

# Emerging Adult College Students' Anti-Racist Sociopolitical Development Within and Beyond the Year 2020



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## INTRODUCTION

- Early emerging adults experienced the sociopolitical turbulence of 2020 may have responded with **anti-racist sociopolitical development** (Quiles et al., 2023).
- Through sociopolitical development, these emerging adults may have adopted new anti-racist positions and have further committed to anti-racist social action during and beyond 2020 (Hope et al., 2023).
- Anti-racist sociopolitical development can be supported by **opportunity structures** (e.g., social media; Wilf et al., 2022; Watts & Flanagan, 2007), and informed by social identities (Watts & Halkovic, 2022).
- Sociopolitical development may be entwined with **wellbeing** as a coping strategy (Hope & Spencer, 2017).

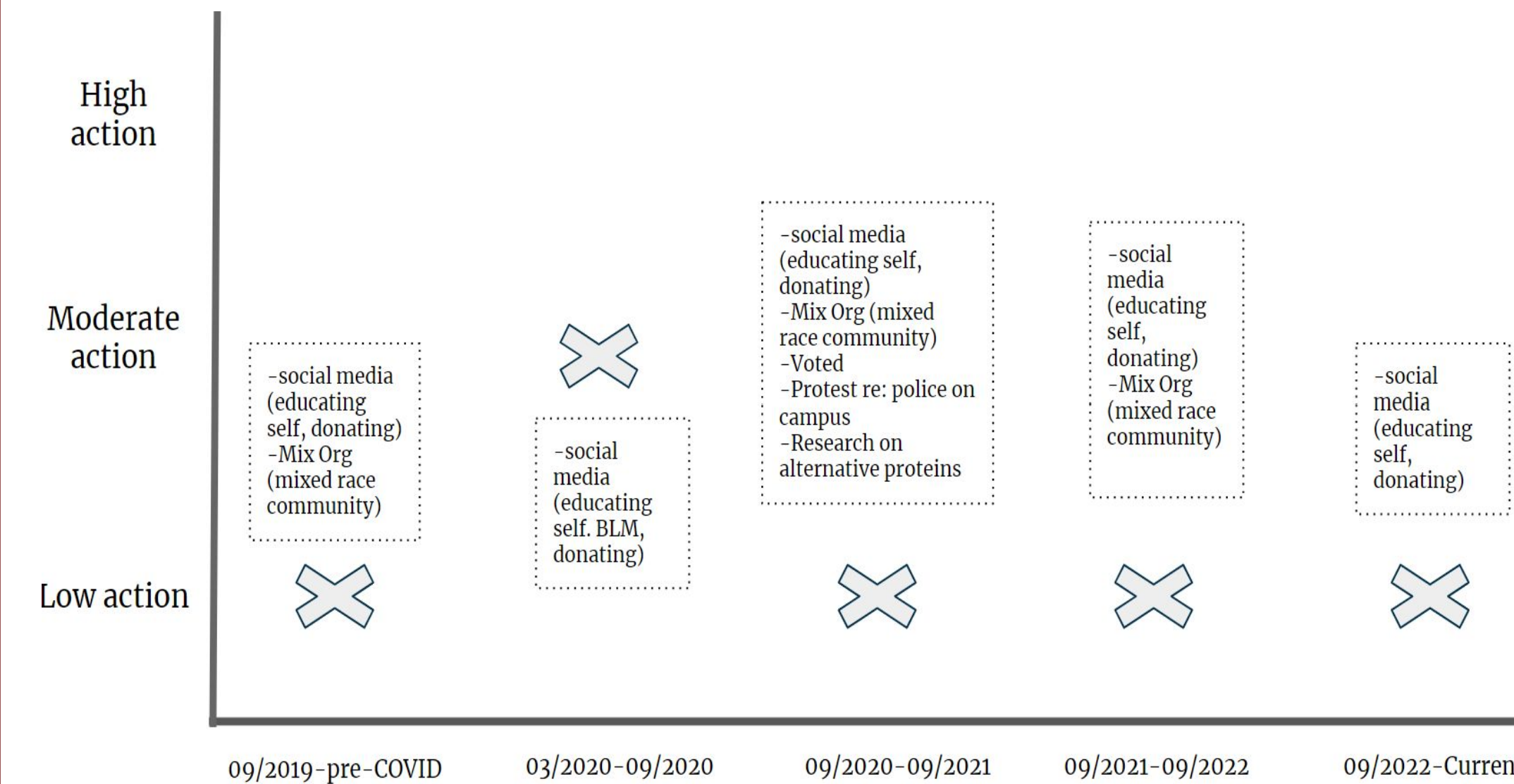
## METHOD

- Recruited participants via email from a larger national cohort (N=707) of **diverse emerging adults who were first or second year college students in April 2020**
