

**EXPLORING DEHISCENCE IN THE
#BLACKLIVESMATTER MOVEMENT
RELATIVE TO PREVIOUS
CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVISM
IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**



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**C&I 6973 #BLACKLIVESMATTERS: CRITICAL
PERSPECTIVES**

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS SAN ANTONIO

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INTRODUCTION

- The *#BlackLivesMatter* movement in the United States was started in 2013 by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi
- It was an organized “call to action” for members of the Black community following the exoneration of George Zimmerman for the shooting and alleged murder of Trayvon Martin, a 17-year old, unarmed Black male

(#BlackLivesMatter website, 2016)

INTRODUCTION

- **Goals of the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement**
 - address continuing issues with “anti-Black racism” throughout the United States
 - continued activism against the use of excessive force by police against members of the Black community.
- **In the words of the movement’s founder, Alicia Garza, “it is an affirmation of Black folks’ contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression”**
(*#BlackLivesMatter*, n.d.)

INTRODUCTION


- Issues similar to those *#BlackLivesMatter* addresses were discussed by Fenderson, Stewart, and Baumgartner (2012), in their historical analysis of *The Black Studies Movement* and include:
 - continuing political inequities toward people of color
 - treatment of members of the Black community as “Third World People”
 - worker’s rights
 - desegregation
 - anti-war and anti-militarism in Viet Nam

INTRODUCTION


- The central tenets of the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement can be applied to university-based social justice issues affecting students of color
- Foster (2005), through his research on racial experiences of Black students at predominantly White universities in the U.S., posits:
 - racism is an ongoing systemic issue, not simply an anomaly of American society
 - thinkers (ie members of the academy) need to formulate concrete plans on how institutions should function with addressing these issues

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to examine **dehiscence** within the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement relative to previous civil rights movements in the United States.




RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What key understandings or images of the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement do members of the Black community have?
 2. Do the activities of the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement influence change within organizations, educational institutions, or other sectors of society?
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METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed for this narrative inquiry study consisted of three one-hour interviews examining the impact of the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement as it relates to previous civil rights activism.



STUDY PARTICIPANTS

- The participants were three Black women who are members of the Special Topics class C&I 6973: *#BlackLivesMatter: Critical Perspectives*.
- Each participant has a pseudonym: Taylor, Mariah, and Ve'nice
- Each participant represented a different level of degree of study within the university: one undergraduate, one masters, and one doctoral student.
- Additionally, each participant was between 20-29 years old
- Each were born and raised in three unique geographic locations related to civil rights activism: Detroit, southern California, and Mississippi.

DATA COLLECTION

The gathering of data occurred through one hour participant interviews

The researcher used the same nine-question interview for each participant with additional probing as needed for general clarification as well as for additional points of interest related to their answers.

Peer de-briefing was used for transcript verification.

Triangulation of the data occurred through verification of participant responses with additional sources to include scholarly articles, books, and other artifacts.

CODING AND DATA ANALYSIS

Coding and data analysis was conducted using NVivo software.

The coded research was classified under four primary nodes and seven subnodes:

- Social Media
 - Civil Rights Education
 - School
 - Family
 - Church
 - Activism
 - Personal
 - Past
 - Present
 - Future
- #BlackLivesMatter* Impact
- *#BlackLivesMatter* Impact-Feminism

ADDITIONAL ANALYSIS

Subsequent analysis was conducted to examine coded responses for two forms of **dehiscence**: **reopened wounds** or **new seeds of growth** as it relates to the impact of the **#BlackLivesMatter** movement relative to historical civil rights activism.



INSPIRATION FOR THE STUDY

Dr. Jared Sexton, in his 2011 article, *The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Afro-Futurism* used the term “**dehiscence**” in his description of global African-American Studies, or Black studies leading everywhere



THE SOURCE FOR THE STUDY

“We might call this outlook or approach—in distinction from and relation to both black studies and African Diaspora studies—*global African American studies*. This is an endeavor, or projection, that teaches us all how we might better inhabit multiplicity under general conditions at the global scale for which such inhabitation has become (and perhaps always has been or must be) a necessary virtue. And it does so less through pedagogical instruction than through an exemplary transmission: emulation of a process of learning through the posing of a question, rather than imitation of a form of being; which is also to say a procedure for reading, for study, for *black study* or, in the spirit of the multiple, for *black studies* ... wherever they may lead. And, contrary to the popular misconception, they do lead *everywhere*. And they do *lead everywhere*, even and especially in their dehiscence. “

Sexton, J. (2011). The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism. *InTensions Journal* 5 (Fall/Winter 2011), 1-47.

