

“OUT OF MANY, ONE PEOPLE”: AFRO-CARIBBEAN EXPERIENCES & IDENTITY  
FORMATION IN THE BLACK LIVES MATTER ERA

by

ASHLEY VANESSA CROOKS-ALLEN

(Under the Direction of Patricia Richards)

ABSTRACT

Can Black people agree that their lives all matter? How do Afro-Caribbean immigrants feel about Black Lives Matter? Can tragedy faced by people that look like you act as a uniting force? Or does cultural difference undermine racial solidarity in this case? Black people in the United States are not a monolith. There are many different groups and ethnicities under the overarching umbrella of Blackness. This study provides another perspective of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement from those who are affected but are often not included in the conversation. This study builds on theories that explain how social movements can affect identity and vice versa. To address these questions, I conducted 16 in-depth qualitative interviews with Afro-Caribbean people. I found that they do understand themselves as part of the Black community, especially in the Black Lives Matter Era, and the variety of understandings they hold play a large role.

INDEX WORDS: Afro-Caribbean, Black Lives Matter, Identity, Social Movements, Black Immigrants

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Ami Djaba, the first known of my lineage to be stolen from Ghana and brought to Jamaica, as well as all of the ancestors.

Questions for My Immigrant Mother

Mom, is this the American Dream you came here for?  
 Is this what you boarded a plane dressed in your Sunday's best for  
 Is this what dad drove a cab in Coney Island for  
 Is this what you left my sister behind for  
 Mom, how did you come here for a better life  
 In a place that doesn't even want us to live

See I never understood how a person could be illegal  
 But I think that we are some of those illegal immigrants people are always complaining about  
 Did you know it was illegal to be Black here  
 That they kill people that look like us here  
 Just for looking the way we do  
 Why would you bring me to a place like this  
 Mom, I feel like a late-term abortion

I don't think sana sana will work on bullet wounds  
 Bush tea won't hide my melanin from them  
 No matter how much leaf-of-life we bring over  
 I fear I will die here  
 And my body will be food for the same trees that they used to lynch Black bodies  
 Bodies that look just like mine

My navel cord is buried under a mango tree in my grandmother's yard  
 And that land is calling out for me  
 calling me back to safety  
 I can feel it in my belly bottom

See I know the American flag is the same colors as ours  
 but this flag here feels like police lights in my rearview mirror  
 And this America's dream is for people who look like us to never see the light of day  
 So can we leave now?  
 Mom  
 If I promise to learn Spanish and scrub the floors and take my cod liver oil every day,  
 Can we go home?  
 Mom  
 Can we please go home?

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“‘Our stories of Black undocumented immigrants are not being told from either side,’ he said. ‘When we’re talking about Black lives, we’re not talking about the difficulties that the undocumented [Black] people have to bring to the conversation. When we’re talking about immigrant stories, we’re generally not highlighting and uplifting the Black struggles and how that intersectionality affects our identities and experiences.’” –Atlanta Black Star

If you Google “#BlackLivesMatter”, you get 3,740,000 results, you even get 81,900 results if you search “#BlackTransLivesMatter.” But if you search “#BlackImmigrantLivesMatter,” you will only find 599 results. This is a representation of the lack of emphasis on Black immigrants. In the national conversation surrounding the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, many people often get left out. One such group, despite inclusion on the national website, are Black immigrants. When you think of the national conversation surrounding immigration, what does the face of that movement look like? It’s not Black. Black immigrant issues are being left out of our movements. This group plays an important role in Black life. There are about 4 million Black immigrants living in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau). Black immigrants comprise 10% of the Black population (American Community Survey 2014). Black immigrant lives matter. The ways in which Black immigrants get involved with social movements matter.

Politicians bring up identity politics as a force of division. For example, Virginia’s Republican congressman, Scott Taylor said, “In the end, I think when tribal, racial and identity politics are being pushed, quite frankly from the left mostly, I think that that is dangerous.” (The

Washington Times). This idea that an individual's political views can be attached to their personal identities may be unsettling for some, but this alignment can be a method of self-preservation. However, it can also be a mechanism for solidarity; it cannot be denied that identity often factors into which issues hold importance for people. Is supporting a movement that denounces the murder of Black people by police in the best interest of Afro-Caribbean people? Or is creating distance from the BLM movement by labeling it a specifically African American issue a better strategy? It is necessary to understand how non-African American Black people identify themselves and how they grapple with the aforementioned questions as it could affect conceptualizations of identity groups. How does an individual's alignment with a political movement affect their perceptions of both racial and ethnic identity? This research explores how identity can draw people into the Black Lives Matter movement and examines the implications of the movement on identity.

Black people in the United States are not a monolith. There are many different groups and ethnicities under the overarching umbrella of Blackness. These ethnic groups have very different cultures and identities; they sometimes hold conflicting views and stereotype each other. Christina Greer's 2013 book, *Black Ethnics*, provides useful insight, observing that:

Black ethnic groups in America have been negotiating multiple identities, that of being immigrants, phenotypically Black, and American. The permanent 'Black' modifier is what distinguishes Black immigrants from other non-Black immigrant populations, thus the significance for phenotypically Black populations living in the United States is solidified not necessarily in place of, but rather in addition to, their ethnic identification... [f]ull inclusion in the American polity for Black immigrants is not the same as previous assimilations of white ethnics. Nor is it the same as the integration of Latino and Asian immigrants. If Black ethnics are

to be fully included in American society, scholars argue, they will not attempt to shed their immigrant status and identities to become “American” (2013:138).

The concept of identity formation is very complex for Black immigrants who want to hold onto their cultural identities. This makes it difficult to predict their politics based on general patterns of Black people. Scholars must continue the work of extracting the various Black ethnic groups from what has been erroneously treated as a homogenized population.

This research is important because it was an attempt to expand on the limited scholarship that explores the particularity of distinct Black ethnic groups. Caribbean voices often get lost in the category of Black, or the “politically correct” African American. Research rarely acknowledges Black ethnic groups. As of 2017, there are only 30 articles in the *American Sociological Review* that even mention the word “Caribbean”. Sociologists cannot continue to treat Blackness as a monolith. As a potential point of division, knowing more about Afro-Caribbean alignment with racial or ethnic identity could be important to building stronger movements. This research will hopefully lead to insights on how to craft a more inclusive social movement. The findings provide an additional perspective on the Black Lives Matter movement from those who are affected but are often not included in the conversation. This research also explored how identity formation is affected by major social movements and addresses how Afro-Caribbean people understand their relations with African Americans. I hope this study contributes to theories that explain how social movements can affect identity and how identity can likewise affect social movements.

Chapter 2 reviews not only the especially significant previous research done about Black ethnic groups but also engages some of the theoretical frameworks in which the present work is situated. I will explore the theoretical intersection of race, ethnicity, identity, and social movements within this literature review. In Chapter 3, I discuss the research methods I used for

this project. The findings of this work are relevant across sociological subfields as well as potential activist concerns. These findings include the potential influence of the Black Lives Matter movement on perceptions of racism and a discussion of the implications of the movement as a potential mechanism for solidarity in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, I also present some of the ways that inclusion and exclusion operate for Afro-Caribbean people in relation to the Black community with contributions to both collective and individual identity literature. Then in Chapter 6, I provide an analysis of the ways that participants understand the Black Lives Matter movement in contrast to the framing done by organizers which can appeal both to social movement scholars and organizers alike. And I then I conclude my analysis with the surprising finding of how women connect with the movement. Finally, within Chapter 8 is a summary of the findings of this project, a discussion of the limitations of this work, and potential areas for future study.

### **The Black Community**

While there is a diversity within the Black community that should not be ignored, the concept of an overarching Black community should still be acknowledged because it is how people in this community understand themselves. I will not attempt to fully define this concept because it can be understood in a variety of ways—both global and local, inclusive and exclusive, context and person specific.

“Overall, ‘the black community,’ and blackness itself are not fixed realities. They are projects” (Pattillo 2007:320). “The Black community” is often how Black people refer to the shared sense of belonging with other people of the African diaspora. It is a term that participants used throughout interviews, both when I asked explicitly about the Black community and when I simply asked participants to tell me about their communities. This work explored the ways that the Black community is defined, both for Black people but also by Black people, and how the

Black Lives Matter movement contributes to factors that lead Black immigrants to seek membership in it. While this work revealed some of the internal workings of this community and even problematizes some of the boundaries, it made no attempt to deny or dismantle it. Although there may appear to be a tension based on cultural differences, there is often a common experience both of struggle and resilience that connect Black people across the diaspora. Patillo also stated that blackness is “a collective endeavor, and the black community as an implicit agreement to persevere in that journey” (2007:20). The solidarity of the Black community can be maintained even with an attention to the diversity that it encompasses.

### **Black Lives Matter Background**

The Black Lives Matter movement started to take shape during the summer of 2013, in the wake of Trayvon Martin’s murder by George Zimmerman and the resulting acquittal; the movement continued to strengthen after the murder of Michael Brown by Darren Wilson, a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. The police are killing a large number of people and a disproportionate number of those people are Black; in 2016 Black people accounted for 24% of the victims in reported police shootings despite representing merely 13.3% of the population (U.S. Census, The Counted). The failure to indict the police responsible in these cases sent a clear message to the American people: it was legal to kill Black people.

The following months would reinforce that it did not matter whether these Black people were armed or unarmed, whether they were only committing low level crimes, whether they were mentally ill, whether there were children present, or whether there was any real and present danger to the accused officers; police continued to play judge, jury, and executioner as they have in the past. As a response, people took to the streets, their computers, and the media to declare that Black lives do matter, despite what police and the legal system have tried to otherwise convey.

## Research Questions

Can Black people agree that their lives all matter? The Black Lives Matter movement has been very divisive and politically charged in the United States. Some have even called it a terrorist organization (Khan-Cullors and bandele 2018). Those who oppose the movement usually view it as anti-police, though the reality is that the movement is anti-police brutality. Some feel threatened by the assertion that Black lives should matter as much as their own. This movement attempts to defend the right to live for all Black people, and was mobilized in response to the visible threat of police violence. Researchers have not had the opportunity to study Black ethnic groups' identity during a movement of this magnitude since the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. How do Afro-Caribbean immigrants feel about Black Lives Matter? Can tragedy faced by people that look like you act as a uniting force? Or does cultural difference undermine racial solidarity in this case?

The themes explored by these questions prompted two main lines of inquiry for my research. First, I conducted an exploratory study of how Afro-Caribbean people are interacting with the Black Lives Matter movement and its participants. This first aim was mostly exploratory, but I was particularly interested in Afro-Caribbean experiences to see the reasoning behind Afro-Caribbean participation in the movement. With this, I hope I have highlighted the narratives of Afro-Caribbean people and their experiences. With regards to my second query, I investigated Afro-Caribbean identity formation during the Black Lives Matter movement and their mutual effects on each other. Specifically, I sought to understand how the Black Lives Matter movement plays a role in the formation of Afro-Caribbean identities, and how those identities might affect participation in the movement.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Black Ethnic Groups**

Mary C. Waters' 1999 book, *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities*, was instrumental in exploring the relations among Black ethnic groups. Waters conducted intensive interviews with 202 participants of different racial and cultural backgrounds, including Caribbean immigrants, Black Americans, and White Americans. Immigrant participants either had one or both parents who directly emigrated from a Caribbean country. Waters found that a number of the Caribbean immigrants interviewed had internalized negative stereotypes about African Americans and the Black experience in the United States. Accordingly, these immigrants tried to distance themselves from what they perceived as traditional African American identities and experiences. They often cited their values of education and hard work as their reason for potential success. In Waters' study, Black immigrants also believed that African Americans had cultural values that disadvantaged them; in contrast, the advantages of White Americans had been earned. Despite these negative perceptions of African Americans, second generation youth interviewed that attended predominantly Black schools, learned about American Black history, or experienced discrimination first-hand, were better able to understand the realities of American racism.

While Waters' research had many limitations methodologically, it is particularly important to highlight that Waters was limited by her race and bias. In her appendix methodology section, she even reveals an instance where she thought one of her participants, a Black man, was approaching her to rob her (Waters 1999:365). This fear of Black men is an

insidious component of U.S. society and Waters' bias here should not be taken lightly, as it often produces material consequences for the people she set out to research.

Additionally, while Waters believed her comfort with immigrant participants was due to the clarity of her project to this demographic, she eventually had to confront that she—like other white participants—was uncomfortable with African Americans as a reminder of her white guilt (Waters 1999:359). She also highlights the different perspectives given by her Black participants when she interviewed them as compared to her Black assistant. Sociologist Penny J. Rhodes asserted that while responses may differ in cross-racial interviews, these are just examples of the multiple truths available (1994). Since it is known that race and gender can lead to different responses from interview participants, it is possible that being a Black researcher may have allowed me to elicit richer responses from participants when conducting the interviews. Although there is research addressing the experiences of African American and Afro-Caribbean people in the workplace and at school, there is more work to be done dealing with identity and social movements. Fortunately, other more recent scholars have also started to recognize the distinctions among Black ethnic groups.

One such scholar, political scientist Christina Greer (2013), compared political patterns and participation among groups and found tensions similar to those reported by Waters. Greer concluded that there was greater diversity in political alignments among Black immigrants, as they did not have the same context of the history of political parties as African Americans. However, on issues centering a Black/White dichotomy, there was more consensus (Greer 2013:145). Similar to Waters, Greer also found a continued elevated status for Black immigrants as a “model minority” within a minority group (Greer 2013:139). These works revealed that Caribbean Blacks have different views than African Americans and are not inherently able to

understand African American struggles. With so many differences among Black ethnic groups, it is reasonable to expect that the African diaspora in America cannot be represented by one voice.

Even more recently, Jones and Erving's 2015 article, "Structural Constraints and Lived Realities: Negotiating Racial and Ethnic Identities for African Caribbeans in the United States" set a precedent for my current work. They used a mixed methods approach utilizing data from the National Survey of American Life and in-depth interviews to look at the boundaries and factors involved with Afro-Caribbean identity formation. Jones and Erving found that foreign-born Afro-Caribbeans who were less likely to identify as Black/African American and more likely to identify ethnically and feel closer to other Afro-Caribbeans reported less major discrimination. In contrast, Jones and Erving found that foreign-born Afro-Caribbeans who experience more everyday discrimination are more likely to identify as Black American or other (2015:533). This is significant for thinking about the present work as well because this understanding of self as part of the local identity in response to discrimination can help us think about threat and belonging. Per Jones and Erving:

All the respondents saw their fates linked to African Americans because of their shared racialization as Black. They also acknowledged that regardless of ethnicity, Whites in the United States still saw them as being Black and trying to separate ethnically was perceived as unproductive (Jones and Erving 2015:537).

While these respondents reported that they experienced discrimination from African Americans, distancing from African Americans was encouraged by their families, and occurred on both sides, they still saw their fates linked by white America's perceptions. Jones and Erving presented these identity preferences as affected by a host of factors including the demographics of the Midwest location. This factor could be seen as an amplification of the white gaze that I believe is at the root of this phenomenon, as well as account for the divergence from other literatures. Their research questions are similar to mine with interest in likelihood of racial versus ethnic identification, "social distancing and discrimination". However, their contextual

interest for their qualitative interviews lies in the spatial location of the Midwest, while mine centers the Black Lives Matter movement as an era or more temporal setting.

Jones and Erving's work demonstrated the value of quantitative data that differentiates among Black ethnic groups. The quantitative data set they utilize does have some shortcomings, such as its lack of representation outside of the Midwest region or the ambiguity of language such as "Black people in this country" (Jones and Erving 2015:528). However, it also provides a more standardized measure of concepts like perceived linked fate and discrimination. Simien explained "For African Americans, linked fate is the recognition that individual life chances are inextricably tied to the race as a whole" (Simien 2005:529). Some of my preliminary interviews brought up a theme of putting aside other identities to "just be Black." I was interested to see how that becomes a part of the conversation regarding Afro-Caribbean identities with the Black Lives Matter movement. As they reviewed work by Bashi and McDaniel, Benson, and Richards, Jones and Erving suggested United States socialization leads immigrants to adopt "a more 'Americanized' racial identification" to corroborate the instances where some Afro-Caribbeans chose to identify as African American (Jones and Erving 2015:540). They posited that this could be a consequence of the widespread conflation of Black and African American in the United States, e.g. the census. This is often an attempt at political correctness and a manifestation of white discomfort with the word Black. Using these terms interchangeably is just another exemplar of white Americans reinforcing the perception that "the Black population is monolithic and devoid of differences" (Jones and Erving 2015:542).

