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Marginalization in the Movement:

The Effect of Intersectionality on Activist Leadership

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

by

Crystal Denise Robertson

2024

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Marginalization in the Movement:  
The Effect of Intersectionality on Activist Leadership

by

Crystal Denise Robertson

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

University of California, Los Angeles 2024

Professor Lorrie Frasure, Co-Chair

Professor Efrén Osvaldo Pérez, Co-Chair

Under what conditions does intersectionality influence the strategies of social movement leaders? Social identities are crucial for social movement organizations (SMO), serving as one of the strongest mobilizers for movement participants. Activists utilize group identities to recruit and retain participants (Polletta and Jasper 2001), similarly, the social identities of the movement's leadership are important for mobilization processes. Psychology research suggests people expect leaders to hold more privileged identities such as Whiteness or masculinity (Rosette, Leonardelli, and Phillips 2008; Scott and Brown 2006). While Black women can achieve leadership positions, they tend to do so in organizations on the decline (Rosette and Livingston 2012a). Between the downward trajectory of the organizations and discrimination

from within (H. M. Hurwitz 2019) leaders with multiple marginalized, or intersectional, identities face tremendous challenges in leading activist organizations.

I argue intersectional activists take resistance against their intersectional identity into account in their strategizing and therefore prefer more moderate tactics rather than techniques considered radical. I speculate this includes a hesitation to include intersectional political agendas into their organizing for fear of backlash. This framework identifies the concern of discriminatory resistance as a key factor in intersectional leaders' tactical selection and assesses the potency of this factor's influence on public opinion. Social psychology research finds that as intersectional activists' leadership status is more fragile, they are more likely to act on behalf of the group and react more harshly when someone defies group norms (Ellemers and Jetten 2013). Given the symbiotic relationship between leaders and followers, I assess each group's perception of public support for intersectional leadership and their freedom in emphasizing issues.

This multi-method project seeks to understand intersectional leadership within social justice organizations and how these dynamics influence American political behavior. Utilizing survey experiments and in-depth interviews, I focus this analysis on Black women's incorporation into activist organizations public reception to movements focusing on them, public response to Black women's leadership, and how Black women in social movements manage these attitudes while organizing. Experimental evidence shows that Black Americans respond positively to intersectionality in public presentation of movements. Furthermore, Black participants demonstrated positive reception to Black women leading Black social movements. However I find this warm reception does not extend to policy outcomes with intersectional policies are less likely to be supported under Black women's leadership among Black

Americans. Furthermore, Black women activists who experienced discrimination expressed a hesitance toward radical tactical approaches.

This dissertation project offers interdisciplinary and actionable contributions to our understanding of identity and activist leadership. Furthermore, I apply a social psychology framework of leadership to assess leader and public dynamics in contemporary movements. These findings hold implications for our understanding of any distinctions in intersectional activists' strategizing and improvements for such strategies. Additionally, there are potential applications extending beyond race and gender's influence on social movement strategies.

The dissertation of Crystal Denise Robertson is approved.

Natalie Remi Masuoka

Christopher John Zepeda

Efrén Osvaldo Pérez, Committee Co-Chair

Lorrie Frasure, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2024

For my parents, Dakarla and Chris, who always believed I could do anything.

For my sister Amanda who always helped me find a way.

For my village who always lifted me up when I needed it the most.

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## Publications

Jones, Chelsea, Crystal Robertson, and Lorrie Frasure. 2022. “Mayor London Breed and the Limits of Governing While Black and Female in San Francisco.” In *Historic Firsts in U.S. Elections: Trailblazing Candidates in Gubernatorial, Congressional, and Mayoral Campaigns*, New York, NY: Routledge.

Pérez, Efrén, Crystal Robertson, and Bianca Vicuña. 2022. “Prejudiced When Climbing Up or Falling Down? Why Some People of Color Express Anti-Black Racism?” *American Political Science Review*

Pérez, Efrén, Alisson Ramos, Crystal Robertson, and Bianca Vicuña. 2022. “Why are prominent Los Angeles Latinos saying such racist things?” *The Washington Post*

Robertson, Crystal and Roman, Marcel. 2023. “The Wages of *Latinidad*: How Immigration Enforcement Forestalls Anti-Black Assimilation.” *Political Behavior*

Baretto, Matt, Claudia Alegre, Alexandria Davis, Joshua Ferrer, Joyce Nguy, Christopher Palmisano, & Crystal Robertson. 2024. “Black Lives Matter and the Racialized Support for the January 6th Insurrection.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*

## **Introduction**

Black women's unpaid labor is essential to the American society from economic systems rooted in slavery to social hierarchies, socio-economic structures depend on this labor. Despite gains in women's and civil rights, contemporary America is no exception. Despite being some of the most highly educated the gender pay gap disproportionately effects Black women (Budig et al. 2021). Black family structures rely on Black women and girls emotional labor, efforts which extend into these women's professional lives as well (Hill Collins, 1999). Despite this reliance on Black women's efforts, society undervalues their lives from poor medical treatment to a lack of protection from violent threats (Lindsey, 2022). Black liberation movements similarly rely on Black women's social networks and emotional intelligence to mobilize minority communities (Robnett, 1999) while failing to address threats to Black women's lives. This is where I focus my analysis, Black women's position, and treatment within Black liberation movements.

As social movements increase their influence on public opinion of polarizing issues (e.g., police brutality, sexual harassment) they become more salient in American politics. Contemporary movements exemplifying this include BLM, #StopAsianHate, #MeToo, and various others, shifting public opinion and legislative interests. Support for police reform increased in neighborhoods hosting 2020 BLM protests (Shuman et al. 2022) pressuring state officials to pursue police reforms (Peay and McNair 2022). Similarly, the #MeToo movement's actions and popularity boosted awareness of sexual harassment and political interest (Castle et al. 2020). Opinions on issues like these can shift the American political landscape particularly if they motivate participation in other forms of politics such as voting. Given social movements' emergence as public opinion leaders, it is important to understand ongoing trends in social movement tactics, leadership, and public engagement.

Over time movement leaders have become more diverse particularly in identity movements, with boosts in intersectional representation. Organizers long recognized the importance of identity and its incorporation into their strategies, particularly in building a collective identity around their movements. Some movements are more easily able to establish this identity using pre-existing social identities as the foundation for solidarity. These identity movements historically tended to be led by more privileged group members namely men (Oberschall 1973). More accurately, women's leadership was more likely to be forgotten by both the public and within movements. Women activists' tactical approach tended to be at the grassroots level with less of a public-facing role (Robnett 1999a).

In contrast, contemporary leaders of various marginalized identities occupy more front-facing roles (Garza, Tometi, and Cullors 2014). As these movements became more representative of their constituents' diverse interests, they increasingly collaborated across identity movements and incorporated discussions of intersectionality. Intersectionality is a theoretical framework describing how people with multiple marginalized identities experience unique forms of oppression (Crenshaw 1989). In this dissertation, the term intersectional describes a person with multiple marginalized identities. I largely focus on the experiences of Black women, who experience marginalization through racism, sexism, and their various intersections, though scholars apply this framework across various social identities including ethnicity, religion, ability, and sexuality to name a few examples. Scholars in various disciplines apply this framework including the most prevalent to this dissertation, psychology, political science, and sociology. Intersectionality warrants further consideration in our understanding of political leadership, particularly with gains in American politics with women of color making tremendous gains in leadership positions (CAWP 2020). I bring intersectionality into social

psychology theories of leadership to better understand contemporary SMO's leadership structures and strategies.

We might anticipate that intersectional leaders' perspectives of multiple identity groups' struggles would present in activist organizations' tactics such as the agenda they pursue or frame for the public. Leaders' tactical approaches such as types of protesting or degree of radicalness in their goals, influence public opinion towards the movement (Feinberg, Willer, and Kovacheff 2020; E. F. Thomas and Louis 2014). There is also evidence that the backlash for radical tactics (e.g., use of violence, riots, etc.) is worse for social justice protests than hate groups (Simpson, Willer, and Feinberg 2018). That is SMO's more likely to have marginalized leaders at the helm who are held to different standards than their antagonistic counterparts. A deviation leaders need to consider while strategizing their SMO's agendas and tactical approach. While there is scholarship on activist organizations' goals and perception of their tactics, there is limited work on how intersectional identity might influence leaders' tactical choices. This dissertation project seeks to address this dearth and assess public responses to such decisions.

While scholarship on tactics and leader's identity is limited, there exists scholarship on social movement's integration of intersectional values in goals and mobilization. Several identity movements still primarily focus on more privileged group members. The Women's March consistently struggles with intersectionality between the trans-exclusionary nature of "pussyhats" (Wrenn 2019) and distance from racial justice organizations (Carroll and Nguyen 2020). Similar critiques have been lobbied against Black liberation movements (Lindsey 2022) neglecting Black women's interests. Potential solutions for this representation gap emphasize the importance of descriptive representation (Weldon 2006) to make movements more inclusive. This paradoxical dynamic between intersectional leadership and tactical approaches centering more privileged

members in social movements motivates my dissertation. Ultimately this leads to me asking **under what conditions does intersectionality influence the strategies of social movement leaders?**

As earlier mentioned, political leaders are becoming more diverse across gender (CAWP 2020), race (Brown and Atske 2021), and sexuality (Fitzsimons 2020) among others. These gains lead to improvements including increased social justice-related bill sponsorship and greater media attention around such issues as well (Bratton and Haynie 1999; N. Brown and Banks 2014). However, such representative boosts also inspire backlash demonstrated by the rise of far-right movements and political leaders. Such leaders indirectly encourage the public to express their prejudicial attitudes (Newman et al. 2021). This backlash affects how social movements operate as they must incorporate countering these messages and efforts into their strategic approach. Despite their positions requiring constant contact with this intensified prejudice, diverse leaders continue to participate even seeking leadership positions.

People tend to expect leaders to hold more privileged identities such as Whiteness or masculinity (Rosette, Leonardelli, and Phillips 2008; Scott and Brown 2006). Leaders who defy these expectations are often distrusted and potentially more likely to face accusations of disloyalty. I argue intersectional activists anticipate resistance against their intersecting identities and strategize with this in mind. This pressures them to avoid intersectional frames and prefer more moderate tactics rather than techniques considered radical. This framework identifies the concern of discriminatory resistance as a key factor in intersectional leaders' tactical selection and assesses the potency of this factor's influence on public opinion. Social psychology research finds that as intersectional activists' leadership status is more fragile, they are more likely to act on behalf of the group and react more harshly when someone defies group norms (Ellemers and

Jetten 2013). Given the symbiotic relationship between leaders and followers, I assess each group's perception of public support for intersectional leadership and their freedom in emphasizing some issues.

## **Dissertation Outline**

I begin recalling scholarly literature drawing on political science, social psychology, and sociology to better understand the role of identity in social movements and leaders' decision-making. Drawing on this scholarship I craft a theoretical framework from the social psychology of leadership and social movement studies intra-group dynamics to form expectations of how intersectionality might influence social movements leadership and tactics. In recognizing the potential influence of intersectionality, I initially examine the role of intersectionality in how movements frame their organizations and their causes to the public.

Chapter 2 assesses the extent intersectional framing influences social movement attitudes & policy preferences among Black Americans. Utilizing the increased public attention towards Black Lives Matter from 2020 - 2021, I assess how identity frames shape public opinion of movements and policy. Social movements use identity frames to appeal to the public and establish a wider political presence (Benford & Snow, 2000). I posit that emphasizing the inclusion of women can bolster a sense of representation among Black women and support for gender-focused policies (i.e., maternal mortality. I conducted a survey experiment ( $n = \sim 1500$ ) of Black Americans wherein I found intersectional frames are positively associated with BLM attitudes and support for maternal healthcare policy. These frames are particularly effective among Black men. To test the extent of this positive response to intersectionality, I examine attitudes toward Black women in leadership and intersectional policies.

Chapter 3 examines the extent of activist social identities' ability to shape public opinion of social movements' leadership and policy preferences among Black Americans. In the U.S. social movements tend to be led by men and White people making it difficult to address this question. I utilize the unique case of Black women leading the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement to explore this dynamic. I posit that Black women face even greater criticism as leaders in political activism than their male counterparts due to their marginalized gender identity. I also anticipate that this criticism will extend to the policies these leader's support. I conducted two studies wherein I found that Black people feel more positively toward leaders when they are Black women. However Black respondents (n=590) were less supportive of policies focusing on Black women's issues, maternal healthcare policies specifically, when a woman was leading BLM instead of a man (.061, .020,  $p < .01$ ). This analysis suggests intersectionality may compromise the policy outcomes organizers seek to achieve. I draw on these findings as I look to assess how organizers operate under these constraints and the development of the strategies.

Chapter 4 assesses the conditions wherein intersectionality can influence the tactical tendencies of social movement leaders. I argue Black women activists anticipate discrimination stemming from their intersectional identity and account for it in their strategizing. This ultimately leads to them preferring more moderate tactics rather than techniques considered radical. This framework identifies the concern of discriminatory resistance as a key factor in Black women leaders' tactical selection and assesses the potency of this factor's influence on public opinion. Utilizing a case study approach, I find Black women activists who experienced discrimination expressed a hesitance toward radical tactical approaches.

I conclude the dissertation by providing a review of the key findings and important takeaways. I continue evaluating some of the limitations of this dissertation and speculate potential directions for moving forward. Finally, I review the scholarly contribution of this dissertation to the discipline and the broader impacts these findings offer American politics.

## **Chapter 1: Literature Review & Theoretical Framework**

Throughout this chapter, I explore the extant literature to understand the factors shaping social movement strategies. I then explicate the theoretical framework driving my argument and the methodologies I utilize to examine my expectations. This dissertation engages disparate fields requiring me to assess the role of public opinion, leadership, and intra-movement dynamics in determining which tactics are available to Black social movements.

### **Identity & Public Opinion**

Public support is a key tool for Black social movements, allowing organizers to leverage the potential outrage of their constituents against elites to achieve legislative outcomes (McAdam 1999; A. Morris 1981). The identities of the public are a determinant in their response to movements and the strategies they utilize. Political scientists explore how engaging audiences' social identities influences their attitudinal formation through implicit and explicit identity appeals.

People use heuristics to make political decisions quickly, for some, this is rooted in their identity groups such as race (M. Dawson 1994; M. C. Dawson 2007), gender (Gurin 1985), or ethnicity (G. R. Sanchez 2006). These cues allow people to make decisions despite little political interest or knowledge (Campbell et al. 1960). Focusing on the role of racial cues, scholars demonstrate they can influence core political predispositions such as the strength of partisan identification, particularly for men (Hutchings, Walton, and Benjamin 2010). Racial appeals are explicit, including the use of racial terms such as Black or African American (Mendelberg 2001). As BLM embeds a racial appeal in its name it's crucial to explore how identity cues influence opinion towards the movement. The little work exploring racial cues and social movements

focuses on understanding White attitudes (Lane, Coles, and Saleem 2019). Despite this, little is known about how identity cues shape Black public opinion toward Black social movements and their actions.

Racial cues are also implicitly implemented via priming (Mendelberg, 2001) relying on racially coded messages (e.g., 1988 Willie Horton Ad). The theory of racial priming argues that after the Civil Rights movement, politicians must use racial messaging covertly to avoid alienating their audiences. For example, discussions of inner-city crime activate racial stereotypes and increase support for punitive criminal policies among Whites (J. Hurwitz and Peffley 2005). Recognizing these discussions are racialized weakens the efficiency of negative racial appeals (Nteta 2016). There is a scholarly consensus that racial priming is more effective than explicit cues (Valentino, Hutchings, and White 2002). However recent work argues the effectiveness of explicit negative racial appeals is on the rise (Christiani 2023) and correlated with an increasing sense of threat among White Americans. Findings such as Whites becoming less supportive of social programs when they are framed as being in majority Black neighborhoods (Wozniak 2020) further demonstrate the resurgence in the effectiveness of explicit racial cues. Both types of racial cues can be wielded against Black social movements, including counterprotests against the movement (e.g., White Lives Matter) and the news coverage referring to BLM protesters as thugs and crooks (Adamson 2016). This language encourages the public to associate BLM protesters with violence, a tactical approach often worsening public opinion among tentative supporters or opponents (Muñoz and Anduiza 2019). While most research focuses on White Americans' response to identity appeals, a few scholars explore their utility for Black respondents.

Explicit and implicit frames inconsistently influence Black American public opinion (Wozniak, 2020). As scholars explored minority attitudinal formation, they found shifts in public opinion formation for some Black Americans (White 2007). These cues are most effective for Black Americans who highly identify with their racial group. Messenger's social identities shape how Black people respond to these cues. Black political elites (e.g., President Obama) can subtly shape attitude formation toward policy preferences through racialization (Tesler 2012). While scholars explore messenger effects from politicians, few explore messenger effects from social movement organizations. Furthermore, we know little about how the efficiency of identity appeals as a means for social movements to influence policy preference formation.

These racial cues vary in effectiveness across respondents' other social identities. For example, men are more likely to accept explicit racial appeals than women (Hutchings, Walton, & Benjamin, 2010). Racial cues are a noteworthy contributor to the gender gap in public opinion (Hutchings et al. 2004). We might anticipate that political appeals targeting people across both race and gender identity are particularly effective. Explicit gendered racial cues can lead to changes in policy preferences among White Americans though the direction is inconsistent (McConnaughy & White, 2011). However, political scientists rarely investigate the impact of gendered racial appeals, and we know even less about their effects on minority groups. This is a rich area for exploration given the political salience of Black women's intersectional identity (Simien, 2005). Most identity appeals scholarship does not consider its implications in understanding attitudinal development toward social movements. As social movements gain prominence in American politics it's important to examine how these organizations are perceived and how they might shape public opinion on political issues. I address this dearth and assess the effectiveness of gendered racial appeals in political attitudes toward a highly prominent Black

social movement. For a better understanding of how movements utilize cues to garner public support, I turn toward social movement theories of framing.

