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Transatlantic Black Lives Matter: Motivations for Participation and Non-Participation in Black Lives Matter Beyond the USA

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A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters by Research in Communication, Cultural and Media Studies

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Abstract

Social movements have long since been a staple in civic life with each new generation presenting new tactics and means for engagement. The introduction of Black Lives Matter in 2014 brought racial disparities at the hands of law enforcement in the US to the attention of thousands of people around the world through their use of social media and their protests which were heavily followed around the world. Whilst studies have looked into how the movement's usage of social media has been pivotal to their growth, and how it has encouraged political participation in a new generation, researchers are yet to delve into the mechanics of the movement and how this is received on a larger scale. Furthermore, how those who have different lived experiences contextualise their support or disagreement of the movement given their difference in cultural context and history of racial tension. This study looks to explore the perception of a globally recognised movement outside of its home, the USA, by taking into consideration where the advocacy is happening and how/why people participate on different levels. This perspective is key in beginning to understand how individuals arrive at various conclusions, and how that journey towards arriving at their conclusions have been influenced along the way. The results of this research project were gathered through the use of a quantative and qualitative survey of 383 people from countries outside of the US, mainly Europe and the UK. The results found that the majority of respondents questioned whether Black Lives Matter as it stands, was relevant in their country, with many calling for a more inclusive movement and therefore, messaging, that extends to other minorities that are thought to receive the same level of injustice (if not more so) than black people with an emphasis on minorities such as Arabs, Gypsies, Jews, Muslims and Turks. The findings from this research create opportunities for future researchers to explore how movements embed their cause and messaging in countries that have different cultural and historical context in order to gain allies/sympathisers, how different information sources influence how people add context to their beliefs and how the decentralised nature of the movement has had an impact on the way they are received.

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Finally, to the various food and drink establishments that aided in me writing this large piece of work – somehow, I managed to find a peace in and amongst all of your chaos – particularly The Victoria Inn Peckham.

Dedications

To my dearest Queenie, who would have thought I would be here? For all the fights we had about me not wanting to go to university I am so happy to be able to have gotten this far. Here's another one for your bragging rights.

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Introduction to Black Lives Matter

The year 2012 saw the way society talked about race relations shift dramatically after the shooting of Trayvon Martin by self-appointed neighbourhood watchdog George Zimmerman in Florida, United States. Many could not have predicted the fallout the not guilty verdict on charges of second-degree murder and manslaughter in 2013 would cause, nor the global impact it would have for years to come. Quickly after the verdict, the phrase 'Black Lives Matter' (BLM) entered into public conversation, introduced by way of a "love letter to black people" (as cited in Eidelson, 2016) by Alicia Garza who went on to co-found the Black Lives Matter movement with Patrice Cullors & Opal Tometi. With this group of organisers already doing the ground work to bring BLM to life in their communities, and within their networks, the death of Michael Brown in 2014 by police officer Darren Wilson and the subsequent protests propelled the movement to global recognition mainly via media attention, some which were positive, and others which were negative.

While the introduction to Black Lives Matter came via the extrajudicial and vigilante killings of young unarmed black men, it is important to note that at the heart of their mission Black Lives Matter also "affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum" (Garza, 2014). This explicit explanation for who they serve is gravely important for highlighting inclusion in the movement, however, despite this being the stated aims of the movement, Black feminist activists have been vocal about the perceived lack of inclusion of women and the LGBTQ community in the BLM conversation in the past (Carney, 2016) and BLM have thus, made efforts to be more inclusive by adopting hashtags such as #SayHerName (McClain, 2015) and engaging in conversation with organisations such as Trans Women of Colour Collective to ensure this is no longer the case (Casper, 2014).

