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An In-Depth Analysis of Black Adults' Engagement with and Perspectives of the Black Lives Matter Movement across Different Ethnic Backgrounds

by

Marsha A. Akoto

A Dissertation

Presented to the

Graduate and Research Committee

of Lehigh University

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in

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Abstract

Over the past decades, Black Americans have experienced increased racial violence, resulting in a noticeable rise in psychological stress, racial trauma (race-based traumatic stress), and adverse psychosocial and physical health concerns. Engagement in activism can serve as a protective factor, promoting collective healing, yet may also contribute to heightened burnout and other challenges. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement addresses police brutality and anti-Black racism, emphasizing the impact of racism as a public health crisis, and focusing on mental well-being. Despite its significance, the movement has been met with varied support. To further understand perspectives on the Black Lives Matter Movement within the U.S. Black communities, this study used a mixed-methods study examined responses from 206 Black participants to three open-ended questions. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the open-ended responses and understand participants' patterns of involvement, attitudes, perceptions, and support within the U.S. Black communities. Grounded in an intersectionality framework, chi-square test of independence analyses explored differences across Black ethnic groups (i.e., African Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, and African immigrants) to examine differences in responses to BLM-related themes. Binary logistic regression examined demographic predictors of movement participation. Qualitative content analysis revealed that Black participants' perspectives are centered on the BLM Movement as a necessary but contested vehicle for Black Liberation, the necessity of critical reflection, and psychological navigation, solidarity as negotiation, participation as a moral, affective obligation and capacity, psychological preservation influencing abstention and nuance in ambivalence. Critical implications for researchers, counseling psychologists, clinicians, community advocates, and educators are discussed.

Chapter I: Introduction

Racism is an inescapable, chronic, public health crisis that profoundly impacts Black Americans, who have endured a longstanding history of racial discrimination (Danzer, 2012; Harrell, 2000; Landor & McNeil Smith, 2019; Williams-Washington & Mills, 2018). The rise in race-based discrimination, racial violence, and police brutality has led to an increase in race-based traumatic stress, physical concerns, and psychological distress within the U.S. Black community (Eichstaedt et al., 2021; Shellae Versey et al., 2019; Waldron, 2020). Despite enduring centuries of oppressive and pernicious racism in the United States, studies demonstrate that Black Americans continue to fight against a myriad of structural injustices (Barnum et al., 2012; Morrow et al., 2017; Motley & Joe, 2018a; Nadal et al., 2017; Paradies et al., 2015; Taniguchi et al., 2017). A potential protective factor in mitigating structural injustices is the use of activism. In particular, the Black community has a longstanding history of organizing in protest and activism (Ross et al., 2022; Szymanski, 2012), with the most recent example being, the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM). Despite its importance, the BLM movement has received limited empirical attention, and we currently do not have a thorough grasp and representation of diverse Black perspectives regarding one of the most crucial protest movements in American history. As such, this investigation aims to fill this gap in the literature on racism and activism.

One particularly egregious function and consequence of racism is police brutality, which has been on the rise in the past decade (Carvalho et al., 2022; Jett, 2022; Morrow et al., 2017; Motley & Joe, 2018a). Over the past decade, and primarily in recent years, the frequent murders of Black Americans at the hands of law enforcement have ignited public discourse, underscoring the systemic injustices endured by racial and ethnic minorities, particularly among the African

American community (Eichstaedt et al., 2021). On May 25th, 2020, in Minneapolis Minnesota, George Floyd a Black man was murdered by police officer Derek Chauvin. The consecutive days were followed by an insurgence of racial uproar and increased psychological distress among the U.S. Black population (Eichstaedt et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2021). This killing sparked a national and global unrest and protests and lead to domestic and global support of over 26 million people, the largest protest movement in American history (Curtis, 2022; Lin et al., 2022; Strickland, 2022). This tragedy juxtaposed with The 2020 COVID-19 global pandemic, served as a pivotal moment of racial awakening and catalyst for BLM movement protests, not only in the United States but also internationally, and fostered an increased awareness of racism against Black individuals (Cox et al., 2024; Curtis, 2022; Eichstaedt et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2022; Strickland, 2022).

However, despite the undeniable significance of the BLM movement, research demonstrates that the movement has always been met with much intergroup backlash and opposition before and even after 2020, mainly from White Americans and non-Black BIPOC individuals in the United States (Gallagher et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2021; Reinka & Leach, 2017). To date, much of the research on the BLM movement is centered on intergroup perspectives (e.g., White police officers, White Americans, Asian Americans, Latinx etc.)(Gallagher et al., 2018; Hordge-Freeman & Loblack, 2021a; Hughey, 2021; Reinka & Leach, 2017), yet there is a paucity of research that examines ingroup thoughts, perceptions, and perspectives of the movement, especially those of Black identified people who are not ethnically African Americans. Furthermore, the fact that George Floyd's roots were traced back to Ghanaian, raises questions as to whether other Black ethnicities (e.g., Afro Caribbean, African Immigrants, Afro-Latinx) are consciously aware of the current racial climate and whether they

are in support of the movement. These phenomena create a unique opportunity to further examine U.S. Black adults' engagement and perspective of the BLM movement.

As the Black population in the United States continues to grow in a racially hostile climate, it is crucial to understand if all Black lives are critically aware of this racial landscape (Alao, 2023; Eichstaedt et al., 2021; Hunter et al., 2017). The purpose of this present study is to gain more insight into Black ethnic groups' perception of The BLM movement, specifically examining general themes of BLM involvement, abstention, and attitudes toward the movement. More specifically, this study seeks to enhance understanding of the factors that motivate or dissuade people from participating in the movement. In addition, we seek to explore demographic (e.g., ethnicity) differences in the endorsement of codes. This understanding can enhance knowledge of collective action and recovery from the trauma experienced by the Black community and provide a preliminary framework for responding to future tragedies and trauma that better accounts for the needs of all Black ethnic identities/groups. This knowledge can help mental health providers better support all Black people who are dealing with racism, activists strive to ensure that social movements bring attention to, represent, and address the needs and voices of diverse groups of people, and hopefully provide new information for healing practices and interventions.

Racism in the United States

Past and current literature on anti-Black racism in the United States encompasses a wealth of information, with numerous studies showing the different structures of racism as well as its negative impact in society and the lives of individuals (Bailey et al., 2017; Gorski, 2019; Harrell, 2000; Nadal et al., 2017; Paradies et al., 2015). Specifically, studies demonstrate that anti-Black racism has detrimental effects environmentally, socially, physically, and psychologically (Alang,

2019; Alim et al., 2008; Aymer, 2016; Balkin et al., 2021; Ebrahimi et al., 2024; Grigsby-Toussaint & Moise, 2013; Nyborg & Curry, 2003). Indeed, the director for the Center for Disease Control (CDC), Dr. Rochelle Walensky, has deemed racism as a serious public health crisis (Wamsley, 2021).

Black Americans have endured centuries of racism, oppression, and struggle, from Chattel slavery to Jim Crow, to reconstruction to present-day racism in the United States (Ebrahimi et al., 2024; Fu et al., 2024; Packard, 2003; Shellae Versey et al., 2019; Waldron, 2020; Williams-Washington & Mills, 2018). The Jim Crow Era and segregation signify periods where racism was legal, underscoring its structural, and institutional nature (Bailey et al., 2017; Egede et al., 2023; Jackson et al., 2023; Paradies et al., 2015). Numerous studies have demonstrated that the U.S. society is not "far removed" from racism, despite the election of the first Black president in 2008, which led some to believe that racism is a thing of the past (Alim et al., 2008; Nyborg & Curry, 2003; Sue et al., 2019)Sue et al., 2019; Nyborg 2003; Alim et al., 2008). Moreover, studies consistently show that racism persists, with police brutality still permeating the U.S Black population (Aymer, 2016; Motley & Joe, 2018a; Reinka & Leach, 2017, 2017). Moreover, reports demonstrate that Black Americans are incarcerated and murdered at a higher rate than any other racial group in the United States (Western & Wildeman, 2009). These findings highlight that these systems of racism have harmful impact on the mental health of Black individuals. Research and conventional wisdom have demonstrated that Black American's mental health have suffered at the hands of racism.

Racism and Mental Health

Research consistently demonstrates that in the United States, many Black individuals endure violence, discrimination, microaggressions, resulting in poorer mental health (S. M.

Alang, 2019; Balkin et al., 2021; Carter et al., 2017; Shellae Versey et al., 2019; Williams, 2018). In fact, recent studies indicate that Black people report 20% more psychological distress than White people (Balkin et al., 2021; Sue et al., 2019). Due to the historical injustices that have taken place in the United States and the aftermath of slavery, many Black people suffer from racial trauma or race-based traumatic stress–defined as the cumulative effects of racism on mental and physical health (Carter et al., 2017). Previous studies have shown that historically, Black Americans have experienced institutional racism (e.g., mass incarceration, war on drugs, Red-lining etc.) and discrimination by law enforcement (e.g., police brutality, increased racial profiling, stop and frisk laws etc.) which has led to hopelessness, poor life satisfaction, economic disadvantages, lower self-concept, depression, anxiety, and complex-PTSD (Alim et al., 2008; Balkin et al., 2021; Nyborg & Curry, 2003; Paradies et al., 2015; Sue et al., 2019). The 2020 George Floyd protests compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic triggered emotional distress among Black communities (Cox et al., 2024; Eichstaedt et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2021).These protests brought long-standing issues of structural racism and police brutality to the forefront, highlighting the necessity for a comprehensive understanding of racism as a complex structure connected to racial identity development.

Racism and Identity

Numerous studies posit that racial identity is one of the most prominent ways to understand racism (Bell, 1980; Carter et al., 2017; Kiang et al., 2021; Sanchez & Awad, 2016; Thomas, 1999; Woo et al., 2019). This is because racial identity encompasses two components—racial group identification and racial group consciousness (Sellers et al., 1998; Townsend & Belgrave, 2000). Racial group consciousness is one's sense of sense related to racial group membership, attachment to other group members, and group relevant attitudes and behaviors

(Townsend & Belgrave, 2000). Studies have demonstrated that racial identity has implications with one's experience with racism.

A study conducted by Stepanikova & Oates, (2016), explored different aspects of racial identity and its influence of the perceptions of discrimination in health care. The findings of this study revealed that self-identified race and ethnicity and the attributed race and ethnicity (this is the categorization of race and ethnicity that people believe others perceive them as) affected their experiences of perceived discrimination. The findings demonstrated that individuals who identify as Black, Asian, and Hispanic or Native American were more likely to report racial discrimination than those who identify as White. Moreover, those with attributed racial/ethnic classification were more likely to perceive discrimination than those classified as White.

From these findings we conclude that the ways in which individuals identify racially, as well as how they believe others perceive their race, play a significant role in shaping their experiences of discrimination. Although this study offers crucial findings and examines different racial groups, it is also important to note that this study, like many, homogenized the Black community (Erving & Smith, 2022; Esie & Bates, 2023; Richardson, 2022). To gain a more nuanced understanding of discrimination, it is essential for research studies to capture the experiences of different Black ethnic groups.

Racial Identity among Black Ethnic Groups

Racial identity is one of the most frequently studied constructs among African Americans, however, it is rarely studied among Black immigrants (Worrell, 2013). Despite this, limited research captures and accounts for the impact of racism on Black Americans that do not identify as African American, and/or identify as Black immigrants, which is important as it can impact their perceptions and experiences of racism. A study by Forsyth et al., (2015) suggest that

racial identity differences are associated with coping with racial discrimination. The results of this study found that there were significant differences between Black West Indians and African Americans perceptions of coping with racism and usage of mental health services. These findings highlight the differences of experiences and perspectives associated with perceived discrimination. Consistently, Sanchez & Awad, (2016) found evidence that the racial identity attitudes of encounter (forced by event(s) to acknowledge racism) and immersion-emersion (actively seeking out opportunities to explore racial identity) are related to perceptions of discrimination. As it has been established that racial identity and racism are interconnected (Kiang et al., 2021; Sanchez & Awad, 2016; A. J. Thomas, 1999), individuals with a strong racial identity have more awareness of racial discrimination and are often more attuned to discriminatory behaviors and practices (Kiang et al., 2021; Mathews et al., 2022; Sanchez & Awad, 2016; Thomas, 1999; Woo et al., 2019). Moreover, studies demonstrate a strong positive racial identity can serve as a tool to mitigate the negative psychological impacts of racial discrimination, increase coping strategies, resilience and stronger support within their racial community (Carter et al., 2017; Hope et al., 2020; Hunter et al., 2017; Mathews et al., 2022; Thelamour et al., 2019; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014a).

While studies exist that examine the relationship between racial identity and experience with racism, it is crucial to note that these studies are typically studied among African Americans, overlooking the experiences of Black immigrants. Previous studies have demonstrated that the discrimination Black immigrants face in the U.S. is often related to ethnicity, acculturation, immigration related stress, language barriers, visa stress etc. (Agbemenu, 2016; Anakwenze & Rasmussen, 2021; Asante & Asante, 2024; Dapherede Otusanya & Castle Bell, 2018; Liu et al., 2019; Miranda et al., 2005; Sall, 2020). However, there is a dearth of

research that focuses on how their relation to Blackness and proximity to the most marginalized Black group in the U.S. (e.g., African Americans) influences their experience of racism (Hunter et al., 2017). Notably George Floyd's heritage was traced back to Ghana (Britannica, 2024; U.S. Embassy, 2020), his disposition to Blackness highlights the complexity of racial and ethnic experiences within the Black community in the United States (Pierre, 2004; A. J. Thomas, 1999; Vickerman, 2016; M. C. Waters, 2002). While his identity as a Black man positioned him within the broader context of structural racism and police brutality—which predominately affects African Americans, his Ghanaian identity may have also shaped his experiences in a more nuanced way. His ethnic identity and racial identity may have added layers to his experiences possibly involving cultural bias and prejudice (Benson, 2006; Pierre, 2004; Tormala & Deaux, 2006; Vickerman, 2016). It is possible that the fact that George Floyd did not have a traditionally Ghanaian or foreign name, but rather a name that is associated with African American heritage, likely influenced people's ethnic perceptions of him, and subjected him to the same racism and police profiling that African Americans experience (Benson, 2006; Pierre, 2004; Tormala & Deaux, 2006; Vickerman, 2016). Within the landscape of Black activism literature, there is a lack of empirical research on the BLM movement involvement among African Immigrants and Afro-Caribbeans in the U.S. Understanding this phenomenon can provide a more comprehensive perspective leading to more inclusive and potentially effective activism aims.

U.S. Black Population

The increasing number of different Black ethnicities in the U.S. (e.g., Afro-Caribbean, Ghanaians, Nigerians, Afro-Hispanics etc.) is a catalyst to understand more about racialization and their experiences with racism in the U.S. (Dapherede Otusanya & Castle Bell, 2018; Hunter et al., 2017; Pierre, 2004; K. Thomas, 2024; M. C. Waters, 2002). The U.S. Black population is

growing with almost 20 million identifying as immigrants from many different parts of the world (Bureau, 2021), and comprised of diverse ethnicities—defined as distinctions of cultural characteristics, language, history, religion, and customs (Montagu, 1942; Peoples & Bailey, 2012). However, a monolithic narrative is still propagated across the literature, centering the experiences of the African American ethnicity. Upon migration to the U.S., Black immigrants are often racially categorized as either Black or African American (descendants of enslaved people from Africa) due to the shared phenotype (Benson, 2006; Hunter et al., 2017; Tormala & Deaux, 2006). However, research has established that the messages transmitted about what it means to be Black in the United States do not universally translate across all Black ethnicities and contexts (Dzidzienyo & Oboler, 2005; Hordge-Freeman & Loblack, 2021a; Pierre, 2004). In fact, research indicates that some Black immigrants tend to prioritize their ethnicity over their race or may even disassociate themselves from their racial group altogether (Dzidzienyo & Oboler, 2005; Pierre, 2004). Moreover, existing literature on racial-ethnic identity suggests that some Black immigrants from Africa may not identify as "Black" preferring instead to specify their nationality, such as identifying as "Nigerian" or by their country/continent of origin (Dzidzienyo & Oboler, 2005; Pierre, 2004). Some scholars have argued that this distinction is due to Black immigrants separating from a racially disadvantaged group (Benson, 2006; Vickerman, 2016; M. Waters, 1999).

Implications for Social Justice Movements

There is a lack of research attention given to the relationship between different Black ethnic groups' perception, attitudes, and participation in activism, as majority of the ones that do exist, focus on African Americans (Jett, 2022; Krueger et al., 2022; Szymanski, 2012; Szymanski & Lewis, 2015). Exploring different Black ethnic groups' perceptions of BLM on a deeper level

is crucial as it relates to their experiences with racism and has larger implications for how they engage with Black social justice movements. When exploring attitudes toward racism and the BLM movement, it is important to consider how the perception of ethnicity and race differ among Black immigrants, and as studies have demonstrated that racial identity is correlated with engagement in activism (Flanagan et al., 2011; Martínez et al., 2017; Szymanski & Lewis, 2015), this can influence their perception of racism and involvement of participation in Black social justice movements.

In a study on racial identity and activism among African Americans in the U.S., Szymanski & Lewis (2015) specifically investigated six racial identity dimensions (i.e., Pre-Encounter, Assimilation, Miseducation and self-hatred, Immersion-Emersion Anti-White, Internalization Afrocentricity and Multiculturalist inclusive), and race-related stress as predictors of activism among 185 African American undergraduate women and men. The study specifically found that the Immersion-Emersion Anti-White racial identity dimension, which involves rejecting and critiquing systemic racism, is positively correlated with activism. Internalization Afrocentricity, characterized by embracing African cultural values, also significantly predicted higher levels of activism. Similarly, internalization multiculturalist inclusive, which supports and values diverse cultural perspectives was positively associated with activism. Moreover, internalization Afrocentricity positive focus on Black culture, history, and heritage. Individuals may seek out and connect with their African roots, developing a strong sense of pride and belonging within their community not only predicated higher activism but also mitigated cultural race-related stress suggesting that a strong identification with Afrocentric values can alleviate some of the stress related to racial identify and experiences of racism, thus fostering greater engagement in activism efforts (Szymanski & Lewis, 2015). These studies

highlight the complex connection among cultural identity, race related stress, and activism, an important construct that needs further investigation especially among different Black ethnic groups with respect to Black activism

Black Activism

African American Activism

A substantial body of research documents activism as a key tool by which Black individuals in the U.S. and globally have fought against racism (Elnakib & Turner, 2023; Hope et al., 2016; Hope, Gugwor, et al., 2019; Hope et al., 2020, 2022a, 2022b; Jett, 2022; Mathews et al., 2022; Szymanski & Lewis, 2015). Black activism, also known as African American activism, is defined as, "the intentional action aimed at fostering social and/or political change and often includes engaging in behaviors aimed at reducing and/or eliminating racism…to enhance the everyday lives of African American persons and the African American community as a whole" (Szymanski & Lewis, 2015, p.171). Black activism encompasses a broad spectrum of informal/nonconfrontational engagements and formal/confrontational engagements. Informal engagement includes activities like keeping informed of Black issues, involvement in Black activities/organization to advocate for a social cause, mentorship, voting, and engaging in discussion with others about African American issues. More formal/confrontational activism includes boycotts, protests, rallies, and writing letters to politicians (Szymanski, 2012).

Studies have demonstrated that engaging in activism can serve as a protective factor against racial trauma, brings psychological benefits, increases critical consciousness, and help with spiritual and emotional wellness. (Baskin-Sommers et al., 2021; D. L. Brown, 2008; Gilster, 2012; Kirshner, 2007; Klar & Kasser, 2009; Szymanski & Lewis, 2015). However, evidence also suggests that activism may impose undue burden on those who are already oppressed (Conner et

al., 2023a; Eaton & Warner, 2021; Gorski, 2019). Some of the documented negative consequences of activism include burnout , somatic symptoms, insomnia, extreme fatigue, depression and overall negative mental health outcomes (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Conner et al., 2023a; Eaton & Warner, 2021; Gorski, 2019).

Despite the recognized importance of activism in the Black community, there is a paucity of research on the factors that motivate individuals to participate in the BLM movement, which despite its rapid growth and impact, may still be considered a "newer" movement. Subsequently, the existing literature on Black activism focuses on the experiences of African Americans, often overlooking other Black ethnicities (African Immigrants, Afro Caribbeans, etc. but with the ever-growing Black immigrant population in the United States, it is crucial to study the perceptions and attitudes of Black immigrants, especially when considering the Black Lives Matter Movement. As such, this study will fill this gap in the literature by exploring BLM perspectives from various ethnic groups within the Black community in the U.S. Understanding these diverse identities within the Black community is crucial to adequately evaluating the inclusivity and impact of the BLM movement.

African Activism

African people have a long history of participating in activism spanning across various causes, colonial liberation, human rights, political reform, and other important social justice movements (Alao, 2023; Nwakanma, 2022). The Pan-African movement, which was one of the most prominent movements in Africa, advocated for the independence of African nations from the colonial rules (Essien, 2007). The liberation movements in Africa during the 1960s, paralleled the Civil Rights movements in the United States, in fact, civil rights leader Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana influenced much of the Black civil rights movements in the United States

(Essien, 2007. More contemporary, the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria is social justice movement which mobilized young Nigerians against police brutality in Nigeria, which parallels the BLM movement in the U.S. (Nwakanma, 2022). These examples highlight just a fraction of the diverse ways in which African people have participated in activism in their respective country of origin, however, there is still a significant dearth of empirical literature that examines African Immigrants in the United States and their involvement in U.S. Black activism, specifically the BLM movement.

Black Lives Matter Movement

The BLM movement started nearly 11 years ago in June 2013, following the acquittal of George Zimmerman, who was charged with the murder of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager. The movement was founded by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi to address and bring attention to the systemic racism and police brutality against Black individuals in the United States (Curtis, 2022; Hargons et al., 2017a; Lebron, 2023; Strickland, 2022). The BLM movement consists advocating of the rights of Black individuals, accountability for police offers who engage in violence towards Black individuals. The mission of the movement is to work inside and outside the system to heal the past, reimagine the present, and invest in the future of Black lives through policy change, investment in our community and a commitment to arts and culture (Black Lives Matter, 2024)*"Black Lives Matter Foundation is an abolition-centered foundation fighting institutional injustice and serving Black people globally. We fund organizations and individuals leading policy and abolitionist efforts and partner with organizations and individuals who offer direct services to support the needs of Black communities* (Black Lives Matter, 2024). Beyond the formal organization, the BLM movement has become a powerful ideology that advocates for the liberation of Black people. Many

individuals may support the ideals and goals of the movement, such as advocating for the rights of Black people, without being directly involved in the official organization. While the BLM movement has gained significant traction, especially since 2020, it has also faced substantial intergroup backlash and criticism, opposition and countermovement (e.g., Back the Blue, Blue Lives Matter, All Lives Matter). Some White Americans oppose the BLM movement, perceiving it as "reverse racism" (Gallagher et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2021; Patashnik, 2022), which is consistent with the historical opposition against Black Civil Rights movements (Lo, 1982; Patashnik, 2022; Schmidt, 2016; Splawinski, 2016). Despite facing backlash, the movement underscores a critical element in the success of civil rights efforts—in-group solidarity (Boucher & Chisholm-Burns, 2020; Hordge-Freeman & Loblack, 2021a; Novick & Pickett, 2024; Strickland, 2022).

Ingroup Solidarity

Research suggests that one of the primary factors for sustaining civil rights movements and fostering cohesive collective action is in-group solidarity (Begeny et al., 2022). Despite extensive research on intergroup conflict—often within the context of privilege, power and oppression—there remains a lack of studies on ingroup support for the BLM movement. Particularly under-researched are the BLM movement experiences and perspectives of Black Immigrants, especially African immigrants. There is somewhat more research on Afro-Caribbeans, the earliest Black immigrants in the U.S., but it is still insufficient given our lack of understanding of the complex nature of structural racism and its impacts on all Black people. Scholarly work on the BLM movement has notably centered on the experiences, beliefs, and attitudes of African Americans, often overlooking ethnic distinctions within the broader Black

community (Alao, 2023; Anderson et al., 2023). This raises the question: Do all Black people perceive the BLM movement as inclusive for *all* Black lives?

With the opposition to the BLM movement, solidarity and support amongst the Black community is crucial. Currently, limited research has examined how different Black ethnic groups perceive and engage with the BLM movement, particularly in light of criticisms that it primarily focuses on African American men (Crenshaw, 2018a). With the evident ethnic diversity among the U.S. Black population, the relevance of the BLM movement and the considerable public divide, this study aims to explore these phenomena.

Given the diverse ethnic backgrounds within the U.S. Black population, it is important to investigate how other Black ethnic groups understand and express their perceptions of social justice movement support. As public support for the BLM movement is varied, it is crucial to better understand the factors that underlie support among all Black ethnicities, as standing in solidarity has historically shown collective healing and movement sustainability (Van Zomeren et al., 2018). Specifically, it is important to explore how diverse Black ethnic groups understand and express their Black identity in a race-based social justice movement. Additionally, examining how their dual identification with the Black racial group and identification with an ethnic group (African American, African Immigrants, Afro Caribbeans, multi-ethnic) influences their BLM participation and perceptions.

Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality

Properly recognizing and accounting for Black ethnic heterogeneity requires acknowledging intersectionality. The theory of intersectionality describes how important identities individuals have—race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics--

"intersect" with one another to shape one's experiences (e.g., Black lesbian woman; Crenshaw, 1989). This paradigm highlights the myriad identities within the Black community and underscores how the structural barriers and advantages associated with these identities overlap, shaping Black life in different ways (Billups et al., 2022; Crenshaw, 1991, 2018b). As intersectionality recognizes that not all Black individuals have the same experiences, perspectives, priorities, or perception of race, it is essential to also consider these factors when examining differences among Black ethnic groups in sociopolitical participation.

In a previous study (Akoto et al., 2024), we explored the dynamics of ethnic identity, racial attitudes, and sociopolitical participation among a diverse sample of 208 Black-identified individuals (African Americans, Africans, Afro-Caribbeans). In contrast to previous research that treated the "Black" community as a monolith, our findings revealed significant nuances and differences across ethnic groups. African Americans exhibited higher sociopolitical engagement, but lower ethnic identity and higher self-hatred attitudes compared to African immigrants and Afro-Caribbeans. Further analysis showed variations within subgroups (i.e., the intersection of ethnic group, gender, and level of education), such as lower ethnic identity reported by African American women and higher levels endorsed by college-educated Afro-Caribbeans. Within an intersectional framework, this study's findings demonstrate how ethnicity shapes different experiences with affirmation to an ethnic group, and involvement in activism, emphasizing the need for future research studies to understand the why behind these differences.

Present Study

To enhance our knowledge of one of the most profound Black Civil Rights movements of modern times and increase understanding of collective action–defined as coordinated group efforts to achieve common goals--it is crucial to have a clear understanding of the perceptions

that Black individuals in the United States have regarding the Black Lives Matter movement. This study will employ a mixed methods approach to explore general attitudes towards the movement, and the reasons for supporting or abstaining from the BLM movement, centering the attitudes of Black individuals in the United States. Despite the widespread colloquial knowledge of the BLM movement, there are critical gaps in the existing literature, particularly concerning the attitudes and perceptions of different Black ethnic groups in the United States. This is an important gap to fill given that the Black immigrant population in the U.S. continues to grow, and the crucial need for a more comprehensive understanding of the Black experience in the United States. We hope this investigation will provide insights that can guide educators, activist-psychologists, researchers, and Black Liberation Activists in better serving all Black ethnicities. This study will employ a convergent parallel mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2014) to address the following aims:

1. Conduct an in-depth, inductive content analysis of perceptions and attitudes held about the Black Lives Matter Movement, the largest civil rights movement of modern times, in an ethnically diverse sample of Black adults.
2. Conduct an in-depth inductive content analysis of the reasons for participation or abstention from the Black Lives Matter Movement
3. Explore thematic differences based on participant ethnic group (e.g., African American, Afro-Caribbean, African Immigrant).

This study will specifically answer the following questions:

RQ 1: How do Black individuals in the U.S. perceive and understand the Black Lives Matter movement?

RQ 2: Among those who self-identify as Black, what are the key discourses and narratives surrounding participation and abstention with the Black Lives Matter movement?

RQ 3: What are the dominant discourses and narratives that Black people associate with those who participate in the Black Lives Matter movement?

RQ4: Are there significant differences in the perception and understanding of the BLM movement among African Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, and African Immigrants?

Study findings are anticipated to enrich the literature on Black activism, providing a comprehensive integration of the experiences of various Black ethnic groups. Additionally, this study hopes to offer insights that can guide educators, activist-psychologists, researchers, and Black Liberation activists in better serving all Black ethnicities.

CHAPTER II: Literature Review Outline

There is substantial research on activism, racism, race and police brutality centered on the African American community, primarily driven by studies examining the historical racist context of the United States and the role activism plays within this community (Egede et al., 2023; Feagin & Bennefield, 2014; Packard, 2003; Western & Wildeman, 2009). A significant portion of published work concentrates on the experiences of African Americans in the face of U.S. racism, particularly in recent years amidst the evolving sociopolitical landscape and the BLM movement. A limited body of empirical knowledge exists on the factors influencing different Black ethnic groups' perceptions of the BLM movement; encompassing general perceptions of movement, thoughts on those actively involved, levels of involvement and reasons for either participating or abstaining. The anticipated exploratory findings aim to contribute to the literature discussions on Black Liberation, offering a comprehensive integration of Black literature that explores the experiences of various Black ethnic groups.

