At the Forefront: The Experiences of Girls, Young Women, and Gender-Expansive Youth of Color as they Navigate the COVID-19 Pandemic and Social Uprising

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This work would not be possible without the leadership of In Solidarity Youth Fellows from across the country who led work organizing and facilitating conversations, analyzing data, and curating this report. We are grateful for their time, energy and expertise. Your wisdom and perspective were critical and invaluable.

And finally, we would like to thank the more than 380 girls, young women and gender-expansive youth of color who took the time to join our conversations and to share their lived experiences.

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IMPORTANT NOTES

This is a time of tremendous transformation during which we acknowledge that gender norms are a social construct built on a false binary. We recognize that gender and how we claim our identities is evolving across the spectrum. In response, the language we use to describe ourselves continues to transform and grow. (For more on language and terminology see Appendix A)

Some of the content in this report may be triggering. We urge readers to prioritize their wellness and self-care while engaging with the text.

The cursive font in this report may make it difficult to access for people with screen readers or visual impairments – a version with regular type face can be downloaded here: https://nationalcrittenton.org/project/is_conversations_project/

Suggested Citation:
CALL TO ACTION FROM AN IN SOLIDARITY FELLOW

LETTER TO THE READER

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THE PROCESS

MAJOR THEMES

Theme 1: “…I feel like there’s been like this entire pressure put on me”: Girls, young women and gender-expansive youth of color experienced economic instability within their ecosystems as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Theme 2: “Coming home to study was very, very difficult”: Girls, young women, and gender-expansive youth of color reported changes in relationships and responsibilities.

Theme 3: “Where am I going to go from here?": The abrupt switch to virtual learning truncated the educational journeys, disrupted traditional rites of passage, and created financial strains and deep uncertainty about the academic futures of girls and gender-expansive youth of color.

Theme 4: “The more connected I get, the further targeted I am”: While addressing the sudden changes in their lives as a result of COVID-19, girls, young women, and gender-expansive youth of color were further impacted emotionally by experiences of ongoing systemic racism.

Theme 5: “Youth organizing are a huge source of power”: Girls and gender-expansive youth of color responded to local and national injustices by engaging in protest and community action.

CONCLUSION

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B. Process
C. Engagement Flyer
D. Sample Conversation Guide
E. Coding Sheet
F. Pre-Conversation Questions
G. Submissions from Conversation Participants
Some things are just the “right thing to do.” Without an audience, or a call to action outside of oneself, some things challenge our integrity by simply posing the question within ourselves, “Am I doing the right thing?” Most often, this introspective query meets us in the face of adversity, and we find ourselves at the crossroads of instant gratification and long term satisfaction. In many cases, instant gratification manifests as convenience, the path of ease. Instant gratification urges us to indulge, it prompts us to be individualistic, self-serving, it entices us with a clear path to greener grass, so long as one does not look back and see the collateral damage of their decision.

Long term satisfaction often presents itself as a challenge, it urges us to be ambitious and critical, to face a problem head on. Long term satisfaction requires one to think of themselves and others, facing obstacles and strategizing to overcome them. This is, for obvious reasons, the path less walked. It is also the path most commonly walked by women of color, who in the face of adversity do not simply acknowledge strife, but are compelled to investigate who else is suffering silently and working tirelessly to amplify their voices, build community, and leverage strength in numbers to procure change.

The women of color that represent the fellows conducting the research behind this report have committed to the long term satisfaction of working towards equitable change. The initiative taken by women of color to gather, organize, and conduct research to investigate not a quantity of people, but the quality of the lives they live has the potential to move us forward in improving our social structures that facilitate our lived experience.

During a worldwide series of crises and in a country with minimal relief issuing from its political leaders, working class and student women of color took it upon themselves to work towards relief their officials failed to provide a country in need. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the US distributed minimal financial relief, issuing only (up to) two stimulus checks, publicly performed gratitude for “essential workers,” going as far as calling them “heroes” but failing to provide any additional care, resources or support to compensate them for their sacrifice, and often fell short with adequate pay or fair working conditions. Accommodations made were short sighted, and reflected ideas cultivated from a place of privilege. Social distancing policies and procedures for work and school were not accessible to those who needed accommodations the most. Over the course of the study, our Fellows discovered that those most impacted by disparity were continuously despaired and neglected, even as they were promised equity, change and a solution-oriented approach.

This report is a call to action. The efforts of women of color have produced a key to map out and identify problems within our social systems and structures, and suggests where we can implement change. This report is a guide for future policy recommendations, so we can begin to strategize against structural and systemic oppression by implementing structural and systemic solutions.

This report codes the comments reflecting the lived experience of women and gender-expansive folks of color across the US and paints a picture of the disproportionate impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on these demographics. This report is demystifying; it is a call out that highlights where we have been let down systemically, structurally, and the poverty, despair, helplessness and lack of accessibility that has been left behind and seemingly forgotten.

The illumination provided by our findings is a vessel of hope. A hope for us to be seen, heard, understood, and empathized with. To be treated as a neighbor or relative in need, rather than a throw away in the eyes of society. It is with great pleasure and gratitude that myself and the fellows I have worked closely with are able to pass the torch of long term satisfaction.

We challenge you to understand the problems in our systems and structures and face them head on. We challenge you to not only consider yourself but your neighbors. We challenge you to ask yourself the same question that compelled us all to put our heads together to do what us activists call the work, “Am I doing the right thing in this situation?” It is our hope that it leads you to meet us on the path less walked, so we can heal with equity, as equals, and start to make our way home.

Sincere and hopeful regards,

Chloe Williams, In Solidarity Fellow
Letter to the Reader

"I’m Mexican and Indigenous too. And what I think is beautiful is that our liberation is tied together. When we center Black women, Black trans women at the forefront of all our fights, we all get free."

- Conversation Participant

"There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle, because we do not lead single-issue lives. Our struggles are particular, but we are not alone. What we must do is commit ourselves to some future that can include each other and to work toward that future with the particular strengths of our individual identities."

- Audre Lorde

The In Solidarity Conversations were born out of our frustrations about the continued invisibility and marginalization of girls and gender-expansive young people of color, who in the midst of chaos and confusion, were stepping up to meet added caregiving and financial responsibilities in response to a global pandemic, while also engaging as leaders, organizers and activists at the forefront of the protests against the deaths of people of color at the hands of police during 2020. These were not ordinary times and this is not a traditional research report.

These conversations were also born out of hope and our trust in the leadership of young people of color to heal their communities and chart their destinies, our knowledge that if we created conditions where girls and gender-expansive young people could thrive—free of barriers—we would all be stronger, especially in times of conflict, crisis, and chaos.

This report is an act of intergenerational love, respect, and resistance that seeks to honor the wisdom, courage, and fierceness of girls, young women and gender-expansive youth of color. There is no executive summary in this report because we do not believe there should be a “short cut” to hearing about the experiences and perspectives shared during 45 hours of conversation in the midst of multiple, intersecting crises—a global pandemic, an ensuing economic crisis that exacerbated inequality, and a social uprising fueled by longstanding violence and racism. With a mix of fear and uncertainty punctuated by great hope that their activism would yield lasting change, participants described navigating multiple issues impacting them emotionally, socially, economically, and politically.

It is impossible to compartmentalize the experiences and the effects of the cumulative events of 2020 on anyone. There is no doubt that this is profoundly true for girls, young women and gender-expansive young people of color who—through the content of the conversations—revealed the complexity within which they worked to respond to all of it. Their words reflect the intricacy, grace and courage with which they stood in their own power to find their own way through the maze of events, feelings, challenges, and possibilities. Grounded in words of allyship, realizations that they are not alone and with a mix of razor sharp clarity rising out of confusion and questions. Only through their words can we come to understand the overwhelming and all-consuming heaviness of the challenges confronting them and the realities they faced in stepping up and in to meet them.
We recognize that youth-led intergenerational work is complex because it calls on us to acknowledge our tendency toward adultism and to set aside our need to interpret and evaluate the insights and observations of young people whose leadership we pledge to follow and honor.

As such, the report is built on quotes from the conversations rather than the translation that adults so often engage in about what it all means through our own lens. But we do know that the written word cannot convey the passion, fear, hope, confusion, the determination and struggle in their voices and hearts. So, we urge you to stop and pause, to read and not rush through the report, to hear their voices, to capture the feelings behind the words. Once you have done this, ask yourself what actions you can take to support them in:

• Being safe – from overwhelming physical, emotional, economic and political threats;

• Healing – from the impacts of adultification, complex stress, trauma and oppression in all its forms; and

• Thriving, not just surviving by advancing in their journey toward justice and joy.

Find a theme in this report that resonates with your heart and do something about it. If you are a funder – revisit what and how you fund your priorities and do not let them be invisible. If you are a policy maker – ensure that their needs and potential are always included by engaging them as leaders for change. Do anything but remain silent, because if you do nothing you are complicit in their oppression and marginalization. Their words are not a call for sympathy, they are a call to action – so act.

Jeannette Pai-Espinosa  
President, National Crittenton

Kalisha Dessources Figures  
Senior Advisor, National Crittenton  
Former Director of the National Collaborative of Young Women’s Initiatives
INTRODUCTION

“Young women and young, um, nonbinary people, nonbinary femmes, we don’t get a childhood. We don’t get to be 16 and like think freely and just be whatever. We have to be in these conversations. And like at the forefront of like healing things that were never ours to inherit to begin with.”

–Conversation Participant

“Coronavirus did not create the stark social, financial, and political inequalities that define life for so many Americans, but it has made them more strikingly visible than any moment in recent history. Unfortunately, some of the intersectional dimensions of these structural disparities remain undetected and unreported.”

–Kimberlé Crenshaw

The Context

The In Solidarity Conversations began in June 2020 and ended in early November 2020. At the time of the first conversation, the country was four months into social isolation and distancing. Schools were operating through virtual learning. Businesses and childcare centers were closed and many jobs were on pause. Families and the economy alike were struggling, and in April of that year, the Centers for Disease Control issued the first recommended guidance for wearing of non-medical face masks.

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd’s death at the hands of law enforcement was viewed around the world and the protests against state sanctioned violence and racism began. At this same time, we learned that Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old African-American woman, had been fatally shot two months earlier in her Louisville, Kentucky apartment on March 13, 2020. Police officers forced entry into her apartment where she was sleeping. Since the deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd in 2020, more than 200 Black people have been killed by the police - resulting in thousands of protests demanding justice and systemic change.

The #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate campaigns were a response to the growing recognition of hate motivated violence, discrimination and bigotry against Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AA and NH/PI) communities, in particular girls and women, who have long experienced violence, sexualization, and fetishization. During his presidency, Donald Trump engaged in overt and unacceptable acts of racism stoking the fears, polarization, and uncertainty of the times by referring to Covid as “Kung Flu” and “the Chinese virus”.

This time of uncertainty, shock, fear, isolation, chaos, and polarization was the real-life context for the young folks as they facilitated and participated in the In Solidarity Conversations. Recent reports have highlighted the experiences of various communities impacted by these historic events, but few have specifically focused on the intersecting impacts on the lived experiences of girls, young women and gender-expansive youth of color.

The period of June through November of 2020 only scratches the surface of the totality of how these converging crises have impacted the lives and well-being of girls, young women, and gender-expansive youth of color. As we publish this report, we are still in the midst of an unprecedented public health crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to cause illness and death across communities—disproportionately
communities of color. Young people continue to feel the consequences of virtual and lost learning at every level of education, and families of color—particularly women of color—continue to experience a labor market that has historically produced barriers to their economic security and freedom. Girls, young women, and gender-expansive youth of color are still struggling with and healing from experiences they voiced in this report, and this report represents only the beginning of the research that will be needed to adequately share their stories and reshape systems that will not fail them in moments of crisis.

This Report

Retrospectively highlighting the impacts of this series of events on girls, young women and gender-expansive youth of color through their own words, this report fills a critical gap in our social understanding. Over 400 girls, young women and gender-expansive young people of color between the ages of 13-26 from across the country participated in over 45 hours of In Solidarity Conversations.

An intersectional framework has been applied to the analysis of the conversation content to understand multiple forms of social inequalities girls, young women and gender-expansive youth of color experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the theory of intersectionality, the convergence of racism, classism, sexism, ableism, transphobia, immigration status, and other impactful inequities and forms of oppression create overlapping and interdependent systems of identity-based marginalization, invisibility, and discrimination.

In particular, structural gendered racism, or “the totality of interconnectedness between structural racism and structural sexism” (Pirtle & Wright, 2021 p. 171) has caused race and gender inequities in the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing social uprising. Through structural gendered racism, girls, women, and gender-expansive youth of color are embedded in conditions that elevate their risk for COVID-19, and contribute to their well-being in multiple and complex ways. By centering the perspectives and experiences of girls and gender-expansive young people of color, this report aims to enhance our knowledge of critical stressors and supports experienced by girls and gender-expansive youth of color as they navigate the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing social uprising in ways that can inform policy, practice, and research.
The Process

Using a youth participatory action research (YPAR) approach, 15 regional, virtual In Solidarity Conversations were led by and held with girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color between June and November of 2020. The following information briefly summarizes the engagement process, conversation format, and descriptive information about the girls, young women and gender-expansive young people of color who participated in the conversations. A more detailed description of the IS conversations, analysis process and information about the participants can be found in the appendices (See Appendix B –Process).

Engagement of Participants

In Solidarity Conversation (IS Conversation) participants were invited to participate in conversations using a variety of methods. Fliers and information about the conversations were distributed by partner organizations, their allies, and by youth facilitators using methods such as email list, listservs, social media platforms (i.e., Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, etc.), and word of mouth (See Appendix C: Engagement Flyer). Efforts were made to restrict the conversations to girls, young women, and gender-expansive youth of color by including exclusion criterion on certain questions during the registration process. The goal was to provide a safe space for girls, young women, and gender-expansive youth of color to discuss their experiences.

IS Conversation Youth Facilitators and Format

Seventeen girls, young women and gender-expansive young people of color facilitated the IS conversations. For context and understanding, the majority of facilitators lived in the region where their conversation took place.