- Stratified approach to recruit participants diverse in race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and geographic location
- 108 participants contacted; **27 completed semi-structured Zoom interviews** and received \$50 Amazon gift cards
- Interviews used **two tools to foster a participatory experience** (i.e., co-constructed timeline and visual elicitation tool)

## Sample (N = 27)

Demographic	Number (%)
Women	15 (56%)
Men	8 (29%)
Transgender and Gender Diverse	4 (15%)
LGBTQ+	13 (48%)
Asian	9 (33%)
Black	4 (15%)
Latinx	2 (7%)
White	9 (33%)
Multiracial	3 (11%)
Immigrant-origin status	15 (56%)
First generation college students	10 (37%)
Attended public colleges and universities	15 (56%)
Attended 4 year institutions	26 (96%)
Attended Predominantly White Institutions	20 (74%)

## FINDINGS ON LONGITUDINAL ANTI-RACIST SOCIOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENT



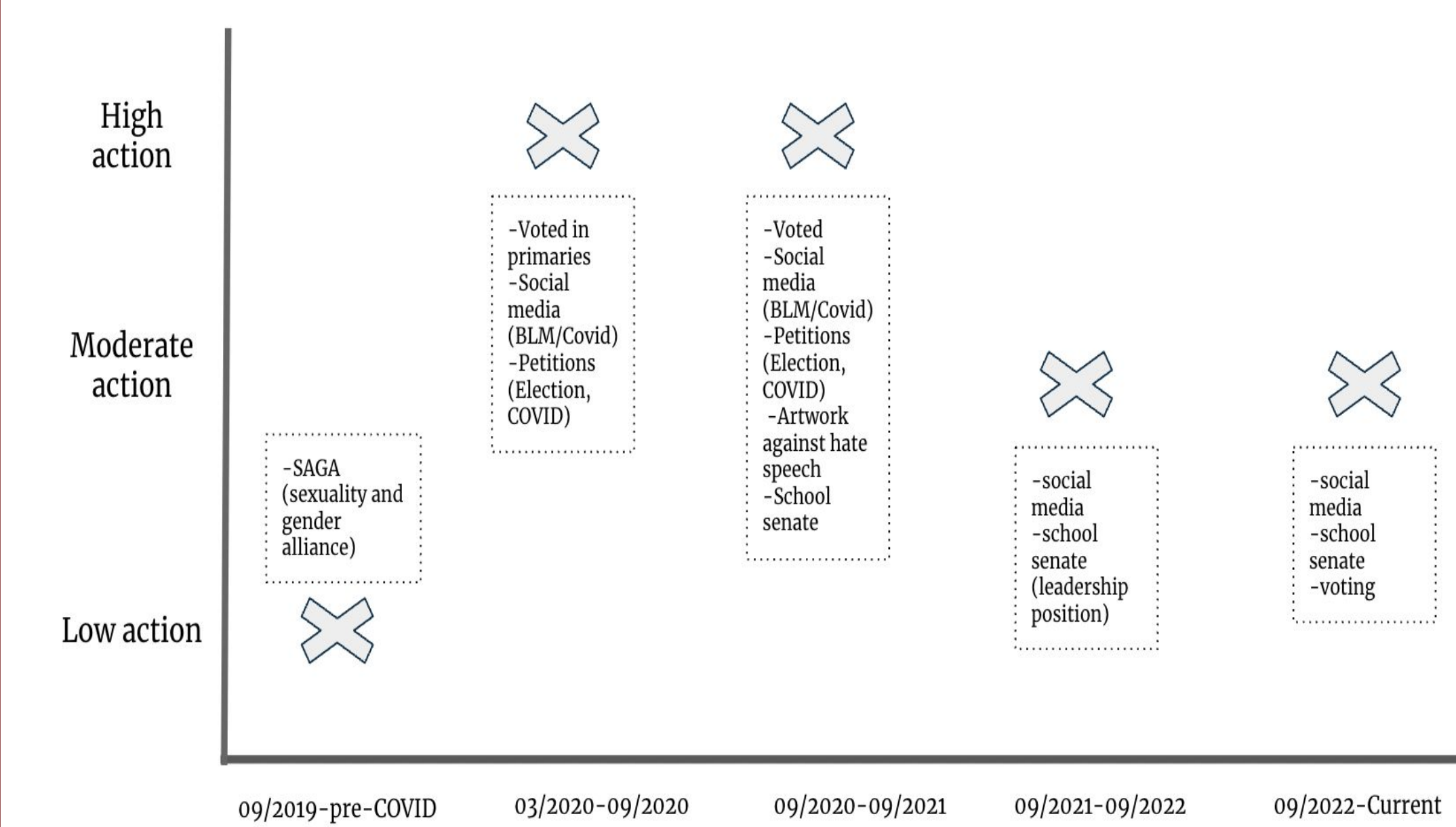
**Trajectory 1:** Interest in racial experiences informed by racial identities  
**Quoted participant:** Yazmin, a Central American and Middle Eastern/North African" straight woman