History of Race and Racism in America

Historical and Structural Racism

Research consistently demonstrates that African Americans have a longstanding historical relationship with structural racism which is a source of trauma (Bailey et al., 2017; Danzer, 2012; Egede et al., 2023; Hardeman et al., 2021; Jackson et al., 2023; Lukachko et al., 2014; Waldron, 2020). From the era of Jim Crow—a racial caste system characterized by laws enforcing segregation in the U.S.—to reconstruction, mass incarceration and contemporary racism, African Americans have faced significant adversities (Egede et al., 2023; Feagin & Bennefield, 2014; Packard, 2003; Western & Wildeman, 2009). The Jim Crow era represents during which Black individuals were subjugated to extreme brutality and inhumanity, even after

the abolition of slavery (Packard, 2003). These historical periods underscore the structural nature of racism, highlighting that racism was once legal, and institutionalized. Presently, many studies provide evidence that structural racism continues to impact the U.S. Black population. Studies reveal that Black Americans experience both overt and subtle forms of racism (Chisholm-Burns, 2020; Feagin & Bennefield, 2014; Hardeman et al., 2021), are disproportionately affected by the criminal justice system (Bui et al., 2018; Carvalho et al., 2022; Jett, 2022; Morrow et al., 2017; Motley & Joe, 2018a; Western & Wildeman, 2009), and are more likely to be stopped by police, be arrested and sentenced to a longer prison term than White people who have similar offenses (Barnum et al., 2012; Morrow et al., 2017; Motley & Joe, 2018b; Nadal et al., 2017; Taniguchi et al., 2017). This enumeration of structural racism is not exhaustive as there are numerous forms and types of anti-black racism such as the denial of quality health access to Black people and denial of employment (Hardeman et al., 2021, 2021; Laurie Garo et al., 2018; Paradies et al., 2015). As previously noted, and as discussed in most detail later, the increase of police brutality, among other related injustices, has caused significant mental health issues in the Black community (Eichstaedt et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2021).One empirical study by Alang et al., (2022) examined the associations between police brutality, heightened vigilance, and mental health outcomes—depression and generalized anxiety—among Black adults in the United States. The findings from the study demonstrated that over half of the sample, reported experiencing police brutality, and increased levels of depression and generalized anxiety were associated with police brutality and heightened vigilance. From these findings, we can conclude that police brutality contributes negatively to mental health outcomes in Black individuals. This underscores the impact of the racial climate surrounding policing on the psychological well-being of Black

individuals. Addressing the stressors related to police brutality is crucial, and social justice movements have historically been linked to this.

Impact of Racial Trauma and Discrimination

Previous studies have shown that historically, Black Americans have experienced race-based traumatic stress, hopelessness, poor life satisfaction and lower self-concept due to exposure to violence, structural racism, discrimination, and oppression among other injustices (Balkin et al., 2021; Carter et al., 2017; Paradies et al., 2015; Williams, 2018). These socio-emotional difficulties that are a product of racism have in turn contributed to an increased likelihood of experiencing economic disadvantages, increased unemployment, educational barriers, health discrimination and health crises, and mass incarceration (Alim et al., 2008; Hardeman et al., 2021; Jackson et al., 2023; Laurie Garo et al., 2018).

A systematic review and meta-analysis by Paradies et al., (2015) explored how racism influences both mental and physical health outcomes. The study synthesized data from 293 studies documented in 333 articles published between 1983 and 2013, predominantly within the United States. The findings revealed a clear link between experiences of racism and poorer mental health, manifesting in higher levels of depression, anxiety, and psychological stress, as well as other negative mental health outcomes among Black individuals. This study corroborates a recent 2021 study by Anakwenze & Rasmussen investigating the mental health of West African parents and their impact on children. The findings revealed that children of West African immigrant parents who reported experiencing posttraumatic stress symptoms—stemming from factors such as forced displacement, acculturative stress, and family separation, as measured by the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ)—were at greater risk of exhibiting behavioral difficulties. This issue is of particular significance given the growing population of West African

immigrants in the U.S. These children raised with bi-cultural identity, not only navigate the complexities of their immigrant background but also a shared racial group with African Americans, who have historically endured trauma due to structural racism in the U.S. Moreover, in recent years the increase of police brutality among the African American community is quite alarming and has several implications. To better understand the impact of police brutality on the Black community, the following section will provide a brief overview of the historical context that has led to the current day issues with police officers and Black Americans.

African Americans and Law Enforcement

The aforementioned structural inequalities highlight racism at the structural level, and also illuminate the historically complex and tense relationship between African Americans and police officers, which has persisted for centuries. This relationship has been characterized by significant tension, hostility, and violence (Jett, 2022; Reichel, 1988; Sewell, 2017; Spruill, 2016). Empirical research demonstrates that police officers are more likely to racially profile, administer terry stops, use excessive force, and use exclusionary practices towards Black people, (Barnum et al., 2012; Morrow et al., 2017; Motley & Joe, 2018b; Nadal et al., 2017; Taniguchi et al., 2017). Historically, during the 18th and 19th centuries, slave patrols were established to capture escaped slaves to maintain control over the enslaved populations (Reichel, 1988; Spruill, 2016).These patrols, also known as slave catchers, are some of the earliest forms of organized policing in the United States and created the framework for current police organization (Reichel, 1988; Spruill, 2016).

Research indicates that the ideologies, principles and infrastructure established during this period remain deeply embedded in the current dynamics between police officers and African Americans (Barnum et al., 2012; Bui et al., 2018; Sewell, 2017; Voigt et al., 2017).Furthermore,

following the abolition of slavery, Black Codes and Jim Crow laws were enacted, which perpetuated extreme violence and institutionalized racism, enabling police officers to enforce racial segregation and suppress the rights of African Americans (Egede et al., 2023; Hardeman et al., 2021, 2021; Packard, 2003; Reichel, 1988). It is pertinent to note that the 13th amendment states, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, expect as punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States or any place subject to their jurisdiction." This clause suggests that while the amendment is often propagated as abolishing slavery, it allows for a form of involuntary servitude as a punishment for those convicted of crimes. Research on institutional racism and law highlights the legacy of mass incarceration, "no loitering" acts, and disproportionate racial profiling for crimes that Black Americans experience to the fact that slavery is allowed in the prison systems because it constitutes as a crime. This underscores the extreme nature of racism and how it is built into the U.S. culture, ideology, society and infrastructure, that has detrimental consequences.

Civil Rights Movement and Law Enforcement

During the 1950s and 1960s Civil Rights Movement, police forces were frequently employed to suppress civil rights protests. Literature demonstrates high-profile incidents, such as those in Birmingham and Selma, Alabama, which reveal the aggressive and violent tactics employed by law enforcement against the Black community (Egede et al., 2023; Jett, 2022; Reichel, 1988; Spruill, 2016).

In recent years the murders of Black individuals have garnered much public attention as these tragedies permeate the U.S Black population (Barnum et al., 2012; Jett, 2022; Morrow et al., 2017; Motley & Joe, 2018a; Waldron, 2020). In 2020, following George Floyd, there was a huge public outcry to "defund the police" reduce police imbalance of power towards Black

individuals and rather pour funding back into mental health providers, onsite providers to go along with police officers, teachers, educators etc. (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022; Jacobs et al., 2021). With the rise of the BLM movement, there is still an evident hostile relationship between Black people and police officers. One study by (Novick & Pickett, 2024) examined the relationship between police responses to the BLM movement, protests and voter support. The findings revealed that perceptions of inappropriate police use of form (e.g., tear gas, tasers, excessive form etc.) significantly influenced voter intentions to support reform measures. The findings demonstrate that unjust police tactics decrease trust in police and voters who perceived police mistreatment were more likely to support police reforms aimed at increasing accountability and reducing racial bias.

Killings of Unarmed Black Individuals

Moreover, the killings of unarmed Black individuals have a long history with notable cases including Rodney King, who was brutally and gruesomely beaten by police, and Amadou Diallo a 22-year-old student from Guinea, who was shot 41 times by police officers when he reached for his wallet (Roy, 2009). This pattern continues with the modern-day killings of Eric Garner, Breanna Taylor, and to the widely publicized murder of George Floyd in 2020. These murders exemplify the pervasive and inhumane nature of system racism and police brutality—defined as "the use of excessive physical force or verbal assault and psychological intimidation" (p. 579). Furthermore, the intersection of Blackness and racism exposes the harsh realities of structural racism and serves as a poignant reminder of its detrimental effects. The complex dyad of Blackness and racism highlighted in these cases, reinforce the brutal reality of structural racism but also serve as a reminder of its detriments. While these tragedies have ignited widespread public outrage and discussions about race, racism and social justice, they are part of

a broader and more complex issues that extends beyond African Americans in the U.S. It underscores how globally all Black people are subjugated to racism, brutality, and a long-standing struggle. In fact, the murder of Amadou Diallo—a Guinea-American, sparked Black scholars to investigate experiences of Black immigrants. Pierre, (2004) argued that the media's portrayal of Amadou Diallo's murder emphasized his status as an African immigrant, deliberately distancing him from African Americans by not explicitly identifying him as Black. Pierre argues this focus on his immigration status, rather than his racial identity, altered the narrative of his death at the hands of white police officers. The media's framing suggested that his immigrant status conferred a degree of innocence, in contrast to African Americans, who have historically been subjected to criminal suspicion. This widespread and highly publicized case prompted important questions about the distinct experiences of Black immigrants in the United States compared to African Americans among Black scholars. Despite the significance of these issues, there is still a substantial lack of empirical research exploring these differences. Moreover, the intersectional lens of cultural marginalization underscores the complexities of racism as experienced by different ethnic groups. Afro-Latinx individuals often face marginalization within broader contexts as well as African immigrants and other Black immigrants, which underscores the need for a larger conversation. The current study seeks to address this gap by contributing to the literature and examining the perspectives of various Black ethnic groups on the largest civil rights movement in the U.S. This broader context reveals how structural racism intersects with other forms of marginalization underscoring the concept of multiple jeopardies.

Diversity in the U.S. Black Population

"...social science representations of post-1965 Black immigrants in the United States employ the concept of "ethnicity" in ways that reinforce the racialist myth of Black (American) cultural inferiority. Specifically, the discursive use of Black immigrant "ethnic" and "cultural distinctiveness," while admittedly reflecting an important recognition of the heterogeneity of the United States Black populations, is in fact predicated upon a repackaged "culture of poverty" discourse that serves to reaffirm the overarching racial order. In a discussion of the theoretical and historical development of the concept, I show how the current discourse of "ethnic distinctiveness" perpetuates a form of racism under a theory that denies the relevance of race while it continuously recodes the biological notions of race as "culture." Thus, Black immigrant distinctiveness, when presented through the prism of the cultural narratives of ethnicity, allows for the perpetuation of a "cultural racism" that adversely affects all Blacks in this country. I therefore call for a rejection of ethnicity theory as it is currently conceptualized and suggest the need to ground theories of Black distinctiveness within analyses of power relations and ongoing practices of racial subjugation."

—Dr. Pierre, (2009, p.141)

The quote from Dr. Pierre, (2004) argues that emphasis on ethnic distinctiveness and theory perpetuates racism. Many scholars have similarly argued that, for nearly half a century, the primary scholarly outcomes on Black ethnicities have been used to undermine African Americans and further divide the Black U.S. population (Benson, 2006; BlackPast, 2007; Pierre, 2004). However, acknowledging ethnic distinctions is not intended to perpetuate racism, but rather to better understand how racism is used as a tool to further divide the U.S. Black community, rather than ethnicity itself being the cause. Focusing on cultural distinctiveness within the Black community—acknowledging the unique cultural backgrounds, experiences and

ethnicities of different Black ethnic groups—does not divide the community; rather, it can strengthen it by fostering unity through a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of Black identity (Alao, 2023; Hunter et al., 2017; Tormala & Deaux, 2006; Vickerman, 2016).

Moreover, from the literature, it is evident that when individuals and groups within the community learn about each other's histories, struggles, and contributions, they are more likely to support causes, increase sense of belonging, and peer relationships which in turn has implications for social justice movements (Begeny et al., 2022; Hornsey et al., 2006; Saab et al., 2015; Simon et al., 1998; Van Zomeren et al., 2008, 2018). A 2019 study by Thelamour et al., (2019) examined the relationship between racial identity, and sense of belonging, and campus connectedness among diverse Black college students which included 345 African, Caribbean, and Black American adults. The findings from this study revealed that strong racial identity led to less sense of campus connectedness, only for Black Americans, and across all ethnic backgrounds' students felt closer sense of belonging to peers of the same ethnicities, than those of different ethnicities. More importantly, same ethnic friendships mediated the relationship between racial identity and campus. From these findings Thelamour posits that acknowledging ethnic diversity within the Black college population provides valuable insights into how to better support all Black students.

Acknowledging cultural distinctions allows for more effective collective action. Social movements and advocacy efforts can be tailored to address the unique needs and concerns of different groups within the Black community, leading to more comprehensive and impactful change. For example, addressing the specific experiences of African immigrants in the U.S. legal system may require different strategies than those used to address police brutality against African Americans, yet both efforts contribute to the broader goal of racial justice. As racism affects

Afro-Latinx, Afro-Caribbean, African Immigrants and other Black ethnic groups in a multitude of ways, recognizing both their racial and ethnic identities can create a more comprehensive examination of how racism impacts all Black people in the U.S. and the ways to mitigate this virus.

Race and Intersectionality

The concept of multiple jeopardies refers to the compounded discrimination and marginalization faced by Black people belonging to more than one marginalized group (King, 1988). For Black U.S. Immigrants, this concept is crucial to explore as they may experience intersecting forms of oppression based on race, immigration status, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, socioeconomic status, religious identification and other identities (Forsyth et al., 2015; Miranda et al., 2005; Pierre, 2004; Roy, 2009). Research suggests that compounding racial discrimination, is an added layer of ethnic discrimination—where stereotypes and biases are experienced based on language, accent, cultural practices, perceived foreignness skin tone, generation and immigration status (Agbemenu, 2016; Asante & Asante, 2024; Landor & McNeil Smith, 2019; Liu et al., 2019; Sall, 2020), which makes it hard to navigate daily life, impacting sense of belonging, psychological well-ness and mental health (Anakwenze & Rasmussen, 2021; Dapherede Otusanya & Castle Bell, 2018; Miranda et al., 2005; Saechao et al., 2012; M. Waters, 1999).

Despite importance of this phenomenon, there is still a dearth of literature that examines the experiences, attitudes and experiences that they uniquely face in the United States. This gap can lead to lack of culturally sensitive mental health interventions, policy recommendations, and an overall inclusive conversation about anti-Black racism, which will be a forever existing conversation. Understanding more about their unique experiences can help psychologists better

understand their mental health concerns and support them with their impact of discrimination. Moreover, it can provide insights into collective action, collective healing and resilience, and the BLM movement which aims at advocating for *all* Black lives. Addressing this gap in understanding is crucial, as it directly impacts the ability to develop culturally sensitive mental health interventions and policies. We can gain a deeper understanding of the impact of racial discrimination for all Black people.

Race and Ethnicity Intersection

The Black community is composed of many different ethnicities, cultures, languages, and other nuances. Although the welcoming of diverse Black individuals across the diaspora has brought about community, new traditions, new culturally representations, and ethnic variances within the Black community in the United States (Benson, 2006; Pierre, 2004; Tormala & Deaux, 2006; Vickerman, 2016; M. C. Waters, 2002); the U.S Black Community is still represented as monolithic. This representation disregards the rich diversity within the community (Erving & Smith, 2022; Richardson, 2022). For example, the terms African American and Black are often used synonymously or interchangeably, the ethnic categorization of African American, is typically used as the blanket term for many Black people, regardless of their actual background or heritage (Erving & Smith, 2022; Richardson, 2022). This homogenization can lead to a lack of recognition for the unique challenges and contributions of various Black ethnic groups (Erving & Smith, 2022; Richardson, 2022).

As the U.S. Black Population grows amidst a racially hostile climate characterized by increase anti-Black racism, Black xenophobia, anti-immigration rhetoric, and police brutality, it is crucial to foster greater consciousness and solidarity among all Black individuals (Hunter et al., 2017). Despite the rich diversity within the Black community, there is an oversight within

empirical literature, where this rich diversity is not properly accounted for. The disregard for Black ethnic diversity may be leading to a lack of cultural awareness and insight that has implications for better serving the Black population, the most marginalized group in the United States (Hunter, 2017).

***Current U.S. Black Demographics*.** Currently, the 2022 census bureau estimates that approximately 41.6 million individuals in the United States identify as Black, accounting for 13.6% of the American population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Many identify as African American (descendants of enslaved persons in the United States), while others are Black immigrants or have multi-ethnic backgrounds. Within this makeup of 41.6 million, 3.7 million identify as multiracial (Pew Institute, 2021), 2.1 million are Sub-Saharan African immigrants (Batalova, 2022; A. Montagu, 1962) and approximately 13 million Black immigrants identify as Afro-Caribbeans—the largest source of the growing Black immigrant population in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). The United States Census has evolved over time with capturing the nuances in the U.S. Black population, and with the insurgency of Black immigration (e.g., 1960s barrier removal of entry for Blacks in the Diaspora); the "Black" Community is comprised of African Americans who are descendants of enslaved Africans in the United States, Afro-Latinx, Afro-Caribbean, African Immigrants, and Bi-Racial Black folks. Although the welcoming of more Black folks across the diaspora has brought about community, new traditions, new perspectives, and variances in the Black community (Thomas, 2024; Tormala & Deaux, 2006; M. C. Waters, 2002), a significant gap still exists in the literature, many studies homogenize the Black population, specially centering the African American ethnic group ((Esie & Bates, 2023; Richardson, 2022). This singular focus not only overlooks the rich ethnic and cultural variations

within the community, but also has significant implications for Black identity development, which in turn has implications for race perceptions, racism, and Black activism.

Black U.S. Identity Development

Race in the context of the United States is a very complex and multifaceted structure. Social psychologists, anthropologists, and cultural psychologists have posited how race is a social construct, meaning society gives meaning to race (Gregory, 1993; A. Montagu, 1962; Tormala & Deaux, 2006; Vandiver et al., 2012). There is a plethora of research that exists examining racial identity development, race, and ethnicity. Specially within the United States Black community, there is a wealth of existing research that examines different racial models. Racial Identity development is the process by which African Americans come to understand their racial identity (Vandiver et al., 2012). Ethnic identity is of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one's thinking, perceptions, feelings, and behavior that is due to ethnic group membership (D. L. Brown, 2008; Phinney, 1992). There is a dearth of literature that examines racial identity development among other Black ethnic groups in the U.S. for example African Immigrants (Nigerians, Ghanaians, Ethiopians etc.) and Afro- Caribbeans (Haitian, Jamaicans, Black Hispanics etc,.). A study by Waters, (2002) exploring Black ethnic identity among youth Black immigrants revealed that Black immigrant youth who identify closely as Black Americans/African American, tend to see more racial discrimination and limits to opportunities, in contrast to Black immigrants who identify as West Indian and Haitian American, are more likely to see more opportunities and rewards in the U.S. in the context of upward mobility, classism, and race.

To inform a comprehensive understanding of racism within the context of U.S., one must understand their racial identity (Bell, 1980). Studies have demonstrated that individuals are not

embedded within just one social context, but rather many contexts (e.g., family, peers, cultural, country of origin, community); identities develop based on interactions between individuals and the social context; therefore, racial-ethnic identity must be understood within many contexts (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014b). Benson, (2006) suggests that although Black immigrants adopt a shared racial identity with African Americans, the meaning attached to what is meant to be "Black" in the United States varies based on country of origin.

Black Identity for Immigrants. Many immigrants who originate in a country where they are the dominant racial or ethnic group are less inclined to process their racial identity or think critically about what it means to be black since they are not in a minority context (Benson, 2006; Pierre, 2004). Black racial identity refers to a set of attitudes held by folks of African descent and includes how these individuals view (a) themselves as Blacks, (b) other individuals of African descent, and (c) individuals from other racial and ethnic groups (Cross, 1971; Frank 2011). Past research posits that these racial identity attitudes have been linked to numerous outcomes from psychological well-being to support of social justice movement.(Begeny et al., 2022; Gregory, 1993; Mathews et al., 2022; Szymanski & Lewis, 2015).

Black Immigrant disposition to African Americans. Studies have shown that in terms of race, while Black immigrants in the United States share the same racial categorization with African Americans, their interpretation and value of "Blackness" (racial identity) varies based on factors such as country of origin, perception of blackness, racial socialization, level of immigration, among other factors (Benson, 2006) Past work suggests that Black immigrants from countries where they are the dominant racial or ethnic group are less inclined to process or think critically about their racial identity and instead place more emphasis on their ethnicity (Gregory, 1993; Pierre, 2004). For example, a Ghanaian student in college may highlight aspects

of their ethnicity—their foreign last name, cultural foods, parental heritage, distinguishing themselves from the assumed central African American ethnic identity often synonymous with "Black" in the United States. These ethnic distinctions can serve as both a protective factor (McNeil Smith et al., 2016), and paradoxically as an agent for potential division in the Black community (Pierre, 2004). Similarly, it has been demonstrated that Afro-Latinx individuals are more likely to identify as White than Black–a discrepancy traced back to colonialism in Latin American and the development of white supremacist "racial projects" oppressed Black people. (Comas-Díaz, 2021; Hordge-Freeman & Loblack, 2021a; Hordge-Freeman & Veras, 2020)Andrews 2004; García-Peña 2016).

One study by Hordge-Freeman & Loblack, (2021) examined Afro-Latinx women's experiences of racialization and how it is related to their positionality to the BLM movement. This study examined 115 Afro-Latinx adults' perception of the BLM movement relevant to their own lives. The study revealed that Afro-Latinx people believe they should participate in the BLM movement and the findings also revealed positionality to Blackness is an indicator for support of the BLM movement. One respondent mentioned *"Yes! Many people don't believe that Afro-Latinx share the same history and experiences as many of the Africans Americans. Besides language, Afro-Latinx and African Americans are the same. We are just Black people in different locations, yet we face the same racial inequality. It's important that more people start seeing that and giving support where needed because our lives are being affected".* These findings, consistent with past studies (e.g., Brown, 2004) suggest that when examining perceptions and participation in Black movements, it is imperative to examine ethnic distinctions.

Implications for Black Identity. Previous research has underscored that for many Black immigrants, the process of contemplating and critically thinking about what it means to be Black

often begins only after immigrating to the U.S. (Gregory, 1993). Studies have shown that if this process is hindered, or worse, not achieved, it can lead to potential blinders in perceiving discrimination and racism (Neville et al., 2013; Pierre, 2004). Scholars have established that as racial ethnic identity increases, critical consciousness increases too, and is a protective factor against Black Trauma (Mosley et al., 2021; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). However, much of these studies have been studied among African Americans and there is a paucity of research that exists examining these same concepts among Black immigrants. Some studies suggest that processing and thinking critically about what it means to be Black begins may only after immigrating to the U.S. (Dzidzienyo & Oboler, 2005), whereas other scholars have suggested that depending on gender and race, and generation, age of arrival status this process may be delayed or intensified (Neville et al., 2013; Pierre, 2004).

Black Identity and Racism. If the process to start racial identity development is delayed and worse if not achieved, it may lead to potential blinders with perceptions of discrimination and racism (Neville et al., 2009; Pierre, 2004) and a reluctance to participate in social justice movements. If past research has established that that stronger racial identity leads to more involvement in social justice movements, then it is crucial to take Black ethnicities into more consideration as their connection to Blackness by impact their level of involvement in social justice movements, inform different perspectives, and attitudes towards the movement, and provide insight into what framework can be done to help expand the literature on racial identity development. Studies have demonstrated that experiencing blinders to discrimination is related to the broader notion of denying racism, which serves as an obstacle to achieving racial equity (Neville et al., 2013; Pierre, 2004; Yi et al., 2023). Furthermore, it perpetuates explanations that attribute structural oppression to solely Black people, reinforcing victim blaming. Yi et al.,

(2023) characterized this phenomenon as color blindness, which involves evading discussions about color and power. Subsequently, this denial of anti-Black racism and acceptance of color-blind racism leads to negative racial identity attitudes such as self-hatred, a symptom related to internalized racism (Baloyi, 2020; Kwate & Meyer, 2011; Yi et al., 2023) and reduced intentions to engage in social justice efforts (Neville et al., 2013).

Black Immigrant Identity and Racism. Hamilton et al., (2020) systematic review on Black immigrant social integration from 1910 to 2018 illustrates how the increasing Black U.S. population has complicated both the scholarly literature and public discourse on racial dynamics, particularly regarding Black and White vertical racism. Hamilton argues that the rise in the Black immigrant population has reduced the proportion of Black individuals who are descendants of American slaves, also known as African Americans. Furthermore, scholarly understanding of racial disparities in the United States has been complicated by literature that fails to account for Black immigration when measuring disparities, racism, discrimination, and opportunity outcomes. This issue is intrinsically linked to the BLM movement, as the movement's focus on racial injustice, addressing structural issues and equality is affected by the complexity of the ever-growing U.S. Black immigrant population. The lack of comprehensive evidence on the perspectives of both African Americans and Black immigrants impedes a thorough understanding of the movements impact and the varied experiences within the U.S. Black community.

Implications for Social Justice Movements

Black identity development impactions for understanding experiences of racism, and engagement in social justice movements. Numerous authors have demonstrated that racism in the U.S. is a problem, with widespread consensus that this is an issue and research suggest that a

protective factor against racism is using activism (Hope et al., 2022b; Szymanski & Lewis, 2015). Further research is needed to explore these ethnic variations in greater depth to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Black experience in the United States and how it informs activism.

Activism and the Black Community

Studies have demonstrated that activism in the Black community is one of the crucial responses to racism (Elnakib & Turner, 2023; Hope et al., 2022a; Jett, 2022; Szymanski, 2012) Anti-Blackness is global and far-reaching, therefore it necessitates a collective action the detriments of it (Begeny et al., 2022; Louis, 2009; Mathews et al., 2022; Saab et al., 2015). One of the ways to mitigate and cope with racism is though activism and Szymanski & Lewis, (2015) define activism as "intentional action aimed at fostering social and/or political change and often includes engaging in behaviors aimed at reducing and/or eliminating racism and its negative effects and proactive behaviors to enhance the everyday lives of African American persons and the African American community as a whole". The existing literature points to how racial-ethnic identity differences may explain differences in Black activism, moreover, stronger connections with Africans ethnic identity can lead to lower levels of activism participation. The research is sparse, as most activism studies centers on African Americans and seldom on other Black ethnicities. From the existing literature, we conclude that different perspectives and worldviews and perceptions of activism can affect how people perceive and cope with racism, thus in turn impacting their attitudes towards activism.

African American Resistance and Activism

Activism has always been part of the African American culture and ideology, and previous studies describe activism covering a wide range of activities, from protests, boycotts,

strikes, and rallies, to community groups, providing education on racial injustice, social media activism, and other acts (Szymanski, 2012). According to recent studies on the advent of social media, there has been increased Social Media Activism, particularly with resource sharing and accessing. Past research shows that involvement in social justice acts, and activism is a salient response to Black trauma (Szymanski, 2012). Several authors have noted that African Americans have an extensive history of Black Activism and more importantly, access to activism. African Americans began their resistance of slavery and racism from rebellions, to mass suicides, to revolts on slave ships centuries ago to the 1960s Civil rights era and present-day activism (Andrews, 1997; Blain, 2020; D. L. Brown, 2008; Ross et al., 2022). African Americans have been extremely visible when it comes to Black activism in the United States. Historically, African Americans have led the way in fighting for the rights for Black people to vote, acquire employment, housing rights, educational rights and many other rights (Andrews, 1997; Blain, 2020; Clayton, 2018; Jett, 2022).

Contemporary activism. This form of activism covers a wide range–from protests, boycotts, strikes, rallies, to community groups, providing education on racial injustice, social media activism, among other acts (Szymanski, 2012). The advent of social media has significantly increased social media activism, particularly in resource sharing and accessing information. Past research indicates that involvement in social justice acts, and activism is a salient response to Black trauma (Szymanski, 2012). Numerous studies have demonstrated that within the last 10 years, African American activism has gained immense visibility and has grown significantly mainly due to the sociopolitical changes (Baskin-Sommers et al., 2021; Elnakib & Turner, 2023; Hargons et al., 2017a; Hope et al., 2016; Jett, 2022; Mosley et al., 2021; Szymanski & Lewis, 2015), hostile racial climate in the United States, and the rise of the BLM

movement which centers on protecting the lives of Black people in the United States and internationally against police brutality. While activism in the U.S. has prominently involved American Americans, substantial participation from other ethnic groups has also been noted in their respective country of origin. Thus, activism is a phenomenon experienced by Black individuals globally. In the context of U.S. activism, it is crucial to understand current engagement particularly with the BLM movement.

Africans, Afro Caribbean, African Americans Activism

As the U.S. Black population encompasses many different ethnic groups, it is important to parse out Black activism. As stated, a crucial protective factor in aiding against the race-related stress that results from systemic, structural, and individual racism is engagement in activism (Mosley et al., 2021; Szymanski, 2012). The enduring struggles of African Americans against racism in the United States draw compelling parallels with the colonial liberation struggles of African and Afro-Caribbean people (Alao, 2023). The historical backdrop of African American and African struggles reveals a shared narrative of resilience and collective efforts to resist structural oppression (Alao, 2023). These connections exemplify the pervasive nature of anti-Blackness around the world and highlight resistance against such oppression among various Black groups. However, current literature addressing Black racism and activism experienced in the U.S. lacks exploration of the experiences of U.S. African immigrants, Afro-Caribbeans, and other Black ethnicities. As the Black diaspora from sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin American countries continue to grow, (Corra, 2023), it is imperative to study all Black ethnic groups' experiences racism and activism in relation to the BLM movement. Despite its importance, racism, discrimination, specifically in relation to activism have primarily been studied in the African American community (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014b; Watts et al., 1999) and

under-researched across most Black ethnic groups (e.g., African Immigrants, Afro-Caribbeans, Black Hispanics, etc.).

Studies have examined how the U.S. Civil Rights movement parallels those in Ghana and other West African countries during that time, highlighting how liberatory movements in these regions influenced the U.S. Civil Rights movement. This phenomenon is important as Black literature emphasizes the importance of Black solidarity. African Americans and Black people worldwide have a deep history of activism to liberate themselves from oppressive regimes.

Benefits of Activism

There is consensus in the literature that Black Americans have a long-standing history of using their voices to advocate for their rights, resist oppression, and create pathways to advocate for their rights which has the transformative potential for healing, strength, and change (Conner et al., 2023a; Elnakib & Turner, 2023; Hope et al., 2022b; Jett, 2022; Ross et al., 2022). Almost a decade ago, Szymanski & Lewis, (2015) highlighted that race-related stress in African Americans is associated with an increase in activism to cope and fight for social liberation. Scholarly work shows that the increased momentum of the BLM movement empowered individuals to channel their distress into meaningful action, allowing the movement to become a potent force for resilience, confronting structural injustices, demanding accountability, and effecting positive change (Waldron, 2020).

Challenges of Activism

Though many studies have demonstrated how activism can be a powerful tool to overcome racism, on the other hand, recent studies have demonstrated that continuous activism can lead to burnout and increase psychological trauma as well as constant exposure to injustice, anger, and despair, while facing backlash, criticism, and even personal attacks while engaging in

activism causes emotional burnout at may lead to significant distress and exhaustion (Conner et al., 2023a; Eaton & Warner, 2021; Gorski, 2019). Current literature has demonstrated that engaging in activism has become more pronounced since the genesis of the BLM movement, catalyzed by the unsettling and disturbing publicized murders of Black men and women (Hargons et al., 2017a).

