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As members of the Dissertation Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Taylor-Kristen Myers Saltzgeber, titled Examining the Influence of Racial Self-Identity on Black Adolescents' Psychological Well-Being: A Mixed-Methods Study Across Counties in Arizona and Florida and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copies of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

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**Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to those I exist because of and for: my Egun, Divine, and children: Erik, Jakson & Korbin: my Past, Present, and Future.





































- Black youth experience increased connection to their racial minority group, which serves as a protective factor and source of resilience that buffers the negative impact of prejudices and discrimination (Umaña-Taylor, 2016; Wong et al., 2003).
- Black youth can be involved in Policy and curricula development that promotes self-regulation and self-esteem (Verkuyten & Brug, 2004).

## **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

More specifically, this study seeks to explore:

### ***Quantitatively***

1. Does where youth are geographically situated differentiate how racial identity and psychological stressors predict/contribute to one or more aspects of well-being/well-being outcomes?
  - a. Black youth located in the Southeast will exhibit higher levels of racial identity integration than those in the Southwest.
  - b. There will be a differential impact of psychological stressors on the well-being of Black youth in the Southwest in comparison to those in the Southeast.

### ***Qualitatively***

1. Across US geographic locations, how do Black youths organize racial determinants of self-identity?
2. How do Black youths' racial self-identity processes interact with the psychological stressors associated with the African American experience?
3. How do Black youth use their racial self-identity to cope with psychological stressors?



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Current research and historical factors were explored to establish an in-depth understanding of the conceptualization and impact of race in America, in Arizona and Florida, as well as the evolution of Black Psychology used to frame the methodology used within the study. A review of historical circumstances surrounding how race can be defined as a social construct, implications of social categorizations of race in America, and each state of Arizona and Florida's record of race relations are outlined.

### **Historical Context**

#### ***Race as a social construct***

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the concept of race is socially constructed. Biophysical diversity across humanity has been scientifically validated through advances in human genome sequencing. Hence, what is often considered "racial groups" is not genetically discrete, reliably measured, or scientifically meaningful (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). However, socially, the concept of race is genuine and plays a crucial role in how one experiences the world. Race, as a social categorization system that separates individuals into social groups, is fluid in its determinants, inconsistently applied, and often leads to severe consequences. (Harris & Sim, 2002; Hitlin et al., 2006; Perez & Hirschman, 2009; Prewitt, 2018). Despite its shaky etymology and shifting makeup, the racial designation of Black or African American within the US has stood the test of time. This hardline of what it means to be Black in America has marginalized large groups of people in all sectors of society (Trent et al., 2019). Living in a state with a more substantial legacy of racism (such as the Southern U.S.) worsens the poverty of Black people, as racism affects wealth inequality (Baker,

2019). It also negatively affects life outcomes as Black women and men have a significantly higher likelihood of being killed by police and suffer a higher overall death rate than any other racial ethnicity at 16.3 per 100,000 compared to 2.5 for Whites (CDC, 2010; Edwards, 2019). Thus, this social rather than biological phenomenon directly impacts one's quality of life. The direct impacts of the racial caste system implemented in the US vary across differing societal sectors and periods influenced by geographic location.

### ***Race in America***

Despite the limited resources, means of communication, the threat of re-capture, and imminent death, enslaved, trafficked African and Black Americans resisted chattel slavery from its inception. Of the 3.9 million enslaved humans living in the United States, an estimated 400,000 of them had thrown off the shackles of literal oppression and found freedom (Library of Congress, 2021; Statistica, 2021) by 1860. Although considered a mental illness (Drapetomania) by some at the time, escapism served as the route out of bondage for many. Revolting was also an authentic resistance tactic against this brutal and dehumanizing system. In certain circles, Black liberation at all costs became pivotal to fighting back against the restrictive nature of forced enslavement, which kept millions of Blacks impoverished, uneducated, and disconnected from self and community. By the early 19th century, there were a series of armed revolts in Louisiana, South Carolina, Florida, and most prominently in Virginia, where revolutionary Nat Turner left at least 50 enslavers and surrounding White families' casualties of war as hundreds blazed their way to freedom (Library of Congress, 2021).





fierce fight for equal access to opportunities diverged into two main camps. Pan-Africanist attitudes began to take root and gain traction grounded in the premise of “Black Power,” which spoke to the inherent common interest and desire for reunification amongst all members of the Black diaspora. This sentiment was echoed loudly by community leaders who saw Black unity as the key to liberation and autonomy. Simultaneously, universalist thought led others to commit acts of civil disobedience through sit-ins, marches, pickets, boycotts, and protests to demonstrate the community’s disdain for the conditions and status of Black Americans (Library of Congress, 2021). Both forms of resistance aided in passing federal legislation, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which gave US citizens legal protections against discrimination and segregation, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which secured the right to vote.

Unfortunately, even though these legislations passed, barriers to access remained, specifically within education, housing, and employment. Affirmative Action measures, initially instituted by John F. Kennedy, extended federal protections and the feasibility of opportunity to Black Americans. This was not the only means of continued resistance and struggle against the status quo. As hundreds of thousands of Black men converged onto the steps of the Washington Monument on Oct 16th, 1995, as a show of self-reliance and defense against the ills plaguing the Black community, one could see that grassroots efforts to free oneself “from inner slavery” were still burning bright in the heart and mind of the Black collective. In the wake of new technological advances, veils of illusory equality and racial tolerance were ripped away as modern times approached. Starting with the untimely and horrifyingly frightful murder of Trayvon Martin in 2012, social media platforms began to be flooded with Black death. Whether perpetrators took

the form of vigilante neighbors or desensitized police officers, Black children, teens, and adults' deaths continue to be filmed and streamed across the world. Inescapably snuff films that again reignite fear and rage in much of Black American society, reconfirming thoughts that nothing much has changed since the plantation days of ole. The collective outpouring of Black pain channeled itself through the chant "Black Lives Matter," as many took to the streets to protest Trayvon's and subsequent murders of Black bodies. Resilience and perseverance, despite the turmoil associated with the history of Black Americans, have been its saving grace. Much of this is grounded in what Kambon describes as the African thrust survival, the sheer inherent will to overcome. Examining, understanding, and incorporating these concepts into scholarly research and applicable intervention can only help to further the thriving continuance of Black people in America.

### ***Race in Arizona and Florida***

More specifically, Florida and Arizona hold unique histories surrounding Black people. Arizona, as a territory, was officially created via the Organic Act in 1863 and established without the ability to implement slavery within its borders. Having previously been a part of the New Mexico Territory, where under the Compromise of 1850, the territory had been able to choose slavery by popular sovereignty, predominately only Native/Indigenous peoples were enslaved. Sentiment quickly turned in favor of the Confederacy as some settlers felt abandoned by the US. The unofficial territory succeeded in the earlier parts of the Civil War, citing greater alignment with the secessionist South's ideals, protection from the Apache, and anger over the loss of US postal services. After the war, small waves of African American settlers pushed into the state, which was officially recognized in 1912. Arizona was also home to the first African

American US Army regiments that would later be known as Buffalo Soldiers (Kellogg & Kellogg, 2000; Whitaker, 2000). Recent racial tensions during the 2020 Black Lives Matter riots in Phoenix saw a declared state of emergency by then Governor Doug Ducey, with nineteen straight days of protests emphasizing built-up tensions over excessive police force against Black, Native American, and Latino populations (Vandall & Keenehan, 2020).

In contrast, Florida's history with African Americans is robust and deep. Once considered a fugitive slave haven, Florida was the first to have enslaved Africans, the first to offer emancipation, and the location of the first freedmen's settlement. Before English rule, the Spanish's implementation of slavery in the territory of Florida was different as enslaved peoples were not born into slavery, could marry even interracially, own property, and purchase their freedom. This was unheard of in the British-owned territories. As enslaved people there, severely dehumanized, caught wind of the ensured freedom amongst the Creek and Seminole natives, Spanish towns, as well as all Black settlements, many risked it all to step foot across the Florida border. As British rule began, within months, the once haven became subject to strict laws that revoked freed status and enslaved previously freed people. Many Blacks fled further south into the swamps of Florida and even out of the country into the Caribbean. After the Revolution, enslavers migrated to Florida from the coastal regions of the Carolinas and Georgia, expanding the slave population of the state. As a critical asset of the Confederacy, Florida fought fiercely to maintain its antebellum wealth, leaving a sour and dark trail of terror surrounding African Americans after the South was defeated. From KKK burnings, lynchings, massacres of all-Black towns, riots, and segregation to

the current day location of murdered Black teens Trayvon Martin and Jordan Davis (Kelley, 2015), Florida's relationship with race remains convoluted. Florida's recent passing of the "Individual Freedom" measure, which bans the subjection of individuals to the sound theoretical teachings about race, privilege, and bias, highlights the ongoing push of race-based historical erasure within the state (CS/HB 7, 2022)<sup>1</sup>.

Today, the African American population in Arizona makes up about 4.5%-5% of the total state population of 7.3 million people (US Census, 2020). At the same time, Florida's current Black population makes up approximately 17%-19% of the total state population of 21 million (US Census, 2020). Both states share similar Hispanic populations, above the national average of 18.3%, making them good representatives of regional racial/ethnic demographics (Freeman & Frey, 2014).

## **Relevant Theory**

### **Nigrescence Model**

Thus, when considering the historical context of race in the United States and the immense trauma caused by systematic oppression and discrimination that has been inflicted on African Americans as a collective people, it is crucial to be mindful of how using highly Eurocentric models of racial identity development to measure Black Self-Identity can cause further perpetuation of white supremacy. In 1971, William Cross developed a psychological model based on the psychological premise that a Black person typically goes through a journey from self-degradation to self-pride over time due to oppression. His five-stage model explained how a Black person shifts from a White-oriented perspective to a positive, Black-oriented perspective: pre-encounter,

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<sup>1</sup> CS/HB 7 Individual Freedom Bill Florida Senate 2022

encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization/commitment. Where the initial introduction to race is overlooked and insignificantly experienced In the home. It is not until encounter with outside oppressive forces where one would be challenged about their identity, causing the emergence of a self-loathing identity and then hopefully transformed into one that is more accepting and compassionate. This Nigrescence model is the most widely discussed Black racial identity model in the psychological literature, mainly because it is linked to a measurement tool developed by Janet Helms— the Racial Identity Attitude Scale-Black—which has been used to assess Black racial identity development (Parham & Helms, 1981).

### **Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity**

The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity framework by Robert Sellers, also expanded from William Cross' Nigrescence Theory, allows for exploring what it means to be African American, emphasizing African Americans' unique cultural and historical experiences. Racial identity is considered just one part of a person's self-concept related to her/his membership within a race. While using race as a social construct, it was necessary to consider less Eurocentric frameworks for those that measured multiple dimensions of African American racial identity (Sellers et al., 1997). Sellers used subscale measurements to evaluate Salience and Centrality, which focuses on the unique self-significance one places on the concept of race. Subscales of Regard and Ideology address the qualitative meaning ascribed to blackness. Centrality and Regard have been linked to positive psychological well-being (Sellers et al., 1997). Further terminology breakdown defines racial Salience as the fluid extent to which race is relevant to the self-concept at a particular time or situation. Centrality refers to how

individuals normatively emphasize racial group membership as part of their overall self-concept. Racial Regard is subdivided into public and private spheres, how an individual feels positively or negatively about their African American group status in terms of how others view the African American community (Public) and how they view it (Private).