### **Social Movement Attitude Formation**

Framing presents a social movement organization to its participants, enemies, and the public (Benford and Snow 2000). People use frames to understand and contextualize the world around them (Goffman 1974). Activists orient such frames around mobilization and public engagement generating collective action frames (Benford and Snow 2000). They cultivate frames strategically bridging the gap between their goals and current perceptions of the movement by their potential constituents (Benford & Snow, 2000). As identity movements became more common organizations began centering these frames around appealing to social and collective identities. I explore the effectiveness of racial frames in social movement's appeals to the public, to better understand how identity frames shape social movement attitudes.

People utilize racial frames for racial justice movements and counter-protests (Yazdiha 2022). Depending on their implementation, racial frames can lead to backlash and withdrawal of support from White supporters such as the declining support of White participants in response to Civil Rights Movement race frames (Robnett 2005). In developing coalitions, multi-racial coalitions are better supported using broad injustice frames that might include social and racial issues (Zamora and Osuji 2014). Recently, some organizations utilized racial frames to develop White solidarity for racial justice movements called anti-racism frames (Seikkula 2022). Therein racial frames can appeal to White audiences when movements are targeting White people specifically. While scholars find mixed results for White audiences' responses to racial frames, less understood is how effective identity appeals are to Black Americans. Movements tend to hyper-focus on White supporters and establish support broadly to the detriment of the people

movements seek to represent. The limited scholarship on identity frames' influence on Black engagement focuses largely on race in historic movements. I address the theoretical gap in understanding identity frames beyond race in contemporary Black movements.

Historically Black social movements (i.e., Civil Rights Movement) utilized racial solidarity as a mobilizing agent for Black participants (A. D. Morris 1986). On the other hand, identity frames can serve as a site of conflict between Black social movements, such as the implications of abortion policy for the Black community (Luna 2018). Considering the intersecting marginalized identities people hold, some scholars find intersectionality can serve as an effective collective action frame. Participants describe that their intersectional identities empowered them to protest in identity movements (Terriquez, Brenes, and Lopez 2018). Intersectionality can bring attention to conflicting goals within the movement and serve as a foundation for coalition-building (Laperrière and Lépinard 2016). Movements consider both the intersectional identities of potential participants and the intersectionality within the frame itself. It's crucial to account for the audience's identities as they and their intersections can influence frame resonance (Okechukwu 2014). People also engaged with Black liberation movements through their gendered racial identity (Platt and Fraser 1998). While some scholars explored the role of intersectionality in response to collective action frames, few studied the role of intersectional frames in opinion formation. Those who have (Tillery & Bonilla, 2020) focused largely on movement attitudes and not the downstream consequences of such frames on policy preferences.

Activists carefully select these frames recognizing the importance of public support, considering attitudes towards the movement, and monitoring public reactions to their strategies to ensure the tide of public opinion turns in their favor. Such considerations limit tactical

approach availability. More disruptive forms of protest (e.g., riots, sit-ins) tend to receive negative public perception (Thomas & Louis, 2014) but can be effective when environmental contexts and neighborhood ideology are favorable (Shuman et al. 2022). These effects worsen when minorities utilize disruptive tactics Black protests are more effective using more conventional or moderate tactics (e.g., rallies, demonstrations) than their disruptive counterparts (e.g., sit-ins) (Rojas, 2006). However, when obtaining support from advantaged groups disruptive tactics can help the public recognize the needs of marginalized communities (Shuman et al. 2021). While social movement scholars analyzing tactics examine the effect of protesters' identities on the public response to their tactics, they rarely consider how the relationship between leaders' identities and attitudes toward the movement. I delve into the role of social identities and attitudes towards leaders to conceptualize our expectations of identities' role in public response to leaders.

## **Identity & Public Opinion of Social Movement Leaders**

### *Prototypicality*

Social psychologists establish that people use their group membership to feel positive distinctiveness, focusing on the unique attributes that differentiate them from others, and developing a sense of community with other people in their group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As people derive their self-esteem from their group membership, they are protective of their group's status (Brewer 1993). People who fit the characteristics associated with a group are typically perceived as a positive representation of the group. For example, men are associated with being tall, therefore a tall man would be a positive representation of men. This association allows these representatives a higher status in the group as people perceive them to have the group's best

interests in mind (Hogg, 1993). As people value the groups, they are members of they also value the people representative of the group more than those who do not fit group characteristics.

Black women are not group representatives of the Black community because masculinity is more closely associated with Blackness (Goff et al. 2008). While patriarchal norms appear in various communities, this theory describes an under-distinction between Black men and women leading to the erasure of Black women's struggles with intersectional discrimination (Coles and Pasek 2020). As people think about the Black community and their political interests, Black womanhood is not considered nor the political issues salient to them. Instead, as representative group members, Black men are centered in discussions of the Black community and its concerns (Lindsey 2022). In the Black Lives Matter movement, people tend to focus on Black male victims of police violence often forgetting their feminine counterparts (Threadcraft 2017).

This psychological predisposition of Blackness equating Black men trickles into more than how Black people are perceived but also into who deserves to speak on their behalf. Recall the Civil Rights Movement wherein Black women engaged in grassroots activism whereas Black men took nationally recognized leadership positions and engaged with political elites (Robnett, 1999). These psychological tendencies allow Black men to be recognized as leaders more easily as they are more trusted (Baretto & Ellemers, 2017). In the Black community, people who match group characteristics, in this case, Black men, are more favored and trusted than their female counterparts. Theories of prototypicality invite us to consider whether the mistreatment of Black women activists extends to a more public venue and how such attitudes extend to their leadership.

## Social Identity Theory of Leadership

To understand how identity shapes public preferences for leadership, I lean on the social identity theory of leadership. This theory describes how people prefer leaders who most fit the characteristics associated with a group (Hogg 2001a). In the context of Black people, this characteristic is masculinity, and Black women who defy this characteristic are rarely seen as leaders (Ponce de Leon and Rosette 2022; Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach 2008) and when they are people perceive them poorly (Ellemers and Jetten 2013). This preference for a leader that is a strong representative of the group, is strongest in highly salient identity groups. As most Black Americans highly value their racial group identity (van Knippenberg 2011; McClain et al. 2009) we might anticipate Black people to prefer male leaders, seen as more representative of the group, than women. However, the context in which Black women obtain leadership is often precarious, and difficult for them to work well, a phenomenon called glass cliffs. Marginal group members are more likely to become leaders in times of uncertainty (Rast et al. 2012). These positions are more readily available for Black women in declining organizations (Cook and Glass 2013; Rosette and Livingston 2012b). Black women are often chosen as leaders as a last resort as they operate in a position of invisibility.

Black women pursuing leadership face additional difficulties, as they defy racial stereotypes through their femininity and leadership stereotypes as the stereotypical leader is White (Rosette, Leonardelli, and Phillips 2008) and male (Scott and Brown 2006). Individuals associate leadership qualities with people with privileged identities (Ridgeway 2001) and rate such leaders with higher levels of trust (Baretto & Ellemers, 2002). In a political context, people are more likely to participate in collective action under leadership with more privileged identities. While prior scholarship considers identity and collective action this work tends to

focus on allyship and political participation or inter-group relations (Chin et al. 2023) rather than intra-group dynamics in Black politics. Dynamics play a significant role in understanding the contextual factors influencing Black women's leadership in social movements and the tactics available to them.

### **Identity Dynamics of Leadership**

Social movement leaders consider the implications of their decisions on public opinion and the perspectives of their constituents. While launching public appeals leaders must develop and maintain a strong sense of unity within their organizations (Ganz 2009). Infighting can disrupt organizing efforts redirecting attention from strategy to factionalism prevention (Ghaziani and Fine 2008). Leaders often lean on the authority and credibility their status gives them to usher in unity. However, marginalized leaders may struggle more to establish authority than their White male counterparts (Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2020). Minority leaders constantly combat doubts regarding their capability and struggle to establish credibility (Koenig et al. 2011). These doubts might be heightened for those with intersectional marginalized identities who defy multiple leader stereotypes. Thus, I suspect minority leaders need to exert additional effort into group cohesion and such efforts might extend into their strategies and tactics. Strategies that can be further complicated by leader's identities and those of their constituents.

Activists advocating for marginalized groups tend to focus on single identity concerns (Strolovitch, 2007) as it's easier to focus on issues that most Black people find concerning. This leaves Black women activists unheard and experiencing mistreatment based on their race and gender (Lorde, 1984). Cohen describes a secondary marginalization experienced in addition to their racial and gendered marginalized identities (1999). This marginalization within Black

women's racial or gender group can be more subtle than overt discrimination, such as intersectional concerns being neglected in community mobilization. For example, the Black community's lack of response to the HIV/AIDS crisis despite the large portions of Black people suffering from the illness (Cohen, 1999). This example emphasizes the concerns of Black queer people, but also other intersectional groups in the Black community such as Black women and people with disabilities. Some Black women attempt to draw attention to their struggles; however, this can lead to accusations of women being distractions from larger issues making them traitors to the Black community (Alexander-Floyd, 2007). Black women activists experience mistreatment based on their intersectional identity, however, scholarship on intersectionality and Black feminist thought leans on a philosophical approach rather than empirical analysis. This creates opportunities for empirical exploration of the effect of Black women's marginalized position on the public perception of activists and their tactical approaches to organizing.

Given this mistreatment towards Black women in activist spaces, one might begin to wonder how these women accomplish anything in these organizations. However, theories of intersectionality and Black feminist thought offer clarity. As systems of oppression rely upon and reinforce each other, Black women are stripped of their humanity to be resources for physical and emotional labor (Hill Collins, 1999) to their racial and gendered communities. It is typical for social justice movements to benefit from the labor of Black women without addressing political issues targeting them specifically such as the maternal mortality crisis.

Theories of intersectionality offer a framework to understand how Black women's position in society shapes their perspective and political experiences. Intersectionality is a theoretical framework describing how people with multiple marginalized identities experience

unique forms of oppression (Crenshaw 1989). While researchers of intersectionality explore the theory across race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and other identities, it's founded on understanding the experiences of Black working-class women. Black women encounter discrimination entangled between racism and sexism to create an experience of prejudice distinct from solely racism or sexism. In discussing these multiple marginalized groups, I will use the term intersectional to describe people with multiple marginalized identities and factors relevant to their political engagement such as policies or framing.

These intersectional experiences offer key insights into Black women's experiences in activism. Though movements seek to combat injustices at times they can replicate them within their organizations. For instance, Black women report that their access to key information was limited or given later than their more privileged counterparts (Dickerson 2006). In racial movements specifically, women report a lack of representation and visibility in their organizing (Lauby and Koprowski 2023). Upon reaching leadership positions Black women report being assigned roles with less power and influence (Dickerson 2006). As contemporary social movements move toward non-hierarchical decentralized leadership these structures also fall victim to such biases. Movements with this structure such as Occupy Wall Street replicate discrimination against women of color leading similarly to their more hierarchical counterparts. Some argue that decentralized leadership is more likely to foster hidden prejudices (i.e., sexism) (Sturm 2004). Participants use racial and gender stereotypes to undermine Black women's leadership in social movements known as discriminatory resistance (H. M. Hurwitz 2021). Black women as social movement leaders must account for the potential of resistance within and outside their organization as they make decisions. This distinct context cultivates a noteworthy style of protesting and leadership for Black women.

Black women historically protested while constrained to gendered norms, as respectability was a core tenet of the Civil Rights Movement. Black women were expected to exhibit ladylike behavior to exemplify the civilized nature of Black organizing efforts (Chappell, Hutchinson, and Ward 1999). This practice of adhering to gendered norms might have socialized later generations of organizers to expect these roles in contemporary movements and respond negatively to women who defy these expectations. Black women who refused to follow models of respectability politics had their contributions erased from movements e.g., Ella Baker (Jackson 2024). Concern surrounding their erasure pressured Black women to minimize the radical nature of their activism subsequently distracting others from how their efforts defied the patriarchal hierarchy (Upton and Bell 2017). As Black women pursued and achieved leadership, they often focused on community work and developing a politics of care.

Black women engage with a unique style of leadership Robnett names bridge leadership understanding their work to be short-term charismatic leaders (1999). Through their wide community ties and social networks, Black women are uniquely equipped to distribute movement messages and personalize political issues (Upton and Bell 2017). Additionally, their experiences facilitate their ability to build communities of people with several marginalized identities and coalition building across such identities (Carastathis 2013). By adopting an inclusive tactical approach organizers can pursue social change across several community issues and recognize the similarities in oppressive tactics (Chun, Lipsitz, and Shin 2013). Historically Black liberation movements like the Black Panthers aligned themselves with pro-LGBTQ and feminist ideologies however in practice Black women encountered misogyny daily (Collier-Thomas and Franklin 2001).

Throughout the hardships Black women experienced while organizing, they developed a politics of radical care and sought to develop strategies that avoided inflicting further trauma on the Black community (Woodly 2022). Prior scholarship explores Black women's leadership styles but rarely investigates the role of public opinion in influencing their tactical decisions. This is especially important for studying Black women's leadership as they operate at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities limiting their public appeal. I draw on this literature on social movements and political psychology to develop a theoretical framework explaining the psychological factors that shape public opinion toward intersectionality in movements and the strategies of women leading them. In the following section, I explain the theories grounding the argument of this dissertation.

## **Theoretical Framework**

As earlier established Black women's lower group standing renders their political realities invisible. This invisibility manifests multifold including the neglect of Black feminist concerns by interest groups (Strolovitch, 2007) or social movements (Cohen, 1999). This lower status makes it more difficult for people with intersectional identities (e.g., women of color) to become leaders (Hogg, 2001). People prefer high-status group members rather than intersectional leaders, particularly for salient identity groups (Hogg, 1993). Furthermore, individuals tend to associate privileged group members with leadership characteristics (Ridgeway, 2001) and rate such leaders with higher levels of trust (Baretto & Ellemers, 2002).

As intersectional leaders rise, they face more hardships and criticism than their more privileged counterparts. Most people associate the archetypical leader with Whiteness (Rosette et al. 2008) and masculinity (Scott & Brown, 2006). Oftentimes when Black women defy these expectations and take on a leadership role they do so in failing organizations (Rosette &

Livingston, 2022) or encounter discrimination disrupting their work (Huruwitz, 2019).

Followers' adherence to identity stereotypes of leaders as white men typically leads to the harassment of intersectional leaders (Huruwitz, 2021).

Furthermore, it can be difficult for intersectional leaders to obtain the respect or high regard necessary to take control. Social movement studies discuss the importance of cultural, social, and symbolic capital culminating in leadership capital. This capital includes culturally relevant knowledge about the community where the SMO is organized, rich social ties making mobilization easier, and social prestige (Nepstad & Bob, 2006). These areas of capital capture the heart of mobilization and retention for activism including social networks (Kitts, 2006), collective identity (Gamson, 1997), and identity frames (Snow & Benford, 2000). Intersectional leaders encounter a variety of hardships in garnering such influence, particularly in obtaining social and symbolic capital. While their intersectional status lends them a unique perspective on hardships their community encounters, they face hurdles in establishing strong social ties and receiving prestige despite impressive works. Despite gains for Black women in some areas, White men still possess more social capital (Yang et al. 2020). The accumulation of such status shapes the tactics and goals leaders can pursue. It is easier for leaders with high leadership capital to justify the tactics and gain favor from relevant stakeholders like the media (Nepstad & Bob, 2006). The difficulties intersectional leaders encounter along these dimensions constrain the tactics and political outcomes available to them. This leads to my first hypothesis:

**H1:** Black women activists who experienced intra-group discrimination favor more moderate tactics than organizers without discriminatory experiences

I theorize intersectional activists will prefer more moderate tactics, such as mobilizing for privileged group members (i.e., Black men) to avoid accusations of selfishness. To effectively

lead, activists need to appear as though they are acting on behalf of the organization rather than themselves (Haslam et al. 2020). As intersectional leaders are less trusted than their single-identity counterparts (Barreto & Hogg, 2017) I argue they strategize according to the limited trust of their constituents.

Intersectional activists use leadership to validate their group membership in the movement boosting their self-esteem. In cases where marginalized people are reminded of their weaker in-group status, their reaction depends on how feasible they perceive raising their status in the group. For people who perceive climbing into a higher status as achievable their investment in the group is strengthened to raise their self-esteem (Jetten, 2002). This hope encourages the relationship between their self-esteem and the group's status therefore they become more defensive, work harder, and are more likely to participate on behalf of the group than their privileged counterparts (Jetten & Ellemers, 2013). I theorize these psychological processes are at play as Black women make tactical decisions in activist organizations. Leaders make these decisions to achieve their organization's objective and to demonstrate they belong in the position they obtained. In the case of intersectional activists, highlighting their belonging might include strictly adhering to such norms to validate their leadership to the group.