WHAT IS DEHISCENCE?

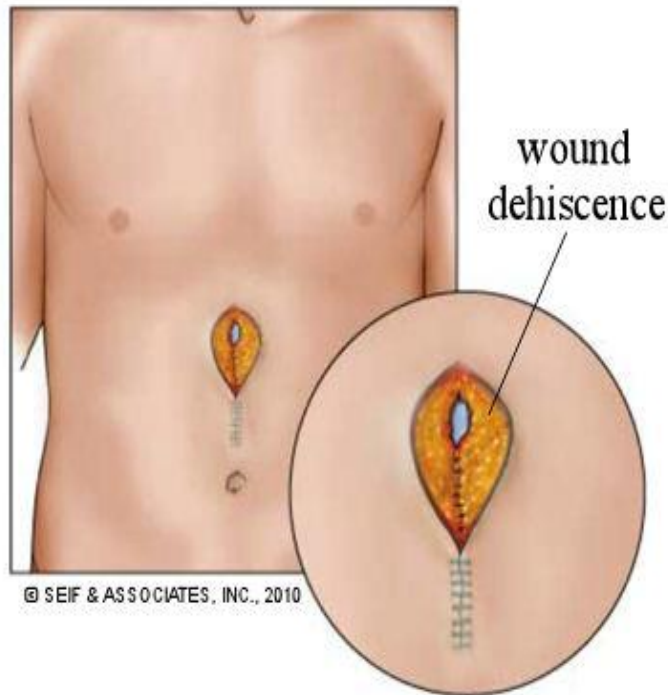
In Medicine,
dehiscence refers to
a wound that re-
opens due to
complications

In Botany, **dehiscence**
refers to the forceful
projection of seeds
from a plant in order
to promote new
growth of the
species

It occurs as a result of
built-up pressure
inside the plant cell
wall

EXAMPLES

**Dehiscence in
Medicine** (artist
rendering)



**Dehiscence in
Botany** (actual picture)



SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS, & SCHOLARLY LITERATURE

Passy and Monsch (2014) posit that networks provide the connection activists seek for protest and provide bridges to social movements

Social movements like *#BlackLivesMatter* find strength and support for the cause in the writings of Bloomaert and Bulcaen (2000) and Wodak and Meyer (2001) regarding the development of new forms of Critical Discourse Analysis.

Spillers (1994), in her argument for the development of the black creative intellectual, would support social media as a means of community development in areas like social-political relations.

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

Given the importance of Social Media in the *#BlackLivesMatter* Movement, the following slides are presented as a series of “tweets” from each participant for each node and subnode. In traditional *#Twitter* style, a hashtag will be used for the nodes/subnodes of each tweet.

Dehiscence will be noted in each section using a separate hashtag following participant responses

- *#WoundsRe-opened*
- *#SeedsOfChange*

SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS

Participants indicated strong ties to social media as a preferred form of activism compared to past efforts

Each response received additional analysis to code for **dehiscence** using the parameters:

#WoundsRe-opened or *#SeedsOfChange*

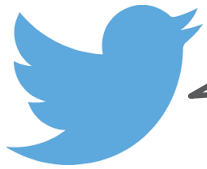




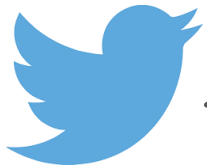
@Rick...#BlackLivesMatter
trending on #Twitter



@Rick...What positive roles has Social Media, like #Twitter, like the #BlackLivesMatter movement? #BlackLivesMatter #SocialMedia #DehiscenceSeedsofChange



@Mariah... #BlackLivesMatter took off just as a hashtag on *Twitter*...it's become something more powerful...more people involved...in the social and political aspect.
#DehiscenceSeedsofChange