The last dimension of racial Ideology, one's philosophy about the ways that members of the African American community should act, is broken down into four subcomponents: Nationalist, Oppressed Minority, Assimilationist, and Humanist (Sellers et al., 1998). The Nationalist Ideology celebrates the uniqueness and support of African American culture. The Oppressed Minority Ideology emphasizes the African American experience as one of an oppressed minority group. Assimilationist Ideology emphasizes the similarities between African Americans and mainstream American society, whereas Humanist emphasizes the similarities among all people regardless of race. Originally conceptualized with adults, his framework has been extended to incorporate African American youth. As adolescent youth, peer and societal interactions affect identity, it is evidenced that family is still the primary racial socializing agent. It is important to hear directly from youth about their conceptual view of identity as it differs from the developmental stages below. Through tight conceptualization, potential mappings and processes can be incorporated to assist youth along their journey to identity stability (Scottham, 2008).

### **Black Personality Theory**

Although the Nigrescence and the Multidimensional Model offer essential insights, Black Personality Theory presents a fully Afrocentric perspective. Expanding upon a reconstructionist approach to separate a Black self-concept and create greater

culturally sensitive access to psychological models, Black Personality Theory challenges Eurocentric-based conceptualizations and presents instead fully Afrocentric-based paradigms and practices that center around core tenets of self-agency, spirituality, social interdependence, and authenticity that allow for full expression of one's Blackness despite an oppressive setting (Baldwin, 1980; Cokley & Garba, 2018). Black Personality Theory's conceptualized framework of Black identity allows for further exploration from a strength-based perspective. Previous research has shown that positive outcomes such as well-being, self-esteem, and academic success positively correlate to Afrocentric worldviews in Black youth (Constantine et al., 2005; Jones, 2017; Thomas et al., 2003). Afrocentric values have also been positively linked to youth's prosocial behaviors, civic and justice-oriented participation, and future orientation (Grills et al., 2016). One measurable instrument derived from Black Personality Theory is the African Self-Consciousness model, used in this study to assess Black youth's racial Self Identity. The African Self-Consciousness model consists of four cognitive and behavioral constructs that focus on one's awareness of a more significant collective African identity, priority of positive racial self-identity, collective participation in African-centered goals, and internal and external resistance to Eurocentric worldviews (Kambon, 2010). The African Self-Consciousness Scale (ASC) was developed to measure these constructs. This scale, originally a 42-item measure by Baldwin and Bell (1985), was designed to assess African self-consciousness among African Americans. Test-retest reliability was calculated at .90. with a total Cronbach alpha of .70. Later, Stokes and colleagues (1994) administered the ASC to 147 African Americans (aged 13–70) and conducted research to examine the psychometric



properties of ASC and found it to be a key variable in understanding how Black students' psychological and behavioral outcomes vary across different sociocultural contexts. Additionally, the research team administered the ASC to 147 African Americans (aged 13–70) and evaluated its reliability, validity, and factor structure. The authors utilized principal component factoring to derive four subscales: *Sense of Collective African Identity and Self-Fortification* (one's connectedness to African/Black culture), 2: *Resistance/Defense against anti-African Forces* (one's rejection of anti-African/Blackness), 3: *Value for Afrocentric Institutions and Cultural Expressions* (one's association and participation in African/Black culture), and 4: *Value for African Culture* (one's appreciation for African/Blackness) confirmatory of results found in Baldwin and Bell. Coefficients for the ASCS subscales ranged from .61 to .77, with a total alpha of .78. However, they also suggested that ten items should be removed from the ASC, as they did not enhance its internal consistency. Likewise, a study by Myers and Thompson in 1994 also confirmed a four-factor model but failed to report internal consistency in publication.

Consequentially, the dimensionality of the ASC has been a topic of debate. While some studies confirmed a four-factor model, others suggested a two-factor model. For instance, Dixon and Azibo (1998) identified two factors: "Value for African-Centered Institutions and Relationships" and "Value Against Affirmative Africanity" with internal consistency scores reported as Cronbach's alphas of .88 and .89, respectively. Later, Bhagwat (2009) conducted an exploratory factor analysis, using modern methods of Principal axis factoring, Parallel analysis, and Cattell's scree test to retain factors, and

further supported this two-factor model, also suggesting a reduction of the scale to 28 items for better reliability.

In conclusion, the Black Personality Theory and the ASC provide a more Afrocentric approach to understanding and measuring Black identity. There is limited replication data on the psychometric properties of the two-factor or 28-item version with adults and no studies to date on adolescents. Nonetheless, the ASCS has a nearly 40-year history within academia, and further research is needed to refine this tool and ensure its effectiveness in different sociocultural contexts.

### **Current Empirical Literature**

Over the last decade, research seeking to connect and integrate Black youth's racial identity, psychological stress, and well-being has gained traction. Race-related trauma shapes the lens of how Black youth see themselves and others. As Black youth develop past the initial familial sphere of influence and become more cognitively aware of the multilayers of racism that exist structurally in the world, they are more likely to exhibit the more negative externalizing and internalizing outcomes associated with combating racism on a systemic and interpersonal level (Henderson et al., 2019). Lewis et al. (2012) observed that in youth ages 11-14 years of age, having undergone more negative life events, less social support, and more coping efforts, as well as being an African American, increased scores related to experiencing more anxiety symptoms. Even more interestingly, adverse life events were only related to anxiety symptoms in African American youth in comparison to White youth, indicating the type of adverse life events may be different (race-related) or possibly more intense than the ones experienced by their white counterparts. These adverse life events, which add to the

psychological stress African American children encounter, start early and encompass all areas of their lives. In research conducted by Sanchez and colleagues (2012), a sample of 419 (47.2% females) urban African American adolescents' depressive symptoms were examined over four years. Associations were noted in which adverse life events experienced directly by themselves, their peers' life, and their families impacted the development of depressive symptoms, specifically in urban African American females.

Since impact happens across ecological domains, the psychological stressors that occur in younger individuals appear to have a more significant impact than those that occur later in development. Hicks et al. (2020) discovered, using a subsample of longitudinal data from 265 participants, adverse childhood experiences during preadolescence significantly predicted depressive symptoms during adolescence and, in turn, later substance use and behavioral delinquency. Additionally, Simons and Steele (2020) discovered, using a longitudinal design of an African American sample of 442 youth, that academic engagement was negatively impacted by adverse effects categorized under the Family Stress Model, which is directly associated with managing inadequate financial resources. When considering the many forms of psychological stressors and the detrimental outcomes they produce, it is plausible to reason that many African American children grow up traumatized. Henderson's qualitative study in 2019 outlined how Black teens conceptualized trauma. The themes that stood out—death and loss, exposure to violence, police harassment, racism and discrimination, poverty, being 'stuck in the hood,' and being bullied—were compatible with, and in some cases more extensive than, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) standards of trauma. It is crucial to acknowledge, give space for, and create culturally

responsive interventions and treatment for the traumatic experiences African American youth may experience.

As Black youth undoubtedly face harsh realities, some mediating factors may assist in promoting more positive well-being despite the odds stacked against them. In a quantitative study conducted by William et al. (2014), among youth facing discrimination, high levels of racial identity achievement (awareness of one's racial membership) and low levels of racial identity affirmation (positive validation of one's racial membership) were shown to express greater aggressive and delinquent behaviors. In addition to criminal offensive behavior when confronted with discrimination. Interventions focused on increasing achievement and affirmation of racial identity may lead to fewer antisocial behaviors or moderate some interactions. In Stokes et al. (2020), 287 Black youths aged 13-17 were reported to have demonstrated higher feelings about their racial identity and less negative symptoms of depression when they received more affirming racial socialization messages.

Nonetheless, limited research considers the cultural/racial lens of the more commonly used subjective well-being measurement, specifically, invariance across groups. This was examined by Curtis et al. (2021), where a data analysis of over 6,000 Black and White youth in grades 7 through 12 was completed using the *Subjective Well-Being Measure*. Results showed that the conventional conceptualization of subjective well-being constructs was inconsistent across gender and racial groups. This is significant when considering how to serve youths from historically oppressive backgrounds best. A more culturally sensitive conceptualization of well-being, such as psychological well-being, may support a more balanced representation of what is most

distressing to Black youth. In the study by Seaton et al. (2011), 560 African American youths' perceptions of racial discrimination and their psychological well-being (meaning/purpose) over time were assessed. What was cemented is that adolescents who reported having higher psychological responses to discrimination had lower initial levels of well-being.

Interestingly, racial identity was not found to moderate the relationship between racial discrimination and changes in well-being, which begs the question of whether the timeline of interventions that incorporate racial identity matters. As well as how racial identity is conceptualized and whether it is encompassing enough to capture Afrocentric worldviews that may be more effective in explaining adverse symptomatology in Black people. In a study by Pierre and Mahalik (2005), the authors examined how African self-consciousness and Black racial identity affect psychological well-being and self-worth in Black men. One hundred thirty Black men from college and community settings were surveyed using the African Self-Consciousness Scale. Results suggested that Black men who had low levels of racial identity development and did not challenge anti-Black oppression had more psychological problems and lower self-esteem. The second pattern showed that Black men who had high levels of racial identity development resisted anti-Black oppression and did not strongly identify with other Blacks who had higher self-esteem.

Qualitative research does an adequate job of capturing more elusive elements of racial identity. In Woods-Jager et al. (2020), five focus group meetings were conducted with 39 African American adolescents (ages 13–18) who had grown up and are currently living in communities exposed to violence. The young participants identified

key elements of resilience that helped them overcome the stress placed on them by their environment. The ability to persevere during challenges, self-regulate reactions, and adapt to changing circumstances stood out. Connectedness amongst the community, trust, self-determination, stigma, and familial burdens were contextual factors in how youth resilience manifested. The theme of connectedness continued in McKinney and Madkins (2019), who conducted on two Full-Service Community schools. These schools were designed in response to racial and economic inequity experienced by students with lower SES and linked to contemporary patterns of residential resegregation. They offered students a school setting where restorative justice was practiced, awareness of student reality was highlighted, a focus on equity and access inside and outside of school was centered, and a commitment to student well-being was promoted. These schools' academic and psychosocial functioning significantly improved after this model's implementation, indicating that students may benefit from complete wraparound care that acknowledges unique racial experiences and capitalizes on the unique existing protective factors within the familial and cultural context of the African American community. The sustenance and positive protective factors available growing up in the African American community cannot be overlooked. Amid what one may see as a racial group drenched in violence committed on it and amongst it, research shows that for Black students, their communities provide a sort of shelter from the ills of society that are not reproducible outside of it. Dudovitz et al. (2021) examined geographical contexts via school makeup. With participants from a multi-year longitudinal study, it was found that Black students who had attended a school with higher percentages of White students had associated rates of depressive symptoms, substance use, and self-







respondents were < 17 years of age (ages 14,15,16). Participants had a family context frequency of 87.4% of kids reported living in a two-guardian household (Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographic Characteristics: Quantitative*

Demographic Characteristics	Arizona N (%)	Florida N (%)	Total N (%)
Gender			
Female	24 (48.0)	16 (36.4)	40 (41.7)
Male	26 (52.0)	28 (63.6)	54 (56)
Age			
14	1 (2.0)	3 (6.8)	4 (4.2)
15	2 (4.0)	4 (9.1)	6 (6.3)
16	21 (42.0)	11 (25.0)	32 (33.3)
17	26 (52.0)	26 (59.1)	52 (54.2)
Ethnicity			
Hispanic	15 (30.0)	8 (18.2)	23 (24.0)
Non-Hispanic	35 (70.0)	34 (77.3)	69 (71.9)
Current State			
Arizona	--	--	50 (52.1)
Florida	--	--	44 (45.8)
2 Parent/Guardian Household			
Yes	49 (98.0)	35 (79.5)	84 (87.5)
No	1 (2.0)	9 (20.5)	10 (10.4)

Eligibility for Phase 2 was that the adolescent had to have completed Phase I with both the parent providing consenting to both phases of the study and the adolescent selecting the option that they were willing to be contacted for Phase II, and the adolescent signing the assent form and scheduling one of the available time slots. An automated random selection process was used to select participants for the focus group out of those from the Phase I portion who were eligible and contacted ( $n = 76$ ), contacted, and ( $n = 17$ ) returned assent and selected availability for the session. However, three did not show up on the scheduled date and did not respond to outreach. We originally planned to enroll up to 20 participants in Phase II based on original Phase

I recruitment numbers. However, based on the new Phase I sample size, 14 participants were selected, and four independent sessions were scheduled due to the deductive approach used in coding and to achieve theoretical and technical saturation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021; Reifner, 2001).