As Black women leaders tend to emerge in times of uncertainty (Rast et al. 2011), they are even less likely to want to risk taking organizations in new directions. In social movements, this might manifest as hesitation or reluctance to incorporate an intersectional agenda into an established identity movement. Furthermore, intersectional leaders take their followers' lack of trust into account while strategizing, for activist organizations to incorporate intersectionality this change needs to come from followers rather than leaders. Followers might feel more inspired to incorporate intersectionality under the leadership of a privileged group member, who instead of

selfishness would come across as progressive. Given these dynamics of trust and credibility leaning toward prototypical group leaders, I further hypothesize

**H2:** Followers will be less supportive of Black gender-inclusive movements than their gender-neutral counterparts

For most of this theory section, I focus on the thoughts and behaviors of leaders, however as they operate around the desires and expectations of their followers it is crucial to assess the effectiveness of these strategies. A central assumption in my understanding of intersectional leaders' strategy is the belief that the public will respond negatively to incorporating intersectionality into social movements. To understand the validity of this anxiety I empirically test public response to activist agendas across leader identities.

Theoretically, this examination is motivated by scholarship surrounding responses to dissent in movements. Early scholarship argues that infighting will lead to factions resulting in SMOs splitting into competing bodies (McAdam, 1982). Leaders work to prevent such divides as organizational proliferation disrupts their follower base and weakens the overall movement. I argue intersectional leaders modify their political agendas to avoid infighting, especially as a core cause of infighting is discriminatory treatment in member-to-member interactions (Chesler, 2001; McCall, 2005). Social psychology research encourages this assumption in followers' responses to leaders with intersecting or marginal identities (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

I anticipate followers will be more resistant to intersectionality under an intersectional leader. People are less likely to trust intersectional leaders to be acting for the group's best interests. Historically, women of color faced accusations of being race traitors, often for drawing attention to their mistreatment at the hands of their male counterparts (Alexander-Floyd, 2007; Candelaria, 1980). As one of the motivations for participating is satisfying a sense of morality,

the suspicion of leaders acting in self-interest might incite moral outrage against their leaders. Followers' doubting intersectional leaders' intentions encourages their resistance to new initiatives they usher in that do not explicitly benefit the follower. Followers are more supportive of innovation under the leadership of higher-status group members than intersectional leaders (Haslam et al. 2020). However, this hesitance dissipates under higher-status leaders whose followers grant the benefit of the doubt when introducing new tactical approaches.

To summarize I argue that intersectional organizers encounter discrimination within activist organizations as their constituents doubt their motivations are altruistic. This doubt encourages their constituents to resist tactical innovations, such as incorporating intersectionality, that Black women leaders might suggest. Intersectional leaders are aware of their followers' tenuous trust and subsequently prioritize more moderate tactics to reassure their followers of their leadership capabilities.

## **Conclusion**

Scholarship of intersectionality and American social movements spans from contemporary activism to the Abolitionist era. Throughout this literature, researchers studied the injustices Black people suffer under and how these sometimes disproportionately impact Black women. Social movements scholars assessed intersectionality as a threat and a boon to movements, but few studies sought to explore how intersectionality shapes the internal working of these SMOs. From obtaining public support to the persuasiveness of their leaders through understanding public engagement with social movements the context wherein intersectional leaders operate becomes clearer. Such contexts allow us to engage with Black organizers more richly to understand the relationship between their experiences in their organizations and the strategies that are available to them. Throughout this dissertation, I explore intersectionality as a

means of public support, a determinant factor in attitudes toward social movement leadership, and its influence on the tactics selected by activists.

In the following chapters, I consider three components of intersectionality in social movements. First, I delve into identity frames and BLM, using a survey experiment to assess the feasibility of Black social movements utilizing intersectional frames to bolster public opinion without alienating current supporters. Upon examining how the public responds to intersectional frames in BLM, I analyze their response to intersectional leadership i.e., Black women's leadership in the movement utilizing two survey experimental studies. Understanding how the public responds to Black women in leadership, I conduct a case study of Black women's strategizing under public scrutiny. I expand on this case study by interviewing Black organizers on their tactical preferences and experiences in activist organizations. In the following chapter, I briefly review the prevalent theories guiding my hypothesis and assess the role of intersectionality in social movement frames.

## **Chapter 2: Intersectionality, Framing, & Public Opinion of Black Lives Matter**

Social movements fighting for Black liberation have a long tradition of prioritizing men from neglecting the gendered implications of racial issues (e.g., policing, mass incarceration) (Lindsey 2022; Ritchie 2017) to the denial of women's leadership (Barnett 1993). As we look to more contemporary examples, Black Lives Matter might exemplify the beginning of a shift in this tradition. Between the three Black women who founded the movement alongside their setting intersectionality as a core tenet of their cause (Garza, Tometi, and Cullors 2014) BLM seems to be adopting a more gender-inclusive model of Black organizing, than their historic counterparts. Throughout this project, I explore intersectionality in public opinion formation and activists' organizing experiences. This chapter seeks to understand a social movement's ability to incorporate intersectionality in the movement's presentation to the public.

To what extent does intersectional framing influence social movement attitudes & policy preferences among Black Americans? Intersectional framing describes a process of social movements recognizing the multiple marginalized identities of their audiences and appealing to these identities to bolster public support and recruit new members. Intersectionality, as earlier mentioned, recognizes the unique perspective of people with multiple marginalized identities (Crenshaw, 1989), herein Black women. Black social movements often focus on appealing to cross-racial audiences, giving us few opportunities to examine the effectiveness of attempts to appeal to sub-groups within the Black community.

Utilizing the increased public attention towards Black Lives Matter throughout 2020 - 2021, I assess how identity frames shape public opinion of movements and policy. While political science defines framing in the context of the mass media, social movement scholars conceptualize framing as a strategic tool for social movements to present themselves in pursuit of

their goals (Benford and Snow 2000). These frames can have a variety of purposes such as collective action frames which focus on cultivating action-oriented beliefs to inspire organizing activity (Gamson, 1995). Identity frames appeal to solidarity for social identities allowing movements to establish a wider political presence. I argue that emphasizing the inclusion of women can bolster a sense of representation among Black women and support for gender-focused policies (i.e., maternal mortality). I conducted a survey experiment ( $n = \sim 1500$ ) of Black Americans wherein I found intersectional frames are positively associated with BLM attitudes and support for maternal healthcare policy. This innovative study includes a large sample of Black Americans and takes steps toward understanding how BLM frames can shape public opinion formation after the 2020 global protests.

Black men feel less supportive of BLM when the movement is framed around the needs of women and the LGBTQ community (Bonilla and Tillery 2020a). This project seeks to examine the downstream consequences of such framing on policy preferences to address a significant threat to Black life, maternal mortality. To better understand how intersectional frames might shape public opinion formation I explore scholars of framing effects on opinion formation.

Framing presents a social movement organization to its participants, enemies, and the public (Benford and Snow 2000). People use frames to understand and contextualize the world around them (Goffman 1974). Activists orient such frames around mobilization and public engagement generating collective action frames (Benford and Snow 2000). They cultivate frames strategically bridging the gap between their goals and current perceptions of the movement by the public i.e., their potential constituents (Benford & Snow, 2000). As identity movements

became more common organizations began centering these frames around appealing to social and collective identities.

Historically Black social movements (i.e., Civil Rights Movement) utilized racial solidarity as a mobilizing agent for Black participants (A. D. Morris 1986). Sometimes, identity frames can serve as a site of conflict between Black social movements, such as the implications of abortion policy for the Black community (Luna 2018). Considering the intersecting marginalized identities people hold, some scholars find intersectionality can serve as an effective collective action frame. Participants describe that through the salience of their intersectional identities, they found a sense of empowerment (Terriquez, Brenes, and Lopez 2018). Intersectionality can bring attention to conflicting goals within the movement and serve as a foundation for coalition-building (Laperrière and Lépinard 2016). Movements consider both the intersectional identities of potential participants and the intersectionality within the frame itself. It's crucial to take the audience's identities into account as they and their intersections can influence frame resonance (Okechukwu 2014). Historically, people also engaged with Black liberation movements through their gendered racial identity (Platt and Fraser 1998). While some scholars explored the role of intersectionality in response to collective action frames, few explored the role of intersectional frames in opinion formation. Those who have (Tillery & Bonilla, 2020) focused largely on movement attitudes and not the downstream consequences of such frames on policy preferences.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Black Lives Matter publicly declares intersectionality as a core organizational value, emphasizing addressing all threats to Black life, including health, economic, and social issues (Garza 2014). While intersectionality may be valued, Black social movements most frequently

mobilize on behalf of Black men (Lindsey 2022). This tendency to neglect Black people who hold additional marginalized identities is reflected in Black public opinions as well. Black men demonstrate weakened support for movements that embrace intersectionality (Bonilla and Tillery 2020b).

Black social movements and activism largely focus on publicly visible forms of resistance, overlooking Black women's contributions to social justice such as community building (Hill Collins, 1990). Black women create a distinct sphere of influence often serving as the foundation for movements to mobilize and recruit new members. This is incredibly important for Black women's political incorporation as alternatively, patriarchal institutions served as the foundation for community organizing such as the Black church or civic organizations designed with Black men in mind (Marable, 1983). Exclusion from participation and later leadership in social movement organizations from labor unions to Black social movements, contributed to Black women's need for institutional transformation within SMOs (Collins, 1991). We may anticipate that social movement frames targeting Black women specifically, might be effective in light of this exclusion as a sign of institutional transformation.

Intersectional frames may be particularly appealing to Black women, as Black movements often mobilize on behalf of Black men despite prevailing threats to Black women (Threadcraft 2017). In fact, rather than BLM drawing attention to such threats, alternative organizations such as SayHerName (Crenshaw and Ritchie 2015) arose. The existence of SayHerName implies negligence within BLM, a neglect that could serve as a threat to Black women's feelings represented in the movement. A gender appeal towards Black women may induce a stronger sense of collective identity for Black women toward BLM. Collective identity is the associated actions and attitudes with a social movement, crucial in mobilizing participants

and recruiting activists. Under this movement identity individuals become a collective under the same leadership and practices of the organization. A stronger sense of collective identity often leads to increased participation in social movements (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Social movement frames can boost feelings of collective identity and lead to movements engaging more with the marginalized identities of their members. Herein I assess the inverse and how engagement with audiences' social identities might lead to gains in a sense of movement identity. This alongside Black women's strong levels of political participation leads me to hypothesize that:

**H1:** When exposed to a women-inclusive BLM frame, Black women will feel more represented than Black men.

As this gender frame focuses on Black women rather than Black men I anticipate any BLM-centered treatment effects will more strongly affect Black women. Intersectional consciousness predicts strengthened solidarity among women (Greenwood 2008). However, for Black men, exposure to Black feminist frames is weakly associated with negative attitudes toward social movements (Bonilla and Tillery 2020a). Intersectional frames of the reproductive justice movement can illicit increased collective action engagement and organizational collaboration (Mandell, Israel, and Schulz 2019). However, these effects might expand beyond attitudes toward the movement. Scholars find intersectional framing of issues can inspire increased support for gendered policies (Perez Brower 2024). Such frames are effective in influencing both movement attitudes and policy preferences, leading me to hypothesize:

**H2:** Black people will feel more supportive of maternal healthcare policies in the women-inclusive BLM frame but may feel less supportive of such policies in the trans-inclusive condition

**H2b:** Black men will be more supportive of maternal healthcare policies in the women-inclusive BLM than Black men in the trans-inclusive condition

Researchers find men of color can feel threatened by sexism through the belief that prejudice towards minorities is monolithic (D. T. Sanchez et al. 2017). Therefore, we may anticipate that observing women's inclusive frames of the movement reinforces the trustworthiness of BLM. Alternatively, such effects may not extend to the trans-inclusive condition as Black people are less likely to express supportive attitudes toward LGBTQ rights (Flores 2015). Such tendencies hold even when focusing on Black members of the LGBTQ community as Black Americans demonstrate stronger beliefs in addressing concerns towards Black women than they do toward the Black LGBTQ community (Bunyasi and Smith 2019). These negative attitudes are heightened when directed at the trans community (Bunyasi and Smith 2019).

Gender may have a moderating effect on responses to trans-inclusive treatment as men are more likely to demonstrate negative attitudes towards the LGBTQ community (Herek 2002). Such attitudes are often attributed to men's heightened preference for traditional gender roles relative to women (McDermott et al. 2014). Given this tendency, I anticipate that men exposed to the women frame will be more supportive of maternal health care policies as such policies facilitate women's ability to be maternal and subsequently adhere to traditional gender roles.

## **Methods**

To test my hypotheses, I conducted a survey experiment with two conditions and a control group. Online data collection ranged from August 2021 to September 2021, concluding with an N of 1500 Black Americans. Census balances across age, gender, and education, using 2021 ACS 5-year estimates, were applied to ensure the sample was comparable to the Black

American public. The gender breakdown of this sample consists of 712 men, 789 women, and 3 non-binary participants who were dropped from the gendered analysis.

The treatment was a press release from a BLM spokesperson discussing the importance of diversity in the Black community. In both treatment conditions, they emphasize the inclusion of Black people in BLM regardless of their gender identity. In one condition the spokesperson specifically references Black men and Black women's inclusion in the movement. In another treatment, a BLM spokesperson emphasizes the inclusion of the Black trans-community in BLM. Post-treatment the survey I assess two outcomes movement attitudes and policy preferences.

#### *BLM Attitudes Outcome Variable*

Researchers assessing attitudes toward social movements typically utilize measures centered on support or favorability. While these measures effectively assess broad audience perceptions of movements, they struggle to capture more nuanced perspectives. In the case of BLM, Black Americans consistently demonstrate strong support for the movement (Azevedo, Marques, and Micheli 2022). Support that remains consistent for Black Americans beyond the spike in support after the murder of George Floyd (D. Thomas and Horowitz 2020). Taking this consistently high BLM support into account rather than assessing these attitudes through support, I turn to alternative mechanisms in understanding Black perceptions of the movement.

Drawing on theories of collective identity which emphasize the importance of a sense of inclusion in long-term movement membership (Stryker, Owens, and White 2000). I developed a measure inspired by psychological measures of inclusion to examine differences in participants' sense of inclusion and representation in the movement across treatment conditions. As movements utilize framing to cultivate attachment toward the movement, I utilize these measures to assess the effectiveness of these Black feminist and trans-inclusive frames. I draw on a social

psychology measure of inclusion assessing one's perceived group inclusion, to assess feelings of representation. As social movements require a group identity to achieve political outcomes, representation serves as an ideal mechanism to understand how movements are managing their audience's political interests. The measure includes four items as follows:

I feel that Black Lives Matter speaks directly to my realities and concerns as a Black woman.

Black Lives Matter does a great job of representing the political interests of individuals like me.

People like me are at the heart of the struggles of Black Lives Matter.

These items are combined to create a BLM attitudinal scale with a Cronbach's alpha at .88, indicating the measure is sufficiently reliable for use in this study. This scale serves as one of two key dependent variables. In the following section, I further discuss the second outcome policy preferences.

### *Policy Preferences Measure*

It's crucial to understand not only how identity frames might influence attitudes toward the movement but also policies relevant to their constituents. The central policy issue of this study is initiatives to address racial disparities in maternal health outcomes. While various issues disproportionately harm the Black community, maternal healthcare policy is distinct in its issue primarily focusing on the well-being of Black women. As one of the leading causes of death for Black women (Oparah and Bonaparte 2016), it's a looming threat against Black life.

The items selected were inspired by the "White House Blueprint for Addressing the Maternal Healthcare Crisis." The report includes among other future actions; expanding social services, increasing access to doulas and midwives, increasing funding, especially for rural areas,

and developing programs to ensure better care for incarcerated mothers and their children. I drew on this report to create a 4-item maternal healthcare policy preference scale with a Cronbach alpha of .84. The items include:

Increase national spending on reducing maternal mortality and injury.

Improve maternal health care and support for incarcerated mothers.

Make vaccinations more accessible to women to protect the health of mothers and infants.

Provide more federal funds so that states can provide better prenatal care to expectant mothers.

I evaluate my experiment via an OLS regression that predicts responses to my outcomes based on the experimental condition. The treatment variable is coded as a dummy variable between the conditions and control. To capture gendered distinctions in the results I conduct a moderation analysis by female identification. I measured female identity with a single item asking “What is your gender” respondents had the option of male, female, or non-binary. Non-binary respondents were dropped from the moderation analysis due to lack of power.

### **Results for BLM Attitudes**

First, I assess the influence of women-inclusive and trans-inclusive frames on attitudes toward BLM. I find that Black Americans feel more positively toward BLM when the movement includes Black women (.02, .01,  $p > .05$ ) and the trans-community (.03, .01,  $p > .05$ ) relative to the control. The effects of the treatment are slightly stronger in the trans-inclusive condition than its gendered counterpart. To better understand, these positive responses to the treatment, I assess the moderating effect of gender.

Table 2.1: BLM Attitudes &amp; Identity Frames

|                           | Full Sample         | Black Women         | Black Men           |
|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Women Inclusive Condition | 0.026*<br>(0.012)   | 0.010<br>(0.016)    | 0.044*<br>(0.018)   |
| Trans Inclusive Condition | 0.030*<br>(0.013)   | 0.027<br>(0.017)    | 0.034<br>(0.019)    |
| Constant                  | 0.800***<br>(0.008) | 0.808***<br>(0.011) | 0.792***<br>(0.012) |
| Observations              | 1,501               | 789                 | 712                 |

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.001, \*\* p&lt;0.01, \* p&lt;0.05

Upon a gendered analysis, these effects are positive but insignificant in the women inclusion condition (.01, .01,  $p > .05$ ) and trans-inclusive condition (.02, .01,  $p < .01$ ) among Black women. This contrasts with H1 as the direct appeal to Black women's incorporation into BLM led to no significant changes in Black women's BLM attitudes. Black men, on the other hand, felt significantly more represented in BLM in the women's inclusion condition (.04, .01,  $p < .05$ ) relative to the control. The trans-inclusive condition is positively correlated, though insignificant in its effect on BLM attitudes. Upon disaggregating by gender, the positive influence of the trans-inclusive condition on BLM attitudes, significant for the full sample, weakened. Further moderation analysis confirms no statistically significant difference in response to the treatment across genders.