Though the movement has been amplified due to its prominence as a popular social media hashtag, it is important to note that they have matured into a chapter-based movement working at local, regional, national, and even global level with chapters dotted all over the world with the majority of them being based in North America. Organisation of offline activities and gatherings are shared across social media via. Twitter and regional chapter Facebook pages with members also using Google Hangouts as a way to take part from a distance (Campbell, 2017). Though they have grown into a movement with more organisational structure, the general association is more aligned with its hashtag as a

separate entity as opposed to a connection with the formal organisational structure (Hoffman et al., 2016a). We have to consider where the advocacy is happening, being that the events that brought BLM to our attention were specific to the US and was simply a rallying cry to begin with that evolved into a chapter-based movement. Whilst their US supporters could relate, it is much harder to determine how those across the pond contextualised their support.

Location is important here as it defines our different cultural context that influences how/if we participate in movements like BLM. This study will focus on participation outside of the USA, and will work to understand the process individuals go through when identifying and engaging with a movement, by thinking about what influences people to search for more information when forming an opinion, where people get their information from, how they discern whether the information is true and therefore decide how to act on that information (participate online, be more active in their community, challenge the movement, etc.).

With BLM being so heavily associated with police brutality, something that is predominantly an American issue embedded, to some degree, in their culture – it is important to look at where it sits with those outside of the US. Not only because of how much it has had an impact globally across different mediums, but because of how race relation-based conversations are received across the world. With conversations surrounding BLM acknowledging the exclusionary undertones of the movement (Rampersaud, 2017) and how rooted police brutality is in American culture (Nodjimbadem, 2017) that isn't seen anywhere else on the same level, we then have to question how people whose lived experiences may be different, with differing cultural context, come to their opinions surrounding BLM.

To that end, this thesis aims to a) take into consideration how location plays a part in how people contextualise their support of the movement focusing mainly on Europe and the UK, b) look at the reasons why/how people participate and c) how people view their online and offline participation and what the relationship between them might be.

To draw context, this thesis starts off by discussing the literature around the movement that touches upon its popularity on social media, its comparison to the Civil Rights Movement and highlights some of their key tactics. It then goes on to look at key themes related to social movements in general that play an important role in their success. This includes discussions

around participatory culture and political participation and how the goal posts have changed over the years given advances in technology and how these are creating new ways for people to get involved in politics. I discuss mass and social media and the role they play in influencing our opinions taking into consideration the different ways things are framed to encourage a particular point of view. I highlight literature around collective identity but more importantly, focus on the individual's identity and why it is important for us to look at the individual and how they sit within the collective identity.

Methodologically, my research will use a qualitative approach for this topic with the understanding that doing this will allow for a better suited approach to discussing why things happen in a particular context. By celebrating the range in nuances, depth and multi-dimensionality that can be found in each participant's journey and relationship to the topic, I will be able to underpin the mechanics behind how individuals respond to social movements (Mason, 2002).

Having mapped out some of the core elements of BLM and themes/areas of study that impact their success, my data analysis draws upon key findings collected through an online survey. These findings include discussions of relevance outside of the US considering cultural differences, why national identity plays a key role in peoples support of BLM, areas where the movement were seen to be more effective and exploring the levels of participation/non-participation and how people have been/would be encouraged to participate in different ways.

Finally, I draw this discussion to a close by highlighting fundamental areas for the movement (and other movements alike) to address in order to build an empathy bridge that is extended to those outside of their core target that increases levels of participation, better understanding of the movement and more recognition in the political arena. I also map out important lines of enquiry for future researchers that arose out of my discussion that would add value to the discussion of BLM outside of the US.

Literature Review

This chapter will delve into some of the key areas of study not only relating to BLM specifically, but areas that inform our perception and participation in social movements in

general. These areas of study are vast, but all add to the overall picture being painted here given the complexity of the framing of opinions, identity and how we use these frames to determine how we support or participate in movements.