An automated simple random sampling process was used to select participants for the focus group out of the Phase 1 portion of the study, who agreed to and had parental consent to be contacted in further relation to the study. Fourteen participants from AZ ( $n = 7$ ) and FL ( $n = 7$ ) across four focus groups comprised of participants as follows: 1) two girls and two boys aged 14, 16, 16, and 17, 2) two boys and one girl aged 15, 16 and 17, 3) three boys and one girl aged 15,16,16 and 17, and 4) three girls aged 15,16 and 17. Each group was comprised of participants from both Arizona and Florida. Participants had a mean age of 16, which 21.4% identified as being of Hispanic/Latinx ethnicity. Self-reported demographic information was collected from all participants in an open-ended manner prior to the start of the focus group (Table 2). The age, race/ethnicity, gender, and location of each participant were collected.

**Table 2**

*Participant Demographic Characteristics: Qualitative*

Demographic Characteristics	Arizona N (%)	Florida N (%)	Total N (%)
Gender			
Female	3 (42.8)	4 (57.1)	7 (50)
Male	4 (57.1)	3 (42.8)	7 (50)
Age			
14	0 (0.0)	1 (14.3)	1 (7.1)
15	1 (14.3)	2 (28.6)	3 (21.4)
16	3 (42.9)	3 (42.9)	6 (42.9)
17	3 (42.89)	1 (14.3)	4 (28.6)
Ethnicity			
Hispanic	2 (28.5)	1(14.3)	3 (21.4)
Non-Hispanic	5(71.4)	6 (85.7)	11 (78.5)
Current State			
Arizona			7 (50.0)
Florida			7 (50.0)

**Measures**

To ensure eligibility and obtain basic demographic information, the digitally administered survey packet consisted of a demographics sheet for youth to record their 1) Race: must self-identify as single-race/multiracial Black or African American; 2) Ethnicity: with or without Hispanic origin; 3) Sex; 4) Age: must be between 14-17, 5) Place of Birth: Any place; 6) Current Residency: Florida or Arizona; 7) Single or Dual Parent/Guardian household 8) Language: Any language as a primary language, however, surveys are only available in English.

Several published instruments were used in this study. The measures were selected to provide a comprehensive assessment of Black youth identity (independent variable) and psychological stressors (independent variable), as well as standardized

conceptualizations of well-being (dependent variable). Well-being outcomes were conceptualized as life satisfaction, meaning/purpose, and positive affect. Each measure was chosen due to its practical application with minority youth and embedded cultural competence. The measures are as follows:

### ***Identity***

#### ***The African Self-Consciousness Scale (ASCS)***

The 28-item version of the African Self-Consciousness Scale (ASCS) with a two-factor structure was used to assess participants' racial identity from the perspective of Black personality theory. The two-factor model of the measure was used and outlined in Chapter 2, including the dimensions of "Value for African-Centered Institutions and Relationships" alpha of .81 and "Relationships and Value Against Affirmative Africanity." These competencies are assessed across dimensions covering the areas of education, family, religion, cultural activities, interpersonal relations, and political orientation. The Value of African-Centered Institutions and Relationships is best conceptualized as beliefs and values around Blackness. An example item is "When a black person uses the terms "Self, Me, and I," his/her reference should encompass all Black people rather than simply him/herself."

Relationships and Value Against Affirmative Africanity assesses resistance to outer group forces of oppression. An example item is "Blacks in America should try harder to be American rather than practicing activities that link them up with their African cultural heritage. Response categories are on an 8-point Likert scale from 1 (*Very Strongly Disagree*), 2 (*Strongly Disagree*), 3 (*Moderately Disagree*), 4 (*Slightly Disagree*), 5 (*Slightly Agree*), 6 (*Moderately Agree*), 7 (*Strongly Agree*) and 8 (*Very*

*Strongly Agree*). Negatively worded items are reversed in scoring. Internal consistency has been found at alpha of .81 (Bhagwat, 2009). The Cronbach alphas for the ASCS subscales in this study were as follows:  $\alpha = .96$  for “Value for African-Centered Institutions and Relationships,” and  $\alpha = .89$  for “Value Against Affirmative Africanity,”

### ***Psychological Stressors***

#### ***The Index of Race-Related Stress for Adolescents (IRRS-A)***

The Index of Race-Related Stress for Adolescents (IRRS-A) is a 32-item adapted version of the IRRS modified for use with adolescents. Adolescents indicate which racist event they or family members have experienced in their lifetimes and the intensity of evoked stress on a scale from 0 (*this has never happened to me*) to 4 (*this event happened, and I was extremely upset*). Representative sample items are separated by subscales and include, “You have observed the police treat White/non-Blacks with more respect and dignity than they do Blacks” (Institutional Racism); “You have heard racist remarks or comments about Black people spoken by White public officials or other influential White people” (Cultural Racism); and “While shopping at a store, or when attempting to make a purchase, you were ignored as if you were not a serious customer or didn’t have any money” (Individual Racism). Internal consistency has ranged from  $\alpha = .64$  to  $.76$  for Collective/Institutional Racism,  $\alpha = .81$  to  $.89$  for Cultural Racism, and  $\alpha = .69$  to  $.87$  for Individual Racism (Atkins, 2015; Chapman-Hilliard, 2020; Seaton, 2003). The Cronbach alpha reliabilities for the three subscales in the current study were as follows:  $\alpha = .90$  for Collective/Institutional Racism,  $\alpha = .92$  for Cultural Racism, and  $\alpha = .91$  for Individual Racism, respectively.

### ***Psychological Well-Being Outcome***

#### ***The PROMIS Pediatric Meaning and Purpose short form.***

The PROMIS Pediatric Meaning and Purpose short form 8-item assesses a child's sense that life has a purpose and has good reasons for living. Higher scores indicate hopefulness, optimism, goal-directedness, and feelings that one's life is worthy. Eudaimonia includes appraisals of life as having meaning, purpose, and hope. Although it has been less evaluated in youth, studies have shown a significant association with increased academic achievement, health, and lower rates of delinquency and substance use. Items that exhibited age-related differential item functioning, local dependence, and poor item discrimination were removed. Sample responses include "When bad things happen, I expect them to get better" and "My life has meaning." Response categories are on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1-5, with qualitative anchors of 1 (*Not at all*), 2 (*A little bit*), 3 (*Somewhat*), 4 (*Quite a bit*), and 5 (*Very much*), with possible scores ranging from 8 to 40. Reliability was measured at >0.90 (Forest, 2019).

Cronbach's alpha for this study was .95, and .84 was in the current study.

#### ***The PROMIS Pediatric Positive Affect short form***

The PROMIS Pediatric Positive Affect short form 8-item assessment captures a child's momentary positive or rewarding affective experiences, such as feelings and mood associated with pleasure, joy, elation, contentment, pride, affection, happiness, engagement, and excitement within a 7-day reporting period. Response categories include a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*), 2 (*rarely*), 3 (*sometimes*), 4 (*often*), and 5 (*always*). Items with low factor loadings and local dependence on other items were removed from the initial item pool. Sample Response stems include "I felt

happy” and “I felt peaceful.” Reliability was measured at  $>0.90$  (Forest, 2018). Cronbach alpha for the current study was .85.

### ***The PROMIS Pediatric Life Satisfaction short form***

The PROMIS Pediatric Life Satisfaction short form 8-item assessment measures global and context-specific dimensions of a child’s life over a 4-week reporting period. High levels result from favorable evaluations and an acceptance of how a child’s life is being led. Conceptual facets include global evaluations of life, context-specific evaluations of life, assessments of life conditions, and comparisons of one’s life with others’ lives (Forrest, 2018). Response categories were frequency-based on a scale ranging from 1 (*never*) 2 (*rarely*), 3 (*sometimes*), 4 (*often*), and 5 (*always*). Thirteen items were removed due to low factor loadings and local dependence on another item already asked. Sample responses included “I was satisfied with my skills and talents.” and “I was happy with my life in my neighborhood.” Published reliability data have been  $>.90$ , and test-retest reliability was  $>.80$  (Forrest, 2018). Cronbach alpha for the current study was .88.

### **Procedure**

The study is a sequential mixed-methods research design. Approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained and classified as exempt. This design was selected to best capture the broad notions of racial identity, psychological stressors, and their impact on well-being while allowing for a more in-depth understanding of the individual and collective process of racial identity integration (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Confirmatory and dependable procedural steps are detailed to allow for study replication.

## Recruitment and Study Process

Participants were solicited from a local church and high school in Florida (approximately 20% of the sample) and via social media posts directly to groups with a large Black membership in Arizona and Florida (approximately 80% of the sample). Parental/Guardian consent and child assent were collected digitally and at in-person recruitment sessions. A secured link from Redcap, a HIPPA-compliant online database for building, securely storing surveys, and exporting results to typical statistics applications, was made available, where parents completed informed consent. Participants completed assent, demographic questions, and the following surveys: ASCS, IRRS-A, and PROMIS Pediatric Life Satisfaction, Affect, and Meaning and Purpose Scales. The PROMIS measures were already programmed into the REDCAP library and automatically scored over two weeks. Administration of measurements took no longer than 50 minutes.

The qualitative portion of the study included four separate, 50–60-minute moderated focus group discussions, accompanied by a written protocol to help guide facilitated discourse. Recruitment for the focus group took place during the Phase 1 survey portion of the study. Thus, it occurred after data were collected but before they were analyzed. Although involving the same participants, fewer participants were incorporated into the focus group after noting their interest, giving parental/guardian consent and youth assent, and completing the quantitative survey portion. This approach aimed to better understand the personal experiences of the quantitative sample in conjunction with the statistical data outcomes. A list of interested participants was created, and assent forms were sent to those who responded with signed assent;



participants were then separated by state to ensure equal geographic location participation. Final participants were randomly selected from an automated system (Adler & Zumstein-Shaha, 2019; Krueger & Casey, 2015). Selected participants were given the choice of their focus group date and time. Discussions were held virtually, and audio was recorded for more straightforward transcription. Participants received a \$30 gift card for participation. A post-online debriefing survey was made available to mitigate any potential triggering effects brought up by the sensitive nature of measurement and discussions around racial identity, psychological stressors, and well-being. Three surveys were completed, and no participants indicated concern. The debriefing survey was a brief online form that inquired about the questioning undergone, comfortability with group conversation, specific areas of need, and additional support. Participants were also provided with the researcher's contact information and appropriate service referrals for their location.