Table 2.2: BLM Attitudes Moderated by Gender

|                           | BLM Attitudes       |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Women Inclusive Condition | 0.010<br>(0.017)    |
| Trans Inclusive Condition | 0.027<br>(0.017)    |
| Male                      | -0.017<br>(0.016)   |
| Male x Women inclusive    | 0.033<br>(0.024)    |
| Male x Trans inclusive    | 0.007<br>(0.025)    |
| Constant                  | 0.808***<br>(0.011) |
| Observations              | 1,501               |
| R-squared                 | 0.006               |

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

## Discussion of BLM Attitudes

Contrary to my expectations, I find that Black Americans feel more positively toward BLM in both the women-inclusive and trans-inclusive conditions. Similar to prior scholarship (Bonilla and Tillery 2020b) the effects I uncover are subtle yet noteworthy, despite going in the opposite direction of prior scholarship. As this study was conducted in 2020 it might be the case that the prominence of the murder of Breonna Taylor (Grant, Jenkins, and Cabas-Mijares 2022) cultivated more gender-inclusive attitudes toward BLM.

Additionally, I consider the distinct nature of the dependent variable. This measure assesses feeling represented by the movement, respondents encountering the movement's inclusion of communities traditionally marginalized in Black activism rather than perceiving this as a threat instead potentially saw this as a boon to the movement. While I anticipated gender would have a moderating effect, rather than Black women responding to women's inclusion

instead Black men demonstrated increased support for the Black feminist condition. I suspect a sense of intersectional solidarity drives Black men's positive attitudes (Crowder, 2023) such that associating BLM with Black women raised these men's sense of inclusion. Intersectional frames were subtly influential in Black representation in BLM, I now turn to understand their influence on policy preferences.

Table 2.3: Support for Maternal Healthcare Policies

|                           | Full Sample         | Black Women         | Black Men           |
|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Women Inclusive Condition | 0.024*<br>(0.010)   | 0.013<br>(0.013)    | 0.036*<br>(0.016)   |
| Trans Inclusive Condition | 0.032**<br>(0.010)  | 0.026*<br>(0.013)   | 0.037*<br>(0.016)   |
| Constant                  | 0.824***<br>(0.007) | 0.834***<br>(0.009) | 0.813***<br>(0.011) |
| Observations              | 1,504               | 789                 | 712                 |

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

## Results for Policy Preferences

I find increased levels of support for maternal healthcare policies in both the women's inclusion (.02, .01,  $p < .05$ ) and trans-inclusion (.03, .01,  $p < .01$ ) frame among Black respondents.

Upon exploring these findings between Black men and women, it seems Black Americans feel more supportive of maternal healthcare policies when BLM is framed around marginalized identities they do not hold. Black women are significantly more favorable of these policies under the trans-inclusive condition rather than the control. An effect I fail to find in the Black women's inclusive condition. The substantive difference in attitudes relative to the women-inclusive

condition is minimal however this effect remains noteworthy relative to the control among Black women.

Turning to Black men, it seems they are more supportive of maternal healthcare policies both in the women-inclusive frame (.04, .01,  $p < .05$ ) and the trans-inclusive (.04, .01,  $p < .05$ ) BLM frames. Again, across treatment conditions, these effects hold minimal substantive differences however in contrast to the expectations described in H2b as the treatment is effective in both conditions. Moderation analysis by gender similarly finds gender does not influence the strength of these results.

Table 2.4: Maternal Healthcare Policy Moderated by Gender

|                           | Policy Support      |
|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Women Inclusive Condition | 0.013<br>(0.014)    |
| Trans Inclusive Condition | 0.026<br>(0.014)    |
| Male                      | -0.021<br>(0.014)   |
| Male x Women inclusive    | 0.022<br>(0.020)    |
| Male x Trans inclusive    | 0.011<br>(0.021)    |
| Constant                  | 0.834***<br>(0.009) |
| Observations              | 1,501               |
| R-squared                 | 0.009               |

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

In the following section, I explore the rationale for these findings and how the discipline might move forward with the results uncovered.

## Discussion of Policy Preferences

Black Americans were significantly more supportive of maternal healthcare policies across the women-inclusion and trans-inclusion conditions. While these effects are subtle, they are statistically significant, especially for the trans-inclusive condition. I explore the role of proximity to the trans-community and ceiling effects driven by strong healthcare policy preferences as contributory factors to this finding. Firstly, exploring the role of proximity to the trans community, scholars find while few Black respondents identify as trans, over a third know someone who is transgender or non-binary (Cox, 2023). This is noteworthy as interpersonal contact with members of the LGBTQ+ community is associated with increased support for trans rights (Flores, 2015). As respondents reacted positively to the trans-inclusive condition it might be the case that increased contact with the LGBTQ+ community has made Black Americans more responsive to trans-inclusive appeals.

Secondly, across conditions, Black respondents hold generally supportive maternal healthcare preferences, recognizing this there may be a ceiling effect that accounts for the subtle nature of the attitudinal shifts. I attribute this partially to the Black community's strong consideration and support of healthcare policies (McCabe 2019). As racial attitudes can positively shape attitudes towards healthcare policy outcomes, it stands to reason that maternal healthcare policies, an issue particularly concerning for Black women, might invite similarly supportive attitudes. Additionally, I considered the gendered nature of participants' responses to the treatment and policy preference formation.

Most notable are Black women's subtle increased support for maternal healthcare policies in the trans-inclusive condition and Black men's increased support in both treatment conditions. This section explores how the inclusive nature of intersectionality as a political strategy might have shaped these findings, particularly the ties between Black feminist ideology

and LGBTQ+ rights organizing. Black people demonstrated increased support for policy outcomes when exposed to BLM identity frames focused on groups within which they did not belong. As previously discussed, it might be the case that intersectionality bolsters supportive attitudes for policies that are relevant for sub-groups within racial communities framed, with respondents recognizing maternal mortality as a concern.

While I hypothesized that Black women would be more responsive to women-inclusive frames I find they are most responsive to trans-inclusive messaging. We might anticipate. Black women may be more responsive to the trans-inclusive condition as Black feminist ideologies are associated with supportive attitudes toward LGBTQ rights (M. C. Dawson 2007). The Black feminist movement has strong ties to the lesbian and trans-communities, especially as Black lesbian women are at the heart of Black feminist organizing (Collective 1977). Taking this relationship into account, perhaps the Black woman-inclusion condition was less effective for Black women who already recognize this relationship whereas the trans-inclusive context puts the issue in a newer context. Especially because Black women organizers often see organizing as a sacrifice for the greater good rather than something they directly benefit from (Brown, 2021) perhaps this trans-inclusive frame appealed to this sense of caring for the needs of Black identity groups wherein they are not members.

## **Conclusion**

There are noteworthy limitations that might account for these findings, particularly the timing of the study and the indirect relation of policy preferences in the treatment. The study was conducted in 2021 right after BLM protests which might have shaped participants' responses to the treatment. Additionally, treatment effects could be weakened by participants already holding fixed BLM attitudes. A follow-up study conducted after the decline of BLM's popularity after

the 2020 global protests, might find a shift in attitudes as BLM holds less influence with broad audiences. While potential recency biases are noteworthy, we should also consider, the advantages that come with the timing of this study, as BLM was popular topic participants were more familiar with the movement allowing for increased focus on the treatment rather than learning about the movement.

Future scholarship might explore if rather than identities shaping attitudinal formation towards BLM and relevant policy preferences, BLM post-2020 protests gained enough political influence to shape public opinion on issues. It may be the case that favorable attitudes towards BLM, especially after the 2020 global protests, are factors in this more progressive response to BLM identity frames. This might take place by exposing participants to content wherein BLM endorses policies focused on communities not often associated with Black people such as the undocumented or trans community. Afterward observing support for initiatives like trans-bathroom policies or restricting immigrants' abilities to obtain legal identification. Additionally, future scholars should consider the role of increased political polarization in bolstering liberal attitudes among Black Americans. Scholars find support for authoritarian parties is motivated by backlash to social change (Inglehart and Norris 2017). Given this scholarship, we might anticipate a liberal backlash in response to conservative political gains such as the aftermath of the Jan 6th insurrection or the *Dobbs* decision. This positive response to gender-inclusive frames of BLM might be driven by political animus rather than BLM's growing influence.

Overall, Black Americans are somewhat responsive to BLM identity frames and the most effective frames seem to be the inclusion of the marginalized groups in the Black community. From that, we might anticipate that the Black feminist and queer-affirming philosophy of BLM is shaping Black attitudes toward policy preferences and potentially other marginalized groups.

As I consider future scholarship on the influence of BLM appeals, the movement may serve as a foundation for reinvigorated coalitions between Black liberation and LGBTQ rights. This is especially salient given the ongoing political polarization in the US and the rise of the conservative movements targeting both minority groups. Scholars find shared enemies can serve as a motivating factor in coalition building for the LGBTQ community and racialized groups (Mayo-Adam 2020). Identity frames targeting gendered racial groups respondents do not belong to can still be effective, as Black men were responsive to both treatment conditions and Black women to the trans-inclusive condition. Movements that share political opponents with BLM such as the #MeToo movement or LGBTQ rights causes might appeal to Black audiences through such identity appeals. This potential strategy is especially noteworthy for grassroots organizations based in the Deep South a region with large Black American populations and a conservative political base growing their influence.

After assessing how identity frames shape public opinion of Black movements, I found intersectional frames are positively associated with BLM attitudes and support for maternal healthcare policy. Given, this positive reception of intersectional frames of contemporary Black movements, one might begin to wonder how such attitudes extend to the people leading the movement. As these results were so strong among Black men who often exhibit more sexist or homophobic attitudes than their woman counterparts, I explore how Black Americans respond to Black women's social movement leadership.

### **Chapter 3: Public Opinion of Identity & BLM Leadership**

Using a political psychology approach, this chapter examines the extent to which the identities of activists shape Black Americans' public opinion of social movements' leadership and policy preferences. In May 2021, the American mass public witnessed the internal tensions within the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, particularly between movement leaders and mothers of police violence victims. In one glaring example, Samaria Rice, mother of Tamir Rice, released a statement denouncing BLM leadership for financial mismanagement and poor treatment. This criticism of BLM activists focused on the BLM global network leader Patrisse Cullors. Critics included right-wing political entities but perhaps more surprisingly fellow Black organizers (Morrison 2021). While criticism was levied at other activists Cullors received the brunt of public outrage with other well-known activists escaping this fate. How much of this discrepancy in reaction is due to Cullor's racial and gender identity as a Black woman?

The low regard for Cullors garnered more attention in 2021 but such attitudes had been brewing among Black Americans for years, before impropriety accusations. A poll conducted in 2017 found a majority of Black Americans wanted Colin Kaepernick to be the national leader of the Black Lives Matter movement, with only 4% of participants rating Patrisse Cullors as their top choice for the position (Tillery 2017). While we could attribute this disparity to Kaepernick's widespread fame, other male activists such as DeRay McKesson were also more frequently preferred. The criticism of Cullors exemplifies a larger phenomenon of intense outrage towards marginalized activists in movements, rarely directed towards activists with higher social status. This study seeks to explore the effect of leaders' social identities on public opinion of social movements and their leaders, using attitudes towards leaders in BLM as a case study of this phenomenon. More precisely I ask, to what extent do Black women's gender identity affect

Black Americans' evaluations of BLM leaders? To answer this question, I implement survey experiments manipulating the gender identity of BLM leadership.

Social movement leaders are disproportionately male (A. D. Morris and Staggenborg 2004) with women historically obtaining leadership roles through their relationships with men (Robnett 1999a) either romantic or familial ties. More recent movements such as the Women's March and #MeToo demonstrate signs of moving beyond such necessities. However, BLM centers its activism on victims of police brutality and the selection of victims may be biased via media coverage. The media focuses largely on male victims of police violence (Crenshaw and Ritchie 2015) and as movements require public attention, they might shift their focus onto men to complement media coverage of the issue. The founders of the BLM global network are Black women however, the public more commonly associates the movement with male victims such as Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and more recently George Floyd. Similarly, to past women leaders, the BLM founders' function in proximity to men via male victims of police brutality. This distinction between the leaders and the focus of the movement might explain why despite gains in public support for BLM, public opinion towards the people within the movement might be more complicated.

This project benefits from an engaging political context and a methodological approach infrequently implemented in social movement studies, utilizing psychological theories and measures to understand the relationship between the American public and activist leadership. Research in these fields rarely explores the nuances of Black attitudes toward political leaders especially looking beyond electoral leaders. This neglect leaves our understanding of Black responses to activist leaders and their approaches underdeveloped. I expand our understanding of attitudes towards social movement leaders by focusing on perceptions of their most prominent

members, leaders. Through my studies, we learn how the social identities of activist leadership shape attitudes towards movements and the policies they support.

This study utilizes measures from social psychology incorporating multiple factors that might shape how one perceives a leader. Prior research in these areas struggled to uncover subtle nuances in Black attitudes toward men and women leaders beyond electoral contexts. Might this potentially be due to measurement error, rooted in using traditional political science measures? My approach intertwines measures from political science and social psychology to emphasize distinctions between the favorability of specific political elites and perceptions of a leader in general by focusing on the leader's perceived effectiveness. This measurement difference is especially valuable in works focusing on political actors beyond electoral contexts. While scholarship on political leadership focuses on politicians rather than activists, often using favorability ratings or feeling thermometers to assess attitudes toward these leaders. Furthermore, this study pushes our understanding of how activists and their public stances shape public opinion toward policy outcomes.

To examine the extent to which the identities of activists shape public opinion of social movements' leadership and policy preferences among Black Americans, I designed an experimental manipulation to examine the influence of activist gender on political behavior. Conducting survey experiments, I oversaw two waves of data collection finding that Black people feel more positively toward leaders when they are Black women. However Black respondents were less supportive of policies focusing on Black women's issues, maternal healthcare policies specifically, when a woman was leading BLM.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Activists and lobbyists advocating for marginalized groups tend to focus on single identity concerns (Strolovitch, 2007) as it's easier to focus on issues that many Black people find concerning. In the case of Black women activists, they often feel unheard and experience mistreatment based on their race and gender (Lorde, 1984). While some Black women attempt to draw attention to their struggles, this can lead to accusations of women being distractions from larger issues making them traitors to the Black community (Alexander-Floyd, 2007).

Black women encounter this prejudice from outside and within their identity groups, as Cohen describes a secondary marginalization experienced in addition to their racial and gendered marginalized identities (1999). This marginalization within Black women's racial or gender group can be more subtle than overt discrimination, such as intersectional concerns being neglected in community mobilization. For example, the Black community's lack of response to the HIV/AIDS crisis despite the large portions of Black people suffering from the illness (Cohen, 1999). This example emphasizes the concerns of Black queer people, but also other intersectional groups in the Black community such as Black women and people with disabilities.

In the context of social movements, we find that Black women activists experience mistreatment based on their intersectional identity, however, scholarship on intersectionality and Black feminist thought leans more theoretical rather than empirical. This offers opportunities for empirical exploration of the effect of Black women's marginalized position on the public perception of activists.

To understand how identity shapes public preferences for leadership, I lean on the social identity theory of leadership. This theory describes how people prefer leaders who most fit the characteristics associated with a group (Hogg 2001a). In the context of Black people, this

characteristic is masculinity, and Black women who defy this characteristic are rarely seen as leaders (Ponce de Leon and Rosette 2022; Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach 2008) and when they are people perceive them poorly (Ellemers and Jetten 2013). This preference for a leader that is a strong representative of the group, is particularly strong in highly salient identity groups. As most Black Americans highly value their racial group identity (van Knippenberg 2011; McClain et al. 2009) we might anticipate Black people to prefer male leaders, seen as more representative of the group, than women.

However, the context where they obtain leadership is often precarious and difficult for them to work well, sometimes referred to as glass cliffs. Marginal group members are more likely to become leaders in times of uncertainty (Rast et al. 2012). For Black women, these positions tend to be more readily available when organizations are on the decline (Cook and Glass 2013; Rosette and Livingston 2012b). Black women are often chosen as leaders as a last resort as they operate in a position of invisibility.

Black women pursuing leadership positions are in an especially difficult position, considering they defy their racial group stereotypes through their femininity. Additionally, the stereotypical leader is White (Rosette, Leonardelli, and Phillips 2008) and male (Scott and Brown 2006). Individuals associate leadership qualities with people with privileged identities (Ridgeway 2001) and rate such leaders with higher levels of trust (Baretto & Ellemers, 2002). In a political context, people are more likely to participate in collective action under leadership with more privileged identities. While prior scholarship considers identity and collective action this work tends to focus on allyship and political participation or inter-group relations (Chin et al. 2023) rather than intra-group dynamics in Black politics. Drawing on these psychological

insights, I anticipate that Black people will not be receptive to Black women's leadership in activism leading to my first hypothesis:

**H1:** Black respondents will feel more positively towards a Black man leading a social movement than the leadership of their Black female counterparts

This hypothesis is further supported by Black women's activists reporting their experiences of gender discrimination in activism (Anderson-Bricker, 1999) and the gendered nature of their contributions. When Black women successfully attain leadership positions their work often centers on community work, reinforcing a maternal aspect of their work. Black women often serve the role of other mothers, feeling a sense of responsibility for Black youth broadly (Hill Collins, 1997). In taking on this maternal role, Black women gain access to limited leadership, centered around women's work like childcare or community building. These women's unpaid labor is the foundation of organizing, building the social ties and networks organizers rely on to mobilize communities (Banks, 2020). Despite its crucial role in organizing, this work is perceived as soft with "diminishing organizational relevance" (Fletcher, 1998).