@Taylor...I think about #Twitter...(and)...
#BlackLivesMatter and I think this connects well how
#Twitter serves as a liberatory space
#DehiscenceSeedsofChange



@Ve'nice...during an age where technology is so, just...phew...powerful...ANYBODY can participate in this!"
You don't have to...meet up...on a Sunday for the rally...you...voice your opinion and...concerns from different spaces. #DehiscenceSeedsofChange

CIVIL RIGHTS EDUCATION & SCHOLARLY LITERATURE

- Historically, White-centric K-12 curriculum in the civil rights movements “glosses over” the injustices toward the Black community. Students receive large exposure to the Emancipation Proclamation. However, exposure is typically brief regarding:
 - The Fifteenth Amendment
 - Jim Crow Laws
 - Black women’s suffrage
 - *Plessy v. Ferguson*
 - *Brown v. Board of Education*
- Typical K-12 curriculum for 1950s civil rights activism is usually limited to the work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks, almost to the point of romanticization.
- Education regarding voting rights is usually limited to a brief discussion of the Fifteenth Amendment, brief descriptions of the work of Sojourner Truth and Susan B. Anthony, and Lyndon B. Johnson’s Voting Right Acts of 1965.
- (Yoder, personal experiences, 2003-2016)

CIVIL RIGHTS EDUCATION & SCHOLARLY LITERATURE

- High school students should be given the opportunity to look at other sources of learning regarding civil rights at the national and global level. Examples to consider include:
 - Rustin's (1957) working papers on the planning by the SCLC regarding the Montgomery Bus Boycott or the Crusade for Citizenship Campaign to increase Black voter registration.
 - Guinier 's (1994) critique of majority-rule voting processes, gerrymandering, and argument on the need for consensus-building to develop cumulative interest representation for Black voters.

Oshinsky's (1997) or Alexander's (2012) discussions on Jim Crow justice in Mississippi and other southern states especially as they relate to the issue of mass incarceration by the White majority.

CIVIL RIGHTS EDUCATION & SCHOLARLY LITERATURE

- **High school civil rights education (cont.)**
 - Oshinsky's (1997) or Alexander's (2012) discussions on Jim Crow justice in Mississippi and other southern states especially as they relate to the issue of mass incarceration by the White majority.
 - The heinous actions of the "slave patrols" in Hadden's (2001) work on the treatment of plantation slaves in Virginia and the Carolinas.
 - Marable and Mullings (2000) anthology on Black Power, especially Chapter 14 with Carmichael's and Rustin's positions on how best to overcome the continuing issues with racism in the U.S.

Freire's (2014) work promoting literacy by teaching oppressed groups in South America how to read in order to become stronger citizens in control of their own destinies.

HISTORICAL CIVIL RIGHTS EDUCATION

Participants were asked to consider how they learned about the historical civil rights movements

Coded responses indicated three subnodes for education: school, family, and church.

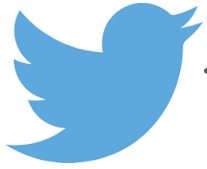
Each of these will receive additional analysis to code for **dehiscence** using the same parameters:

#WoundsRe-opened or *#SeedsOfChange*



@Rick...#Twitter's abuzz about
#CivilRights!





*@Rick...Tell me more about how you were educated about the historical civil rights movements in school?
#BlackLivesMatter #CivilRightsEd*



*@Mariah... the way things were portrayed in textbooks and what teachers would tell us... it wasn't what it seemed...in...high school we got just the "top layer
#DehiscenceWoundsReopened*



*@Taylor...Black history within the context of school, K-12 school, formal school, was very masculine...We would hear about Rosa Parks...and we would hear about Rosa Parks... for the most part, it was very masculine
#DehiscenceWoundsRe-opened*



*@Ve'nice...It was in school...not a chapter, but a section...it was always the same information...Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, the same thing over and over again
#DehiscenceWoundsRe-opened*



@Rick...Did you have other opportunities to learn about the historical civil rights movements outside of your high school classroom? #BlackLivesMatter #CivilRightsEd



@Mariah... (yes)...I'm learning things were done for certain reason now in college...what I learned in high school, it made seem like it basically changed the world, #DehiscenceSeedsOfChange