## **Statistical Analysis**

### ***Quantitative***

The statistical analyses were completed using SPSS, Version 28 data analysis software. Thirteen participants did not complete the full set of batteries and were accounted for in the data via listwise deletion when possible. In considering whether where youth are geographically situated differentiated how racial identity and psychological stressors predict/contribute to aspects of well-being outcomes, researchers hypothesized that Black youth located in the Southeast would exhibit equal to or greater than levels of stress but exhibit higher levels of racial identity integration and well-being than those in the Southwest.

Following descriptive statistics, the primary analysis consisted of a series of multiple regressions inclusive of multiple predictors and well-being outcomes to determine if geography acts as a predictor of well-being. Regarding the multiple regression, each participant's Value for Afrocentric Institutions and Cultural Expressions, Value Against Affirmative Africanity, and psychological stress scores, including Individual Racism, Collective and Institutional, and Cultural Racism (IRRSA), were predictors in the first model. They were entered simultaneously to predict the well-being measures (Life Satisfaction, Affect, and Meaning and Purpose). An ANOVA table was created to indicate the degree to which the set of variables in the model significantly predicted the outcome. Additionally, the t-statistic demonstrated which variables significantly contributed to the prediction (i.e., added unique variance).  $\beta$  weights via standardized regression coefficients when controlled for the other variables in the model. In other words, for each unit of change in the predictor (i.e., IRRS-A score), a standard deviation of change in the outcome (i.e., meaning). B reflects the unstandardized coefficient, indicating that for each unit of change in the predictor, there would be a change in the outcome by that coefficient.  $R^2$  was used to represent the effect size, or percent contribution, of all the predictors of the outcome for youth in each demographic region (Kahane, 2008). Initially, it was planned to run the models separately for the geographic region to determine if there was a difference in how identity and stressors related to well-being outcomes; however, as can be seen in the results, there were no significant correlations in the FL subsample. Therefore, second models were conducted for the combined sample that only included the significant IV subscales in the Spearman pre-testing.

Secondary analysis hypothesized that there would be a differential impact of psychological stressors on the well-being of Black youth in the Southwest in comparison to those in the Southeast. As well as higher levels of racial self-identity integration, increasing overall well-being and happiness independent of location-specific levels of psychological distress. Mann-Whitney U statistic was used to compare differences in identity, stressors, and well-being measures. Data visualization (histograms, boxplots) was also used to illustrate identity, stress, and well-being patterns based on geographic location (i.e., Arizona or Florida). The Mann-Whitney U statistic is the equivalent of a t-test for independent samples; it tests whether the distribution of two groups is different (Sundjaja et al., 2020). The effect size was derived by taking the standardized test statistic and dividing it by the square root of the total sample size.

Additionally, descriptive statistics summarizing the characteristics of the dataset were run. Alpha levels for each predictor were evaluated to determine any statistical significance. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients for all measures were also obtained to determine internal consistency; however, to confirm using a two-factor model of the ASCS, a Principal axis factoring was run to establish the psychometric properties within this sample.

### ***Qualitative***

The qualitative portion of the study sought to examine how, across US geographic locations, Black youths organize racial determinants of self-identity. As well as answer the question of how Black youths' internal racial self-identity integration processes impact their interactions with psychological stressors associated with the African American experience. Focus groups were held to discuss the topics, and

recorded transcriptions were analyzed, interpreted, and explained via social context (Fairclough, 2001). Focus groups were most appropriate as they provided a forum for real-time communications about each participant's worldview in the context of their lived experience and the dialogue that unfolded in the group format. The approach involved strategically crafting interview questions based on Black Personality Theory and extracting themes from these virtual face-to-face interactions (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

During the focus group, a moderator facilitated a guided discussion, and participants received a \$30 gift card following survey completion. Using students' own words holds more consequential validity (Patton, 2002), which can be used in the future to outline a step-by-step process of racial identity development and a more culturally sound conceptualization of well-being. Participants responded to a series of structured prompts (Appendix B). Black Personality Theory phenomenologically drove guiding questions to allow for the exploration of each Black youth's own unique racial identity development process, experience with stressors, and attitude toward well-being (Neubauer et al., 2019). Every component of each research question was addressed in the guided discussion. Questions were open-ended, and each participant was encouraged to reply. A top-down, deductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) approach was used to code. Focus group transcriptions were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using MAXQDA version 24. MAXQDA is a user-friendly and robust software program that assists researchers in analyzing qualitative and mixed methods data, text, and multimedia. To aid with the trustworthiness of the study, data collection was thorough and rigorous and incorporated two doctoral-level reviewers who analyzed the

data using an inductive coding approach; systems identified the major themes and sub-themes present within the transcripts without any predetermined coding frame outside of the study's independent and dependent variables (Nowell et al., 2017; Rauf et al., 2014).

Intercoder reliability was measured using a percent agreement at 94%. Any disagreements in the themes were discussed using consensus agreement. Codes were pre-determined based on research questions; each coder used a codebook to determine adherence (Appendix D). Credibility or confidence in the data was achieved in the following ways: 1) transparency in how the data were analyzed, including how decisions were derived; 2) clear explanations of interpretation; 3) documentation of systematic data collection without altering responses; 4) citing evidence for claims made; and 5) appropriate display of the results. (Greckhamer & Cilesiz, 2014). All external (psychological stressors) and internal (racial self-identity, well-being) relations were derived from the verbal language of the focus groups until no new insights could be gleaned, marking the end of data collection. Themes were then examined, allowing for thematic analysis, and meaning interpretation (Mullet, 2018). Additionally, the researcher and additional coder continuously engaged in reflexivity to consider and reduce the bias in qualitative research. Reflexivity is the process of examining the researcher's biases, values, and beliefs that may impact data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022).

## Chapter 4: Results

This chapter presents the results of the hypothesis testing via statistical analyses to determine how racial identity and psychological stressors contribute to several aspects of well-being, including life satisfaction, positive affect, and meaning and purpose. It addresses the differential impacts of psychological stressors on the well-being and racial self-identity integration of Black youth located in the Southwest and Southeast regions of the US. It includes a comparative analysis of individual psychological stress levels and racial identity's contribution to well-being according to geographic location (i.e., counties within Arizona and Florida). Additionally, it describes qualitative patterns across US geographic locations of how Black youths conceptualize their racial determinants of self-identity, interact with psychological stressors associated with the African American experience, and cope with psychological stressors to maintain functioning levels of well-being. Finally, it presents an integration of the quantitative and qualitative findings to synthesize the data for comparison.

### Quantitative Analyses

#### Descriptive Statistics

The mean scores for each of the five predictor outcomes of racial identity and psychological stressors were as follows: Value of African-Centered Institutions and Relationships ( $M = 96.66$ ,  $SD = 29.32$ ), Value Against Affirmative Africanity ( $M = 57.91$ ,  $SD = 16.65$ ), Individual Racism ( $M = 20.02$ ,  $SD = 9.01$ ), Collective and Institutional Racism ( $M = 21.59$ ,  $SD = 12.06$ ), and Cultural Racism ( $M = 19.50$ ,  $SD = 9.03$ ). The mean scores on the three PROMIS scales selected for reflecting well-being outcomes



AZ	48	41.51	5.68	31.1 – 62.5	40.40	37.30 – 45.48
FL	43	42.01	8.87	22.6 – 62.5	43.50	35.30 – 46.60
Combined	91	41.77	7.32	22.6 – 62.5	41.60	36.60 – 45.90
Meaning and Purpose <sup>a,d</sup> (PROMIS)						
AZ						
FL	46	47.53	7.75	29.2 – 60.6	46.4	43.00 – 53.15
Combined	39	47.15	7.43	29.2 – 60.2	46.0	42.00 – 50.60
	85	47.36	7.56	29.2 – 60.2	46.1	42.60 – 51.30
Positive Affect <sup>a,d</sup> (PROMIS)						
AZ	44	46.99	6.58	33.0 – 66.2	48.65	41.10 – 51.23
FL	37	46.32	8.82	23.0 – 66.2	46.1	40.80 – 53.00
Combined	81	46.67	7.64	23.0 – 66.2	47.6	41.00 – 51.55

Note: <sup>a</sup> Ns may vary as some participants did not provide a response for all surveys. <sup>b</sup>Possible scores on the ASCS subscales could range from 17 to 136. <sup>c</sup>Possible scores on the ASCS subscales could range from 11 to 88. <sup>d</sup>Possible scores on the IRRS-A subscales could range from 10 to 50. <sup>e</sup>Possible scores on the IRRS-A subscales could range from 13 to 65. <sup>f</sup>Possible scores on the IRRS-A subscales could range from 9 to 45. <sup>g</sup>PROMIS have t-scores with  $M = 50$ ;  $SD = 10$ .

### Hypothesis A: Black youth located in the Southeast will exhibit higher levels of racial identity integration than those in the Southwest

The Mann-Whitney U statistic was used to compare identity, stressors, and well-being measures for respondents from AZ and FL. Results indicated that there were no significant differences based on the state in the rank order of Well-Being outcomes (Life satisfaction,  $U = 1085.50$ ,  $z = .43$ ,  $p = .671$ ; Positive Affect,  $U = 780.50$ ,  $z = -.32$ ,  $p = .751$ ; and Meaning/Purpose  $U = 872.50$ ,  $z = -.22$ ,  $p = .829$ ). Florida residents' reports of racial identity (ASCS Value for African-Centered Institutions and Relationships,  $U = 825.500$ ,  $z = -.631$ ,  $p = .528$  and ASCS Value Against Affirmative Africanity,  $U = 1083.500$ ,  $z = 1.646$ ,  $p = .100$ ) and race-based psychological stress (IRRS-A Individual Racism,  $U = 973.00$ ,  $z = -.28$ ,  $p = .777$ ; IRRS-A Collective/Institutional Racism,  $U =$



1092.50,  $z = .68$ ,  $p = .494$ ; and IRRS-A Cultural Racism  $U = 1114.00$ ,  $z = .86$ ,  $p = .391$ ) were not significantly different than those found in Arizona (see Table 4).

Non-parametric Independent-Samples Median tests were also used to examine median differences of the predictors and outcomes between the two states. Only medians of the Life Satisfaction T-score were different across states. Black adolescents in Florida reported higher levels of life satisfaction than those in Arizona,  $\chi^2(1, N = 91) = 3.915$ ,  $p = .048$  (see Figure 1). All other median scores were comparable between participants in the two states.