Furthermore, people overly associated Black women's leadership with the authority of men in their lives (Robnett, 1999). For example, the rise of Elaine Brown as the first Black woman to lead the Black Panther Party is often attributed to her romantic relationship with Huey Newton the prior leader. Through this association women's leadership hinges on these men's authority and Black women become constricted in their ability to lead while still expected to be deferential to men (Pickett, 1999).

This context is important as leaders rely on the heightened credibility their leadership affords them to innovate, bringing new ideas and values to the group (Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2020). Black men can more easily obtain such credibility as people find it easier to give

representative group members the benefit of the doubt. However, Black women's weakened status makes it more difficult for them to incorporate more innovative or progressive initiatives as they are less likely to receive this credibility. Historically Black social movements responded negatively towards including Black women's attempts at incorporating intersectional issues into their political agenda (Anderson-Bricker, 1999). This provides the groundwork for my second hypothesis focusing on public opinion of policy outcomes, activist leaders might pursue. I anticipate that due to Black women's weakened credibility people will be less supportive of their bringing attention to policy issues concerning Black women.

**H2:** Black respondents will be less supportive of intersectional policies under a Black woman's social movement leadership relative to their Black male counterparts' leadership.

Attitudes toward an elite figure can influence perceptions of policy initiatives (Tesler, 2012) and organizations (Matsubayashi, 2013; Gostin, 2020). I anticipate people will associate Black women leaders suggesting intersectional policies as being driven by self-interest. To succeed leaders must be perceived as prioritizing group interests rather than their own (Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2020). Additionally, people with privileged identities are more easily able to address in-group prejudice like racism (Gulker et al. 2013). Furthermore, these privileged group members are more likely to be perceived positively for their contributions (Kutlaca et al. 2020). In the context of this study, I anticipate people might be more supportive of women's policies under a Black man's leadership as the Black public grants them more credibility and the assumption of good intention when associated with women's issues.

To test these hypotheses, I conducted two studies analyzing participants' responses to male and female leadership of the BLM movement. In Study 1 I focus on how responses to Black leader's gender influence public opinion toward leaders and the organization. This study

directly compares Black Americans' responses to male and female leadership after a failed protest. I focus this study on responses to failure to assess if different gender identities lead to more critical evaluations towards Black women's leadership than men's among Black respondents.

### **Study 1: Survey Experiment on Female Activist Leadership**

This study uses data from the survey firm Dynata. The sample was collected to balance age, gender, and education distributions according to the 2020 Census. The survey was fielded from October 2021 to December 2021. The total N for Black American respondents was 401 participants with 222 passing a manipulation check. The gender identity breakdown of the sample consists of 200 men 193 women, and 9 non-binary respondents.

Study 1's treatment consisted of an excerpt from a mock news article describing a BLM protest that went wrong due to the presence of looters. I use looting to demonstrate a failed protest condition as Black women face harsher criticism than men in failing contexts (Rosette and Livingston 2012a). I include an image and quote from a Detroit chapter leader on the next steps after the chaotic protest. The leader went on to acknowledge the problem, take responsibility, and share their plan to prevent further issues in the future. The differences between the treatment and control included the chapter leader's name, pronouns, and a poster at the top of the article with the following text "The woman/man behind the movement". The treatment condition consists of a Black woman leading this protest whereas the control condition describes the protest led by a Black man. I treat this men's leadership as a control condition as in practical application Black men are frequently recognized as leaders of Black activist efforts. After the experiment respondents were given a manipulation check inquiring about the gender and success of the BLM demonstration in the article. Following this check, the survey

included my three dependent variables measuring perceptions of leaders, attitudes about BLM, and participation in BLM.

### *Measures*

To assess participants' attitudes towards BLM leaders I created a scale with three items measuring leadership effectiveness, respondents' confidence in their leadership, and comparing efficiency to other leaders. These items were adapted from psychological measures of leadership effectiveness (Fielding and Hogg 1997). The items included “I think that the Detroit chapter head is an effective leader.” “I have confidence in the Detroit chapter head’s ability to be successful;” and “Other Black Lives Matter chapters led by the Detroit chapter head would be effective.” These items are on a 7-point agreement scale which I combined into a scale on a 0-1 value range where a value of 1 indicates positive attitudes towards the BLM leader ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

While evaluating BLM attitudes, I also asked respondents three questions measuring perceptions of BLM, specifically, respondents' support for the movement's activism, trust in the movement's goals, and perception of the movement as effective. All these items are on a 7-point agree disagree scale ranging from 0-1 with 1 indicating highly positive feelings towards BLM. I also combine these items into a BLM attitude scale referenced as belief in BLM ( $\alpha = .93$ ).

To ascertain political participation outcomes, I evaluate willingness to participate rather than focusing on prior protest participation. This takes into account extenuating factors potentially limiting respondents’ ability to participate such as covid-19 related health concerns. I assessed willingness to participate in BLM activism through a three-item collective action tendencies scale with three items (Van Zomeren et al. 2004). Again, I modified this scale towards referencing BLM participation specifically on a 7-point agree-disagree scale. The wording includes “I would participate in a future Black Lives Matter demonstration to stop

police brutality.”. “I would do something together with fellow Black people to stop police brutality”. ” “I would participate in raising our collective voice to stop police brutality.” I combine these items into a collective action tendency towards the BLM scale ( $\alpha = .91$ ) which I refer to as BLM Participation.

I evaluate my experiment via an OLS regression that predicts responses to my outcomes based on the experimental condition. The treatment variable is coded as a dummy variable between the male and female conditions. I focus my analysis on Black participants as Black people have a unique relationship with the movement.

## Study 1 Results

Black participants exhibited no significant attitudinal change post-treatment demonstrated by Table 1. This shows that the gender identity of the leader did not influence respondent attitudes toward BLM or leadership effectiveness. Disaggregating these results by gender did not reveal noteworthy distinctions between the models.

Table 3.1 BLM Attitudes in Leaders Study 1

|               | (1)<br>Belief in<br>BLM | (2)<br>Leader<br>Effectiveness | (3)<br>BLM<br>Participation |
|---------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Female Leader | -0.027<br>(0.021)       | -0.008<br>(0.019)              | -0.033<br>(0.022)           |
| Constant      | 0.798***<br>(0.035)     | 0.727***<br>(0.031)            | 0.798***<br>(0.036)         |
| Observations  | 401                     | 401                            | 401                         |
| R-squared     | 0.004                   | 0.001                          | 0.005                       |

Standard errors in parentheses  
\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

While the results were insignificant there is partial support for my H1 hypothesis though not for the central variable of interest for H1. Upon examining each of the single items of my dependent variables I find a slight support for my hypothesis within the participation measure. In one participation item, Black respondents were less likely to want to do something about police brutality under a woman's leadership ( $-.200$ ,  $SE=.105$ ,  $p < .10$ ). While this finding does not reach significance at the  $p < .05$  level this response does provide directional support for my hypothesis.

## **Discussion of Study 1**

In this study I find when participants are exposed to Black men and women's leadership in BLM, Black Americans demonstrate no significant difference in attitudes towards the movement. I began this study suspecting that Black respondents would be more likely to critique Black women leaders than men. However, the data uncovered no significant difference between the leaders in the treatment of either Black men or women. I might attribute this to issues with the manipulation, as the leader in both conditions faces accusations of failure, participants might perceive both as ineffective with trickle-down effects on their BLM perceptions. Failures tend to encourage social movements to form factions, a central threat against their continued existence and unification (Lizzio-Wilson et al. 2021). Therefore, it's reasonable that Black Americans might express less of an inclination to participate when both leaders fail.

Though the results were insignificant Black people did seem to hold fewer positive attitudes towards Black women activist leaders. This is in alignment with recent work that found that Black men respond negatively to Black feminist frames of BLM (Bonilla & Tillery, 2020). As social movements framing literature focuses on media, future scholarship might examine the role of media in feminist frames of BLM and attitudes about its leaders if these feminist frames of the movement boost support for women as leaders or invite criticism. In Study 2 I incorporate

how responses to Black leader's gender might have downstream effects on public policy preferences.

## **Study 2: Survey Experiment on Leader Gender & Policy Preferences**

Drawing on the results of Study 1, I expanded the sample size of this subsequent study allowing me to include a third neutral control group rather than directly comparing gendered conditions. As the overall perception of a failed protest is negative this might obscure gender dynamics in responses to leadership, therefore in this new study, I focus on a successful effort. Additionally, as attitudes towards BLM and participation were negligible across conditions, I became curious about the limitations of leaders' credibility beyond the movement. Subsequently, I included measures of policy preferences indirectly related to the movement to assess the downstream effects of Black leaders' gender identities on policy preferences.

This study uses data from the Spring 2022 UCLA REPS Lab Omnibus Study collected with Census balances for age, gender, and education. We collected data over two periods: April - June 2022 and July - August 2022. The first data collection process focused on recruiting students from a West Coast university. The second collection recruited adults from an online survey firm Dynata to supplement Black respondents. The study's full sample size is 1,271 participants, these only include those who passed the manipulation check after treatment exposure. Of these participants, 590 identified as African American. The gender identity breakdown of the sample consists of 539 men, 605 women, and 5 non-binary respondents. Again, non-binary respondents are dropped from the gendered analysis due to insufficient power for separate analyses.

For the treatment, participants read a mock news article discussing a recent victory the Detroit-based BLM chapter achieved. Furthermore, the leader went on to discuss how important

their gender was to them and their desire to focus more on people of the same gender in the fight against police brutality. This article also included a poster above the article's text with a Black fist and the following text "the woman/man behind the movement" (See Appendix A pg. 19). After reading the article respondents answered a question about the article confirming they were exposed to the treatment. Following this check respondents answered questions regarding the perception of leaders, policy preferences, and opinion of BLM including support and anticipated future participation.

### *Measures*

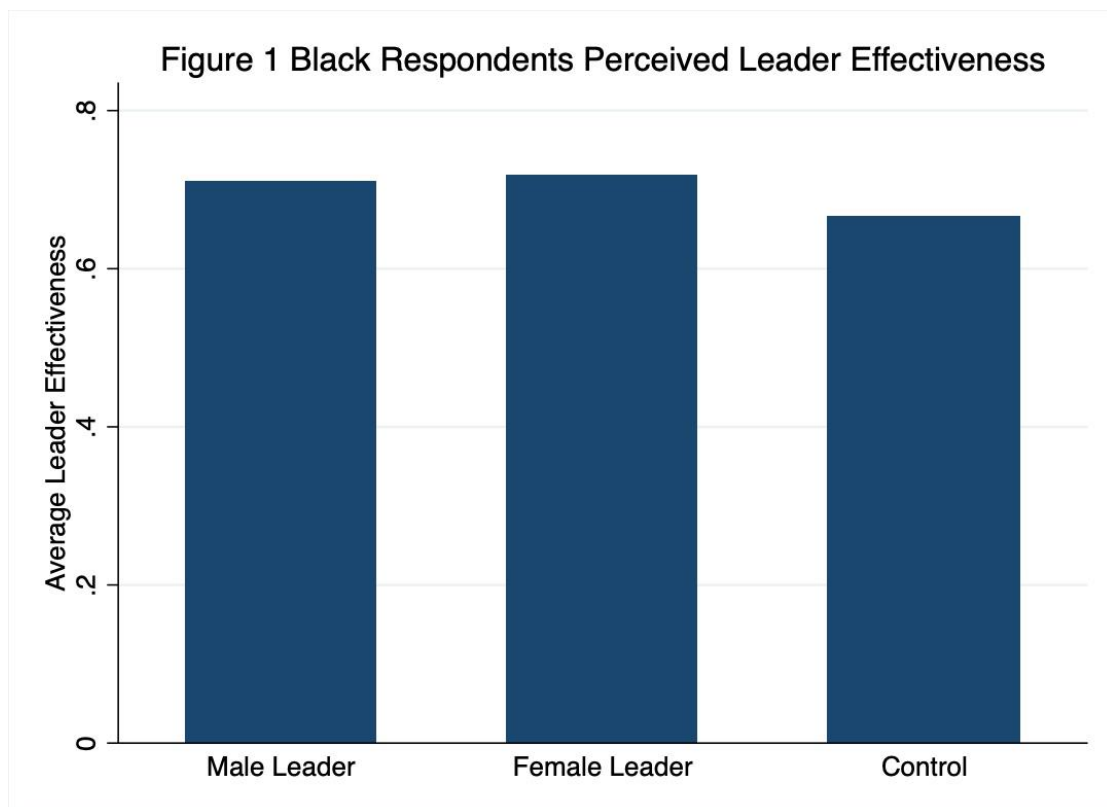
In the second study, I slightly modified how I measure leader attitudes by replacing one item in the scale with a new question. I created a scale with three items measuring leadership effectiveness, respondents' confidence in their leadership, and trust in leaders. These items were taken from psychology scales measuring leadership effectiveness and trust which I modified for this study's context. The item's specific wording includes "I have confidence in Black Lives Matter leadership's ability to be successful. I think that a leader in Black Lives Matter is an effective leader. I would put my trust in Black Lives Matter leadership.". These items are on a 7-point agreement scale which I combined into a scale on a 0-1 value range ( $\alpha = .95$ ).

In the second study, I add measures of policy preferences into the study focusing on issues threatening Black women specifically. I refer to these issues as intersectional policies, as they are geared towards concerns of Black women in particular. I assess attitudes toward maternal healthcare given the Black maternal mortality crisis in the United States (Oparah and Bonaparte 2016). Using a 7-point oppose-support scale coded to a 0-1 value range I measure support for the following policy positions: "Provide more federal funds so that states can provide better prenatal care to expectant mothers." "Increase national spending on reducing maternal

mortality and injury.” I combined these two items into a gendered policy preferences scale ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

## Study 2 Results

First assessing the influence of a Black leader's gender on attitudes towards leaders I find that Black Americans feel more positively towards Black leaders when the leader is a woman. In contrast to my expectations in H1, Black Americans seem to be favorable to women's leadership (.050, .026,  $p < .05$ ). This outcome is demonstrated in Figure 1 where leaders are more positively perceived in the female condition with a six percent point differences in leadership effectiveness between the female condition and control.



While this effect appears marginal upon further exploration of Black attitudes toward leaders, I found gender had a role in this outcome. That is, Black women respondents were

largely driving this effect, demonstrating significantly more support for BLM leaders when they were women. Upon disaggregating these results, as Table 2 demonstrates I find while the direction holds for Black men the result is no longer significant. This contrasts my hypothesis and findings in Study 1, as I anticipated a more positive response towards male leaders rather than females.

Table 3.2: Perceptions of Leader Effectiveness by Gender

|                       | Black Women         | Black Men           |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Male Lead Treatment   | 0.062<br>(0.032)    | 0.033<br>(0.036)    |
| Female Lead Treatment | 0.072*<br>(0.031)   | 0.046<br>(0.035)    |
| Constant              | 0.667***<br>(0.021) | 0.662***<br>(0.024) |
| Observations          | 305                 | 278                 |
| R-squared             | 0.021               | 0.007               |

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

Turning to Black policy preferences under Black leaders of different genders, my findings become more supportive of my hypotheses. I find Black people are more supportive of intersectional policies under a Black man's leadership instead of a Black woman's (.061, .020, p < .01).

| Table 3.3 Leader Attitudes & Policy Preferences |                                |                              |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
|                                                 | (1)<br>Leader<br>Effectiveness | (2)<br>Policy<br>Preferences |
| Male Leader<br>Treatment                        | 0.043<br>(0.026)               | 0.061**<br>(0.020)           |
| Female Leader<br>Treatment                      | 0.050*<br>(0.026)              | 0.033<br>(0.020)             |
| Constant                                        | 0.666***<br>(0.016)            | 0.770***<br>(0.012)          |
| Observations                                    | 509                            | 510                          |
| R-squared                                       | 0.010                          | 0.019                        |

Standard errors in parentheses  
\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

This supports my H2, wherein I anticipated Black respondents would prefer intersectional policies under a man’s leadership rather than a woman’s. I further consider these exciting results in the discussion section, speculating on factors driving Black women’s support for women activists and why this does not extend to their policy preferences.

## Discussion of Study 2

Focusing firstly on my H1, in Study 1, I initially failed to uncover any distinctions in attitudes towards men and women leaders of an unsuccessful protest. Upon further investigation with Study 2, I ultimately found evidence refuting my expectation that Black people would feel more positively towards a man leading BLM relative to the control. As Black women seem to be driving this effect, I focus this discussion mainly on their motivations in supporting other women. Political scientists often discuss how people prefer to be represented by people from their same identity groups (Tate 2004). This effect similarly extends to Black women with Black women believing leaders of the same race and gender are more likely to represent their interests

(Montoya et al. 2021). While this work is frequently conducted in the electoral context, this project contributes to our understanding of Black leadership preferences in an activist context. These findings suggest Black women might seek descriptive representation beyond the electoral context, into leadership of activist organizations. In this study, I demonstrate activist leaders' gender influence's public opinion towards them, which must be taken into account in our understanding of who participates in social movement organizations and their motivations.