Numerous studies have posited that increased psychological trauma, along with constant exposure to injustice, as well as facing backlash, criticism and personal attacks while engaging in activism, contribute to emotional burnout, distress and exhaustion (Eaton & Warner, 2021; Gorski, 2019). More current research has demonstrated how the demands of activism can be physically and emotionally exhausting—encompassing hours of organizing events, attending protests, engaging in advocacy, can cause fatigue (Eaton & Warner, 2021; Gorski, 2019). Moreover, the financial strain, time constraints, and limited resources experienced by many devoted activists cause significant barriers to participation in a social justice movement. Black activists also feel pressure to effect change and meet a high standard whether from the self, community, or society at large, which can cause personal feelings of inadequacy, hopelessness, and lack of motivation (Awad & Connors, 2023; Chen & Gorski, 2015; Eaton & Warner, 2021; Gorski, 2019). Activism can cause strains in relationships with family and friends who may not have the same level of commitment or understanding, and activist burnout can threaten the sustainability of a social movement and threaten social change (Awad & Connors, 2023; Chen & Gorski, 2015; Eaton & Warner, 2021; Gorski, 2019). Despite the significance of activism in the Black community, there is still little research to date has focused on what factors motivate individuals to participate in activism and variables that contribute or negatively impact the sustainability of a movement. Moreover, most research regarding Black activism focuses on the

experiences of African Americans, often overlooking other Black ethnicities motivation of abstaining or participating in Black movements (e.g., African Immigrants, Afro Caribbeans, etc.). With the ever-growing Black immigrant population in the United States, it is crucial to study the perceptions and attitudes of Black immigrants, especially when considering the Black Lives Matter movement—the largest Civil Rights movement of modern times (Strickland, 2022).

Motivational Predictors of Activism

There are many reasons why one chooses to participate in a social justice movement, and the level of involvement that desires to have in the movement. Some of these reasons established in the literature include financial resources, time, flexibility, and moral duty, increase awareness of racism, the movement's objectives appealing to one, movement representation (Pham et al., 2023). Past studies have demonstrated that collective consensus on activism in the black community has helped black movements achieve their intended goal and prevail (Begeny et al., 2022; Hornsey et al., 2006; Saab et al., 2015; Simon et al., 1998). The notion of the collective efforts that Black individuals must take is very crucial to explore. However, there is a gap in the literature that examines activism among non-African American Black individuals. There is limited research on the BLM movement, as this movement is a newer ever growing social justice movement. Moreover, for the studies that do exists, has been seldom studies in all Black ethnicities in the United States. To address this gap, this current study plans to look at ethnic differences and the reasons for participating in the BLM movement. This current study aims to investigate activism among Black Immigrants, Afro-Latinx, Afro-Caribbeans, and Black-Multi Racial folks.

With studies consistently demonstrating that a prominent reason for activism is ingroup support and racial identity (Flanagan et al., 2011; Hope et al., 2016; Szymanski & Lewis, 2015),

past studies have demonstrated that community cohesiveness, solidarity, and consensus of movement aims contribute positively to social justice movements (Nardini et al., 2021). Moreover, studies show that ingroup membership and attachment to racial groups are the most prominent reasons for social justice participation and attachment to a cause are factors for participating in movements (Flanagan et al., 2011; Hope et al., 2016; Pham et al., 2023; Szymanski & Lewis, 2015).

Challenges and Abstention from Activism

There are several reasons why people might not participate in social justice movements. Limited knowledge of the movement's purpose, misconceptions about the movement's goals, political and ideological differences, fear of repercussions, safety concerns, psychological factors, and cultural and community influences can all impact one's motivation to support a movement (Conner et al., 2023a; Gorski, 2019; Pham et al., 2023). Evidence from the literature have shown that there are many downsides and adverse effects of activism and how exposure to violence, psychological trauma, retaliation, backlash etc. can lead to burnout and impact the sustainability of a movement (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Conner et al., 2023b; Gorski, 2019).This is extremely important to consider as activism burnout, advocacy fatigue, and DEI exhaustion are signs of racial trauma and a huge factor in people's apprehension to participate in movements. Many studies have concluded that the demands of activism can be physically and emotionally exhausting—encompassing hours of organizing events, attending protests, engaging in advocacy, can cause fatigue (Eaton & Warner, 2021; Gorski, 2019). Moreover, evidence from the literature has shown that the financial strain, time constraints, and limited resources experienced by many devoted activists cause significant barriers to the sustainability of a movement (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Conner et al., 2023b; Gorski, 2019). The 2020 George Floyd protests caused massive

outrage and lead to 26 million people worldwide participating in the movement in 2020. Since then, reports have shown that participation in the movement has decreased, and abstention has increased (Pew Research Center, 2023). However, it remains unclear why Black people specifically are choosing to participate or abstain from the movement. Understanding the motivations and barriers within the Black community is crucial for informing advocacy strategies, enhancing the movement's inclusivity and impact. Moreover, a clearer understanding of these factors can inform activism, policymakers, and mental health therapists on how to better address the needs and concerns of Black individuals, ultimately fostering more sustained and effective participation in the BLM movement.

#BlackLivesMatter Movement

The Black Lives Matter movement was founded in 2013 by three Black women. It is a movement that advocates for a comprehensive examination and reform of law enforcement practices, aiming to address the deeply rooted institutional and structural racism that pervades U.S. law enforcement. Furthermore, the aims of the BLM movement are to dismantle not only overt forms of racism but also the structures that perpetuate inequality (Hargons et al., 2017a). By fostering increased awareness, promoting protests, advocating for policy and structural changes, and promoting other social justice movements, the BLM movement strives to create a just and equitable society for all. The movement has demonstrated substantial global reach and mobilization capacity in a shorter time. It has over 40 chapters in the United States and internationally. Following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, the BLM organized the largest protest in U.S. history with estimation of 15-26 million people participating in demonstrations (Buchanan et al., 2020).

Rest in Eternal Power

Rest in perfect peace Trayvon Martin. The BLM movement started nearly 11 years ago in June 2013 when George Zimmerman was acquitted on charges of murdering an unarmed Black teenager—Trayvon Martin. He was innocently walking home to his father's house after a visit to a local convenience store, carrying an Arizona drink and a bag of Skittles and was on the phone with his girlfriend. As he walked through his neighborhood, the neighborhood watch, George Zimmerman, suspected that Trayvon was an intruder in his own neighborhood. Despite the fact police officers were called and instructed Zimmerman not to approach Trayvon, Zimmerman took the law into his own hands by the Florida "Stand Your Ground" law and proceeded to follow Trayvon Martin. After a confrontation ensued between the two of them, Trayvon fought for his life. George murdered Trayvon from a gunshot wound on February 26th, 2012. A year later, George was acquitted on all charges and the widespread outrage led to the development of the #BlackLives Matter movement (Ramaswamy, 2017).

Rest in Perfect Peace Sandra Bland. In July 2015, Sandra Bland, a Black woman, tragically lost her life under suspicious circumstances after being taken into police custody after a minor traffic violation. Found hanged in her jail cell three days later, the circumstances surrounding her death raised unsettling questions about the treatment of Black women within the criminal justice system. Sandra Bland's unjust and disturbing death sparked the #SayHerName movement, a social initiative aimed at raising awareness of Black women who are victims of police brutality and anti-Black violence in the United States (Staples et al., 2019). Spearheaded by the African American Policy Forum (AAPF) and the Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies (CISPS), this campaign to bring awareness to meet the most often invisible names and stories of Black women and girls who are victims of police brutality. In recent years, the killings of unarmed Black men have garnered much more national attention and public outrage

than the killings of Black women, who are too often rendered invisible (e.g., Breanna Taylor). According to Kimberlé Crenshaw, co-founder of AAPF, and renowned scholar who coined Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), there is crucial importance in recognizing the specific challenges faced by Black women in the face of police violence. Crenshaw noted "If you say the name, you're prompted to learn the story, and if you know the story, then you have a broader sense of all the ways Black bodies are made vulnerable to police violence"(Staples et al., 2019).

Rest in Perfect Peace George Floyd. George Perry Floyd was a Black who was murdered on May 25th, 2020, by officer Derek Chauvin. For nine minutes and 29 seconds, Chauvin kneeled on the neck of George Floyd, an unarmed Black male arrested on suspicion of giving a convenience store clerk a false $20.00 bill. The death of George Floyd was put on display as the world watched George fight for his life screaming "I can't breathe". Pinned to the ground, George begged and pleaded with the officers, calling out for his mother. After nine minutes and 29 seconds, George was dead and bystanders watched and recorded the horrific murder. George Floyd's death became a catalyst for ongoing change, sparking the largest racial justice protests in the United States since the Civil Rights Marches of the 1960s.

The preceding narratives are shared to exemplify the significance and necessity of the BLM movement. These stories spotlight the tragic deaths of three Black Americans, and they only represent a fraction of the countless others who have lost their lives due to police brutality and other forms of racism. It is essential to recognize that the movement extends far beyond these individual stories, as a broader structural issue exists that demands attention and rectification. To this end, the movement has helped increase the visibility of police brutality and racial injustices; the movement is the biggest civil rights movement in modern day (Strickland, 2022).

History and Significance of Movement

The BLM movement is an entity, organization and abstract social justice movement that brings awareness to brutality and racism experienced by Black people. This movement started 11 years ago by three Black women and has since grown continuously. Research on the BLM movements indicates that the movement has increased visibility of issues that Black people face, social political engagement, and critical consciousness among Black people and other racial groups (Curtis, 2022; Strickland, 2022).

Social Political Climate of 2020

Prior research has previously established that the intersection of racism and health is very prominent in the black community (Cox et al., 2024) and the year 2020 was nothing short of this, especially for the Black community. The coronavirus-19 (COVID-19) pandemic, the George Floyd Marches and the presidential elections were all things that the black community was plagued. This represents the collective trauma that was experienced in the black community. The covid-19 pandemic highlighted the ongoing health disparities faced in the U.S. black population, the economic barriers to receiving treatment and how the intersection of racism and health issues is still very prevalent in the community (Cox et al., 2024). According to recent studies, the anxiety and stress of the covid-19 virus was heightened within the Black community and other marginalized population (Cox et al., 2024). This global pandemic juxtaposed with the murder of George Floyd highlighted the issues in the community. During this time, findings of several studies suggest that Black Americans were facing post-traumatic stress disorder, increased anxiety, hopelessness, fear, anticipatory anxiety etc. A study by Eichstaedt et al., (2021) explored the emotional and mental health effects of George Floyd's murder on the U.S. population. Using Gallup data collected from 117,568 respondents, the study found that more than a third of the

population reported increased anger and sadness in the week following Floyd's death, with nearly half of Black Americans expressing these emotions. Additionally, analyzed data from the U.S. Census data from 409,652 responses revealed that Black Americans experienced significantly greater increases in depression and anxiety symptoms compared to White Americans after Floyd's death (Eichstaedt et al., 2021). The U.S. Census Household Pulse data indicated that depression and anxiety severity among Black Americans rose at significantly higher rates than among White Americans in the week following the incident. Moreover, the study found that this increase was estimated to correspond to an additional 900,000 Black Americans screening positive for depression, resulting in approximately 2.7 million to 6.3 million mentally unhealthy days. These findings from this study underscore the severe mental health impact of police brutality on Black Americans, reinforcing and reflecting the broader issue of racial inequality in the United States.

These protests fostered a sense of community and solidarity and resilience. Collective action and advocacy provided a means for emotional support, empowerment, and collective coping. Moreover, the increased attention to racial injustice increased the attention to Black mental health. This was the largest civil rights protest of all time with over 1.6 million people worldwide participating in the movement (Curtis, 2022; Dunivin et al., 2022; Strickland, 2022). People from over 60 countries participated in the movement. The social media campaign of #BlackoutTuesday initiated on June 2nd, 2020, involved people posting a black square on their social media profile, particularly Instagram to show solidarity with the movement. The black square symbolized a moment of silence and was part of a broader effort to bring attention to racial injustice and encourage people to reflect and listen and learn. A study by Bulkeley examining dreams, race and support of BLM among 4,947 demographically diverse Americans,

indicated that people who are most likely to have dreams about the BLM protests were those who happen to support the BLM movement. The study revealed that these dreams were anxiety, fear, and nightmare coded, with several recurrent codes consistent with PTSD–threats to one's home, concerns with pandemics and conversations about BLM. The BLM movement tries to help Black individuals with their mental health, some of the ways it has helped is by spreading mental health awareness, reducing the stigma, and making attempts to push the defund the police movement and allocate funds back to social workers, teachers and therapists to better serve the Black community mental health (Cobbina-Dungy et al., 2022; Jacobs et al., 2021). Despite the detriments of racism, and the significance of the movement, it has been met with much backlash.

BLM Movement Backlash

The BLM movement has been met with a lot of uproar and controversy. In fact, studies have shown that several people in the U.S. population are opposed to the movement, and others are ambivalent to the movement. The BLM movement was met with other movements such as Back the Blue, All Lives Matter, Blue Lives matter etc. to diminish the significance of the movement and undermine its efforts. One study by Gallagher and colleagues (2018) analyzed tweets from August 8th, 2014, to August 31st, 2015, focusing on the hashtags #BlackLivesMatter and #AllLivesMatter. The research study collected 767,139 tweets with #BlackLivesMatter from 375,620 unique suers and 101,498 tweets with #AllLivesMatter from 79,753 users and 23,633 tweets containing both hashtags. The findings revealed that #AllLivesMatter often created a contrast between #BlackLivesMatter and #PoliceLivesMatter, reflecting the historical tensions between Black individuals and law enforcement. Additionally, the study found that #AllLivesMatter was frequently used by #BlackLivesMatter supporters to challenge the "All Lives Matter" rhetoric and to bring discussions about Black murders into the counter-movement

conversation. Prior research on the support of the movement has predominantly centered on opposition to the movement or examined intergroup support, with little attention given to intragroup support. Consistent with this, a 2023 study by Madali et al. found misinformation and "social noise" about the BLM movement, is predominate among social media platforms with the intention to disruptive, deter, alter, and weaken the original message of the BLM movement. Which corroborates past studies that Black movements are often met with opposition and backlash (Blain, 2020; Clayton, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2021; Schmidt, 2016; Strickland, 2022). From these studies we know that Black movements are often met with intergroup backlash, criticism, and pushback which is a manifestation of the function that racism serves and people widely perpetuate this. However, this is consistent with the past, and nothing new. Thus, one of the most salient factors of supporting the movement in ingroup, collective cohesion, solidarity. The U.S. Black population needed ingroup support now more than ever, it is important for studies to understand how the collective Black population feels about the movement and whether there is solidarity.

Varied Support for BLM Movement

Most of the empirical studies on support for the BLM movement focus on the views of Non-Black U.S. adults, hence adding this current study's case of the importance of focusing on the Black voices, and how other Black ethnic groups respond to this movement. In a time of anti-Black hate and rhetoric, the Black community cannot afford division, and a lack of solidarity. Existing literature and reports have an intergroup emphasis on support underscoring potential allyship and intergroup conflict still centers on the perspectives of non-Black Americans. In fact, according to a Pew Research Center survey conducted in June 2020, 67% of United States adults expressed support for the BLM movement, while 30% opposed it. Three years later, the Pew

Research Center has posited that support for the movement has decreased since its peak in 2020. The highest support for BLM is from Black Americans, followed by Hispanics, then White Americans (Bulkeley; Pew Research center).

Black Thoughts on BLM

Black support for BLM has been notably strong and significant, driven by a shared experience of structural racism. A Pew Research Center survey in June 2020 found that 86% of Black adults in the United States support the BLM movement (Braga, 2023). Unfortunately, these results do not delineate the breakdown of the Black ethnic composition and their support of the movement. Studies show that African Americans feel an attachment to an activist movement as it addresses issues that directly impact the Black community (Brown & Pickerill, 2009; Hope et al., 2022a; Jett, 2022; Pham et al., 2023; Ross et al., 2022; Szymanski & Lewis, 2015).

From previous studies, we conclude that racial identity, racial centrality, experiencing racism, are associated with engaging in activism. Though empirical research is growing, there is still limited research that examines the reasons why people support the BLM movement. A 2024 study conducted by Seaton et al., explored how ethnic-racial identity and experiences of racism predict support for the BLM movement. This study was investigated this relationship among 225 Black American youth aged 18-29. The findings from the study revealed that positive ethnic-racial identity and awareness of anti-Black racism were strong predictors of supporting the BLM movement. Moreover, when controlling for ethnic identity, experience with racism did not predict support for the BLM movement. The results indicate that a more crucial factor in supporting BLM even more than personal experiences of racism is racial identity. In addition, a study by Ellefsen & Sandberg, (2022) examining the role of emotions in participating in the BLM movement found that various emotional experiences, such as feelings of imminent change,

emotional connections to personal experiences, and a mix of hope, anger, relief, disappointment, and frustration, motivated young people in Norway to participate in the protests that began in June 2020. From these findings, we know that emotions play a crucial role in driving political participation among young protestors. However, it is important to note that this study focused on Black individuals in Norway, who experience a different social and political context compared to Black individuals in the United States. To this current author's knowledge, no similar study has been conducted in the U.S. that specifically examines the emotional and political engagement of all Black ethnic groups as previous studies have determined that racial identity is a salient predictor, this current study aims to explore within group differences based on ethnicity.

BLM Support

A 2024 systematic review conducted by Azevedo et al., (2022) investigated the factors that influence support of the BLM movement by synthesizing findings from 1,588 records across 24 studies among a total of 27,691 participants. The researchers categorized participants based on demographics, race, partisanship, ideology, discrimination. Secondly, data from 13 nationally represented datasets involving 31,779 participants was used to identify 37 common predictors of supporting the BLM movement. The findings from this study revealed that individuals who self-identify as African American were more likely to support BLM compared to Latinx individuals who identify as Black, who, in turn, showed higher support than those identifying as Latinx and White. Although the review focused on racial and ethnic identities, it did not include African immigrants, concentrating solely on those who self-identify as African American. This underscores the importance of examining within-group differences to gain a fuller understanding of diverse perspectives and experiences, which can enhance the effectiveness of support provided by therapists and researchers, rather than relying on broad categorizations.

Colloquially, there has been within group criticism of the BLM movement showing that not all members of the movement feel that the movement is uplifting their voice, mainly from a gender and sexual identity standpoint. The movement has called for the #Sayhername, #Saytheirname, and #AllBlackLives matter movements, to delineate that there are indeed differences in the U.S. Black community and to underscore how Black women and Black LGBTQ+ individuals did not feel they were being heard, seen, or protected. Though there is a scarcity of empirical research that examines these above sub movements, not concept of sub movements is crucial and important to acknowledge as it underscores the ideology of intersectionality. Moreover, ethnicity has an aspect of intersectionality that is crucial to study. An empirical study conducted by Alao, (2023) analyzed the connections to Blackness among 28 African individuals and explored how this disposition to Blackness relates to their engagement with the BLM movement. Using semi-structured interviews, participants were asked "Do you think African immigrants and Black Americans are perceived or treated differently in the U.S.? "Should African immigrants and their children participate in the BLM movement? The study explored participant narratives concerning the formation of their ethno-racial identity, conceptualization of Blackness (in the U.S. and their native country) and sentiments about police brutality, anti-Black racism, and the BLM movement. The findings revealed both sources of cohesion and alignment with participants expressing sentiments as "you're African, but you're also black" which are similar sentiments to Hordge-Freeman & Loblack, (2021b) study on Afro-Latinx's perceptions of BLM. Another finding was diasporic support for the BLM movement in general. However, the study also identified fragmentation and contention, with some participants stating "being in American is a privilege" thus they did not support the movement's agenda, that

finding is very consistent with the concept of Neville, 2022's concept of colorblind racism and rationalities.

The present study seeks to expand on this prior study by examining motivation behind individuals' involvement or lack thereof in the BLM movement, the nature of their engagement and their perceptions of both the movement and its participants. Additionally, this current study will conduct a comparative analysis of perceptions among Africans, African Americans, and Afro-Caribbeans to identify which codes are more prevalent across these ethnic groups.

Theoretical Framework: Intersectionality

This study is grounded in an intersectionality framework. Expanding upon the importance of contexts, it is important for this study to acknowledge intersectionality—a term coined by Professor Kimberle Crenshaw in the 1980s. Intersectionality describes how race, culture, ethnicity, class, gender, and other individual characteristics "intersect" with one another, for example Black, Lesbian, woman (Crenshaw, 1991). Collins, (2000) expanded on this and delved deeper into how systems and institutions influence the perception of oppression, considering the complex interplay of culture and history. Within this theoretical framework, oppression amongst Black people in the U.S. is shaped by their social position and other salient identities such as race, ethnicity, class, acculturation, generational status etc. The oppression experienced by Black Immigrants can be understood through the lens of *multiple jeopardies* (King, 1988). Part of the richness of the Black community is the aspect of intersectionality which delineates systems of disadvantage and advantage. Through acknowledgement of intersectionality, as the Black community we can understand differences among us–subsequently informing hierarchical systems of power towards Black activism (Cole & Omari, 2003, p. 200). For educators, psychologists, activists in better serving all Black people, it is valuable to understand Black

immigrants' experiences and inform practices and services. There are vast nuances, differences and diversity among Black immigrants, including differences in ethnicity, cultural background, country of origin, region of origin, skin complexion, religiosity, socioeconomic status, and experience with immigration. Still, despite all these nuances, most literature using the overarching broad term "Black" synonymously with the African American identification—who have a completely different landscape. Given the unique historical relationship between West African Immigrants, African Americans, and the unique intersectional experience of Afro-Caribbeans, Afro-Latinx, and Black Bi-Racial individuals, it is imperative to examine within-group ethnic differences in the Black Community understanding oppression, racism and activism. In doing so, researchers, psychologists, and educators can develop more holistic culturally sensitive interventions, policy efforts can be expanded, and the literature is more nuanced. By failing to do so, research is underrepresenting salient nuances, experiences, stories, and perspectives that may not be immediately visible but are of importance.

Current Overview of Study

Taking these complexities into account, the purpose of the current study is to examine Black adults in the U.S. perception of The BLM movement, specifically examining general themes of BLM involvement, abstention, and attitudes toward the movement. More specifically, this study seeks to enhance understanding of the factors that motivate or dissuade people from participating in the movement and examine these themes across different ethnic groups in the Black community, which is operationalized as self-reported identification with one of the following Black ethnic groups: African American, African, Afro-Caribbean, as well across other salient identities, including gender, age, and level of education. This study aims to understand how intersecting identities within the U.S. Black community influence perceptions

and experiences of the BLM movement and factors that influence Black individuals' participation in the BLM movement. This research will delve into Black people's perceptions of the BLM movement through a content analysis of participant responses to four different open-ended questions regarding their general BLM movement attitudes of the movement, thoughts on those actively involved in the movement, levels of involvement, and reasons for either participating or abstaining from the movement. The exploratory findings are anticipated to contribute to the literature discussions on aspects of Black Liberation, offering a comprehensive integration of Black literature that explores the experiences of various black ethnic groups. Furthermore, the study aims to provide insights that can guide educators, activist-psychologists, researchers, and Black Liberation Activists in better serving all Black ethnicities.

Research Questions: The study sought to explore answers to the following:

RQ 1: How do Black individuals in the U.S. perceive and understand the Black Lives Matter movement?

RQ 2: Among those who self-identify as Black, what are the key discourses and narratives surrounding participation and abstention with the Black Lives Matter movement?

RQ 3: What are the dominant discourses and narratives that Black people associate with those who participate in the Black Lives Matter movement?

RQ4: Do patterns of endorsement of BLM-related perception and understanding codes differ significantly across African American, Afro-Caribbean, and African immigrant groups?

CHAPTER III: Method

Participants

This study sample consists of 206 self-identified Black participants who participated in a previous study (Akoto et. al, 2024). To participate in the study, participants had to self-identify as Black, African American, having part or total African ancestry, or belonging in the African diaspora. They were at least 18 years of age, resided in the United States, and were literate in English, although English did not have to be their native language. Ethnic composition included Ghanaian, Nigerian, Haitian, Jamaican, African American, Ethiopian, etc.) and education level, included bachelor's degree, master's, and doctoral degrees. The Black adults were primarily located in the Northeast region of the United States (e.g., Delaware, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland). The majority of participants identified as African American (43.2%, n=90/206), followed closely by African Immigrant (41.2%, n=86/206), and Afro Caribbean (14.5%, n=30/206). Regarding gender, majority of the participants identified as women (73%, n=150), and 56 identify as men (27%, n=56). The largest age group was 25-34, representing 57.2% of the sample (n=117). A detailed breakdown of participants' demographics are presented in Table 1.

Data Collection and Procedures

Recruitment began on June 26th, 2023, after approval by Lehigh University's Institutional Review Board. Participants were recruited through the researcher's professional networks, community networks, and social media. Respondents were invited to participate through email, listservs, recruitment flyers, and through social media posts. Participants were also encouraged to send the flyer to anyone in their close community who identified as Black. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were compensated for their participation

with the opportunity to receive one of five $25 Amazon gift cards. Before starting the survey, participants read and sign informed consents. At the end of the survey, participants were given the option to either exit the survey if they did not want to enter the drawing, or they could click on a securely anonymized Google Docs form where they put their email addresses. A randomized selection generator was used to choose five recipients. The contact information collected for the gift cards selection was not connected to the research data and there is no way of tracking any of the subjects (See Appendices A-D).

The study used a survey methodology where participants answered open-ended questions from the online survey. Once respondents registered to participate, they were sent a secure survey link that was created on Qualtrics XM—a web-based software that allows users to create and generate surveys. The link could only be accessed once to ensure survey security. The survey was completed in 20-25 minutes depending on the subject's pace. Respondents were asked questions pertaining to life experiences including adversity, racial and ethnic identity, and traumatic events and answered 4 Qualitative questions that were used to analyze for this study (See Appendix E). Due to the possibility of participants experiencing some distress in completing the assessment, these risks were clearly outlined in the informed consent and debriefing form, and resources were provided in the debriefing form (See appendix F). Participants' responses were de-identified and were not asked to provide their name or personal information–only age, ethnic group, gender, region of residence, and education status.

Study Measures

Demographics Questionnaire. The study demographic questionnaire collected the following participant information: Participants were asked to provide demographic information including age, gender identity, state of residency, ethnic group, generation status in the U.S.,

religious identification, highest level of education completed, parental and maternal highest level of education, approximate household income, and political affiliation. Detailed options for each demographic measure are included in the Appendix D. The current research study examined four out of the ten demographic items as independent variables (e.g., ethnic group, gender, level of education, and age).

Qualitative Questions. Participants were asked 4 open-ended qualitative questions:

1. Qualitative question #1: *Given the recent acts of violence that have taken place in the Black community, what are your thoughts on the Black Lives Matter movement?*
2. Qualitative question #2: *As an individual who identifies as Black, how do you personally view the Black Americans who protest, march, and advocate on behalf of the Black Lives Matter movement?*
3. Qualitative question #3: *Witnessing the traumatic events that have happened in the Black community, what ways are you involved/active in the Black Lives Matter movement? (e.g., donating money, protesting, campaigning).*
4. Qualitative question #4: *Explain why you ARE involved in the movement OR explain why you ARE NOT involved in the movement (please provide specific reasons).*

Analytic Plan

This study utilized a content analysis approach to examine qualitative questions 1, 2, and 4. Content analysis is appropriate for identifying codes, relationships, patterns and concepts, in textual data, such as short answer responses to open-ended surveys (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Lindgren et al., 2020). The qualitative questions of this study were

asked online through open-ended questions where participants typed their responses to the questions surrounding the BLM movement.

Relational Content Analysis

This study employed relational content analysis, which identifies codes and concepts by analyzing the relationship among coded elements (codes, issues, words, phrases, etc.). It assumes that meaning emerges from the connections between concepts and is effective for exploring associations and relationships within textual data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Lindgren et al., 2020). The process was an iterative, and sequential process, allowing the exploration of relationships among codes and concepts to explain patterns in the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Lindgren et al., 2020).

Data Familiarization

The first step involved immersing ourselves in the data to understand the scope (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). I, along with two trained master's level graduate research assistants, read the responses to the three qualitative questions multiple times to become familiar with the content and identify potential constructs (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). Although prior literature on Black activism informed the study, we remained open to emerging codes, particularly to capture nuanced perspectives from diverse Black ethnic groups beyond African Americans. Moreover, we still guided the analysis using Black activism literature, which enumerates various phenomena and concepts (e.g., mental health concerns, resilience, protective factors, social injustice, racial identity development, etc.).

Coding Process

The entire coding process continued through a span of five months (see Appendix G). We began identifying units of meaning (e.g., words, phrase, sentences, paragraphs) to capture

concepts and general code (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). Given the possibility of variability in participant responses (e.g., one-word answers, paragraphs, sentences, etc.), based on the questions and format, we used phrases, words and sentences to understand concepts and constructs.

From then, the research assistants and I independently coded a small sample of responses and met as a group to discuss similarities and differences (Campbell et al., 2013; Hruschka et al., 2004; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). We continued this iteratively and developed an agreed upon list of 10-12 dominant codes for each qualitative question. The leader coder sent the tentative codebook to an outside auditor that is an expert on content analysis (Principal investigator's supervising dissertation advisor). After meeting and adjusting the codebook after expert feedback, the lead coder sent the finalized codebook to the trained research assistants. We continued coding until no new concepts, phenomena, or constructs emerged

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria and Operational Definitions

To ensure consistency in coding and reliability, inclusion and exclusion criteria for each code were established (see Tables 2, 3 and 4). Each code was given a clear operational definition to guide coding decisions. For instance, the code "Support for the movement" included any general expression for general support for the goals, ideology of the BLM movement. Documenting these definitions supported interrater reliability and transparency throughout the analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Lindgren et al., 2020).

Inter-Coder Reliability

Establishing inter-coder reliability is a crucial part of content analysis and coding (Kleinheksel et al., 2020). Reliability can be established using two methods: calculating percentage agreement or conducting a more rigorous statistical analysis (e.g., Krippendorff's

alpha or Cohen's kappa). The decision on which method to use depended on the number of research coders, the sample size of the data, and the type of data being analyzed. Based on this, and given the conditions of this study, reliability was established using percentage agreement. We then assessed reliability by independently coding an excerpt of a few participant's responses and checking how much alignment and disagreement we have. These codes were refined as coders independently applied them to a randomly selected subset of responses (n = 60). During this time, all discrepancies were reconciled through group discussion led by the first author.