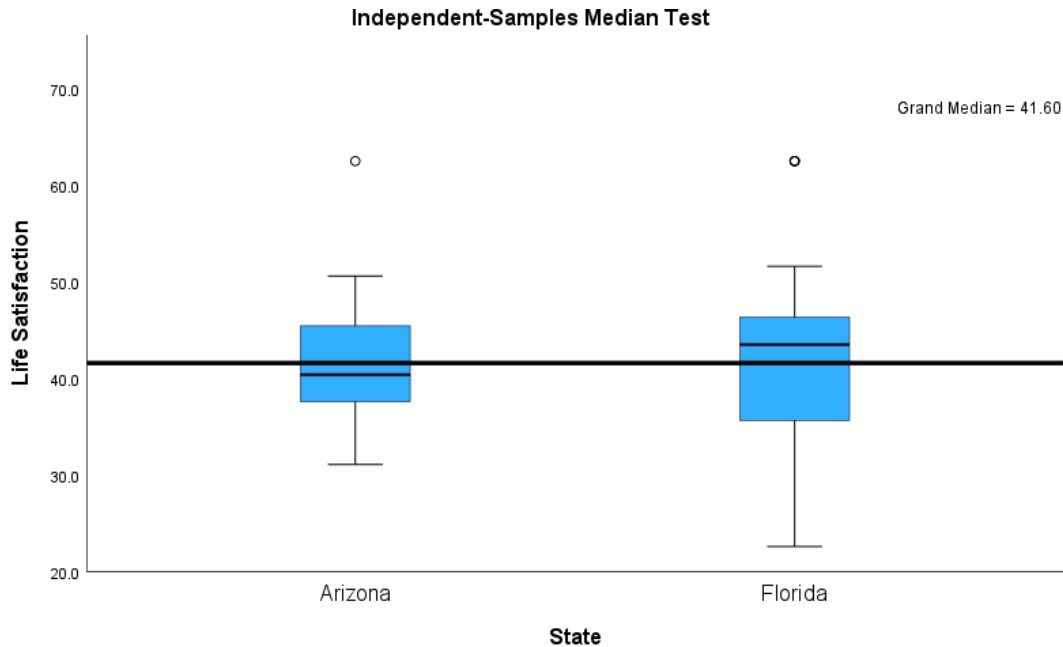
**Table 4**

*Summary of Differences by State: Independent-Samples Mann Whitney*

	<i>U</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Value for African-Centered Institutions and Relationships	825.50	-.63	.528
Value Against Affirmative Africanity	1083.50	1.65	.100
Individual Racism	973.00	-.28	.777
Collective and Institutional Racism	1092.50	.68	.494
Cultural Racism	1114.00	.86	.391
Life Satisfaction	1085.50	.43	.671
Meaning	872.50	-.22	.829
Positive Affect	780.50	-.32	.751

**Figure 1**

*Independent Samples Median Test of Life Satisfaction across states*



**Hypothesis B: There will be a differential impact of psychological stressors on well-being on Black youth in the Southwest in comparison to those in the Southeast**

Nonparametric Spearman correlation analyses were run to examine bivariate associations of the racial identity and psychological stressors independent variables with the well-being outcomes, with the combined sample and separated by state (see Table 5). For the combined sample that included participants both from the states of AZ and FL, ASCS Value of African-Centered Institutions and Relationships was related inversely to PROMIS Life Satisfaction ( $r_s = -.26, p = .018$ ) and positively to PROMIS Meaning ( $r_s = .29, p = .008$ ). IRRS-A Individual Racism was related inversely to PROMIS

Positive Affect ( $r_s = -.24, p = .033$ ). IRRS-A Cultural Racism was related positively to Meaning ( $r_s = .28, p = .010$ ).

When analyzed separately by State, in Arizona, ASCS Value of African-Centered Institutions and Relationships was related inversely to the PROMIS Life Satisfaction subscale ( $r_s = -.36, p = .014$ ) and positively to Meaning ( $r_s = .32, p = .029$ ). IRRS-A Individual Racism was related inversely to PROMIS Life Satisfaction ( $r_s = .37, p = .010$ ) and PROMIS Positive Affect ( $r_s = -.37, p = .012$ ). IRRS-A Collective and Institutional Racism was inversely related to PROMIS Life Satisfaction ( $r_s = -.33, p = .022$ ) and PROMIS Meaning ( $r_s = -.30, p = .044$ ). IRRS-A Cultural racism was positively related to Meaning ( $r_s = .31, p = .039$ ). None of Florida's ASCS and IRRS-A subscales significantly correlated with the PROMIS subscales.

**Table 5**

*Spearman’s Correlation Matrix for Predictors & Outcomes by State*

	Life Satisfaction <sup>a</sup>	Meaning and Purpose	Positive Affect
<hr/>			
Value of African Centered Institutions and Relationships <sup>b</sup>			
AZ	-.36*	.32*	-.10
FL	-.15	.25	-.18
Combined	-.26*	.29**	-.12
Value Against Affirmative Africanity <sup>b</sup>			
AZ	-.14	.24	-.07
FL	-.17	-.10	-.04
Combined	.12	-.07	.04
Individual Racism <sup>c</sup>			
AZ	-.37*	-.08	-.37*
FL	.03	.03	-.16
Combined	-.15	.07	-.24*
Collective and Institutional Racism <sup>c</sup>			
AZ	-.33*	-.30*	-.29
FL	.01	-.08	-.13
Combined	-.11	-.16	-.19
Cultural Racism <sup>c</sup>			
AZ	-.27	.31*	-.17
FL	-.01	.24	.02
Combined	-.11	.28**	-.08

Notes: \*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). <sup>a</sup>These are subscale names from the PROMIS measures used as indicators of well-being for this study. <sup>b</sup>Subscales from the African Self-Conscious Scale. <sup>c</sup>Subscales from the Index of Racial Related Stress.

Next, a series of simultaneous multiple regressions were run on the combined sample; there were two planned models per dependent variable, with the first model including all five subscales to compare the fixed set across prediction models and the second model including only those subscales (if more than one variable) that had been significantly related to the well-being outcome in the Spearman correlation analyses. In the first set, the five subscales of the ASCS (Value of African-Centered Institutions and Relationships, Value Against Affirmative Africanity) and IRRS-A (Individual Racism,

Collective and Institutional Racism; Cultural Racism) were entered simultaneously to predict each well-being PROMIS measure separately (Life Satisfaction; Affect; and Meaning) to determine how much variance of subscales of racial identity and psychological stressors significantly predicted outcomes of well-being.

### **Racial identity and psychological stress impact on life satisfaction**

The model with the five subscales did not significantly predict PROMIS Life Satisfaction scores,  $F(5, 79) = 1.238, p = .299, R^2 = .073$  (see Table 6). The second planned regression model was not run since only the ASCS Value of African-Centered Institutions and Relationships subscale was significant during pre-testing for the combined sample. Instead, since three subscales (ASCS Value of African-Centered Institutions and Relationships; IRRS-A Individual Racism; and IRRS-A Collective and Institutional Racism) were significantly associated with the PROMIS Life Satisfaction at the bivariate level, a regression analysis was conducted with the participants from Arizona (see Table 7). Results revealed that the overall model was insignificant,  $F(3,42) = 1.617, p = .200, R^2 = .10$ .

**Table 6**

*Racial Identity & Psychological Stressors Predictor Contribution to Life Satisfaction for the Combined Sample*

	Coefficient $\beta$	Unstandardized Beta	SE of $\beta$	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Value of African Centered Institutions and Relationships	-.27	-.07	.03	-1.98	.051
Value Against Affirmative Africinity	-.19	-.08	.05	-1.59	.115
Individual Racism	-.04	-.03	.16	-.19	.851
Collective and Institutional Racism	-.13	-.07	.12	-.63	.533
Cultural Racism	.24	.19	.14	1.41	.162

Notes:  $F(5, 79) = 1.238, p = .299, R^2 = .07$ .

**Table 7**

*ASCS Value of African Centered Institutions and Relationships, IRRS-A Individual Racism, and IRRS-A Collective/Institutional Racism Contribution to Life Satisfaction in AZ*

	Coefficient $\beta$	Unstandardized Beta	SE Of $\beta$	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i> - value
Value of African Centered Institutions and Relationships	-.29	-.05	.04	-1.34	.188
Individual Racism	-.10	-.07	.15	-.44	.663
Collective and Institutional Racism	-.06	-.03	.11	.31	.760

Note:  $F(3, 42) = 1.617, p = .200, R^2 = .10$ .

### **Racial identity and psychological stress impact on meaning and purpose**

The first model examining the prediction of Meaning and Purpose was significant,  $F(5, 79) = 6.127, p = <.001$ . Together, the five ASCS and IRRS-A subscales accounted for 28% of the variance in predicting PROMIS Meaning/Purpose scores. Higher scores on the IRRS-A Collective and Institutional Racism subscale,  $\beta = -.65, t(5) = -3.93, p = <.001$ , significantly predicted lower levels of Meaning/Purpose. These data indicate that for each one-point increase on the IRRS-A Collective/Institutional Racism subscale, the

average PROMIS Meaning/Purpose score will decrease by .40 of a point. Next, the IRRS-A Cultural Racism subscale,  $\beta = .44$ ,  $t(5) = 3.01$ ,  $p = .004$ , added its own unique variance in predicting levels of Meaning/Purpose. Consequently, for each point increase on the IRRS-A Cultural Racism subscale, PROMIS Meaning/Purpose scores increase by approximately .37 of a point. On the other hand, although the ASCS subscale Value of African-Centered Institutions and Relationships was significant in the Spearman when controlling for the other four variables, it did not add its unique variance,  $\beta = .21$ ,  $t(5) = 1.70$ ,  $p = .095$  (see Table 8).

**Table 8**

*Racial Identity & Psychological Stressors Predictor Contribution to Meaning for the Combined Sample*

	Coefficient $\beta$	Unstandardized Beta	SE of $\beta$	<i>T</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Value of African Centered Institutions and Relationships	.21	.05	.03	1.70	.095
Value Against Affirmative Africanity	.01	.00	.05	.09	.932
Individual Racism	.16	.13	.15	.88	.382
Collective and Institutional Racism	-.65	-.40	.11	-3.93	<.001
Cultural Racism	.44	.37	.13	3.01	.004

Notes:  $F(5, 79) = 6.127$ ,  $p = <.001$ ,  $R^2 = .28$ .

The second multivariate regression model analysis, including the variables significantly associated with the PROMIS Meaning/Purpose subscale in the Spearman results, was run. Together, the ASCS Value of African-Centered Institutions and Relationships,  $\beta = .26$ ,  $t(2) = 2.09$ ,  $p = .041$ , and IRSS-A Cultural Racism,  $\beta = .09$ ,  $t(2) = 3.35$ ,  $p = .004$  significantly predicted the PROMIS Meaning/Purpose scores explained

10% of the variance in Meaning and Purpose,  $F(2, 82) = 4.38, p = .016$  (see Table 9). These data indicate that for each one-unit increase on the ASCS Value of African-Centered Institutions and Relationships, the average PROMIS Meaning/Purpose score would increase by .07. The IRRS-A Cultural Racism subscale did not add its own unique variance in predicting meaning/purpose when controlling for the ASCS subscale.

**Table 9**

*ASCS Value of African Centered Institutions and Relationships and IRRS-A Cultural Racism Contribution to Meaning for the Combined Sample*

	Coefficient $\beta$	Unstandardized Beta	SE of $\beta$	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i> - value
Value of African Centered Institutions and Relationships	.26	.07	.03	2.091	.041
Cultural Racism	.09	.07	.10	3.354	.472

Note:  $F(2, 82) = 4.38, p = .016, R^2 = .10$ .