### **Identity Theory**

At the forefront of my work is the concept of identity salience. Sheldon Stryker offers crucial insight into exploring the phenomenon of Afro-Caribbean interaction with Black Lives

Matter through his identity salience theory. Stryker is from the symbolic interactionism school, but he also is attentive to how this theory works within structural constraints. His identity theory is also subject to these constraints by coming from a conceptualization of a “self” that is shaped by a collection of “roles” which cue certain behaviors that are limited by interactions and structural factors. The identity salience theory then posits that “the higher the identity in [the salience] hierarchy, the more likely it will be invoked in a given situation or in many situations” (Stryker 1980:61). This hierarchy is conceived as a stable ranking of identities, with the highest ranked identity being the one on which an individual is most likely to base their decisions. The salience hierarchy is the likelihood of a certain identity to become salient in certain contexts. Identity theorists believe behavior is predicted by identity salience, which itself is predicted by commitment to the relationships associated with a particular role (Stryker and Burke 2000). So, for example, if a Caribbean immigrant has developed a strong network of valued relationships with other Caribbean people because of their Caribbean identity, then that might lead that identity to be higher in the hierarchy and be invoked more often. This theory poses the question of what identity people feel most strongly attached to, and also proposes an answer to why people are more attached to some identities than others. If the salience of an identity can predict behavior, then the identity that is most salient to the participant should be able to predict their Black Lives Matter participation.

Identity salience can also be situation specific; for some individuals, their Caribbean identity is most salient for them as they distinguish themselves from African Americans, but their Black identity may be elevated when their lives are at risk. More recent work by Brenner, Serpe, and Stryker in 2014 further disentangled this concept into salience (how likely an individual is to perform an identity) versus prominence (how important this identity is to that individual). They empirically tested a causal relationship and found high prominence led to high

salience in science student identity for their sample composed mostly of women of color. While they did find support for their hypothesis, they were also restricted by a relatively short time span and stable context where identity may appear less dynamic than usual. The researchers (2014) demonstrated that in some situations, how much subjective value you attach to an identity affects how likely you are to share that identity, but they do not address the likelihood when in varied contexts or even when compared to other identities. Identity theory provides some useful insights on the why and even the how, but does not explain enough of the when, such as in the midst of an identity-based social movement like Black Lives Matter.

### **Social Identity Theory**

Social identity can supplement identity theory to better address the identity formation of Afro-Caribbean immigrants within the context of the Black Lives Matter movement. Social identity theory is more related to group membership and categories. Hogg, Terry, and White aptly summarized the distinctions, stating, “Identity theory may be more effective in dealing with chronic identities and with interpersonal social interaction, while social identity theory may be more useful in exploring intergroup dimensions and in specifying the sociocognitive generative details of identity dynamics” (1995:255). Social identity theory operates on the basis of two mechanisms, categorization and self-enhancement (Tajfel 1978). According to Tajfel, “social categorization can be understood as the ordering of social environment in terms of groupings of persons in a manner which makes sense to the individual” (Tajfel 2010:119). Often this categorization creates a dichotomous grouping of “us” and “them”, which then become oppositional. This process is demonstrated in various replications of experiments that create miscellaneous groupings and explore the way the group dynamics play out (Billig and Tajfel 1973). In their data collection, the researchers found that regardless of the capricious nature of the categorizations, there are effects on how the people in a given group perceive and interact

with others in and out of their group. For example, Billig and Tajfel found that even in randomly assigned groups when presented with distributing points to members of their group or others that when they were explicitly told that they were put into groups that ingroup favoritism emerged (1973). These findings that mimic real-world dynamics demonstrate that group membership has tangible consequences.

Society categorizes people into certain identifying groups; people categorized within a group adjust their perceptions, so they find the people within their group most favorable. Tajfel explains,

An individual will tend to remain a member of a group and seek membership of new groups... unless leaving the group is impossible for some 'objective reasons' or; it conflicts with important values... then at least two solutions are possible: (a)change one's interpretations of the attributes of the group so that its unwelcome features (e.g. low status) are either justified or made acceptable through a reinterpretations; or (b) to accept he situation for what it is and engage in social action which would lead to desirable changes in the situation (2010:121).

From this insight, it is clear that there are situations in which one cannot leave a lower status group and instead must engage in self-enhancing reinterpretations that make their group membership more favorable. The positive interpretation has to be applied to the entire group in order to enhance oneself because under this model, there is a deindividuation.

People define themselves by their group membership. For instance, if Caribbean immigrants come to the United States and find that they are now Black, or even African American, and they cannot escape it, then they have to re-categorize themselves in terms the society understands. However, Tajfel also cited works by Berkowitz to explain the role of within group comparisons and "relative deprivation." These comparisons are contingent upon the

perceived legitimacy of the similarity within the group, such as how African American and Afro-Caribbean interactions within the group of Blackness are affected by comparing success across ethnic groups. These comparisons are possible because they have to see each other as similar. It is also important to note the potential of dissimilarity to influence identity as well. Afro-Caribbeans can define themselves by what they are not. In recognizing that African Americans are a lower status group in the United States, sometimes the response is to attempt to create distance from this group to avoid stigmatization.

### **Stigma**

Goffman presents stigma as an abnormality, which “normals” use to justify mistreatment of individuals with said abnormality (1963). This can be applied to an entire race of people. Matory’s 2015 book, *Stigma and Culture: Last-Place Anxiety in Black America*, is an incredibly adept examination of this topic. Foreword author Thomas Gibson, discussed stigma, stating, “[a]mbitious populations are driven to differentiate themselves from the stigmatized... One way to do this is to claim that their own group possesses a unique ‘culture’ that may not be of universal value but that is at least superior to the character and lifeway of the stigmatized underclass.” (Matory 2015:x). The titular concept of Matory’s work describes a very real concern in response to the hierarchical nature of the racialized American society. Afro-Caribbean immigrants are “identified as part of a collective” and as a result, subjected to “segmented assimilation” (Matory 2015:1; Portes and Zhou 1993). So, if it has been established that American society mistreats Black people, how can people protect themselves from mistreatment?

### **Splintering Groups**

Many, like Matory, argue Afro-Caribbean immigrants have the option to “assert ethnic distinction from other Black people and exemption from that stigma” (2015:2). The focus of the book is to explore different Black groups exercising this distinct self-identification “option.”

Matory explored perceptions of all members of the African diaspora, ranging from immigrants, the upper class, and Afro-descendant Native Americans seeking tribal rights. But still he acknowledged that “many Americans, including African Americans, are oblivious to such Black ethnic diversity among them.” (2015:9). African Americans who are unaware of this truth risk being scapegoated as other ethnic groups who are inherently aware via the experience of migration, potentially climb over them in the hierarchy. Simultaneously, this lack of awareness is also emblematic of African Americans’ perceived monopoly on Blackness. The expectation that a “shared relative density of melanin being a metonym for a shared worldview and lifeway and, consequently, a shared set of political interests” is an American privilege of its own (Matory 2015:9). This American understanding often can contribute to an unintentional reification by African Americans of a perceived monolithic Blackness. Though this is not inherently the case, Matory later brings in a Yoruba proverb that states “It is because of the rain that doves and chicken were brought together [in the same coop]... that is, similar adversity unites previously dissimilar parties” (2015:313). This proverb does encompass the realities of a similar history—and often present—of oppression, as well as a shared threat that I will explore in greater detail in chapter 5.

Matory’s work is also part of a larger body of work which illustrates the fluidity of ethnic identification. He presents the importance of context in an example of mixed-race Caribbean elites who were shocked to discover they were considered Black in the United States (2015:25). He further explored this fluidity for other groups, but offered a caveat that Afro-descendant immigrants still have more narrow options of identification in the United States context because of anti-Blackness and a strict racial hierarchy. But within their limits, immigrants make assertions like “I’m Jamaican, not Black” (27). These assertions reflect immigrants’ internalization of these anti-Black perceptions and the desire to create distance from those

perceptions. Though Blackness cannot usually be fully denied, asserting these sorts of ethnic and cultural identifications appeal to modern post-racial sensibilities (Matory 2015). He furthered his argument by systematically analyzing multiple cases of self-identifications as non-Black that persist to the present. Matory recognized a dissonance between his phenotypic observations, his certainty of their African Ancestry, and their alternative identities as a remedy for the stigmatized Blackness they must reject. His more novel contribution is this idea of culture as a performative defense against stigma. Per Matory, Afro-Caribbeans and others who identified as non-Black “tend to play up the power of [their] clothing, accents, and verbal self-representations to deflect the mistreatment accorded to low-status people” (321).

Matory actually argues that ethnicity functions similarly to class in attempts to separate oneself or group from the Blackness that is stigmatized, that some Black people use their affluence to distinguish themselves as not the type of Black that gets treated the worst. This argument is furthered in Eugene Robinson’s book, *Disintegration*. This work takes a pretty strong stance against the existence of Black America by the time of writing in 2010. Robinson asserts that Black America has divided into four parts that he calls: “The Mainstream”, “The Transcendent”, “The Abandoned”, and “The Emergent”. These refer to the middle class, the elites, the impoverished, and the immigrant/ multiracial groups within Black America. He claims that because of this splintering we have lost a previously unified Black America. Here it is the relative distance from “The Abandoned” that is to protect these various Black groups.

Since this book’s publication, participants have continued to share sentiments that echo Robinson’s characterization of the Jim Crow era. He sums this up by saying, “there was no special section in the front of the bus for Jamaicans” (2010:176). That sentiments like these persist, about how police do not care what country they are from, led me to temper my optimism regarding actual possibilities for self-identification. I remain skeptical of Robinson’s perceived

temporal shift from strict Jim Crow to a society where Black immigrants can decide their own identity. The choices range from an identification with their country of origin, to with the community of immigrants, as well as whether to stand with or away from the rest of Black America. However, what are the contexts where these choices can happen? Does this choice also cease to matter in the various contexts that Black lives do not matter?

These strategies highlight the difficulties of addressing stigma because it is dictated by the dominant group. So, because white society has constructed Blackness as this negative trait; Black people will be mistreated, and this mistreatment is justified because they are Black. Black people are already experiencing the effects of the stigma themselves, so they do not have the power to actually remove the stigma from their identity by establishing Blackness as positive in society. As a result, Black people, such as Afro-Caribbean immigrants, often either accept the identity and elevate it; or they try to distance themselves using these aforementioned strategies.

### **Ascription & Misclassification**

Afro-Caribbean people often are ascribed the identity of African American and have their culture erased. Racial ascription is a process that Amanda Lewis conceptualized to explain how racial identities can be externally given. Afro-Caribbean people may not even identify with the status groups available in a United States context. At an event hosted by a Caribbean student group at a university in Georgia where I conducted some preliminary observations, the guest speaker was recounting a story from her past and said, “we were West Indians back then.” The speaker’s clarification addresses the shift in terminology away from the colonizing-centered “West Indians” to the more current term, “Caribbean.” This idea of ascribed identities being malleable (and historically or geographically bounded) is important. Caribbean immigrants come to this country and are expected to assimilate into an oppressed racial group while simultaneously receiving a range of ideas about who they are from outside parties. There are

many factors that go into the racial identification/ascription process including language, culture, skin color, and socioeconomic status (Lewis 2013:133). There are a complex set of criteria that get engaged when people find an individual to have an ambiguous identity that involves determining “‘how other’ or ‘how different’” they are. For those who have easily been boxed into existing categories, they often do not get the chance to make a case for their self-determined identities.

Campbell and Troyer conducted an important study on the effects of racial misclassification that I believe can be applied for ethnic misclassification as well (2007). They also take into consideration the direction of the misclassification, that is as being higher or lower status. They find, “some support for the possibility that the nature of the misclassification may affect the degree of stress experienced; being misclassified into a lower-status group, with increased prospects of oppression, may engender greater degrees of stress. Still, misclassification into a higher-status group is not associated with significant positive emotional outcomes” (2007:761). Using a different dataset, Stepanikova found evidence supporting a difference in direction of misclassification; these studies are addressing racial/ethnic misclassification, but not necessarily ethnic misclassification within race (2010). In 2011, Troyer and Campbell follow up their work in response to criticism from Chang and Powell, which include their study as not adequately addressing the inconsistencies in identification over time because when they confined the sample to those who self-identified consistently, there was less misclassification with less consequences.

This example is consistent with the kind of changes over time that Nagel (1997) and Snipp (1992) described: as the Red Power movement grew in influence, individuals who previously did not self-identify as American Indian and whose parents did not identify as American Indian came to feel they were authentically American Indian. We propose that these individuals, despite having inconsistent indicators of their racial identity, could feel strongly connected to an American Indian identity and so, perhaps, be stressed by others’ failure to validate that identity (Campbell and Troyer 2011:358).

This is helpful for beginning to address the impact a social movement can have on identity.

Using the Behavioral Risk Factors Surveillance System (BRFSS), annual cross-sectional survey, Stepanikova found that individuals who were routinely racially misclassified as a lower status race were more likely to report experiencing emotional and physical symptoms. This was not true for those who had not experienced perceived misclassification or who were misclassified into higher status groups. This data set specifically included questions where participants were asked if they experienced these symptoms “as a result of how [they] were treated based on [their] race” (Stepanikova 2010:168). This study also captured the factor that Troyer and Campbell could not because this data set included self-reported misclassification. This is important when you consider that an individual would need to have an awareness of being misclassified in order to understand their treatment as different based on that factor.

In my study, I attempted to address the potential stress of being misclassified by asking specifically for participants to self-identify their race, ethnicity, and country of origin as open ended-questions. I also asked participants how closely they identified with being Caribbean and how closely they identified with being Black. This opportunity to self-identify may be appreciated by people who are so often ascribed identities with which they do not align themselves.

### **Social Movements**

While the social movements literature is expansive and different theoretical orientations could be applied to the Black Lives Matter movement; collective identity, framing and meaning-making are the most relevant for this particular research. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor’s popular book, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, offers an informative analysis of the movement. In particular, Taylor’s chapter “Black Awakening in Obama’s America” provides a thought-provoking interpretation when considering the timing of the “cognitive liberation” that

allowed for the recognition of the political opportunity upon which the BLM movement mobilized (McAdam 1982; Taylor 2016). Here, Taylor explained how Obama's presidency gave Black people in America hope for more inclusion by being represented in the highest office of the political sphere. Taylor demonstrates that ultimately, Obama's election did not significantly improve the quality of life for Black Americans. This disillusionment helped solidify the recognition that the government would not redress the injustice done to the Black community on its own and confirmed the necessity of the Black Lives Matter movement. Taylor argued that this was mobilizing as a transformative realization but also that the Obama presidency provided a political opportunity by way of a government that people thought would be more amenable to the demands of the Black Lives Matter movement. However in the present work, I am more interested how the movement affected people and vice versa than the circumstances that allowed it to begin. Melucci provides some essential contributions for thinking about collective identity as a process.

Collective identity is an interactive and shared definition produced by several interacting individuals who are concerned with the orientations of their action as well as the field of opportunities and constraints in which their action takes place. The process of constructing, maintaining, and altering a collective identity provides the basis for actors to shape their expectations and calculate the costs and benefits of their action. . . .

Collective identity is thus a process in which actors produce the common cognitive frameworks that enable them to assess their environment and to calculate the costs and benefits of their action (Melucci 1989:34-5).

Notice that he specified the collective identity is a produced definition, instead of a collection of individual identities. This is helpful for thinking about the construction of the Black community and the negotiation of belonging as ongoing. The process Melucci described can apply to the present research where various individuals involved in the Black community collectively negotiate the collective identity and the accompanying values in such a way that is impacted by

the context in which it is formed, such as the BLM era. Melucci's later work provides a framework for the purpose of this project and beyond in his following statement:

Democracy in complex societies requires conditions, which enable individuals and social groups to affirm themselves and to be recognized for what they are or wish to be. That is, it requires conditions for enhancing the recognition and autonomy of individual and collective signifying processes in everyday life. The formation, maintenance and alteration through time of a self-reflexive identity require social spaces free from control or repression (1993: 188).