Once the coding was finalized, researchers independently applied codes to a random subset of 20% (n=42) of responses to determine reliability (different from the 60 responses used to develop codes). Once interrater reliability was established (91%), each coder was assigned to code randomly selected subsets of the remaining responses. After the codebook, and initial IRR was established, the 206 participant responses were dived evenly among research assistants where Researcher 2 was assigned responses 1-103 and Researcher 3 was assigned responses 104-206. Researchers went through each participant's responses to mark a "1" or "0" in the corresponding categories.

During the coding process, the lead coder randomly selected a sample of each researcher's sample responses to ensure IRR. After this we met independently (myself with each individual coder) to compare results, and if reliability was low, we met as a research team and discussed discrepancies, examine literature, and re-analyze the data (Campbell et al., 2013; Hruschka et al., 2004; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020) to ensure we met consensus and establish substantial to high reliability between .61-.80 (Campbell et al., 2013; Cohen, 1960; Hruschka et al., 2004; O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). Please see Appendix G for more details on qualitative process.

Conceptual Understanding

To provide a more conceptual understanding of participants' responses, the individual codes derived from the content analysis collapsed into overarching interpretive themes. This process allows the researcher to identify higher-order patterns, relationships, and meaning in the data, moving beyond descriptive coding to analytic abstraction (Cokley et al., 2001; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Lindgren et al., 2020). Themes were developed iteratively: after all data was independently coded, the lead coder (author) and the supervising principal investigator reviewed the codes, discussed potential groupings, and reached consensus on the final set of six overarching themes through a process of reflection, outlines, reorganizing, and meeting to discuss the final themes. This collaborative process ensured rigor, thoughtfulness, transparency and consistency in theme development given the nature and richness of participants' experiences. By grouping codes under interpretive themes, the analysis highlights patterns across participants and supports integration with existing literature.

Mixed-Methods Integration

This study employed a mixed method approach the examine Black individuals' perceptions, narratives, and engagement with the Black Lives Matter movement. After qualitative responses to open-ended survey were analyzed, each participant was assigned a value of 1 (endorsement) or 0 (no endorsement) for each code based on their responses allowing for the quantification of qualitative data. Moreover, for Qualitative Question 3, which asks 'explain why you ARE or ARE NOT involved in the BLM movement, participants were assigned a P for participation, A for abstention of U for undefined by the research team. This categorization was not self-reported but derived from the content of participants' qualitative responses. A binary variable was then created in which participants were coded as participator or abstainer enabling

the use of codes selective to their categorization. For example, a study participant labeled as an abstainer's response was given a code from the codebook only for abstention code binary logistic regression to examine whether ethnicity predicted likelihood of BLM participation.

Quantitative Analysis

To address research questions 2 and 4, quantitative analyses were conducted to examine predictors of participation and differences in theme endorsement and difference in theme endorsement. Binary logistic regression analyses were conducted to see ethnicity predicted participation, and an exploratory analysis examining other variables (e.g., income level, education status, immigration status) was explored to see if this predicted participation. The dependent variable was binary representing participation or abstention. Additionally, to examine differences in the frequency of endorsed codes, a series of Chi-square analyses were conducted to determine how these differences relate to ethnicity.

Positionality Statements

Given the sensitive nature of this research topic, the research team approached the coding process with reflexivity and sensitivity. To embed reflexivity during the coding process, our research coding team held weekly coding meetings by discussing our experiences with the responses and the influence of our individual contexts. Additionally, we each completed reflexive memos after each session of interacting with the data.

Statement 1. This study is deeply personal and grounded in my own lived experiences. I identify as a Black Ghanaian woman raised by two Ghanaian immigrant parents. My parents migrated to Western countries in early adulthood and worked diligently to provide my siblings and me with access to educational and professional opportunities.

From an early age, I became aware of my racial identity, often before fully understanding my ethnic identity. As one of the few Black students in many of my academic environments, I learned that my physical appearance was often foregrounded in how I was perceived. At the same time, I maintained strong connections to my Ghanaian cultural identity through food, language, and family values, while also navigating and, at times, resisting the expectations placed upon me within both my Ghanaian and American contexts.

These dual experiences fostered an early awareness of both racial and ethnic consciousness. I witnessed discrimination directed toward my parents based on both their race and their ethnic, and immigrant identity, even before I had the language to fully articulate these experiences.

The events of 2020, particularly the murder of George Floyd, marked a pivotal moment in my personal and intellectual journey. While the Black Lives Matter movement had long been present in African American communities, the global response in 2020 represented a broader racial awakening. The public acknowledgment of George Floyd's Ghanaian heritage further deepened my personal connection to these events.

This study emerged from a desire to understand whether others who share similar bicultural and diasporic identities experience and interpret the BLM movement in comparable ways. As such, this research centers two deeply salient dimensions of Black identity—race and ethnicity—and reflects both my scholarly and personal commitment to exploring these intersections.

I have worked in the mental health field for 10 years and hold a bachelor's degree in psychology, a master's degree in clinical and counseling psychology, and is a licensed professional counselor of mental health. I've been trained in the skills necessary to conduct

qualitative research. My skills include research laboratory training on qualitative research by an expert qualitative researcher in the field of counseling psychology, with a special emphasis on culture, trauma, and multiculturalism. I acknowledge the importance of approaching qualitative research with sensitivity, trustworthiness, and cultural sensitivity and will do so for this current study.

Statement 2. Researcher 2 is a Black Dominican-American ciswoman from a lower-class socioeconomic status in her second year of a master's graduate program as a first- generation college student. She is a second-generation immigrant who experienced a journey of racial self-discovery due to growing up in an environment with deeply rooted colorist views. Upon claiming her identity as an Afro-Latina, her Latinidad has often been questioned and dismissed because of her blackness. The invisibility of the intersectionality between the Black racial identity and the Latine cultural identity has inspired Researcher 3 to be vocal about the existence and experiences of Afro-Latines, individuals who are equally Black and Latine. Although she is not actively engaged in the BLM movement, Researcher 3 has attended protests and currently advocates for amplifying Black voices. She acknowledges that her positionality has influenced her coding of participant responses.

Statement 3. Researcher 3 self-identifies as a Ghanaian graduate student pursuing a master's in communication at North Dakota State University, with a cultural background and academic experiences that greatly inform his approach to research and analysis. Having grown up in Ghana, researcher 2 is rooted in an African perspective that emphasizes community, resilience, and the importance of social justice. Researcher 2 recognizes that his background as an African immigrant may differ from the lived experiences of Black Americans and other members of the diaspora engaged with the BLM movement. This distinction informs his

commitment to reflexivity as he approached the data. While his perspective provides valuable insights into global Black solidarity, he remains mindful of the importance of centering participants' voices and resisting any assumptions or biases he may carry. He approached the coding process with a dedication to accuracy, cultural sensitivity, and a focus on amplifying the diversity of perspectives reflected in the data.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Qualitative Analyses

The first research question examined Black adults' *perceptions* of the BLM movement, the second research question examined *perceptions and differences in participation*, and the third research question examined Black adults' *perceptions of the people who are involved in the BLM movement*. Participant responses to the open-ended questions highlighted a total of 22 codes. Ten codes were identified across qualitative question 1 (QQ1) which asks Black adults their perception of the movement and qualitative question 2 (QQ2) which asks Black adults about their perception of people involved in the movement. These two qualitative questions produced the same set of codes, reflecting similar thematic patterns that emerged during the coding process. For qualitative question 3 (QQ3), which asks participants about involvement in the movement, six codes were identified for BLM movement participation reasons and six codes for BLM abstention reasons. Participant responses were permitted to receive multiple codes to capture the nuance of perspectives, ideological, emotional, and cultural complexities embedded within participants' responses and preserve analytic richness. Tables 2, 3, and 4 provide the thematic codes and definitions. To illustrate the richness and nuance of the responses Tables 5, 6, 7 and 8, provide a more detailed breakdown of the codes, code frequency by ethnicity, and sample responses from participants.

Codes from Qualitative Questions 1 & 2

Support for BLM Movement. Support for the BLM movement emerged as the most frequently endorsed code across both qualitative questions (QQ1: 60%, n=122/206; QQ2: 54%, n=112/206). Participants articulated positive support not only for the movement's goals but also for its broader ideological aims. They also expressed immense support for the Black people involved in the movement.

QQ 1 sample quote: *"I think the Black Lives Matter Movement is a necessary and powerful movement. I fully support the movement and I think that the backlash against the movement feels like a slap in the face a lot. As a Black person, it feels like we always have to scream to the rooftops to convince White people that racism is real and police brutality affects us both personally and vicariously*" (Afro-Caribbean participant).

QQ 2 sample quote: "*I have a lot of respect and support for Black Americans who protest and March on behalf of the Black Lives Matter movement. I know that I have always wanted to protest, but I get scared of being hurt or ending up in prison. I also fear facing police brutality or worse at these protests. I think people who protest are committed to change and are really strong people"* (Afro-Caribbean participant).

Recognition of Systemic Issues. Beyond the movement itself, many participants situated the BLM movement within a broader recognition of racial inequalities. There was expression of acknowledged systemic, deep-rooted societal issues (e.g., anti- Black violence, police brutality, discrimination) impacting Black communities. This was the second most endorsed code for QQ1 (26%, n=54/206) and the third highest endorsed code for QQ2 (14%, n=28/206).

QQ 1 sample quote*: "I THINK IT IS A GOOD THING THAT MAJORITY OF PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD HAVE CONDEMNED THE ACTS WHICH ADVERSELY AFFECT BLACK PEOPLE. IT IS REASSURING THAT EVEN CELEBRITY FOOTBALLERS OF ALL RACES DEMONSTRATE SUPPORT FOR THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT BY KNEELING DOWN ON THE FIELD OF PLAY"* (African participant).

QQ 2 sample quote*: "I view it as strength and commitment to furthering the work that has been done in the past 400+ years to liberate Blacks and to remove any obstacles of inequity and injustice for Black people"* (African American participant).

Criticism about effectiveness/longevity of BLM Movement. While support for BLM movement was dominant, a substantial subset of participants expressed concerns regarding impact, and methods of the BLM movement. This was the third most frequently endorsed code for qualitative question 1 (QQ1: 15%, n=30/206) and was endorsed for qualitative question 2 (QQ2: 4%, n=9/206), marking it as the prominent critical perspective endorsed across participants.

QQ 1 Sample Quote: *"Genuinely the most misleading groups or "charities" that I've come across. They have caused irreparable damage to the black community and race relations at large. The founders are fraudsters and have done very little to nothing tangible that has helped the black community. They espouse views which don't represent me as a black person, instead they focus on banding together identity groups in which i don't fit i.e. other unconnected social groups"* (African participant).

QQ 2 Sample Quote: *"I think we need to do more than march. I would like to see more mobilization and action. I'm curious what those who march are doing to improve the lives of other Blacks"* (African American participant).

Admiration and Respect. Distinct from the general BLM support, the admiration and respect code captured an affective orientation toward the movement's participants. Expressions of moral regard, inspiration, perceived courage and bravery were often reflected. This code emerged as the second most endorsed code for qualitative question 2 and was also present in qualitative question 1 (QQ1: 2.9%, n=6/206; QQ2: 33%, n=70/206).

QQ 1 Sample Quote: *"The movement is powerful n speaks of the lives lost who weren't given the chance to fight for themselves"* (African participant).

QQ 2 Sample Quote: *"I personally view them with a lot of admiration. The will power and initiative that it takes to take on issues that have gotten individuals killed in the past shows the level of bravery and determination that many of the individuals advocating on behalf of the BLM movement have"* (Afro-Caribbean participant).

Indifferent/Neutral. Although less prevalent than support, a subset of responses reflected lack of opinion for and/or against the BLM movement. Several participants stated "N/a", "no opinion, or "none" while others stated general and neutral comments (e.g., it has both pros and cons). This was the fourth highest endorsed code for both qualitative questions (QQ1: 11%, n=23/206; QQ2: 9%, n=19/206).

QQ 1 Sample Quote: *"Indifferent. It's a good movement, but there are better effective ways to help the community and demonstrate our frustrations"* (Afro-Caribbean participant).

QQ 2 Sample Quote: *"White people and black people are equal"* (African American participant).

Criticism of BLM Organization. Like criticism about the effectiveness of the movement, but still distinct, many participants criticized the movement and organization in general. Concerns about mismanagement, selfish motives from leadership, or deviation from original goals/mission of the BLM stance were endorsed. This was the fifth highest endorsed code for qualitative question 2 (9%, n=19/206) and was also endorsed with qualitative question 1 (2.4% n=5/206).

QQ 1 Sample Quote: *"It was hijacked by white liberals and feminists and eventually undermined to the point that unless white liberal post or say something about Black lives, no one will listen. white liberals more so than conservatives are the biggest enemy to Black people, especially Black men. They pretend to be our allies but are really foxes in sheep's wool. We allow them to get close to us, then they divide and conquer"* (African participant).

QQ 2 Sample Quote *"Although I may not agree morally with everything the founders have done, I think it's great to know who stands with the mission when I see a Black Lives Matter shirt or it in someone's instagram bio"* (African participant).

Importance of Collective Action. A recurring theme consistent across both qualitative questions emphasized the importance of unity and solidarity. Participants shared thoughts about the Black community working together and being united, emphasizing their belief in collective action, protesting, and solidarity crucial for achieving change (QQ 1:7.7%, n=16/206; QQ2 6.7%, n=14/206).

QQ 1 Sample Quote: *"I think the movement has done a good job in creating a structured community that brings not only blacks but people of different races together to fight social justice for African Americans."* (African participant).

QQ 2 Sample Quote: *"I am also Black American and I support it. We have to back our own community, especially when so many other cultural groups are against us*" (African American participant).

Reflection on Participation. A smaller but notable subset of participants also shared their personal reflection on involvement with the BLM movement/taking critical action, and others' involvement/critical action (QQ1 2.42%, 5/206; QQ2: 4.36%, n=9/206).

QQ 1 Sample Quote: *"I admire those who are taking a stand for Black people and it's sad we have to protest to convince people they our lives matter and convince them that the police are dangerous forces that often target Black people"* (African participant).

QQ 2 Sample Quote: *"They are well meaning and well-intentioned but ultimately, the efficacy of the marches is questionable at best. I think our time and efforts would be much better spent solving the issues that are prevalent and only prevalent within our community as opposed to wasting time marching.* (African participant).

Internal Division within Black community. A small proportion of responses reflected internal division/fragmentation within the community itself. Participants mentioned a perceived lack of unity and concerns about intra-community relationships with the BLM movement (QQ1: 2.9%, n=6/206; QQ2: 2.43%, n=5/206).

> ***QQ 1 Sample Quote****: I am not against the movement, but I do not personally support the movement. The movement has a good cause, but the black community is divided. The movement only focuses on black men and centers police brutality. The movement should be address more issues because police brutality is not the only issue that the black community faces. I think some people take the movement too far and use it for selfish gains. If a white person asks about the movement, i will say i agree with it, but if a black person asks, I will describe my concerns with it which what I stated*" (Afro-Caribbean participant).
>
> ***QQ 1 Sample Quote****: "Black Lives Matter, but also remember we are not Black. Black is what we're have been identified as. Black is a color. Also America does not belong to anyone but the Natives. Everyone should check their ethnicity"* (Afro-Caribbean participant).

QQ 2 Sample Quote: *"I do not have any feeling. At the end of the day, we are free to express our views and beliefs. I personally, do not align with those who protests and feel like this does not address the problem but stimulates more rage in the community*" (African American participant).

Concerns about Violence and Destruction. Finally, a small but salient group of participants had critique about the violence and destruction from protests. Individuals expressed disagreement with such methods, sometimes expressing preference for peaceful methods (QQ1: 1.5%, n=4/206; QQ2: 2.9%, n=6/206).

QQ 1 Sample quote*: "I like the Black Lives Matter movement...but I think sometimes it goes too far. Like when ppl were looting and burning businesses. Some people even burned down black businesses. I don't agree with that"* (Afro-Caribbean participant).

QQ 2 Sample quote: *"I am proud of the Black Americans who protest, march, and advocate on behalf of BLM. But I think we need to do better, and some Blacks take things too far, like stealing and looting, and violence is not okay"* (Afro-Caribbean participant).

Codes from Qualitative Question 3

Qualitative question 3 (QQ3) asked participants to explain why they were or were not involved in the BLM movement. Responses were organized into two major categories: Participation codes (i.e. reasons for participating in the BLM movement) and Abstention codes (i.e. reasons for abstaining from the BLM movement). Additionally, participants were categorized into two major positions: Participator, and Abstainer. A total of 29.61% (n=61/206) of study participants endorsed participating in the movement, and 27.6% (n=57/206) endorsed abstaining from the movement. Furthermore, an unexpected category of non-binary categorization emerged, consisting of 42.71% (n= 88/206) of study participants who did not

explicitly state whether they are involved or not involved in the BLM movement. These responses are described qualitatively in the section below.

Qualitative Question 3: Participation codes

Social Change. This was the most endorsed code for reason to participate (62%, n=38/61) among participators and captures involvement as motivated by the belief in the need to address societal injustices and push for systemic changes that promote fairness and equality.

> ***QQ 3 Participator Quote:*** "*I am involved in the movement because at the end of the day it affects me and my family and loved ones. I want to see a difference being made so I take the route that best suits my passions and keeps me safe. My family migrated from Ghana to here and we see daily struggles in all aspects of not just our lives but the people around us. We deal with soo much already within our own culture, having to add racism and discrimination on top of that is wild. I don't protest/March because I am scared but I find other ways to contribute"* (African participant).

Personal connection to racial injustice. Participators endorsed personal connection to racial injustice as a dominant reason to be involved in the movement. This was the second most endorsed code (27% n=17/61) and captures participants' engagement in the BLM movement due to direct personal experiences with racial discrimination and injustices or witnessing the effects of such injustices.

> ***QQ 3 Participator Sample Quote:*** *"My involvement in the movement is rooted in my rage and love for Black people all across the world. I witnessed those close to me be brutalized and die from ways that are rooted in anti-Black racism - my grandmother is my primary reason (she died from surgical complications committed by a physician and we were only given an apology). I have had family members die from and struggle with*

health complications (i.e., hypertension, stroke) due to lack of access to viable sources of living. I faced racial discrimination (i.e., microaggressions) that devalued me as an animal and witnessed similarly of my friends and peers in my training program. All of these have moved from my own rage but love that I have for myself and other Black people" (African American participant).

Solidarity. Furthermore, several participators shared their reason for involvement based on the belief in the strength of unity and collective efforts and duty to create positive social change and was the third highest emerged participation code (26%, n=16/61).

QQ 3 Participator Sample Quote: *"I feel if Blacks are protesting because of a traumatic event that has happened in the Black communities, I should show solidarity"* (African American participant).

Empathy for the Suffering of Black People. For some, witnessing the struggles, pain and suffering of Black individuals was a reason for participation. Many participators shared that witnessing the suffering incited strong emotions and was motivation to be involved in the movement (16.39%, n=10/61).

***QQ 3 Participator Sample Quote*:** *"Because as a Black American, I can not stand by and stay silent to the harm and killing of my people"* (African American participant).

Civil Rights. A small subset of participants shared their participation due to a firm belief in the importance of advocating for civil rights and equality for all individuals, aligning with the movement's core goals (14.75%, n=9/61).

QQ 3 Participator Sample Quote: *"I am involved in the moment because I believe that it is a personal responsibility to stand up and advocate when injustices are occurring"* (African American participant).

Affirmation of Black People's Lives. Similarly, a smaller portion of participators expressed engagement in the movement grounded in the affirmation of Black lives as inherently valuable, deserving dignity, respect, and protection (9.84%, n=6/61). This code is theoretically distinct from other codes that endorse structural change (e.g., social change, civil rights), as participators reflected moral and psychological recognition of Black humanity, Black body, Black mind, Black survival and Black well-being.

QQ 3 Participator Sample Quote: *…we live in a world where we've been told blackness is almost like a sickness. It's not good, and others try to avoid being associated with it. It's a world of anti-blackness. This obviously can have a negative impact on the mindset of individuals that hear negative things about themselves always. Especially with even having to advocate that our own lives matter. I feel with the BLM movement, they were able to build momentum and build that momentum on the positives on what it means to be a black individual despite dealing with things like police shootings and always having to think of your skin color as something that can potentially bring you harm because of others perception of you and the group you belong to. I also feel like BLM built on racial pride associated with our blackness — this is something I feel it's important to instill in yourself no matter how old you are. Being black is seen as something inherently negative and we have to do our best to combat these negatives things thrown at us and know that we are great and we can be greater, despite what the outside world tells us"* (African participant).

Qualitative Question 3: Abstention codes

Psychosocial Emotional. Psychosocial emotional reasons emerged as the most frequently endorsed abstention code (50.87%, n=29/57) and captured abstention due to emotional and/or social reasons. The reasons for abstaining were due to anger, frustration, social

condition, fear about racial injustice, fear of burnout or social ramifications. Others shared abstention was due to being an immigrant, being poor, and have a disability—capturing the social nuance that goes into ability to participate.

QQ 3 Abstainer Sample Quote: *"I'm not involved in the BLM movement because it's exhausting. It's already exhausting enough being black in America. I'd rather work within my own neighborhood/community to make sustainable changes rather than work with an "overarching" group*" (African American participant).

Competing Responsibilities. The code competing responsibilities and/or obligations over activism was the second highest endorsed code (36%, n=21/57) and captures participants' engagement in other responsibilities, such as work, family obligations, or personal activities, that limits the ability to participate in activism.

QQ 3 Abstainer Sample quote: *"I am not directly involved in the movement because I am pursuing other things unrelated to BLM but have similar goals to BLM through advocacy, initiative taking, research, etc. I also did not get involved at the height of the BLM movement because of COVID"* (Afro-Caribbean participant).

Unsure of Impact. While not many, a small subset of abstainers expressed doubt about whether participation in the BLM movement will lead to meaningful change or whether individual involvement will have any real effect as a reason for not being involved in the BLM movement (14%, n=8/57).

QQ 3 Abstainer Sample quote: *"I am not involved in the movement because I do not believe it will provide meaningful change. Looking at the leadership of the movement, there is a lack of acknowledgment to criticize oneself for the problems that are currently being faced"* (African American participant).

Disagreement/Misunderstanding of Ideology. Similarly, abstainers also expressed abstention from the BLM movement due to a lack of understanding of the BLM movement's goals, disagreement with its methods, or opposition to its political/ideological stance (14%, n=8/57).

QQ 3 Abstainer Sample quote: *"I am not involved because I have too many mixed feelings about the movement and do not want to involve in something I do not understand"* (Afro-Caribbean participant).

Lack of Personal Connection. A lack of connection to the struggles of Black Americans and/or lack of connection to the BLM movement's cause was referenced as a reason for abstaining from the movement by a small portion of respondents (8.77%, 5/57).

QQ 3 Abstainer Sample quote: "*I don't because it is high time I prove myself to transcend and break the mentality that we are not worth it … I am tired of just roaming the streets with placard"* (African American participant).

Limited Focus. Finally, a small portion of abstainers indicated that their lack of involvement is due to the movement's narrow focus, overlooking intersectional issues such as immigrant and global Black concerns, economic inequality, and other structural injustices (7.01%, n=4/57).

QQ 3 Abstainer Sample quote: *"I am not directly involved with the Black Lives Matter Movement besides campaigning and protesting because I have chosen to have more hands on involvement in other organizations that focus on specific black issues, primarily housing injustice and prison reformation. My decision is mainly based on what I feel is the need in my local community*" (Afro-Caribbean participant).

Qualitative Question 3: Abstract, Indeterminate, or Neutral Viewpoints

An additional third category emerged among 88 participants (42.7%, n=88/206) who did not explicitly state whether they support or not support the BLM movement. Some individuals in this category endorsed neutral stances, stating "N/A" "do your part" "I think it makes sense" and expressed neutral, and philosophical viewpoints.

QQ 3 Abstract Sample Quote: *"Love of humanity and the sincere goodness within every person*" (African American participant).

QQ 3 Abstract Sample Quote: *"Being a member of the black community understands the importance of the movement to black people."* (African American participant).

Thematic Organization of Findings

To summarize the thematic findings, the 22 individual codes from the content analysis were organized into six overarching themes: 1) BLM Movement is a necessary but contested vehicle for Black Liberation, 2) The necessity of critical reflection, and psychological navigation, 3) Solidarity as negotiation: Collective action and intragroup tensions, 4) Participation is a moral, affective and collective obligation, 5) Capacity and psychological preservation influence abstention, 6) Nuance in ambivalence: Philosophical neutrality and selective engagement. Each theme represents a set of related codes, as shown in the table which provides a detailed description of each theme and the codes encompassed within it (see Table 9).

Quantitative Analyses

Open-ended responses were coded using qualitative content analysis procedures described in Chapter 3. Two sets of analyses were conducted. First, binary logistic regression was used to examine ethnic differences in movement participation, addressing the second part of Research Question 2. Second, chi-square tests of independence were conducted to examine ethnic differences (e.g., African Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, and African Immigrants) in the top

three most frequent codes (see Figure 1) for each qualitative question, addressing Research Question 4. Additionally, as an exploratory analysis, variables often linked to systemic inequality were examined (e.g., generation status, education level, income level) to explore if these social identities predict BLM participation.

Prior to conducting chi square analyses, assumptions were evaluated. Both ethnicity and code endorsement were categorical, and observations were independent. Examination of expected cell frequencies indicates that no more than 20% of cells had expected cell count less than 5 (Field, 2018).

For Binary logistic regression, assumptions were evaluated to ensure appropriateness of the model. The dependent variable was dichotomous (Participation? Yes/No), observations were independent. Multicollinearity was assessed using tolerance statistics and Variance Inflation Factors (VIF). All tolerance values exceeded .10 (range= .627-.935), and VIF values were well below the recommended threshold of 5 (range= 1.07-1.60), indicating no evidence of multicollinearity violation. Crosstabulations between each categorical predictor and the dependent variable were examined to assess cell frequencies. No cells contained empty cells or fewer than 5 cases, indicating no concerns of sparse data. Taken together, the assumptions for both analyses were met (Hosmer, D. & Lemeshow, S, 2000).

Binary Logistic Regression Analyses

The results for binary logistic regression conducted in SPSS are presented in Table 10. The model fit was not statistically significant χ^2 (8) =2.577, *p*=. 958. Therefore, the findings indicate that ethnicity did not significantly predict BLM movement participation, nor did the exploratory independent variables (e.g., generation status, education level, income level) *(p>.05)*.

Chi-Square Test of Independence Analyses

The results for the Chi square tests are summarized in Tables 11-14. The findings indicate that ethnicity did not significantly differ for the most endorsed codes for QQ1, however did for QQ2 and QQ3 participation.

QQ 1 Code Endorsement

There were no significant endorsement differences among ethnic groups regarding the top three most endorsed codes $p>.05$.

QQ 2 Code Endorsement

Support x Ethnicity. We observed a statistically significant difference of endorsement of BLM support code based on participant ethnicity, where African immigrants were more likely to endorse the support code compared to counterparts χ^2 (2, N=206) =.6.638, p=.036. The effect size was small to moderate (Cramer's V = .18).

Respect x Ethnicity. Additionally, we also observed a statistically significant difference of endorsement of the respect code where African immigrants were also more likely to endorse the support code compared to counterparts, χ^2 (2, N=206) =9.236, p=.010. The effect size was small to moderate (Cramer's V = .21).

Moreover, there were no other significant endorsements differences among ethnic groups regarding collective action/solidarity code, $p>.05$.

QQ 3 Participation Code Endorsement

Personal Connection x Ethnicity. When examining the personal connection code, we observed a statistically significant difference of endorsement based on participant ethnicity, where African Americans were more likely to endorse the support code compared to counterparts, χ^2 (2, N=61) =.10.279, p=.006. The effect size was medium-to-large (Cramer's V =

.41). An additional Fisher–Freeman–Halton exact test was conducted to examine the association, given small cell frequencies (4 in the presence of one column). The test also indicated a significant association, χ^2 (2) = 11.53, p = .004.

Moreover, there were no significant differences in endorsement of desire for change code across ethnic groups*, p>.05*

QQ 3 Abstention Code Endorsement. There was no significant endorsement for the top two most endorsed abstention codes among ethnic groups, *p>.05.*

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

This study is the first empirical mixed-method exploration to systematically and comprehensively examine diverse U.S. Black adults' relation to the Black Lives Matter movement. A limited body of empirical knowledge exists on the phenomenon, and this study provides insight into Black ethnic groups' perceptions of the BLM movement, including general attitudes toward BLM, views of those actively involved, levels of participation, and reasons for either engaging with or abstaining from the movement.

The study addressed the following research questions:

RQ 1: How do Black individuals in the U.S. perceive and understand the Black Lives Matter movement?

RQ 2: Among those who self-identify as Black, what are the key discourses and narratives surrounding participation and abstention with the Black Lives Matter movement?

RQ 3: What are the dominant discourses and narratives that Black people associate with those who participate in the Black Lives Matter movement?

RQ4: Do patterns of endorsement of BLM-related perception and understanding codes differ significantly across African American, Afro-Caribbean, and African immigrant groups?

Findings from this study offer meaningful insight into how Black individuals within the U.S. are responding to recent atrocities and how they perceive the most prominent contemporary Black social justice organization. The insights have implications for clinical practice, culturally sensitive mental health interventions, and community-based healing efforts especially among educators, psychologists, and researchers and Black liberation activists.

Qualitative Findings

Thematic Findings in BLM Movement and Participants

Overall, participants' perspectives reflected psychological engagement with the BLM movement not only support and critique. Their responses revealed deeper processes of meaning-making—including cognitive processes, emotional responses, identity processes, motivational orientations—shaped by critical consciousness and racial/ethnic identity. The original codes were organized into six overarching interpretive themes that capture Black adults' perceptions encompassing critical nuanced moral, cognitive, and emotional psychological engagement with the movement, reflecting critical reflection, and psychological processing. Together, these themes highlight that positioning to BLM cannot be simplified, and instead reflect the layered, emotionally and socially complex nature of the meaning-making process of this movement.

BLM Movement is a necessary but contested vehicle for Black Liberation. Participants' narratives revealed a complex relationship between the BLM movement, characterized by simultaneous reflections of support for the movement's aims and critique of its organizational structure, methods, and perceived effectiveness. This is significant because it reflects participants' critical engagement with the movement rather than passive acceptance. Expressions of skepticism, critique, and questioning indicate a heightened political awareness shaped by historical experiences and unfulfilled institutional trust. Participants' willingness to challenge the movement, even while expressing support and admiration, symbolizes care, investment, and a demand for accountability (Nardini et al., 2021).