An additional multivariate regression model analysis was run to explore the degree to which the ASCS Value of African-Centered Institutions and Relationships,  $\beta = .31, t(3) = 2.41, p = .020$ , ASCS Collective and Institutional Racism  $\beta = -.67, t(3) = -4.40, p = <.001$ , and IRRS-A Cultural Racism,  $\beta = .57, t(3) = 3.50, p = .001$ , contributed to the prediction of PROMIS Meaning/Purpose in the state of Arizona. These three subscales each added their own unique variance, accounting for 42% of the variance in predicting PROMIS Meaning/Purpose scores. These data indicate that for each one-point increase on the ASCS Value of African-Centered Institutions and Relationships subscale, the average PROMIS Meaning/Purpose score will increase by .10 of a point. Conversely, for each increase of one point on the IRRS-A Collective and Institutional Racism subscale, Meaning/Purpose would decrease by .50 of a point. For each point



increase on the IRRS-A Cultural Racism subscale, PROMIS Meaning/Purpose scores would increase by approximately .52 of a point (see Table 10).

**Table 10**

*Value of ASCS African Centered Institutions and Relationships, IRRS-A Collective and Institutional Racism as and IRRS-A Cultural Racism Contribution to Meaning in AZ*

	Coefficient $\beta$	Unstandardized Beta	SE of $\beta$	T	p-value
Value of African Centered Institutions and Relationships	.31	.10	.04	2.41	.020
Collective and Institutional Racism	-.67	-.50	.11	-4.40	<.001
Cultural Racism	.57	.52	.15	3.50	.001

Note:  $F(3,42) = 10.16, p = <.001, R^2 = .42.$

**Racial identity and psychological stress impact on positive affect**

Regression analyses with the five ASCS and IRRS-A subscales did not significantly predict PROMIS Positive Affect,  $F(5, 75) = 1.235, p = .301, R^2 = .076$  (see Table 11). A second model was not run since only the IRRS-A Individual Racism and the PROMIS Positive Affect significantly correlated (for both the combined and Arizona samples).

**Table 11**

*Racial Identity & Psychological Stressors Predictor Contribution to Positive Affect for the Combined Sample*

	Coefficient $\beta$	Unstandardized Beta	SE of $\beta$	T	p-value
Value of African Centered Institutions and Relationships	.01	.00	.04	.095	.925
Value Against Affirmative Africanity	-.01	-.01	.06	-.116	.908
Individual Racism	-.44	-.36	.18	-1.986	.051
Collective and Institutional Racism	.07	.05	.13	.340	.735
Cultural Racism	.21	.19	.15	1.218	.227

Notes:  $F(5, 75) = 1.235, p = .301, R^2 = .076.$

**Exploratory Analyses**

**Potential Gender Differences in Identity, Racial Stress, and Well-Being**

Although gender was considered as a possible covariate, non-parametric testing does not allow for a 2x2 analysis. Using Mann-Whitney U, results showed that males and females shared similar scores; however, the Value of African-Centered Institutions and Relationships distribution was not the same across gender categories. Females had significantly higher levels of ACSC Value for African-Centered Institutions and Relationships than males,  $U = 643.500$ ,  $z = -2.068$ ,  $p = .039$  (see Table 12 and Figure 2).

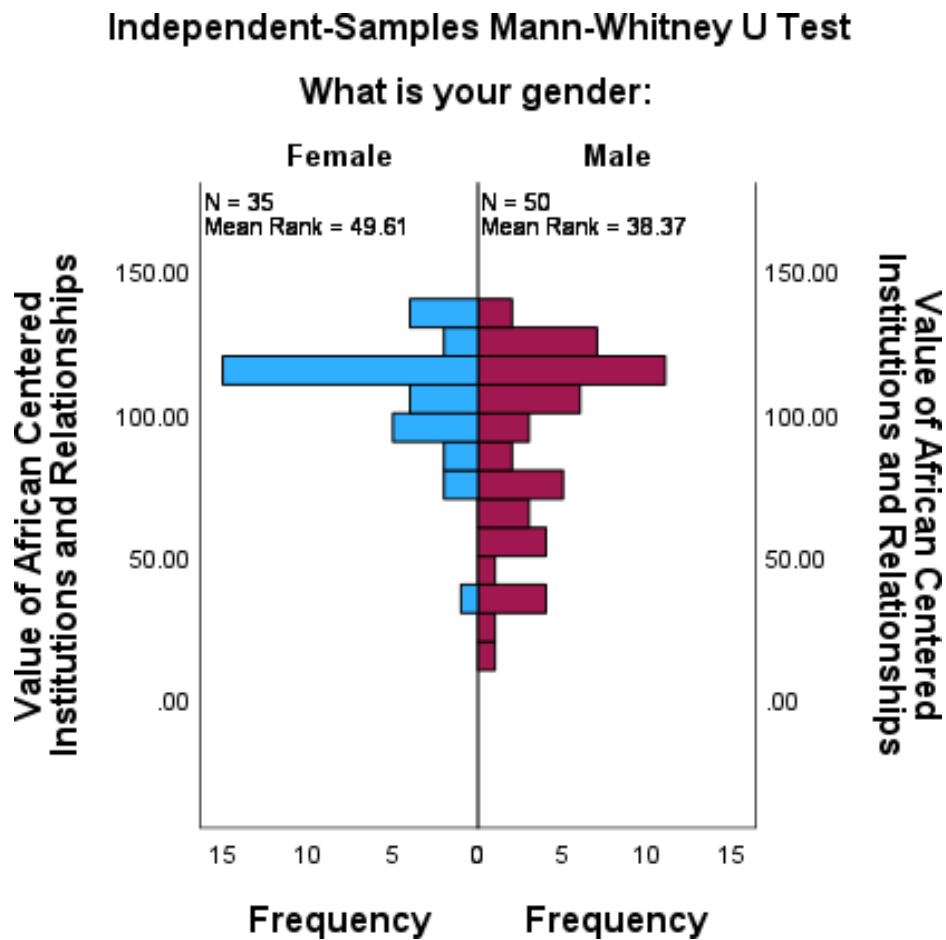
**Table 12**

*Summary of Differences by Gender: Independent-Samples Mann Whitney*

	<i>U</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Value for African-Centered Institutions and Relationships	643.50	-2.07	.039
Value Against Affirmative Africanity	901.50	.24	.813
Individual Racism	1095.50	.88	.379
Collective and Institutional Racism	1107.00	.97	.331
Cultural Racism	945.50	-.35	.728
Life Satisfaction	1193.00	1.44	.151
Meaning	810.50	-.58	.564
Positive Affect	800.00	.08	.939

**Figure 2**

*Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test of Value of African-Centered Institutions and Relationships by Gender*



**Factor Structure of the African Self-Consciousness Scale**

Although the two factors used for this study evidenced strong internal consistency (Cronbach  $\alpha = .96$  and  $.89$ ), the psychometric properties of the ASCS 2- 2-factor model have only previously been assessed in adults. Therefore, exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factoring and Promax rotation was used to examine its factor structure in this sample. Principal Axis Factoring with Promax rotation is an

oblique rotation method that extracts factors based on shared variances (commonalities) and then rotates these factors to achieve a simpler structure. Rotated factor structures were reviewed for items loaded with at least .35 and at least .15 apart from loadings on other factors.

Using an initial scree test criterion of 1.0, five factors initially emerged. Factor 3 had four items loaded onto it, accounting for 4.75% of the variance with factor loadings from .62 to .80. However, the last two factors only had one item that sufficiently loaded onto them. After reviewing the scree plot to determine where the slope started to flatten, a stricter eigenvalue of 1.5 was set. Results yielded a two-factor model. However, one item could be removed due to indiscriminate factor loadings. This item was "*Blacks should form loving relationships with and marry only other blacks,*" The Cronbach alphas of the two factors without that item were .96 and .89, respectively, consistent with the two-factor model used in the hypothesis testing (see Appendix C).

## Qualitative Analyses

Centering around adolescent responses to multiple aspects of experiences while mindful of potential geographic differences in the southeast and southwest states of Arizona and Florida, focus group research questions were addressed as follows:

1. How do Black youths' racial self-identity processes interact with the psychological stressors associated with the African American experience?
2. Across US geographic locations, how do Black youths organize racial determinants of self-identity?
3. How do Black youth define well-being?

The results section presents direct quotes from participants as initially transcribed from the focus group.

### **Black youths' racial Self-Identity interaction with Psychological Stressors**

The first set of codes focused on Black Self-Identity. *"For me, being black is an attitude. It's what makes you different. It's the way you think. It's the way you embrace things"*, stated a male participant from Group 2. Both internal and external descriptors were stated as essential factors of what it meant to be black. Terms such as *"dark," "complexion," "strong,"* and *"different"* were most frequent. Several students also identified their internal identity development processes as shaped by their physical appearance in relation to the society around them. *"I don't need anyone to tell me I'm black. I look at myself in the mirror and see I'm black,"* stated one male in Group 3. *"I mean, I really kind of, like, tried to figure it out by myself because I used to always get in trouble a lot, and the other kids didn't,"* noted one male participant in Group 1 as he recalled quickly learning his identity by comparing treatment he received in school to his white peers. Many participants across groups explained their crystallization of Blackness because of their immediate family. *"I really learned the definition of being black from my family,"* stated a participant. When asked in focus Group 4, a female participant stated, *"I would say my grandmother."* Another female in Group 2 elaborated, *"I also found out from my mom that I'm actually black, and she taught me about culture and history and our physical characteristics."*

Psychological Stressors were addressed through a series of direct questions such as: "What are your experiences with psychological stressors such as violence, poverty, and racial discrimination," and "Do you think non-Black people experience similar impacts of violence, racial discrimination, poverty in the way that you do," "Stressors were identified and ranked in order from most to least frequent as follows::

racial discrimination of themselves or others, relationships, school and tied issues of poverty and violence. All participants acknowledged the generality of stress across cultures, *“there are some stressors that are universal, right? They're very general. Money worries, relationship worries, school worries,”* stated one male participant in Group 3. Another male in Group 2 explicitly listed groups of people that shared the same racial stress as black people, *“for example, the Latinx people, Indigenous people in the US, face discrimination and negative stereotypes, you know, so, yes, and also immigrants and refugees from a variety of backgrounds.”*

### **Black youths organize racial determinants of Self-Identity**

When asked, “What does it look like to be your most authentic Black self both actively and passively,” participants responded predominantly with a desire to showcase their unique abilities and styles and feel safe. Authenticity was developed through this discussion as a place of comfortability with oneself and others. Authenticity is *“when you're able to really show your intelligence and show your uniqueness and your abilities and your gifts,”* stated a female participant in Group 3. Multiple participants' sentiments echoed those of a female respondent in group 4, whom they felt most authentic around, *“anybody that I feel I can do or be like how I act and be who I am without being judged or looked at.”*

Safety was identified as a critical requirement to express participants' Black authenticity. Family and friends of similar backgrounds were prominent as providing the most safety. In line with current research by Jacob et al., 2023, the term “avoid” appeared most frequently as a means of coping with racial stressors. *“To avoid problems, um, we just avoid the area,”* explained a male participant from Group 3. At

the same time, others noted the need to also “*blend in*” when navigating unsafe spaces to express authenticity.