I observed a microcosm of these required conditions for both individual and collective unfettered self-identification in the analysis of the Black community, as well as a site to imagine the possibilities for group recognition in a society where Black people are free.

In chapter 6, I will engage with some of the tensions between how BLM organizers frame the movement and how those frames are distorted by public discourse and the media. With the traditional definition of framing, there is more of a one-sided relationship where the movement makes strategic decisions about the types of meanings it will signify to align its frame with those from whom it is seeking support (Snow et al. 1986). Steinberg's "Tilting the frame: Considerations on Collective Action Framing From a Discursive Turn" highlights the importance of incorporating discourse (1998). His "discursive approach depicts framing as an inherently collective process, as opposed to the atomistic characterizations of its foundations among some framing theorists." (Steinberg 1998:862). Snow's later more collaborative definition of framing appears to take this discursive element into consideration.

Framing, within the context of social movements, refers to the signifying work or meaning construction engaged in by movement adherents (e.g., leaders, activists, and rank-and-file participants) and other actors (e.g., adversaries, institutional elites, media, social control agents, countermovements) relevant to the interests of movements and the challenges they mount in pursuit of those interests (Snow 2013).

Francesca Polletta critiques traditional understanding of framing for using culture as a strategy instead of recognizing its own value in conjunction with structural political factors, which led her to focus on “institutional schemas”, which “treat[s] culture as constitutive of interests and identities but also as circulating through networks, backed up by resources, and employed in the service of organizational agendas” (Polletta 2008:85). While the present work does not engage directly with organizers to understand their framing objectives or exclusively with activists or those who consider themselves active members of the BLM movement, it does seek to understand the meaning-making processes of potential adherents for whom the organizers’ construct their frames. Afro-Caribbean people are a part of the Black community that BLM organizers intend to include. In order to understand how to align their frames, Afro-Caribbean perceptions of the current social events need to be better understood.

### **Social Movements, Emotions, & Collective Effervescence**

Collective effervescence is Durkheim’s concept that “In the midst of an assembly animated by a common passion, we become susceptible to acts and sentiments of which we are incapable when reduced to our own forces” (Durkheim 1995:211-212). Often this concept is used to explain the phenomenon of getting swept up in an emotional state of a crowd in examples such as a huge sports championship or concert. However, Durkheim also expands this to a more “durable” state:

There are periods in history when, under the influence of some great collective shock, social interactions have become more frequent and active. Men look for each other and assemble together more than ever. That general effervescence results which is characteristic of revolutionary or creative epochs. (Durkheim 1995:212-213)

Can the Black Lives Matter era be characterized as a “revolutionary epoch”? If so, perhaps the “great collective shock” of the era was the publicization of the continued “state-sanctioned violence and anti-Black racism” (Blacklivesmatter.com). The concept of effervescence here is an attempt to give a name to the concept of intense palpable energy that occurs during a situation or

period. Keeping in mind the potential to expand collective effervescence from an assembly to a period, it is then both possible and reasonable to think of this proliferation of energy reaching beyond in-person interaction to mainstream and social media. This expanded definition suggests the great collective shock that influences the increased social interactions which results in the effervescence. I read this as an explanation for mobilization but also one which is broad enough to capture the more community-focused aspects of assembly.

Social movement theories provide the best avenue to a thorough analysis of the Black Lives Matter phenomenon as a movement and not just an era. Initially, I was hesitant to use the social movement theories for this analysis, as collective effervescence mirrors a number of collective behavior theories. Collective behavior theories in the sociology of social movements have largely been rejected because of the way social movement actors are presented, as individuals susceptible to crowd behavior via irrational emotions. Early theorists such as Park and Blumer explained this through the “contagion theory,” which characterized emotion as an irrational pathogen spreading between actors (Locher 2002). Turner and Killian argued instead that new norms were created in the midst of crowds, but that there was not any evidence of a loss of rationality inherent to crowds as was suggested (1957). But the idea of irrational actors controlled by emotion contributed to the perception of collective behavior theories as a mostly negative view of social movements. This perspective is understandable given the context in which they developed, but is not necessarily appropriate for analyzing the Black Lives Matter movement as a movement for Black liberation.

Social movement scholars were resistant to label those African-Americans who were in pursuit of equal rights as irrational, and so a shift towards resource mobilization theory provided a framework that could analyze social movement participants and organizers as rational actors (McCarthy and Zald 1977). So how can a movement like Black Lives Matter, which involves a

great deal of emotion, be explained without returning to the reductionist problems of collective behavior theory? I believe we must first note that rationality is not actually oppositional to emotion. Scholars of the “emotional turn” proposed that movements and their actors can actually, and often do, embody both; they can work in conjunction (Gould 2013).

...Collins’s (1975) discussion of the emotional energy generated in collective rituals, labeled “collective effervescence” by Durkheim. As part of Collins’s conflict theory, emotions and attention are values that people compete for, and excitements and solidarities draw people to collective action (Jasper 2011:14.3).

Jasper later suggests that Collins “offers a theory of emotional energy, generated in face-to-face situations, that gives people consciousness of groups and motivation to participate in collective endeavors” (2011:14.10), but I wonder if the “face-to-face” aspect is a necessary component.

While I will not ignore the difference between virtual and in-person interactions, I can hardly imagine that Durkheim could have predicted a phenomenon like #BlackTwitter (a virtual space comparable to a political salon of the enlightenment era). However, even with the technological differences, there remain important emotional components of social movements that span across time. ..

In her 2009 book *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS*, Gould provided insights that proved useful for my research. Despite differences between the queer and Black community, her analysis of emotion in an identity-based movement that is directed towards the state in response to its role in the deaths of its members and devaluation of their lives provides a lot of interesting points to draw comparisons. There are a few caveats to these comparisons regarding the difference in identity, community, and issue that are worth acknowledging. For example, while Black and Queer identities do overlap, there are differences between identities of race and sexual orientation. The most pressing distinction here would be the inevitability of external phenotype classification. Also, since someone is more likely to have family members who share their race than their sexual orientation, then growing up a part of the

Black community may happen earlier than locating oneself in the queer community for example. Additionally, though ACT UP and Black Lives Matter are both concerned with state-sanctioned death, the particular issues have distinct differences and are experienced differently. While the AIDS epidemic that especially impacted queer folks was maliciously neglected by the government, the particular issue of police brutality is actively carried out by agents of the state (Gould 2004). Also, the experiences of these deaths differ in that with the high numerical amount of people dying in the AIDS epidemic the people participating had often lost their personal loved ones, on the other hand, Black Lives Matter often rallies supporters who often do not personally know the victim or others.

I think most pressing for my work is Gould 's examination of the process of transforming grief and fear into a mobilizable anger. Gould draws similarities to when women often felt depressed about their situation until they were made aware of the external imposition of their oppression which allowed them to feel an anger directed towards the patriarchy, in what Flam terms an "emotional liberation" (2009, Jasper 2011). Jasper further clarifies this concept by defining it as,

a package of emotions that removes blockages to protest, including a shift of affective loyalties from dominant identities and institutions to protest-oriented ones, reflex emotions of anger rather than fear, moods of hope and enthusiasm rather than despair or resignation, and moral emotions of indignation (Jasper 2011:14.12).

Gould uses Hochschild's feeling "rules" to explain that "part of socialization includes informal instruction about which emotions are appropriate to feel and to express, for how long, and how intensely, by whom and in what contexts." (2004:162). This concept of "emotional liberation" can be applied to the goals of activists when framing, as they attempt to disrupt the constraints of what emotions society have deemed acceptable for potential adherents. It opens up the space for discomfort. "In contemporary U.S. society, anger is never an unproblematic emotion... particularly when articulated by people of color, women, poor people, and other

marginalized folks. Everyone is supposed to keep anger under wraps” (Gould 2004: 165). ACT UP did execute strategies to transform grief into anger by promoting a logic that Gould summarized, “given our grief and under these dire circumstances, anger and militant, confrontational action targeting state and society are acceptable, legitimate, justifiable, and indeed necessary” (2004:169). Gould traces the social movement transformation of emotions related to queer identity from shame to pride to grief to anger. Some of Gould’s earlier work is particularly useful for looking at how this is done.

**Emotional components of social movements.** Jasper provides an analysis of a variety of movements with a focus on how understandings of morality are at play (1997). In this work, he incorporated a range of perspectives and factors, including the connection between morality and emotion. Jasper addressed a few key topics in this book that I believe will be useful to contextualize in conjunction with concrete examples as I discuss Gould’s research on ACT UP and its potential contributions to my analysis of emotions in relation to the Black Lives Matter movement. Those topics are (a) moral shocks, (b) death and funerals, and (c) solidarity and shared feelings.

*Moral Shocks.* Jasper describes “Moral Shocks” as,

often the first step toward recruitment into social movements. When an unexpected event or piece of information raises such a sense of outrage in a person, she becomes inclined toward political action, with or without the network of personal contacts emphasized in mobilization and process theories. The triggers may be highly publicized public events...or personal experiences, such as the death of a child. They may be sudden, like an accident or public announcement, or they may unfold gradually over time...Most are dramatic and attention getting, but some are modest, more like the “last straw” that finally spurs action...The information or event helps a person think about her basic values and how the world diverges from them in some important way...Events can be powerful symbols (Jasper 1997:106).

What makes the shock, shocking enough to mobilize? When does the framing enacted by organizers take precedence over shock level? Hardwick, for example, demonstrates a potential

“last straw” type of shock in the midst of the AIDS epidemic. Gould described this catalyzing moment, saying, “Because the Court was denying an entire class of people their basic rights, lesbians and gay men were encouraged to interpret the ruling not as the product of their individual failings but as the prejudicial and discriminatory exclusion from society of an entire social group” (2004:167). While they had already suffered a staggering amount of death in their community, the framing of this decision played a role in transforming how they felt by a recognition of the government’s failure to include them. Gould cites the anger from the 1986 *Hardwick* decision as the “moral shock” that helped mobilize the grief-stricken community.

Black Lives Matter was similarly mobilized by a perceived court failure. We have mourned many times knowing that not only can we be murdered for existing, but that justice will not be served, and often not even pursued. So, while I would argue that Black people are not often shocked by the discrimination in the United States, people still hope for progress. For this reason, I believe the point that is often the most shocking—and mobilizing—is the acquittal. That moment is where we find our lives are worthless not only from one individual's perspective, but to our society.

The specific “moral shock” that was noted for mobilizing #BlackLivesMatter was the acquittal of George Zimmerman. The Black community grieved for Trayvon Martin, the 14-year-old Black boy walking through his own neighborhood, who was murdered by George Zimmerman. Still, it was not until we all watched George Zimmerman walk free that it became clear the depths that we had been discarded by our society; the little faith we might have had in the criminal justice system was shattered. This was a shock, though not the first.

“Much protest—more than has been recognized—has at its core a sense of threat, a key component of moral shocks” (Jasper 1997:129). Considering a sense of threat as an emotion had not initially occurred to me, but it provided a point from which to consider an emotion that can

lead to various secondary emotions and therefore differing actions. In the Black Lives Matter movement, Afro-Caribbean participants recognized the threat to Black people included them and also that this was a very emotionally charged movement. From there we can consider the potential follow-ups to a threat, including a choice between outrage or fear, fight or flight, solidarity or distance. I must concede that these are not clear binaries that I have just described, but the parallels between them are an important exercise considering Jasper's suggestion that this sense of threat is often a vital component for both social movements and moral shocks.

*Death & Funerals.* Activists invoke the emotions that spring from death and funerals to mobilize people, which can be observed in both the ACT UP and Black Lives Matter movements and are relevant to the analysis of Black Lives Matter movement. Jasper provides some helpful insights into the mechanisms at work in this process as well.

Death and funerals also form salient situations. If time and place are two influential-but often overlooked-dimensions of culture, helping to define protestors' identities and projects, then so are the existential boundaries of human life...As Samuel Johnson pointed out, death focuses the attention. It eliminates nonessential concerns from sight. The prospect of one's own death, the death of a loved one, even the death of a stranger (perhaps because she was a young child or because she died in a grisly manner): all these can arouse intense, urgent emotions, can force one to affirm or reconsider basic values, and can motivate political efforts. (Jasper 1997:95).

Here Jasper provides a pretty broad perspective of death and funerals role in some social movements. I think this is useful for addressing the importance that it can have on people and social movements, especially the arousal of urgent emotions.

Gould's earlier work "Passionate Political Processes: Bringing Emotions Back into the Study of Social Movements" also provides some helpful critiques of the absence of emotion in of political process theory. Here she addresses the intentional use of the emotion of grief and public mourning through ACT UP's "political funerals" (2004). This is a concept that "links a public procession marking someone's death to political demands" (Gould 2004:159). She provides multiple examples of political funerals that capture the poignant emotions on display. For

example, “On the day of the march, as hundreds of people assembled, a small group met together. Holding the ashes of their loved ones, they would lead the funeral procession. Arthur, from Chicago, held up a worn sack that contained the ashes of his lover... ‘This is Ortez’” (Gould 2004:156). However, in the tradition of the “emotional turn”, she is careful to implore you to not essentialize these moving narratives as purely strategic.

“It makes sense to understand ACT UP’s political funerals, as in part strategic mobilizations of emotions designed to motivate greater activist participation and to force concessions from those the movement was targeting” but Gould makes the case that there are more to these narratives than that (2004:159). She expands on this point, stating, “A view of emotions as strategic deployments would strip them of all of their noncognitive, non-instrumental attributes, thereby depleting some of their most interesting characteristics and sapping them of a large component of their conceptual force” (Gould 2004:160). I found her examples incredibly useful for concretizing the concept of “nonrationality” that Gould describes in her later work,

As cultural theorist Lauren Berlant notes, nonrationality is at the heart of the political (2005). Nonrationality differs from irrationality: the nonrational is not within conscious, cognitive sense-making but rather to the side of such processes; the term irrational, in contrast, usually means that which is contrary to such processes, connoting that which goes against one’s interests as well as that which is (therefore) illogical, crazy, senseless, unfounded, and unreasonable (Gould 2013:4).

With these narratives of political funerals, Gould illustrates the value of challenging the false dichotomy between emotion and rationality in a way that does not oversimplify emotion into an instrument.

The way that Jasper relates this concept back to the reevaluation of one’s basic values contextualizes the role he sees for morality, and the way threats to this can be used. He goes on to say that,

part of the urgency of the civil rights movement came from the fact that young black men were still being killed in the South... there can even be threats to one's sense of moral order, as when others are allowed to get away with flagrant activities that one considers immoral" (Jasper 1997:128).

Political funerals occurred before the ACT UP movement and continue today, so understanding how emotion plays a role is important. I recognize the non-instrumentalist emotional importance of collective grieving and community building in my interviews. In 1955, it was Emmett Till's literal funeral that moved people to protest, but in 2018, a symbolic funeral for Oshae Terry and Botham Jean, who were both murdered by police, is held as the protest itself. News source coverage of this demonstration did not fully capture this demonstration like the photos do, and even those likely fall short of the experience of actually being present. The Dallas News website posted, "Activists used two coffins to drive home their message about police slayings at a protest outside AT&T Stadium ahead of Sunday night's Dallas Cowboys game. About 75 people marched alongside the coffins symbolizing Oshae Terry and Botham Jean, men who were fatally shot by North Texas officers this month (Dallas News 2018). Even without the actual body, the symbol of the funeral remains a poignant emotional symbol. It is not only the sense of threat to one's own life that act as motivation, but that others' deaths can be a disruption in how you understand how the world should work.