Across ethnic groups, more than half of participants (54%) expressed strong support for the movement and the core premise that Black lives are systemically disadvantaged, devalued and harmed; and this movement is necessary. Statements such as 'I am the Movement' "I

SUPPORT!" and expressions of admiration for those involved reflect affective alignment with the movement's aims. This finding aligns with past studies that demonstrate support for racial justice movements often reflect shared recognition of structural oppression (Hope et al., 2022a, Selvanathan & Jetten, 2020).

Black adults expressed the importance of collective action, as well as an added layer of responsibility and acceptance. The statement "we have to help ourselves" conveys a sense of ownership, accountability, and responsibility. This perspective aligns with past liberation scholars who argue that Black liberation begins with collective unity and mutual support. It is also consistent with Nardini et al., (2021), who demonstrated that community cohesiveness and solidarity can contribute to social justice movements.

At the same time, participants frequently distinguished between supporting the cause and critiquing the organization, a distinction that complicates dominant narratives portraying Black communities as either supportive or "selling out." Concerns about leadership, violent tactics used, effectiveness of the movement, impact of the movement, mismanagement of funds and deviation of original goals were common, aligning with past studies that have revealed Black liberation movements are scrutinized outwardly and inwardly (Clayton, 2018; Nardini et al., 2021). Nardini et al. (2021) emphasize that for social justice movements to succeed, leaders must coordinate their efforts, communicate important information, and reflect on prior successes and failures. The perspectives expressed by participants demonstrate a lack of trust in leadership and in failures that have not been clarified by leaders. This finding suggests that it is important for community leaders and activists to coordinate meetings that promote transparency and outline future strategies.

For some participants, these critiques coexisted with continued belief in the necessity of the movement, suggesting that critique did not automatically equate to opposition but rather reflected psychological engagement and critical thinking. Participants often made statements like, “I like BLM but…” or “I am proud of the Black protesters, but…” typically followed by a critique, concern, or suggestion. This reflects the complex ways people navigate support for a cause while also expressing reservations, showing that appreciation and critique can coexist.

Furthermore, participants’ concerns about movement effectiveness and longevity reflect broader concerns about sustainability and tangible outcomes. Calls for “doing more than marching” and references to alternative grassroots organization suggest a desire for strategic change that will benefit the Black community.

Lastly, concerns regarding the use of violence and property destruction during protests, as some viewed such tactics as counterproductive or morally concerning, others supported the methods used during protests. These contrary beliefs mirror longstanding debates within Black liberation movements regarding the legitimacy, effectiveness, and consequences of disruptive resistance (Lo, 1982; Nguyen et al., 2021).

Taken together, these findings suggest the Black participants viewed BLM as a necessary but contested vehicle for liberation. It is seen as necessary yet imperfect. But overall, Black individuals are critically engaged whether thinking about it, questioning it, and supporting people who are directly involved in the movement.

The Necessity of Critical Reflection, and Psychological Navigation. Narratives from participants revealed that psychological engagement with the BLM movement often occurred through internal reflection and navigation, even among those who did not endorse support for the movement or active participation. Participants described evaluating protest strategies,

considering their own level of involvement, and processing emotions such as fear, hopelessness, and uncertainty. One participant reflected, "…I think our time and efforts would be much better spent solving the issues that are prevalent and only prevalent within our community as opposed to wasting time marching."

Such reflections illustrated cognitive engagement with systemic inequities alongside critique about protest methods. These patterns align with critical consciousness frameworks emphasizing critical reflection as foundational to sociopolitical development (Diemer et al., 2016; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015), as well as Mosley's (2020) Critical Consciousness for Anti-Black Racism model (CCABR). The CCABR model posits that Black individuals follow a three-step process to resist racial trauma which entails a) witnessing, b) processing and c) acting critically against racism.

Consistent with the first component of CCABR (witnessing racism), over 26% of participants demonstrated the capacity to name structural racism within broader institutional and historical patterns, reinforcing prior scholarship that established witnessing racism is a component of critical consciousness development (Mathews et al., 2022; Mosley et al., 2021). One participant stated "… violence affecting the Black community have been distressing and have highlighted ongoing systemic issues." This awareness often co-existed with processing racism which encompassed psychological negotiation, evaluation of methods and assessment of risk, emotional capacity, safety, and perceived efficacy.

These findings extend the argument that progression from witnessing racism, to processing anti-Black racism, to acting critically may be less deterministic than theorized, complicating assumptions that behavioral critical action is the inevitable endpoint of critical consciousness development. In the processing phase of CCABR, an additional component of

negotiation should be considered (e.g., *Is this worth it? Will I see results? Is this safe for me*?) which participants often expressed. One participant described inactivity due to "healing", stating "I am not active in the movement in terms of physical protest…that's because I have chosen to assist with healing which is revolutionary in itself."

Contrary to traditional models of critical consciousness often implying a developmental progression from reflection to critical action (Diemer, 2012; Mosley et al., 2021; Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015), participants endorsed, at times, remaining in the processing phase. Participants made statements such as "fighting in the spirit," "I only pray for God's protection," "focusing on healing is revolutionary," "I'm supportive in my heart," and "I'm not involved, but I bear them in prayer." These responses suggest that the conceptualization of "acting critically" can extend beyond behavioral methods. It can also exist psychologically, spiritually, morally, and emotionally. Focusing on personal healing, affirming self-worth, or simply enduring the burdens of being Black is described as sufficient and meaningful resistance to anti-Black racism.

Importantly, much of the scholarship informing critical consciousness theory has centered predominantly on African American or U.S. born Black samples (e.g., Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015; Diemer et al., 2016). The present study extends this body of work and suggests that reflective engagement with systemic racism operates across diasporic identities, though negotiated within different sociocultural contexts by examining these processes across multiple Black ethnic groups.

Solidarity as Negotiation: Collective Action and Intragroup Tensions. Participants' narratives also highlighted significant emphasis on solidarity and collective action, while revealing fractures within the Black community. This revealed how ethnic identity, intersectional positioning and ideological differences shaped perceptions of the BLM movement. Several

participants expressed a moral obligation to support the movement either due to race, practicality, and/or empathy.

One participant stated, “Because I am Black American, I cannot stand by and stay silent to harm and killing of my people.” This reflects the notion of feeling ethically and morally obliged to act, as staying silent cannot be tolerated. Another participant discussed how he feels secure in the solidarity, stating, “…but if I get unjustly harmed or shot, I know who will stand up for me.” Several participants described collective action as a means of fostering broader community cohesion stating, “I think the movement has done a good job... brings not only Blacks but people or different races together to fight social justice.” Though these sentiments reflect cohesion, there was also tension that complicated the notion of solidarity.

Some participants articulated concerns about lack of cohesion among Black people, often framing internal division as a barrier to effective collective resistance. Participants reflected on the limitations of the movement, with one participant stating, “I think BLM is relevant as anti-Black racism continues…what’s missing is conversations about how skin tone and colorism shapes anti-Black racism.” Moreover, statements emphasizing the need to “fix what’s broken on the inside before confronting external oppression” suggest an awareness that intra-community relationships are central to the success of liberation efforts, consistent with past research (Begeny et al., 2022; Gow, 2023; Hitchens et al., 2023; Jeong et al., 2025).

At the same time, this framing occasionally shifted responsibility for racial injustice inward. Such perspectives aligned with scholarship on internalized oppression and respectability politics (Baloyi, 2020). Perceptions of “hijacking” further reinforced how participants

negotiated responsibility and blame. While some framed the "co-optation of the movement" as a failure within the Black community, others located responsibility in White liberal or conservative "enemies".

These contrary interpretations offer a nuanced perspective to internalized racism and colorblind theory scholarship (Baloyi, 2020; Yi et al., 2023). Statements of "*we* allowed them to hijack us" and calls to "break the mentality *we* aren't worth it" could be interpreted as reflecting internalized self-blame. However, within the broader context of participants' narratives, these remarks coexisted with not only explicit acknowledgement of systemic oppression, but support for collective action and solidarity. One participant negotiated this tension through their response "I understand the country we live in and how Blacks have been oppressed by the Whites… Yet, Blacks themselves murder their own kind."

Therefore, this pattern points to a potential boundary condition of colorblind and internalized racism frameworks (Hamilton et al., 2022; Neville et al., 2013; Rogers et al., 2021; Yi et al., 2023), wherein inward critique may not reflect minimization of racism awareness, but an effort to reconcile this awareness with collective accountability.

Importantly, ethnic differences emerged in how participants articulated these concerns, underscoring the role of ethnic positioning in shaping interpretations of collective struggle. An African participant stated "Black Lives Matter, but also remember we are not Black. Black is what we're have been identified as…Everyone should check their ethnicity". Some African immigrant participants expressed distance from BLM movement, emphasizing it as an "*African American* issue" that "gives them false hope" rather than a collective Black struggle.

The use of distancing language (e.g., "they" versus "we") reflects processes of boundary-making within the broader Black racial category. These linguistic distinctions underscore how

culture informs perceptions of belonging, responsibility, and ownership of racial justice movements. These findings are consistent with prior research demonstrating that Black immigrants may experience racialization differently upon entering the U.S., which shapes their perspective on the movement (Alao, 2023; Tormala & Deaux, 2006).

Moreover, some participants expressed frustration with the movement primarily centered on police brutality against Black men, overlooking the experiences of Black women, immigrants, and other individuals experiencing intersecting forms of oppression. These concerns mirror longstanding critiques within Black feminist and intersectional scholarship, which emphasize that movements that fail to account for gender, sexuality, and colorism risk reproducing internal hierarchies of visibility and protection (Billups et al., 2022; Crenshaw, 1991, 2018b; Hitchens et al., 2023; Staples et al., 2019).

For some participants, these exclusions weakened their sense of connection to the movement and contributed to selective or alternative forms of engagement, aligning with prior research that demonstrates while shared racial identity can motivate collective action, perceived internal conflict may simultaneously undermine sustained cohesion (Hornsey et al., 2006; Van Zomeren et al., 2018). Despite these differences, participants still maintained a strong desire for unity and collective action. Many emphasized that "no one else is going to help us," reflecting an understanding that liberation must be pursued collectively in the absence of external support.

The preceding section explores participants' perceptions and meaning-making around the BLM movement and highlights the complex cognitive, emotional, and identity-based processes through which Black adults interpret and understand racial injustice. These understandings, rooted in critical consciousness, racial trauma, lived experiences and other relevant contexts provide critical context for the ways individuals later describe their choices to participate,

abstain, or engage selectively with the movement which will be discussed in the following section.

Perceptions and Understanding of Participation, Abstention, and Ambivalence

While the previous section highlighted participants' perceptions and understanding of the BLM movement, this section analyzes how Black individuals make sense of movement involvement. The findings are organized into three overarching interpretive themes that examine participation as a moral and collective obligation; abstention shaped by capacity; and ambivalence as reflections of nuanced, nonbinary approaches to involvement.

Participation is a Moral, Affective and Collective Obligation. Participants who endorsed involvement in the BLM movement consistently described it as a moral, emotional, and collective responsibility rooted in affirmation of Black life, shared Black identity, and historical consciousness. This suggests that participation functioned as an ethical response to racial injustice, shaped by affective reactions to witnessing harm against Black people and a perceived duty to act consistent with past studies about the influence of emotions in social justice (Ellefsen & Sandberg, 2022).

A primary reason for participation was empathy for Black suffering, particularly in response to targeted murders. Participants described feelings of grief, anger, and moral urgency as catalysts for action rather than passive emotional reactions. As one participant stated, "I am involved…because I believe our people have an overall unjust experience in this country." These accounts align with scholarship on collective trauma, suggesting that witnessing racial violence mobilizes engagement as a form of resistance (Cox et al., 2024; Eichstaedt et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2021; Thelamour et al., 2019). Closely aligned to these motivations was the affirmation of Black lives and humanity. Participants emphasized that involvement in BLM served to counter

anti-Black narratives and assert Black dignity, worth, and psychological well-being. One participant asserted, “I am a Black human. A whole being, not 3/5 of a person…Black lives do matter.” Participation was described not only as protection of Black bodies, but as preservation of Black minds, families, and identities within an anti-Black social context.

For several participants, Black identity itself rendered participation unavoidable, highlighting the involuntary nature of social justice participation in a racially stratified society. As one participant explained “I’m involved because I am black, I have family and friends that are black and I can’t see injustice continue on for any longer. It’s not fair.”

Participants also framed their involvement as a commitment to civil rights and justice, often positioning activism as an obligation. One participant noted, “I believe that it is a personal responsibility to stand up and advocate when injustices are occurring,” while others described their engagement as rooted in seeking equity. This framing reflects prior research conceptualizing social justice participation as morally grounded rather than purely political (Briggs, 2024; Krueger et al., 2022; Sabucedo et al., 2018; Zaal et al., 2017).

Desire for social change and collective action further shaped participants’ engagement, with many emphasizing unity, solidarity, and shared responsibility. Participation was framed as both a survival strategy and a mechanism for transformation. As one participant explained, “Because it’s my duty to be a part of the solution,” while another stated, “We are all we have, we need support and unity.”

These findings suggest that BLM participation among Black adults is best understood as a morally grounded, affective, and relational process. It was driven by empathy, historical consciousness, and affirmation of Black life. Accordingly, while existing models of activism (Mosley et al., 2021; Nardini et al., 2021) highlight behavioral and structural dimensions, they do

not fully integrate morality, identity, and psychological meaning making as interconnected core mechanisms through which Black adults respond to and resist racism. In the context of this study, psychological meaning-making is the process through Black adults interpret racial injustice, connect it within the collective history and Black identity, and construct participation in BLM as a morally and personally necessary response. While prior research has examined moral motivations, racial identity, and psychological processes of activism separately or in partial combination (Ellefsen & Sandberg, 2022; Krueger et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2023), this study finds that all three dimensions emerged simultaneously as central to how Black adults respond to BLM participation. Limited qualitative research has documented how diasporic Black adults express and integrate these processes in their lived experiences.

Capacity and Psychological Preservation influencing abstention. Participants' abstention from the BLM movement was shaped by negotiations of psychological capacity, emotional preservation, and competing survival demands. While many participants articulated uncertainty about the movement's impact, mixed feelings about its leadership or goals, emotional exhaustion, or competing responsibilities, these reasons were not discrete or mutually exclusive. Rather, they reflected a broader consideration in which abstention functioned as a protective response to psychological burden, racial trauma, and constrained capacity within an anti-Black social structure.

Several participants frequently described abstention through language of inefficacy and hopelessness, expressing doubt that their involvement would lead to meaningful or visible change. One participant noted abstaining due to "time and hopelessness, it's not worth my time," capturing a cost–benefit framework in which emotional and time investment was weighed against anticipated outcomes (Conner et al., 2023). Although awareness of the BLM movement

was widely acknowledged, many participants emphasized the perceived absence of sustained structural change, which contributed to frustration, skepticism, and emotional withdrawal. One participant stated, "I support the movement but am not involved in the movement…because I am scared of wasting my time…I do not really know what impact the movement has had."

These sentiments align with existing literature demonstrating how perceived inefficacy and performative activism contribute to burnout, demotivation, and abstention from social justice efforts (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Conner et al., 2023b; Eaton & Warner, 2021; Gorski, 2019; Vierra et al., 2023).

Importantly, participants' questioning of the movement's impact or leadership often reflected apprehension about expending psychological energy on a movement perceived as unclear and politically risky. Some participants expressed discomfort, uncertainty, and critique with the political nature of BLM and ideologies. One African participant stated, "I'm not involved in the BLM because I believe all lives matter." Other participants stated that they did not feel adequately informed about the goals, noting that they did not want to involve themselves in something they did not fully understand. This corroborates previous studies that institutional mistrust and unaddressed racial trauma in Black communities' impact on social justice movement involvement (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Hope et al., 2019; Nardini et al., 2021)

Psychosocial and emotional factors emerged as the most salient contributors to abstention. Half of the sample cited emotional or psychological reasons for nonparticipation, including fear, anger, frustration, exhaustion, safety concerns, and apprehension about job loss or retaliation against family members. One participant shared, "I'm not involved in the BLM movement because it's exhausting. It's already exhausting enough being black in America."

Others referenced immigration status, religion, poverty, disability, or social vulnerability as conditions that reduced capacity for involvement. These accounts are consistent with research on how intersectionality highlights overlapping forms of oppression (Billups et al., 2022; Crenshaw, 1991; Sanchez & Awad, 2016; Szymanski & Gupta, 2009). Moreover, participants' narratives reflected chronic exposure to racism, violence, and systemic inequities, which are associated with heightened depression, anxiety, hopelessness, race-based traumatic stress and complex trauma among Black Americans (Alang, 2019; Carter et al., 2017; Sue et al., 2019).

Empirical evidence following the murder of George Floyd indicates that Black Americans experienced disproportionate increases in anger, sadness, depression, and anxiety, reinforcing the emotional context in which decisions about engagement were made (Eichstaedt et al., 2021). For many participants, abstention represented not disengagement, but a deliberate effort to protect mental health and prioritize healing in the face of ongoing racial trauma. One participant sharing "I don't because it is high time I prove myself to transcend and break the mentality that we are not worth it … I am tired of just roaming the streets with placard."

Competing responsibilities further limited participants' capacity for participation. Work obligations, caregiving roles, religious commitments, educational demands, and pandemic-related disruptions were frequently cited as reasons for abstention. Participants described pursuing alternative forms of advocacy (e.g., mentoring, research, education, or community support) that aligned with the movement's values while remaining compatible with their day-to-day realities. These narratives illustrate how abstention from visible or traditional forms of activism still coexisted with commitment to racial justice goals. It is also important to consider how this demand is embedded within a capitalist and racialized society that restricts time, energy, and financial flexibility (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Eaton & Warner, 2021; Gorski, 2019).

Across these accounts, abstention was best understood as a process of negotiating capacity rather than a fixed stance of opposition. One participant stated, “I am not involved because it does not really cross my mind. I think there are other ways to help the black community. I support it though”. Psychological burden, racial trauma, perceived inefficacy, mistrust, and competing survival demands all influence participants’ inability to engage in ways that threaten emotional well-being. These perspectives position abstention as a form of self-preservation, highlighting the need for clinicians, educators, psychologists, and activists to recognize how emotional capacity and structural constraints shape involvement. Supporting Black communities therefore requires attending not only to motivation and ideology, but also to the psychological costs of activism and the conditions necessary for sustainable involvement.

Nuance in ambivalence: Philosophical Neutrality and Selective Engagement. Most participants (43%) did not endorse involvement within binary categories of participation or abstention; rather endorsed ambivalence, indirect involvement, or philosophical neutrality as alternative ways of relating to the movement. These positions complicate traditional applications of critical consciousness frameworks (Diemer, 2012; Hamilton et al., 2022; Mosley et al., 2021) by suggesting that high awareness of systemic racism does not uniformly translate into overt activism. Instead, critical reflection may exist with strategic restraint, or alternative forms of engagement.

Participants emphasized that involvement with the BLM Movement should not be synonymous with marching or protesting, challenging dominant narratives that equate visibility with commitment. One participant noted, “I believe that we have been taught that everyone has to march or protest or you are not involved. Everyone’s role in this is not the same,” underscoring a belief in alternative forms of contribution. Others expressed sentiments centered

on collective moral responsibility without specifying their personal stance, such as “Do your part,” or framed their stance through broader humanistic values, including “Black and white people are created equally.”

These expressions reveal a form of ambiguous engagement in which some participants acknowledged the importance of the movement while maintaining philosophical distance from formal activism or organizational affiliation. For some, this distance reflected abstract or universal frameworks such as beliefs in equality or shared humanity that deemphasized race-specific activism. One participant stated, “Love of humanity and the sincere goodness within every person”. Such narratives may align with colorblind or universalist ideologies (Neville, 2022), but they may also reflect alternative coping mechanisms, self-preservation strategies, or efforts to maintain a belief in a just world amid continued exposure to racial harm (Hamilton et al., 2022; Rogers et al., 2021; Yi et al., 2023).

Expressions of neutrality commonly expressed among participants stating, “I have no opinion” or that “everyone is created equal”, complicate interpretations of non-participation. While prior research critiques such positions aligning with colorblind ideology or insufficient racial awareness (Hamilton et al., 2022; Neville et al., 2013; Yi et al., 2023), participants’ narratives suggest that neutrality may reflect emotional boundary-setting, or skepticism about movement efficacy. Participants stating, “It’s hard enough being Black, I don’t see a point in the movement”, suggest that individuals are dealing with internal complexities and may be incapable of extending outwardly in action. Moreover, previous studies seldom look at the function of neutrality. This finding suggests that neutrality potentially functions as a psychological or cultural strategy that allows individuals to relate to racial injustice at a manageable emotional distance. At the same time, this stance can be contrasted with historical and moral perspectives

on neutrality. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1994) famously quoted "If you are neutral in a situation of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor", highlighting the ethical tension in choosing inaction. This perspective contrasts with participants' experience, illustrating that neutrality may serve as a self-preservation coping mechanism rather than an explicit public stance on injustice, and suggesting that future studies would benefit from examining this phenomenon among Black adults.

Overall, the responses demonstrated rejection of oversimplified conceptualizations of involvement, challenging previous representations of activism (Hope, Pender, et al., 2019; Szymanski & Lewis, 2015). One participant stated, "Movements don't have to involve everyone, but I shop and hire black workers for my projects." In this way, selective engagement emerges as a meaningful framework that activists and educators should consider.

Taken together, these findings underscore the necessity of an intersectional framework for continuing to understand Black adults' engagement with the BLM movement, and social justice movements beyond. Perspectives were shaped not only by race, but by the intersection of ethnicity, psychological capacity, trauma history, and social positioning. Variations in support, critique, participation, abstention, and lived experiences reflect nuance in how participants made meaning of racial injustice. By highlighting how these layered experiences inform such perspectives, this study advances an intersectional understanding of critical consciousness. It also expands conceptualizations of engagement beyond visible activism to include negotiated, relational, affective, psychological forms of resistance that are meaningful and self-preserving. Participants illustrated the complexity of relating to a movement that exists within a complex ongoing anti-Black racist society, demonstrating how they articulate indirect, selective, and philosophical forms of engagement.

Participation in BLM Across Black Ethnic Groups

There were no ethnic differences in BLM participation, nor differences based on demographic characteristics such as generational status, education, or income. This finding suggests that engagement with BLM may function as a global Black political issue, which align with scholarship indicating that highly visible racial justice movements can foster a shared racialized fate unifying diverse Black populations around common experiences of anti-Black racism (Eichstaedt et al., 2021; Hunter et al., 2017; Nguyen et al., 2021; Thelamour et al., 2019).

The absence of demographic predictors (e.g., income, education level, and generation status) of participation may further suggest that BLM engagement may be less dependent on traditional socioeconomic identities and more influenced by collective racial consciousness and political climate, and global suffering. This pattern may be particularly salient given the historical moment in which BLM gained prominence during 2020, a period characterized by widespread media coverage to racialized violence and increased opportunities for both online and in-person participation (Elnakib & Turner, 2023; Freelon et al., 2016; Ince et al., 2017; Nguyen et al., 2021). These findings imply that BLM mobilization may transcend socioeconomic and ethnic differences within the U.S. population, highlighting the potential of shared racial identity and collective consciousness to drive political engagement consistent with the sentiments and reflections shared qualitatively.

Perceptions on BLM Movement Across Black Ethnic Groups

Themes of support for the BLM movement, recognition of systemic issues and criticism of the effectiveness of the movement did not differ significantly all Black ethnic groups. This suggests broad agreement among Black ethnic groups regarding the legitimacy of BLM, the structural nature of racial injustice, and ambivalence or skepticism about movement outcomes.

The consistency of these themes underscores the extent to which BLM and anti-Black racism resonates across the Black diaspora, even when individual experiences and cultural frameworks differ (Blain, 2020; Eichstaedt et al., 2021; Hunter et al., 2017). The qualitative findings further support this interpretation, as most participants emphasized how they support the movement and appreciate the solidarity across diverse cultural groups. Together, these patterns suggest that BLM serves as a unifying platform for Black communities, promoting shared recognition of systemic oppression while accommodating diverse perspectives and experiences within the diaspora.

Perceptions of BLM Participants Across Black Ethnic Groups

African immigrant participants were significantly more likely than African American and Afro-Caribbean participants to endorse themes of support and respect for participants involved in BLM. This pattern is consistent with empirical research demonstrating that Black immigrants in the U.S. have increased awareness of anti-Black racism and are increasing support for Black Lives Matter, suggesting that experiences of racism influence support and respect (Alao, 2023; Hunter et al., 2017; K. J. A. Thomas et al., 2024). The findings suggest that African immigrants may be more likely to express support for the BLM movement, which may, in part, reflect processes of both racial consciousness development. Compared to African Americans, who have a longer and more continuous history of engagement in U.S.-based social justice movements, African immigrants may experience support for BLM as more psychologically or emotionally accessible than direct activism.

Additionally, the data point to a potential "othering" dynamic, in which African immigrants may position African Americans as a distinct group, thereby creating subtle social and psychological distance. Historical parallels may also help contextualize this finding. The

Civil Rights Movement in the United States occurred alongside liberation and anti-colonial movements across the African continent during the 1960s, suggesting a shared global framework of Black resistance. More recently, the 2020 murder of George Floyd—whose Ghanaian heritage was publicly acknowledged—may have contributed to increased racial consciousness and diasporic connection among African immigrants, further shaping their support for the movement.

Interestingly, these patterns also resonate with broader international support, as West African countries such as Ghana publicly endorsed the BLM movement, including building a monument honoring George Floyd. This suggests that solidarity with BLM extends beyond the U.S. borders, reflecting global recognition of anti-Black racism, which subsequentially can be calling for an increase in consciousness among Black African immigrants residing in the U.S. there was widespread endorsement of Africans in west African countries endorsing support of the movement, even with Ghana building a monument honoring George Floyd.

Despite these ethnic differences in support and respect codes, no ethnic differences were observed in recognition of systemic issues, suggesting a shared understanding of racism as structural across Black ethnic groups. value-based orientations toward the movement.

Reasons for Participation Across Black Ethnic Groups

Among participants who reported participation in BLM, African Americans were significantly more likely to endorse personal connection to racial injustice as a motivating factor. This finding is consistent with literature documenting African Americans' long-standing, intergenerational exposure to racialized policing, violence, and discrimination in the U.S. (Elnakib & Turner, 2023; Jett, 2022; Krueger et al., 2022; Szymanski & Lewis, 2015). For African Americans, participation in BLM may be deeply rooted in lived experience, history, and perceived personal vulnerability, making engagement feel less optional and more existential.

Conversely, the absence of ethnic differences in desire for social change and collective action/solidarity codes across groups, may suggest participants shared a common desire for social change and transformative justice even if the pathways and emotional reasons of participation differed (Hordge-Freeman & Loblack, 2021b; Hunter et al., 2017).

Reasons for Abstention Across Black Ethnic Groups

Across Black ethnic groups, participants cited competing responsibilities and psychosocial/ emotional stressors at similar frequencies. This finding is consistent with prior studies establishing how structural and emotional constraints, such as time limitations, caregiving responsibilities, fear of retaliation, or emotional exhaustion, can inhibit participation (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Conner et al., 2023b; Gorski, 2019; Hope et al., 2022a). Importantly, abstention does not necessarily indicate opposition or disengagement but may reflect the burdens of navigating racial stress alongside daily survival demands for by Black individuals.

Mixed-Method Integration

Understanding the data together quantitatively and qualitatively provides a more meaningful perspective. The quantitative results identify what is happening across the population, whereas the qualitative results illustrate how and why these patterns emerge, capturing the complexity of perceptions, discourse, and decision-making. This integrated perspective allows for a richer understanding of both the extent of engagement and the motivations shaping Black adults' attitudes and behaviors regarding BLM.

Study Contributions

This study makes several contributions to scholarship on racial justice engagement, Black identity, and psychological responses to structural racism. First, the findings challenge binary conceptualizations of activism that categorize individuals as either participants or abstainers.

Participants in this study described multiple ways of relating to the movement, including active participation, selective participation, supportive distance, and deliberate abstention. Engagement therefore functioned as a continuum of positioning.

Second, the study reveals insights into the critical reflection on non-participants. Rather than indicating opposition, it was frequently reflected that emotional capacity, safety, competing responsibility and psychological burden are at stake.

Third, this study provided a more comprehensive understanding of three Black ethnic groups in the U.S., contrary to previous studies commonly focusing on African Americans. This indicates that racial injustice is relevant across different cultural understandings and frameworks, highlighting the need for future studies to disaggregate the Black population in research.

Lastly, these findings extend theories of critical consciousness by showing that awareness of systemic racism does not always translate directly to observable action. Instead, involvement was often mediated by emotional sustainability, personal capacity, belief and trust in the organization, among other affective components. Taking all these contributions into consideration, engagement with the BLM movement among Black adults in the U.S. reveals a complex relational and psychological process with many implications.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

Contributions to literature/research

Previous studies have examined specific aspects of Black adults' engagement with the BLM movement or focused on individual ethnic groups; however, this is the first mixed-method study to simultaneously explore the three largest Black ethnic groups in the U.S., examining their perspectives, attitudes toward the BLM movement, and reasons and discourse surrounding both participation in and abstention from the movement. The findings of this study contribute to and

extend scholarships on Black identity, Black perspectives and the diverse Black experience. Future research studies can re-evaluate the methods through which activism and racial identity manifest among the Black population and how this informs their psychological well-being, quality of life, and affirmation of the Black life.

Under a similar vein, future studies should also examine how critical consciousness may develop non-linearly, with reflection, processing and action occurring in cycles, and recognize that for some Black individuals, remaining at the reflection or processing component can itself be meaningful, healing, and psychologically profound.

Moreover, findings from this study enhance the understanding of the BLM movement, as there had been no prior empirical studies that examined these three distinct ethnic groups looking at their attitudes about the movement, the people involved, participation, and abstention reason. Alao (2023) emphasized that future studies should expand on their work and *"examine how Africans express their consciousness in the U.S. in relation to Afro-Caribbean, Afro Latinx.*" Building on that prior study, this current study expanded upon and examined Afro-Caribbean, African Immigrants and African Americans' perceptions of the BLM movement providing insights into how activism, racial identity, ethnic identity and lived experiences shape one's disposition to racism.