*You just got to kind of like, ok, like, my mom for when she does it. She like, uses like a white people voice. Like you, kind of just like, got to blend in with really everybody that you're surrounding. I mean, there's certain times where you can, like, be yourself, but at some point, you're going to have to, like, blend in, because being yourself is going to either look weird or it's going to have a weird outcome still.”*

– Male,

Group 1

The term Role Models was also coded. Role models, listed from most to least frequently mentioned, included family members, athletes, philanthropists/social activists, politicians, music artists, and spiritual leaders. Examples include parents, Serena Williams, Oprah, Barack Obama, Fela Kuti, and Martin Luther King Jr.

Coding for Protection was noted through a series of questions explored individually, “Do you think/believe/feel that Blackness needs to be protected,” “How do you or people you know protect your/their Blackness?” and “Has this protection only come from other Black people?” Do you think outside communities protect Blackness? If so, in what way?” Rationale for a unanimous position of protection of blackness was premised on universality and equal rights, “*we are all humans despite our color or races, we are all one,*” as one male from Group 2 stated. Consensus for a need to protect the idea and form of Blackness was followed by participants’ desire to protect one’s blackness as a means of preserving heritage. Participants provided several forms of in-group and out-group involvement, including advocating, social networking,

exhibiting self-love and increasing self-esteem. One female participant in Group 4 noted protection can be accomplished by black people, *“standing up for their self, no matter what, no matter the situation, who's around, or what's going on, just putting a stop to it.”* While another male respondent in Group 1 noted the need for reciprocity among non-Black peers in the fight for protection, *“I mean, if you don't want to protect us, there's no point of helping you. So, I mean, it's like, kind of 50/50 equal thing.”*

### **Black youth define Well-Being**

Thirdly, Psychological Well-Being/Happiness was the highest-coded theme. In asking, “What makes you happy?” and “What is your purpose in life?” Respondents provided ways to keep themselves happy and filled with meaning and purpose. In defining happiness, one male respondent from Group 1 stated, *“Actually, happiness is something that, you know, you can create it yourself.”* Happiness was seen as a tool that was both self-generated and served the authenticity of oneself. Spending time with friends (both in-person and virtually), listening to music, and enjoying food were listed most frequently. However, other respondents mentioned engaging in activities such as playing sports, practicing dance, and reading books to maintain their Well-Being, including positive emotions, satisfaction with life, and pursuing a purpose. Specific attention to communal emotional coping responses was noted as one male participant in Group 3 stated, *“I know that if I talk to a person, I will feel relieved. Most especially my mom.”* Additionally, Meaning was most frequently derived through service to others. The sentiments of growth, change, and contribution, such as those found in this female’s comment from Group 1 response:



*My purpose in life is just to, you know, continually learn and grow as a person, you know, to build meaningful connections with others to make a positive impact on my community, to help those in need.*

Another exemplar reflected the sentiment of giving back across focus groups:

*I think my purpose in life is really making my mom happy because I know I make her mad all the time. I could get in trouble. But really, at the end of the day, I really want to make her happy and not see her sad. – Male, Group 1*

There were no noticeable differences in sentiment based on gender; however, females across groups expressed the family's role as supportive, educational, and safe more often than the males. *"I feel more comfortable with my family,"* one female from Group 3 stated. *"I feel so comfortable when I'm with my family, so that's the only space I can rely on,"* another female participant from Group 1 expressed. In contrast, males expressed more comfortability with their peers. *"I would say school, but like, there's ups and downs, but really, just my friends," friends, I've grown to learn how they interact, and I'm going to be comfortable with them,"* a male from Group 4 shared.

Additionally, location stood out in terms of what makes youth happy. Although all youth contributed ways to maintain their Well-Being in terms of self-generated happiness and life purpose to the conversation, youth from Florida expressed activities that encompassed more physical engagement and team effort, including sports and community involvement (see Figure 3).

**Table 13***Code System Frequency*

	Segments	Percentage
Conceptualization of Blackness	24	12.77
Meaning of Blackness	8	4.26
Psychological Stressors	20	10.64
Psychological Stressors for Non-Blacks	10	5.32
Black Authentic Self	18	9.57
Black Role Model	32	17.02
Barriers to Expression of Blackness	11	5.85
Protection of Blackness	31	16.49
Well-Being	34	18.09
TOTAL	188	100.00

**Figure 3***Black Youth's Keys to Well-Being Word Cloud*

### Integration of mixed methods results

After analysis, three subscales of psychological stressors were found to be predictors of Well-Being. Specifically, Value for African-Centered Institutions and Relationships, Collective/Institutional Racism, and Cultural Racism regarding the prediction of the Meaning outcome. This effect held steady among males in the sample and the state of Arizona. However, no variation between states was significant enough to suggest that there were geographical differences in how Black youth racially identified or their levels of psychological stressors. Interestingly, Kids in Florida reported

higher levels of Life Satisfaction than those in Arizona. This was corroborated in focus group discussions as youth in Florida stated they engaged in a broader range of happiness-generating activities compared to those in Arizona, including organized sports, artistic outlets, and social connections. This could be a factor in the limited population of other black youth, but it was not explored. Participants in Arizona and females in both states had significantly higher levels of Value for African-Centered Institutions and Relationships (VAIC) than males; VAIC was related inversely to Life Satisfaction and positively predicted Meaning. This could suggest that having a higher sense of value placed on Afrocentric-based cultural ideals could lower one's satisfaction with life within the larger dominant In-group culture. This was echoed in qualitative data of participants reporting having to blend in so as not to feel left out in school, as well as examples given of various interactions with the in-group demographic where they were left with negative feelings, *"growing up as a kid, I was so shy of my color, you know, I used to feel that isolation (male, Group 3)"*, *"yeah, it's kind of, I felt like a feeling of injustice and low self-esteem and a sense of powerlessness (female, Group 2)"*. However, because VAIC fosters a spirit of community and safety, its positive correlation with and significant predictor of Meaning was also expressed throughout the focus groups. *"Being black to me is not just an identity, yeah to me, it shapes how people see me, and it shapes how I see the world around me,"* stated a female from Group 4. As confirmed by statistical analysis, the view is not always pleasant. Individual Racism was related inversely to both life satisfaction and positive affect. This was qualified through several anecdotes given of experiences of direct racial discrimination that negatively impacted respondents: one female youth in Group 2 described her experience in a

predominantly White school, *“It was kind of hard to make friends with them,”* Other hurtful experiences were expressed:

*You can walk up to the cashier or the counter, and you’re not being attended to, like the person just wants to attend to the white folks before attending to you. Now I’m being watched. Now they acting like, you know, like I don’t have no money and I’m going to just rob the place.*

– Male, Group 3.

Another adolescent continued, recounting his experience aboard a train while vacationing in a predominantly White area,

*They were staring at me before. But meanwhile before, before I got in, they were talking. They were talking, you know, having fun. But as soon as I stepped in there, they didn’t say anything again. They were just looking at each other, looking at me. Oh my God. It was a very bad experience; I really had a bad day.*

– Male, Group 3

Experiences like those mentioned above left participants feeling lonely, ignored, and awkward. With Cultural Racism being related positively to Meaning, perhaps instead of allowing the experiences of culturally based discrimination to deflate Well-Being fully, youth experienced a deeper drive towards creating change. Sentiments of *“changing the world, especially changing the mentality they have about black people,”* one female participant in Group 4, as their purpose in life stood as a testament to a deeply rooted sense and appreciation of one’s identity. Thus, as paradoxical as some findings may seem, it speaks to the innate resilience and tenacity found within the community.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The current exploratory sequential (Quant + Qual), mixed methods study applied Black Personality Theory to adolescents' experiences of well-being, with an Afrocentric conceptualization of identity and racial stressors in predicting life satisfaction, positive affect and meaning and purpose. Contrary to the hypothesis that Black youth located in the Southeast would exhibit higher levels of racial identity integration than those in the Southwest, the non-parametric tests revealed few differences between adolescents in Arizona and Florida. Similarly, PROMIS scores suggested similar levels of well-being, apart from Florida residents' median score being higher in Life Satisfaction.

### Integration

The data did not reveal a clear pattern of psychosocial stressors differentially impacting well-being based on geographical region. Nonetheless, in line with current well-being research conducted by Ryff and colleagues (2003), regression analyses demonstrated that ASCS Value of African African-centered institutions and Relationships significantly predicted Meaningful outcomes for participants in both states combined. Additionally, ASCS Value of African-Centered Institutions and Relationships, IRRS-A Collective and Institutional Racism, and Cultural Racism significantly predicted Meaning for those in the state of Arizona. Moreover, focus group data suggested that youth develop identity early and predominately from familial narratives and differences in treatment experienced in the larger society. Youth expressed racial discrimination as a critical psychological stressor and expressed their capacity to generate happiness



**Black youth relation to self-identity**

During qualitative analysis, youth articulated some critical components of Black Personality Theory, including the value of community, connection to all things, including nature, self-knowledge, and participation in culturally relevant practices. This corresponded to quantitative analysis, with the ASCS Value of African-Centered Institutions and Relationships being a strong predictor of one of the three aspects of well-being (Meaning) and correlated to Life Satisfaction at the bivariate level. The intrinsic value of Black youths' identity was formed primarily in childhood and formulated from family and contrasting experiences within the larger society. Youths' positive correlation and prediction of the influence of racial identity towards meaning was confirmed in their verbal responses that comprised personal growth and continued maturation, including spirituality--highlighting the possible importance of self-identity in shaping youth's success. Additionally, youth spoke fervently about individual experiences of racism, which could suggest some degradation of their racial identity, as suggested by Baldwin (1985). This could explain why ASCS subscales did not show predictive ability across all areas of well-being. Qualitative data showed that youth across both states formed identities and dealt with the same kinds of psychological stressors. In addition, respondents in Florida expressed activities that required physical and communal involvement, corroborating quantitative data of increased Life Satisfaction in Florida.

Interestingly, for the combined states, ASCS Value of African-Centered Institutions and Relationships was related to Meaning. However, when controlling for the other four predictors, it did not add its own unique variance in predicting Meaning;



however, when paired with Cultural Racism only, it did. This suggests further exploration is warranted since Arizona ASCS scores were predictive and were possibly drowned out once combined with scores from Florida. Assumptions that youth in the Southeast boast higher numbers of African Americans, leading to more opportunity for communal indoctrination, seem to be muted by the fact that racial identity development begins in the home and is more influenced by the quality of experiences youths have with the racially dominant group.

### **Black youth experience of stressors**

Overall, contemporary research still highlights the significant discrepancies in Black youths' experiences of violence, poverty, and discrimination in comparison to their white peers. Historical repercussions of race within the US still impact how Black youth experience the world (Wilson et al., 2023). In qualitative accounts, poverty and violence ranked last, respectively, as causes of psychological stressors in comparison to racial discrimination, relationships, and school. They suggest that the direct effects of violence and poverty may be secondary to adolescents' own direct experiences of racism, academia, and age-appropriate relationships or that there may be a buffer between youth and the impacts of poverty and violence not explored in this study. However, in quantitative data, Individual Racism was correlated inversely to Life Satisfaction and Positive Affect, Collective and Institutional Racism was inversely correlated and predictive of Meaning, and Cultural Racism was positively correlated with and predictive of Meaning, suggesting that the stress of racial discrimination has an impact on black youth well-being.

## Limitations

Although the study has several strengths, some limitations should be considered and addressed in future research. The limitations include the sample size, recruitment, focus group methodology, and measurement.