**Solidarity & shared feelings.** The last insights from *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements* that I want to highlight are the proposed impact of emotions on solidarity and this concept of "shared emotions" because those are important themes that have emerged in my research (Jasper 1997). Here Jasper says,

Emotions don't merely accompany our deepest desires and satisfactions, they constitute them, permeating our ideas, identities, and interests. They are, in Randall Collins' words, "the 'glue' of solidarity-and what mobilizes conflict." Anxiety, enthusiasm, or even stronger emotions may be necessary to focus our attention, especially on political issues outside our normal daily routines. (Jasper 1997:108)

By this, I understand this to mean that emotions' role in motivating our participation is what allows solidarity to form. Encouraging people to buy into the movement and make the effort to show up is an essential function that emotion serves. Still, this brings me to the question of how emotion functions within movements which Jasper begins to explain,

Other emotions—call them shared—are consciously held by a group at the same time, but they do not have the other group members as their objects. Collectively the group generates or elaborates anger toward outsiders, or outrage over government policies. It trusts certain individuals and institutions and mistrusts others. The power of shared emotions comes from expressing them together, from recognizing and proclaiming that they are shared, so that they become what Max Scheler called a “feeling-in-common.” It is this collective expression that helps create movement identities. (Jasper 1997:187).

This might not provide a particularly in-depth look at the group dynamics, which I can't quite apply since my participants are not restricted to social movement actors, but it does show how emotions can contribute to identity. Having reviewed the literature on Black ethnic groups, theories of identity, and theories of social movements, I will now explain my methods before I present my analysis where all of these literatures intersect.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

Caribbean immigrants in particular are a good case study of the U.S. Black immigrant population because they make up about half of the Black immigrant population. They also have more in common with U.S. Blacks in terms of socio-historical background because of their shared trauma in the Atlantic slave trade. This similarity in history makes it more likely that effects observed are actually related to their different identities, as immigrants (or the children of immigrants). I primarily conducted interviews in Georgia because it is the most accessible to me. However, Georgia is the 6th most popular destination for immigrants from the Caribbean in the country and also has an active social justice community, making this an area well suited for studying this phenomenon. It also has the added layer of being part of the South which, due to the legacy of slavery, the Civil War, Jim Crow segregation, et cetera, has some interesting implications for how people may perceive and experience racism differently than other regions of the United States.

Qualitative interviews are well suited for this phenomenon because most large-scale surveys do not have information on my questions or they aggregate Black people into one category. This is also a relatively recent and possibly ephemeral phenomenon so getting on the ground to talk to people as quickly as possible was imperative. My criteria for participation included any person over 18 years old, living in Georgia, and they or one of their parents were born in the Caribbean. I chose to avoid using language of “first/second generation immigrant” because there is still a lack of consensus about whether first generation refers to the person who immigrated or to the first generation of their children born in the new country. Instead, I use

having a parent who was born in the Caribbean as a proxy for immigrant status with the expectation that having a parent who is a Caribbean immigrant would create a similar culturally specific socialization to those born there themselves.

I recruited via emails to the Caribbean association of Georgia, as well as the Caribbean student associations at Georgia universities. I also attended meetings in person to announce the study. I also visited a variety of Caribbean restaurants and grocery stores in Georgia and asked if I could place my flyers there. I also joined Caribbean oriented social media groups where I posted a link to the survey. Additionally, I asked that my social media networks share the link and ask that participants share it with others. I also encouraged participants to share the survey link with other Caribbean people in their networks. The survey was created through Qualtrics, an online platform that provided a link that could be freely distributed. It concludes by asking if the respondent would be willing to be contacted for an interview and request an email address and phone number. I used this survey to gather participants, as well as to collect some descriptive statistics about the respondents. The survey asked about their identity, social movement participation, and perceptions of Black Lives Matter in addition to demographic information.

From there, I collected the information provided from those who were willing to participate in interviews. I contacted the participants by email and worked with their availability to meet in person or over Skype. I requested a pseudonym from the interviewee to use during my research and assigned a pseudonym for those that did not select their own. I conducted the interview and recorded it to be transcribed later. I also took notes, especially noting recurring themes, while I conducted the interview. My questions asked about their experiences and perceptions of Blackness, Anti-Black police brutality, identity, social groups, and social movements over their life course.

## **Data**

My data consist of descriptive survey statistics from my sample in addition to the in-depth interviews, which are the bulk of my data. I primarily used the survey as a tool to recruit participants for the interviews, but this also gave me the chance to collect some descriptive information about those who participated. Of the 68 people who started the survey, 56 respondents completed 60% of the survey, and 49 completed the survey. A little over half of the respondents identified as women and a similar amount were between the ages of 18 and 24. Less than half of respondents were currently students at a college or university, and roughly half had a 4-year degree or higher. About a third of participants were themselves born in the Caribbean.

Although feelings of warmth towards Black Lives Matter and that “the Black Lives Matter Movement addresses issues that are important to you” were very high, less than half of the respondents reported having “participated in anything related to Black Lives Matter.” When asked to rank the five provided common social issues in importance, “Police Brutality” was the second most important and “Immigration” was ranked the third most important, followed by “Reproductive Rights” as fourth, and “LGBTQ Rights” as the least important, with “Poverty” being ranked the most important overall. Although 33 respondents said they would be willing to be contacted for an interview, not all of those resulted in interviews for various reasons, from lack of response to relocation. From these respondents, I conducted interviews until I reached saturation, which came up to 16 interviews. I later sent these interviews to be transcribed by an online service and, in conjunction with my notes from the interviews, I began the process of inductive coding. This allowed me to not only identify ways that participants were talking about the topics that I went in interested in but also the ones that emerged from the data; for example, none of my interview questions ask about gender but gender nevertheless became a prevalent theme to explore in this work. I went through each interview transcript highlighting passages and

creating a master list of emergent themes. I used this list in conjunction with related words to establish my codes in the qualitative software, ATLAS.ti.

## CHAPTER 4

### #BLACKLIVESMATTER MATTERS

“For foreign-born African Caribbeans, greater frequency of everyday discrimination is associated with a higher likelihood of identifying as Black American or Other, as opposed to an ethnic identity” (Jones and Erving 2015:533). What function might the Black Lives Matter movement serve in identity formation? And how might this relate to Jones and Erving’s findings about Caribbean immigrants who had experienced more discrimination? In this chapter I will present findings from the interviews and then discuss the possibilities for BLM as a potential mechanism for identity formation. I chose to ask participants about their perceptions of racism and whether anything had ever changed those perceptions before asking about the Black Lives Matter movement in order to try to get their own understandings of what actually influenced them without leading them. However, if they said they had not been influenced by the BLM movement, I did not ask them about why since they had already shared their actual influences. The responses to being explicitly asked about whether or not they thought the BLM movement actually affected their perceptions of racism in the United States were somewhat mixed. Many participants said that the BLM movement has affected their perceptions, but still others cited other factors, such as maturity or the passage of time. Usually they expressed that the BLM movement had played a supplementary role in shaping their understandings.

However, I will first examine the few participants who said the BLM movement did not have any effect on their perceptions of racism in the United States. The main recurring theme among those who did not think BLM had affected them, was a sense that they had already solidified their beliefs due to other factors. For example, Crystal, a Jamaican immigrant in her

early 20s, explained that her perceptions of racism in America were largely impacted by her move to the United States and seeing it for herself; she did not feel personally influenced by the Black Lives Matter movement

Interviewer: What are your perceptions of racism in America like as a whole? What do you think about American racism?

Crystal: ...Things have changed in different ways. But I feel like there's a lot of racism but either people say it or they don't. It's still present.

Interviewer: Have your perceptions of racism ever changed? Like what you thought about racism in the United States ever to change?

Crystal: Before I moved here, it was the place to go. America. But now I'm here, it's like, there's a lot of racism. I mean, living here, you get to hear more things, see more things and it's just more real but when you're in Jamaica, it's like, oh, but America has all to offer. Like they kind of like wash over the racism.

Interviewer: And has the Black Lives Matter movement impacted the way that you see racism in any way?

Crystal: No. Not the way I see it.

From there, we moved on to the next question. At the time of the interview, Crystal had only lived in the United States for about four years, so her time here had mostly overlapped with BLM. This could be a contributing factor to why she did not feel directly affected by BLM. It was her first-hand experiences with American racism that really transformed her views from the ones she had previously held in Jamaica. Since the realization of the magnitude of American racism when Crystal moved to the United States was already so impactful, BLM was not what she understood to be a part of that change.

Winston, who was born in the United States but is also of Jamaican descent, had a very different experience having always lived here and being a young Black man also in his early 20s.

The exchange went as follows:

Interviewer: And has the Black Lives Matter movement influenced your perceptions of racism in any way?

Winston: No. Because I've always known that it exists. I was never really- I never turn a blind eye to it. I experience racism in all forms. I've been profiled by police all the time for a drug dealer.

These participants have a certain level of confidence in their understandings of racism due to their lived experiences. Though Winston says he supports the BLM movement and shows

this through conversations with others, he does not think he needs to be told about racism because he lives it. He also revealed that during a marijuana-inspired conversation with his “brother”, they had theorized a “cure for racism” that is based on a very individual understanding of racism. Winston explained:

Maybe once upon a time, you had someone of a particular group cause you harm. Now, you look at everyone that reminds you of that group of people, just like that one person. So, without ever having a problem or getting to know them, you’ll now say, OK. She’s just like that person. That’s pretty much racism.

While he personally experiences profiling by the police, he still arrived at understanding of racism absent of the systemic state-centered aspect embodied by the BLM movement. What Winston describes as racism really better describes prejudice, since racism specifically affects oppressed groups. Winston interpreted racism as an individual experience based on their interactions, rather than how racism has been built into the country’s political and socioeconomic foundations. Winston exemplifies one of many factors that can influence someone’s perceptions of racism. Having experienced profiling from the police on an individual level was enough to make him aware of racism in such a way that he supports the movement, but does not turn to the movement as a source for information. While I believe that a system-level understanding of racism is beneficial for framing the movement for those who may not feel they are affected by racism, BLM as a proxy for experiencing discrimination is not something that Winston needs having already actually experienced discrimination.

Another example of someone with prior knowledge that they believe precluded them from BLM’s influence on their understandings of racism was Taylor, a U.S. born Haitian graduate student. When asked whether her perceptions of racism in the U.S. had ever changed, she said “I think, being more aware of it since coming to college... when I was in high school, used to be very concerned about my own little bubble.” Here, Taylor’s confidence comes from a prior knowledge gained during her college years.

Taylor: It's – yeah I think so, I can't recognize whether it's fact that I was in college or the fact that I got older and was like also more information but I'd say yeah, at college you have access to more information and the age.

Interviewer: And then, has the Black Lives Matter movement influenced your perceptions of racism in any way?

Taylor: Not really, I've always had sort of the same thoughts about racism and Black Lives Matter movement kind of falls in line with what I've already thought about.

Taylor's understandings of racism have a different source that did not require experiencing racism nor even witnessing it firsthand. It was through acquiring additional information that she felt led her to the same point that BLM would have. So, it appears that someone who is accustomed to experiencing discrimination, Winston, and someone who learned about it second hand, can both arrive at the same conclusion that they already know what BLM is trying to teach. Regardless of whether they actually have a systemic understanding of what BLM espouses, their understanding of BLM is what leads them to believe that it has not influenced them. While this will be further explored in Chapter 6, these perceptions raise the question of what role a movement largely centering on consciousness-raising play in the identity formation of the already “woke”? BLM can still serve its community building function and potentially serve as a tool for their discussions as they try to share their knowledge with others via conversations and social media, which were the most common ways that participants said they showed their support.

In contrast, Kris, a U.S. born mother in her late 30s, felt she did need an external wake-up call, but it did not relate to the BLM movement. Although she does not think BLM influenced her perceptions, she did share that the 2016 election was turning point for her understandings of racism in the United States.

Interviewer: Okay. And what are your perceptions of racism in America?

Kris: Goodness. I really thought we were in a different place and time, and having the current president that we do, hearing him say certain things, hearing the public react the way that they are, it lets me know that racism is alive and well. I guess it was kind of like a sleeping dragon and he kind of unleashed that dragon. I thought we had made some gains and I feel like we have but we still have a lot more work to do....

Interviewer: And do you think that the Black Lives Matter Movement has influenced your perceptions of racism in anyway?

Kris: No. I don't think it has influenced my perception, no.

Many who had bought into the myth of racial progress did indeed experience the 2016 election as a moral shock. Similar to the 2013 acquittal or the Hardwick decision, where people had been aware of ongoing issues but that was a mobilizing turning point; people like Kim may have been aware of certain issues but still believed that the country had advanced further than it had until this event. So, although Kris said she supports the movement, she evidently still was not convinced of the magnitude of the racial issues plaguing the U.S. until the 2016 election.

Others believed that the BLM movement had some influence but were still somewhat reserved in attributing a change in their perceptions to the movement. For example, Marie, a Haitian graduate student,

Interviewer: And do you think that the Black Lives Matter movement influenced your perceptions of racism in any way?

Marie: It definitely raised more—it made me question more about police brutality because it's not something that I really knew much about before the Black Lives Matter movement...

For Marie, the BLM movement brought attention to a specific pressing issue that she had not been as aware of before although she had been well aware of racism. Gracey, a middle-aged U.S. born woman of West Indian descent, commented:

Gracey: I think it has. I think it's made me more aware of—of its complexity, how it can operate on a day to day basis and also what kinds of responses are possible and what kind of impact that response can have, even on a larger national scale, in terms of the national debate, cause I feel like it has as much as there's a long way to go, it has really made that national debate have to stand up and take notice.

Gracey also had her previous awareness of racism expanded, and understood more of the nation's racial dynamics once race was forced back into the national forum. Both of these participants did not necessarily say that it has dictated their perceptions but that it has influenced them by encouraging them to learn more.

However, many participants said that their perceptions of racism were definitely influenced by the Black Lives Matter movement in some way. Adrian, a U.S born woman in her early 20s said that it was the backlash to the movement that really affected her.

Interviewer: Has the Black Lives movement influenced your perceptions of racism in any way?

Adrian: Yeah. I mean, while I knew that it was always there, I think the strong negative reaction to Black Lives movement was very hurtful, if that's the right word. Like, I knew it was there, but I would like to think that at the end of the day most people can get behind supporting that it's bad and racism and prejudice are, like, things that you should work towards as a country to eliminate. And then this group came about that was trying to advocate for that. Like, literally saying Black Lives Matter, which should not be a controversial statement, and so many people jumped on this bandwagon villainizing them and saying that that's not right. And that just really, that shocked me, honestly. - Adrian

Monica, also U.S. born and in her early 20s, also saw the movement as illuminating the country's racism, and found the national response to the BLM movement particularly impactful.

Monica: Yes. I feel like it shed a light on racist people more.

Interviewer: How so?

Monica: Because I feel like—at least, what I could see. I don't think that people really voice their opinions as much before the movement. But then once the movement started, other movement started such as Blue Lives Matter, All Lives Matter which did not exist until the Black Lives movement came up. So, I think that that way people started voicing their opinion, saying how they feel. So, before the Black Lives movement, those movements did not exist which means those people were not voicing their opinions beforehand but now they are.

The responses in opposition to BLM have shown Monica that people really believe that Black lives don't matter or matter less than others. In response to the Black Lives Matter movement, some counter-movements emerged such as the Blue Lives Matter and All Lives Matter movements that Monica mentioned. These movements were born out of a misinterpretation of Black Lives Matter which understood the movement as anti-police or claiming that Black lives mattered more than others. I will return to misinterpretations, during my discussion of framing and understandings in chapter 6. The emergence of these movements in response to BLM was illuminating for those who understood what BLM stood for because BLM supporters became more aware of the discomfort many had with the notion that Black lives

could matter as much as everyone else's. The counter-movements vocally denounced a statement that supporters thought should be widely accepted, and in the process exposed the racism still present in the United States. For some like Monica, it was not necessarily the movement itself that influenced their perceptions of racism, but seeing how opponents reacted and the counter-movements that ensued.

Others' perceptions were more influenced by the informative aspects of the movement. Rooker, an 18-year-old undergraduate student, shared that she did not really have any perceptions but that she has "learned more, grew with news on social media and things like that." When asked if the BLM movement had an influence, she says "Yes. I would say so, yes." Joe, an international student from the Bahamas, similarly was influenced by the movement as a source of information.

It has influenced me because it's kinda like people who were very active in it let me know what's going on in other parts of the U.S. and I think I have like a really closed-minded view just living at Atlanta, but like the Black Lives Matter movement is across the U.S. And if something happens in Ohio, like people know about it and people will speak on it and it kind of educates me on the realities of racism in America as a whole, not just in my small view of Atlanta.