Each of the 15 regional conversations were 90 minutes in length, took place using the Zoom platform, were recorded for analysis purposes, and were divided into three distinct phases. Phase one (approximately 45 minutes) was a discussion among all participants. During this time, the lead facilitator described the purpose of the conversations, the agenda of the discussion and, in collaboration with participants, established the community agreements for the conversation. This phase also included a full group conversation focused on three specific questions that were asked consistently in all 15 conversations. These questions were designed by young people within partner organizations that are experts in engaging in youth participatory action research. These questions were:

1. We know that the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacts communities of color, and specifically Black communities. This is not only this health crisis—it is a result of inequities and systemic oppression that exist in our healthcare system. As young women of color and gender-expansive young people of color, has the COVID-19 crisis impacted you? If so, how? Has it impacted your community? How have you been feeling since the start of the pandemic?

2. This pandemic has also led to an economic crisis that communities of color feel disproportionately. Has COVID-19 had a financial impact on you and your family? Your community?
3. Recently, we’ve seen Black bodies dehumanized and continued victims of police and state violence. How have the murders of Breonna Taylor, Nina Pop, Tony McDade, and George Floyd (and so many others) and ongoing racism impacted you? How are you processing everything? What would you like to see your community and leaders doing to fight against and push back on police violence and brutality?

Phase two of the conversation included small group discussions of approximately 30-35 minutes. During this time, young people participating in the conversations were grouped into virtual breakout rooms that included anywhere from 5-10 participants, a youth facilitator and an adult ally who took notes and provided technical support if needed. Breakout session facilitators were provided a list of 14 additional questions from which they could choose to discuss in their breakout session. The third and final phase of each conversation included a brief recap of the highlights from the breakout sessions to the full group, a closing statement by the lead youth facilitator and time for questions and answers. (See Appendix D: Sample Conversation Guide for more details about the conversation structure and questions.)

Throughout the conversation, participants were given the option to respond to questions by unmuting their microphones and speaking or using the chat box. At the end of each virtual conversation, youth facilitators were compensated $75 and conversation participants were compensated $30 for their time and expertise.

**Conversation Participants**

A total of 557 young people registered to participate in the virtual conversations. Of the 557, at least 387 logged into one conversation (retention rate of 69.5%). At least 33 states, the District of Columbia, and tribal communities were represented in the conversations. Their ages ranged from 13 to 32 (mean = 18.7) with the majority being between the ages of 16 and 23.
### Table 1: Gender Identity

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### Table 2: Race/Ethnicity

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MAJOR THEMES

THEME 1:

"...I feel like there’s been like this entire pressure put on me"

Girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color and their families experienced changes in their employment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some young women and gender-expansive young people of color were laid off, scheduled to work fewer hours, or placed on leave (often without pay) due to exposure to COVID-19. Girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color who lost their job or were looking for new employment had a difficult experience finding a job. When girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color did not have a job, it negatively affected the entire family because they often shared or assumed the full responsibility of paying the household bills during the pandemic.

Subtheme 1: Helping Their Families Pay for Basic Needs

The pressure to assume more responsibility served as a catalyst of negative mental health outcomes during the pandemic. One youth who graduated high school in 2020 reported feeling pressured to immediately get a job to support their family:

"...I feel like there’s been like this entire pressure put on me, like, especially, because like I graduated high school like this, with class of 2020, and like, I didn’t get like a graduation or anything. And like, I just kind of straight out, got out of school and then like had to find a job, like help out with the family. So, I’ve been like, I’ve been working at like a progressive path right now ... And, I’ve been putting that money towards like my sister’s tuition."

The abrupt pressure to help their families pay for basic needs during the pandemic was a recurrent theme amongst participants. A 16 year old reported that they helped their mother pay bills, but they lost their job due to the pandemic and that had a tremendous impact on their entire family’s financial stability. A 17 year old living in a group home described how they needed a job to save money to afford rent for an apartment and to help their younger sister still living at home:

"...And like, my sister has been struggling because like she needs stuff like food and ... I don’t know all this stuff that you need on the daily basis. And 'cause I don’t have a job, it’s just hard."
Another youth who identified themselves as the main provider for their sister described how difficult it was to secure gainful employment during the pandemic:

"I am my sister’s provider, so like, it’s been really hard, not being able to find a job because right now, like for example, in restaurants that say they have, normally they have like 20 waitresses, but since COVID is here, they cut down to 10 waitresses only. So, like finding a job for now is really hard. I have been putting my email everywhere and going to a bunch of places trying to like, get hired for anything. And it’s just, nobody wants to hire like anybody or like they’re full or something. I don’t know. It’s just, it’s been really hard."

In fact, many youth moved back home to support and be supported by their families. One young person, for instance, moved in with their parents and worked remotely after their father began to work less because the shipping company he worked at was no longer receiving shipments. They shared,

"...I moved back in with them and like now we kind of share bills. Um, and it’s, it’s kind of like a plus, like a silver lining thing because bills are cheaper, but also, it’s like, we, like, I have to depend on my parents more and they have to depend on me more, and like, I had their place to go to."

**Subtheme 2: Experiencing Difficulties in Accessing Social Supports**

The lack of or delayed access to governmental support (e.g., unemployment benefits, stimulus checks, housing vouchers) contributed to the need for girls, young women, and gender-expansive youth of color to support themselves and their families. For example, a girl reported: “my parents lost both of their jobs permanently and it was a real struggle at first and the stimulus checks took a while to come in and they weren’t, they don’t stretch that far.” Several other girls, young women, and gender-expansive youth described the difficulties associated with navigating these benefits, as well as feelings of guilt or pride that delayed their decision to apply for them:

“My godmother is a teacher and like, since the pandemic has started, she has done everything to make sure that like, we still have food in the refrigerator and she’s still able to, you know, sustain life and pay bills and things like that. And it’s come to the point where she has to apply for unemployment and apply for food stamps and things like that. And it’s not as easy as people kind of make it seem. So, she’s had a very hard time to getting to that point and getting that support needed from the government or that the government is offering. But yeah, I have experienced some economic struggles since the pandemic has started.”
Some youth reported that they had difficulties or were ineligible for benefits. One participant, for example, described how their father applied for unemployment benefits and was rejected, which provoked various challenges:

"...And then I'm living with a family friend due to like family issues and like, you know, they lost their jobs too. They don't have any money. So, they're living off of like last year's, like the amount they had before COVID. And we've been applying for like unemployment, but for some reason, every time we apply, we get rejected. Um, and so my dad just gave up 'cause he had applied for unemployment like six times and he got rejected each time. And he even went to his boss to talk about it. His boss sent in something to the unemployment you know, unemployment people and he still got rejected. So, it's like my dad's living, he wasn't living on anything before just like DOORDASH type of stuff. But now he has like, he works like three hours once a week. But it's still really hard with COVID. He has to be really careful. And then my brother has, you know, heart problems. Um, so there's just a lot of health issues in my family, financial issues."

Financial difficulties were exacerbated for youth and their families due to the lack of accessibility for government benefits. Another young person shared that their family was ineligible to receive the stimulus:

"...as a Latina and as a daughter of an immigrant. Uh, that is very real. Anything from house cleaners, like my aunt, to street vendors to, um, just any, you know, roofers, um, anyone in the community who has a big impact on the community and on, you know, the economy has been hit hard and they unfortunately were not included in the stimulus package. ...Also, children who relied on meals for the school system are seeing food insecurities. That is a huge thing."

**Subtheme 3: Navigating the Dangers of Essential Work**

Many girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color were deemed essential workers during the pandemic and reported different safety protocols and leave policies related to COVID-19. One participant who reported that they were a server at a restaurant where other employees tested positive for COVID-19 expressed frustration in the manager's response to the ongoing pandemic, saying:

"They're really doing this for a dollar. They won't shut down until it's mandatory for us to shut down. So, no one's really advocating for us. It's just like we have to continue to work. I have to continue to serve cause I have, I have to make money somehow."
This need to continue to work to make an income, at the cost of one’s health, was echoed across the conversations. One young participant expressed concern about their dad on the front lines:

"For me, it’s my dad. He still has to go to work. He works at a grocery store and it’s always been kind of worrying to know that he has to interact with so many people, but it’s our only source of income."

A common theme among young people and their families working during the pandemic was formally or informally learning that they had been exposed to COVID-19 and waiting for the results of their test. During this period of waiting, they worried about their inability to make an income and the possibility that they contracted and spread the virus to a family member. For example, one young participant said, “So I take care of my grandparents. So being, having to expose myself so that definitely creates anxiety. That definitely creates anxiety.” However, many acknowledged that there was nothing they could do because they relied on that income to stay afloat:

"My mom was working from home currently and I actually, I have a job as a cashier. A few employees were just tested positive and I wasn’t let known, so I just kind of, got tested like last week and I just got my results yesterday. So then hopefully I’ll be returning back to work soon."

Many girls, young women, and gender-expansive youth of color expressed the need for equitable access to COVID-19 testing due to employment related exposure. Some areas, particularly Black and Latinx/e communities, where the youths lived did not have COVID-19 testing centers, while other areas only offered tests for a fee, to people with symptoms, or at a physician’s discretion. Many reported long lines to get tested. One young person, for instance, reported that they had been exposed but ineligible to receive a test at their local testing center because they were not exhibiting symptoms. Another young person was unable to secure a job contingent on presenting a negative COVID-19 test because they were also unable to find a location that would test them. One youth with five members of their family who had recently tested positive for COVID-19 expressed how hard it was for African Americans to be tested and receive appropriate care,

"Okay. So, five members of my family had COVID-19. Two of them was in my household, including my mom and my mom literally went through a two-day process to get them tested. My little baby cousin who was eight months at the time, she actually went to the hospital to get checked up and they wouldn’t test her. I’m from a very small rural town. And it’s like, it was like pulling teeth to try and get tested. And they went on only one factor, that they were not running a fever and they tried to push them to not get tested, to try to go back to work. And of course, you know, that results in spreading the disease. I mean, I’m sorry, the virus. So
yeah, that's kind of what I'm going through in like a small town. They're not testing because merely because you are an African-American woman and you're pushing for it, so yeah."

In talking about disparities in Texas and the need to support people who do get sick with COVID-19, a young person in Texas said,

"So, like here in Fort Worth and Arlington, there's like a lack of COVID testing centers and wherever they are, it tends to be in like nicer parts of town, um, like richer parts, whiter parts. Then if there are testing locations in poor parts of town, the lines are so long and they have to wait so much longer for results. I've also seen some people posting that like after getting out of the hospital, they're just left with thousands and thousands of dollars of bills and like that can ruin your entire life, and like, I don't know, there should be some type of government safety net so that people don't have to go bankrupt in order to stay alive."
Theme 2: “Coming home to study was very, very difficult”

Girls, young women, and gender-expansive youth of color reported changes in relationships and responsibilities.

Girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color had to navigate changes across multiple systems (e.g., at home, in school, or at work). Young mothers, in particular, reported disruptions in employment, childcare, and school routines. Some girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color found themselves having to navigate new and/or increased household expectations, often caring for siblings and/or other loved ones, while also balancing school and work. Young people who were enrolled in college and returned home during the pandemic reported dramatic changes to their support structures and routines. Many found the expectation to balance schoolwork, employment, and household duties extremely difficult. Often, the pressure to assume more adult roles and responsibilities caused a strain in their relationships. However, the change in routines as a result of the pandemic may have also provided an opportunity to deepen their familial relationships and to engage in self-reflection.

Subtheme 1: Assuming Additional Responsibilities at Home

Many reported that because they spent more time at home, they were expected to assume more responsibilities. One participant shared,

“I’m about to be a senior in college and coming home to study was very, very difficult because once my family sees me at home, they expect me to have more responsibilities. So, they’ll sit, they’ll see me sitting at my computer and they’re assuming that I’m not doing my homework, or they think that school is just the hours that you have classes and that’s it. So, they see me at home and they think that I’m really not doing much. So, they expect me to do more responsibilities than if I would’ve just stayed on campus. Um, cause on campus, I don’t really have any distractions and the distractions definitely were a lot when I came home, especially with younger siblings and everything. Cause you have to help around the house, cleaning, cooking, making sure that the siblings are okay because now they’re doing online school too. And how do I make sure that they’re, they’re doing their school? While I’m still maintaining my classes.”

This participant found the expectation to balance schoolwork and household duties extremely difficult, reflecting how it was easier going to school away from home. Other participants also found themselves having to navigate new household expectations, often taking a greater role in caregiving. One young participant reported, “[I] had to kind of cut back on my hours from like myself working in order to take care of my little sister. So that impacted me a lot because I wasn’t making as much money.” Another participant described how they assumed the role of teacher to their younger siblings during the pandemic:
"I have three other siblings that are also in, online school and I have another three siblings that are not old enough to go to school yet. And since I’m the oldest sibling, I do a lot of the teaching my younger siblings when they have questions and because my parents don’t understand the work that we’re doing in class, so we don't get very much help from them. So, they rely on me. And sometimes I feel like I’m the teacher now."

For some youth, leaving home was the most sustainable option. To protect their wellbeing, one participant who was a senior in college living at home decided to leave home to be financially independent, saying,

"They really leaned on me a lot financially, which also stressed me out because I also had things to pay for, and it got to the point where I moved out. So, I moved out, in July because if I want, I want it to be financially independent and I love, and I gave my parents so much, but I, I couldn’t handle the, the, I just couldn’t handle that aspect. And it wasn’t really, um, a positive atmosphere when it came to money. It was just like, they expected me to do a lot when I didn’t have the means to and so I, I had to, I had to move out for my own sake. I still talk to them. I visit them once a week, but I had to remove myself from that situation because it wasn’t very good for me."

**Subtheme 2: Navigating Changes in Family Dynamics**

The shift to virtual learning and working also resulted in significantly more time with family members. Participants reflected on how this change in environment affected their relationships with siblings and family members, in both positive and challenging ways:

"I think it really changes the family dynamic, because I don’t know now, like both of my parents are home, so it’s kind of like, everybody’s got to like to contribute now. So, I think in that aspect, it like does a little more, like I definitely like try to help my mom out more or at least I’m more mindful about it."