**Sample/Sampling.** Since the number of participants in this study ( $n = 94$ ) was fewer than the desired 134, or 67 participants in Arizona and Florida, the study likely had compromised power. However, shifting to non-parametric tests, such as the Mann-Whitney U test of group differences (geographic region) and median tests, required fewer assumptions, supporting this smaller sample. Further, some references indicate that a ratio of 10 participants was variable in a multiple regression could be sufficient (Voorhis & Morgan, 2007). The proposed study also indicated that up to 20 youths would be included in focus groups. However, for qualitative studies utilizing a phenomenological approach that focused on the authentic “stories” of the youth and the meaning associated with their worldview, the sample size is in line with recommendations for this type of approach, mainly when no new information is being extracted from the various focus groups or themes are being replicated (i.e., *saturation*; Moser & Korsteins, 2018). Non-probability sampling was used during phase 1 of the study, which could create potential bias and render responses ungeneralizable to a representative population. To reduce this, population criteria were clearly defined, multiple recruitment sources were used, sampling methods were transparently reported, and generalized regression modeling techniques were considered in statistical analysis (Greenacre, 2016).

**Recruitment.** Original recruitment plans of the sample population were stunted due to the nature of the racial identity component and the current political climate in both states that passed legislation banning any discussions or research around race. Future research can address this by expanding regional localization to include additional states in the Southwest and Southeast that do not operate under such legislation. Online recruitment through social media also presented a limitation of being able to track the overall pool of potential participants reached. Additionally, the social and cultural context was repeatedly highlighted during the focus groups, suggesting that despite the number of people of color living in an area, how those people are perceived in that location significantly affects how youth internalize their identity.

**Focus Group Methodology.** Although focus group methodology has been shown to provide insightful and rich data, in adolescents, it also can lead to group thinking in that one participant's responses influence the others to garner social approval. Additionally, it can heighten experiences of social mistrust, making disclosure of personal information uncomfortable and creating restlessness and opportunity for loss of attention (Norris et al., 2012). Another potential risk of group discussions may be that a participant will be less comfortable sharing their perspective if a different viewpoint has already been shared. Youth may also be reluctant to share if they are concerned with confidentiality. To mitigate these concerns, the focus group moderator encouraged name anonymity, kept to the scheduled timeframe, and elicited replies from each participant. However, some youths still preferred to have their cameras off. Camera shut-off requests were honored after identity was confirmed.

**Data Collection Timeframe.** Additionally, since this study utilized a cross-sectional design for both the quantitative and qualitative portions, the contribution of identity development over time and the cumulative nature of experiencing racism could not be ascertained. Therefore, future research would benefit from a series of focus groups to allow the youth to increase comfort and reflect on their responses between sessions. Different approaches can be incorporated to facilitate participation if the session is held virtually again, including having adolescents remain unmuted the entire session, possibly increasing participants of each group to five to seven, and increasing probing questions to the illicit free-flowing conversation (Van Ser Voort, 2023).

**Measurement.** Utilizing the ASCS allowed for the exploration of Black identity with an Afrocentric lens; however, the instrument's exact factor structure and ability to capture the dimensions of personality have been challenged in previous research (Bhagwat, 2009) and the current study. Specifically, only including the 28 items for the two-factor model may not have captured some aspects of identity that the original 14 omitted during previous iterations or different items may have provided. Additionally, developmental aspects of Black identity, particularly in the current social-cultural and political context, may require further honing of language used in the ASCS to elicit a clear understanding of concepts, terms such as "liberation," "heritage," and "racial consciousness" may not be as familiar to adolescence today as they were in the seventies when the measure was first developed. Additionally, a possible revision of the Likert scale could be helpful to ensure that youth can handle the number of options and undergo survey fatigue when responding. Furthermore, questions that address

participation in culturally based activities and associations, age-appropriate relationships, and knowledge of self could be helpful.

Despite the issues mentioned above that may impact the impact of the findings, the study's credibility was ensured through a rigorous approach of pairing the quantitative and qualitative data. Further, the confirmability (the degree to which others can confirm or corroborate the findings) was addressed through consultation with the dissertation advisor and having a second coder for the qualitative portion.

### **Implications for School Psychology**

During qualitative analysis, school stress ranked third behind racial discrimination and relationships as the most pressing psychological stressor in youth's lives. Additionally, youth expressed several incidences of perceived unfair treatment in school based on race, difficulty building connections with non-black peers in school, and pressure to assimilate into the dominant culture. These findings suggest that school can be a highly distressing setting for Black youth outside of the standard academic demands.

Youth were also able to highlight positive attributes of school that made them feel accepted and safe; those include good teacher-student relationships, participation in advocacy and social justice-oriented social groups, and opportunities to excel in subject areas in which youth feel naturally talented--suggesting that the impact of feeling connected and successful at school played a role in their self-identity. Interestingly, the only report of school acting as a conduit of self-identity discovery was witnessing non-white peers being treated more fairly than themselves. This is concerning considering

new legislation regarding the teaching of African American studies in states such as Florida that seeks to limit further access to historical knowledge surrounding race.

Schools must provide protection, allyship, and a culturally responsive sense of belonging for this student demographic (Jones et al., 2023; Ruffin & Blake, 2023). Hence, a curriculum designed to educate Black youth on and strengthen elements of their racial identity could be beneficial for promoting positive outcomes of Well-Being and academic success. Furthermore, implementing a culturally responsive approach to servicing Black youth in schools, reflecting on the multilayered systems of communities, institutions, and even larger societal and political climates, could create safe spaces for our youth to reach their highest potential (APA, 2017). Likewise, in qualitative research, the transferability of these findings is akin to external validity. Accordingly, the results may apply to other minoritized demographics of youth, as each community has its own traditional cultural systems and identification with them, thus suggesting the need for schools to increase racial equity in curriculum, promote social advocacy, and reform behavioral disciplinary discrepancies across the board.

## **Reflexivity**

Reflexivity involves researchers reflecting on their biases, values, and experiences that might affect the research. Albeit both the researcher and additional coder racially self-identified similarly as participants and shared some of the same experiences of racial psychological stressors, the first crucial step in our personal reflexivity process involved reflecting on our racial identity development and managing our assumptions around how current youth may think about and experience racial stressors considering modern technological advances and current political climate

unlike that of which the coder and myself matured in. During data generation via focus groups and analysis, unique experiences of youth's conceptualization of self, barriers to expression of self, and proficiency in self-generating happiness were uncovered, creating a new perspective neither the coder nor myself were aware of. Thus, both the coder and I could examine these distinct occurrences separately from our own experience unbiasedly.

### **Future Considerations**

This study's preliminary explorative steps can assist in future analysis, namely, assessing the complex relationship of the various constructs using more sophisticated tools such as structural equation modeling (Bryne, 2012). As Well-Being is a multifaceted construct, having the power to look at related predictors, such as racial identity and psychological stress interaction with it in one model, can assist in creating more accurate representations of how complex relationships interact to serve minority youth better. Finally, the increased use of qualitative work in Black youth racial identity research can lead to a greater understanding of how it is developed and expand upon culturally sustainable definitions of broader psychologically conceptualized terminology such as well-being and happiness. Replication or expansion of these findings will increase confidence that the current study's findings were dependable (i.e., consistency of findings over time). Further research is needed to expand the conceptualization of subscales Value for African-Centered Institutions and Relationships and Factor 2 Value Against Affirmative Africanity to account for modernized language youth used during the focus group. As well as research using the two-factor model on youth populations, including its correlation and predicting ability on well-being.

Gender differences showing that females had significantly higher levels of Value for African-Centered Institutions and Relationships than males for both states may suggest the intersectionality of gender socialization and females being more involved in communal activities and thus more apt to place higher value on them. Additionally, perceived beliefs about the out-group sentiments towards one's identity, as well as a more modernized conceptualization regarding anti-Africanity, summarized as cultural oppression, could be factored in when determining racial identity development as it was shown to harm Black youths, overall sense of well-being.

## **Conclusion**

The current study's mixed methods design allows for data triangulation that would not have been possible with only a qualitative or quantitative approach. The natural development of self in African American communities has been affected by many kinds of psychological stressors. Compared to other racial and ethnic groups, African American youth face more frequent exposure to racism, poverty, violence, and a host of other negative factors. One of those factors, well-being, was intently examined in this study by exploring Afrocentric-based racial identity development and frequency of psychological stressors. Although this study could not determine whether geography was a moderating factor of how racial identity and psychological stressors contribute to aspects of well-being outcomes, data did demonstrate that significant differences in several well-being measures (Life Satisfaction, Positive Affect, and Meaning) were seen based on racial identity (Value for African-Centered Institutions and Relationships) and psychological stressors (Collective/Institutional Racism and Cultural Racism) as well as youth experiences of well-being (Life Satisfaction) was dependent on whether youth



were in Florida or Arizona. This suggests the need for further exploration of geography as a moderating factor. Youth stressed the importance of the other in their sense of happiness and meaning, which, when considering the challenges they face, helped them cope healthily and maintain a positive outlook for the future. Thus, exploring various solutions to increase positive self-identification can help reduce the effects of the broader systems and structures that support inequality

## Appendix A

### *Definition of Terms*

African American- an ethnic group consisting of Americans with partial or total ancestry from any of the Black racial groups of Africa

Afrocentric- a form of thought centered on peoples of African descent

Black-melanated person of African descent, irrespective of nationality

Biophysical diversity- variation in genetic and physical characteristics among humans

Culture- customary shared beliefs, social forms, values, and norms groups use to identify themselves

Discrimination- unfair or prejudicial treatment of people groups based on characteristics such as race, gender, age, or sexual orientation

Ethnic identity- one's sense of belonging to a particular group based on culture in a geographic region, including language, heritage, religion, and customs

Eurocentric- a form of thought in which assessment and evaluation of non-European societies are viewed in light of European and Western cultural assumptions

Focus group- a research method used to collect opinions and feedback from a group of people about a specific thing

Identity- one's sense of who they are as an individual and as a member of a social group

Mixed methodology- the use of more than one method of data collection

Positionality- the position a researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study

Racial consciousness- one's awareness of one's race and status in society

Racial identity- an individual's sense of belonging to a particular race

Racism- a form of prejudice that assumes distinctive characteristics about members of a racial category and assumes inferiority of those members because of it

Stressor- a biological or environmental factor that causes strain or tension

Well-being- state of being comprised of an affective, cognitive, and purpose component

## Appendix B

### *Focus Group Question Prompts*

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#### **How do Black youths' racial self-identity processes interact with the psychological stressors associated with the African American experience?**

1. What does it mean to be Black?
2. Where did you learn the definition of Blackness (to define Blackness)?
3. What are your experiences with psychological stressors such as violence, poverty, and racial discrimination?
4. Do you think non-Black people experience similar impacts of violence, racial discrimination, and poverty in the way that you do?

#### **Across US geographic locations, how do Black youths organize racial determinants of self-identity?**

1. In what space do you think you can be your most authentic Black self?
2. What does it look like to be your most authentic Black self? (Can be active/passive participation)
3. Who's your Black role model? Who do you look up to as a Black role model?
4. How do you engage with that person?
5. What are things in society that create barriers for you to express your Blackness?
6. Do you think/believe/feel that Blackness needs to be protected?
7. How do you or people you know protect your/their Blackness?
8. Has this protection only come from other Black people? Do you think outside communities protect Blackness? If so, in what way?

#### **How do Black youth define well-being?**

1. What makes you happy?
2. What is your purpose in life?

























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