Joe explains that the limited access to information he would have from his location was countered by the activists who are reporting from all over the country. Before BLM, people were more limited to what information was provided from traditional news sources but BLM connected people and information in a new way. BLM's utilization of the modern technologies of the day that allow people to capture video and connect quickly all over the country, enables the BLM activist network to function as a makeshift news outlet for people like Joe. Even Leona, a conservative graduate student in her early 20s, saw the movement as having informed her perceptions. Her complicated relationship with racism is still also transforming.

Interviewer: How do you perceive racism in the United States?

Leona: I would say as I'm learning... racism looks like economic oppression. Like I always go against the idea of oppression. I guess, I never really experienced it. Again,

being Caribbean, it is just different. My parents really emphasize education... Racism is like the lack of opportunity. It looks like damage to health. Unfortunately death. Back in the day I would think that that was more of an exaggeration. But I get it now. Not just by police brutality... It is more than that. It is also health, anxiety, high blood pressure, all that. Not even just those conditions, but the complications of those conditions. We don't know exactly why, but racism wears on you. It shortens your years, it induces your stress. That damages your body. It causes inflammation everywhere. I get it now, more than I did back in the day.

Interviewer: Definitely [graduate school] has had an influence on your perceptions and understandings of the United States. Are there any other experiences, or any other influences that have affected your perceptions on racism here in the United States?

Leona: I would say, as I learn more about my dad's experiences, interactions with the cops when he was in New York as a young, Black male. I don't know exactly everything that happened to him, but it was bad. My mom's boyfriend..., he tries to help me to understand Blackness in America...also media.

Interviewer: Do you think that the Black Lives Matter Movement has influenced your perceptions of racism in any way?

Leona: Definitely. Again, I didn't realize police brutality is as bad as it can be.

Leona is an illustrative case because although she was born in the United States, she remained particularly oblivious to the racism going on in the country. As you will see in other sections, Leona's racial identity is a point of contention for her. This allows her to serve as an example for how BLM can function for influencing Black immigrants who, having not experienced racism, may be hesitant to build ties with African Americans due to a lack of awareness about U.S. racism.

While the Black Lives Matter movement might not always be seen as influential by those who think they have solidified their views, it is often a factor for how people who are still open to expanding their understanding of racism. This is important given Jones and Erving's findings connecting the experience of discrimination to immigrant identification as Black American. Potentially understanding racism better, which the BLM movement can influence, could serve as a proxy for those who have not experienced much discrimination personally. By increasing understandings of racism, BLM may indirectly be responsible for encouraging not only identification with Black Americans but also building solidarity among the groups of the Black community.

## CHAPTER 5

### INCLUSION & EXCLUSION

How does context contribute to identity salience and the formation of a collective identity? The interviews began with having participants select five identities that they hold and go through each one talking about why they chose it. I also tried to capture identity salience by asking when they notice that identity most in their daily lives or are the most aware of it. If their race and ethnicity were not in their top five, then I asked the same question about those identities.

Of the 16 participants, 10 included their race in their top five. The recurring experience was that being Black in white spaces made participants most aware of their racial identity. Out of the 16 participants, 10 included their ethnicity in the top five. Most of the participants stated that they were most aware of their ethnic identity—whether Caribbean or from their particular country of origin—when they were with others who shared that identity. While 10 participants selected race in their top five, and 10 selected ethnicity in their top five, these were not the same 10 participants.

These spaces of heightened salience seemed to map onto some of the ways that people experience difference. Participants shared a wide range of experiences with inclusion in or exclusion from the Black Lives Matter movement, and the Black community at large. Nevertheless, some striking patterns surrounding the varying sources of the classifications did emerge. For inclusion, I will discuss two levels where this process may occur for Afro-Caribbean people, namely 1) Outgroup 2) Ingroup. Then for exclusion I will focus primarily on the understandings formed within the Black community as this is the site where difference is most

considered. This chapter explores mechanisms for understanding group membership and its relationship to identity, specifically highlighting the implications for the Black Lives Matter movement, because seeing oneself as part of the targeted group impacts support.

### **Inclusion**

When Black immigrants come to the United States, they must often confront “segmented assimilation”, or constraints on what part of society they are able to assimilate with because of the racism already ingrained in the society (Portes and Zhou 1993). They are indeed expected to assimilate, but into the segment of society that faces the most oppression. White people already do not plan to accept them; full assimilation into the white middle class “American Dream” is not an available option. So how then do Black immigrants become part of the American Black community? Most commonly there is a push from the outgroup as Whites not only deny Black immigrants entry into their group, they also subject them to the same injustice that they impose on African Americans. Simultaneously, Black immigrants may experience a pull from the Black community which offers opportunities for community building through shared understandings and experiences in addition to prior knowledge in exchange for solidarity. I will return to complicate this idea in the “Exclusion” section but as you will see, the era of the Black Lives Matter movement is an interesting time to study inclusion in particular.

**Out-group.** Constantly surveilled under a perpetual white gaze, participants expressed their awareness, and the importance, of being seen by white people as Black (Yancy and Alcott 2016). As Marie explained:

I identify with a Black community now because I realize that no matter how I self-identify even though I'm Haitian, it doesn't matter. Because of my skin tone, people will always see me as a Black. And that's how they see me. That's how I understand myself in order for me to be able to survive.

Marie conveys a way in which her self-understanding is shaped by potential threats to her survival. When specifically speaking about survival, it is important to note who actually constitutes a threat in this context.

It is not simply the presence of the white gaze that is the threat; the threat lies in the fact the perception of white people towards outgroups can escalate into an actual danger to an individual's existence. This reality is especially significant when considering my research question is in relation to the Black Lives Matter movement. Afro-Caribbean alignment with the BLM movement cannot be reduced to an internal decision of whether one feels a sense of belonging with Black people over some broad sense of shared culture or connection via diaspora. It is simultaneously accompanied by a response to the threat posed by white people who flatten the category of Blackness, particularly when perpetrating violence on this community. For example, Anne-Marie summarizes the dangers of the flattening clearly when she says, "Police officers on the street are not going to be like, 'are you Caribbean or are you African American?'" She understands the threat of police violence as applicable to all Black people, without any recognition for diversity.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the Black Lives Matter movement raises awareness. Therefore, as Afro-Caribbean people become increasingly aware of the reality of state sanctioned violence against Black people, particularly as the violence is carried out by white people, they must simultaneously confront the reality that the white people enacting the violence against Black people still see Afro-Caribbean people as Black. For example, Monica says, "I guess since the world sees me as Black as well, I kind of have to keep that in my mind at all times." This requirement that Monica always thinks about the race others see her as, is a direct result of the constant threat posed to Black people as they try to exist in a racist society.

BLM has done work to make this violence more visible to some in a way that might not have been as possible before.

The previous literatures that were focused on the distancing and tensions between Black groups, which is still present although likely to a lesser extent, was probably a manifestation of Black immigrants who had heard about racism but still believed that it was something they could avoid. However, that was before you could open your phone and see video footage of unarmed Black people being killed by police; the visibility of the threat and the realization that there is not a lot of opportunity to differentiate oneself has some impact on the strategies adopted. In response to my question asking about when they feel like a part of the Black community, Joe and Kris had similar answers regarding being in white areas and being seen as Black. Joe says,

I'd definitely say, I don't know, in large, large social settings when there are a lot of Black people around me, when I'm walking through predominantly white areas, I definitely feel like, okay, I'm definitely seen as Black here and yeah, that's mostly it.

For Joe, there is the additional element of also feeling like a part of the Black community in Black spaces that emerges sometimes as well. But for Kris, and many others, it is primarily white spaces where they feel most aware of their blackness:

I feel like I'm part of the Black community every time I walk up and down a street... and I don't know if it's just me, but I do feel like I see the eyes, I see the stares. I go in certain places and people are clutching their purses or moving to the other side of the street. I feel like those are the times where I go okay, they're noticing my brown skin.

In the excerpt, Kris feels like a part of the Black community in direct response to feeling pushed away due to her "brown skin". So, it is reasonable to expect that she would seek out community with others that might have more similar experiences or traits.

**In-group.** What then is happening on the other side of that process? I have demonstrated how Afro-Caribbean people are being pushed towards the Black community, but what is actually pulling people inside? People do still seek out community in order to discuss their shared experiences. Solidarity with African Americans provides not just a community, but a community

with the knowledge and experience to organize in response to the violence. Although Kris felt pushed towards the Black community by the ostracization from the white gaze due to her “brown skin”, there was also a pull evident when she shares how she felt connected to BLM, “I guess the first time I saw them publicized or saw them on the news I felt connected because I could tell that they were angry and I was at home just as angry as they were.” Or Marie, who shares: “I think those sad experiences like the fact that you can be targeted just because you're Black. That makes me feel a part of the Black community.” This type of collective shared emotion: anger, sadness, a sense of threat is strong enough to connect individuals even via social media and foster solidarity. The connection can result in the type of “collective expression that helps create movement identities” (Jasper 1997:187). This sense of community also provides a space of collective grieving that acts as a site for continued community building.

For the most part, participants felt like they were a part of the Black community. They communicated this and had their group membership validated in subtle ways, like an acknowledgment on the street, as Adrian explained: “I don’t know, we like similar things, we understand similar jokes. And it’s also something we’ve talked about if you’re like walking in Buckhead or something like that, and you pass one other Black person. You both kind of acknowledge each other,” or a connection over hair products for Rooker, who stated “I don’t know, maybe, when random people, I really don’t know, maybe when random women ask me what hair products I use, or ask me how I did my hair and stuff like that.” Or commonly they’ll explain the connection as a constant part of their life, for example, Taylor stated: “I’ve always felt like I’m part of the Black community which is always with me, Black everywhere I go. Yeah, when I get into a new space and I see someone’s Black, it’s like an instant kind of connection”

Often Black spaces actually serve as sites to recognize in-group diversity without creating exclusion, in contrast to how participants were forced to think of themselves as Black in white spaces because it was dangerous for them there. Black spaces provided a safe space which allowed some participants to not have to think of their racial identity, a luxury often reserved for whites. Taylor explained,

Being Black I think because of where I grew up, who I was around. It was never necessary then to make sure that I identified as being Black but I think as far as going to a PWI for college and things like that...I definitely thought that was a need, to make sure that I encompass that into my identity of being Black...I would say as a younger elementary (and) middle school I didn't really feel a need to identify as being Black because everyone was Black so I felt like it was something that we all knew.

Rooker shared a similar experience,

Other than school I don't feel like I feel it or I notice it that much because most of my friends are Black and where I'm from is mostly Black people anyways, so there's no reason to use that as an identifier, as strongly here.

These experiences are an important look at what might occur in that democratic society “free from control or repression” that Melucci describes which “enable individuals and social groups to affirm themselves and to be recognized for what they are or wish to be.” (1993:188)

These experiences with in and out groups were internalized in different ways and, whether through push or pull, it seems to manifest as some sort of feeling of belonging to the Black community. This is evident throughout the examples like Marie's recognition of her self-identification not mattering, of having her choices constrained. I also highlight the ways that Black environments allow participants to have the opportunity to not actively claim a Black identity, without it being rooted in anti-Blackness but a chance to have their ethnic identity be more salient. This demonstrates that the United States in the Black Lives Matter era provides a context in which a Black identity is very high in these Afro-Caribbean participants' salience hierarchy. This placement is related to a variety of factors and structural constraints such as the white gaze, misclassification, a sense of threat, shared emotions and solidarity, as well as a sense

of community. However, this placement also suggests that, without these somewhat context-specific factors, participants' ethnic identities might be higher up in their salience hierarchy.

### **Exclusion**

Although exclusion from the Black community is not an overwhelming narrative of these interviews, it is helpful to think of the ways that this process can occur given the national and even transnational discourse about this issue. I will begin with a discussion of the Black community and the ways that Afro-Caribbean people sometimes feel excluded. I will conclude by presenting some examples of how participants have understood their exclusion. Although participants overwhelmingly identify as Black and largely feel comfortable in their membership in the Black community, feelings of exclusion from within the Black community are not uncommon. This Black community is a collective identity formed by those of the African diaspora as well as a group. Adrian describes Blackness for her:

I think it means... somehow, I think it's a little bit different than just identifying as Black just in color. I think Blackness means that you kind of feel that you are part of the Black community, if you experience and understand Blackness. I think... it provides more of a feeling of community.

The Black community can differ from a Black identity as Blackness is not necessarily defined by group membership for everyone. One may identify as Black and still not feel a sense of belonging in the Black community.

A keener awareness to the diversity across the African Diaspora is often present in the Black community that can lead to the exclusion expected in any heterogenous group. Similar to the concept that it is easier to distinguish between faces of people within your own racial group, it is also easier to see differences when you are a part of that group (Vizioli, Rousselet, and Caldara 2010). However, this awareness may not always be conveyed in such a manner that demonstrates the full extent of the meaning behind it.

While Marie knew the white gaze presented a threat to her survival, and most often is comfortable within the Black community, she also shared her feelings of exclusion as an outsider within the Black community. She says, “It's tough because sometimes I feel like outside of it, because of like those Twitter things like, oh, you're not Black if you don't know what this is or things like that.”

As evidenced by the excerpt from Marie’s interview, the social media determination of Blackness does not necessarily include a variety of backgrounds, cultures, and experiences across the diaspora. For example, in social media, hashtags such as #YouKnowYouAreBlackWhen, which imply certain characteristics and actions are associated with Blackness, are just a reflection of other common offline social expectations and understandings. For instance, take the age-old criteria of a proficiency in Spades; this game is often used as a determination of who is sufficiently Black. Although the game is common within African American communities, it is far less common in non-African American Black communities such as Afro-Caribbean communities who favor playing dominoes. It is common to hear that not knowing how to play spades is grounds to have one’s “Black card” taken away. The top entry on UrbanDictionary.com defines a Black Card as, “An imaginary card that all Black people are born with and that mixed people have to earn that is constantly under threat of being revoked if said Black person does not act Black enough or in proper Black ways” (Urban Dictionary).

This particular idea of Blackness being a quality that can be given and taken has become so pervasive that in 2015, Latesha Williams and Jay Bobo released an actual print game called “Black Card Revoked.” (Black Card Revoked.) While the game encapsulates the vulnerability of one’s grip on their Black card, it also inherently poses some interesting questions. Moreover, what is truly peculiar is the introduction of a “Jollof & Fufu” expansion pack to the game, “an

expansion pack celebrating West African culture” (Wilson 2015). Although Blackness assumes and invokes some connection to being an Afro-descendant, this notion of Blackness apparently does not automatically include all Afro-descendants. Some have to wait for the expansion pack. African Americans sometimes value a narrow understanding of what Blackness encompasses, often creating a seemingly limited criteria for inclusion in the group.

African Americans have what some describe as a “Monopoly on Blackness”; this concept explains the phenomenon by which African American identity and culture has taken hold as the only valid understanding of Blackness (Iloabugichukwu 2018). This is often evident in the ubiquitous American use of Black and African American interchangeably, while many Black people who have ancestry elsewhere do not identify as such. This identification is similar to the way that many white Americans understand themselves as the authentic “Americans”, in which their identification does not require any qualifiers before the identification to specify type. African Americans as well as other Black ethnic groups have adopted a practice of referring to African Americans using the expression, “just Black.” For example, in describing her friends, Monica said, “They're just Black, same African American, like parents born in America, in the United States.”

This term, “just Black”, is often used as matter of fact, but also has a sort of implied lack of ancestral homeland. Christina Greer explained this term, stating,

“I began to notice that many of the black kids were not “just blacks” or “JBs” like me, a term quickly used by other native-born black Americans and friends when I could come up with no country other than the United States for my racial ancestry” (Greer 2013)

The definition of “just” as “simply; only; no more than”, results in “just Black” becoming almost an expression of deficiency (Merriam-Webster). The phrase implies a lack of homeland, but also a claim to ownership of the “authentic” Blackness. Without an adequate

education on the African Diaspora, many African Americans are left with the sense that U.S. slavery occurred in a vacuum. The idea that non-American Black people automatically know where they are from or have some deeper sense of home seems to exist; and it furthermore implies that this identity does not necessitate the adoption of the ambiguous label of Black. African Americans sometimes understand Black people from Latin America and the Caribbean as indigenous to those places. I have often heard African Americans discuss the cultures from these regions in a manner that separates their identity from the shared results of what managed to survive and emerge throughout and in the aftermath of slavery.