One participant described the initial stages of quarantine with their family as being “really hard” especially during the first month or so for “everyone” in their family. However, like a few others, eventually the family was able to adjust and that their “family has had the chance to come together and be closer and learn a little bit more about each other that we didn’t know before we were told to stay at home.” Another participant stated,

"Me and my foster mom been just chilling together, bond, having a great bond and just advising me about being social distant in college. That’s it. It hasn’t hit us the way
Particularly for college students who returned back home, the structure, routine, and moving away from friends was associated with changing relationships with parents:

“I will say as a college student and even just at any age, it’s very hard transitioning from interacting with your friends, to being with your family and your parents 24/7. So, I would definitely say adjusting to that has been interesting, but definitely good.”

A few participants also mentioned that the pandemic and more time at home encouraged them to share more about their identities with their family. Another youth expressed a similar desire saying,

“...I think we're, we're starting to work on our communication, like me and my parents. So, I think there's room for growth and also, I'm, not out to my parents. I have pride flags all over my room so I'm not hiding it, but it's just... I don't know how to have that conversation with them. But I feel like during this pandemic, I might just tell them because like, I don't know, like I'm wearing my pride shirts. I can have my pride experience with my parents.”

**Subtheme 3: Learning More About Their Own Identities and Interests**

Moreover, without prompting, several participants noted that forced quarantine provided them the opportunity to engage in self-reflection, acts of self-care and for some, to begin new hobbies or even to start their own businesses. For example, one participant shared how they started a business,

“I found I have a lot more time and I've been using it to kind of listen to a lot of podcasts, on like building businesses and e-commerce. So, I've been trying to start an e-commerce business and actually have my website up. I'm not gonna tell you what it is 'cause it's not finished, but, uh, I think this is a great time to use to further your education. I feel like in a lot of places that people of color, especially women in general have, traditionally been kind of boxed out of... so I would encourage people to listen to like financial literacy podcast or like even Youtube. Youtube is also, has been a great resource for me to just, I've been learning so much.... So, every weekend I have nothing to do and I become a business woman and I'm really, really happy about that actually.”

Some participants talked about the benefits of slowing down, sharing that “it does not really bother me as much because it gives me a little time to focus on myself and like focus on what I
want to do towards the future and stuff.” One participant, in particular, said

“I think what COVID has really done for me is it has allowed me to take this world, that we’re constantly on the move. We’re constantly exposed to so much information at once that we often times don’t actually sit down and take a breather and actually reflect on who we are as people. Who we see as people, like, what we see as people.”

Another participant described the joy of being “cool” with herself as a result of self-reflection during the pandemic, saying

“They asked us how COVID has affected us, and it’s affected me both negatively and positively, but mostly so positive because I’ve been able to sit with myself and get to know myself a whole lot more. And that’s been such a beautiful experience. Like I can look in the mirror now and actually be satisfied with what I see. Like me and me are cool right now, you know? And it’s been like so hard trying to get up to that point, you know, because being queer, but also being like inside queer because you don’t want nobody to know. Like, anybody’s going to judge you and there’s my background with my family. And also, my religion. It’s always been so hard to balance queerness and religion at the same time, because, you know, you have both and you know, neither one you can really change about yourself.”

**Subtheme 4: Young Mothers Navigated Changes Across Multiple Systems While Supporting their Children**

Young mothers talked specifically about the unique impact of the pandemic on their families. The on-going challenges faced by young mothers were compounded by the pandemic, highlighting the issues they were already facing. Overall, young mothers had to navigate changes across multiple systems – at home, in school, at work, at childcare – in order to support themselves and their young children. One pregnant participant, who secured a temporary job in campaign elections, described how difficult it was to find a fulltime job because they were pregnant, saying “it’s like, nobody wants to hire me because I’ll be gone in a few months. And so that’s not so fun.” Another participant described how job hunting, experiencing a strained relationship with their mother, and working to find stable housing was “a lot at once.” In addition to financial strains, such as not qualifying for stimulus payments if they were dependents for their parents, young moms faced unique challenges when pursuing education. One young mother in college discussed how difficult virtual learning, in particular, was with an infant:
“So, for me, school is virtual this year and for me I also have a one-year-old daughter and, um, I’m not sure how I’m going to go to school virtually and have her at home because she cannot go to daycare because I’m not an essential worker. So, for me, I’m kind of stressed because I don’t know how I’m going to focus on my schoolwork and getting things done as well as have her running around all day.”

Another mother discussed how their initial excitement for virtual learning waned as she worried about the potential impacts of the pandemic on her life:

“It had a huge impact. I, I’ve always done online school and because I, you know, I’m a busy mom, I’m a single mom. I work whatever. And, with this pandemic, I was like, so pumped. I’m like, yes, I’m going to get so much schoolwork done because I can work from home. My kids here, like I don’t have to travel around. I’m going to get everything done. And that wasn’t the case. I lost so much focus and so much motivation. And I really lost sight of my future goals. I just didn’t think that they were important. I just felt like I needed a plan for the short term. Like I started thinking about like, how much rent can I pay if I lose my job tomorrow? Can I still live here? Like, can I, should I apply to like a grocery job or, you know, something that is going to pay my bills and keep us afloat. And I really stopped thinking about school or I wasn’t really making that my first priority. And it, it actually did hurt me and you know, now I’m scurrying and trying to get things done. Um, but it did have a huge impact on my motivation. And even just like the roll that I was on, you know, the read, you know, just like the, the little rolls that you get into, like now I’m going to read, and then I’m going to do this. I’m going to do that. I just, I just lost it. So, it has taken me a really long time to get back on, you know, my, my role in, and that’s me, you know, not, not being focused because I’ve always been online.”

Similar to this mother, a 21 year old mother majoring in psychology described the stress of widespread closings and the fear of contracting COVID-19:

“I ended up having to lose my job, day cares are closing, and the schools closing so many days. I’m used to having books in front of me or a teacher in front of me, where it’s not like that anymore, where we have to do online. So, I kind of do struggle with online classes right now and day cares are closing. And so, I now am a full-time mom where, you know, you gotta tell your toddler to stop running, do this, do that. And you have to deal with an infant and a toddler at the same time. And you can’t. Well, I told him not to go to their appointments because of COVID-19 and
they have everyone sitting outside for a lot of stuff. And because I have an infant and
toddler like the others did say you don’t know who has COVID-19. And so that’s kind
of been traumatizing and, you know, finding good jobs, that is traumatizing and young
Black women and mothers, not having certain places, places to go. For me before
everything got taken away, I’m not gonna lie to you, I was actually living lavish. I
was great. But when it did happen, it became a struggle where, like I said, day cares
are closed. You don’t want to be around other people and you can’t find a job because
of they choose certain people first. And for some of us who do not want to get
COVID tested because some of them be false accusations saying that we do or we don’t
have COVID. You be so scared to go in and then they test you, you’re positive. And
the reality is like, you’re just paranoid if you do or you don’t have COVID. So, me
personally, I just didn’t go back to looking for work at all because of my children.”

The closing of child care centers made some of the strategies that young mothers used to
balance home, work, and school impossible:

“I live in Chicago, Illinois, and I currently live in like a home for like mothers and
children. And so, I feel like the whole building is like, the pandemic has attacked
everyone emotionally and financially because you know, some of the daycares were
closed. And so that’s basically a lot of peoples like support systems in my building.
And so, they really couldn’t work or I couldn’t work because the daycare was closed.
So, you know, like even when, even the financial part. I’m not working
and trying to pay our bills as being single parents, that was really hard also.”

For this young mother, losing access to daycare affected their ability to work as well as their
mental health. Another young mother also expressed the same sentiment, expanding on the
cascading effects of losing childcare:

“Something that has impacted me pretty significantly is that during this pandemic,
childcare was a very important thing for me, um, to be able to make it to work.
And since, uh, you know, like everything with COVID has gotten kind of serious, like,
I think it was at the end of March or the beginning of April that my kid’s daycare
closed. And I can’t, you know, like it’s kind of, I have to miss out on a lot of work
or like, I don’t get to come here on time unless some of my family is willing to help
me with them. So yeah, that childcare and daycare is like a really huge part of it.
Um, which in turn affects my income. And like what I’m able to bring home. And,
Um, I’ve been single parenting for about seven months now. And so that’s, it’s, it’s
really huge for me not to get those hours that I used to be able to, to get. And then
I know it’s, it’s a really big deal for my kids too. Like they don’t get that interaction with their friends. I’m at home like trying to teach them their ABCs cause they’re two and four. I’m like teaching them whatever I can whenever I have time when I’m there, that I’m not working. And then that in itself is really isolating. Like we don’t get to talk to any other people or, you know, they don’t get to hang out with their kids. I don’t get to see other parents, um, my friends. So that’s one of the impacts that it’s had on me and like my mental health.”
**Theme 3:**

"Where am I going to go from here?"

The abrupt switch to virtual learning truncated the educational journeys, disrupted traditional rites of passage, and created financial strains and deep uncertainty about the academic futures of girls and gender-expansive youth of color.

COVID-19 drastically changed the way young people learn and engage with their peers and teachers. In the wake of the national stay at home order, most girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color switched from in-person to virtual learning. While youth reported different responses by schools and universities, most reported difficulties with the transition, including modifying established school-related routines (e.g., not going to the library, no longer living in a dorm or off-campus housing), and the delay or cancellation of events (e.g., prom, graduation, sporting events). Many participants expressed frustration and difficulties adapting to the new online environment and noted a lack of motivation and struggles with focus while doing school virtually. This lack of motivation seemed to stem not only from technological difficulties or blurred boundaries of home and school, but also from the emotional toll of feeling overwhelmed by the abrupt changes and loss of milestones and rites of passage.

**Subtheme 1: Accessing Technology and Resources Needed to Engage in Online Schooling**

Although most girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color did not personally experience difficulties accessing the online educational materials, many worried about inequities in access to technologies within their communities. One student in college worried about the implications of access on children’s learning, saying,

"It was kinda difficult for me because like you said, earlier I'm an in-person type of person also I'm an engineering major, so a lot of classes I really don't want to take online. So, it was a hard transition. And also, not even just for me, I see the ways it affected like my nieces and nephews, because, um, this made me realize like just them having at least decent Wi-Fi and stuff. Um, I'm thinking about all the kids who don't have internet at home, the kids who don't have their own study area to be able to focus and do the work they need to do, or don't have the teacher's aide to be able to help them when they need help."

One young woman reflected on how mandating students to attend school online when technology is not available to all students is “inherently oppressive.” One college-aged participant cited the lack of other resources they needed to complete assignments at home, such as access to books or study spaces:

"I definitely felt the lack of resources. And so, when, I'm a college student and so, I had access to a lot of resources that I just don't have at home. Um, so even when it comes to spaces that I could study in, the library and the way I can access books,
we have an interlibrary program. So, if my library doesn't have the book, I can still get it. It might be, um, in a nearby library. And so, I guess my, one of the conversations that my school had was, how to make, how to make sure the students have those resources, technology, you know, material resources. It all happened so quickly. I left everything on campus. It was during my spring break and so, I never got to go back and get my things. And so that was also a problem I had, but I think, yeah, I really wanted to bring that up, but also definitely I relate to everything that's been said thus far.

A high schooler expressed a similar shift in resources available during the pandemic:

“Education has definitely like switched. Like I'm in a public high school, a senior in high school. So, it was like a transition to online. Like we have such a long time, like two to three weeks just to have teachers like get used to like the new technology. And like also, like, it has like, the quality as like you aren't able to get as much help directly from teachers or like resources, like library or like career centers or like counselors. I feel so overwhelmed with like so much virtual communication.”

Another high school student conveys the stress caused by COVID-19:

“COVID-19 has definitely brought on a lot of stress for me. With online learning, I find myself constantly stressing about Wi-Fi connectivity issues and managing a huge workload. I try to manage my stress by going on long bike rides with my family.”

Subtheme 2: Sustaining Focus Amidst the Pandemic

Many participants expressed difficulties with sustaining focus and attention on the online material. According to the participants, the shift in modality caused a “disconnect” that made it more difficult to learn online. For instance, one participant described their experience attending college classes online with the following statement:

“There's been kind of a disconnect with online learning. I feel like I've like, I'm in university, like I said before, and I've attended like zoom lectures and things like that, but it's kind of hard to interact and like really absorb that information and feel like you're honestly learning when I'm just like sitting in my bed in my pajamas. So, it's definitely hard to kind of just have that same learning experience, especially because for me personally, I was living on campus.”

Another woman talked about how the transition from attending school in person to attending school online was “emotionally taxing”:
“Well weeks ago, that was like, I’m physically in July, but I’m mentally still in March. Like it’s like completely nerve wracking the way that we’re in a totally different environment now. And, you know, for me, I, back in March, I had to stop school as I’m sure many people on here did and had to, it had to go from being in person to being online. And that is just so emotionally taxing because as much as we might want to say that we hate school, we also, in some ways like need that, sort of routine or, that, thing that we’re used to. And so, it was like very jarring to not have that for so long.”

This comment resonated with other focus group members, particularly participants who returned home from college and completed their semester online:

“Yeah. I can definitely resonate with that. So, coming back home, that was kind of a strange adjustment as well, kind of having a new environment and trying to like learning, figuring out how to learn in that new space. So, it’s definitely a challenge. I definitely resonate with that.”

During the pandemic, teachers and professors’ expectations of what their students should complete at home varied. Some youth reported that their instructors extended more grace, while others reported that virtual learning required more work than in-person learning. For example, one participant said,

“Learning from home is very hard for me to focus, especially with a lot of my relatives coming in and out. Also, my teachers didn’t have any remorse for [not accepting] late assignments, which was discouraging since I was an all A student.”

Another young woman returned to school during the pandemic and was surprised how inflexible instructors were:

“...I think it’s like impacted my ability to learn both positively and negatively. I lost my job and living situation when COVID came out. And so, I had a lot of time on my hands, so I decided that I was going to try to go back to school and find some sort of online program that wouldn’t be impacted by COVID. So that was awesome. And then getting into the program and getting that started, I quickly realized that just like learning hasn’t taken into like the conflict, the way that the content and curriculum is designed itself, hasn’t taken into account people’s changed ability and capacity with COVID. And so, it was very hard to reenter the classroom and understand that like professors aren’t necessarily being mindful or conscientious of people’s changing capacities and just the things going on beyond COVID like COVID is happening...
alongside like a racial pandemic and just understanding that there’s not a lot of that understanding and competency in classroom.”