Expanding on this, future studies could further disaggregate the population of interest by examining within-group differences based on country of origin (e.g., Nigerians, Senegalese, Ethiopians, etc.) Moreover, it would be worthwhile to incorporate additional racialized factors—such as skin tone, featurism, heritage, etc. as these dimensions inform the intersection of race, racial socialization and experiences with racism.

These findings contribute to the growing body of research and provide clinicians with a more comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting their client's lives. By integrating this research into practice, clinicians can deepen their understanding of racial trauma, enhance therapeutic interventions, and remain informed about emerging developments in this topic.

Clinical Implications

Within the past decade, scholars have examined the role of counseling psychologists in relation to the Black Lives Matter movement and broader racial justice efforts (Hargons et al., 2017b). The present findings extend this growing body of literature by highlighting the complex psychological processes that shape Black adults' engagement, well-being, and responses to racial injustice. Counseling psychologists, clinicians and activists can apply these findings by acknowledging the multiple, intersecting factors that impact mental health outcomes and by conceptualizing treatment plans and recovery goals, within a scientist-activist-practitioner framework.

Traditional biopsychosocial models provide a useful foundation for case conceptualization; however, these frameworks must explicitly integrate social justice and systemic oppression within the "social" domain. Symptom reduction alone is insufficient when working with Black individuals experiencing an added layer of race-based traumatic exhaustion and stress.

Clinicians should attend to subtle or culturally nuanced expressions as signs of distress as Black individuals may not explicitly endorse depressive symptoms, rather may communicate sentiments such as "what's the point" "I am tired" "there's no hope" "I have more important things to focus on." They may struggle to find clinical language to describe the full extent of

their experiences. These expressions may reflect the cumulative racial stress rather than individual psychopathology.

Therapeutic interventions should incorporate techniques grounded in ethnic-racial identity development and consider the impact of social and systemic issues on mental health. Approaches that emphasize Black empowerment, advocacy, and affirming of Black lives can be especially effective in supporting resilience and psychological well-being. The findings also underscore the importance of expanding culturally responsive interventions beyond frameworks validated on Black/African American populations. Much of the Black healing practices that have been cited in the literature (e.g., radical healing, mindfulness for African American) can be expanding to be more inclusive to Afro-Caribbean and African immigrants. There is a charge for more culturally sensitive therapy tailored specific for different Black ethnic groups taking into consideration their ethnic identity, experience with racism in American and their views on what is like to exist and embedded in an anti-Black racist culture. Additionally, clinicians must avoid overgeneralization and recognize the intra-group variability that shapes how individuals interpret and respond to racialized experiences.

Findings from this study suggest that overall while participants largely support the BLM movement, their engagement varies considerably based on many factors. Psychological strain, emotional fatigue, hopelessness and competing life responsibilities were some of the biggest barriers for lack of involvement. This complexity underscores the need for a more comprehensive understanding of activism and support within marginalized groups.

Psychologists, advocates and clinicians should consider how race-based traumatic stress may shape individuals' engagement with social justice movements. Symptoms commonly associated with race-based traumatic stress–exhaustion, hopelessness, emotional fatigue, and

hypervigilance—are consistent with the experiences described my participants. Clinicians should assess and contextualize these responses within the broader sociopolitical landscape, recognizing that both direct exposure to racial injustice and vicarious witnessing can contribute to cumulative psychological strain. Integrating interventions that address collective trauma, racial stress, and emotional depletion are essential.

Importantly, the processing phase of the CCABR model represents an important site for psychological intervention and support. Although most participants expressed strong support for BLM, majority of participants were also in the ambivalence category for participation. This suggests that remaining in the processing phase does not necessarily reflect failure of critical action, but rather ongoing psychological engagement. Participants described fears of being killed, concerns related to immigration, financial and disability status, religious beliefs, and psychological reasons as reasons to not participant directly. Yet they simultaneously articulated support in spirit, emotionally and cognitively aligning themselves with the movement's core aims. This coexistence reflects meaningful investment and psychologically acting critically. Counseling psychologists are uniquely positioned to normalize this form of engagement, helping Black individuals understand psychological engagement is valid and transformative.

Importantly, the present study included a more comprehensive understanding of the heterogeneity within Black communities in the U.S. clinical frameworks often rely on research conducted primarily with African American samples, which may not fully capture the cultural and sociopolitical nuance. These distinctions are clinically meaningful and given this complexity, counseling psychologists are uniquely positioned to lead interdisciplinary efforts within the mental health field by integrating social justice and culturally responsive principles into training, supervision, and clinical practice. This may include providing racial justice

education and professional development seminars that enhance clinicians' ability to assess race-based traumatic stress while also recognizing the ethnic variability within the Black community.

Community Implications

Findings from this study highlight that Black adults' relationship to the Black Lives Matter movement are shaped by complex processing of meaning-making, capacity negotiation, racial trauma, and collective responsibility. Intra-community fractures, colorism, ethnic distinctions, self and community blame, ideological differences influence solidarity and collective action, suggesting interventions and community strategies must account for these internal dynamics. These processes extend beyond individual attitudes or behaviors and have important implications for Black communities, activist spaces, and collective healing practices. Findings suggest community engagement and solidarity cannot be assumed as automatic or uniform, even in the face of shared racial oppression. This has important implications for community organizations, grassroots movements and activist spaces. Creating environments where Black individuals can express divergent perspectives while remaining connected to the broader struggle may strengthen collective resilience. Moreover, promoting empowering healing circles and affirming spaces in neighborhoods and local community centers can provide supportive spaces.

For educators working within schools, universities, and community-based educational settings, the findings suggest the importance of recognizing that Black adults are engaging with social justice movements affectively and psychologically. Educators may therefore benefit from creating learning environments that allow students to process these mixed feelings through reflection, dialogue, and narrative expression without the additive pressure to adopt a particular stance on activism.

The findings also carry important implications for activists and movement organizers. Participants' critiques of the BLM movement specifically regarding leadership, methods and effectiveness, were frequently expressed alongside support of the movement's core aims. This suggests that the critiques reflect investment and accountability, rather than simple opposition. Activist spaces that actively welcome internal dialogue, and community feedback may be successful by incorporating some of the critical conversations and statements. Moreover, the rejection of binary categories of participators versus abstainers, ambivalence, neutrality, highlights the need for more movement cultures that accommodate multiple pathways to engagement. Providing varied avenues for involvement such as education, social media, resource sharing, artistic expression, advocacy via dialogue, etc. can reduce burnout, mitigate guilt or shame, and broaden overall inclusion.

Community organizations and activist spaces can strengthen collective resilience by acknowledging the continuum of engagement, providing multiple avenues for involvement that accommodate diverse capacities, and validating both active and indirect contributions.

Limitations/ Future research

While this study offers valuable insights into the perspectives of U.S. Black adults regarding the BLM movement, it is not without limitations and should be considered when

interpreting the findings. The study had limitations related to generalizability, sample population, ethnic categorization, and sampling methods.

Sample Characteristics and Generalizability

A strength of this present study was the relatively large sample size (N=206), and the inclusion of multiple Black ethnic groups, which contributes to a more representative understanding of Black experiences than the typically monolithic samples. However, the findings

remain preliminary and cannot be assumed to generalize broadly across the entire United States Black population.

Firstly, the sample was composed of primarily emerging adults aged 25–34 (54.3%, n=112/206) residing on the East Coast of the U.S., predominantly female-identified (73%), with an annual income of $60,000–$80,000+ (54%; 112/206), and a majority (70%; 145/206) having completed higher education (e.g., bachelor's degree or advanced). This sample composition may overrepresent the perspectives of younger, financially stable, and highly educated Black adults potentially limiting insights into the experiences of lower-income or less formally educated Black individuals. It is also important to acknowledge the role of structural and educational privilege within this sample. Participants had the time, resources, and capacity to engage in the study and provide detailed, reflective responses.

The sample composition may overrepresent the perspectives of younger, financially stable, and highly educated Black adults, potentially limiting insights into the experiences of lower-income or less formally educated Black individuals. It is important to acknowledge the role of structural, educational and economic privilege. Specifically, 68.3% of participants had a bachelor's degree or higher, 54.4% reported an annual income of at least $60,000, and the largest income category was over $80,000, representing 35.9% of participants. Given that education and SES can shape experiences of privilege and racialized meaning-making among Black Americans, the generalizability of these findings may be limited (Cole & Omari, 2003).

As a result, these findings are not fully representative of the broader Black population. This limitation is consistent with a common challenge in academic research, particularly studies that rely on convenience sampling. Future studies would do well to invest resources in recruiting

a more socioeconomically and educationally diverse and representative sample of Black populations in the U.S.

Furthermore, the geographic concentration of participants in the Northeastern United States may have influenced the results. Regional differences in racial climate, political orientation, and exposure to diversity may shape how individuals perceive and engage with movements such as BLM. For example, a Black male residing in Minneapolis—where George Floyd was murdered—or individuals living in the South or Midwest may have qualitatively different experiences and perspectives.

Future research should prioritize more representative sampling across regions, socioeconomic statuses, gender identities, and educational backgrounds to better capture the diversity of perspectives within the Black diaspora.

The geographical concentration of respondents centering specifically in the Northeast coast of the U.S. (e.g., Maryland, Delaware, NY, NJ, VA) further limits national representativeness, as experiences of racialization and engagement with social movements may differ across regions. This underscores the necessity for a more geographically representative national sample to capture the full spectrum of experiences among Black individuals across the United States. In addition to expanding demographic diversity, future studies will include a wider age range and socioeconomic status to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Categorization of Black Ethnic Identity

This study presents preliminary findings on a complex phenomenon, and its scope is enhanced by the diversity of ethnic group variation among Black participants. This is a strength as this robust and diverse sample size is more representative of the U.S. Black population, contrary to common ethnically homogenous samples. However, there was a small population of

Afro-Caribbeans included in this study (n=30). Furthermore, the study categorizes individuals into three broad categories (i.e. African American, Afro-Caribbean, African immigrant) and future studies can explore more within group differences—that is, an African immigrant from East Africa may have a different experience than a West African immigrant. To address these limitations, future research endeavors should prioritize disaggregating the data encompassing specific experiences of East African, West African, Haitian, Jamaican subjects, etc., and include a more robust sample of people with multiple ethnic groups.

Recruitment and Sampling Procedures

This present study utilized convenience sampling and community sampling. While this is an appropriate and practical method employed given the population of interest, and nature of the subject, this can also introduce selection bias and limit the representation of responses. Many participants were sent flyers through social media, academic emails, academic Twitter (e.g., principal investigator's academic account), and word of mouth, etc. This can unintentionally create a selection bias as most participants were Black individuals with higher education, higher SES, in the academic, professional spaces. It is important to acknowledge this, and future studies can utilize random sampling or a method that can reach a wider nationally representative pool of individuals.

Data Collection Methodology

Furthermore, the subject matter of this study is complex and sensitive in nature. Collecting data through typed, open-ended responses may have limited the depth and nuance of participants' disclosures. Although this format afforded participants privacy and autonomy, the use of written text, contrary to verbal responses, poses a limitation of the breadth of detail they

can share. Future studies would do well to center on virtual or in-person interviews that capture comprehensive and in-depth experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of Black individuals.

Additionally, prior to answering the 4 open-ended qualitative questions, participants completed an extensive set of multiple-choice questions assessing their experience with race-based traumatic stress. This ordering and structure of survey questions could have contributed to participant fatigue and reduced response detail toward the end of the survey. Future research should consider separating these components or presenting the qualitative questions earlier in the survey to preserve the response depth and richness.

Future research would benefit from systematically examining how question type influences response depth, including the extent to which certain questions evoke emotional engagement, critical reflection, or guardedness. Such analyses may provide deeper insight into how individuals process and articulate their perspectives on sensitive sociopolitical topics.

Finally, for qualitative question 3, participants were asked to "explain why they were or were not involved in the BLM movement" without first indicating participation status through a close-ended item. Including an initial explicit participation question (e.g., Are you involved in the BLM movement? Select: yes, no, other) would allow respondents to self-identify their engagement prior to elaboration in the open-ended questions and may improve clarity and interpretability of qualitative responses.

Quantitative Limitations

Quantitative limitations should also be acknowledged. Sample size constraints for codes particularly for codes derived from qualitative data, may have limited statistical power. For instance, there were 22 codes, but the number of participants endorsing codes had a cell count below 5, which may have contributed to the lack of significant findings. Second, participants

could not self-select participation or abstention label which may have reduced the precision of the analyses and overlooked meaningful variation in identity and involvement experience.

Conclusion

This study examined how a diverse group of Black adults in the United States understand and relate to the BLM movement in the context of ongoing racial injustice though an intersectional lens. Findings indicate that responses to the movement are complex and multifaceted, reflecting the interplay of critical reflection, psychological navigation, participation as moral obligation, and emotional capacity. Participants endorse support and necessity of the movement as both personally and globally meaningful, yet sometimes constrained by exhaustion, burnout, hopelessness, or competing life demands. The findings highlight that Black individuals in the U.S. are carrying and responding to psychological and practical weight of caring while navigating daily life under ongoing racial threat. Recognizing this has implications for research, clinical practice and community work.

Taken together, this study highlights that engagement with social movements among ethnically diverse Black adults operates as a continuum of coping, identity negotiation, and collective responsibility under the conditions of racism. Recognizing this complexity has important implications for research, clinical practice, education, and community interventions seeking to support holistic well-being within Black communities.

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Summary of Demographics, Themes, Coding, and Analyses**: Tables and Figures**

Table 1

Participant Sociodemographic Characteristics

Characteristic	Self-identified category	n	%
Ethnicity	African American	89	43.7
	African Immigrant	87	41.3
	Afro-Caribbean	30	14.6
Gender	Man	56	27.2
	Women	150	72.8
Age (years)	18–24	25	12.1
	25–34	119	57.8
	35–44	42	20.4
	45–65	22	10.7
Education Level	K–12	61	29.6
	College Degree	79	38.3
	Advanced Degree	66	32.0
Generation Status	Born outside the U.S.	67	32.5
	Born in the U.S., parents immigrated	58	28.2
	Self, parents, and grandparents born in U.S.	81	39.3
SES (Annual Income)	Under $20,000	12	5.8
	$20,000–$40,000	37	18.0
	$40,000–$60,000	45	21.8
	$60,000–$80,000	38	18.5
	$80,000+	74	35.9

Table 2

Definitions of Thematic Codes Qualitative Questions 1 and 2

Thematic Codes	Description
Support for the Movement	Expression of general support for the goals and objectives of the Black Lives Matter movement, organization and/or ideology.
Criticism of BLM organization	Critical or negative commentary about the leadership, motives or deviation from original goals/mission of the BLM
Personal reflection on involvement	Reflection on personal involvement and others contribution to the movement, sometimes beyond just marching
Recognition of systemic issues	Acknowledgment of the deep-rooted societal issues (e.g., anti-Black violence, police brutality, discrimination etc.) impacting Black communities.
Internal divisions within the Black community	Perceived lack of unity and concerns about intra-community relations.
Criticism effectiveness and longevity of the Movement	Concerns regarding the sustainability, impact, and methods, of BLM.
Admiration and respect	Expressed admiration, pride, and respect for those involved in the movement and for their courage and dedication.
Concerns about violence or destruction	Expressed disagreement with violence or destruction in protests, expressing preference for peaceful methods.
Importance of collective action	The belief that collective action, protesting and solidarity are crucial for achieving change.
Indifferent/neutral	Expressed lack of opinion for or against engagement on BLM

Table 3

Definitions of Thematic Codes Qualitative Question 3 Participation Reasons

Thematic Codes	Description
Personal connection to racial injustice	Comments related to direct personal experiences with racial discrimination or bias or witnessing the effects of such injustices.
Desire for social change	Comments related to the belief in the need to address societal injustices and push for systemic changes that promote fairness and equality.
Empathy for the suffering of Black people	Comments related to emotional motivation, empathy, for witnessing struggles and pain, of Black individuals due to racial injustice and violence.
Belief in civil rights and equality	Comments related to a firm belief in the importance of civil rights and equality for all individuals, aligning with the movement's core goals.
Affirmation of Black people's lives	Comments related to the belief that Black lives should be valued equally and treated with respect, dignity, and fairness.
Solidarity and collective action	Comments related to the belief in the strength of unity and collective efforts to create positive social change

Table 4

Definitions of Thematic Categories Qualitative Question 3 Abstention Reasons

Thematic Category	Description
Competing responsibilities and/or obligations over activism	Comments related to engagement in other responsibilities, such as work, family obligations, or personal activities, that limit the ability to participate in activism
Psychosocial emotional reasons	Comments related to emotional reasons, anger, frustration, fear about racial injustice, fear of burnout or social ramifications.
Unsure of impact	Comments related to the doubts about whether meaningful change or whether individual involvement will have any real effect.
Lack of personal connection to the cause	Comments related to not feeling a personal connection to the struggles of Black Americans, and/or not fully connecting to impact of racial the cause.
Disagreement/misunderstanding with Movement's Ideology	Comments related to a lack of understanding of its goals, disagreement with its methods, or opposition to its political/ideological stance
Limited focus	Belief that the movement focuses too heavily on race or neglects other important issues such as economic inequality or healthcare

Table 5

Frequency Categories Qualitative Question 1 General Thoughts on BLM

Code Endorsed	# of Participants endorsing code	Ethnicity			Sample Quote
	Total	AA	CARIB	African	
Support for BLM Movement	122	55	20	47	*I fully support the movement. I think it's disheartening how society has allowed for the wrongful misinterpretation of a movement that is supposed to support and uplift others.*
Recognition of systemic issues	54	20	8	26	*Recent acts of violence affecting the Black community have been distressing and have highlighted ongoing systemic issues. Tragic incidents like the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery.*
Criticism about effectiveness	30	8	4	18	*Not sure how it's benefiting us of bringing change*
Indifferent/neutral	23	15	1	7	*Honestly, I don't have any thoughts.*
Criticism of BLM organization	19	9	4	6	*More popular and a catch phrase for a completely opposite rhetoric. Takes away from the needed conversation of justice for black persons in American*
Solidarity and collective action	14	2	7	5	*I think the movement has done a good job in creating a structured community that brings not only blacks but people of different races together to fight social justice for African Americans.*
Internal division within Black Community	6	1	3	2	*…the BLM is a way to bring awareness to Blacks living here in America. Yet, Blacks themselves murder their own kind yet you expect or blame the Whites to do something about our community. While as we as black people don't*

					even try to do better. Instead we go and do illegal stuff.
Admiration and respect	6	5	0	1	*I admire those who are taking a stand for Black people and it's sad we have to protest to convince people they our lives matter and convince them that the police are dangerous forces that often target Black people.*
Reflection on involvement	5	3	0	2	*People in the public may call the leaders "scammers", but if I get unjustly harmed or shot, I know who will stand up for me. This movement United black people.*
Concerns about violence/destruction	3	1	2	0	*Overall I support the movement but I disagree with the others who have joined who are looting. It adds a negative perspective to BLM and of course, this is what is portrayed in the media*

Note. AA denotes African American; CARIB denotes Afro-Caribbean; and African denotes African immigrant.

Table 6

Frequency Categories Qualitative Question 2 Thoughts on Participants of BLM

Code Endorsed	# of Participants endorsing code	Ethnicity			Sample Quote
	Total	AA	CARIB	African	
Support for BLM Movement	112	50	11	51	*I am also Black American and I support it. We have to back our own community, especially when so many other cultural groups are against us.*
Admiration and respect	70	24	18	28	*I view them as noble and I think they deserve our support, love, and care. We all have different roles in the movement and it is important that we work together.*
Recognition of systemic issues	28	10	6	12	*I view Black Americans as leaders that challenge the normalcy of anti-Black racism at all levels of society. They call out people who engage and perpetuate missteps, ranging from subtle to egregious forms.*
Indifferent/neutral	19	10	1	8	*White people and black people are equal*
Solidarity and collective action	16	5	3	8	*I appreciate it. WE NEED TO STAND TOGETHER*
Criticism of effectiveness	9	4	2	3	*They are well meaning and well intentioned but ultimately, the efficacy of the marches is questionable at best. I think our time and efforts would be much better spent solving the issues that are prevalent and only prevalent within our community as opposed to wasting time marching.*

Personal reflection on involvement	9	3	1	5	*I fully support black people who protest, march and advocate on behalf of black lives. There is a place for everyone to do advocacy work and commend them for putting their livelihood on the line for movement.*
Criticism of BLM organization	5	2	1	2	*Although I may not agree morally with everything the founders have done, I think it's great to know who stands with the mission when I see a Black Lives Matter shirt or it in someone's instagram bio.*
Concerns about violence/destruction	6	3	2	1	*I am proud of the Black Americans who protest, march and advocate on behalf of BLM. But i think we need to do better and some Blacks take things too far, like stealing and looting and violence is not okay. Sometimes it is needed but other times we can have a peaceful protest*
Internal division within Black community	5	1	3	1	*This is a great way to get our voice heard but again, we had to fix what broken on the inside before we can try to be unified and stand against the oppressors*

Note. AA denotes African American; CARIB denotes Afro-Caribbean; and African denotes African immigrant.

Table 7

Frequency Categories Qualitative Question 3 Participation Reasons

Code Endorsed	# of Participants endorsing code	Ethnicity			Sample Quote
	Total	AA	CARIB	African	
Desire for social change	38	9	4	25	*I am involved because this is work towards the greater good not just for Black people, but for our entire planet*
Personal connection to racial injustice	17	8	5	4	*I'm involved because I am black, I have family and friends that are black and I can't see injustice continue on for any longer. It's not fair*
Solidarity and collective action	15	4	2	9	*I feel if Blacks are protesting because of a traumatic event that has happened in the Black communities, I should show solidarity.*
Empathy for the suffering of Black people	10	1	3	6	*Because as a Black American, I can not stand by and stay silent to the harm and killing of my people.*
Belief in civil rights and Equality	9	4	1	4	*I am involved in the moment because I believe that it is a personal responsibility to stand up and advocate when injustices are occurring.*
Affirmation of Black people's lives	6	3	0	3	*I am black human. A whole being not 3/5 of a person. Black lives do matter. My life matters. My family's lives matter, the ppl who I know lives matter.*

Note. AA denotes African American; CARIB denotes Afro-Caribbean; and African denotes African immigrant.

Table 8

Frequency Categories Qualitative Question 3 Abstention Reasons

Code Endorsed	# of Participants endorsing code	Ethnicity			Sample Quote
	Total	AA	CARIB	African	
Psychosocial emotional	29	11	4	14	*I am not actively involved but I am part of the movement simply because I am Black. The reason I am not actively involved is because I do not want to get killed by protesting. It's also a lot of work*
Competing responsibilities	21	5	6	10	*I am not directly involved in the movement because I am pursuing other things unrelated to BLM but have similar goals to BLM through advocacy, initiative taking, research, etc. I also did not get involved at the height of the BLM movement because of COVID.*
Unsure of impact	8	2	3	3	*I support the movement but am not involved in the movement as much as I would like. That is because I am scared of wasting my time. I support the movement, but I do not really know what impact the movement has had.*
Disagreement/ misunderstanding with movement's ideology	8	2	4	4	*I am not involved in the BLM movement as my values as a person does not align with what they do or represent. The leaders of the organisation have profitted personally from black tragedy in America*

					and continue to enrichen themselves and their families on the backs of black men who have been murdered.
Lack of personal connection	4	0	2	2	*I'm not involved because I feel like other people are going to do it and I also don't really have the energy for it if I'm being honest*
Limited focus	4	1	1	2	*Because I feel like I can spend my time doing other things to help Black people globally. A lot of my focus is especially on helping black immigrants get established in America.*

Note. AA denotes African American; CARIB denotes Afro-Caribbean; and African denotes African immigrant.

Table 9

Qualitative Codes for Overarching Themes

Codes	Overarching Theme	Interpretive Insight
• Support for the movement • Admiration for movement/participants • Criticism of movement leadership • Criticism of effectiveness • Violence	BLM as a necessary but contested vehicle for Black liberation	Participants view BLM as necessary and morally legitimate, yet critically evaluate its leadership, methods, and impact.
• Reflection on self and others • Naming systemic issues	Critical consciousness, reflection, and psychological navigation	Highlights participants' ongoing critical reflection, emotional processing, and negotiation of responsibility in understanding racial injustice.
• Collective Action within the Black community • Internal Division within the Black community	Solidarity as a negotiation: Collective Action and Intragroup Tensions	Solidarity is not automatic; intersectional differences and internal divisions shape collective engagement and perceptions of responsibility.
• Desire for social change • Personal connection • Solidarity / Collective Action • Belief in civil rights • Affirmation of Black lives	Participation is a moral, affective and collective obligation	Participation reflects moral, relational, and identity-driven motivations rooted in empathy, historical consciousness, and affirmation of Black life.
• Competing responsibilities • Psychosocial / emotional reasons • Unsure of impact • Disagreement / misunderstanding • Narrow focus	Capacity and psychological preservation influence abstention	Abstention often reflects strategic self-preservation, emotional burden, and practical constraints beyond opposition to the movement.
• Neutral/indifferent thoughts	Nuance in Ambivalence: Philosophical Neutrality and Selective Engagement	Participants reject binary labels of participation/abstention, demonstrating nuanced, selective, or philosophical engagement with BLM.

Table 10

Binary Logistic Regression Output for BLM Participation

Predictor	**B**	**SE**	**Wald χ^2**	**df**	***p***	**OR**
African Americans	—	—	0.17	2	.921	—
Afro-Caribbeans	0.16	0.82	0.04	1	.842	1.18
African Immigrants	−0.19	0.66	0.08	1	.775	0.83
Third Generation	—	—	1.22	2	.543	—
First generation	−0.51	0.49	1.08	1	.300	0.60
Second generation	−0.07	0.86	0.01	1	.938	0.94
Bachelor's degree	—	—	0.69	2	.707	—
K-12 Education	0.29	0.45	0.40	1	.525	1.33
Advanced degree	−0.16	0.58	0.08	1	.776	0.85
Low Income	—	—	0.62	2	.733	—
Middle Income	0.21	0.46	0.21	1	.645	1.24
High Income	0.47	0.61	0.60	1	.439	1.61

Table 11

Chi Square Analysis of Most Endorsed Codes for QQ 1: General thoughts on BLM

Code Endorsed	# of Participants endorsing code	Ethnicity			*p* value
	Total	AA	CARIB	African	
Support for movement	122	55	20	47	*.724*
Recognition of systemic issues	54	20	8	26	*.420*
Criticism of effectiveness	30	8	4	18	*.060*

Note. AA denotes African American; CARIB denotes Afro-Caribbean; and African denotes African immigrant.

Table 12

Chi Square Analysis of Most Endorsed Codes for QQ 2: Thoughts on BLM Participants

Code Endorsed	# of Participants endorsing code	Ethnicity			*p* value
	Total	AA	CARIB	African	
Support for movement	112	50	11	51	*.036*
Admiration and respect	70	24	18	28	*.010*
Recognition of systemic issues	28	10	6	12	*.540*

Note. AA denotes African American; CARIB denotes Afro-Caribbean; and African denotes African immigrant.

Table 13

Chi Square Analysis of Most Endorsed Codes for QQ 3: Participation Reasons

Code Endorsed	# of Participants endorsing code	Ethnicity			*p* value
	Total	AA	CARIB	African	
Desire for social change	38	9	4	25	*.122*
Personal connection to racial injustice	17	8	5	4	*.006*
Solidarity and collective action	16	5	2	9	*.929*

Note. AA denotes African American, CARIB denotes Afro-Caribbean, and African denotes African immigrant.

Table 14

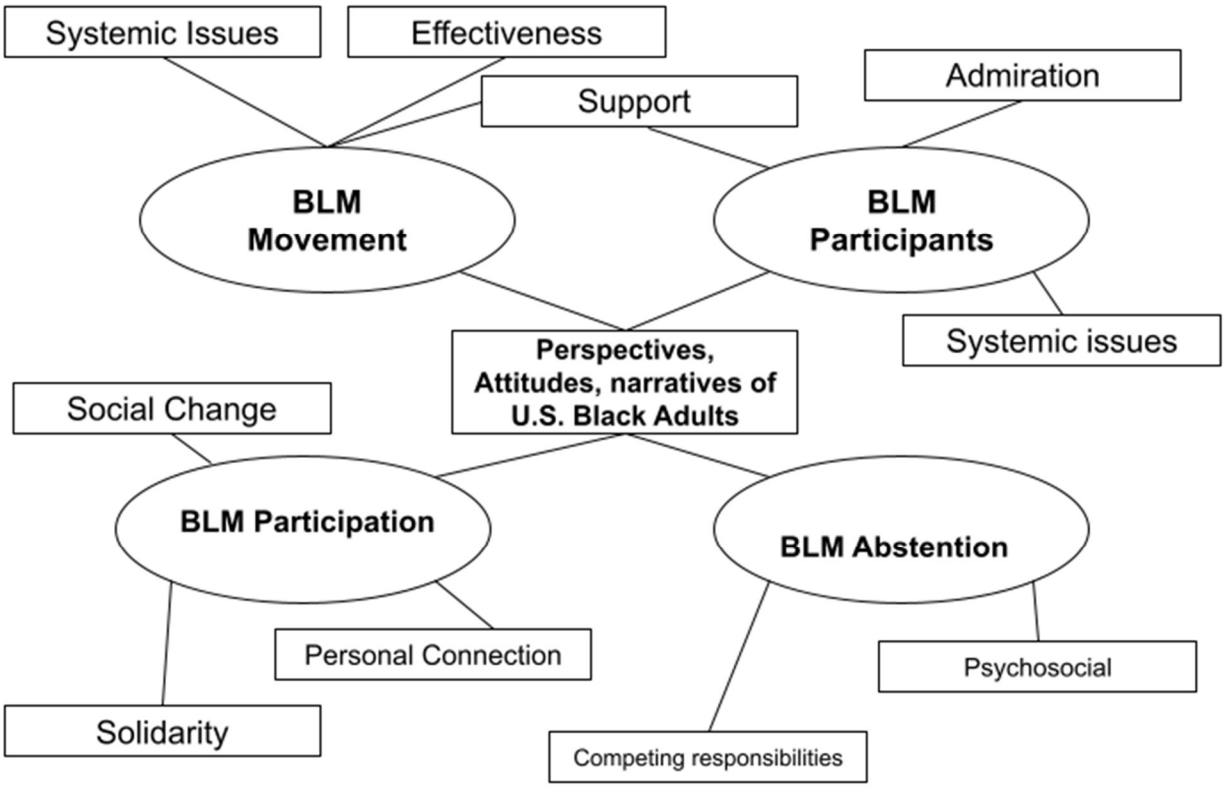
Chi Square Analysis of Most Endorsed Codes for QQ 3: Abstention Reasons

Code Endorsed	# of Participants endorsing code	Ethnicity			*p* value
	Total	AA	CARIB	African	
Psychosocial emotional	29	11	4	14	*.126*
Competing responsibilities	21	5	6	10	*.245*

Note. AA denotes African American, CARIB denotes Afro-Caribbean, and African denotes African immigrant.