2020: Involved somewhat, but still **largely low action**. Participants were mostly involved in **racial issues** regarding their own positionality.

*"I was very into Black Lives Matter stuff... But I think race issues do interest me more, because I'm already kind of focused on race stuff."*

2021-2022: **Increased or maintained low to moderate engagement**.

*"Right now, there's just a lot going on in Iran. And my dad is Iranian, so I do care.... And also, I feel like nobody else that follows me would care too much. If, you know, it's easy to like, ignore it. So I will post about that a little bit."*



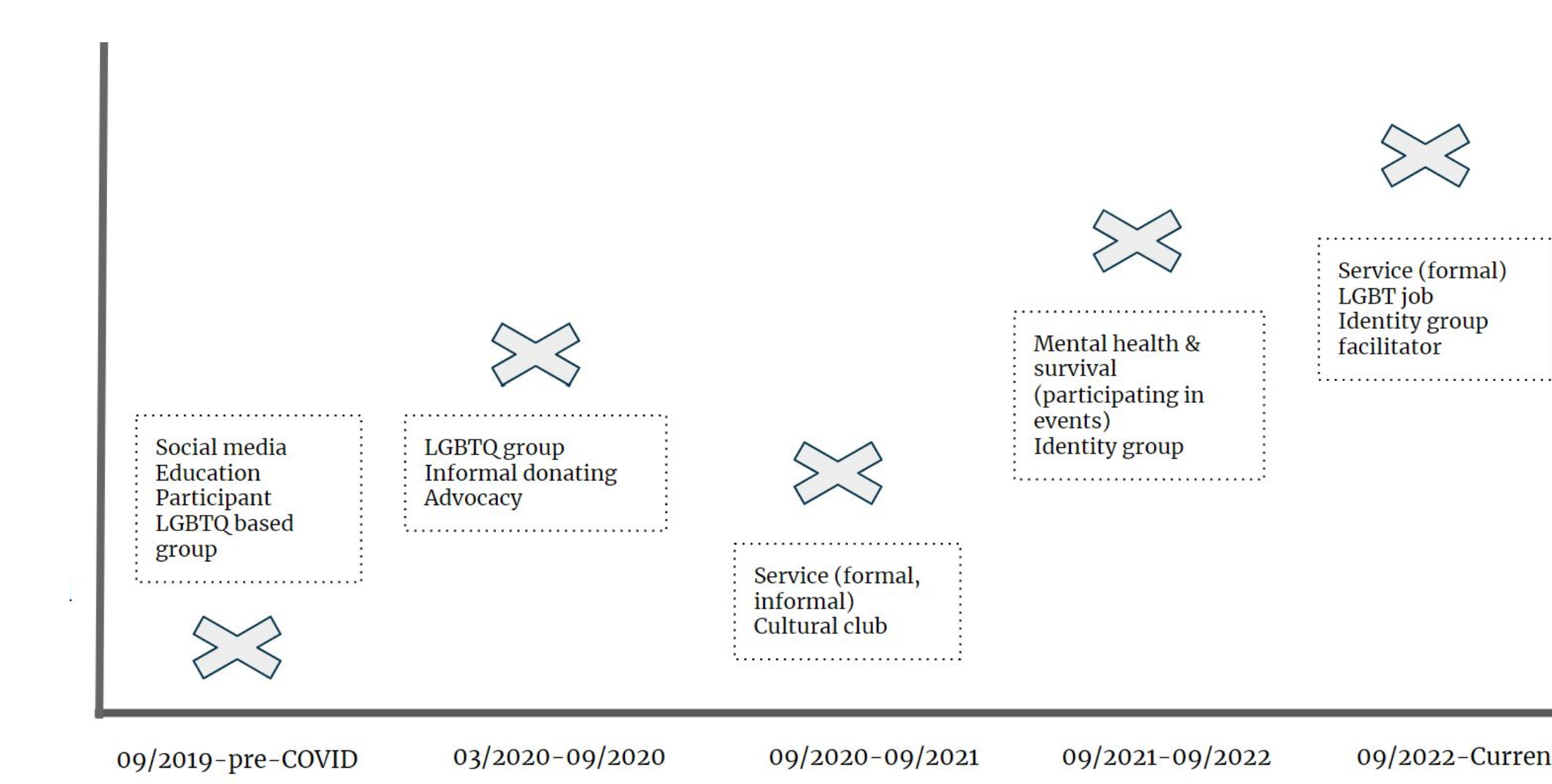
**Trajectory 2:** Exposure to BLM as a catalyst to address other systems  
**Quoted participant:** Felix, queer white non binary