As a result of the shift to virtual learning, some youth cited changes in their grades. One participant commented, for example, “Um, since classes were shifted, um, online, my success tanked. So, with all classes being online or a hybrid, it’s going to be a ride. Yes. My last two classes during COVID tanked.” One college student initially worried if they would be able to graduate due to the drop in their grades:

“Yes, I am in school. I do miss being in class, um. COVID has made it really difficult. Um, last semester I was really nervous that I wasn’t going to graduate from my, community college just because, my grades just started, dipping from trying to do everything online. Like it was just a sudden shift in the middle of the semester. But luckily, I graduated…”

Subtheme 3: Missing Celebrations and Other Effects of Virtual Learning

Many girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color expressed sadness in missing school-related events such as prom and graduation. Many felt they had worked hard to accomplish school-related tasks and were eagerly awaiting the opportunity to experience the rewards, celebratory moments, and new experiences that traditionally mark specific accomplishments and transitions for many young people -- only to be disappointed as many traditional markers were canceled due to concerns about COVID. For example, one participant shared,

“Like, literally I’m struggling with virtual right now, like classes and the ways assignments are set up also like just totally missing prom and the way graduation went like that, it’s a whole different change. You know I didn’t get to experience that yet.”

Many young participants who were transitioning from high school to college expressed sadness in missing graduation and a typical freshman year of college. One participant said,

“...I feel like, like my entire, like, four years of high school, like I always worked, I wasn’t like the type to go to like homecoming or prom. Cause I was like, education is so important and I would just spend all my time doing that. And I was like, you know, I’m going to have my moment for graduation. And then I didn’t have that either. So, like, I just was like really hoping that I would get like a better college experience. Like I’m just like the freshman year where I could do like all those, eating, learning and like, they would do like specific activities for like freshmen, but I don’t get to participate in that anymore. And I also was looking forward to living
on campus. I don’t get to live on campus, so like everything’s just virtual and it just kinda sucks. I like, I don’t know how to phrase that. Um, and I, in high school I like pursued like the specific, like scientific research that I want to do. Like, you know, right as I got into college, and like all the labs are shut down and everything. So, like, I still can’t pursue that either. Which, so, I’m trying to keep myself motivated in some way, but, it’s still like really hard.”

**Subtheme 4: College Students Experiences with Educational Cost and Reduced Services**

A common experience among college students, in particular, was the need to find alternate sources of income when colleges closed:

“I did have a few jobs on campus and at first, I felt really bad about applying to unemployment. Cause I felt so bad because there’s like the nurses and the first responders and central workers that are getting paid, like nowhere close to what people on unemployment are getting paid. I’m just like, you know, I might as well just pass it up. I’m just gonna sit in the house. I’m not doing anything. Like I don’t need the money. But I ended up doing it because I have bills to pay for school.”

Several participants described the frustration which emerged when relief efforts did not consider college students:

“I think my biggest issue economically, was how, the treatment of college students mostly during this, because a lot of us are unemployed because we take full time classes. So, when this hit and people got stimulus checks the, the requirements were geared towards people opposite of who needed it the most. At this time, I would think because a lot of students either are on a lot of financial aid or already in a lot of debt and things of that sort.”

Several participants attending college expressed dismay at the response of colleges and universities to the pandemic. One key concern focused on the response of educational institutions regarding school-related fees such as tuition that remained relatively unchanged even though many students were living at home and taking online classes or were only accessing part of the services and programs that would normally be available. One participant described how it “feels like paying a lot of money for a school experience that doesn’t really have as many resources or support.” Another participant also expressed frustration at paying for the “college experience”, but not “receiving it,”
"Um, I guess like, uh, it's been frustrating. Um, the, for colleges... That, like that, we're still paying for the like, um, college experience, but not [interrupted]. My dad was still paying for the, like, um, college experience and not receiving it with, um, like the resources that come with being on campus, like libraries and, um, like peer like evaluations and stuff. I think that that stuff helped me a lot when I was on campus. And, um, like I can definitely feel a difference when I got home and I was just doing class from my bed and like, it was much easier to be distracted. So that's a frustration that I have and have had this coming semester and this past semester."

Participants expressed difficulties in saving for the expenses during the pandemic.

"I can. I can kind of relate to one of the pieces about tuition cause. I'm going to grad school in the fall. And that made me think about that. They're having us to still pay like full tuition and they also [inaudible]. So, a lot of people including me, like still secured our spots because I've been working for the past few years trying to save up, um, like it's kind of upsetting to think that I'm going to be paying rent while not attending classes in person. And I know it's the safest thing to do, but it's also really frustrating that you waited that long to tell us, cause that's like most of my savings. So, it's, it's going to be pretty stressful. I think I was hoping that my savings would last a little bit longer. I think... they just didn't let us know like what was going on with the classes and tuition and stuff until it was kind of too late to make good plans or to avoid paying."

One participant even reported that their school increased tuition rates during the pandemic:

"I'm from Chicago, but I go to school in Mississippi. My school raised tuition because of the COVID. And I don't think that makes sense, but that's what they did. And we are trying to fight it. And, we're not doing very good, but I don't think that makes sense. They raised the tuition because of COVID."

**Subtheme 5: Feeling Concerned about Future Academic and Professional Careers**

Girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color also worried about how the pandemic would affect their education and careers in the future. A 17 year-old participant in high school stated that it was “super, super overwhelming trying to get through all classes and just rigorous things, especially when it comes to college applications and stuff” during the pandemic. They continued, saying their family put a lot of pressure on them to succeed,
explaining how being home most of the day only exacerbated their feelings of stress. Another high school participant talked about similar pressures to succeed in order to get into college, but their school had just announced that they would move to in-person learning, with an inequitable virtual option, in the fall. They explained,

"And for us, the school that I go to is particularly very white dominated and they don’t necessarily listen to everyone’s perspective in a way. So, what they had decided was that opening schools would be a great option and they didn’t even basically mandate masks and they didn’t, they’re not doing temperature checks. And if someone gets COVID, they’re really not going to do anything about it. They’re pushing all of that to our County, which isn’t really doing much. And so, for me personally, I have a lot of health problems and I have a very low immunity and I’m a senior. So, at this point we’re deciding like the rest of our life, basically college, what we’re going to do. And it’s very important for me to be in school and get all of my education, but then I can’t risk my health. And so, I was going to pick the virtual option, but our school decided that they’re not going to add all of our classes in the virtual option. So, I’m taking quite a few AP classes, which are not even going to be on the virtual option. So, now I have to come to a decision of do I need to worry about my health or my education? And I don’t think any child should actually come to that point. And I think it’s very frustrating, especially from a mental health. And just for me being like physically healthy…"

The choice between one’s health or education illustrates the powerful decision some youth had to make as they navigated virtual learning. Another rising senior in high school described how the pandemic did not suspend education and, they were “forced” to focus on education:

"My school is doing online, so I’m a rising senior in high school. So, it’s not great. Like I’m not excited to have, ‘cause you know, you go through three years of high school and your like senior year is the year. You know, it’s gonna be the best year. You plan for it. You have, everyone has all these expectations of senior year and it’s just, it’s just been going down the drain. And, like on the topic of like college and stuff, like there’s literally no guidance right now. In regards to like college apps. Like we’re just, just kind of rolling through it and it’s so confusing and just like colleges are showing their true colors. Like organizations like the college board are showing their true colors. Because it’s just like, there’s so many things that are happening right now. And yet people are still trying to take their SATs and all this stuff because like the college board needs the money. And so, it’s just kind of frustrating to see that like people are growing, going through these economic situations, racist situations,"
and they’re still forced to like kind have this thing about education. That, you know, is unfair to expect from people who have literally their plans of even, cause, I don’t even know what’s going to happen for our freshman year in college. So, like the two monumental years for a lot of us are just like going down the drain are expected to be. So, it’s kind of hard to like kind of think about that and deal with, even if it’s like kind of selfish considering like so many other things that are happening right now.

It’s just, yeah."

Participants already enrolled in college or who had just graduated college also worried about their futures. One participant poignantly asked, “where am I going to go from here,” in their reflection,

“Yeah. So, for me, I just graduated college. COVID meant that I didn’t get to go walk across the stage, which really sucked. Um, it’s also meant, uh, a little, a lot of uncertainty in terms of like, what, where am I going to go from here? Work wise, you know, trying to actually start my career off. It’s been kind of difficult considering, uh, the economic hardship and just the job shortage that we’re experiencing right now."
Theme 4: “The more connected I get, the further targeted I am”

While addressing the sudden changes in their lives as a result of COVID-19, girls, young women, and gender-expansive youth of color were further impacted emotionally by experiences of ongoing systemic racism.

Subtheme 1: Coping with Racism and Discrimination in their Communities

Throughout the conversations group, many girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color shared the difficulties of coping with racism and discrimination in their environments (e.g., in school, in the neighborhood). Youth were also dramatically impacted by police violence towards the Black community. For example, one youth living in Minnesota recounted some of their experiences,

“I live in a small town, also in Minnesota. I live about two hours away from George Floyd’s murder. And I just already, before this whole mess, like it was, I, I was trying to already deal with like COVID and like self-isolating and not being able to like hang out with friends as much. So, I would be able to like go on runs or sit outside and read my book. But then now since things have been happening, even closer to where my home is, it feels like there’s this constant, like, I can’t be safe anywhere with anyone. Like seeing... you see Black men and women being shot in the country, but when it’s two hours away from your house, I feel it definitely hits even harder. Like it felt to like, Oh wow. Like it happened here in Minnesota, like, and it just made me feel so much more aware of my surroundings.”

Another youth in Minneapolis illustrated the interconnections between youths’ environments and the impact of systemic racism, sharing:

“My younger sister who goes to a school that’s relatively all white and her science teacher got into like, as in like a big mess right now, because he was caught pepper spraying protestors in Minneapolis who are protesting for the Black Lives Matter movement. Then it was like, it was her own teacher, like at school. So, like how... you can’t escape that... like just outside of school. But when you go to school and...
you have the science teacher who had purposely drove two hours to go pepper spray people, like you just live in this constant, like, I don’t know if I can trust you. I don’t know if I can trust you. A lot of my relationships with people have been completely cut off. I chose to like completely cut some people. [...]"

Girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color often changed their routines and relationships as a result of feeling unsafe as a result of racism and discrimination. Two youth commented:

“You kind of scare yourself a bit already being alone, but whether I was going grocery shopping or going to work, or I didn’t feel safe going on walks anymore by myself. Like there was this constant, like what if this happens? What if this happens? Because you’re, we were just in this, like... in this... a week and a half period where yeah, people were not afraid to speak their mind, whether it was on Facebook or Instagram, or out in public. I work at a coffee shop and you hear customers who are elderly and white and they don’t really care. They’ll still say some racist stuff underneath their breath. They’ll say racist stuff to their friends that are around them. I think a lot of people are kind of being bold and it, it just makes me feel very untrustworthy.”

“It truly shows people’s true colors. And it’s honestly been a disgusting time because now I’d feel like I can’t hang out with people without feeling like, oh, if this situation were to happen, would they, would they protect me? Will they defend me? Will they take the right precautions to make sure that I come out safe and alive? Today was the first day I’ve ever gotten pulled over. And that was by like a state patrol. And it just, it just felt different. It felt like I was on, I was driving by myself. I was, it was, it was scary. My whole body was physically shaking. So, yeah, it’s been definitely devastating, disgusting, awful. Seeing some people who I would call like my best friends, closest friends really showed that they could give less than two craps about myself and the people that look like me. So yeah....”

A few girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color made particular note of the impact of anti-Asian sentiments on their sense of safety:

“I think something that I’ve noticed within the COVID pandemic is that the increase of racism against Asian Americans, um, that has been very, you know, not interesting, but almost kind of scary to understand because, you know, I started to see more and more, racism directly against people who look exactly like me. So then when I’d go out into public, it was almost like I had another extra guard up because I was
wondering in my community who we’re going to believe these lies that, you know, the general media or even some politicians are saying about this virus and how it gets transmitted. And so, I think that has been an interesting experience because, um, we don’t, like, the Asian community doesn’t usually face that direct racism. Like it was being shown during this pandemic and how people were responding to it because it came from China. And so that was just interesting to see, but also very, very scary to experience too, because you never know if someone’s going to have a reaction."

**Subtheme 2: Coping with Trauma from Watching Viral Videos of Racist Attacks and Police Brutality.**

Watching violent viral videos also had a tremendous impact on girls and young women. In the conversations, girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color used words such as “helpless,” “angry,” “living in fear.” For example, after watching the video of Ahmaud Arbery, one youth said they became depressed, saying:

“I’d like to answer this if that’s okay. I know for me, after I saw Ahmaud Arbery’s video, it really hit me very hard because that’s, for me, when I started seeing more and more murders after that. And it was really early in the morning when I saw that. I was, I felt like I was one of the first people and I posted it right away because I felt like it was really important for everyone to see this. And after that in George Floyd, I just felt my mental health, like a big shift. I was getting really depressed. I didn’t want to get out of bed. I had to take a social media break because I felt like even though it was important to me to see, um, how we’re treated in this country, I just couldn’t look at it every day. It was getting harder and harder for me to see more people being murdered and the comments and people’s reactions and just no sympathy for Black men, Black children, Black women in their lives. I just didn’t look at it. And I didn’t even feel like it was appropriate for me to post regular things. Like I just felt like even now, I just don’t feel like it’s appropriate for me to post myself, or it just feels wrong to be all happy and getting on social media, which isn’t fair to us, but that’s just how it feels. Like I only feel like posting things that are going to educate people and show them what’s going on. And it’s just, just been a big shift for me.”
Another participant also shared how impactful these instances were:

“... like for me, this whole experience is really emotional and it’s sad having to see people die out here. It’s not that it’s like you think about it and it’s like, another person has died, but it’s really an actual person lost their life over something that wasn’t even that serious. And it’s not like people get on their jobs every day and, but they don’t realize other people’s lives. They have families, they have people that care for them, and you will never be able to see them again. And people don’t take into consideration how much that impacts people. And it’s just really sad what’s going on right now.”