This shows up in acts of subtle exclusion or gatekeeping by African Americans in areas such as social media, which can come from a certain level of protectiveness for the Black identity and community they have fostered in the U.S. Within the United States and in the context of this work, African Americans are assumed to be the internal gatekeepers for Blackness, while white people are assumed to push all Black people into one category, which they assume to be homogenous. Within this phenomenon, Afro-Caribbean people are pushed up against the gates of Blackness, not necessarily allowed inside, but obscured by the shadows of the gate. There are many potential possibilities to account for the strict guarding of the boundaries around the U.S. conceptualization of Blackness. While it may seem counterintuitive to restrict access to a stigmatized identity, one can also imagine why one might be reasonably suspicious of the motives of those who are potentially seeking entry into a known marginalized group.

In particular, having experienced a socio-history of struggle, African Americans have to determine if new members have sufficiently struggled to understand the shared experience. This could function similarly to Patricia Hill Collins' assertion that for Black feminist standpoint "one core theme is a legacy of struggle" (1990). If this legacy is part of the uniting force for how

African Americans see the Black community, then there may be some reservations about welcoming new members; particularly if they are often not perceived as having met these criteria.

They may observe instances of privilege that are sometimes extended for Black immigrants, such as more positive stereotypes in some contexts (Waters 1999). At a 2014 performance at Emory University, StaceyAnn Chin, a Jamaican author and performing artist, theorizes that this privilege may be rooted in the comfortability of white people with foreign-born Blacks because they feel “less intimately involved with [their] oppression”. This may also be due to an assumption, and occasional reality, of Black immigrants’ ignorance of U.S.

historical context. For example, Dave says

And they’ll say shit like, “Oh, white people this” or you’re in a rural area and they say, “Oh, we better get out of here, these white people, you know how they are.” You’re like, “What? What are you talking about? I don’t know what you mean by that.” So, they perpetuate. It’s a self-fulfilling prophecy. Until they start acting like they matter, nothing matters because they don’t like themselves. They’re afraid of something. Their beliefs about what they are, are still skewed. How you gonna wanna stand up for Black Lives Matter, but you go in a rural area and you still think white people, all of them, still wanna be racist against you? If you go into every situation like that, that’s what you will attract. That’s a self-fulfilling prophecy. That’s how the world works. That’s how life works.

Is it possible that Dave, who did not immigrate from Trinidad until the age of fourteen and lacks a multigenerational connection to the history of his present location, has a harder time truly understanding the realities of the depth of racism in the United States? Even Leona, who was born in the United States, struggles with understanding the reality of American racism; though she may not be particularly cognizant of the history of her Caribbean heritage either. In explaining one of the reasons she has had trouble identifying as Black growing up, she says, “kind of not having the slave heritage of other American black people, but also remembering, we do have slave heritage. It is just weird growing up in history classes and all that.” U.S. history classrooms often do not adequately address slavery in the Caribbean, if at all, and so it is not

unsurprising that having attended school here, Leona does not think of the Caribbean as a place where slavery happened. Although slavery in the Caribbean was responsible for her family's presence there, the history was so different from what she was taught that the connection was not her first thought. She sees herself as different from African Americans because she does not feel welcome and so she looks for differences like "not having the slave heritage" and then corrects herself when she remembers that she shares that as well.

It is as though she is reaching for an explanation of why she is different from African Americans in order to make sense of her exclusion. I cannot locate the source of her feelings of exclusion in any particular factor either. Other participants cited similar experiences of being teased for being smart, growing up in white neighborhoods, hearing negative stereotypes from family members, but did not end up with the persistent feelings of exclusion that make understanding American racism so difficult. For example, even Kris, who had experienced and understood U.S. racism, says:

I was looked at differently because I was in honors classes and usually my honors classes I was the only one of brown skin so...of course my black counterparts would actually say I was trying to be white which I thought was interesting because I was trying to do well in school.

Kris's experience with having her academic achievement associated with whiteness did not turn out to be as isolating as it was for Leona. Leona explains that her support of the Black Lives Matter movement was a gradual one:

Initially just because I generally gave police the benefit of the doubt. Any interactions with my family with the police have generally been because we were speeding. We actually have legitimate reasons to be pulled over. I guess I was never fearful of police. I was never fearful for my life. That was not a concept to me until I learned about people who do live in fear for their life, legitimately, and people who have had their life taken. But I think I still err towards giving the police the benefit of the doubt until proven otherwise. Unfortunately, I now understand that Black people are not necessarily given the benefit of the doubt. Until I make the connection, I think with new roots, like the new theories, the new iteration of roots, understanding where police came from in America, historically... Yeah, I would say I'm supportive. - Leona

Another commonality, between both Dave and Leona, is that they both have felt excluded from the Black community. Their reasoning for why they did not fit into a particularly narrow views of what Blackness could be, did not necessarily hinge on their ethnic background. They cited experiences such as feeling limited by high academic achievement, spending time in predominantly white environments, swim team membership or even a distaste for hip hop music. Dave's understanding of what it means to be African American demonstrates how a limited definition that he does not connect with can relate to his feelings of exclusion. Dave said,

Being an African American to me, brings along the idea that you gotta like hip hop music, and you gotta you know dress a certain way, and you gotta think of life in a certain way. Like 'I'm African-American the police want to beat me' like I don't think like that, I don't get pulled over, I don't get in altercations with the police. I don't get any of that.

The co-occurrence of these experiences, feeling excluded from the Black community and embraced by white people, does not dismiss why the participants have a challenging time accepting racism; but it does pose some interesting questions about how their experiences with white people may have influenced their interest in trusting them. For instance, when Leona was asked if she had experienced racism, she said:

I have not. If anything, my worst relations come from the Black community, not from the white community, ironically. I felt like I was never growing up really accepted, mostly because I was just smart. I was around so many white people, unfortunately. That's kind of how it worked. I never experienced direct racism that I'm aware of. -  
Leona

Similarly, Dave felt separated from the Black community when hearing phrases such as, "you speak so white". This experience that Leona explains as, "the Oreo concept: Black on the outside, white on the inside" is fairly common occurrence among African Americans as well. Perhaps more significant than this stereotype that African Americans do not value education is the notion of "acting-white." Downey and Ainsworth-Darnell (2002) presented research which challenged the notion of "acting-white," or the counterculture hypothesis, that suggested the

racial achievement gap was due to Black students' association of academic achievement with whiteness. Instead, they found Black students actually were more likely than white students to report that they perceived high academic achievement positively.

This is not to say that these participants' experiences are not valid. However, the feeling of exclusion because of their academic achievement or perceived white characteristics is not only a reality specific to Caribbean immigrants and their children, but also African Americans, and even non-Black groups. That is, these participants explained their exclusion from Black communities as a clash of differing cultural values between African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans without recognizing the white supremacy present in the rhetoric of African Americans not valuing education. Joe, who immigrated to the U.S. 2 years ago, remembers being told before leaving the Bahamas, "don't go over there acting like a little African American. Remember where you came from, remember how you grew up. And like make sure you keep those values with you when you go over there. Don't try acting like a thug or like picking up any bad habits."

While the actuality of privilege remains present, this potential relationship between a lack of understanding racism and alienation from the Black community could be further explored in future work. If, as StaceyAnn Chin suspected, white people feel more comfortable around Black immigrants, then this occurrence might pose a threat to African Americans. Black immigrants can be seen as a potential avenue for white people to the achieve their prized "diversity" without having to endure the discomfort of actually redressing the inequality in the U.S. How can you threaten a group's positionality with a social hierarchy when they are already at the bottom? Additionally, it plays out in the access to material resources, which has been a recent debate in regard to affirmative action and diversity initiatives. If companies are being pressured to hire

Black people, or universities to admit them, then is it not likely they would select the Black candidates who they potentially feel most comfortable around (and also in the case of African immigrants, the ones who likely brought over more education and labor skills than Black Americans or other Black immigrants)?

There are two ways of presenting this issue; each one yields different reactions. On one hand, diversity initiatives are still inadequate. Institutions cannot gloss over the inequity by simply undertaking superficial or additive measures of “including” non-African American Black people in candidate pools and then counting them as “Black/African American” in diversity reports. On the other hand, the notion that there is a finite number of admission spots for Black people, and they must compete for them within their own racial group, is a fallacy. Therefore, African Americans may recognize that initiatives intended to mitigate the legacy of U.S. slavery are actually considering people whose ancestors were not here during that time. Although, in response, an argument could be made that the Transatlantic slave trade had global effects, which included an even larger slave system in Latin America and the Caribbean and colonization on the continent of Africa. A type of authenticity acquired by being from the United States could still be called into question for Black immigrants for potentially receiving better treatment, reifying them as a “model minority” among Black people.

However, the examples aren’t always so subtle; a participant shared an experience where her difference as Caribbean was explicitly declared grounds for exclusion. Kris says,

I think coming to the south its people don’t consider me Black. I’ve been told numerous times you’re not Black, you’re not one of us, you think differently, you eat differently, your family’s not from here so I think I’ve taken that on as to say okay I guess I’m West Indian American, but I guess I can’t truly consider myself Black.

This example presents a clear definition of Blackness being presented as monolithic and uniquely American. African Americans sometimes go further than just creating a space that might not feel welcoming and inclusive to other Black people, to actual explicit exclusion.

However, this is not usually the case. For the most part, participants did feel a sense of belonging in the Black community. Taylor shared that, “I’ve always felt like I’m part of the Black community which is always with me, Black everywhere I go. Yeah, when I get into a new space and I see someone’s Black, it’s like an instant kind of connection, yeah.” Or Adrian who said, “I really feel like I’m always part of the Black community.” Marie, who mentioned the Twitter example of feeling left out, also said, “I think those sad experiences like the fact that you can be targeted just because you're Black. That makes me feel a part of the Black community... whenever there's a social movement for Black people, I feel a part of the Black community.” Although the Black Lives Matter movement attempts to address a wide range of Black issues including immigration, this topic gets regularly reduced to exclusively address police brutality against Black men. Another instance of this reduction is how the Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI), of which BLM co-founder Opal Tometi is currently the executive director, had to partner with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 2017 to have a webinar addressing the question of Black immigration, entitled: “Is Immigration a Black Issue? The Dangerous Intersection of the Immigration and Criminal Justice Systems.” This webinar was primarily informative and shed light on the plight of Black immigrants living at the intersection of the hyper-criminalization of Blackness and the threat of deportation. However, it is particularly illustrative of the erasure of Black immigrants, even from the Black imaginary, that the NAACP still has to address this question. Nevertheless, many Black immigrants continue to feel a sense of belonging in these movements, even when they think some of their identities and experiences are absent.

But by and large, for my participants, the Black Lives Matter movement seemed to provide an additional avenue by which Black people could connect, even if their family was not specifically within United States context for generations to take part in the “legacy of struggle”.

For example, while discussing the BLM movement, Adrian said, “they’re addressing things like violence against Black people and racism against Black people. And I am a Black person, regardless of what a few people say to me here and there.” Even Kris who was told she was not Black, said she felt a sense of belonging with the BLM movement since “the first time I saw them.” A common cause can act as uniting force for an otherwise ambiguous community. With BLM, Afro-Caribbean people are being pushed towards the Black community by an often-undiscerning white gaze or the threat of white violence. In addition to this threat, they are also being pulled in by a sense of community around feelings of concern, anger, and grief.

The experience that Kris shared, provides a glimpse into the realities of the hard boundary identity drawing that sometimes occurs. This also shows where one’s internal identity can be impacted by those within their group as well. She had been told that she did not qualify for Blackness, and so when prompted to share her five most important identities, Black was not included. However, when after I explicitly asked her race and she said that she did identify as Black despite the comments, we delved deeper into what that meant:

Interviewer: How important is your Black identity to your life?

Kris: I mean I feel like it’s what mainstream America sees when they see me. They see someone with brown skin, they see someone with natural hair I think they see me as a Black female. However, I don’t know if actual Black people consider me to be their ideal of a Black person since my roots are outside of the United States.

Interviewer: Do you consider yourself to be Black?

Kris: I do.

She understands herself as Black, and she knows those in power in the U.S. see her as Black. She also recognizes her Blackness means a great deal to her, and she describes it as:

I think it means strength. I think it means I think it means untapped potential. I think it means I think it means mothering because I truly believe in birthing. I truly believe that a lot of things have started in the Black community. It means perseverance and endurance having gone through so many things and still being around and still thriving. - Kris

While Kris allows the gatekeepers of the southern African American community to make her second-guess her self-identification, ultimately, she holds onto her Black identity.

What Kris shows is that even in the face of blatant exclusionary rhetoric, full exclusion is unlikely, and identification remains. The process of inclusion in the Black community is the more powerful because this inclusion is in the interest of the dominant group. When the white gaze presents a threat to Black people, Black immigrants understand that means all Black people. This analysis presents an opportunity for organizers to better understand where internal fissures do occur and potentially develop tactics to prevent or address them. It also remains vitally important to investigate the in-group experiences of exclusion as well because due to the consistent failure of scholars to account for the heterogeneity of Black people, this is one of the rare times when there is actually the data available to do so.

While identity theory provides insight into the salience hierarchy and the role of the structural constraints placed on it, looking at the data with both identity theory and social identity theory provides a fuller understanding. In comparing the categorizing of Black immigrants to the experiments with arbitrarily determined categories, there are many points of divergence, yet the permeability of these categories demonstrates a similar connection between the salience of the grouping and the attachment to one's group (Billig and Tajfel 1973). Previous work highlighted the tensions in the Black community due to negative stereotypes and a lack of understanding that encouraged Black immigrants to create distance from identifying as Black. But when a social movement, such as BLM heightens the visibility of the threat to all Black people and forces that identity higher up the salience hierarchy, then the dynamics can shift. So now, when the out-group is watching, or the white gaze is present, identifying with Black Americans becomes a matter of necessity and so that leaves Afro-Caribbean people with two choices either, "change one's interpretations" or "engage in social action which would lead to desirable changes in the

situation” (Tajfel 2010). Sometimes they choose both options, but still when given the chance to explore the in-group dynamics, then there is a more nuanced picture of how ethnic identity can re-emerge as salient in some contexts.

## CHAPTER 6

### OUT OF FOCUS: MEANING-MAKING & FRAMING MISALIGNMENT

Chapter 5 just examined how meanings and understandings that are assigned to people or things can have real consequences. Similar to the way participants found that how other people see them has more weight than their own self-identification, the founders and organizers of the Black Lives Matter movement were unable to keep control over the discourse that surrounds it. In this chapter, I will start by looking at a statement from an Economist interview with one of the three women credited with founding the movement, Alicia Garza. Then I will begin to compare this to participants' responses regarding what they know about the BLM movement and what purpose they think it serves. This helps to demonstrate the disconnect between organizing efforts for an expansive movement for Black liberation and mainstream understandings of a movement about police brutality. I will then explore some of the mechanisms that may contribute to this disconnect, namely the media, language, and discourse.

This chapter is important not only because it helps us to understand what participants believe to be the general purpose of the Black Lives Matter movement, but also prepares us to look critically at how they understand their connection to it, which will be addressed in the next chapter. A prime example is how although the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag began following the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer, George Zimmerman, who was not a police officer, people still regularly understand the movement as primarily about police brutality. It would be unreasonable to assume that people not necessarily involved in activist work would regularly discuss the movement using terms like "state sanctioned violence" or "Black liberation."

However, understandings of the purpose of the movement remain an essential component of how to potentially realign organizer frames more effectively.

### **What the Founders Said**

I will begin with the statement from Alicia Garza, so the creators' intent is clear before I assess how the movement has been portrayed by others. In a 2018 interview with *The Economist*, Garza reiterated the aims of BLM saying:

We have always been clear that Black Lives Matter was not just about police violence but about the wide range of ways in which state-sanctioned violence against Black people impacts our lives. State-sanctioned violence looks like Sandra Bland being found hanging in her jail cell after being pulled over for a traffic violation. It looks like Black women making 63 cents to every dollar that white men make and the 79 cents that white women make. It is the fact that though Black and white people in this country sell and use drugs at around the same rates, Black people are more than twice as likely to be arrested for drug offences. Our goal is to build the kind of society where Black people can live with dignity and respect. The movement is much bigger than us. If we say we alone founded this, it erases the people who have made it possible. So, we talk about it as an organization, rather than a movement. From the beginning, there has been misinformation about what we do. We are not trying to build a world where Black people are empowered and white people aren't, or where there is Black supremacy. That wouldn't make things better; you can't replace one group with another. Instead, we want to transform the way that power currently operates.