Turning to my second hypothesis I find support for my H2 that Black people are more supportive of intersectional policies when a Black man is leading BLM rather than a woman. This supports my theoretical framework that Black women being marginal group members affords them less opportunity as leaders to pursue initiatives focused on Black women's needs. While this weakened credibility does not hurt evaluations of their capabilities as leaders it does influence public policy preferences. This is incredibly important for considerations of activist leaders as public opinion leaders demonstrated by their influence on policy preference formation.

## Conclusion

Throughout this investigation, I examined the role of activist leaders' identities on public opinion both on their movement and public policy preferences. I found that BLM leaders' gender influenced public opinion towards the leaders, with Black women preferring their fellow Black women's leadership in BLM. However Black men showed no noteworthy change in attitudes between women or men's BLM leadership. Future work might focus on Black men's BLM leader preferences to better our understanding of how Black men engage with BLM. It could be that due to BLM's masculine-centered agenda, men already feel sufficiently represented by the movement regardless of the leader's gender identity. Future scholarship might also examine how Black men's attitudes toward leaders shift when leaders propose agendas that cater less to Black

men's needs. As losses are more powerful than gains (Kahneman and Tversky 2013; Soroka 2014) Black men might respond more strongly under conditions where their status in the movement is threatened.

These findings demonstrate that in contemporary social movements, marginalized leaders might lean on their marginalized communities for support through hardships. In uncovering Black women's supporters rather than their critiques we can better understand who social movement leaders can rely on through triumphs and failures. While activists in contemporary leaders might encounter criticism or public outrage through examining public attitudes towards these activists, we might become more equipped to understand who is the most susceptible to such news coverage.

Additionally, I find that a Black leader's gender identity influences policy preferences for intersectional issues. However, as I conducted these studies in 2021 and 2022, a single year greatly shifted the political context wherein the public formed their attitudes towards movements and their leaders. For example, Given the abortion rights protests after the *Dobbs* case, we might anticipate public attitudes towards women activists shifted with exposure to movements with most women participants. Future work should expand to multiple cases approach examining public attitudes towards activists in gender (e.g., abortion rights protests, #MeToo) and LGBTQ rights movements (e.g., trans-rights activism).

This study offers a major contribution to social movements scholarship introducing the role of public opinion towards leaders' influence on movements agenda setting. Furthermore, activist leaders' identity representation has the potential to influence broader political impacts beyond their movement into Black policy preferences. The influence of social movement leaders as public opinion leaders is crucial for understanding how the status of the political elite might be

expanding beyond electoral leadership into activists garnering more political influence. These nuanced findings emphasize the complex nature of public attitudes toward Black women leaders in American politics and invite additional exploration into their experiences leading one of the largest racial justice movements of our time.

In this chapter, I describe two studies wherein I found that Black people feel more positively toward activists when they are Black women. However Black respondents were less supportive of policies focusing on Black women's issues when a woman was leading BLM instead of a man. This innovative study uncovers political attitudes underlying public support for Black women's leadership emphasizing that while Black women may be valued for their labor, their wellbeing is not a priority in Black politics. This inspires questions of how Black women activists organize under such conditions, wherein their labor is essential, but their wellbeing is neglected. In the following chapter, I explore the impact of this labor on Black women organizers and how their marginalized identities influence their tactical preferences, allowing us to begin understanding the factors influencing organizers' strategy.

## **Chapter 4: Black Women's Experiences & Decision-Making in Organizing**

Ida B Wells was a crucial leader in the beginning of the civil rights movement largely active from the 1880s into the early 1930s. She is accredited as one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for her anti-segregation activism and investigative journalism against lynching. She organized passionately on behalf of the Black community, reporting on Black lynching at great personal and professional risk. Despite her years of organizing for civil rights and Black liberation, she was initially excluded from leadership in (NAACP) due to her work being perceived as radical. After the selection committee revisited the matter and included Wells among the forty founders her exclusion continued with Wells rarely invited to meetings and told little about organizational activity (Giddings 2001). Black organizers at the time disliked Wells for her militant approach often seen as radical by her contemporaries (Giddings 2001), and her approach defied gender stereotypes of Black women as submissive and demure (Jackson 2024). Wells's treatment by the Black organizers of her time exemplifies a larger phenomenon, Black women who are perceived as radical have their legitimacy undermined within Black social movements. Scholars find that Black women organizers face discrimination from their fellow organizers for their gendered identities undermining their political efforts (H. M. Hurwitz 2021). We might anticipate that this tradition of Black political organizations implementing a social and political exclusion against Black women perceived as radical influences Black women's activist strategies and tactics.

Activists utilize group identities to recruit and retain participants (Polletta and Jasper 2001), similarly, the social identities of the movement's leadership are important for mobilization processes. People expect leaders to hold more privileged identities such as Whiteness or masculinity (Rosette, Leonardelli, and Phillips 2008). While there are exceptions,

they tend to occur in organizations on the decline (Rosette and Livingston 2012a). Between the downward trajectory of the organizations and discrimination from outside and within (H. M. Hurwitz 2021), I am inspired to ask the question under what conditions does intersectionality influence the strategies of social movement leaders? I draw on social psychology and social movement theories to theorize an answer to this question.

Intersectionality is the theoretical framework that recognizes that systems of oppression collaborate to reinforce societal hierarchies, creating distinct forms of discrimination against those with multiple marginalized identities (Crenshaw, 1989). Scholars utilize this concept as an analytical tool to explore how such intersecting identities can fundamentally alter theoretical expectations for research questions. In this case, I employ this tool to elucidate the nature of Black women's political leadership wherein Black women often find their efforts minimized or villainized. Black women are marginalized in their race and gender as the ideal Black person is male and the ideal woman is white (Goff, Thomas, and Jackson 2008). This low status renders Black women politically invisible including a lack of advocacy from interest groups (Strolovitch 2007) and social movements (Cohen 1999). Placing Black women in leadership positions can be an effective solution as women of color are some of the most effective people in addressing disparities and improving them (Dickerson 2006).

Upon reaching leadership positions women of color report their roles having less power and influence (Dickerson 2006). As Black women achieve leadership positions they grapple with their efforts being undervalued (K. N. Brown 2021) or resisted outright (Dickerson 2006; H. M. Hurwitz 2021). Black women's steadfast participation and heavy contributions to Black liberation often go unrecognized. Historically Black movements center on one-man charismatic

leadership models (A. D. Morris 1986). This undermines the reliance of recruitment on Black women's social networks (Hill Collins 2009; McAdam 1999).

Unfortunately, intersectional invisibility is a hurdle in Black women reaching leadership positions (Hogg 2001b). People associate privileged group members (e.g. White women, men of color) with leadership characteristics (Ridgeway 2001) and find them more trustworthy (Barreto and Ellemers 2002). As Black women leaders are less trusted than their male counterparts, I anticipate they will exercise more caution while leading as they will be more severely criticized should they fail. This leads me to hypothesize:

**H1:** Black women face more hardships using radical tactics than Black men

Operating under a consistent threat of harassment requires women to modify their leadership. As women hold less societal power, they wield power differently than their male counterparts. These limitations are intensified when these women balance their work with followers' resistance (Pick 2017) which can lead to women changing their strategies to accommodate gendered attitudes. Women, especially Black women who refuse to engage in such tactics historically encounter ostracization from their community (Jackson 2024).

Followers' belief in identity stereotypes of leaders as white men typically leads to discrimination against women of color activists and leaders through harassment (H. M. Hurwitz 2019). Women in leadership can encounter a variety of harassment from verbal dismissal to physical assault, actions reinforcing an informal gendered hierarchy. Such threats are particularly intense for women of color, who reported sexual harassment, racial discrimination, and an overall hostile culture in the Occupy movement (H. M. Hurwitz 2021). Gendered harassment limits women leaders' ability to communicate with their followers and pursue movement outcomes (Jackman 2006). Considering these experiences, a pattern emerges wherein when

Black women activists take on leadership roles, they encounter discrimination making it more difficult for them to organize effectively. I suspect that activists account for prejudiced attitudes of their peers and audience in their strategic decisions, hypothesizing

**H2:** Black women activists who experienced intra-group discrimination favor more moderate tactics than those who do not report discriminatory experiences

I argue Black women activists account for resistance against their identities in their strategizing and using more moderate tactics rather than techniques some find radical. I speculate this includes a stronger tendency towards encouraging civic engagement (e.g., asking for donations or petition signatures) rather than contentious political participation (e.g., protests, sit-ins). This framework identifies the concern of discriminatory resistance as a key factor in marginalized leaders' tactical selection and assesses the potency of this factor's influence on public opinion. Social psychology research finds that as intersectional activists' position in the group becomes fragile, they are more likely to double down in their group advocacy subsequently reacting more harshly when someone defies group norms (Ellemers and Jetten 2013).

To test my hypothesis, I utilize a case study approach supplemented by in-depth interviews of Black organizers. Study 1 explores Black organizers' responses to public criticism and any strategic changes in response to this feedback. This study exemplifies the intense scrutiny Black women in organizing leadership operate under and how they adapt their behavior to the various contexts wherein they operate. Study 2 takes firsthand accounts from Black organizers to understand their tactical preferences and how the conditions they operate in might shift them.

## **Study 1**

### *Methodological Approach*

Case Studies allow researchers to explore real-life phenomena, exemplifying their theoretical constructs, with the benefit of incorporating context (Yin 1992). Leaning on multiple data sources throughout time a standard within case study analysis, this approach allows me to assess the full breadth of the unique situation I examine below. A limitation of this approach is that qualitative research is rarely as replicable as its quantitative counterpart as these investigations often home in on more specific populations and situations. While social science research focuses on the importance of generalizability, case studies draw attention to the limitations of generalization (Stake 2008) as I examine unique situations that may defy scholarly expectations.

To test my hypotheses I analyze news coverage, social media posts, and Google search trend data to compare the difference in public reaction and activists' responses to scandals by Black men and women. I focus on Tamika Mallory, a nationally recognized organizer for women's rights and police accountability, and Lee Merritt a civil rights attorney and activist, for this case study. This case assesses how the public and named organizers responded to an online controversy wherein Samaria Rice and Lisa Simpson, mothers of police violence victims criticize prominent Black activists. This study focuses on Merritt and Mallory as in Rice's initial Facebook posts, she criticized both Mallory and Merritt for clout chasing before releasing a joint statement with Simpson. As both Mallory and Merritt are mentioned in the initial critique there is a similar time frame of public criticism focusing on them. I measure strategy through the organizing activities the two mentions participating in and the demands they focus on through drawing attention to issues in their social media including reposts of other's content. I assess the

response to these activists through the concentration of attention and comments posted on their social media from March - April 2021.

### *Case Study of 2021 Statement from Samaria Rice & Lisa Simpson*

In March 2021 Samaria Rice, mother of Tamir Rice, and Lisa Simpson, mother of Richard Risher, released an official statement criticizing prominent figures in the Movement for Black Lives, a coalition of social justice organizations fighting for Black liberation. The individuals accused of predatory behavior toward families of police violence victims include Tamika D Mallory, Shaun King, Benjamin Crump, Lee Merritt, Patrisse Cullors, and Dr. Melina Abdullah. Rice & Simpson accused them of organizing and attending protests as a means to gain wealth and power rather than advocate for victims and their families. While this controversy did not garner mainstream news coverage the public became aware of it through social media posts and the Black Press (e.g., the Grio, Shine My Crown).

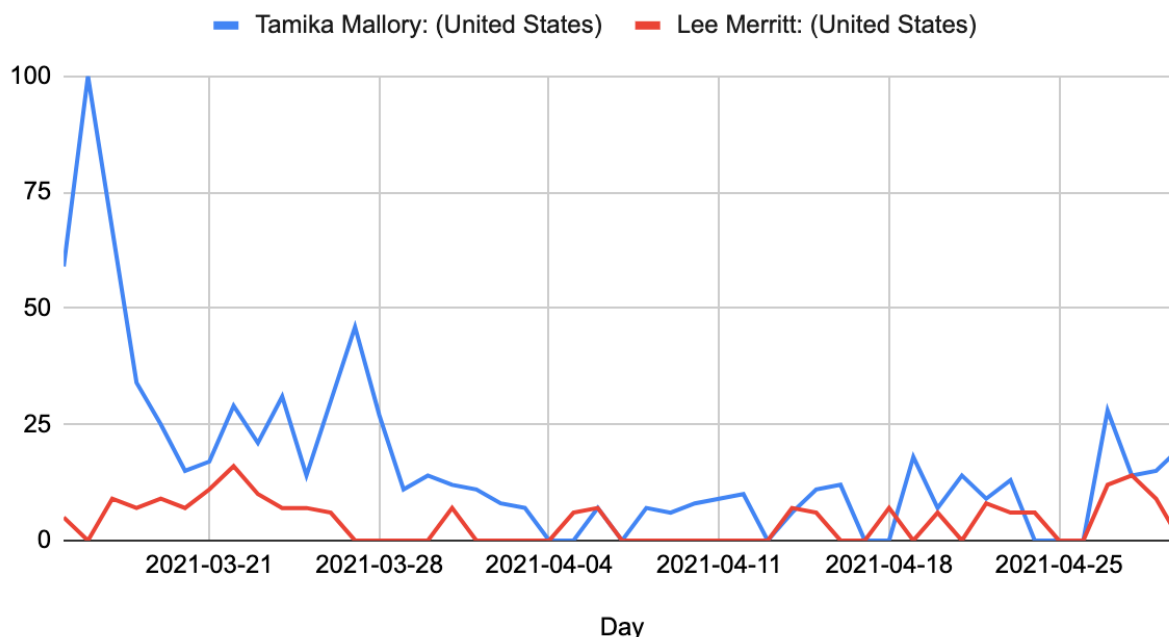
This case study compares Merritt's and Mallory's responses to this accusation and any influence it may have had on their organizing. Rice's accusations against organizers began as a response to Mallory's 2021 Grammy appearance posting on Facebook "Look at this clout chaser did she lose something in this fight I don't think so" (Rice, 2021). Additionally, despite the multiple people listed in the statement, the news coverage focused on Mallory likely driven by her responding to the statement on social media and her podcast.

Drawing on social psychology insights Black men in leadership tend to have more influence over Black organizations as their gender adheres to group (Sesko and Biernat 2010) and leader prototypes (Rosette et al. 2016). Through this influence, they can shape group norms and acceptable behaviors. Following this framework, we should anticipate that the public response is more focused and harsher toward Mallory than Merritt as Mallory lacked the

influence on shape group dynamics. Turning to search trends, I examine how frequently US Google users searched the names, Tamika Mallory, or Lee Merritt. Political scientists analyzing search trend data typically focus on it as a measure of issue salience. Scholars assessing the validity of this measure find this data can serve as a proxy for salient issues (Ripberger 2011), though inconsistently (Mellon 2013, 2014) however this can be overcome through term specificity in the analysis. As this analysis primarily focuses on organizers' names throughout the event, focusing on this micro event facilitates the specificity helpful in search trend data analysis. The figure below demonstrates changes in these search trends from March 15th the day Rice posted on Facebook to April 30th, 2021.

As the figure below demonstrates throughout the peak of the controversy most searches are concentrated on Mallory. Around March 21st is one of the highest increases in attention toward Merritt, likely driven by the announcement of his bid for Texas Attorney General. Merritt's interest only peaked over Mallory on April 4th when Mallory's searches declined and there was a slight increase in interest in Merritt. However, throughout April, the searches were concentrated on Mallory, despite Merritt's announcement. While investigating the related search terms I find further evidence that the focus of this controversy is Mallory rather than the similarly accused Merritt. Related search terms to Mallory included "Tamir Rice" despite Mallory not leading protests on the death of Tamir Rice. Alternatively, the Merritt-related terms focus on his career "attorney" and "interview". Considering geographic factors, the trend holds with users in most states focusing on Mallory even Merritt's home state of Texas.

## US Mallory & Merritt Search Trend March - April 2021



Furthermore, non-prototypical leaders are less trusted than prototypical leaders (Barreto and Ellemers 2002) and we should anticipate that the public will display more doubt toward Mallory than Merritt. In assessing comments on Mallory’s Instagram posts specifically those directly addressing the controversy I find people express distrust for Mallory such as “You used to be my Shero. What happened? Is it the need for money? I am so disappointed 😞. Did you turn into one of them ? Why ? ... So disappointed” (Anonymous, 2021). Others wondered more broadly about Mallory’s intentions behind her organizing “ She [‘s] becoming famous off of the suffering families” (username: @goddess\_shepard\_made, 2021). Alternatively, when reviewing comments on Merritt’s Instagram throughout March and April 2021 I found no comments mentioning the Rice statement or criticism of Merritt.

In 2021, leading up to this scandal Mallory engages with various tactics including some more radical agendas and approaches. This includes her continued pursuit of justice for Breonna Taylor throughout 2020 and 2021 despite the global focus on George Floyd. Additionally,

Mallory's strategic approach before the scandal skewed toward disruptive tactics such as protesting for the first anniversary of Breonna Taylor's killing (untilfreedom [@untilfreedom] 2021a). Mallory's demands focused a great deal on uplifting Black women either politicians (Brittany Ramos DeBarros [@Britt4People] 2021; Tamika D. Mallory [@TamikaDMallory] 2021a) or entertainers (untilfreedom [@untilfreedom] 2021b). Merritt before the Rice Simpson statement focused on Ahmaud Arbery and community organizing to address the 2021 Texas winter crisis.