The emotional impact was especially noted among Black participants who found it difficult to see the deaths or brutalization of Black people regularly on television and social media. Constant exposures had the effect of raising fears and concerns about their own lives - creating an environment in which some participants expressed the difficulties in what it means to be a Black person living and moving in America. One person discussed how traumatizing it was:

“Yeah, it’s very, very sad to go on. I actually had to delete social media for the time being, because it was very, it was too common to scroll on social media and see acts of police brutality and seeing dead bodies on the ground. And recently, you know, the, I believe the, George Floyd, camera that the police just released and it’s, it’s, it’s, it’s too much. It’s very traumatizing and it’s really sad how normalized it is to see these things. And it’s just like, oh, another Black person has been killed. Another police brutality.”

Two other participants further discussed the toll of witnessing police violence against Black people and the regularity of new hashtags on their mental health:

“I’m just really exhausted because every day we have to wake up and we see a new hashtag. And it’s like, at this point we’re getting desensitized to it. And we’re like, I’m sorry. It’s just, it’s so hard being Black. I mean, I don’t know how to say this, but, it’s just like, we’re just fighting for equality. And then we have people on the sidelines that are, um, against this movement. And I don’t, I don’t really know how to say it, but I’m just exhausted of like fearing for my life every day.”

“Like it’s so stressful to be a Black person because we’re just expected to carry on like we’re not seeing our bodies brutalized every day, every instant, every second. And it was just really hard. Like I had to take a social media break personally. Do things to find joy because it’s just so draining, being a Black person in this country.”
**Subtheme 3: Descriptions of Being Targeted by White Supremacists**

Many described how the myriad of ways they took action made them a target for violence from white supremacists across the nation. One youth shared:

“I’ve been taking action. I’ve been trying to personally like work on just every way possible to show up. So, whether that’s like rallies and protests or yard sales where money can go to places or starting mutual aid funds for Black folks or just like really anything and everything, creating spaces where hopefully we can experience some joy and just not think about shit for a while. And it’s made me feel connected to the moment in the movements and the people. But it’s also like, the more connected I get the further targeted I am and the more unsafe I am. And it’s put me in a position where like, I’m either having to move back because there’s COVID safety or moving back because now there’s like supremacists leaking our address in chats and stuff.”

This young person describes the two constant considerations when deciding to become more involved in the movement: COVID-19 and the threat of physical violence from white supremacists. Two young people from Idaho also mentioned being attacked by white supremacists while organizing. The first young person shared:

“...And it’s also been hard just navigating the movement as a Black person, just trying to stay alive and let your representatives know that you matter. And that you’re here when they try to erase your existence. It’s really like degrading. Um, cause they’re like, no, that’s not true. Like one Black person. And especially in Idaho, there’s just so much blatant violence and it’s so hard to see it, these white supremacists coming out and like they are actively fighting against you. It’s like traumatizing when white people just share this stuff online without any regard for how triggering it can be is also very traumatizing.”

The other young person described an instance when they and others were attacked at a “healing space” designed for Black indigenous people of color in Idaho:

“...And, it was so uplifting and empowering until they let us know that there was a white supremacist who released our location on Twitter. And so, then everyone was on edge. It was not great. We were just off for a game and then they started lighting off fireworks or something. And it was just obnoxious. It very quickly turned into an unwelcome unsafe space. And we left the parking lot and saw like trucks, Jeeps with American flags, blue lives matter, that sort of thing. And it’s wild. How, even though I haven’t been to the protest, I literally just went to a healing space. Even that was taken over by white supremacists. [...]”
One participant from Minnesota went to Minneapolis to attend demonstrations for George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor and described how they navigated violent encounters:

"And then I went down to Minneapolis for another protest for George Floyd. And then we also did, um, for Arbery. And then we did for Breonna Taylor. And a lot of white supremacists showed up. And then there was the incident with the whole truck that went through the freeway that was like trampling a lot of people. And at that moment when I was there, it was so traumatizing. It was super scary to see that these people were actually just trying to kill other people for protesting, for like the right reasons. For like human rights and stuff like that. For the Black Lives Matter. And it was super crazy how so many white supremacists showed up. And then the what’s it called though? That was, there was the, the army that was there too. The state troops were also there and they had like... tear gassing a lot of people. And it was like, it was super scary. But at the same time there was, it felt good to like protest for like something good. And it was, it was super, it was super crazy is, yeah, it was crazy."

Another young person, also residing in Minneapolis also reflected on the trauma associated with protesting, saying,

"Like we, I live two or three blocks away from where, uh, George Floyd was murdered. Uh, and I have been, working in Minneapolis and have worked around this area for a long time. And a street corner that was so innocuous, uh, now I just can’t even look at it in the same way. I mean, also there’s a memorial there, but I think what’s really great about this conversation is that we’re here to talk about the ways in which these systems have harmed us really, uh, have deeply impacted us and deeply impacted our wellbeing. And I think I have been really nervous and really scared of everyone who has been out protesting, because I want to know, like what kind of resources are out there to help people process this trauma. There are so many of us on this call that in 90 or so days are going to still be experiencing symptoms that will follow us for a long time if we are unable to heal. Not only are we trying to heal like the trauma that was passed down in our DNA, we’re also trying to heal the trauma that we’re experiencing now. And so, like for leadership on this call, like, it’s great that we want to be leaders, but I get frustrated. Young women and young, um, nonbinary people, nonbinary femmes, we don’t get a childhood. We don’t get to be 16 and like think freely and just be whatever. We have to be in these conversations. And like at the forefront of like healing things that were never ours to inhabit to begin with."

Girls and gender-expansive youth of color responded to local and national injustices by engaging in protest and community action.

\[\text{Theme 5:} \quad \text{“Youth organizing are a huge source of power”} \]

Many girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color participated in direct action in support of Black lives, describing movements they helped organize in their local communities. One youth activist in Oakland detailed their experiences during one conversation.

“I helped organize the Black and Brown Solidarity March in Oakland. We had about 2000 people show up and then I helped organize a number of other protests and a few actions like the caravan with a bunch of organizations throughout East Oakland, going to city council members houses to make sure that they were voting in the interest of defunding the police. When they, and then they didn’t actually follow through with that, so we ended up going back to his house for another event. That was always exciting. And then, I helped organize the sit-in, the fuck your curfew, sit in. I don’t know if you guys saw that in Oakland, um, with ATPT and CURYJ. Um, and then the Eric Salgado um, um, protests and memorials and everything for him and then the justice for Sean. We did a lot of actions, actually. I work with them, CURYJ, a lot. So yeah, we were doing a lot. And then, um, getting supplies out to protests. I got arrested at one of the protests, that was fun. Um, yeah, that was the day of the protest that was supposed to be a family-friendly quote unquote peaceful protest, even though we know peaceful protest is a horrible term. That’s really just a cop word because it’s, every protest is peaceful until the police show up. So, yeah, that’s when we got arrested and, yeah.”

\[\text{Subtheme 1:} \quad \text{Engaging in Acts of Protest other than Rallies and Marches} \]

Many young folks living at home shared that they were unable to protest in person during the pandemic because their parents were worried about their health and safety. In response to being unable to protest in person, these youth found other ways to enact change by engaging in activities such as conversations with peers, sharing information, and signing petitions. One youth, for example, discussed the importance of raising funds and donating to petitions as a form of activism:

“I haven’t been involved with any protests. I am a minor and my mom’s been working and all that, and I just got my own car. But I have been trying to help with what I can through home. I’ve been signing petitions. I’ve been telling my friends to sign
petitions, donating, supporting different types of organizations. There was recently a bake sale where all the proceeds were donated to Black Lives Matter. So, it’s just little stuff like that I’ve been like trying to do. So, I’m not necessarily like put out there on the front lines with like other people.”

Another youth discussed the dangers associated with protesting and how they stayed involved from home:

“I’m 16 and I live in my mother’s household, so I follow her rules. So, if she didn’t want me to go, I wasn’t going to go. And because of COVID, she wanted me to stay safe, but I know that I have a lot of friends that attended them. And then they saw a lot of things going on. Police were being very aggressive towards them. Even though they were peacefully protesting, they saw police planting things around them, and it seemed like they were trying to instigate violent actions. And I saw a lot of things on social media that I didn’t like with the looting. I saw a lot of people doing it in the way it wasn’t intended to be, which caused a whole shift in the media about everyone’s perspective on it. I tried to contribute by donating to the families posting.”

The importance of incremental support was not lost on the participants. One discussed how they could do their part to support the movement, “even if it’s just on a small scale”:

“Okay. I went to a few protests. I was able to attend one for Breonna Taylor, especially. So that was really cool. I have been signing every petition that I ever seen. So, spending more time signing, as well as calling different offices, trying to do my part. My mom won’t let me protest that, which is everything about being in your parent’s home. But you know, just trying to do my part, even if it’s just on a smaller scale.”

Many youth engaged in small acts of protest within their friend groups. One person, for example, discussed the importance of having difficult conversations with friends:

“Okay. So, most of my friends I know here … in Connecticut, so we’ve been really having those conversations and those hard ones. And some of those conversations have been had with some Caucasian friends of mine, or even some African friends of mine, so they can understand what it is that we actually live in here. And it’s also bridging, you know, just building that bridge between Africans and African Americans here and making sure that we are speaking the same language, still the same battle and people do not really understand that. So, we still have a fight, you know, we’re trying to, even as all Blacks altogether, you know, trying to have our voice be known
and heard, but even within our own community, there’s still a lot of building to do. Yeah. That’s tough."

Importantly, they recognized that their various contributions mattered:

“I kind of beat myself up in the beginning of the movement and towards the end of June. So, the beginning of June and end of May, because I was so scared to go to a protest, but I had to understand that like my fear was validated and my fear was like in truth of like, I was afraid of my life to go out there and protest for a cause because I don’t want to get beat up by the police. I just, I don’t, that’s not something I want for myself. I’m terribly afraid of it. I’m terribly afraid of the police. So, I don’t want you all to ever beat yourself up or feel bad because your form of activism is sharing information. Even if it’s just a retweet on Twitter, I’m pretty sure somebody by, by you doing that, you’re helping somebody else. You’re passing along information, passing along information as a form of activism, passing along information is a form of education, educating someone else. So don’t ever feel like you’re not doing enough. Um, as long as you’re involved in some way, I feel like anything counts, any, any little thing counts. So, if you’re donating, signing petitions, even if you’re at home, um, I still want to just thank you. And I’m proud of all of you for still being involved and still staying connected, even if you feel disconnected. Cause I felt disconnected too. So yeah. Um, with that also said being here today and sharing your experiences is a huge contribution. So, thank you for like really you guys, because we can’t move forward unless we’re moving forward together and we’re all on the same page.”

Subtheme 2: Addressing the Need for More Inclusive, Intersectional Movements

Girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color also highlighted the disproportionate media coverage of Black women impacted by state violence. In describing the lack of media attention of girls and women impacted by state violence, one participant said:

“And then with Black women, they don’t get half of the attention people do. Sandra Bland still hasn’t gotten justice, Breonna Taylor, hasn’t gotten justice. There so many names that go unnamed. And this, I understand that, that George Floyd and others, people deserve the attention, but the women deserve the attention just as much.”
Another elaborated, saying:

“So, like me, I’m also from Louisville and it really like impacted me, Breonna’s death. And it’s so crazy ’cause like I always talk about like, I try to speak about the disproportionate ways that in, within our community, as Black people, that male death versus, everyone else’s death is disproportionately shown and throughout the media. Like for example, Breonna got murdered in March. I live in Kentucky and I didn’t know that she got murdered until the middle of April. And it seemed like I’m really, I’m not sure if people were protesting, but it seemed like, that a male, which is George Floyd, and it’s not anything to take away from his death at all, because it was horrible, but it seemed like a man had to die for us to step up for this woman. And, what I’ve been doing on my media is talking about like the everyone else. Like I’ve been talking about George Floyd, I’m talking about everyone else, but I really want to focus, um, and use my voice to focus on the people that are not getting the attention. The Black women, especially Black trans women, all the Black trans women that have died this year. Uh, Tony McDade like, where are they marching for Tony McDade? I don’t see, uh, I didn’t see it covered on the media as much. So that’s what my experience has been. It’s been really like messing with me. But you know, her killers still haven’t, um, gotten arrested. And I remember I was talking to my mom about an issue, like one of the cops actually like arrested my uncle once. So, I was like, okay. It was really, it was really crazy. But yeah, that’s been my experience.”

Similar sentiments were expressed by other youth who also noted the exclusion or silencing of the voices and contributions of Black youth, women, transgender and gender-expansive communities from many of the discussions of hate-related violence and the current movement for social justice. One youth wondered, “why does the movement have to be centered around Black men,” saying:

“But I’ve been going to a lot of the protests and I’ve been trying to find opportunities to highlight, especially Black youth because Black youth are the ones leading these protests and they’re not getting enough for having this recognition. But additionally, at these protests, I have realized the way that patriarchy and the way that the heteronormative societal views, um, also are very like they’re also in the Black community. Because in a lot of these protests, it’s Black women who are leading these movements. It’s, and yet I... the only Black woman I know is Breonna Taylor so far who’s been shot by the police. But I know that there is more Black women.
I know that there’s more Black trans people out there experiencing this. And I think what’s irritating about this is that we have allowed this feeling of, we always have to highlight the Black man or else we’re not really, you know, pushing the movement. Why does the movement have to be centered around Black men, masculinity, you know? And for me it’s hard because I am a Black woman, you know. And, but I don’t dress, you know, in this way of that stereotypically women are supposed to dress. And so, what I deal with is this feeling of, you know, as a Black woman, you’re already masculine, um, seen as more masculine. And so, I think even more, I feel erased from the narrative, you know. Not as much as Black trans people who have just been completely erased and no one is recognizing that. But I just feel like we’re not accepting of anybody who’s not Black and a man within these movements. Um, and I’m not seeing the representation. And I need to see that in this protest or, you know, how I just, I just need to see it."