It is important to highlight that those credited with founding the movement are under the impression that they have been clear about the purpose of BLM from the very beginning. Later in the interview while responding to the pervasive misclassification of BLM as a hate group Garza mentions that, "people could google Black Lives Matter." While their public materials are indeed a great resource for those who misinterpret the purpose of BLM as hate, this could also be a message for everyone who understands the movement as "just about police violence". Her clear outline of other tangible examples about what "state-sanctioned violence" includes is an important departure from the popular discourse that is portrays the movement as either an abstract, large concept, or entirely about police brutality. In contrast to the multifaceted and inclusive platform the founders envisioned, Afro-Caribbean people did not report their ethnic

identity to be salient in supporting the BLM movement because they saw the movement in more narrow terms. In understanding BLM as primarily about police brutality, like many African Americans, Afro-Caribbean people did not consider immigration, or the wide range of other issues that BLM seeks to address, because police brutality is more about the threat to all people that are seen as Black.

### **What the People Heard**

Seeing what people knew and thought about the Black Lives Matter Movement before asking about whether or not they support it was important because it painted a clearer picture for both the participant and interviewer of what exactly participants support. I asked participants to share what they knew about the BLM movement. Then depending on their response, I explicitly asked what they thought was the purpose of the BLM movement. These responses did not all match up exactly with the popular discourse that tends to paint the purpose of BLM with a narrow focus on police brutality primarily against Black men, though those sentiments did often surface here and again in subsequent responses throughout the interviews. The responses varied from some who were hesitant to speak at all on the topic due to a perceived lack of expertise to those who were quite confident in their knowledge. Interestingly, although many were unfamiliar with the breadth of issues included in the BLM platform, many still felt qualified to act as representatives. Perhaps this is the goal in a decentralized movement like the BLM movement. Winston, who found the “cure to racism” and supports the movement through conversations, describes this decentralization, stating “everyone's kind of like a leader.”

But first let's begin with those who were less sure of their BLM knowledge, like Lisa, a U.S. Virgin Islands-born mother to adult children. When asked what she knew about the BLM movement, she responded: “No, I don't really know and I'm so sorry. I really don't know and that's – I'm ashamed of myself.” I then asked about the purpose and she replied, “I don't want to

speak on that, cause I really don't want to say something that's not right." I attempted to quell Lisa's apprehension by specifically asking what she thought about BLM and finally she responded saying: "That Black lives matter, that we are here and we are not beneath anybody. We are actually – Black lives do matter... don't kill us off, cause we do matter. We make a purpose. We get – we are U.S. citizens, we are humans, so treat us as such." Although she is hesitant at first, she does actually have some thoughts on the movement which do allude to a focus on killing, though not explicitly referring to the perpetrators nor the victims of this crime.

Another participant, Crystal, was also not so sure. When asked what she knew about the Black Lives Matter movement, the exchange went as follows:

Crystal: I know that they stand up for the Black race in a peaceful way.

Interviewer: And what do you think the purpose of this movement is?

Crystal: To raise awareness of what's going on, basically. Well, I can be wrong.

Interviewer: No. Just whatever you know or think.

Crystal: Raise awareness, to stand up for rights as a Black community and do it in a way that's not violent or disrespectful.

Interviewer: And you said raise awareness of what's going on, what's going on?

Crystal: In terms of like racism and brutality. Police brutality towards Black people.

Crystal, like Lisa, was born and raised in the Caribbean, so this may have contributed to her uncertainty when speaking on the movement. Her caveat of "well, I can be wrong" conveys not only a reasonable disclosure of fallibility, but potentially also a perceived lack of authority on the matter. She specifically mentioned police brutality as one of the issues that the movement aims to bring awareness, along with racism and a lack of rights.

### **Police Brutality**

As police brutality emerged often in interview responses as the primary or sometimes only concern of the movement, I will briefly unpack a potential explanation for this. Despite organizers' attempt to avoid this reading of the movement, police brutality provides an appealing central issue for people trying to understand the movement. Liberation may be an abstract concept, even reparations may seem too unattainable or contentious, but being wrongly murdered

by police is both tangible and irrefutably unjust. Given the diversity of the Black community and the broad spectrum of political and moral beliefs that accompany that, building this level of widespread support for other causes in the BLM platform, such as immigration or Trans and Queer concerns, would be far less likely.

Support from Black people is by no means unanimous; even the counterarguments have caveats. For example, while discussing her belief that her family was not affected by police brutality because they did not engage in stereotypical behavior, I asked Leona, who identifies as a conservative republican, about cases where people were not engaged in what she calls “the negatively stereotypical black behavior, you know: gangs, street dealings, drugs, violence...”

Leona responded:

Again, I like to reserve judgment for better or worse. I like to know the facts. It is probably very, very difficult stuff. But I think those cases, it is just not fair...I'm more compassionate towards situations like that. I think if you're breaking the law it is kind of different.

Firstly, the Black Lives Matter movement has been instrumental in bringing the unfair cases of the unarmed innocent victims of police brutality, who elicit the aforementioned compassion, to the public stage. But the remarkable thing about police brutality is that it does not actually matter if the victims of police brutality were “breaking the law”. Even for conservatives, there is a societal script for law enforcement to apprehend criminals and then process them through our (albeit flawed) criminal justice system. The frequency of cases where that script is not followed, provides what should in theory be an urgent uncontested stimulus. For example, it doesn't actually matter if you believe that Eric Garner was or was not illegally selling cigarettes, because not only is that not a crime punishable by death, but the police are not the ones responsible for carrying out executions. Though organizers do not want the movement reduced to “just police brutality”, it is quite clear why this issue might be the one that takes the forefront in the popular discourse.

## Blurring of Messages

Yet still, those opposed to the BLM movement continue to warp the messages. Adrian's response to what she knows about BLM presents an example of how some people misconstrue the BLM movement. Adrian says,

I guess, I know that essentially that it sparked because there is racial inequality in the country. I think it really came about with a lot of the incidences of police brutality... and the police officers being let off. And I think all the people are really angry. And the idea that Black Lives Matter is that they're not being valued within the justice system. And I would assume that they're not being valued within a lot of other, like, healthcare systems. And so, I know that they are, like, the Black Lives Matter movement is advocating for valuing Black lives. It really frustrates me when people misunderstand it, and they're like, 'Oh, it means that Black people are better than everyone else.' Which it doesn't. That's not what it means. It just means that Black people just aren't being valued in this country as much as they should be. And I think it's something that people kind of danced around for a really long time. People are like, 'Oh, we're in post-racial America' But I think it's good that they actually came out and said that they are not being valued. They're being undervalued...And it should have made everyone be like, "Oh, my God. This is a problem. We need to fix it." And instead, it just ended up polarizing a lot of people who didn't want to hear what the actual message was.

Adrian's understandings of the BLM movement capture the frustrations of many who see people look at how obvious it was that the idea was not intended to communicate any sort of superiority or division but then distort the movement's intention anyway. It is the meanings that people read onto things that make words into powerful symbols. Black Lives Matter has been spread as predominantly anti-police brutality, but then that becomes understood as anti-police despite police supposedly not being equated with police brutality.

Her point about misinformation is essential to how this movement has been framed, with a noticeable split between the organizer's framing and that of the popular, mainstream media - and even less coherence within this arena. Anne-Marie, the U.S. born first-year undergraduate student who in Chapter 5 aptly summarized the threat to all Black lives, reflects on this departure when asked about her knowledge of the movement:

I know that it is not a radical movement like they like to say in the news. People aren't just going- it's not a violent movement. It's literally just standing and letting them know

that we are like here. We're actual people. We're not dogs. Like I remember I saw that thing in Atlanta where the police officer said to the woman, 'you're not Black, we only shoot Black people'. Like it's those things it's kind of like, 'alright, y'all don't see the issue yet?'. Like I don't understand why you don't so. Black Lives Matter is not violent. It's not supposed to be something that we just are fighting back. It's supposed to say we're a community. We're grieving for all the people who were losing their lives and who are just living their daily lives and being apprehended and we're just tired of it. So, um, that's what Black Lives Matter is to me.

There are a couple different sentiments to unpack here. Firstly, Anne-Marie's wariness of the news on this topic is not unfounded. Many of the misinterpretations of the movement as a violent hate group or terrorist organization have been proliferated by news outlets. Additionally, the ways in which news outlets determine which topics get covered and how they will frame them influences the discourse surrounding BLM. For example, major news sources did not provide extensive coverage for each of the 14 unarmed Black people fatally shot by police just this year, as of October 1, 2018 (FOX n.d.).

Even in the occurrences they do cover, many mainstream news outlets are notorious for presenting racially biased portrayals to the public. Tactics such as circulating mugshots and other less than flattering photos of Black victims are common. Examples of such tactics include the 2018 attempt to defame Botham Shem Jean by releasing the discovery of marijuana in his Dallas apartment as though it were evidence against him, though Amber Guyger was the off-duty police officer who shot him after "accidentally" entering his home (Fox4news). Even the framing of the movement as narrowly about police brutality is reified by the news coverage of Black Lives Matter protests centering police brutality. People are always protesting, but only some get covered. For instance, there was a lot of coverage of protests in response to the fatal shooting of Stephon Clark by police, but much less for the protests following the murder of Nia Wilson, who was stabbed to death by a white supremacist civilian.

However, Anne-Marie might be a bit off when she describes the movement as not radical. If as Garza suggests the goal is, "to transform the way that power currently operates", then it still

falls under the actual definition of “radical.” However, it is not inherently radical to imagine a society where Black Lives do Matter; that this idea could be radical may be even harder to fathom for 18-year-old Anne-Marie, who just wants people to know “we’re actual people”. The politicizing of the phrase “Black Lives Matter”, was a meaning-making project in and of itself. What started as a line in Garza’s Facebook “love note to Black people” in the wake of the Zimmerman acquittal became one of the most controversial phrases of our time.

Furthermore, Anne Marie follows up after using the term “radical” by saying “it’s not a violent movement” which leads us to believe that these terms, “radical” and “violent” have become conflated for her, likely due to the ways that she sees them used in popular media. This understanding further clarifies her perceptions of the movement but also demonstrates an assumed position of defense against the media. This misrepresentation of the movement prompted Anne-Marie to begin by addressing what she knows the movement “is not.” Before she can even begin to address her knowledge of the Black Lives Matter movement as a site to reclaim humanity, to build community, or even to grieve; she feels she must first address what it is not. What is particularly interesting, is that despite this apparent cognizance of the distortions of media rhetoric, she remains constrained in her word choice. In explaining her involvement, Anne-Marie stated:

I do support Black Lives Matter. I did not get involved in high school because I didn’t really know how to get involved. Cause sometimes you always see like - um, they call them riots, well I don’t actually like to call them riots- um, the groups meeting in certain cities and things like that.

Later while discussing the effect Black Lives Matter has had on her perception of personal agency Anne-Marie said,

I can do something. Like I don’t have to just sit down & take it. I can- maybe if I ever go to one of those riots or go to one of those meetings, just be like in a group, be collected. So, it’s changed how to deal with racism, to me.

I should note that after her mention of riots and lack of involvement in high school, I confirmed that she hasn't participated in any BLM "demonstrations" and I went on to ask about her experiences with other social movements. When she asked for clarification, I provided examples of "women's rights, global warming, any other protests or..." Anne-Marie responded, "I haven't been in any protests yet, I'd be open to going to them though." Although I posed this question after the first time, she mentioned that she didn't "like to call them riots" and she hears the terms "demonstration" and "protest," even using "protest" herself; less than 10 minutes later she made that remark about potentially "going to one of those riots..." The default back to the language of the media exhibits the insidiousness of word choice can accomplish.

Here is Anne-Marie, a self-identified Black Lives Matter supporter saying that she would be open to attending an affiliated "riot", while also understanding the movement as neither violent, nor even radical. The implications of the spread of this type of language can be life-threatening. One of the other Black Lives Matter Co-Founders, Patrisse Cullors in collaboration with asha bandele, published *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir* (Khan-Cullors and bandele 2018). This memoir reveals some of the dangers experienced by those involved with the movement, particularly what was legally permissible once the label of terrorism was attached.

It is not just how people understand Black Lives Matter, but the way they express it and how that impacts discourse that matters. The simplistic irrefutability is part of the effectiveness of the hashtag; the only rhetorical response in direct opposition to "Black Lives Matter" is "Black Lives Don't Matter", which is false. However, I have explored some of the ways that the far reaching and inclusive broad platform of BLM regularly gets reduced to police brutality by supporters, and warped into anti-police terrorism by opponents. With Afro-Caribbean people often understanding the BLM movement in the same narrow police brutality frame as many

supporters, they often don't consider their ethnic and/or immigrant identities to be connected to this issue and by extension, the movement. What then does the framing of the movement mean for how people see themselves in the movement? This theme will be considered in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 7

### HOW WOMEN CONNECT TO BLM

Although we are feminists and Lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand. Our situation as Black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which white women of course do not need to have with white men, unless it is their negative solidarity as racial oppressors. We struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism. –The Combahee River Collective Statement

Although I set out to investigate how Afro-Caribbean people were understanding their connection to the Black Lives Matter movement across ethnic groupings, what fascinatingly emerged was a pronounced gendered understanding. These understandings of the purpose of the movement are essential for understanding one's place in it. Imagine that you are a Black woman who understands the BLM movement to be primarily about police brutality against Black men, then it might be reasonable to assume that the primary way you understand your connection to this movement is through Black men. This chapter will present some of the findings from the interviews that demonstrate women's connection to the BLM movement and discuss how women got left out. I also present potential understandings of their vulnerability to police, and conclude with a comparison of how the role of women has changed from the Civil Rights Movement to now.

It is important to preface this section by noting that not every woman sees the Black Lives Matter movement in a such a way that it is predominately about police brutality against Black men and feel a connection to the movement on their own behalf; after all, it is a movement founded by women. Kris, shares her knowledge of the BLM movement like this:

What I know about the Black Lives Matter Movement is that it is a movement that was created based on me. It is a movement that was created to bring attention to issues and problems that were occurring in the Black community. It was to advocate for Black issues and Black rights. It was to inform people on the needs of the Black community and to really bring a voice to certain things that were being overlooked and to fill in gaps.

Interviewer: And what do you think is the purpose of this movement?

Kris: I think the purpose of the movement is to stop the injustices that are happening. The fact that we have a lot of African Americans who are being killed for no reason or being killed based on someone's prejudice.

While Kris does ultimately also mention the unwarranted killings of African Americans, she does not restrict this to incidents between police and men. What stands out in her understanding of the movement is not just her broad incorporation of the function it serves for the Black community, but the knowledge that the movement was “created based on [her].” Though Kris does not provide a comprehensive list of specific issues, needs, or rights for which BLM advocates; as part of the Black community, she inherently understands these to be her own concerns as well.

However, this is not always the case, and women in particular interact with the Black Lives Matter movement in a way that is often a manifestation of the recurrent narrowing of the discourse to exclusively police brutality against Black men. This is embodied in the frequent discussion of Black male relatives or loved ones as a proxy for their connection. As an example, here are two quotations from Gracey, a middle-aged woman of West Indian descent, the first in which she discusses her knowledge of the movement:

I know that in part their leadership was sort of like its origins really came from Black women... really about awareness, not only about protests in terms of brutality – ongoing police brutality against African Americans, maybe predominantly, not exclusively men, not exclusively by any means actually...and I think about building coalitions to really force, not only awareness, but a substantive action, that will have lasting effects, not only in terms of awareness but also in terms of legislation.

and the second where she explains why she supports it:

Partially myself as a Black woman...my family had only run-ins with the police but in particular I think about my cousins... I have many cousins who are young Black men...It

could be them at any time... And also young Black women in my family so, again it's not just men who are the – who are susceptible or vulnerable I should say.