After Rice & Simpson released their statement, Mallory responded three days later acknowledging their pain stating in various news outlets "We all failed her" (Adams 2021). However, Mallory also refuted some of Rice's claims "I think it's important to clarify whether we have used Ms. Rice's child, her baby, in campaigns or speeches, fundraising, we have not" (Adams 2021). While Mallory directly responded to the Rice Simpson statement Merritt did not instead during the controversy, he announced his decision to run for Attorney General of Texas (Connelly 2021). News coverage of Merritt's bid for Attorney General did not include the accusations when reporting on his decision to run (Connelly 2021). Contrastingly, front page news articles of Mallory throughout April 2021 discussed the accusations and her response. While newspapers are not a direct means of assessing public opinion, reporters may have expected coverage of Mallory in the controversy to be more marketable than Merritt.

To test my second hypothesis, I utilize news articles and social media posts to understand how both activists conducted their work after the controversy. I anticipate Mallory will moderate her organizing whereas Merritt's work is unaltered. I find observable changes in Mallory's social media presence in the wake of this controversy focusing more on Black media (Mallory 2021) and male victims of police brutality, specifically the death of Daunte Wright

([@TamikaDMallory] 2021). However, this effect seems temporary with Mallory returning to focus on Black women and girls (Tamika D. Mallory [@TamikaDMallory] 2021b).

Alternatively, I observe no notable shifts in Merritt's work or social media presence. If anything, Merritt's tactics became more aggressive with a stronger Instagram presence and posting about his protest attendance.

Looking at Mallory and Merritt's positions throughout this scandal I find that Merritt ignored the controversy leaving Mallory at its center. I found the Google Searches at the time focused on Mallory with related searches focused on Tamir Rice. Upon reviewing social media comments Mallory engaged with a mixture of support and criticism for her work whereas Merritt's largely supported his legal work and campaign. Mallory engaged more with the controversy we also see more notable changes in her public presence focusing on more male victims of police brutality and discussing less controversial subjects throughout April. Ultimately, this moderating effect seems temporary as Mallory returns to protesting and sit-in actions in May. Drawing on insights from this case study I anticipate distinct gendered experiences in Black organizing with Black women more likely to moderate their behavior though this moderation may be temporary.

## **Study 2**

### *Methodological Approach*

I conducted 9 semi-structured interviews with Black organizers ages from 18 - 34. These interviews took place virtually on Zoom for approximately 90 minutes. While in-person interviews are highly respected, scholars find the content from online interviews equally rigorous while interviewing respondents (OliFFE et al. 2021). As participant comfort is one of the most

important components of in-depth interviewing online interviews empower the participant to choose the location they are being interviewed in and ensure the safety of both interviewers and respondents. Topics discussed included the nature of their organizing work, their tactical preferences, the role of identity in organizing strategy, and discriminatory experiences within their organizations.

I asked organizers about the tactics they typically use, their tactical preferences as individuals and the role of race and gender in the strategic decisions to assess their tendency toward moderate or radical tactical approaches. Recognizing that contextual factors like the type of organization they work in could restrict the tactics available to them I distinguish between the tactics they most use and those they would prefer to implement in these interviews. I continue the interview by focusing on their first-hand experiences organizing and more generally for Black men or women according to the respondent's gender identity. We discussed the gendered treatment of Black organizers in their organizations and by the public then explored the discrimination they faced while organizing to assess the role of discrimination in distinctions in tactical preferences.

Participants were informed these interviews would be recorded both in the solicitation to participate and before beginning the interview. To recruit participants, I developed a list of Black social justice organizations cultivated from online search engines, social media presence, and coalition networks. I contacted these organizations to share my recruitment email with their members. Additionally, I took on a snowball sampling approach receiving recommendations from study participants and networking. All the participants are career organizers, they are professionals associated with organizations dedicated to politically and socially advocating for Black liberation, which I refer to as activist organizations.

### *Sample*

Most of the sample are Black women with one Black man and one non-binary organizer participating. Of these Black women organizers two identified as Afro-Caribbean. The median age was 30 with most participants in their thirties. Organizers in their twenties and thirties may have been more available as they had fewer family obligations and felt more comfortable being interviewed by someone of a similar age. Participants operated in different organizational contexts working in either activism in the arts, policy-centered organizations, or academia advocating for Black students and their local communities. Additionally, several organizers described a strong family tradition of activist work with parents participating in the Black Panther movement and being encouraged to organize as children.

College degree-holders are overrepresented, most participants earned at least a bachelor's degree. This overrepresentation might be driven by the high rates at which Black women are pursuing higher education. While my sample is disproportionately concentrated on organizers with higher education, I anticipate these findings have broader applications than solely my sample as the sample does have a wide degree of organizational diversity. Furthermore, historically Black women across varying educational levels express discriminatory experiences in movements such that the effects of strategy should similarly spill over.

### **Results**

Black organizers expressed support for various tactics, but several mentioned the importance of community building for the longevity of the cause. While a few were comfortable engaging with radical or higher-risk tactics such as hunger strikes or non-legal approaches, several described more traditional means of civic engagement such as signing petitions and handing out buttons with movement messages. While this is a wide range of approaches, I

attribute this diversity of responses to a growing sense of burnout among organizers. Several Black women, specifically, described no longer being interested in protesting and transitioning their organizing to civic engagement (i.e., donations). I explore distinctions between these tactical preferences and their relationship to my theoretical expectations. The core three themes of respondents' tactical preferences focus on civic engagement, public shaming, and community building.

### *Civic Engagement in Organizing*

People considering social movements, often think of protests however, Black liberation movements have a long tradition of organizing through civic engagement such as obtaining petition signatures or boycotts (Glennon 1991; A. D. Morris 1986). While social movements may have shifted away from these modes given technological advancements and the rise of hashtag activism, this does not seem to be the case. The Black women I interviewed described using these approaches for two primary reasons: lack of interest in physical protesting and building off prior experience. Monica, a 30-year-old director at an artistic activism organization expressed her frustrations stating

“I’m out here for you to drive past me and like not do enough... I feel like the physicality of organizing, that chapter has closed for me”

Black women who preferred more civic engagement forms of organizing especially donating described a drop in their belief in protest’s efficacy to lead to change. Sydney, a 29-year-old campaign director at a non-profit, describes this shift in her approach to activism,

“Here is a check. Honey, I will just give you the money. You don't need me to show up. I don't think it works anymore.”

A strong sense of collective efficacy can inspire collective action engagement (van Zomeren 2013). While some scholarship finds social movement participation can strengthen an individual's efficacy, the long-term effects of organizing without victories alongside losses may lead to a backlash effect weakening protest efficacy. These women do not describe their doubts as withdrawing support from social movements, as their increasing doubts seem to be associated with this preference for civic engagement-focused tactics. Monica goes on to recognize the value of more visible organizing despite no longer partaking stating

“I respect the fact that so many people like that [protesting] is their form of organizing, but I just the physicality of it. I was like, I can't keep doing this anymore.”

As financial support is a consistent struggle for activist organizations this support does carry an impact though it's less direct engagement than they have in the past. Resource mobilization theory assumes that movement constituents lack the financial resources to continue their work and need to rely on elites (Edwards and McCarthy 2004). This reliance on elite funding sources and organizations can compromise the tactics available to organizers (Dowie 1995) as these elites require more moderate goals and tactics for their funding. While some activists may be moving away from more traditional modes of organizing as Black activists shift from physical participation to fiscal support, their organizations may become less reliant on philanthropic partners that restrict their contentious activity (Colwell 1993).

Should Black women, specifically concentrate their support fiscally rather than physically we might anticipate Black women obtaining a greater financial influence over the direction of organizations. Though I find Black women are becoming less willing to engage in physical organizing efforts, they demonstrated their continued engagement and commitment through their additional preferences.

Jada, a 34-year-old communications strategist, cited accountability as one of the most important tactics for social movements to implement for long-term success.

“I think one tactic I think that's also missing is just or maybe it's my preferred thing as having a system of accountability.”

As organizers begin drifting toward more modes of civic engagement, some women emphasize how systems of accountability might resolve this depreciating group efficacy several organizers expressed. Establishing such systems allows organizers and the public to observe tangible gains. These outcomes might focus on public engagement or the behavior of political elites. Participants described the importance of elected officials working for the public good and how they expressed their outrage towards such elites who neglected important issues. In the following section I explore Black organizer's attitudes toward public shaming, several women emphasized the effectiveness and catharsis of public shaming government officials.

### *Public Shaming*

Despite expressing doubt in activism's efficacy, several organizers described the tactic of public shame or “bird-dogging” with excitement. Remi, a 34-year-old non-binary organizing director mentioned

“That's my favorite fun tactic cause again we don't Like, you know, most times people who are making decisions on the behalf or for poor black people are don't live there. So why not let your neighbors know that you're a fucking scumbag.”

Social movement organizations are particularly effective at targeting and launching naming and shaming campaigns to bring public attention to injustice (Meernik et al. 2012). As the people have limited access to elites directly, naming and shaming facilitates the public's ability to hold elites accountable. Sydney describes the importance of expressing dissatisfaction

with the elite's performance, especially among marginalized communities, the most likely to be neglected in the political institutions.

“Let's cause some ruckus. ... you need to know people are upset. Mostly cause it's also doing this fucking work at all the institutions that I've done it and all the people that I have to sit down and talk to and like, be at the table with to talk about solutions. They're not doing their job. And there are not very many mechanisms that we have to make them do their job. Accountability. So, if I got to be rude to you, I'll be rude.”

Several Black women organizers emphasized the importance of using public shame against individuals, particularly politicians, and institutions to express disapproval of their current work and create accountability. They emphasized being comfortable with making political elites uncomfortable in public and the value of being disruptive.

Through public shaming, these organizers can reinforce the antagonists to their cause providing an alternative source for activist to unleash their frustrations on rather than the most marginalized within activist organizations. Social psychologists find defining the out-group can reinforce group identity and cohesion (Gamson 1997). While Black women may defy leadership stereotypes their utilization of naming and shaming as a tactic might protect these organizers from the typical backlash from their norm defiance. In focusing negative attention on antagonists of the movement, such an approach may protect more marginalized activists and reinforce group cohesion. While some organizers foster cohesion and unity through identifying enemies' others focus on community building and cultivator public supporters.

### *Community as a Strategy*

At the heart of organizing are the communities' activists fight for and my participants focused on community-building techniques as a priority. While organizing on others' behalf in

allyship is a powerful tool, several respondents discussed the importance of prioritizing the communities affected by an issue and recognizing they are the best advocates for themselves.

Whitney, a 33-year-old policy analyst shares her approach

“I prefer to have self-narrated campaign campaigns, where you bring in people who are impacted in the most marginalized, and you have them speak on their own stories in a respectful way, and present themselves how they want to be presented to say”

Not only can such efforts lead to more effective campaigns as the people directly impacted by issues have a crucial perspective on the downstream consequences, but they also facilitate the development of sustained engagement. Black organizers discussed the importance of tactics not only achieving their demands but also mobilizing the public beyond the initial issue that inspired them to show up. Charles, a 30-year-old campaign strategist went on to say

“My preferred thing is organized for the long haul, versus just mobilizing for this moment, because it doesn't last. You know, it doesn't deepen leadership into the space of when the next big fight comes”

Many organizers across gender identity emphasized the importance of community building through different means of connecting through op-eds, door knocking, and deep canvassing the recurring theme was through developing a sense of community the public became more engaged and efficacious.

### *The Role of Discrimination*

Black organizers reported a range of discriminatory experiences both in the public and within their organizations. While some struggled to recall their experiences, others reported several instances from various sources. Some organizers using civic engagement approaches reported discriminatory experiences in their organizations. These experiences fit the pet-to-threat

framework (K. M. Thomas et al. 2013) wherein they experienced several microaggressions within their organizations. Jada described being placed within a couple of categories for Black women.

“Either like the poor black girl that like doesn't know what she's doing, like new to this space, like blah, blah, and they want to, like mentor you in like shape you. Or you're a scary black woman”

The women who describe experiencing discrimination tend to prefer community building or civic engagement tactics. These approaches are important for SMOs however they are less disruptive and have fewer consequences than alternatives such as hunger strikes or highway blocking. Other women reported a distinct lack of such experiences; however, such women typically exert additional effort to find organizations that prioritize their well-being. These women report researching their organizational partners to avoid such experiences. Lauren, a 20-year-old student organizer described the type of movements and people with whom she organized.

“Most of the time, it [the people I organize with] is a woman of color. Or black woman. So, I guess it's a lot different also, because the people that I see around me when I step up look like me. Um, and I don't put myself in a place in which like, it's a patriarchal space.”

Among Black women who expressed being comfortable with radical tactics and approaches they often struggled to recount discriminatory experiences in their current organizations. While they experienced microaggressions at former organizations, currently they lack these experiences. One participant describes the culture as healing saying

“I’m able to sit in diverse circles. It doesn’t mean it’s perfect. But the peace I have known these past three years working [here], I did not know at all when I worked at [other] organizations.”

Without actively combatting intra-organizational discrimination Black women organizers are empowered to access the full tactical repertoires of social movements. For some, this access inspires the utilization of radical tactics and ideologies. To expand their perspectives beyond immediate needs and unleash their imagination to develop new innovative goals for movements. The philosophy of a Black feminist radical imagination exemplifies this approach recognizing that social movement organizations pursue realities beyond the confines of the traditional democratic practice (Woodly 2022). These Black women organizers employ a similar approach concentrated on the goals and strategy of their organizations.

## **Conclusion**

Through case study analysis I find public outrage against organizers is concentrated on Black women leading activist organizations rather than their male counterparts. This high concentration of criticism can inspire changes in their tactics; however, these changes appear to be temporary. From my interviews with Black organizers, predominantly Black women, I find those who experienced discrimination in their current organizations preferred more moderate tactics such as donating rather than more physical means of engagement (e.g., protesting). Alternatively, those who described their organization as a positive environment felt more comfortable using physical tactics and engaging with radical politics. However, there are additional factors which might explain these findings.

In study 1, this controversy took place on social media wherein users can moderate their comment sections, a tool both organizers utilize on their accounts. Perhaps the lack of outrage

for male organizers is driven by stricter content moderation on his platforms rather than a lack of public upset. Future research might build on this analysis by utilizing an experimental approach exposing people in the public to the case and asking the public their initial thoughts to capture their unimpeded thoughts on the controversy.

The in-depth interviews were conducted online via Zoom making participation more accessible across the US and more affordable negating the costs of travel. However, these benefits come at the cost of a few important components of qualitative interviews such as control over the environment. While participants were asked to take this call in a private place where they felt comfortable some participated in their cars whereas others had to address work emergencies during the interview. Online interviews allow researchers less control over where the participant will be while asking sensitive questions (Olliffe et al. 2021).

Additionally, participants were more comfortable rescheduling interviews as rescheduling a phone or Zoom call is easier than rescheduling an in-person appointment. This partially accounts for the smaller sample size of interview participants as participants frequently rescheduled or canceled outright. Future research might include a mixed model approach of interviews with a portion of interviews conducted in person at key sites while supplemented by online interviews with more geographic diversity. These in-person interviews should be concentrated with two or three organizations controlling for organizational factors potentially influencing which tactics are available to organizers.

The findings of this chapter inspire questions about how Black organizers come to decisions about the tactics they prefer and when that differs from what they use. Moving forward researchers might further expand to explore how Black non-binary and transgender organizers make strategic decisions and the tactics they feel are available to them. As the Black trans

community is typically the most politically neglected (Bunyasi and Smith 2019; Cohen 1999) we may anticipate that their public appeals are more carefully managed than their cis-gender counterparts. These studies offer an essential contribution to political science adopting a political psychological framework to understand intersectionality's influence on social movement leaders strategizing. The nuanced findings of this study emphasize the complex nature of social movement strategies and invite further exploration into studying Black organizers after the 2020 Global Black Lives Matter protests and capturing major shifts in Black organizing tactics and strategies.

## **Conclusion**

This project aimed to assess how intersectionality shape's public opinion and the strategies organizers find effective with their identities. While political science research public opinion toward politicians and social movements, the influence of intersectionality on public opinion of leaders and the strategies available to them has largely been understudied. Prior research explores the strategies and public opinion of Black women politicians (N. E. Brown 2014; Orey et al. 2006) suggesting that the intersection of race and gender influences how Black women lead. However, to date, few investigations analyze the psychological factors shaping these contexts within social movements. This dissertation interrogates Black women's leadership within SMOs and how their discriminatory experiences influence their strategies. Drawing on social psychology theories of leadership I argue that intersectionality shape's public opinion of social movements, their leadership, and the outcomes they endorse. Subsequently, organizers recognizing these attitudes and their pervasiveness within SMOs adapt their tactics to retain participants in their organizations.

## **Overview of Findings**

In Chapter 2 I first examine the role of intersectionality in social movement strategies, by assessing the effectiveness of intersectional framing in garnering public support for BLM. Through this analysis, I demonstrate the influence of intersectionality on social movement work and its capacity to influence SMOs' relationship with the public. In doing so I highlight the influence social movements might have on Black public opinion, whereas scholars find Black people demonstrate cooler attitudes toward their trans or women counterparts, herein I find that associating these groups with BLM does not harm attitudes toward the movement. Instead, I find

that Black Americans feel more positively toward BLM when the movement includes Black women and the trans-community relative to the control. The effects of the treatment are slightly stronger in the trans-inclusive condition than its gendered counterpart. I hypothesized that women's inclusion in BLM would boost Black women's BLM attitudes. Contrary to my expectations a gendered analysis unveils positive but insignificant effects in the women-inclusive condition. Instead, intersectional frames in trans-inclusive conditions were effective among Black women. Black men, on the other hand, felt significantly more represented in BLM in the women's inclusion condition relative to the control.