@Taylor...the stuff that I learned within the context of the school organizations I served in... choir, band, student council...all of these different groups really challenged...some of the stuff we were learning in the classroom #DehiscenceSeedsOfChange



@Ve'nice...(I took AA studies in college...) Black professors are extremely tough...I could never really engage in what we were learning... I was so stressed over the workload #DehiscenceWoundsRe-opened



@Rick...What about outside of the classroom? Did you have any experiences learning about civil rights outside of school? For example, from family? #BlackLivesMatter #Civil RightsEd



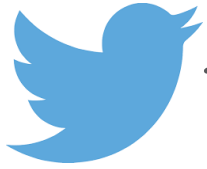
@Mariah... my grandmother...told me about needing to vote and she remembers when they didn't have the right to vote #Dehiscence Seeds of Change...my grandfather, he rarely speaks about it...I don't think it was a positive time in his life...#DehiscenceWoundsRe-opened



@Taylor... my parents and grandparents were able to teach (me)...about the sacrifices and contributions the family made, (and its importance) to Black history or even my history specifically #DehiscenceSeedsOfChange



@Ve'nice...a lot of our mindsets are shaped at a very early age even when we're not comprehending it... I spent a lot of time at church...a lot of time giving back...community service means so much #DehiscenceSeedsOfChange



@Rick...What about in addition to education by your family? Perhaps church? #BlackLivesMatter #Civil RightsEd



@Taylor...learning about civil rights in church comes from testimonies (from friends and loved ones)...#DehiscenceSeedsofChange



*@Ve' nice...just being able to sit there and kind of listen to the different things that he (Pastor Lawson) would talk about...although at the time I didn't really comprehend it...but, I think that has shaped me into who I am today ... because in the Black community, you don't have to be blood to be related to someone
#DehiscenceSeedsofChange*



@Rick...#Twitter lives for
#Activism

ACTIVISM & SCHOLARLY LITERATURE

Mdembe (2003) as translated by Meintjes, posits that political sovereignty in its greatest manifestation is developed as a result of norms created by both men and women who are considered free and equal. The result is autonomy and agreement among all groups through effective communication and recognition. It is plausible to consider that Mdembe is promoting activism among the groups for this to occur.

Brah and Phoenix (2004), in their research on intersectionality, argue for the use of Feminist agendas as a form of activism, in order to not only challenge issues related to the treatment of women of color in the United States but for all women's issues on a global level.

Merrill and Carter (2016) urge young Black activists to seek coalition building through a two-fold process of coalition building and coordinated action with multiple groups. They argue against racial division and the rejection of assistance by White groups who are empathetic to their cause.

ACTIVISM

The need for continued activism was evident during all interviews

Coded responses indicated four subnodes for activism: past, present, future, and personal

Each of these received additional analysis to code for **dehiscence** using the parameters:

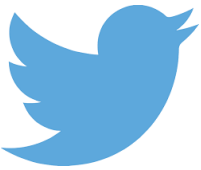
#WoundsRe-opened or *#SeedsOfChange*



@Rick...Who wants to weigh in on some of the civil rights efforts by Black women activists of the past? #Activism



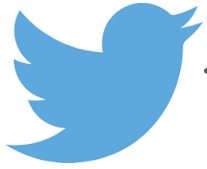
@Taylor... Fannie Lou Hamer was said to be an uneducated Black woman, but, she was a businesswoman and she used her positionality to essentially get the Democratic party of Mississippi to allow her to be a delegate #DehiscenceSeedsOfChange



@Mariah...I would have to say... Rosa Parks...Some people think they (MLK) actually planned for her to sit in the front of the bus and told her not to move...a lot of people don't know that... #DehiscenceWoundsRe-opened



@Ve'nice...(I think about Wisconsin's first Black Judge Vel Phillips)...every step she made, there was someone there trying to knock her down...they used to shoot into her house trying to take her out...you know, just, just try to bring her down... #DehiscenceWoundsRe-opened



@Rick...*What about issues in general with Black activism in the present? #Activism*



@Mariah...for Black people time is cyclical, and not linear...we're basically going through the same things...just a different time period...not really fighting different movements, they've evolved...It's just a repeated cycle." #*DehiscenceWoundsRe-opened*