Figure 1

Most Frequently Endorsed Thematic Codes in U.S. Black Adults' Narratives of BLM



Note. Systemic Issues= Recognition of Systemic, Effectiveness= Criticism of Effectiveness, Support= Support for movement, Personal connection= Personal Connection to Racial Injustice, Admiration= Admiration and respect, Social Change= Desire for Social Change, Solidarity= Solidarity and Collective action, Psychosocial= Psychosocial Emotional

Appendix A

Recruitment Email

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Marsha Akoto, and I am a Counseling Psychology PhD student at Lehigh University. I am currently working on a research study under the direction of my advisor, Dr. Vanesa Mora Ringle. We are inviting you to participate in our research project examining Black activism, racial trauma, and perceptions of the Black Lives Matter Movement within the Black community. This study will help us to gain a better understanding of Black liberation, psychological well-being, and solidarity in spite of recent tragedies that have plagued the Black community.

In order to participate in this study, you must self-identify as African, Black, African American, have part or total African ancestry, or belong in the African diaspora. You must be at least 18 years of age or older, must live in the United States and be literate in English. This survey will take approximately 20-25 minutes to complete and must be completed only once. Your participation will be completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time if you wish to.

At the end of the survey, you will have the opportunity to be entered into a drawing for a $25 gift card, you will have a chance of receiving 1 of 5 gift cards, if you wish to submit your email address. Electing to participate in the drawing does not impact the anonymity of your responses as your answers to this survey will not be associated with the information you provide to enter into the gift drawing.

The protocol for this study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board for protection of human subjects at Lehigh University. IRB ID: 2058859-1

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact Marsha Akoto at maa821@lehigh.edu or Dr. Ringle at vmoraringle@lehigh.edu.

Survey Link:

https://lehigh.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eIEINTItVylbV3M

Appendix B

Recruitment Flyer



Appendix C

Informed Consent

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine racial trauma, activism between ethnic groups in the Black community, and Black Critical Consciousness, perceptions and involvement of the Black Lives Matter Movement among Black adults.

Eligibility Criteria: Respondents must be at least 18 years or older and self-identify as Black, African American, or belonging to the African diaspora and living in the United States and literate in English.

Procedures: If you wish to participate in this study, please select the "I agree to participate" option below. You will be directed to a series of questions, please select the continue arrow at the bottom of each page after you have answered all questions on the page.

Duration of Participation: This survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

Potential risks: You will be asked questions pertaining to life experiences including adversity, and racial trauma. We are also asking you to describe thoughts, feelings and behaviors about these experiences. You may experience some distress in completing these assessments. At the end of the survey, we encourage you to take time to relax. Additional resources will also be provided at the end of the survey if you wish to seek supportive services.

Potential benefits: Subjects may benefit from reflecting on their thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and experiences. They may also derive satisfaction by checking cultural biases and eliminating negative stereotypes among different ethnic groups. This research may help to identify factors contributing to success and unity of the Black community, subsequently benefiting psychological distress.

Compensation: At the end of this survey, you will be given the opportunity to click on a link to provide your email address. You will be entered into a raffle to potentially win a $25 amazon gift card; you will have a chance to win 1 out of 5 $25 Amazon gift cards.

Confidentiality: All your responses are completely anonymous and will be kept confidential. The results of this study will be de-identified and cannot be traced back to you. Email addresses collected at the end for the optional raffle will be kept confidential, will remain password-

protected, and will only be accessible to the researcher and PI that are named in this IRB. There will not be efforts made to link your email address with responses.

Voluntary Nature of Participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may skip any questions that you are not comfortable answering or withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

Contact Information: If you have any questions about this research project, you can contact Marsha Akoto at maa821@lehigh.edu, or Dr. Vanesa Mora Ringle at vmoraringle@lehigh.edu. If you have concerns about the ethics of this research study, you can contact the Lehigh Institutional Review Board at 610-758-2871, or inirb@lehigh.edu.

Documentation of Informed Consent: I have read the information provided above which describes the purpose of this study, my participation in the study, and the nature of the study. I have carefully read the entire consent form and am prepared to participate in the research study described above. If you agree to participate, please click "I agree" at the bottom of the page. If you do not agree to participate, kindly exit out of the study.

- ○ I agree to participate
- ○ I do not agree to participate

Appendix D

Pre-Survey and Demographic Questionnaire

Pre-Survey Questionnaire

Do you self-identify as Black?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Are you fluent in English?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Do you currently reside in the United States?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Demographic Questionnaire

Please select your age:

- ○ 18-24
- ○ 25-34
- ○ 35-44
- ○ 45-54
- ○ 55-64
- ○ 65+

Please select your gender:

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Other (self-describe): _____

Please name the state that you live in:

_____

Please select how you identify ethnically:

- ○ African (e.g. Ghanaian, Nigerian, etc.)

  _____

  _____

- ○ African-American or Black American
- ○ Afro-Caribbean or Afro-Hispanic

  _____

- ○ Multi-Ethnic (Please specify)

  _____

- ○ Other (Please specify)

  _____

Please select the most applicable generation status in the United States:

- ○ I was born outside the U.S. (e.g., Nigeria), and moved to the U.S. (1)
- ○ I was born in the U.S. but both parent(s) immigrated. (2)
- ○ One parent and I were born in the U.S. (other parents immigrated). (3)
- ○ Both parents and I were born in the U.S. (4)
- ○ Both parents and I were born outside the U.S. (7)
- ○ Grandparents, parents, and I were born in the U.S. (5)
- ○ Great-grandparents and beyond were born in the U.S. (6)

Please select your religious identification:

- ○ Catholic
- ○ Islamic/Muslim
- ○ Christian
- ○ Agnostic
- ○ Atheist
- ○ Other (self-describe) _____

Please select the highest level of education you have completed:

- ○ No formal education
- ○ Elementary school graduate
- ○ Middle school graduate
- ○ High school graduate
- ○ College graduate
- ○ Advanced graduate (M.A., PhD, MD)

Please select the highest level of education your mother has completed:

- ○ No formal education
- ○ Elementary school graduate
- ○ Middle school graduate
- ○ High school graduate
- ○ College graduate
- ○ Advanced graduate (M.A., PhD, MD)

Please select the highest level of education your father has completed:

- ○ No formal education
- ○ Elementary school graduate
- ○ Middle school graduate
- ○ High school graduate
- ○ College graduate
- ○ Advanced graduate (M.A., PhD, MD)

Please select your approximate household income before taxes:

- ○ Under $ 20,000
- ○ $20,000 to less than $40,000
- ○ $40,000 to less than $60,000
- ○ $60,000 to less than $80,000
- ○ $80,000 or more

Please select your political affiliation:

- ○ Liberal
- ○ Moderate
- ○ Conservative
- ○ No political affiliation
- ○ Other (Please describe)

Appendix E

Open Ended Survey Questions

Qualitative Q #1 Given the recent acts of violence that have taken place in the Black community, what are your thoughts on the Black Lives Matter Movement?

Qualitative Q #2 As an individual who identifies as Black, how do you personally view the Black Americans who protest, march, and advocate on behalf of the Black Lives Matter movement?

Qualitative Q #3 Witnessing the traumatic events that have happened in the Black community, what ways are you involved/active in the Black Lives Matter movement? (e.g. donating money, protesting, campaigning etc.)

Qualitative Q #4 Explain why you ARE involved in the movement OR explain why you ARE NOT involved in the movement (please provide specific reasons).

Appendix F

Debriefing Form

The purpose of this survey is to examine Black activism, racial trauma, and perceptions of the Black Lives Matter Movement within the Black community. This study will help us to gain a better understanding of Black liberation, psychological well-being and solidarity in spite of recent tragedies that have plagued the Black community.

In the event that you experience discomfort or distress related to your participation in this study, the following resources will be available to you to contact:

The National Crisis Line: 988
Therapy for Black Men: (646)-780-8278
Therapy For Black Girls: info@therapyforblackgirls.com.

If you are experiencing an immediate mental health crisis (e.g. suicidal thoughts, thoughts of self-harm, thoughts of homicidal behavior), call 911 and seek assistance at your nearest emergency room.

Appendix G

Content Analysis Coding Process Steps

Step	Description	Approx Due Date
Step 1: Data Familiarization	Read through the qualitative responses multiple times to gain an in-depth understanding of the data.	2/6
Step 2: Initial Identification of Constructs	Identify potential constructs based on literature and emerging codes within the data.	2/6
Step 3: Establishing Units of Meaning	Decide whether to segment responses into phrases, sentences, or paragraphs for coding.	2/13
Step 4: Initial Coding Process	Develop an initial set of 10-20 dominant codes. Each coder analyzes 42 responses/qual questions	2/27
Step 5: Refinement of Coding Framework and Discussing and Reconciling Coding Discrepancies	Coders meet and collaboratively adjust coding codes based on emerging codes and patterns from initial analysis.	3/1
Step 6:	Lead Coder-Develop a full codebook with codes, clear operational definitions for each code and document inclusion/exclusion criteria. Lead coder will train RAs on using codebook	3/14
Step 7: Finalizing the Codebook	Coders will collaboratively code a new subset of data w/ codebook and refine codes. Saturation will be assessed during this phase; if no new codes emerge and redundancy data is observed, coding will move forward.	3/20
Step 8: Send codebook to outside auditor	Codebook will be sent to Dr. Mora Ringle for approval and finalization of codebook. Lead coder will update the codebook if needed.	4/20
Step 9: Establishing codebook Interrater Reliability (IRR)	Independently code a subset of data 28% (n=60) and measure % agreement. Lead coder calculate IRR	5/5
Step 10: Application of Finalized Codes to Full Dataset	Once IRR is established, coders will independently code a random subset of responses (n=42) to finalize IRR.	5/19

Step 11: Final Coding of Remaining Data	Coders will independently code the remaining responses.	5/19-6/27
Step 12: Reliability Check and Consensus	Any discrepancies will be discussed and resolved during meetings	5/19-6/27
Step 13: Coding of the Remaining Data	Continue coding process; if no new concepts arise, the process is considered complete.	5/19-6/27
Step 14: Statistical Reliability Analysis	Cohen's Kappa or Krippendorff's alpha will be computed to assess reliability or % agreement.	6/27-7/1
Step 15: Final Review and Thematic Analysis	Ensure consistency across coded data and finalize codes.	6/27-7/1

Appendix H
Curriculum Vita

Marsha A. Akoto
(614)-805-0839| Maa821@lehigh.edu

CANDIDATE BIOGRAPHY

Marsha A. Akoto is a Black Ghanaian-American scholar-clinician whose work centers culturally responsive mental health care, Black mental health, racial identity, social justice, and psychological healing among historically marginalized communities. She earned her doctoral degree in Counseling Psychology from Lehigh University in 2026. Her dissertation examined Black adults' engagement with and perspectives of the Black Lives Matter Movement across African American, Afro-Caribbean, and African immigrant communities.

Marsha completed her APA-accredited doctoral internship at Yale School of Medicine/Connecticut Mental Health Center in the Adult Community Mental Health Track, where she provided inpatient and outpatient clinical services to adults with serious mental illness, psychosis, mood disorders, co-occurring conditions, and complex psychosocial needs. During internship, she also developed and co-facilitated BRAVE, the first Black support group for Black inpatients at CMHC, which focused on culturally responsive recovery, advocacy, empowerment, and community healing.

EDUCATION

Yale School of Medicine| New Haven, CT June 30, 2026
Pre-Doctoral Internship in Clinical and Community Psychology (APA Accredited)

Lehigh University| Bethlehem, PA
Doctor of Philosophy in Counseling Psychology (APA Accredited)
Advisor: Vanesa Mora Ringle, PhD
Cumulative GPA: 3.94/4.00

William Paterson University| Wayne, NJ August 2020
Master of Arts, Clinical and Counseling Psychology
Cumulative GPA: 3.85/4.00
Thesis: *The role of peer relationships on newly immigrated Youth mental health: Perceptions of Latinx, Arabic and Bengali students*

The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio May 2018
Bachelor of Arts, Psychology

CREDENTIALS

Licensed Professional Counselor of Mental Health (LPCMH)
Delaware State Board
License Number: PC-0011455
Issue Date: 08/23/2023.
National Certified Counselor (NCC)
National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC)

Issue Date: 08/03/2023.

CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

Yale School of Medicine Doctoral Internship in Clinical and Community Psychology
Department of Psychiatry | New Haven, CT Jul 2025 – Present
Psychology Fellow

Connecticut Mental Health Center: Inpatient Track

- Deliver comprehensive diagnostic evaluations, treatment planning, and psychotherapy for adults with severe and persistent mental illness (SPMI) within a multidisciplinary hospital setting.
- Facilitate DBT-informed individual and group therapy for individuals with psychosis, bipolar disorder, and treatment-resistant depression, focusing on stabilization, emotion regulation, and recovery.
- Manage complex psychiatric presentations including clozapine-resistant psychosis, OCD, schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, and comorbid medical conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and dementia-related psychosis.
- Implement Wellness Recovery Action Plans (WRAP) and provide palliative and supportive psychotherapy to enhance long-term wellness, dignity, and quality of life.

Supervisors: Drs. Erika Carr, PhD & Marisa Kottage, PsyD

Connecticut Mental Health Center: Outpatient Track

- Conduct intake assessments, diagnostic evaluations, and psychodynamic psychotherapy for adults with mood, psychotic, and trauma-related disorders.
- Provide psychoeducation and grief counseling to patients and families, addressing diagnosis, treatment adherence, and relapse prevention strategies.
- Deliver individual therapy utilizing DBT and recovery-oriented approaches for clients with treatment-resistant and ketamine-treated major depressive disorder (MDD).
- Collaborate with psychiatrists and interdisciplinary teams to develop and implement integrated, person-centered treatment plans that support ongoing recovery and stability.

Supervisors: Drs. Thomas Styron, PhD, Deborah Fisk, LICSW, PhD, Bethany Flanagan, PhD, Bonnie Becker, PhD, Francisco Lopez, PhD

Medstar Georgetown University Hospital| Washington, D.C. Sept 2024 – May 2025
Department of Psychiatry- Outpatient & Health Psychology tracks
Doctoral Extern

Medstar Health Family Medicine: Primary Care at Fort Lincoln Rotation

- Conduct comprehensive psychological tests, intakes, consultation and diagnostic evaluations to adults from historically challenged backgrounds (Black and Latinx) on concerns about physical and mental health conditions, grounded in biopsychosocial, health psychology medical model.
- Collaborate with multidisciplinary teams, including doctors, nurses, and social workers, to develop and implement integrated care plans.
- Contribute to research projects and quality improvement initiatives, develop and deliver staff education workshops and presentations aimed at enhancing the delivery of mental health services within the primary care setting.
- Educate patients and families about mental health conditions, treatment options, and coping strategies to enhance overall well-being.

MedStar Center for Wellbeing in School Environments (WISE) program Rotation

- Provide outpatient trauma-informed individual and group psychotherapy grounded in TLDP, [TF]-CBT and DBT to adolescents and adult educators in the D.C. Public School district.
- Maintain a weekly caseload of 6-8 adolescents and adults from various backgrounds on concerns about intra/interpersonal concerns, burnout, stress management, anxiety disorders, complex trauma, neighborhood violence, depression, familial concerns, anger management, health anxiety.
- Participate in professional development meetings, individual supervision, grand rounds and group consultation with case presentations.

Supervisor: Drs. Keri Kirk, PhD & Jonathan Rivers, LICSW, PhD

Sibley Memorial Hospital| Washington, D.C. Sept 2024 – Nov 2024
John's Hopkins Medicine Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health
Doctoral-Student Extern

- Provided assessment, consultation, and treatment to adult patients at Sibley Memorial Inpatient Behavioral Health Unit, addressing issues such as suicidal behavior and/or self-harm/self-mutilation, insomnia, eating disorders, severe agitation, medication noncompliance, severe mood swings, emotional dysregulation, and thought disturbances.
- Evaluated department's assessment, screeners, and tests provided to patients to ensure effective and comprehensive assessments.
- Participated in weekly individual and group supervision, shadowing, observation with chief of psychiatry and mental health professionals

Supervisors: Drs. Erica Richards, M.D., PhD, Carlos Brown, LICSW, PhD

CapitolHill Consort. for Counseling & Consultation |Washington, D.C. Jun 2024 – Sep 2024
Doctoral Extern

- Conducted comprehensive assessments of intellectual and personality functions using a variety of tools (MMPI, PAI, NEO, WASSI, WAIS-IV, Wisconsin Card Sort, Brown ADD, BASC, WAIS, WISC, MMPI-3, MCMI-4, CONNORS-CPT, DKEFS, WMS, CPT, WIAT, WRAT-5, Projective Tests, etc.), including test selection, administration, scoring, interpretation, and report writing for children, adolescents, and adults with intellectual, developmental, and mental health conditions.
- Authored detailed integrative reports and provided recommendations to enhance treatment plans and diagnostic clarification.
- Conducted diagnostic interviews with children, adolescents, and adults to gather relevant history pertaining to referral questions.
- Delivered feedback sessions to patients, explaining evaluation findings and offering recommendations for treatment and additional support services.

Supervisor: Dr. Jamie Hakim, PhD

JFS Delaware Outpatient Behavioral Health Dept.| Wilmington, DE Aug 2023 – Aug 2024
Doctoral Practicum Trainee

- Provided individual, and group psychotherapy grounded in Dialectical Behavioral Therapy and Psychodynamic theory to a caseload of 15 adolescents and adults from

diverse backgrounds; presenting concerns include SPMI (Borderline Personality Disorder, Schizophrenia, Schizoaffective Disorder, Bipolar Disorder I/II, Psychosis, Major Depressive Disorder), high SI and self-harm, ADHD, Autism, PTSD, medication non-compliance, complex trauma, grief, intra/interpersonal issues and anxiety disorders.

- Performed comprehensive psychotherapeutic diagnostic evaluations and administered, scored, and interpreted brief psychological, cognitive, and risk assessments to gauge client concerns (PH-Q9, GAD-7, MMSE, Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale)
- Collaborated in an interdisciplinary team of psychologists, psychiatrists, psychiatric nurse practitioners to ensure comprehensive treatment to clients receiving psychotherapy and psychotropic medications.
- Received supervision with video review, and attended case conferences, didactic seminars focused on ACT, Maternal Mental health, child psychopathology, trauma, anxiety etc.

Supervisor: Drs. Angelica Santiago Montalvo, PhD & William Fishbein, PhD

Muhlenberg College Counseling Services| Allentown, PA Aug 2022 – May 2023
Doctoral Practicum Trainee

- Performed initial intakes and conducted individual psychotherapy grounded in Time-Limited Dynamic Therapy and DBT with a weekly caseload of 6-8 college students from various backgrounds on concerns about intra/interpersonal concerns, anxiety disorders, depression, eating disorders, and academic difficulties.
- Facilitated monthly mental health outreach programming via counseling and psychological services media page, to promote various mental health and student topics such as choosing the right therapist, misconceptions of therapy, and mental health awareness.
- Documented Data, Assessment, Plan (DAP) progress notes and behavioral observations efficiently and timely
- Participated in professional development meetings, individual supervision with tape review, and group consultation with case presentations.

Supervisor: Dr. Tim Silvestri, PhD

JFS Delaware Mental Health Fellowship Program| Wilmington, DE Oct 2022 – Aug 2023
Mental Health Fellow

- Provided individual and group psychotherapy grounded in psychodynamic and trauma informed dialectical behavioral therapy to adolescent and adult survivors of human trafficking, asylum seekers, Afghan evacuees, individuals from war-torn countries, addressing PTSD, emotional dysregulation, acculturative stress, complex trauma, complex grief, isolation, and depression.
- Documented client's health and behavior and assisted in the implementation of individual's behavior support plans.
- Attended didactics and workshops focused on: Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Supportive Parenting for Anxious Childhood Emotions (SPACE), Trauma
- Developed mental health group programming for anxiety, depression, social concern

Supervisor: Wendell Covell, LICSW

Department of Services for Children, Youth & Families July 2021- June 2022

Division of Youth Rehabilitation Services | Wilmington, DE
Doctoral Practicum Trainee

- Provided individual and group psychotherapy to Black/African American male adolescents (12-19 years old) in court-committed residential program—Ferris Detention Center School for Boys
- Performed comprehensive clinical intakes and interpreted Psychological Evaluations administered by psychologists to incorporate in treatment planning.
- Provided TF-CBT, DBT and Trauma Affect Regulation Education & Therapy (TARGET) treatment to help youth boys with Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Conduct Disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder, Problematic Sexual Behavior, Substance Abuse, PTSD, CPTSD, Bipolar Disorder, Major Depressive Disorder, ADHD, Generalized Anxiety Disorder.

Supervisors: Drs. Katherine Powers, PsyD and Linda Friedman, PsyD

High Focus Centers Outpatient Treatment Center| Parsippany, NJ Aug 2019 – May 2020
Intensive Outpatient Program & Partial Hospitalization Program
Master's Practicum Intern

- Provided individual and group evidence-based psychotherapy grounded in Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Acceptance and Commitment therapy to adolescents and adults of diverse backgrounds and different identities.
- Provided therapy with SPMI population (Borderline Personality Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, Schizoaffective disorder, Major Depressive Disorder) Adult/Adolescent Psychopathology program, Eating Disorder Program, Chemical Dependency program, and Co-Morbid Substance Abuse program
- Co-led weekly DBT group, yoga, and mindfulness groups with clients from diverse identities, backgrounds, presenting concerns (25+ patients/group)
- Participated in individual and group supervision, participated in didactic topics related to Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) training, and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.

Supervisor: Meredith Gonzenbach, LISCW

ASSESSMENT EXPERIENCE

- Adaptive Behavior Assessment System
- Adult ADHD Self- Report Scale (ASRS)
- Adverse Childhood Experience Scale (ACE)
- Autism Spectrum Quotient (AQ)
- Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI)
- Beck's Depression Inventory
- Behavioral Assessment System for Children (BASC)
- Bender-Gestalt Test
- Brief Trauma Questionnaire (BTQ)
- Brown Executive Function/Attention Scales
- Caregiver Burden Inventory
- Children's Depression Inventory 2 (CDI)
- Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS)

- Comprehensive Biopsychosocial Evaluations (CBE)
- Comprehensive Trail-Making Test 2nd Edition
- Connors CPT
- Delis-Kaplan Executive Function System (D-KEFS)
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item Scale (GAD-7)
- Geriatric Depression Scale
- Gilliam Autism Rating Scale (GARS)
- Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale
- Iowa Personality Disorder Screener
- IVA-2+
- Kessler Psychological Distress Scale
- KTEA
- McLean Screening Instrument for Borderline Personality Disorder (MSI-BPD)
- Million Clinical Multiaxial Inventory (MCMI-IV)
- Mini Mental Status Examination (MMSE)
- Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI)
- Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MOCA)
- Mood Disorder Questionnaire (MDQ)
- Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children (MASC-2)
- Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PH-Q9)
- Personality Assessment Inventory (PAI)
- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5)
- Resilience Questionnaire
- Severity of Dissociative Symptoms Adult
- Social Responsiveness Scale (SRS)
- The 16-item Version of the Prodromal Questionnaire
- The Conners' Adult ADHD Rating Scale (CAARS)
- The NEO Personality Inventory
- The Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-5 (WAIS-5)
- The Wechsler Memory Scale (WMS)
- The Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Cognitive Abilities
- Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC)
- World Health Organization Disability Assessment Schedule 2.0

RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

Highmark Health and Jewish Family Services of Delaware Collaboration
Project Manager

- Overseeing a project that provides training and education to medical providers on how to better serve refugees and immigrants navigating the U.S. healthcare system.
- Coordinate with JFS supervisors and 3Spoons videographers to ensure successful project completion, overseeing participant recruitment.
- Develop and review consent forms and interview questions ensuring HIPAA compliance and cultural sensitivity.

- Collaborate with leadership and videographers to define project scope and finalize questions that highlight relevant experiences for healthcare providers.
- Coordinate participant recruitment for individual and group interviews.

Mental Health Psychosocial Support Program | Wilmington, DE Jan 2021 – May 2023
Funder: Hebrew Immigrant Aid Support (HIAS)
Support Group Facilitator

- Provided psychosocial support groups for newly arrived refugees, asylees, and immigrants dealing with acculturative stress, depression, grief, isolation, PTSD
- Administered pre/post test evaluations
- Trauma-Informed and culturally sensitive therapy

Branches to Chances ® Work Re-entry Program| Wilmington, DE Dec 2020 – Oct 2022
Behavioral Health Group Facilitator

- Provided psycho-educational and interpersonal group psychotherapy to previously incarcerated adult population
- Administered pre/post test evaluations
- Therapy is grounded in Trauma-Informed Dialectical Behavioral Therapy.
- Topics covered: complex trauma, self-care management, suicide prevention, race-based traumatic stress, distress tolerance skills, work-place conflict, adjustment issues, family concerns, institutionalization.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Grant, Wilmington, DE 2020 – 2022
Helping The Helpers: Public Wellness Series
Co-facilitator

- Co-facilitated virtual well-ness groups for behavioral healthcare workers experiencing trauma and/or requiring mental healthcare due to COVID-19
- Facilitated two successful grant funded support groups for essential personal: health care workers, LCSWs, Nurses, licensed therapists, clinical interns.
- Topics covered: coping with pandemic stress, self-care management, suicide prevention, micro- aggression, distress tolerance skills, work-place conflict, adjustment issues, family concerns with covid, anxiety.

Healing Hearts Parenting Support Group | Wilmington, DE Aug 2020 – June 2021
Co-facilitator

- Provided a psycho-education training education course for court-mandated parenting and families divorcing or separating parents on how to better support their children.
- Topics covered: isolation, grief, family grief, child anxiety familial transition/adjustments

JFS Delaware, Refugee Integration Support Effort | Wilmington, DE Aug 2020 – June 2021
Trauma-Informed Case Manager

- Provided intensive case management services for immigrants, asylum seekers, survivors of human trafficking.
- Provided workforce development to newly emigrated adults encompassing employment training, work-readiness activities, counseling, and job placement for individuals with significant barriers to employment
- Offered support, workforce development, English as a second language training, provided guidance, and fostered a sense of connection to the immigrant community

- Assisted clients with challenges related to adjusting to the U.S. and pandemic stress

Easterseals Delaware &Maryland Eastern Shore | Newark, DE May 2018 – July 2020
Home Health Aid (per-diem)

- Served as a direct support staff for adolescents and young adults with developmental difficulties
- Assisted clients with challenges related to activities of daily living (e.g, bathing, dressing, meal preparation)
- Offered support, provided guidance, and fostered a sense of connection to the community, inside and outside the home

The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center | Columbus, OH Aug 2015 – May 2018
OSU Psychiatric Emergency Dept. & Harding Psychiatric Inpatient Hospital
Psychiatric Care Technician and Psychiatric Crisis Sitter

- Enhanced patient wellbeing by supporting participation in recreational activities.
- Increased safety and reduced harm, as a 1:1 suicide/self-harm sitter
- Co facilitated group therapy with psychiatric nurses and LCSWs.
- Assisted with admitting /discharging patients and transporting patients to internal IOP.

PROVISION OF CLINICAL SUPERVISION

Jewish Family Services of Delaware| Wilmington, DE Aug 2023– Present
Mental Health Fellowship Program
Doctoral-Practicum Supervisor

- Supervised four mental health fellows pursuing licensure for their master's in mental health counseling (LPCMHs, LCSWs)
- Assisted supervisees in conceptualizing and applying clinical theoretical orientations.
- Reviewed notes and provided feedback to strengthen supervisee's clinical note writing skills.
- Led didactics on multicultural competencies in therapy, ethics, and other relevant clinical topics, engaged in role-plays with mental health fellows.
- Trained fellows on conducting proper intakes, utilizing psychological screening tools, treatment plans, and discharge plans

Supervision of Supervision received: Dr. Angelica Montalvo, PhD

Lehigh University| Bethlehem, PA August 2023 – April 2024
Doctoral-Student Supervisor

- Supervised students in the master's in mental health counseling program and students in the international school counseling program
- Assisted supervisees in learning new counseling techniques and sharpening risk assessment skills to help with challenging cases
- Listened to session tape and provided written and verbal feedback

Supervision of Supervision received: Dr. Bethany Detwiler, PhD

HIAS Mental Health Psychosocial Support Program| Wilmington, DE Aug 2022– Present
Community Staff Supervisor

- Co-lead the development of the MHPSS program within the JFS Delaware branch.
- Recruited and trained community co-facilitators on a culturally responsive curriculum.
- Reviewed notes and provided feedback to strengthen supervisee's note writing skills.
- Provided weekly one on one supervision to co-facilitators.
- Participated in monthly check-in sessions led by leaders and grant funders.

PROVISION OF PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Administration for Children & Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)
U.S. Department of State (DSS)
Grant Initiatives: Refugee School Impact and Afghans Refugee School Impact including Support to Schools (S2S) programs, Youth Mentorship.
Doctoral Practicum Counselor

- Developed two 10-week long mental health programs for newly immigrated adolescents and for the parents of newly immigrated adolescents according to the scope of the approved grant requirements with pre/post test assessments for group evaluation and to assess mental health symptom reduction.
- Topics covered for both groups were: acculturative stress, mental health awareness, social skills
- **Population Served:** Newly immigrated adolescents and their parents.

Delaware Hope Center Inc. Houseless Art Expression Group
Doctoral Practicum Counselor

- Developed a trauma-informed DBT grounded creative art expression support group for community members of the largest homeless shelter in the East Coast–The Delaware Hope Center.
- Created pre/post assessments to evaluate program effectiveness.
- **Population Served:** adolescents and adults experiencing homelessness.

JFS Delaware LGBTQ+ Affirmation Parent Support Group
Doctoral Practicum Counselor

- Co-developed a 12-week psycho-educational support group for parents of LGBTQ+-identified adolescents
- Topics of group included grief, affirmation, education, radical acceptance
- Created pre/post assessments to evaluate program effectiveness.
- **Population Served:** Parents of LGBTQ+ Identified adolescents.

