. The purpose of this study is to describe the actions youth poets take in their communities.

**Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria**  
Participants must be youth poets ages 18-21, participate in spoken word poetry events, perform spoken word poetry publicly, and have an interest in political, civic, or social justice topics.

**Participation Procedures and Duration**  
For this project, you/your child will be asked discuss your civic action and engage one thirty-minute interview about their civic engagement. The study will be conducted at times and public locations convenient for you via online synchronous video conferencing. With your permission, interviews will be audio recorded for data collection purposes only.

**Data Confidentiality**  
For my research data, I will use your interview as data. All data will be maintained as confidential and no identifying information such as names will appear in any publication or presentation of my study’s findings in the future.

**Storage of Data**  
Paper data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s (my) personal office for three years and then be shredded and discarded. The data will also be stored on the researcher’s (my) password-protected computer for three years and then deleted. Only I as the researcher and my advisor at Ball State University (see contact information below) will have access to my research data.

**Risks or Discomforts**  
There are no perceived risks or discomforts for participating in this study.

**Benefits**  
There are no perceived benefits for participating in this study.

**Voluntary Participation**
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your permission at any time for any reason without penalty or prejudice from the investigator. Please feel free to ask any questions of the investigator before signing this Consent form and at any time during the study.

**IRB Contact Information**
For questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact Director, Office of Research Integrity, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5070, irb@bsu.edu.

**********

**Participant Consent**
I give my consent for myself to participate in this research project entitled, “From the Stage to the Streets: Minoritized Youth Poets’ Civic Actions.” I have had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

_________________________  ___________________
Participant Signature       Date

_________________________  ___________________
Participant Name           Date

**Researcher Contact Information**

Principal Investigator: Camea Davis, Graduate Student Educational Studies Ball State University Muncie, IN 47306 Telephone: 765-285-5463 Email: clsoborn@bsu.edu

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Sheron Fraser-Burgess Educational Studies Ball State University Muncie, IN 47306 Telephone: (765) 285-5471 Email: sfraserburge@bsu.edu
Appendix D: Letter of Support
To: Camea Davis, Graduate Student at Ball State University

Re: From the Stage to the Streets: Minoritized Youth Poets’ Civic Actions

4/24/2017

You have permission to collect information and interview youth engaged with Youth Poet Laureates for the purposes of the research project “From the Stage to the Streets: Minoritized Youth Poets’ Civic Actions.”

Signature,

x
Appendix E: Code Book

Youth Poet Laureate Dissertation Code Book

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name/ Node</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activism Definition</td>
<td>Participant definitions of civic action, activism, youth activist, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woke</td>
<td>Participants’ mention of the term; related to political consciousness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions</td>
<td>Participant descriptions of the types of actions they considered civic actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts-Based Actions</td>
<td>Actions related to youth spoken word, visual art, dance, hip hop, any art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers &amp; Concerns</td>
<td>Concerns participants have; obstacles participants they are facing and how it impacts what they can and cannot do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Habits</td>
<td>The everyday radical; daily actions made radical; just this idea of small, constant, actions that resists &quot;isms&quot; on a one to one/personal human level lived out daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>Digital &quot;code switching&quot;- the shift of what's on each profile. etc./ social media used to share experiences, opinions, broadcasting, promoting info, distribution of info</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Participant conception of commitment; earnest calling, commitment, dedication to the work that needs to be done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Definitions &amp; characteristics of community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy Thoughts</td>
<td>Participants definitions, understandings on what democracy means to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dig Citizen Definition</td>
<td>How participants define digital citizenship, what it means, how they understand digital citizenship and digital actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Any mention of the term empathy; what it means; how participants understand empathy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Participants' mention of fear; how fear relates to civic action/activism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings When Acting</td>
<td>Emotions felt/described when doing civic action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>Mention of hope; aspirations toward an improved future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humility</td>
<td>Statements related to humility; evidence of humility; servant leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name/ Node</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risks</td>
<td>Concerns/Obstacles faced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>How participants are developing or in process as civic beings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>What values, roles, and expectations come with each identity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>Mention of immigrant identity or parents’ identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naming the Self</td>
<td>Mention of owning, changing, or controlling the narrative of/about oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues</td>
<td>Topic youth are most concerned about/fighting or working toward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentrification</td>
<td>Issue mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Awareness</td>
<td>A consciousness of the specific context and local community they live and work in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memos</td>
<td>Key points/ Researcher notes I want to remember from transcripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outliers</td>
<td>examples&amp; statements that conflict with or are different than the majority of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy</td>
<td>Participants mention of teaching tools/strategies used in their civic education or tools they employ in teaching/serving roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Role Models</td>
<td>Participants' mention of acting as peer role models or examples of experiencing peer role models.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry</td>
<td>Lines to use in poems, strikes me, poetic resonance, metaphor, imagery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>Skills, experiences, habits that prepared participants to be civically active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Contexts</td>
<td>Mention of social networking sites relationship to civic preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>Life events related to civic preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions</td>
<td>Schools, churches, community centers, colleges, etc. related to civic preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizations</td>
<td>Non-profit organizations, Youth Spoken Word orgs,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>Parents, teachers, mentors, coaches, advisors,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Awareness</td>
<td>Comments related to developing an acute self awareness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Name/ Node | Description
--- | ---
**Private School** | Mention of private school education; experiences in private school.
**Rationale** | Reasons why participants act, purpose, function, essential motivators. (They serve in areas where they have been hurt.)
**Safety** | Participants mention of needing safety, creating safety, safe spaces.
**Self-Love/Care** | Mention of self-love, self-care, concern for self-preservation
**Socioeconomic Status** | Participant stories related to income, home life, growing up in low income communities.
**Space** | Mention of spaces, norms, rules, expectations associated with spaces.
**Accountability** | Mention of the term; structures that support accountability; people mentioned as accountability partners
**Creating Safe Spaces** | Spaces where youth can be safe and protected
**Trauma** | Participants' mention of trauma, details explaining traumatic circumstances, and what trauma in YSW spaces looks like.
**YPL Application Process** | What they had to do and submit to get role
**Books** | Mention of YPL self-authored books.
**Doubt Winning** | Participants’ mention of not feeling adequate, prepared, worthy of winning
**Why YPL** | Explanation why participants chose to be YPLs