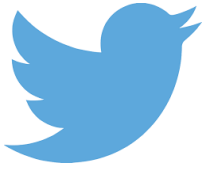
@Taylor...(A key issue with me is Black voter disenfranchisement)...I think about what voting means and what it does because if you can't vote, you can't have a voice #*DehiscenceWoundsRe-opened*



@Ve'nice...a lot of people say "*racism is over because Obama is President*" ...that's not true! #*DehiscenceWoundsRe-opened*



*@Rick...Where do you see future efforts with Black activism, like the #BlackLivesMatter movement heading?
#Activism*



@Mariah...I think from here it can only progress...I don't see it dissolving any time soon...it will only getting stronger and stronger I would say as years go by...since it has already, I guess as a micro-movement, enlightened so many people...there is no going back. #DehiscenceSeedsOfChange



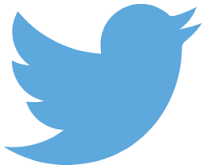
*@Taylor...I hope #BlackLivesMatter in the future when folks are talking about it, it's not old news... I want it to be fresh in acknowledging it being inclusive of everybody and really challenging some of the ways in which dominant narratives have skewed folks ways of thinking
#DehiscenceSeedsOfChange*



@Ve'nice...I think we're working in the right direction...but, we have to carry on the legacy...#BlackLivesMatter is setting up their legacy and they are training our younger generation to be ready to take the torch and to continue to fight and demand respect...#DehiscenceSeedsOfChange



@Rick...*Tell me about your personal efforts with activism.*
#Activism



@Taylor...I do identify as a Black feminist as someone who engages in critical research, specifically Critical Race Research. In thinking about how is it that all of my work, all of my academic professional experiences-- how are they something geared toward this overall goal of liberation *#DehiscenceSeedsOfChange*



@Ve' nice...I made the decision not to become desensitized any more and to play an active role for Black lives...it's always been around women, gender equality, and stuff like that. So, I said: "Okay, I want to do something, how can I contribute to my community?...I can be a change agent in the environments that I do have access to and to make an impact."
#DehiscenceSeedsOfChange



@Rick...#Twitter and
#BlackLivesMatter...the future of
#Activism

#BLACKLIVESMATTER IMPACT & SCHOLARLY LITERATURE

It can be posited that Delgado & Stefancic's (2012) central tenets of Critical Race Theory serves as a "backbone" or foundation for the mission of the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement.

For the impact of the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement to continue, Rickford (2016) argues that the organization must develop links with other oppressed groups and grassroots movements. By doing so, it can cement its future as a movement that can truly lead to positive change.

Along with Delgado & Stefancic's work, Wing's (2003) research on Critical Race Feminism must be considered especially when developing equitable solutions to social justice issues affecting women of color

Additionally, the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement shares similarities toward the embracing of Blackness like those suggested in Wilderson's (2003) essay "*The Prison Slave as Hegemony's (Silent) Scandal*"

***#BLACKLIVESMATTER* IMPACT**

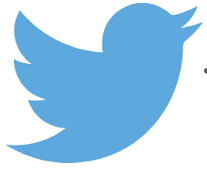
Participants were asked their thoughts regarding what the impact has been or will be of the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement

Coded responses indicated one additional subnode for impact: Feminism

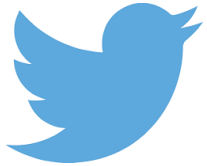
Each response received additional analysis to code for **dehiscence** using the parameters:

#WoundsRe-opened or ***#SeedsofChange***

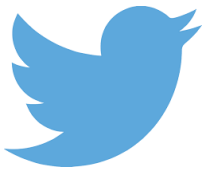




@Rick...Where do you feel the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement has had the greatest impact?