In speaking specifically about the death of transgender folks, one participant expressed the importance of holding the community accountable for speaking out against transphobia, saying:

“I just wanted to speak on some of the trans deaths that happened in the recent months. It’s been a lot. It’s been about, let’s say 10 plus, and that’s kind of extreme. But I would say it’s kind of draining just because at one point you’re fighting for like equality racially, and then, um, also you’re having people in your community kind of toss you to the side. Like you don’t really matter. And, so struggling with that and what I kind of want to see done is just like more cis Black people taking accountability for that underhanded and blatant transphobia that they spread in the community. And, just everyone coming together as a whole. And when we say Black Lives Matter, we mean all Black lives and everyone in between. So yeah."

Conversations regarding police violence towards Black communities were raised by several youth who were the children of recent immigrants. Several participants, for example, discussed conflicting beliefs between their parents and, at times, others within their communities about who should be concerned about police violence towards Black people, and more specifically African American communities. While many participants in the conversations expressed an understanding that police violence does not make distinctions of culture, immigration status, etc. within the Black community, some participants expressed that this was not always the same belief for their parents and others in their communities. One youth, for example, talked about their experiences within an immigrant household:
“...I because we come from immigrant households, right. Our parents almost like, you know, just in the concept of safety, like this is where their head is at. They want to sort of, I don’t even know the exact word, but try to differentiate our blackness versus like a Black American. And so, when we want to go outside and protest and we want to march, we want to do all these things. I know for me, I've received a lot of back-lash from my parents being like, you know, you’re not Black American, right? Like, because of my name, because of my heritage, because of, you know, I carry a different passport. But that's not true, right. Like for me, like, they're not going to ask me, like, when they're pulling me over, when they're about to shoot me, like, were you born here? Or were you not, that's not a question for them. Right. Like blackness right now is so right. Blackness right now, that's the threat in general, right? Like our entire life, regardless of where we come from is going to be political, especially living in America.”

One youth shared that they were scared because they felt like their parents did not fully understand police brutality:

“I also want to say like, it’s kind of, this has really scared me because I’m a refugee immigrant and so are my parents and being African and being refugee immigrants. My parents don't understand police brutality the way African-Americans do. And so, what happens is, you know, my dad doesn't know what to do when the police stop him. He doesn't have all this, you know, years of training, you would say that African-Americans have had. He doesn't know anything. And so, I think there isn't enough conversation within the Black community about how to protect, you know, people who are Black, but who aren't African-American, who may not exactly know what they're supposed to do or not even know what police brutality is.”

Some African youth shared that they did not feel as connected to the movement. One young person shared how they wondered where they “fit” and another young person responded, posing the question “Who are we talking to when we’re talking about Black Lives Matter?”:

“I'm Kikuyu. So, I also, uh, feel that the African-American community, I mean, the African community who is like African immigrants and refugees and so on are really disconnected from Black Lives Matter. But also, I think it has to do with like, who are we talking to when we're talking about Black Lives Matter? Like are we putting these, all of our posters into a Swahili as well? Like, are we putting them up in neighborhoods that have a lot of refugees and immigrants living there? So, I think that we, I think that Black Americans, cause yeah, it’s also like an identity thing, but
we definitely need to make sure we’re really reaching out to immigrant and refugee communities and African communities and making things like just like super inclusive.”


Girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color also questioned whether the actions of their peers as well as the actions of local and national businesses were performative, rather than transformative in nature. In calling out people and spaces that were not truly dedicated to justice, the girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color emphasized the importance of “definitely surrounding yourself in spaces that are for abolition, for Black Lives Matter on paper and in their actions.” In speaking about the potentially performative actions of local and national businesses, for example, one youth commented:

“...But, like ever since the movement has started, like the Black Lives Matter movement and all of that, it seems more like as if, companies are for Black Lives Matter, but I’m like wondering, like, I’m kind of concerned if they’re actually being sincere or if they’re actually doing it for the money. Like, does that make sense? So, it’s like, are you guys being sincere? Like, are you guys with the people of color and the Black Lives Matter movement? Are you guys just here to keep the business going and the economy and stuff like that? So, to me, it’s like, I dunno, it’s just concerning...”

Another questioned whether standing up for Black lives was “a trend,” also wondering if everybody was ever actually in solidarity with people of color, commenting:

“I feel like there’s so much more that could be done because like now, like when it first happened to Breonna Taylor and George Floyd and everybody else, like everybody was all for it. But then like a couple of days and then weeks pass and like everybody forgot about it. They was onto like a new trend and like new topics. But it’s like, how can you forget about something that’s constantly happening to different people and it’s not even different age groups, it’s all age groups of Black people and nobody’s standing up for it. So, it was like, who really can we call if we are in trouble?"

One youth described how students in their school posted about Black Lives Matter, but did nothing to address the racism within their school:

“[... ] schools have been emailing all these things about, you know, Black Lives Matter. And what’s funny is a lot of these, there is now Instagram with schools, where students, talk about the racist things that are happening in those schools. So those same schools that are saying Black Lives Matter, have all these racist teachers,
Some youth talked about important conversations they had with their friends who questioned the Black Lives Matter Movement. For example, one Navajo participant talked about “having some really tough conversations,” saying:

“I... I Because I know with recently the, the Black Lives Matter movement, I'm not, I'm not Black and I'm not from a Black community, but I am a person of color, as in that I'm Navajo. And so, I've had, um, some friends come talk to me and be like, well, I don't think this is really like, it's really being blown out of proportion. I thought everybody was all chill. We're all good. Like we're past all of this. And, I've had to have to sit down and have some really like tough conversations about how that's not true. That's not accurate. We're told that for the most part through our academic careers, when really that's, that's really far from the truth....”

A youth in Hawaii emphasized that everybody needs to work to solve inequality:

“I guess here in Hawaii. It's kind of like a mix. There's some people who are like, it doesn't really matter cause it's not happening here all the way on the islands. But that's not true because we definitely still have it here. It might not be specifically towards African Americans, but there are definitely communities that experience police, police brutality that get put in jails just because of their skin color, their ethnicities. And also like we should care about what's happening on the other States because it's not like, just because we're an ocean away, it doesn't affect us. It still affects us because it's still, we're still under the US and everything that happens in this, in the government affects us too, whether we like it or not. And so, I've just been trying to like, educate like my friends or even family members who like, are like, oh, it doesn't really matter. I'm like, it does matter. Like until all of us can like actually seem at least as one in a one former way, like nothing's going to get solved. And so, I think that's just, it's frustrating when people are like, it doesn't matter where, we're away. It doesn't affect us. I'm like it does, it does affect us.”
Subtheme 4: Protest as a Form of Positive Coping

While many of the topics discussed were difficult at times, they also brought some moments of hope and connection. One youth said:

"I realized that it’s a beauty and finding a comfort in other Black women. And as much as this has been such a terrible time, um, realizing that is what really, pushes me through every single day, knowing that I can go talk to somebody that relates in an utmost way. That’s really all I really had to say."

Another participant commented that “It’s, it’s about the community coming together. You can’t do it on your own, so you gotta, you know, get with your people.” Many discussed the power of intergenerational, youth led movements:

“Community organizing, youth organizing are a huge source of power. Not untapped, but often like not immediately considered or overlooked, but like yeah, that, that community power, um, being really essential to getting folks through this time both when it comes to like COVID-19 and when it comes to like navigating a white supremacist society. And I mean, just noting that like a lot of the people here are really young and then like having that kind of responsibility and also initiative to like organize. So, I think that that’s really cool. Not cool that they had to, but like cool that they are the ones leading the conversation, which is, I think important in an intergenerational movement like this."

One participant likened the social action to action taken at Standing Rock, saying:

"Like, you know, that reminds me a lot of what happened at Standing Rock. If you guys aren’t familiar with it...when we took a stand against the Dakota access pipeline, it was the same exact scene as a local community event. We had elders. We had women. We had young children. So, I was like on one of those streets and I could just picture when I was out in Standing Rock. A lot of people got hurt. And it was the same thing. ‘Cause when I was, you know, down the block from my house, like I was seeing my people get hurt because it was my community members. It was the people that I know, the people that I love, the people that I see out here fighting and fighting for liberation every single day. Our collective liberation. And so, I think like, I think like a lot of us, you know, the how this spread so far around the country that is like, we, yeah, we all need to start opening our eyes a lot more to each other’s struggles and we need to be standing and not fighting against each other. Because like when I’m not speaking up and when I’m not speaking out best believe I’m going to be standing next to people that are."
Young folks in the conversations also discussed the positive rewards and feelings that came from engaging in various forms of protest in response to police brutality. Perhaps what was most notable is that positive feelings were often associated with seeing communities coming together that one might not expect, feeling that one was doing their part no matter how small, and actually seeing change occur as a result of community actions. One Idaho area youth discussed the groundswell of change:

"...for me, especially in the state of Idaho, right, folks think that Idaho is super rural. And so, Idaho has kind of been, I know it’s kind of been like pushed off to the side when it comes to places which you wouldn’t think, right, for it to be a hotspot of organizing. But we have some of the most amazing organizers in this state and it literally boggles my mind every day. We have done such amazing things, um, even to the fact that we had it, we had a vigil in the beginning of June, um, that had over 5,000 folks come out. We had a really big event that was only Black folks, Black folks, only for Juneteenth. We had so many other protests and so many we’re right now going through an "abolish the police and defunding police," cycle.
Where like we’re meeting with city council members, we’re having town halls, we’re doing a bunch of things. So, like, it has been super exhausting. Like we, I want to emphasize saying that earlier, but it’s been super rewarding. I feel as if the state of Idaho currently, like we have gained a lot of new aspiring allies into this movement and that’s huge, right. Especially in a state that’s like insanely red and insanely white to the point that it’s clear. So, for us to get any sort of like small, um, you know, small progress in any way, it’s huge."

Another youth discussed the changes occurring at the University of Minnesota:

"Like, U of M so University of Minnesota, like completely cut ties with the MPD. And like they, like St. Paul schools like cut ties with a few other things. Like we saw like fast change. Like we saw people saying like, like people who like, um, I don’t know how to word this, that aren’t like in full ties with like, um, police and security and as much, like, we just saw a lot of people kind of stepping back and saying like, hey, like for our business, for our, the people that come and work for us, for people that come in and use our supplies and resources, like for their safety, we are going to take these measures, um, especially for the people of color in our community. So yeah, like living in Minnesota and seeing and seeing like fast, um, change, like amazing. Like, like new source after new source of like, dah da dah da dah cuts ties with this. And cut ties with that. Like, I just really hope the momentum like keeps on going and it keeps on happening."
Girls, young women, and gender-expansive youth of color had hopeful visions for the future, with them at the “forefront”:

“I want to say that I’m Mexican and Indigenous too. And what I think is beautiful is that our liberation is tied together. When we center Black women, Black trans women at the forefront of all our fights, we all get free. Because the center of like queer feminist, queer theory is that like when we center the voices that need it the most, like we will be able to get free. So, when I see you all fighting, I know that it’s my fight too....”
CONCLUSION

It is critical that we look to the past and also foreground the experience of young folx in the future. Too often the voices of girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color, are left out of larger conversations. This invisibility creates gaps in responses by decision makers who are tasked with supporting and developing programs and policies to address the social, economic, and political needs of the populous. Too often, unprecedented societal challenges, such as those created by the events of the last few years, are further exacerbated by pre-existing disparities resulting from historically based adversities and traumas driven by various forms of oppression.

This report provides a high level overview of the issues and challenges faced by the girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color who participated in these conversations, but it is also a portrait of their courage and strength. The report offers a first step in understanding, but we must push ourselves to listen more deeply to them and to act with intention and purpose and to accept that their fight is our fight. We must work with them as partners and leaders for change. To support us all in listening and acting, additional brief reports will delve deeper into their experiences during the early years of the pandemic and social uprisings. Further, a series of follow up conversations and research are in process for fall of 2022 to provide deeper understanding of where many of these young folks are today.

Calls for individual resilience to life’s challenges rarely take into account these intersecting social factors that bring additional burdens to the lives of girls of color, ultimately creating an untenable environment through which they must continue to navigate and thrive. Yet, refusal to reckon with historical and present colonization, acts of bigotry, oppression and structural racism and sexism exacerbates the existing barriers to their educational, economic, and social mobility. Only when we implement policies that undo the injustices woven throughout our systems can young people thrive and enjoy the opportunities they deserve. To that end, we close as we began with Chloe’s call to action –

“We challenge you to understand the problems in our systems and structures and face them head on. We challenge you to not only consider yourself but your neighbors, we challenge you to ask yourself the same question that compelled us all to put our heads together to do what we activists call the work, "Am I doing the right thing in this situation?" and it is our hope, that it leads you to meet us on the path less walked, so we can all heal with equity, as equals, and start to make our way home.”

-Chloe Williams, In Solidarity Fellow
Endnotes


3 Crenshaw, Kimberlé (2020). “Under the Black Light: The Intersectional Vulnerabilities that COVID Lays Bare.”


Appendices
APPENDIX A: Language Matters

National Crittenton will use “her/them*” to emphasize that our shared understanding of gender identity is evolving in resistance to cis- and hetero-patriarchal, white-supremacist norms and systems that have for far too long oppressed, marginalized, and harmed all cis and trans girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people. In addition to her/them*, we will use a variety of terms to express gender identity and will defer to young leaders for guidance. As we continue to evolve, so too will our practices. National Crittenton, as a multiracial/ethnic, intergenerational organization, commits to continued self-critique and reflection to ensure that those of us most impacted by oppression and marginalization are centered.

Below we have included definitions and explanations of specific terminology used in this report.

**Black**: Black people of African descent who are scattered throughout the world; refers to Black people whose ancestors were removed from the African continent through slavery and colonization, and dispersed worldwide.