2020: Participants' engagement **increased**. **New modes** of civic engagement were adopted. All mention **race**.

*"[BLM] was happening with COVID. So much was happening that summer... I remember that being when I actually paid attention on social media in this way around civic issues. Petitions were also huge at that point... voting, or COVID, or whatever it happened to be..."*

2021: Engagement continues to **increase**. Social media still used. Participants **move away from race** to other issues (e.g., LGBTQ+ rights)

*"Social media... then School Senate came together because that year was prompted by all the civic stuff going on. Our Senate became probably 3x as active as it had been previously."*



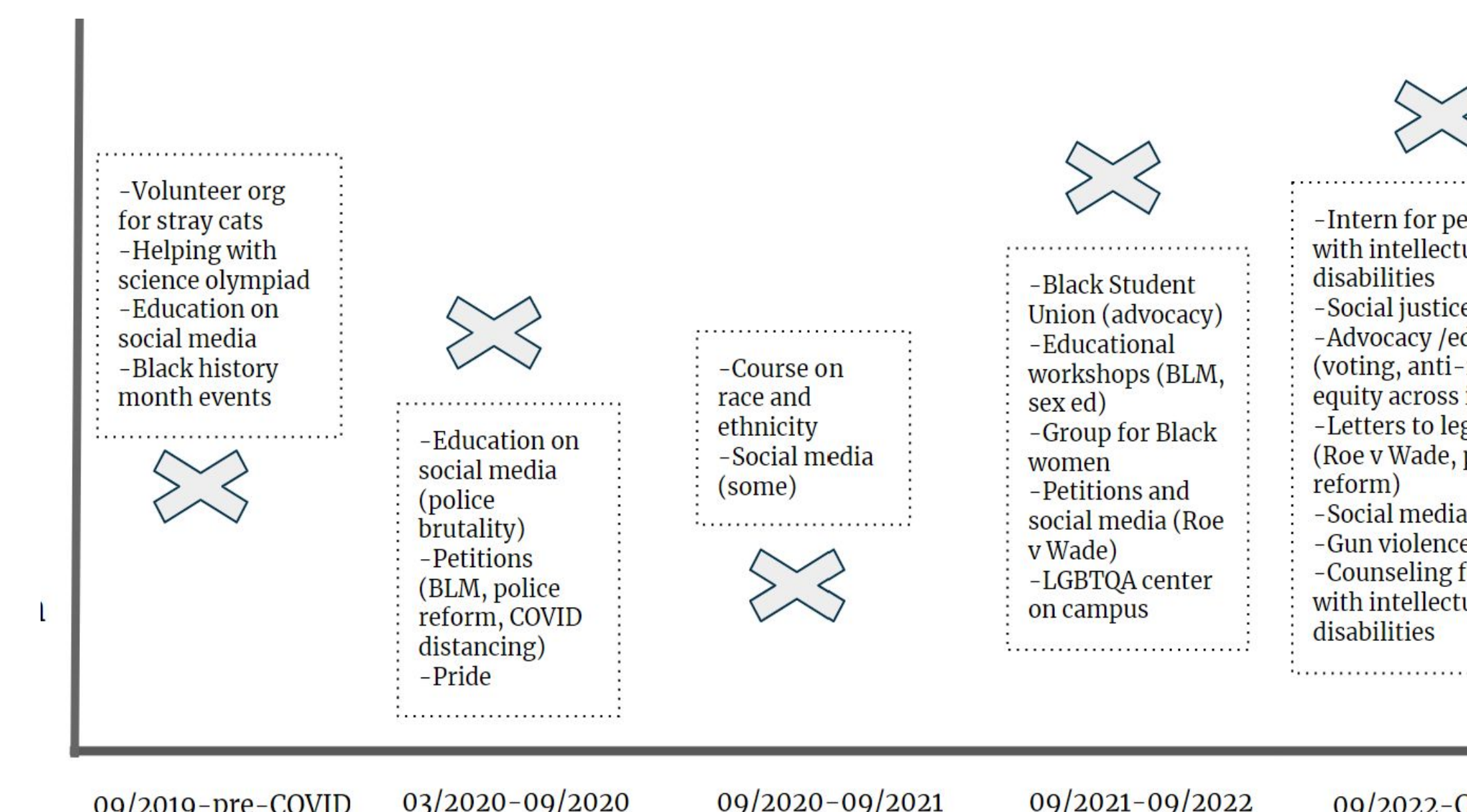
**Trajectory 3:** Sustained focused on issues other than anti-Black or anti-Asian racism  
**Quoted participant:** Jo, a queer South Asian gender queer person