Even with a potentially more nuanced understanding of the movement, one that is attentive to the foundational roles of women leaders and that the police brutality BLM seeks to address is “not exclusively men...by any means”; there remains a gendered distance. Gracey's support comes only “partially” from her own identities “as a Black woman” but her particular concern is with the “young Black men” in her family. Even the “young Black women in [her] family” come afterwards.

Even within the confines of police brutality, this tendency to attach women as an afterthought is not idiosyncratic to Gracey. I would argue that the very existence of the #SayHerName movement is evidence of this. Kimberlé Crenshaw, coiner of the popular term “intersectionality”, promotes this movement as an attempt to recognize the intersectional experience of Black women, who are also subject to the dangers of police violence (Khaleeli 2016). While the attention to the particular experiences of Black women play an essential role to Black Feminist Theory as well as praxis, it is important to be critical of why this became necessary in the first place. How did a movement created by Black women in response state-sanctioned violence against all Black people, manage to be warped by the popular discourse into a movement that leave out Black women? The preceding chapter outlines how the founders and organizers rarely have the ability to maintain control over how people understand the movement. Marie's interview provides a unique insight into one of the ways that her conception of the movement might actually be shaped by the ways that her understandings of police violence are gendered in general.

I've always thought that the purpose of Black Lives Matter is to raise awareness of the disproportionate targeting of Black men by police. And to secure the safety and to allow Black men to have due process whether they are guilty or not. So, that's what I felt from the inception of Black Lives Matter was, the purpose of it was. But now I feel like they've moved on to having a more broad purpose of just being for and about Black people. And

since Sandra Bland, it's trying to incorporate more of women, so that Black women are not invisible...

So, although Marie thought that police targeting Black men was the central purpose, she does note that this has expanded to include other issues, as well as the threat police pose to Black women. However, her understandings of the gendered nature of police violence still reflect a men-centered view that shapes the way she connects to the BLM movement. Marie explains,

I don't think I personally fear being attacked by the police because I don't interact with the police that much... because I have a little brother... he would face these types of targeting... my husband, I hope he wouldn't face these types of targeting either... now that I have more Black men in my life, I feel more closely connected to it.

This is a recurring sentiment among the women that I interviewed. Other examples include Rooker, who explained how she feels when I asked if the BLM movement addresses issues of importance specifically to her. She responded, "Yes, because this brutality does concern me, although I feel like as a female, it's not as great of an issue for me, but still those are like my friends, my cousins, my brothers, so it still impacts me." Even while sharing some of the reasons for her support of BLM, Rooker says "you shouldn't have to give your son a talk about handling interactions with the police for fear that he will be shot for reaching for his wallet." Rooker assumes that this "talk" only needs to happen with sons, and that daughters are assumed to not require this advice. Given that Rooker also echoes similar discourse about BLM being primarily centered around police brutality, it is important to recognize that her understandings of police violence focus on men as well. This focus on men even when asked about concerns specific to her, reveals some of the tensions present when people accept a narrow conception of the BLM movement.

Additionally, Adrian, who brought up BLM on her own amidst discussing times when her Black identity is the most salient:

...recently with a lot of issues about race, about police brutality, about movements, and really having to figure out how much do I identify with Black people who are

experiencing these things. And like, things like shootings in cars and stuff like that, that's really affected me. My brother just got his driver's license, and in that moment, I really identified as being Black.

Due to Adrian's understanding of her Black identity as activated by the challenges Black people face, her concern for her brother in this context is one of the ways that her Blackness becomes particularly salient. There are many ways that type of understanding, of a particular threat to Black men by police, can affect Black women.

In a 2016 interview, Crenshaw stated "...although the numbers are hard to assess, the reality is that black women are vulnerable to the same justifications used for killing black men" (Khaleeli 2016). While the actual vulnerability to the violence is undeniable, the justifications might not be the same or at least many do not share this understanding. During Marie's interview, I followed up with her to get some greater insights on why she thought "that police violence is mostly a concern for Black men." Marie explained,

Well, because there's a stereotype of Black men being criminal and being dangerous ...and he's going to hurt everyone, like rape your women. So, I think that's more like the fear of what you say and just think that Black men are just like unruly. And they are irrational. And they just hurt you for no reason. And especially, when you think of the crime statistics, like Black men are a lot more likely to commit crime than Black women. So, that's why I think it's more like, you know, Black men are like this. I think it's more of a concern for Black men. But do I think that Black women don't have to worry about it? No. But I think it's for different reasons. For Black women, it's more of like police do not think of you as very feminine and deserving to be protected. They see you as kind of averse to femininity and therefore they can treat you rougher and they can kind of take advantage of you in different ways. So, I don't think they're not necessarily scared of Black women but they don't really care for their femininity or whatever.

This was a particularly helpful approach to considering the many ways that gender shapes experiences with BLM and vice versa. It may not be that Black women generally believed that their gender protected them from the dangers of their race, but instead, this sentiment may uncover a potentially internalized understanding of being perceived differently by police. Not just that it occurs less frequently, but that even when hearing [about] or watching police brutality involving Black women, there is often a difference in the tactics and behavior of police officers.

In the technological age of constant video footage, people are no longer limited by their imaginations. Although there has been a proliferation of video footage of Black men being murdered, often shot, by the police, often when they murder women all that is disseminated are reports about it, if the mainstream news ever covers it at all. However, when videos of police violence against women do circulate the videos usually depict them being roughly handled, tackled, or beaten as opposed to being killed. Marie's explanation above appears to be an internalization of the gendered differences between these types of images. With video as an important element of the novelty of the BLM movement but the footage of most incidents shared involves men, this difference in mediums could contribute to the perceptions of an absence of women in BLM.

To conclude, I think it would be particularly useful to look at how the context and role of women has potentially influenced their understandings. Robnett's 1997 book *How Long How Long: African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights*, and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor's 2016 book *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* provide an interesting point of comparison. Robnett's work takes an intersectional approach to understanding the roles and experience of women during the Civil Right Movement. She is careful to explain that her work is not intended to be divisive, citing that women during that time did not understand the dynamics of the movement as one of gendered oppression (Robnett 1997). Instead, Robnett used her work to show how societal organization influenced the gendered roles that took hold. For example, she discussed how men were often the visible leaders working with outside actors who would not recognize women as leaders. Robnett also argued that women were often more able to engage in public civil disobedience because their encounters with the police were less likely to turn fatal, a reality that still plays out today.

What is very different now though, is that women are the face of Black Lives Matter activism. Taylor's book acknowledges that women have always been actively involved in movements for Black Liberation. However, the fact that they are so visible in this movement is significant, especially in a movement that seemingly centers Black men's victimization by police. Taylor makes a compelling case not only for the impact that rampant police brutality against Black men has for their families, but also points out the material consequences for women of "missing men". Per Taylor, "Across the United States, 1.5 million Black men are 'missing'" – snatched from society by imprisonment or premature death" (2016:165). Taylor's argument that women's participation at the front of this movement may be a necessity is helpful but also understood as just one part of the puzzle. The work I have laid out, contributes another reason, women might connect to the Black Lives Matter movement via men, because the discourse often shapes their understandings of who the movement is concerned about. In addition to women being affected police brutality directly, and as members of families and communities losing Black men, there is a difference in the way the movement is understood. The complexity my research adds lies in that women feel as though they cannot connect to the BLM movement without men in their life, not because women inherently minimize themselves but, because the popular discourse has reduced the entire movement to one issue, for the reasons outlined in chapter 6.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSIONS

The opening quote to this work was from a Black immigrant explaining how their stories are being ignored. This work is just one attempt to begin to redress that wrong. In addition to an exploratory study of Afro-Caribbean understandings and experiences, I sought to understand how the Black Lives Matter movement plays a role in the formation of Afro-Caribbean identities, and how those identities might affect participation in the movement. I found that the BLM movement has indeed affected perceptions of racism which can play a role in how people identify. If a lack of understanding of U.S. racism potentially hinders forging solidarity with African Americans, then BLM is one way to illuminate that experience for Black immigrants. BLM brought issues of blatant racism into the mainstream media by taking tragedies such as the murder of Trayvon Martin and bringing it to the general public via social media. The increase in visibility that #BlackLivesMatter and the BLM mobilization of technologies such as cell phone cameras allowed for people who may have been previously unaware to see the threat to Black people, as well as the lack of consequences for agents of the state.

Despite feeling misclassified, the Afro-Caribbean people I interviewed realized that the identity white people ascribe to them is of paramount importance because these white people are an embodiment of the threat of state sanctioned violence. Furthermore, this new awareness manifests not only in an individual identity but a pursuit of group membership and a solidifying collective identity. Generally, the recognition of linked fate with each other regardless of actually understanding the diversity of the Black community, as well as the bonds formed by collectively effervescent experiences of emotion such as grief and anger, are enough to garner acceptance for

newcomers' inclusion into the Black community. I have also identified some potential barriers to this inclusion that exist internally in the form of exclusion within the Black community, such as narrow entry criteria, as well as "last place anxiety."

Despite gaining a greater understanding of how the BLM movement influenced identity and group membership, and identifying how participants perceived the threat to all Black people, and sought solidarity with others who were in danger, this study only revealed a partial picture of how this identity influenced support for the BLM movement. I clarified this picture by examining the ways that participants understood the purpose of the BLM movement. I found that contrary to the founders' insistence that the movement could not be reduced to police brutality, it is common for people to report understandings that essentialize it to police brutality. However, this understanding was quite effective in accumulating widespread support. So effective, that even though most understood victims of police brutality to be men, women still felt pulled to support BLM on their behalf.

This work contributes to the theoretical intersection of race, ethnicity, identity, and social movements by demonstrating how a social movement can act as mechanism to motivate Black immigrants to pursue membership in a stigmatized group, as well as some potential barriers to full assimilation within it. Furthermore, I explored a case of a misaligned attempt at framing and identify some of the mechanisms that allow that misunderstanding to proliferate. I found that, specifically for the Black Lives Matter movement, while the Afro-Caribbean people interviewed understood the movement to be primarily about police brutality against Black men—which appeals broadly to Black men and the people who care about them—it is still important to conduct research that addresses ethnic diversity. One could attempt to minimize the role of ethnic identity in this study by asserting that gender is the most salient identity in regard to the BLM movement, or understand this as an excuse to allow the popular Black Lives Matter

discourse to continue and leave out important concerns like immigration. However, the importance of the recognition of the diversity of people throughout the diaspora remains a vital part of the community building project. Furthermore, this was also an opportunity to explore how the BLM movement affects perceptions of racism. If it does indeed function as a mechanism for raising awareness that inspires people to potentially identify differently, build solidarity, or to seek community with African Americans, then this was already a useful finding.

### **Limitations**

This research had some limitations that are worth noting. The primary limitation is temporal in nature; there were countless shifts in the context of the United States throughout the development and execution of this project. This project was initially conceived in the fall of 2016, prior to the presidential election. Black Lives Matter protests were still actively being covered. The preceding summer, the police murdered Philando Castile in front of his girlfriend and her four-year-old daughter (Furber and Pérez-Peña 2016). Serena Williams used social media to speak out about this incident in September 2016 (Linton 2016). That summer, Micah Johnson murdered five police officers and, although he was unaffiliated with Black Lives Matter, many blamed BLM. Tensions were high regarding BLM in the United States at the time this work began.

As I conducted preliminary interviews, Hurricane Matthew devastated Haiti; natural disasters appeared to be an additional potential motivator for heightened ethnic identity salience. However, this was before the 2016 election. Something was shifting in the nature of activism around this time. For example, while performing preliminary observations, I attended an immigration rights meeting post-election and overheard two older white women discussing their attempts to get involved with more movements. As the interviews collected for this research span

from the summer of 2017 to the fall of 2018, I am unable to account for the perceptions and experiences at what might be considered the peak of the movement.

Additional limitations include some of the aspects of the study I wanted to include but were not feasible this time. I intended to include a multigenerational comparison but recruiting older participants proved particularly challenging. I also wanted to conduct some participant observations by requesting to shadow participants at protests however few participants were actively attending protests even if they had attended a protest in the past. There also were not many men willing to be interviewed, which made complicating the gendered understandings of the movement an impractical task. Finally, due to a lack of funding, I was not able to compensate participants which potentially hindered recruiting or exacerbated a recruitment bias for those interested in talking about this subject and those with more available time.

### **Future Directions**

In conclusion, this research highlighted the understandings of Afro-Caribbean people in the Black Lives Matter era. From how the Black Lives Matter movement influences perceptions of racism, to the importance of identifying the source and context of inclusion or exclusion, to the conceptualization of the purpose of the movement and their role within it, this work has addressed some of the ways that these ideas form. It uncovered a breadth of interesting themes and topics to pursue in future work as well. This is a chance to further pursue questions like the ways that men are understanding themselves in relation to the Black Lives Matter movement. Another future direction could be to identify situations in which people do feel that most salient difference amongst Black people is across ethnic groups instead of gender.

Black Lives Matter organizers can also use this research to better understand the ways that their messages are being distorted. They can then potentially construct more effective frames that will allow the rest of the BLM platform to gain more attention. Specifically, they may

increase efforts to expand initiatives to increase the visibility of Black immigrants. If the goal for BLM is to truly craft a more inclusive movement, then they cannot rest on the effectiveness of the essentialized police brutality platform. The Black community at large can benefit from this research in its ability to highlight some of the subtleties of exclusion and draw connections of shared experience while recognizing the value of diversity within the Black community. In general, this is yet another example of how Black people are not a monolithic group, and how Afro-Caribbean people understand themselves and the Black Lives Matter movement to the end of building solidarity.

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APPENDIX A:  
INTERVIEW GUIDE

- 1) Please provide a pseudonym for the study.
- 2) Can you introduce yourself and tell me a bit about yourself?
- 3) In our daily lives, we have membership in certain social groups based on different characteristics like race, or statuses like class, or activities like career. What are 5 groups with which you identify and why?
  - a) How do you experience each in everyday life? When do you notice them? How do you feel about them?
  - b) How do you identify in terms of race, ethnicity, and country of origin? And why
  - c) How has your identity changed over time?
- 4) How important is your (country of origin) identity to your daily life?
- 5) What are some examples of when it is important? What makes someone (insert country here)?
- 6) How important is your Black identity to your daily life?
  - a) What are some examples of when it is important?
- 7) When did you realize you were Black?
  - a) What did you think about this experience?
- 8) What does Blackness mean to you?
- 9) Can you tell me about your current involvement in any groups or organizations?
  - a) How regularly do you participate?
- 10) What do you consider to be your communities? How important are your communities to you?
  - a) How did you build this community?
  - b) Please tell me about your closest friends
  - c) What about your neighbors?
- 11) What do you know about the Black Lives Matter movement?
  - a) What do you think the purpose of the Black Lives Matter movement is?
  - b) Is this a purpose you support? Why?
- 12) Are you involved in this movement?
  - a) Why did you or didn't you become involved in this movement?
- 13) If you support this movement, how do you show your support?
  - a) Do you use social media to show your support?
  - b) How?
- 14) Have you participated in any Black Lives Matter Demonstrations?
  - a) If so, please tell me about your experience there?
  - b) Who did you go with?
  - c) How did you find out about it?
- 15) Do you remember the Amadou Diallo case?
  - a) Can you tell me about any memories you have of the aftermath of his death?
  - b) Did this event affect your identity in any way? How?
- 16) Can you tell me about your experiences with other social movements?
- 17) Have you ever experienced racism?
  - a) If yes, can you please provide some examples?
  - b) What are your perceptions of racism in America?
  - c) Have those perceptions ever changed?
    - i) What brought that on?

- d) Has the Black Lives Matter movement influenced your perceptions of racism in any way?
- 18) Have you ever felt at risk of violence by the police?
  - a) Could you tell me about that experience(s)?
  - b) What do you think could protect you from police violence?
- 19) What did you hear about African-Americans in your household growing up?
- 20) What were your experiences with African-Americans growing up?
- 21) Can you provide some examples of when, if ever, you feel you are a part of the Black community?
- 22) Can you provide some examples of when you feel a sense of belonging in the Black Lives Matter movement?
  - a) does it address the issues that concern you? In what way?