**Cisgender (cis)**: A term used to describe people who identify as the gender they were assigned at birth.

**Gender-expansive**: An umbrella term sometimes used to describe people who expand notions of gender expression and identity beyond perceived or expected societal gender norms. Some gender-expansive individuals identify as a mix of genders, some identify more binarily as a man or a woman, and some identify as no gender.

**Latine**: A gender-neutral form of the word Latino, created by gender non-binary and feminist communities in Spanish-speaking countries. The objective of the term is also to remove gender from Spanish, by replacing it with the gender-neutral Spanish letter E, which can already be found in words like estudiante.

**Intersectionality**: A legal term created by Kimberle Crenshaw that holds the classical models of oppression within society, such as those based on race/ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, class, species, or disability do not act independently of one another; instead, these forms of oppression interrelate, creating a system of oppression that reflects the “intersection” of multiple forms of discrimination.

**Pronouns**: The words used to refer to a person other than their name. Common pronouns are they/them, he/him, and she/her. Neopronouns are pronouns created to be specifically gender-neutral including xe/xem, ze/zir and fae/faer. Pronouns are sometimes called Personal Gender Pronouns, or PGPs. For those who use pronouns--and not all people do--they are not preferred, they are essential.

**Transgender (trans)**: A term that describes people whose gender identity is different from the gender they were assigned at birth.

**Non-Binary**: An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do.

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5 Colorado State University. (2021, February 7). Why Latinx/e? [https://elcentro.colostate.edu/about/why-latinx/](https://elcentro.colostate.edu/about/why-latinx/)
APPENDIX B: Process

Using a youth participatory action research (YPAR) approach, 14 virtual In Solidarity Conversations were led by and held with cis and trans girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color. The conversations (except for two conversations organized by a partner organization) were organized by region, taking time zones into consideration. Each regional conversation included anywhere from one to seven states, with the goal of having young people represented in the conversations from each state. The following information describes the recruiting process and conversation format, and includes descriptive information about the cis and trans girls, young women, and gender-expansive young people of color who participated in the conversations and the analysis process.

Engagement Process

In Solidarity Conversation (IS Conversation) participants were invited to conversations using a variety of methods. Electronic fliers (see Appendix A: Recruiting Flier) were generated for each regional conversation and included a brief description of the conversation purpose, format, dates, times, and registration information. Fliers and information about the conversations were distributed by partner organizations, their allies, and by youth facilitators using methods such as email list, listservs, social media platforms (i.e., Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, etc.), and word of mouth. Registration links embedded in recruiting materials automatically assigned participants to the appropriate regional conversation and gathered basic demographic information including city, state, age, gender identity, race, and ethnicity. An open-ended question assessing their concerns or most salient interests was also included at the end of the registration form. Finally, efforts were made to restrict the conversation to cis and trans girls, young women, and gender-expansive youth of color by including exclusion criterion on certain questions during the registration process. The goal was to provide a safe space for cis and trans girls, young women, and gender-expansive youth of color to discuss their experiences.

IS Conversation Youth Facilitators

Seventeen cis and trans girls, young women and gender-expansive young people of color facilitated the IS conversations. For context and understanding, the majority of facilitators lived in the region where their conversation took place. Each facilitator was required to participate in a 60-minute virtual training about the purpose and format of the IS conversations, at which time they were given a Conversation Guide that outlined the specifics of each conversation. (see Appendix B: Sample Conversation Guide)

Conversation Format

Each of the 15 conversations were 90 minutes in length, took place using the Zoom platform, were recorded for future analysis, and were divided into three distinct phases. Phase one (approximately 45 minutes) was a discussion among all participants. During this time, the lead facilitator described the purpose of the conversations, the agenda of the discussion and, in collaboration with the participants, established the community agreements for the conversation. This phase also included a full group conversation focused on three specific questions that were asked consistently in all 15 conversations. These questions were:
1. We know that the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacts communities of color, and specifically Black communities. This is not only this health crisis—it is a result of the inequities and systemic oppression that exist in our healthcare system. As young women of color and gender-expansive young people of color, has the COVID-19 crisis impacted you? If so, how? Has it impacted your community? How have you been feeling since the start of the pandemic?

2. This pandemic has also led to an economic crisis that communities of color feel disproportionately. Has COVID-19 had a financial impact on you and your family? Your community?

3. Recently, we’ve seen Black bodies dehumanized and continued victims of police and state violence. How have the murders of Breonna Taylor, Nina Pop, Tony McDade, and George Floyd (and so many others) and ongoing racism impacted you? How are you processing everything? What would you like to see your community and leaders doing to fight against and push back on police violence and brutality?

Phase two of the conversation included small group discussions of approximately 30-35 minutes. During this time, young people participating in the conversations were grouped into virtual breakout rooms that included anywhere from 5-10 participants, a youth facilitator, and an adult ally who took notes and provided technical support if needed. Youth facilitators were provided a list of 14 additional questions from which they could choose to discuss in their breakout session. The addition questions were:

1. Has anyone in your family been impacted economically by COVID-19? Has anyone in your family lost their job? Is your family worried about money and paying bills?

2. Has COVID-19 impacted your ability or desire to learn because of changes in schooling/education?

3. Do you miss being in school? If so, what are the things you miss?

4. Do you have younger siblings? Are you supporting them in any way during this time? What has that looked like for you?

5. Has COVID-19 impacted how you feel at home? How are family members getting along? What are your responsibilities at home?

6. As summer approaches, do you have a plan for gaining income during your summer? What have summer employment opportunities looked like for you and your peers this year?

7. How has COVID-19 impacted your transition from high school to college and/or your plans post-graduation? How has it impacted your college journey?

8. Have you had access to the school support you needed at this time? Have you been connected to a support system?

9. How have you been taking action in your communities against police brutality? Do you feel connected at this moment? What do you need to feel connected to this movement?

10. Have you participated in any actions or protests to end police violence against Black bodies in your community? How has that looked for you?
11. What do you need right now? What does support during this time look like?

12. What do community leaders, policy makers, philanthropists and elected officials need to do in response to police brutality and state violence?

13. What do community leaders, policy makers, philanthropists and elected officials need to know as they plan response efforts to COVID-19?

14. What does power for your community look like? What does power look like for you?

The final phase of each conversation included a brief recap of the highlights from the breakout sessions to the full group, a closing statement by the lead youth facilitator, and time for questions and answers. Throughout the conversation, participants were given the option to respond to questions by unmuting their microphones and speaking or by using the chat box.

Compensation

At the end of each virtual conversation, youth facilitators were compensated $75 and conversation participants were compensated $30 for their time and expertise.

Conversation Participants

A total of 557 young people registered to participate in the virtual conversations. Of the 557, at least 387 logged into one conversation (retention rate of 69.5%). It is believed that more young people participated in the conversations but were missed in the tracking process. Therefore, descriptive information is only provided for those who were tracked from the point of registration to receipt of participation incentives. Further, due to differences in recruiting and registration methods and the completion of demographic information as optional, information about some participants is missing.

Young people from at least 33 states, the District of Columbia, and tribal communities were represented in the conversations. Their ages ranged from 13 to 32 (mean = 18.7) with the majority being between the ages of 16 and 23. The total number of participants in each conversation included a low of 10 to a high of 50 (mean = 27.6), not including staff and adult allies.

During the registration process registrants were also asked the open-ended question “What topics are most important to talk about?” Of the 557 cis and trans girls, young women and gender-expansive young people of color who registered, 452 provided a least one topic of interest with a large number providing multiple topics of interest. Of the topics mentioned, three large topic areas were most prominent. At least 316 mentioned topics focused on various forms of racism, oppression and discrimination including specific topics such as the “Black Lives Matter” movement (n = 94), sexism and gender inequity (n = 71), discrimination against and exclusion of transgender communities as well as interest in topics related to LGBQ and gender-expansive communities (n = 38), discrimination against Black women and girls specifically (n = 28), and policies and practices around immigration, ICE (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement) and “children in cages” (n = 11).

Topics related to health (n = 166) were the next largest broad category of interest mentioned. Within this category registrants mentioned topics such as mental health and self-care (n = 81), Covid 19 related issues such as health disparities, access to testing, treatment, etc. (n = 67), and topics related to relationships, abuse and exposure to various forms of violence (n = 18). The third largest category included responses from ninety registrants that were focused on engagement in social change issues such as activism or activist related topics (n = 75), elections or political engagement (n = 15), and topics of police brutality (n = 41) and policy abolition (n = 18). Finally, the remaining topics of interest included expanding “access” to housing, food security, etc. (n
= 16), learning more about history and our current situation (n = 7), a range of topics focused on school and education (n = 22), climate change and the environment (n = 8), employment and workforce topics (n = 18), youth in general (n = 14), and “anything” (n = 22).

**Table 1: Number of Participants per Regional Conversation**

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<th>Regional Conversation</th>
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<th>Percent</th>
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<tr>
<td>IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, SD</td>
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<tr>
<td>AL, KY, TN, MS</td>
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<tr>
<td>AK, HI, OR, ID, MT, WA</td>
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<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY City*</td>
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<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR, LA, OK, TX</td>
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<tr>
<td>CA</td>
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<td>7.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>DC, MD, NC, SC, VA, WV</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>NY, NJ, PA, DE</td>
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<td>7.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>IL, IN, MI, OH, WI</td>
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<td>FL, GA</td>
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<td>CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT</td>
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<tr>
<td>AZ, CO, NV, NM, UT, WY</td>
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*Two conversations were organized by a partner organization and only included New York City based young people.*

**Table 2: Gender Identity**

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<td>.3</td>
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### Table 3: Race/Ethnicity

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<th>Participant Race/Ethnicity</th>
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<td>Latina/Latinx/e</td>
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<td>Asian/Asian American</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bi/Multi-racial/ethnic</td>
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<td>Native American/American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
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<td>White/Caucasian</td>
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<td>Pacific Islander/Polynesian/ Native Hawaiian</td>
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### Table 4: Participant Age

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### Table 5: State Location of Participants

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Analysis Process

Of the original 17 IS facilitators, 14 self-selected to be a Research Assistant (RA) and participate in the analysis of the conversations. At a minimum, each RA participated in a 90-minute training that provided a general overview of qualitative data analysis and how the analysis process would proceed. Compensation ranged from $75 to $800 for each RA and was dependent on the extent of their participation in the analysis process.

The rapid and rigorous accelerated qualitative data analysis strategy (RADaR) technique by Watkins (2017) was utilized for systematic analysis of the conversation transcripts. The RADaR technique is a team based technique to code qualitative data. Just over 500 pages of verbatim conversation and 57 pages of Zoom chat box text were analyzed for this report.

The following outlines steps taken to analyze the virtual conversations:

Step 1: Videos from the conversations were transcribed verbatim in Microsoft Word and de-identified for analysis.

Step 2: Project staff read the transcripts and developed a preliminary codebook that RAs could use to add additional themes and subthemes as deemed appropriate (see Appendix C: Coding Sheet).

Step 3: RAs were trained in the coding process and assigned a set of transcripts.

Step 4: Consensus calls were completed with the RAs and staff to complete final coding of the conversation transcripts.

Step 5: Staff transferred and incorporated the data into spreadsheets, organized by location and question number. The data was then moved into focused tabs based on themes that represented the experiences and ideas of participants.9 10

Step 6: Research staff wrote analytic memos to discuss and refine each theme.11

Step 7: Staff-generated spreadsheets and memos were shared with RAs and discussed during multiple meetings until a consensus was reached on the chosen themes and the team was satisfied that the data was represented meaningfully.

Step 8: The research team conducted a final analysis and write-up of the report.

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10 See Appendix C. Themes for a full list of themes
Limitations

There are several limitations to the findings presented in this report. Qualitative data limits the ability to generalize finds to the specific communities of interest. However, more than 400 youth registered and participated in the In Solidarity Conversations, enabling substantial saturation of the main themes outlined in this report (except for in those areas that are noted). Further, many of the themes noted in this report have been identified as major issues that impacted girls and gender-expansive youth of color in other reports, further lending support to many of our findings. Qualitative analysis is also at risk for bias introduced on the part of the participant (e.g., acquiescence bias and social desirability bias, etc.) or the researcher (e.g., confirmation bias, question-order bias and leading questions and wording bias). The questions used for this discussion were worded in a manner to establish context when necessary or were worded in a neutral manner to reduce influencing participants’ responses. Community agreements also emphasized the need to accept differing opinions and experiences, with the goal of reducing participants’ desires to conform or please the facilitators or other participants in the conversations. Further, to reduce researcher bias, themes were identified and confirmed by multiple reviewers of varying ages. Finally, while attempts were made to include a significant number of participants from various populations, several communities were under-represented (e.g., young parents, LGBTQ and gender-expansive youth, and youth of varying immigration and ability status). The need to expand our understanding of the unique needs of these communities’ experiences became evident during the analysis process. For example, the unique needs of young mothers was evident through a number of comments sprinkled throughout the conversations by young mothers about the impact of lost childcare access and the need for resources that accounted for specific dietary and language needs of immigrant communities during the COVID crisis. These comments raised the possibility that the unique needs of certain communities may not have been identified during the conversations. Therefore, future efforts should specifically focus on these and other under engaged communities.
APPENDIX C: Engagement Flyer

in SOLIDARITY CONVERSATIONS

SHARE YOUR VOICE, JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Register for an In Solidarity Conversation - a safe space for cis and trans girls, young women, and gender-expansive youth of color to come together as leaders and advocates for change - to share your experiences, needs, and solutions as our communities heal and repair from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its fallout, as well as the murders of Breonna Taylor, Nina Pop, Tony McDade, and George Floyd.