Black Lives Matter

Much of the research surrounding Black Lives Matter has focused on offshoots of the movement's mission, looking particularly at education, public health, policing and policy reform. For example, how educators are introducing the conversation of Black Lives Matter to their students in the form of a dedicated syllabus both in classrooms and via a collection of digital material related to the topic, most notably #FergusonSyllabus and #CharlestonSyllabus (Goldthree and Bahng, 2016; Troka and Adedoja, 2016; Williams et al., 2016) but also how BLM have highlighted the public educations failure to incorporate a multicultural approach that is critical not only in tone, but in a social reconstructionist nature (Dixson, 2018).

Freelon et al., (2016) provide the most comprehensive data driven research of Black Lives Matter with them making a clear distinction between Black Lives Matter (the organisation), #BlackLivesMatter (the hashtag) and BLM (the overall movement) seeing them as not synonymous to each other. Their research gives strong insight to the role online media played in the amplification of the movement at various points of its development (e.g. before Mike Brown was killed, the day of his death, the ensuing days of protest etc.). The report gave a clear indication as to who was leading the conversations online, showing that women were shown to be underrepresented in the data set with there being only one woman in the 10 most referenced users during this time, while also highlighting that none of the co-founders were prominent voices in the online conversation. This raises questions around credibility and distribution of power, but also how the decentralised nature of social media activism at times, can appear to praise those whose skills lay in excelling the heart of the movement in the public eye (primarily via online means) even if not officially affiliated with the movement, over the organisers who in the shadows, make change happen (McClain, 2016). Exploring who is telling the story and who is being heard is central to this study, particularly with the lack of gatekeeping, and therefore, anyone being able to represent the movement. Understanding the narratives that are being amplified and how this matches up with the movements mission statement are vital to determining how this impacts the way people participate.

In other places, Black Lives Matter has been discussed in the ways they have taken tactics from previous movements such as the Civil Rights Movement and Occupy Wall Street but adapted them to serve in different ways to be able to reach far more people (Ruffin, 2015; Day, 2015). We can see discussions about social media power and how they've harnessed its uses to their benefit (Stephen, 2015; Jackson & Welles, 2016), as well as arguments for the assertion of identity, power and agency the movement has given to a new generation of political participants (Ray et al, 2017a; Ray et al., 2017b), whilst also being the first entry point for a lot of young people to the idea of solidarity and activism (Roediger, 2016). For the most part, research around Black Lives Matter has been explorative from a tactics and impact point of view, however, consideration for motivations (or lack thereof) in support of the movement, potential long-term effectiveness, and determining the difference in attitudes towards the movement based on race, gender, age and ethnicity are scarce. Furthermore, there is plenty scope to explore questions around consistency and fluctuations in participation and whose story matters and who has the right to tell them.

Though it's difficult to deny the influence BLM has had in public discourse, this isn't without its critiques. Much of the critique leans towards their tactics and the stark difference to the Civil Rights Movement (Reynolds, 2015; Hooker, 2016). Doubters of BLM have referred to respectability politics and the new movement's inability to emulate the non-violent aspects of previous race movements, assuming that they would garner more support if they upheld a higher and more conventional level of decorum (Rickford, 2016; Hooker, 2016). The assertion of #AllLivesMatter (as well as #PoliceLivesMatter) is frequently used as a silencing mechanism that fails to acknowledge the implied "too" at the end of #BlackLivesMatter (Siscoe, 2016) whereas others believe that in discussions of race equality to single out that one race matters above another is in fact, racism (Smiley and Fakunle, 2016).

There hasn't been much on the proximity to the cause and how that has either been an encourager or deterrent for people's involvement let alone what level of involvement they have. De Choudhury et al. (2016) make a good point in their assessment of social media participation in BLM from a race equality point of view, taking into consideration states that have a history of police brutality. They found that there were higher levels of engagement on Twitter from those who lived in states where particular incidences have happened, or those that have a history of police brutality. Though they only looked at the US, they refer to the Mark et al. (2012) term "collective abuse" [39] with the idea that people are moved to

organise, discuss, support and engage with each other as if they have experienced this event together – this is in spite of geography.