2020: Some reported **decreased engagement**, often due to **COVID-19 related barriers**,

*"I was pretty off the grid. So not social media. It was mostly in person. So in this regard, I would say participation in an LGBT group once again... I was an unofficial officer. I would say informal donating... and advocacy."*

2021-2022: Often found service/advocacy related to **majors and careers** and **increased engagement**

*"Like I am a Gender and Sexuality Studies major along with Sociology. And so like the organization of these communities is like, that's like wonderful to kind of just have a shared experience, I think and to resonate with each other."*



**Trajectory 4:** Intersectional identity development and engagement  
**Quoted participant:** Onna, a bisexual Black woman

2020: Participants **struggled** with their **wellbeing** in response physical distancing and racial justice protests, and were able to find **support systems later in 2020**

*"I learned a lot... especially applicable for me since I'm an African American female... It's all very relevant and interesting to learn about. I think it did definitely support my well-being; I did really well in the spring."*

2021-2022: Continued to focus on **racial justice** while also addressing **intersecting** issues of gender and sexuality in their advocacy

*"I'm a social work student. So obviously, there's a lot of stuff—advocacy is a huge thing for voting for anti racism for um just equity / equality across the board."*

## ANALYTIC APPROACH

- Conducted a reflexive thematic analysis using inductive-deductive coding and iterative memoing (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Creswell, 2013).
- **Positionality Statement:** Our team: three undergraduate students and three professors. The undergraduate students identified as (Asian/cis-gender woman), (Central Asian/nonbinary), and (Latina/cis-gender woman). The professors all identified as white cis-gender women. How we did and did not share experiences with our participants form our "insider-outsider" (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) positions. An advisory board of 6 emerging adult college students contributed further insiders' perspectives.

## DISCUSSION

- Identified **significant heterogeneity in early emerging adult college students' anti-racist sociopolitical trajectories** over time. There was also heterogeneity within the different trajectories.
- Findings affirm the influential role of the year 2020 on some early emerging adult college students' college and early career trajectories, and suggest that **sociopolitical development specifically related to anti-racism can activate a broader awareness of inequality**.
- Notably, **only one participant in Trajectory 1 and the two participants in Trajectory 4 reported remaining actively committed to anti-racism beyond 2020**. Many emerging adults may have benefited from deeper and more sustained opportunities to move from critical analysis of racism to ongoing anti-racist action.

## Future Work

- **Methodology:** Use prospective longitudinal methods and focus more specifically on emerging adults' anti-racist sociopolitical development
- **Institutional representation:** Examine emerging adults at a greater variety of institutions/on tracks outside of college
- **Racial diversity:** Purposively seek out larger and more representative samples of emerging adults across ethnic/racial groups

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & REFERENCES

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