*Space is limited. Participants will receive a $30 electronic gift card. Open to those age 16-26

For more info contact:

National Crittenton
The National Collaborative of Young Women’s Initiatives
APPENDIX D: Sample Conversation Guide

In Solidarity Conversation
(name of participating states)

August 4, 4PM-5:30PM PST

PARTICIPANTS
# young people from
# notetakers
# break out session leaders:

SONGS
• Brown Skin Girls-- Beyonce
• Do it-- Chloe Halle

RUN OF SHOW
3:55-4:03PM Music
4:03-4:15PM Moderator Introduction, Overview and Community Norms
(15 minutes) xxis moderating the conversation
4:15-4:20PM Poll Questions
4:20-4:45PM Full Group Prompts + Questions: (20 minutes)
4:45-5:15PM Breakout Rooms: (30-35 minutes)
5:15-5:30PM Discussion + Debrief (15 minutes)

Moderator Introduction, Overview and Community Norms (15 minutes) - xx to moderate main group discussion.
• Introduce Yourself (2 minutes)
• Frame the Conversation (3 minutes)
  - Background on In Solidarity Conversations:
    • These are confusing and complicated times for everyone with COVID-19, the resulting economic crisis, and the recent protests and uprisings in reaction to the murders of Breonna Taylor, Nina Pop, Tony McDade, George Floyd and so many others and ongoing racism in the United States.
    • While all of this has caused a tremendous shift and uncertainty for our nation as a whole, these crises uniquely and disproportionately impact communities of color, their families, and their communities across the country.
    • As our communities heal and repair from these recent events, In Solidarity Conversations space that centers the leadership, voices, experiences and advocacy of cis and trans girls, young women, and gender-expansive people of color.
- We have already had five In Solidarity conversations, hearing from young people from almost 20 states. Today our conversation will include young women of color and gender-expansive young people from Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. There will be a total of 15 conversations across the country.
  - The Goal of In Solidarity Conversations is to:
    - Identify experiences of young women of color and gender-expansive young people, and their immediate needs
    - Identify solutions that are led by young people
    - Identify healing practices young people
- Agenda Overview (2 minutes)
  - Moderator will let young people know how they will spend the next 80 minutes.
    - 5 minutes discussing Community Agreements and Norms
    - 5 minutes doing some polling questions
    - 25 minutes in a full group dialogue
    - 30 minutes in break out sessions
    - 15 minutes reporting back from break out sessions
- Community Agreements (5 minutes)
  - Moderator will share a preliminary list of community agreements
    - Foster safe space for ALL young people joining
    - Feel comfortable speaking out, or using the chat box to share your thoughts
  - Young people will be asked to share some of their favorite community agreements into the Zoom chat box. Hosts will read out community agreements and also accept agreements from young people written in the Zoom chat box.
- Full Group Prompts + Questions: (25 minutes)
  1. We know that the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacts communities of color, and specifically Black communities. This is not only this health crisis—it is a result of inequities and systemic oppression that exist in our healthcare system. As young women of color and gender-expansive young people of color, has the COVID-19 crisis impacted you? If so, how? Has it impacted your community? How have you been feeling since the start of the pandemic?
  2. This pandemic has also led to an economic crisis that communities of color feel disproportionately. Has COVID-19 had a financial impact on you and your family? Your community?
  3. Recently, we’ve seen Black bodies dehumanized and continued victims of police and state violence. How have the murders of Breonna Taylor, Nina Pop, Tony McDade, and George Floyd (and so many others) and ongoing racism impacted you? How are you processing everything? What would you like to see your community and leaders doing to fight against and push back on police violence and brutality?
- Breakout Rooms: (30 minutes)
  - Facilitators will break up young people into groups of about 6-7. In each group, a young person will lead the dialogue, and an adult ally will be present for note taking.
    - Breakout #1 - Youth facilitator, Adult Ally
    - Breakout #2 - Youth facilitator, Adult Ally
    - Breakout #3 - Youth facilitator, Adult Ally
Breakout #4 - Youth facilitator, Adult Ally
Breakout #5 - Youth facilitator, Adult Ally
Breakout #6 - Youth facilitator, Adult Ally
Breakout #7 - Youth facilitator, Adult Ally (if needed)

- Breakout leads can focus on any of the following questions, or let the conversation flow as young people see fit.

1. Has anyone in your family been impacted economically by COVID-19? Has anyone in your family lost their job? Is your family worried about money and paying bills?
2. Has COVID-19 impacted your ability or desire to learn because of changes in schooling/education?
3. Do you miss being in school? If so, what are the things you miss?
4. Do you have younger siblings? Are you supporting them in any way during this time? What has that looked like for you?
5. Has COVID-19 impacted how you feel at home? How family members are getting along? Your responsibilities at home?
6. As summer approaches, do you have a plan for gaining income during your summer? What has summer employment opportunities looked like for you and your peers this year?
7. How has COVID-19 impacted your transition from high school to college and/or your plans post-graduation? How has it impacted your college journey?
8. Have you had access to the school support you needed at this time? Have you been connected to a support system?
9. How have you been taking action in your communities against police brutality? Do you feel connected at this moment? What do you need to feel connected to this movement?
10. Have you participated in any actions or protests to end police violence against Black bodies in your community? How has that looked for you?
11. What do you need right now? What does support during this time look like?
12. What do community leaders, policy makers, philanthropy and elected officials need to do in response to police brutality and state violence?
13. What do community leaders, policy makers, philanthropy and elected officials need to know as they plan response efforts to COVID-19?
14. What does power for your community look like? What does power look like for you?

Discussion + Debrief (15 minutes): (Youth facilitator name) to close discussion

- (Tech assistant name) will play music as folks come back full group
- Moderator will call on one young person from each group to discuss and highlight what was brought up in their groups and their biggest takeaway.
APPENDIX E: CODING SHEET

Question Codes

COVID IMPACT QUESTIONS
1. General
2. Economic
3. School
4. Family Relationships & Responsibilities
5. Role of Political Leaders, etc. and Response to COVID

SOCIAL UPRISING QUESTIONS
6. Impact of State Violence
7. Engaging in Protest and Community Action
8. Role of Political Leaders and Community Regarding Police Brutality and Racism

GETTING SUPPORT QUESTIONS
9. School Supports
10. General Supports

WOMEN - COVID AND INJUSTICE
11. Women - COVID and Injustice Responses

LEADERS, POLITICAL OFFICIALS, ETC. RESPONSE TO COVID & UPRISING
12. Leaders Responses to COVID & Uprising

POWER LOOK LIKE FOR/TO YOU
13. Power Look Like

SELF CARE AND JOY
14. Self-Care & Joy

PLANS FOR 2021; PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE
15. Future Plans

RANDOM QUESTIONS
16. “What is enough”
17. “Hate vs. Dislike”
18. Where are we going from here”
19. "Life post COVID”
20. How are you genuinely (feeling)?
21. Every day there was something new. Like, how did y’all process that?
22. Has anyone personally experienced anything out there, like with police, all that crazy stuff?
23. Has this moment benefited or hurt the Black women? Same for Black men/Black women?
24. How do you all find community and what does community look like to you all?

Theme Codes

a. Emotional impact, both positive and negative to COVID/Uprising
b. Mental health changes in response to COVID/Uprising
c. Individual Responsibilities (i.e., change in, increase, decrease, etc.)
d. Impact of isolation, quarantine, etc.
e. Routine or life change
f. Self-care changes, both positive and negative
g. Relationship changes, family, peers
h. Contracting/spreading COVID, fear of
i. Jobs/employment, loss or gain by participant, parent or community
j. Financial stability, personal and family
k. Access to health services, testing, etc.
l. Access to economic supports – unemployment checks, child care
m. School internships, scholarships, etc. (loss,
gain, etc.)
n. School traditions lost, missed — such as graduation, prom, on campus experiences, etc.
o. School support changes, such as access to needed programs, services, etc.
p. Online learning experience, adjustments, etc.
q. Teacher, school administration responses
r. Racism, discrimination, white supremacy, etc. (i.e., encounters with; realization of; etc.)
s. Allyship, cross race/ethnicity/etc.
t. Historical context of racism, discrimination, oppression, disparities, etc.
u. Protesting, engagement in protest — in streets, online; taking action/activism
v. Performative acts
w. Gender equity in protest; gender identity equity (equity for trans ppl)
x. Employer responses to COVID/Uprising; enforcement of rules/laws
y. Government responses to COVID/Uprising
z. Police, law enforcement responses to COVID/Uprising

Example code:

1.e = question #1 general COVID response, is a change in normal life routine

6.v = question #6 impact of social uprising, is seeing performative actions, behaviors
APPENDIX F: PRE-CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

Pre-Conversation Questions

During the registration process registrants were also asked the open-ended question “What topics are most important to talk about?” Of the topics mentioned, three large topic areas were most prominent: various forms of racism, oppression and discrimination including specific topics such as the “Black Lives Matter” movement, etc.; mental health and self-care including related issues such as health disparities, access to testing, treatment, exposure to various forms of violence; engagement in social change issues such as activism or activist related topics including elections or political engagement, police brutality, etc. Finally, the remaining topics of interest included expanding “access” to housing, food security, learning more about history and our current situation, topics focused on school and education, climate change and the environment, etc. (For a detailed breakdown of topics see Appendix B – Methodology). The word cloud below summarizes and prioritizes the responses to the pre-conversation questions.
APPENDIX G: SUBMISSIONS FROM CONVERSATION PARTICIPANTS

The following includes submission from conversation participants’ lives during COVID.

BLACK BOY by Patricia Figueroa

Laying on the firm mustard couch
  I just got
  Entrenandolo with these tears,
  which I’ve fought
  To hold back
  To silence
  Like they’ve done to us

Like the conversations, we’d have
Fiery passions of injustice
Telling me how you’ve protested
Endless back n forth

Chewing every word coming out of your mouth
  Emphasizing it’s not only down south

So when you told me you were undocumented
Laughter was the only thing that came out
  You see it must be satirical
That the first black man I love might be sent home
  So I laugh
  Yes, hysterical.
  You couldn’t see through the crackles
  Pero sorrow was inevitable
  I began to envision you; picturing us.

Artist’s Statement: In this piece, we encounter heartbreak and love all in the context of racial injustice and unstable immigrant status. She talks about an undocumented black man, an image overshadowed in the conversation of migration stories. The narrator compares their fiery love to the protests on the streets. We see love and humanity; an image we can all resonate with.
Sarah Ortes
Destined Warrior

Duality.
Intersectionality.
Synergistic oppression.
Black woman.

Two identities that have been labeled as inferior, and as a result, she overcompensates in all aspects in life to show that she is just as deserving, just as intelligent, and just as capable as other people. Black woman.

Innate sympathetic, selfless creature that would rather endure suffering herself than witness someone else go through an adversity and not receive any justice.
Black woman.

Victimized by a healthcare system that negligently puts her life at risk, even though it is in the institution’s oath to protect her.
Black woman.

Assigned Superhero at birth, provoking her reticent, reserved nature as a means to avoid being labeled as “loud” and “angry.”
Black woman.

Eurocentric ideals conflicting with what she sees in the mirror, and to cope with that reality, she turns to cosmetic procedures and fantasizes about what it would be like to drift away from her physical qualities that define her as being from the motherland.
Black woman.

Abused, culture used, and misconstrued.
Black woman.

And though she is broken down and carries the world’s burden on her shoulders, she rises above it all and conquers.

I am her.
Black woman.

Artist’s Statement: I wrote this piece with the intention to touch on all the generic issues that Black women face, but also recognizing that all of them have deeper extents that a poem would not be able to touch; I believe only hearing about such struggles and experiences can have that impact. Oppressed on all levels, Black women, even though I am one myself, continue to inspire me to keep pushing in pursuit of our daily adversity, which come from internal, institutional, ideological, and interpersonal sources. Our concerns are often dismissed because we were assigned the Superhero trope at birth (hence the name of the poem), thus, we are labeled resilient and are often called “strong Black women.” Despite it all, we exceed all expectations and reach our individual goals of success. “Innate sympathetic, selfless creature that would rather endure suffering herself than witness someone else go through an adversity and not receive any justice.” When people think about Black Lives Matter, they think of Black men and police brutality, even though Black women can face police brutality and other forms of systemic oppression (e.g. healthcare and workplace discrimination). Nonetheless, Black women are at the forefront of and organizing these protests advocating on behalf of Black men and their struggles; it is not something that is talked about or recognized, which is why I wanted to annotate this and put it in my description.
SKYSCRAPERS by Maria Arreola

If a bird asks you to stab yourself, don’t do it. He’s not actually a bird, most likely he’s a manifestation of your mental illness. Either way, he’s a squeamish fellow who wants to sacrifice you to the Great Unknown. But sacrifices require blood and the sight of blood makes him uncomfortable. So he’ll ask you to do it yourself. That way he doesn’t have to stab you in the gut. So if he asks you to stab yourself, decline politely, say no thank you. I have plans tonight, big plans. I’m going on a date and who knows this person might be the love of my life. And no, you’re not invited, whoever you are. He’ll insist. He always does.

I don’t know why he looks like a bird. I really don’t. This particular bird isn’t scary-looking. He’s actually pretty cute. But he reminds you of your mortality. Have you ever seen a street littered with bird carcasses? Just like hundreds of birds flying into skyscrapers and falling. I wonder what they think about as they descend.

Anyway, he’ll try to convince you this was your idea all along. You’ll have to remind yourself that it’s not. He’ll say, ‘Doesn’t it sound like fun?’ But that, that’s pretty mild. Your bird will say much worse things. Not worth repeating here. Never worth repeating. And maybe you’ll remember the carcasses of birds lining the streets of the Financial District right then and there. The poor dead birds, blanketing the ground. And you’ll think of the people who were walking down the street, minding their own business, when dead birds started raining from the sky. They must have thought that was it. It’s an apocalypse. Everyone’s dying.

Artist’s Statement: I’ve been thinking a lot about mental health during this time and how my own mental health has worsened. I’ve realized that it’s easier for me to address certain facets of my mental health indirectly and that in some ways my writing serves as a mirror. I’m not going directly to the source, I’m looking at a reflection.
Self Care by Gina Diaz

Artist's Statement: During the pandemic I found art to be a form of self-care. Mental Health became a priority and not being able to go out I found ways to be creative. This drawing shows how I found ways to cope.
2020 in a Nutshell by Joy Stanley

Artist's Statement: This art piece was an original design that combined my genuine feelings of social injustice and covid-19. This art is like a relay race; initially, it started off as the Earth by itself, then it passed the baton to George Floyd, then Brianna Taylor, then passing the baton to Trump being impeached, etc.. It was a tough time and this breathtaking piece was my escape route, it allowed me to say so much without actually saying anything.