The Delaware Adolescent Program, Inc. (DAPI)
Doctoral Practicum Counselor

- Developed a 12-week trauma-informed DBT and ACT maternal mental health support group for pregnant adolescents.
- Trained LCSWs and mental health fellows on executing the support group.
- **Population Served:** Pregnant adolescents (14-19) from ethnically diverse backgrounds.

Administration for Children & Families, Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)
Grant initiative: Funded Behavioral Health Support Resources for Afghan Arrivals

Doctoral Practicum Counselor

- Developed a 6-month mental health program for women Afghan refugee-scholars evacuees fleeing from educational, political, and gender-based persecution.
- Developed pre/post test assessments for group evaluation and to assess mental health symptom reduction.
- Topics covered: mitigating stress, PTSD, complex trauma, women's health, sexual health, career success, financial literacy, educational attainment, etc.
- Led weekly groups with 6 active participants.
- **Population Served:** Women Afghan refugee evacuees.

Widener University–Delaware Law School: Project New Start (PNS)
Doctoral Practicum Counselor

- Developed a 12-week behavioral health support group for the PNS re-entry program with pre/post test assessments to evaluate program effectiveness.
- Program grounded in trauma-centered Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.
- Topics included: conflict resolution, self-forgiveness, distress tolerance skills
- Trained co-facilitators weekly, providing culturally sensitive psycho-educational support.
- **Population Served:** Adults transitioning out of state and federal institutions.

JFS Delaware's Youth Anxiety Program for Older Teens (13-18)
Mental Health Fellow

- Co-developed a 12-week (4 month) school-based youth anxiety program for adolescents aged (13-18) in the Delaware School district, Created pre/posttest assessments for program effectiveness evaluation.
- Program served adolescents with various anxiety presenting concerns including but not limited to Newark Charter School system, St. Marks High School, P.S. DuPont Middle school, Springer Middle School.
- Topics included were self-image, social skills, distress tolerance skills, coping skills, grounded in DBT, ACT, REBT, CBT.
- Trained LCSWs and mental health fellows on executing this support group across the Delaware school district.
- **Population Served:** School-based adolescents aged (13-18) with anxiety.

Friendship House Delaware, Transitional Housing Program
Mental Health Fellow

- Developed curriculum for trauma support groups within the transitional housing program.
- Program served populations including substance abuse, houselessness, homelessness, human trafficking survivors, women coming out of incarceration (Entry Phase Participants), and domestic violence survivors.
- Topics of the groups included: Psychoeducation on trauma, thinking and its impact on emotions, shame/guilt & affirmations, boundaries, anger, grounded in DBT and ACT.
- Created pre/posttest assessments to evaluate program effectiveness.
- **Population Served:** adults from diverse backgrounds experiencing trauma.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Grant, Wilmington, DE
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Grant initiative: Helping the Helpers: Public Wellness Series

- Co-developed two 8-week long mental health programs for essential workers experiencing stress due to the pandemic.
- Topics covered: coping with pandemic stress, self-care management, suicide prevention, micro-aggression, distress tolerance skills, workplace conflict, adjustment issues, family concerns with COVID, anxiety.
- Co-facilitated group sessions administered Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) for program management evaluation.
- **Population Served**: Essential workers experiencing pandemic-related stress.

Delaware Horticulture Center: Branches to Chances Re-entry Program

- Co-developed a 12-week (4 month) ongoing behavioral health support group for the Branches to Chances re-entry program.
- Program grounded in trauma centered DBT and CBT.
- Topics included: distress tolerance skills, trauma-informed CBT, Stress management, microaggression, life transitions
- Created pre/posttest assessments to evaluate program effectiveness.
- **Population Served:** Individuals transitioning out of state and federal institutions.

PROVISION OF CONSULTANCY

Multicultural Competencies in Therapy consultation JFS Nov 2023-April 2024

Doctoral-Student Consultant

- Provided Multicultural Competencies in Therapy training to clinical staff
- Key Deliverables Included: Contributed insights and expertise to a comprehensive dialogue on multicultural competencies in therapy sessions.
- Outcomes Included: Disseminated knowledge and enhanced awareness and understanding of culturally sensitive therapeutic practices.

Strayer Middle School Quakertown, PA Feb 2023-March/2023

Doctoral-Student Consultant

- Provided racial trauma consultation for a master's student in School Counseling Internship
- Key Deliverables Included: Provided weekly discussion with intern on ways to help children experiencing racism, provided intern with resources, created a training manual for educators of children of color experiencing bullying, created and provided intern and educators racial response toolkit.

Racial Injustice Diversity Equity, Inclusion with Siegel JCC, June 2022 – July 2022

Consultant

- Provided Racial Injustice training for Leadership Team and Staff (60 members)
- Key Deliverables Included: Conducted Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities Threats (SWOT) analysis with Director and leadership staff, created 3-6 months DEI strategic plan, created and provided team with Racial Injustice Response Toolkit, Conducted preliminary DEI audit with Director on Camp's Code of Conduct, policies, staff, racial injustice response statement.

JFS prison to pipeline consultation July 2022-October 2022

Consultant

- Provided a comprehensive workshop on the prison pipeline for consultees emphasizing the complexities of the prison industrial complex and its societal impact. Educated staff on its structure, its correlation with mental health and immigration, especially within detention centers.
- Key Deliverables Included: 60-minute workshop with actionable strategies for organization to contribute to the dismantling of the prison industrial complex
- Provided recommendations for local Delaware initiatives and programs aimed at mitigating the impact of the prison industrial complex.
- Outcomes Included: Enhanced staff awareness and organizational understanding of complex topics through this initiative resulted in strengthened partnerships with organizations dedicated to dismantling the prison pipeline. Concurrently, the organization-maintained contracts with work re-entry programs and preventative initiatives aimed at curbing adult and youth incarceration.

Immschools Research Training

Doctoral-student consultant

- Provided a trauma-informed mental health presentation on mental health within the refugee community. Developed and presented a comprehensive 60-minute session addressing various immigration statuses, while highlighting common mental health challenges faced by individuals upon arrival in the United States.
- Key Deliverables Included: Contributed insights and expertise to a comprehensive dialogue on racial justice, emphasizing the intersection of social justice and mental health.

Delaware Division of Vocational Rehabilitation September 2022

Consultant

- Provided a trauma-informed mental health presentation on mental health within the refugee community. Developed and presented a comprehensive 60-minute session addressing various immigration statuses, while highlighting common mental health challenges faced by individuals upon arrival in the United States.
- Key Deliverables Included: Contributed insights and expertise to a comprehensive dialogue on racial justice, emphasizing the intersection of social justice and mental health.
- Outcomes Included: Enhanced organizational capacity to support and address the needs of refugees and immigrants, initiated strategic discussions within the organization regarding potential avenues for support, including volunteerism, donations, and partnerships, fostered a collaborative partnership between the Delaware Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and a local organization, facilitating ongoing support for immigrant causes.

Juvenile Trafficking Consultation/Presentation for DYSCF June 14th 2021

DEI consultant

- Provided presentation on marginalization, access to mental healthcare, and the impact of oppression on youth survivors of human trafficking
- Key Deliverables Included: Contributed insights and expertise to a comprehensive dialogue on racial justice, emphasizing the intersection of social justice and mental health.
- Disseminated knowledge fostering awareness and understanding on diversifying workplace, race-based trauma, school to prison pipeline.

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Interests include mental health disparities, the intersectionality of social justice issues on the mental health of adolescents and adults. Moreover, understanding cultural factors and social determinants of mental health and disseminating culturally appropriate psychological services in other marginalized populations and BIPOC community.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Yale School of Medicine| New Haven, CT Sept 2025-Present
Scholarly Project Proposal Accepted: Feasibility, Implementation and Accessibility of BRAVE Support Group for Black SMI Inpatient individuals
Project Supervisors: Tom Styron, PhD and Marissa Kottage, PsyD.

Lehigh University| Bethlehem, PA October 25th 2024
Dissertation Proposal Accepted: An In-Depth Analysis of Black Adults' Engagement with and Perspectives of the Black Lives Matter Movement across Different Ethnic Backgrounds

Vanesa Mora Ringle, PhD (Chair), Jonathan Sepulveda, PhD, Kwame Essien, PhD, Chere Hunter, PhD (Committee Members)

Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Scholars Program Sept 2024-Present
MedStar Georgetown University Hospital
Psychology Extern- AHEC Scholar

- Scholar in program committed to addressing the needs to increase diversity in health care professionals and to improve primary care workforce in underserved populations.
- Participating in an independent research project examining integrated behavioral health care among low-income patients, and ways providers can better support and reduce health-seeking barriers.
- Examined associations between mental health and social needs among Black patients in Primary Care settings

HEAL Lab, Lehigh University| Bethlehem, PA August 2023 – Present
Graduate Research Lab Member| Advisor: Dr. Vanesa Mora Ringle
Lab website: HEAL Together Research Lab (healtogetherlab.org)

- Prepared manuscripts for journal review with a team consisting of a faculty advisor and other doctoral students
- Attended bi-weekly lab meetings offering insights, and collaborating with other lab members on projects
- Reviewed journal articles and provided written feedback to help improve manuscripts

ALIVE Lab, Lehigh University| Bethlehem, PA August 2021 – May 2022
Graduate Research Assistant| Advisor: Dr. Germán Cadenas
Lab website: https://wordpress.lehigh.edu/ilibpsy/

- Prepared manuscripts for journal review with a team consisting of a faculty advisor and other doctoral students
- Involved in a research collaborative Co-mentoring ALIVE Model
- Reviewed journal articles and provided written feedback to help improve manuscripts
- Organized/coordinated meetings and took the lead on administrative tasks

Lehigh University| Bethlehem, PA September 2019 – May 2021
Graduate Research Apprentice| Advisor: Dr. Germán Cadenas

- Prepared manuscripts for journal review and collaborated with a team of scholars to conceptualize new studies
- Supported a research project examining mental health providers' (psychologists) cultural competencies in working with immigrants by managing an SPSS data file containing 1200 participants, including cleaning, running analyses, and maintaining data security protocols.
- Selected appropriate statistical tests and analyses for the study.
- Conducted and interpreted statistical analyses.
- Co-authored a manuscript covering methods, results, graphs, and figures.

ImmSchools Inc.| Bethlehem, PA August 2021 – May 2022
Research Consultant| Advisor: Dr. Germán Cadenas

- Served as co–research consultant with ImmSchools, a non-profit organization that works with educators, school administrators, and family to create inclusive environments for undocumented and immigrant students.
- Provided knowledge and recommendations to Immschool Co-Founders and Chief Program Officer
- Aided in the development of community advisory board members to engage in community based participatory action research and strengthen research methods
- Conducted literature reviews and gathered resources that align with the organization's theory of change
- Identified validated measures to evaluate and assess the impact of interventions and programming

National Institutes of Health (NIH) & Christiana Care Hospital Department of Medicine
Grant title*:* Wilmington Street PAR Health Project: Health, Opportunity & Violence in Wilmington, Delaware Aug 2020 – Dec 2021
Research Associate| Principal Investigator: Yassar A. Payne, PhD

- Conducted research project that examines the relationship between health, opportunity and violence utilizing a biopsychosocial perspective of formerly incarcerated and/or street identified low-income Black youth and adults in northside and westside sections of Wilmington, DE.
- Coded qualitative interviews (video recorded) over 400 pages of data from adolescents and adults regarding mental health, physical health, neighborhood violence and systemic inequities using deductive methodology.
- Synthesized existing community policies on physical and mental health initiatives for youth and adults of color at the city level.

William Paterson University of New Jersey Jan 2019 – May 2021
Culture and Trauma Lab
Graduate Research Assistant| Advisor: Dr. Sumi Raghavan

- Administered surveys and collected data.
- Interpreted data results in SPSS.
- Conducted a research project to identify the relationship between academic success, social capital, academic generation status, and mental health are related.

William Paterson University of New Jersey August 2019 – Aug 2020
Culture and Resilience Lab
Research Lab Coordinator| Advisors: Dr. Winnie Ma & Dr. Aileen Torres

- Trained graduate and undergraduate research assistants on CQR qualitative methodology
- Recorded and documented lab meeting minutes to ensure accuracy and accountability
- Submitted IRB proposals and conference proposals

William Paterson University of New Jersey August 2018 – Aug 2020
Culture and Resilience Lab
Graduate Research Assistant| Advisors: Dr. Winnie Ma & Dr. Aileen Torres

- Co-designed a 10-week trauma-informed cultural adjustment curriculum for recently immigrated youth
- Analyzed qualitative data from exit interviews to assess the effectiveness of the intervention
- Co-authored a published manuscript focused on methodology and results section
- Participated in weekly lab meetings and provided intellectual capital to discussions

PUBLICATIONS

1. Kirk, K. F., Budd, S., Splain, A., Parsons, C. L., Kini, A., Daniel, G., Kim, L., Alexander, K., Rubio, D., Warren, J., **Akoto, M.,** Laccay, C. D., & Tanjutco, P. (2025). Associations Between Mental Health and Social Needs Among Black Patients in Primary Care Settings. *Journal of primary care & community health*, *16*, 21501319251338912. https://doi.org/10.1177/21501319251338912

2.Ma, P. W., Torres, A., & **Akoto, M. A**. (2023). Feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary findings of a school-based intervention for recently arrived immigrant middle-school students. *Psychology in the Schools*, 60(6), 2072–2089. https://doi_org.libproxy.unl.edu/10.1002/pits.22861

3. Cadenas, G. A., Sosa, R., Mora Ringle, V., Aguilar, C., **Akoto, M**., Bahadori Fallah, M., & Hamilton, K. (2025). Practice guidelines for ALIVE co-mentoring: An approach to liberating psychology education and training from the inside out. *American Psychologist, 80*(4), 549–562. https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0001421

4. Cadenas, G. A., Luna, V., Tule-Romain, L., Carrizales, V., **Akoto, M**., Aguilar, C., Sosa, R., Pasupuleti, V., & Ogunkoya, E. (2024). Reaching Traditionally Underserved Populations: School-Based Interventions to Create Safe and Welcoming Schools for Immigrant Students and Families. In *Scaling Effective School Mental Health Interventions and Practices* (pp. 137-158). Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-68168-4_8

5. Raghavan, S., Hu, D., **Akoto, M**., & Rendon, K. (2024). Community heals: Lessons from qualitative narratives of first-generation college students. *Journal of American college health : J of ACH*, 1–10. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2024.2409670

6. Cadenas, G. A., **Akoto, M.,** Domenech Rodriguez, M., Garcini, L., Venta, A., Paris, M., Galvan, T., Moreno, O., Rojas Perez, O., & Neimeyer, G. (2025). Community, professional, and lived experiences shape competence in immigrant mental health service. *Practice Innovations, 10*(2), 172–188. https://doi.org/10.1037/pri0000281

7.Cadenas, G.A., Akoto, M., & Tschauner, M. (under review). Learning to create career interventions for global justice: A critical and reciprocal education online (CREO) approach.

MANUSCRIPTS UNDER REVIEW OR IN PREPARATION

1.Akoto, M., Mora Ringle, V., Cadenas, G., & Jeremie-rink, J. (under review). Examining Sociopolitical Participation, Ethnic Identity, and Black Self-Hatred Attitudes among different Black ethnicities.

PRESENTATIONS, POSTERS, AND INVITED SPEAKINGS

1**.Akoto, M.** (2024, October 17-19). Examination of Afro-Latinx Critical Consciousness and Ethnic Identity. In G. A. Cadenas (Chair), *Latinx Persistence through Oppression and Trauma.* [Symposium]. National Latinx Psychological Association, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

2**.Akoto, M.,** Mora Ringle, V. (2024, July). Examination of Critical Consciousness, and Ethnic Identity among different Black ethnic groups. 26th Black Graduate Conference in Psychology, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

3**.Akoto, M.,** Jeremie-Brink, G., Rimel, A., Belford, E., Rebolledo, N. (2023, August). Examination of Critical Consciousness, Racial Identity and Mental Health Among Black Emerging Adults. Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.

4.**Akoto, M. (**2023, May 15). Mental Health Panelist Guest Speaker YWCA Delaware, Racial Justice Challenge [Panel discussion on marginalization, access to mental healthcare, and the impact of discrimination on mental health outcomes, specifically addressing racial trauma]. YWCA Delaware. [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_7tQV62qTY

5.**Akoto, M.** (2022, October 20-22). Psychological Wellness and Inclusion of Latinx Students and Immigrants, Black Immigrants, and other Minoritized Students. In G. A. Cadenas (Chair), *Advocacy, Liberation, Immigration, Vocational Psychology, and Education (ALIVE) Community Research!* [Symposium]. National Latinx Psychological Association, Denver, CO, United States.

6.Ma, P.-W., **Akoto, M.,** Saleh, G., Ahmed, M., Sekinat, K. M., & Torres, A. (2020, August). Perceived Discrimination, Acculturative Stress, and Mental Health of Muslim Immigrant Adolescents. Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.

7.Briggs, A., Henao, M., **Akoto, M.,** Torres, A., Billini, O., Cheron, S., Moura, F., Alava, B., & Ma, P.-W. (2020, August). "I am not an American!" The Acculturative Stress of Recently Arrived Latinx Immigrant Youth. Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.

8**.Akoto, M.,** Raghavan, S., Hu, D., & Rendon, K. (2020, June). Mental Health, Social Capital & Academic Success in First Generation College Students. Annual Eastern Psychological Association Conference.

9**.Akoto, M.,** Henao, M., Briggs, A., Torres, A., Ma, P.-W., Billini, O., Bryan, A., (2020, April). A Cultural Adjustment Group for Recently Arrived Immigrant Youth: The Involvement of University Students. William Paterson Explorations, Wayne, New Jersey.

10.**Akoto, M.,** Raghavan, S., Hu, D., & Rendon, K. (2020, April). Mental Health, Social Capital & Academic Success in First Generation College Students. William Paterson University Explorations, Wayne, NJ.

11.Henao, M., Briggs, A., Torres, A., **Akoto, M.,** Ma, P.-W., Billini, O., Alava, B. (2020, February). Clinical Symptoms, Family Separations and Acculturation in Recently Immigrated Latinx and Bangladeshi Middle School Youth. Latino/a Mental Health Association of NJ, Elizabeth, NJ.

12.Ma, P.-W., Chowdhury, T., Chong, Y. K., Valera, R., Cardenas, M. D., Torres, A., Henao, M**., Akoto, M.** (2019, August). Development of a Cultural Adjustment Group for Latinx and Bangladeshi Recent Immigrant Students. Annual American Psychological Association Conference, Chicago, Illinois.

13**.Akoto, M.,** Raghavan, S., Hu, D., & Rendon, K. (2019, April). Mental Health, Social Capital & Academic Success in First Generation College Students: Early Findings from a Pilot Study. Annual William Paterson University Explorations, Wayne, NJ.

14.Valera, R., Cardenas, M. D., Chong, Y. K., Ma, P.-W., Torres, A., **Akoto, M.,** & Billini, O. (2019, February). Clinical Symptoms, Family Separations and Acculturation in Recently Immigrated Latinx Middle School Youth. Latino Mental Health Association of New Jersey, Rutherford, NJ.

15.Mann, S., Hooks A., **Akoto M.,** Korte E., & Roten B. (2017). Recognition-induced forgetting in real-time. The Ohio State University Psychology Department Social and Cognitive Research Laboratory Poster Session, Columbus, Ohio.

JOURNAL PEER REVIEWER EXPERIENCE

Co-reviewer with Dr. Mora Ringle *Journal in Latinx Psychology* September 2024
Co-reviewer with Dr. Mora Ringle *Frontiers in Psychology* September 2023
Co-reviewer with Dr. German Cadenas *Journal of Counseling Psychology* December 2021

TEACHING EXPERIENCE/GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP

Lehigh University| Bethlehem, PA June 2023 – July 2023
Graduate Assistant for Office of Academic Transitions

- Developed academic support materials to assist students on academic probation, focusing on strategies for academic improvement and success.
- Facilitated one-on-one meetings with college students to discuss their academic challenges and provide personalized guidance for navigating their coursework and university resources.
- Led workshops centered on effective study habits, exam preparation, and strategies for overcoming procrastination, helping students enhance their academic skills.

- Provided tutoring support to students, assisting with performance improvement plans to help them achieve their academic goals.
- Assisted in evaluating and tracking student progress, providing constructive feedback and resources tailored to individual academic needs and goals.

Lehigh University| Bethlehem, PA June 2023 – July 2023
Teaching Assistant

- Co-developed course materials such as syllabi, lectures topic for Multicultural Perspectives in Counseling course for master's and doctoral students
- Delivered lectures to graduate students on topics such as religious oppression, diversity and inclusion, liberation psychology, applications in school and workplace
- Evaluating and grading students' classwork, assignments, and papers
- Initiating, facilitating, and moderating classroom discussions

Lehigh University| Bethlehem, PA Dec 2022
Guest Speaker, Career Development Course

- Led and assisted with a lecture for culture centered career development course
- Provided information to doctoral students on how to plan and execute a social justice-oriented career development curriculum

JFS Delaware, Refugee Integration Support Efforts May 2020- June 2021
English as a second language (ESL) instructor

- Led and assisted in lectures for a diversity and multicultural perspectives course
- Taught survival English to non-English newly immigrated adults, provided weekly ESL homework assignments.

HONORS, AWARDS, FELLOWSHIP

- MedStar Georgetown Lead Extern trainee scholarship ($250)
- AHEC Scholar Programs 2024 ($250-500)
- COE Dean's Endowed Student Travel Scholarship recipient 2024 ($450)
- College of Education Graduate Student Leadership and Service Award Nominee 2024
- State of Delaware Mental Health Fellowship Program 2022-2023
- MRC Travel Grant Award: NLPA Conference Grant Award, 2022 ($300)
- Graduate Student Senate conference grant award 2022 ($100)
- COE Dean's Endowed Student Travel Scholarship recipient 2022 ($800)
- Chesapeake Utilities Black History Month Award, 2022 ($1,000)
- Student Research and Creative Expression Program scholarship recipient 2019-2020 ($1,257)
- Presbyterian Synod Scholarship recipient ($500-$1000), 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018

LEADERSHIP ACTIVTIES

BFSA Member
Georgetown MGUH Black Faculty and Staff Association

- BFSA specifically emphasizes supporting Black-identified faculty and staff to confront legacies of anti-Black racism in academic and medical environments.
- Attend regular meetings sharing insights, creating and contributing to safe, supportive environment for Black staff and students

Lead Extern Trainee
Medstar Georgetown University Hospital Externship training program Sep 2024-Present

- Facilitate professional development presentations for peers and faculty on topics of interest (co-led with fellow lead trainees).
- Co-lead the planning committee for trainee social and volunteer activities.
- Collaborate with the MGUH Training Team to strengthen the training program and expand trainee opportunities.
- Participate in the interview process for the incoming training class.
- Provide resources and support to other externs, while organizing mental health initiatives.
- Liaise between externs and faculty to address needs and facilitate communication.

Lehigh University College of Education Graduate Mentor, 2022-Present
COE Graduate-Peer Mentorship Program

- Provided guidance, support, and mentorship to graduate students in the master's and PhD counseling psychology program offered advice on course selection, practicum paths, and research opportunities to help mentees achieve their goals

COE Diversity Committee, Student Representative, 2022-2024

- Organized events and workshops to foster an inclusive environment for students from diverse backgrounds.
- Advocated for the needs of underrepresented student groups within the committee and across campus.
- Co-managed the Food Pantry Initiative through Multicultural Resource Center and Health and Wellness Collaboration

Lehigh Graduate Student Senate, COE Representative, 2022-2024

- Represented the College of Education: Counseling Psychology within the Graduate Student Senate.
- Collaborated with fellow representatives to address issues affecting the graduate student community.
- Participated in decision-making processes regarding funding allocation, campus policies, and student services.

EDI Member, **JFS Delaware Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee,** 2020-Present

- Played an active role in the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Committee, supporting its mission to dismantle racist and prejudiced practices within JFS Delaware and the community.
- Led agency-wide consultations and trainings: the school-to-prison pipeline, multicultural competencies in therapy, trauma-informed culturally humble services.
- Conducted training sessions at the JCC summer camp and for camp directors, addressing racism and promoting cultural sensitivity.
- Served as a guest panelist speaker at the YWCA, discussing the intersection of mental health and social justice.

Director, **Sisters Across Borders (501(c)(3) Nonprofit)**, 2020-present

- Served as Director for Sisters Across Borders, a nonprofit organization dedicated to bridging healthcare literacy gaps in underserved communities.
- Played a pivotal role in serving vulnerable populations including women, children, immigrants, by promoting preventative care initiatives through community events.
- Collaborated with the organization's founders and team to establish events, fundraising, charity events, speaking engagements.

- Organized Maternal Mental Health awareness event to Columbus, Ohio Community, co-lead a discussion on baby blues vs postpartum depression with medical student and psychiatrist.

Public Relations Coordinator, Pennies Make a Dime Inc., 2019-present.

- Supported Pennies Make a Dime Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization advocating for children battling cancer in Africa and aiding the less fortunate.
- Contributed to fundraising efforts aimed at providing financial support for pediatric cancer patients, funding cancer research, and sponsoring children for treatment.
- Organized educational, physical, and spiritual workshops to support pediatric cancer patients and their families.
- Assisted in fundraising efforts to secure key resources for orphans and pediatric cancer patients.
- Promoted donation drives and fundraising events to raise awareness and support for Pennies Make a Dime Inc.'s initiatives.

SERVICE

MGUH Extern Trainee Luncheon 10/8/2024

- Co-organized an event for Georgetown MedStar trainees focused on camaraderie and resource sharing, including opportunities to eat, socialize, and engage in team-building activities.

MRC Finals De-Stress Social, Monday, April 29th, 2024

- Co-organized an event for graduate students for finals week
- Worked alongside the International Student Support Outreach Coordinator to develop a space for graduate students to eat ice cream, socialize, and answer gratitude, self-care, meaning-making questions

COE Newly Admitted Student Day, Sunday, March 17th, 2024

- Co-organized the event for newly admitted PhD students
- Worked alongside hosts to develop a space for newly admitted students to connect and inquire about doctoral journey, opportunities, internships, and practicums, new city etc.

Career Cafe, Wednesday, March 6th, 2024

- Co-organized the event
- Worked alongside the International Student Support Outreach Coordinator to develop a space for international and domestic students to connect and inquire about post-graduation opportunities such as jobs, internships, and practicums

COE Town Hall Meeting, November, 29th 2023

- Co-organized the event
- Worked alongside the International Student Support Outreach Coordinator to develop a space for international and domestic students to connect and inquire about post-graduation opportunities such as jobs, internships, and practicums

Kumasi South Hospital Atonsu Agogo partnership with Ebenezer Ghanaian Presbyterian Church, Bronx, NYC, Sept 2023 - March 12, 2023

- Provided clothing, funds, and essential supplies to the Kumasi South Hospital Atonsu Agogo partnership in collaboration with Ebenezer Ghanaian Presbyterian Church.

Ghana in partnership with Charisma World Ministries Inc., Oct 2023 - April 1, 2024

- Provided financial support for school supplies and children’s books to Ewiase D/A Primary School in Ghana through a partnership with Charisma World Ministries Inc.

Childhood Cancer Sponsorship Program: Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital in Kumasi, Ghana December 2022 - 2023

- Contributed money and raised funds for the childhood cancer sponsorship program
- Sponsored an eight-year-old boy battling childhood cancer, covering treatment and recovery costs

Kumasi Children Home, Department of Social Welfare, Jan 2022 - 2024

- Contributed clothing to Kumasi Children Home and the Department of Social Welfare.

EDI Committee JFS Higher Education Talk

- Organized educational consultant guest speaker to discuss higher education disparities at JFS agency

Ghanaian Presbyterian National Women's Fellowship of North America Mental Health Forum, February 27th, 2022

- Created and presented on "Depression in Women and Youth" for 89 participants.
- Generated discussion and provided resources on coping strategies for mental health.

Olivet Presbyterian Church, Jan 2018 - Present

- Co-lead and donated a food drive, donating non-perishables to the Food Bank of Delaware organizing gatherings for canned goods and non-perishables donated to the Food Bank of year around holidays.

JFS Delaware Holiday Helpers Committee, Dec 2020 - Dec 2021

- Delivered bags of groceries and supplies during holidays to immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, individuals, and families across all three counties in Delaware.

COVID Relief Grant: Presbyterian Church of USA (PCUSA), April-June 2020

- Co-facilitated the delivery of groceries and supplies to over 37 families during the COVID-19 pandemic, funded by a $9000 grant from PCUSA.

William Paterson University of New Jersey College of Humanities and Social Sciences Student-Led Mental Health Forum, June 30th, 2020

- Co-Led a discussion on the mental health impact of two global pandemics: COVID-19 and racism. Topics included anxiety, racism, self-care, stress, trauma, and mindfulness.

NJ PENSA Community Outreach Community Clean up, September 2019

- Organized a clean-up at Tyrone Collins Park, provided (free) meals-on-wheels food truck to community members, and engaged in park clean-up and evangelism.

Pennies Make a Dime Inc Annual Gala Fundraiser, July 27th, 2019

- Contributed to fundraising efforts
- Donated money to support childhood cancer in Ghana
- Proceeds donated to various children's hospitals in the Ghana region

The Ohio State University African Youth League (AYL) Philanthropy event, Feb 2016,2018

- Helped raised funds through auction, contributed to fundraising efforts
- Donated money to support library in Liberia.

The Ohio State University Peers Advancing Literacy in Students (PEN PALS), Aug 2017 - May 2018

- Served as a student mentor in Pen PALS, a program focused on improving the writing skills of elementary school students in the Columbus City School District through pen pal relationships.
- Organized community meetups and served as a pen pal to 3rd-6th graders, promoting language and reading literacy skills.

The Ohio State University College of Medicine & Sister's Across Borders Inc. Partnership, May 30th, 2017

- Led a discussion on baby blues and postpartum depression for community members, engaging with 10 participants.

The Ohio State University College of Medicine & Sister's Across Borders Inc. Partnership, May 2014 - May 2018

- Conducted glucose and HIV testing, advanced health literacy, and provided various services at the annual Ghanaian Community Picnic, serving approximately 300+ community members in Columbus, Ohio.

The Ohio State University AYL Black Mental Health Discussion, April 12th, 2018

- Invited to present a speaking on Black mental health disparities in the Black community.

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- National Latinx Psychological Association (NLPA), Member
- American Psychological Association (APA), Student affiliate
    - Society of Counseling Psychology (Division 17)
- Pennsylvania Psychological Association (PPA), Member
- Eastern Psychological Association (EPA), Former Member

REFERENCES

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