@Mariah...I would say its more than a movement...it's a revolution. We don't have major political figures I guess like MLK and Malcolm X...but, I don't believe we need them because the movement is so powerful, just everyone coming together ...creating this one... *#DehiscenceSeedsOfChange*



@Taylor...*#BlackLivesMatter* was started by a group of queer women of color which is similar to other movements but we acknowledge up front...that women are part of this *#DehiscenceSeedsOfChange*



@Ve'nice... In educating our community to take these roles that puts us in somewhat in a place of power, ...police officers, doctors, judges ...*we need to be represented, you know, if we want to have any type of fighting chance.*
#DehiscenceSeedsOfChange



@Rick...*Tell me more about Feminism and the #BlackLivesMatter movement...#Feminism*



@Taylor... There have been plenty of movements where women have kind of been the backbones or may have been like the invisible hand in a sense. But, we have not always acknowledged them for their contributions..., seeing how a lot of the time now when folks think *#BlackLivesMatter* you might not even think about a woman. *#DehiscenceWoundsRe-opened*



@ Venice...I have a huge women focus because I considered myself, still do consider myself a Feminist...I didn't like the way women were treated...I didn't like the way women were treated in the media...if you think about the word you always say first, I wouldn't say "I'm a woman that's Black...I would say I'm a Black woman." But I feel like I fight first for my woman rights and then for my Black rights if that makes sense.

#DehiscenceSeedsOfChange

CONCLUSIONS

1. What key understandings or images of the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement do members of the Black community have?

KEY UNDERSTANDINGS

The *#BlackLivesMatter* movement is considered one more piece in the cyclical, not linear effort toward equity and social justice for members of the Black community

- A. @Mariah...”for Black people time is cyclical, and not linear...we’re basically going through the same things...just a different time period...not really fighting different movements, they’ve evolved...It’s just a repeated cycle.”

#DehiscenceWoundsReopened

- B. @Mariah...“I would say its more than a movement...it’s a revolution. We don’t have major political figures I guess like MLK and Malcolm X...but, I don’t believe we need them because the movement is so powerful, just everyone coming together ...creating this one” *#DehiscenceSeedsOfChange*

CONCLUSIONS

1. What key understandings or images of the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement do members of the Black community have?

KEY IMAGES

Even though the movement was started by three Black women, it gets represented in the press as Black patriarchal activism just like past efforts of the 1950s and 1960s.

@Taylor...“There have been plenty of movements where women have kind of been the backbones or may have been like the invisible hand in a sense. But, we have not always acknowledged them for their contributions..., seeing how a lot of the time now when folks think *#BlackLivesMatter* you might not even think about a woman. *#DehiscenceWoundsReopened*

CONCLUSIONS

2. Do the activities of the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement influence change within organizations, educational institutions, or other sectors of society?

#BlackLivesMatter Activities

Based on the opinions expressed by the participants, the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement is influencing positive change in society through its efforts to educate.

@Ve'nice...“I think we’re working in the right direction...but, *we have to carry on the legacy...#BlackLivesMatter is setting up their legacy and they are training our younger generation to be ready to take the torch and to continue to fight and demand respect...*” *#DehiscenceSeedsOfChange*

CONCLUSIONS

2. Do the activities of the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement influence change within organizations, educational institutions, or other sectors of society?

#BlackLivesMatter Activities

The *#BlackLivesMatter* movement has radically changed activism as we know it due to the global reach of social media sites like *#Twitter*

@Ve'nice...“during an age where technology is so, just...phew...powerful...ANYBODY can participate in this!” You don't have to...meet up...on a Sunday for the rally...you...voice your opinion and...concerns from different spaces.” *#DehiscenceSeedsOfChange*

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY & FUTURE RESEARCH

Interviews occurred only with Black women and not Black men

The participants are known by the researcher

Findings may not be generalizable


Future research will result from this pilot study practice.

The doctoral participant and researcher will collaborate on a similar study to interview Black students from UTSA involved in civil rights activism.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS


Nine questions were used during the interviews of each study participant.

Part I

1. Tell me about yourself both personally and professionally.
 2. What is your current level of study and expected degree?
 3. What prompted you to take the special topics course *#BlackLivesMatter*?
- 


INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Part II

4. What is the *#BlackLivesMatter Movement* to you?
 5. When you consider the historical civil rights movements in the United States, how were you educated about them?
 6. Which of the historical movements resonates with you the most?
- 

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Part III

7. How would you compare that historical movement with your perception of the current *#BlackLivesMatter* movement?
 8. What are your thoughts regarding what the impact has been or will be of the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement?
 9. How does the current *#BlackLivesMatter* movement relate to previous civil rights activism?
- 

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