I find increased levels of support for maternal healthcare policies in both the women's inclusion and trans-inclusion frame among Black respondents. Black women are significantly more favorable of these policies only under the trans-inclusive condition rather than the control. Turning to Black men, it seems they are more supportive of maternal healthcare policies both in the women-inclusive frame and the trans-inclusive BLM frames. Contrary to my expectations Black Americans positively responded to intersectional frames wherein they did not directly benefit.

To test the extent of this positive response to intersectionality, I examine attitudes toward Black women in leadership and intersectional policies. I hypothesized Black participants would respond more positively to Black men in leadership. In Chapter 3 I found that Black people feel more positively toward leaders when they are Black women. This reaffirms the positive response to Black women in leadership contrary to my expectations, demonstrating that intersectionality may be a benefit for responses to Black social movements. However, these positive effects do not seem to extend into responses to the policy preferences, a crucial outcome for organizers to pursue.

In the second part of Chapter 3, I assess support for intersectional policies under Black leaders of varying gender identities. I theorize that Black women will defy participants' leadership expectations and be less trusted than their male counterparts. I anticipate this lack of trust extending these negative effects toward intersectional policies (i.e., maternal healthcare policies). Black respondents were less supportive of policies focusing on Black women's issues, maternal healthcare policies specifically, when a woman was leading BLM instead of a man. This analysis supports my theoretical expectations that intersectionality may compromise the policy outcomes organizers seek to achieve. I draw on these findings as I look to assess how organizers operate under these constraints and the development of the strategies.

In Chapter 4 I hypothesized that Black women would moderate their strategies while experiencing intragroup discrimination and amid controversy. I found public outrage against organizers is concentrated on Black women leading activist organizations rather than their male counterparts. This high concentration of criticism can inspire changes in their tactics; however, these changes appear temporary. From my interviews with Black organizers, predominantly Black women, I find those who experienced discrimination in their current organizations preferred more moderate tactics such as donating rather than more physical means of engagement (e.g., protesting). Alternatively, those who described their organization as a positive environment felt more comfortable using physical tactics and engaging with radical politics.

## **Limitations**

While I find some evidence to support intersectionality influencing social movement activity and the strategies available to Black organizers there are some limitations to be addressed. Firstly, the timing of data collection should be recognized particularly among the quantitative studies. Several experiments were conducted throughout 2021 in the aftermath of the

2020 global BLM protests and the January 6th insurrection. These events rapidly shifted the political landscape in 2021, wherein organizers might be generally more hesitant to use radical tactics given the negative public response to BLM protests involving looting and the events on Jan 6th. Furthermore, as previously discussed there were questions of corruption within BLM leadership which could have compromised participants' attitudes toward BLM leaders. This dissertation sought to access contemporary social movement efforts, however, these questions of impropriety and social pressure to support BLM could have skewed the data. To address these issues future researchers may focus such treatments on fictional activist organizations rather than ongoing movements.

This analysis focuses on contemporary politics as the resurgence in social movement activity provides an ideal opportunity to assess the role of intersectionality in the strategies available to social movements. However, the ultimate success of these movements has yet to be determined and their leadership may shift over time. Intersectionality dynamics within Black SMOs remain across American history, taking a historical case-study approach may emphasize these dynamics as a long-standing contributory factor in social movements. Future scholars may take a temporal case study approach to such dynamics assessing the strategies of Black social movements with Black women in leadership positions relative to their male lead counterparts (e.g., Ella Baker vs. Martin Luther King Jr). Furthermore, including historical analysis would incorporate the movements contemporary Black organizers draw on for inspiration.

Regional differences hold a small role in my analysis; however, it is plausible the public in more conservative regions of the US may respond negatively toward women in political leadership. Such preferences would have consequences reaching social movement strategies as organizers operating in such states may have access to fewer tactics under marginalized

leadership. Additionally, the political context under which they operate can have a similarly constraining effect. The interviews took place from 2023-2024 and the political climate surrounding protests has been hostile from politicians. More politicians are restricting their residents' right to mass protests specifically in Louisiana, Texas, and Mississippi (Millhiser 2024) states with substantive Black populations. It is plausible these efforts are a contributory factor in organizers' tactical preferences and participation tendencies from the public.

This emphasizes the importance of organizers' relationship with politicians. This study focuses largely on the relationship between organizers and the public; however, future research may engage with the role of politicians in organizers' strategic decisions. Especially given Gause's work emphasizing minority organizers' focus on appealing to electoral political elites (2021). Few scholars assess the extent to which social identities may shape activist leaders' appeals to politicians. Such explorations would address the influence of politicians in which tactics social movement leaders find most effective.

Finally, this dissertation examines the role of intersectionality in social movement strategies, their utility, and their availability to social movement leaders. Though I focus largely on Black women's experiences within Black liberation movements such dynamics extend into various organizations mobilizing for marginalized communities. Furthermore, Black Americans tend to score higher in gender egalitarianism than their White counterparts (Ciabattari 2001). Examining the role of intersectionality for women of color beyond the Black community may have facilitated capturing stronger levels of these effects. This serves as one venue for future directions of this research, beyond the dissertation.

## **Future Directions**

Upon accounting for the limitations of this dissertation, I find plentiful opportunities for extensions. As earlier mentioned, this theoretical framework holds broader applications beyond the Black community. Preliminary research exploring attitudes toward Black women in leadership across racial identities finds generally positive attitudes toward Black women leading BLM. My findings demonstrate support for Black women leading Black movements, however, future scholarship might explore how racial minorities respond to Black women in leadership outside organizations explicitly focused on Black liberation. We might anticipate that public support for Black women leaders weakens in SMOs such as the Undocumented Movement or the Women's March. Applying this theoretical framework to the reception and strategizing of women of color leading social movements more broadly would better our understanding of the effect of race and gender on the influence and leadership styles of social movement leaders.

While this framework focuses on the intersection of race and gender in social movement strategies, broader applications across more identities remain. In the future, one might consider the role of intersectionality in social movements more broadly including racialized organizing such as the Undocumented movement, LGBTQ rights, and movements rarely associated with race such as Climate Change. Similarly analyzing the role of additional marginalized identities such as ability and class dynamics can greatly enrich our understanding of how social movement leaders operate and their relationship with the public.

Additionally, this project focuses primarily on SMOs as protest movements, rather than the various organizational types of SMOs. Politically focused SMOs pursuing racial justice operate through protesting, non-profits, policy institutions, and other institutions. Future scholarship may investigate these identity dynamics found throughout this dissertation across this variation. Though from a tactical perspective, the feasibility of some approaches can be

limited by organization type, it could also be that the leadership structures unveil the importance of identities. For instance, while some protest movements implement decentralized leadership others such as labor unions depend on hierarchical leadership. Future research may focus on SMOs with more strictly defined leadership structures. While this project, leaves grounds for further exploration I contribute a great deal to our understanding of minority collective action.

### **Contributions & Implications**

Through this dissertation, I begin challenging political science's understanding of political elites. Traditionally, political scientists focus on politicians as the primary model of political leadership, however, this dissertation complicates this understanding by recognizing the growing political influence of activists. There are several examples of organizers' burgeoning capacity for political persuasion from growing social media influence on some organizations (i.e., BLM Los Angeles) creating voter guides with their recommendations for the public, activists are making strides in influencing public opinion formation. I utilize methodologies common to scholarship on attitudes toward political elites to assess public opinion formation toward social movement leaders across marginalized identities. My findings set a foundation for exploring the distinctions in public expectations of political leaders between electoral or contentious politics.

I incorporate innovative methodologies to understand minority public opinion and social movement organizing. Social movement researchers primarily utilize qualitative methods such as interviews, participant observation, and ethnography to analyze social movements. Through survey experiments, I assess the utility of social movement frames and the causal direction of their influence on social movement attitudes. I also recognize the importance of the qualitative tradition in social movement studies and incorporate organizers' first-hand perspectives on their

tactical preferences and their thought processes in making strategic decisions. In taking a mixed methods approach I bridge the generalizability of survey research and the rich nuances of interviewing, and a case study approach best emphasize.

My dissertation is innovative in a variety of ways. This dissertation weaves together disparate theories of political science, social psychology, and social movement studies to understand the psychological factors driving the influence of social identities in social movements' reputation and strategies. Drawing on insights from social psychology I utilize a novel application of social identity theories of leadership implemented in understanding social justice activist decision-making. I advance elite behavior theories in studying social justice activists as contemporary political elites merging the disparate theoretical frameworks of elite behavior and social movement organizational structures. Social psychology theories of leadership focus on corporate executives when they assess the political implications of these concepts they focus on elected officials. This dissertation applies these frameworks to assess social movement strategies and leaders' decision-making processes. I offer political science's study of social movement attitudes the recognition of attitudes toward leaders and the identities they hold can shape public responses to movements and their desired outcomes.

Intersectionality is a crucial theoretical tool for recognizing the nuances of systemic oppression, it is essential to understand how these systems might be replicated in SMOs created to oppose them. In analyzing such replications movements will become more adept at recognizing these dynamics externally and ensure they avoid repeating them within their organizations. Black women are at the heart and soul of Black liberation movements with their efforts of micro-mobilization, focusing on sustained grassroots activism at the local level, being the primary reason successful movements hold longevity (Robnett 1999b). Their contributions

cannot be underestimated and in understanding how their experiences shape their strategy, activist organizations can better distribute their labor and properly appreciate these women's labor. By recognizing the importance of Black women's strategizing, these organizations can become more effective in gaining progress for women in the United States and beyond.

The questions I explore in this dissertation further emphasize the importance of understanding Black women's leadership and the limitations they face despite holding such a position. While I focus on social movement leaders, these dynamics are applicable in various contexts including leadership within corporate environments, the policy sector, higher education, and politicians among other organizations. The marginalized identities leaders hold shape the feasibility of leadership and the leadership styles available to them. Through assessing the attitudes of the public, their followers, and the leaders themselves, social scientists can develop a better understanding of how minority women and the organizations they head can thrive in leadership.

## Appendix

### Chapter 2

#### Black Women Treatment



“When we say that Black Lives Matter, we mean *all* Black individuals—that is, Black men *and* Black women. Our movement believes that we cannot attain a true sense of justice for Black people unless our struggle acknowledges and values the rich diversity of Black communities throughout the U.S., while fighting vigorously on behalf of all Black individuals, irrespective of their gender.”

-Public Spokesperson, *Black Lives Matter*

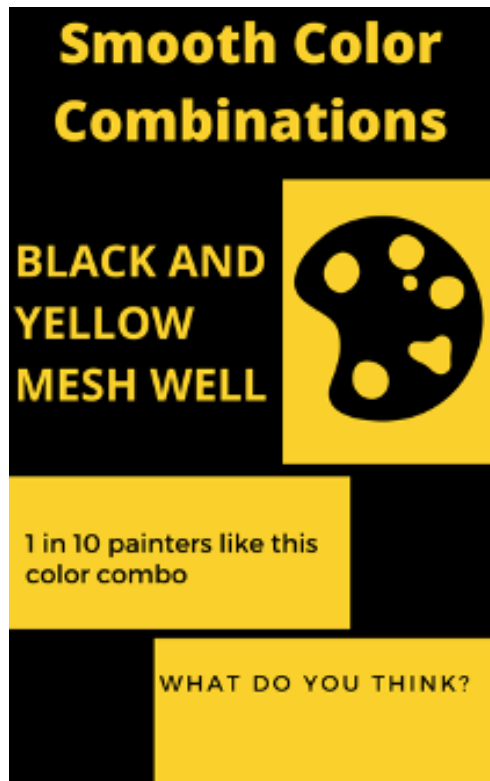
## Black Transgender Treatment



“When we say that Black Lives Matter, we mean *all* Black individuals—that is, Black men, Black women, *and* Black transgender folks. Our movement believes that we cannot attain a true sense of justice for Black people unless our struggle acknowledges and values the rich diversity of Black communities throughout the U.S., while fighting vigorously on behalf of all Black individuals, irrespective of their gender.”

-Public Spokesperson, *Black Lives Matter*

Control Condition



“When we say that black and yellow are popular, we mean the color combination is on the rise. Our organization believes this pattern is so popular due to a renewed appreciation for bees. Homeowners often use black and yellow color combinations in interior design, particularly wall paint. This pattern is particularly popular in children’s rooms and home office spaces.”

-Public Spokesperson, *Painting Contractors Association*

## Chapter 3

### Study 1 Experimental Treatment

#### Woman Condition



Black Lives Matter Detroit Poster,  
- Associated Press

Ruth Washington shared the following quote “Our recent Defund the Detroit Police protest went out of control after individuals unaffiliated with our cause began looting local businesses.” The 32-year-old woman is at the head of the Detroit, MI chapter of Black Lives Matter. “As the woman leading this movement I take full responsibility for this unfortunate incident” she continued her statement. These riots resulted in Ruth Washington receiving a one month ban on her organizing efforts, any permit applications from her will be denied for a month. She went on to describe her plans to address this issue in the future, including more restrictive practices of sharing demonstration locations.



Black Lives Matter Detroit Poster,  
- Associated Press

Richard Washington shared the following quote “Our recent Defund the Detroit Police protest went out of control after individuals unaffiliated with our cause began looting local businesses.” The 32-year-old man is at the head of the Detroit, MI chapter of Black Lives Matter. “As the man leading this movement I take full responsibility for this unfortunate incident” he continued his statement. These riots resulted in Richard Washington receiving a one month ban on his organizing efforts, any permit applications from him will be denied for a month. He went on to describe his plans to address this issue in the future, including more restrictive practices of sharing demonstration locations.

## Study 2 Experimental Manipulation Text

### Man Condition



Black Lives Matter Detroit Poster,  
- Associated Press

Richard Washington, the head of the Black Lives Matter Detroit chapter released an announcement last week. “After months of hard work, we obtained a major victory last week with the creation of the community lead police oversight committee”. This committee will consist of Detroit residents unaffiliated with police and have the authority to suspend or terminate officers engaging in misconduct. “As the man leading this movement, I look forward to achieving even more in the future. It is incredibly important that we work together to protect Black men from police and focus more of our efforts on Black men's experiences with police instead of Black women.” He went on to describe his hopes for the committee working in collaboration with the BLM movement to ensure justice for mistreated Detroit residents.



Black Lives Matter Detroit Poster,  
- Associated Press

Ruth Washington, the head of the Black Lives Matter Detroit chapter released an announcement last week. “After months of hard work, we obtained a major victory last week with the creation of the community lead police oversight committee”. This committee will consist of Detroit residents unaffiliated with police and have the authority to suspend or terminate officers engaging in misconduct. “As the woman leading this movement, I look forward to achieving even more in the future. It is incredibly important to protect Black people from police, and focus our efforts more on Black women's experiences instead of only men.” She went on to describe her hopes for the committee working in collaboration with the BLM movement to ensure justice for mistreated Detroit residents.

| Study 1: Balance Check |                     |                     |                     |                     |
|------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Treatment              | (1)<br>Liberal ID   | (2)<br>Education    | (3)<br>Female       | (4)<br>Democrat     |
| Female Condition       | -0.001<br>(0.050)   | 0.030<br>(0.022)    | 0.042<br>(0.051)    | 0.024<br>(0.050)    |
| Constant               | 0.365***<br>(0.016) | 0.678***<br>(0.036) | 0.420***<br>(0.083) | 0.593***<br>(0.082) |
| Observations           | 373                 | 401                 | 397                 | 375                 |
| R-squared              | -0.003              | 0.002               | -0.002              | -0.001              |

Standard errors in parentheses  
\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

| Study 2 Balance Check |                     |                     |                     |                     |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
|                       | (1)<br>Income       | (2)<br>Education    | (3)<br>Female       | (4)<br>Democrat     |
| Male Lead             | 0.036<br>(0.024)    | 0.038<br>(0.021)    | -0.010<br>(0.049)   | -0.020<br>(0.047)   |
| Women Lead            | -0.004<br>(0.023)   | 0.019<br>(0.020)    | -0.003<br>(0.047)   | 0.062<br>(0.045)    |
| Constant              | 0.394***<br>(0.016) | 0.584***<br>(0.014) | 0.533***<br>(0.032) | 0.628***<br>(0.031) |
| Observations          | 646                 | 664                 | 642                 | 647                 |
| R-squared             | 0.005               | 0.005               | 0.000               | 0.005               |

Standard errors in parentheses  
\*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

## Chapter 4

### Interview Questionnaire

1. How would you describe the work you are doing in your current role?
2. Activists use a lot of different tactics to do this work like petitions, protests, highway blocking, or riots among others. What type of tactics does your organization typically use to pursue AGENDA? follow-up: when would your organization use more disruptive/ radical tactics?
3. Which tactics do you prefer to use while organizing/ doing activism work? Why? How feasible do you find using radical strategies/tactics in your organizing?
4. When deciding which methods to use for your work, how does race and gender come into play?
5. How do you think about your identities while making organizing decisions?
6. Tell me about a time you collaborated with activists in other organizations. How were you treated?
7. In your experience, when you're working with the public, people familiar with your org but don't work in it, how do people respond to you?
8. Overall, how would you describe the experience of the average Black women in your organization? Positive? Negative? Can you give me some examples?
9. Have you ever experienced discrimination in your organization or while organizing? Can you tell me about one time in particular?
10. How did that experience change your relationship with your organization?
11. What gives you hope despite discriminatory experiences in activism?
12. What demands do you want your organization to focus on in the future? Why those?

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