In the wider sense Benjamin et al. (2014) looks at the correlation between web content, linkage, and geographical proximity of social movements. He looked at two different kinds of social movements – patriot groups (political/citizen organisations, media, publishing etc.) and hate groups (Thee KKK, neo-Nazi's, White nationalists, Black separatists etc.). They found that groups that were close together in the physical sense, (e.g. the next state over), drew similarities in content, and shared discussions of areas of interest which resulted in them collaborating in what they call "real-world activism". Though there hasn't been any research to support the following claim you could assume that this would be the case with BLM in that US chapters are more similar in terms of content and collaboration. Still, there's a gap in determining this in a transatlantic way, considering how widespread engagement with the movement has been. Is it the same for people who are in different countries, under different policies, etc.? Does a person living in the UK engage in the same way (and pace) as their US counterparts? Do they give the same amount of effort to the cause or feel the same way about the movement considering how far away from the movements roots they are and the differences in histories and policies? This is not to downplay the well documented race issues in the UK but it's highlighting that the culture is somewhat different (e.g. gun culture).

Whilst I wish to explore this, I'm mindful that the antithesis to this idea is that shared interests and values are usually at the heart of social media campaigns therefore somewhat rendering the proximity void (Tombleson and Wolf, 2016). Whether the same can be said for social media-based activism campaigns like Black Lives Matter that are tied to specific locations/cultures is something I hope to determine.

Race Relations

With race being at the centre of BLM and therefore being a key element to this discussion, it's important to take stock of the various issues surrounding race relations, particularly what race/racism is and how it is reported and how we contextualise it. Even more so, and at the very heart of this discussion, it's important to consider how race relations play out in different ways to different people with different cultural contexts. As will be evident in the data gathered in this study, the cultural context experienced in different countries differs and is key in determining how people relate to causes such as BLM.

On a whole, racism is displayed in actions that are seen to hold prejudice views, feelings and opinions or to exclude and discriminate. For greater understanding, it is to be studied as a multidimensional structural phenomenon as opposed to something that is simply attributed to an individual or authority (Wal, 2002). Racisms lays within the idea that to be non-white is to be other and/or inferior based on identity markers of ethnic minorities.

> 'We refer to exclusionary practices against ethnic minorities as racism, which may be defined as a process whereby social groups categorise other groups as different or inferior, on the basis of phenotypical or cultural markers.' (…) 'Racism means making (and acting upon) predictions about people's character, abilities or behaviour on the basis of socially constructed markers of difference.' (Castles and Miller, 1993: 29)

Over time, the face of racism has changed from being overt and direct (based solely on biological difference/inferiority) to subtle experiences of racism tied into more legitimate styles of rejection (Wal, 2002). The latter goes beyond outright individual prejudice and instead focuses on justification for such prejudice based on cultural incompatibility, economic status (power, resource and space) etc.

An interesting thing to note in this is the distinction between race and ethnicity and how this has evolved over time. Whilst at some point racism was driven by a person's biological make up, we've now moved on to it being based around cultural differences that are tied to national identity and national belonging (Hall et al, 1992). This idea of national identity/belonging appears in my data analysis on numerous occasions, mainly in how social movements like BLM challenge the national identity of those who support it (particular supporters who are white) but also the emphasis people put on their race and how/why race leads in such discussions.

Respondents for this study were based in Europe or the UK, and in some form or other, each referenced how their country's relationship/history with race plays a part in how supported BLM is in their country. A report by Clarke (2012) delved into the experiences of people of African descent in Europe and looked at some of the challenges they faced but also helped to contextualise why each countries response to ethnic minorities differed. She touches upon how the definition of blackness varied between European countries due to the various categories used to explain how Black Europeans came to be through migration and settlement. These categories are:

Colonial:

This is mainly related to countries such as the UK, Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands who each have a strong colonial past and subsequently have large numbers of ethnic minority citizens. For example, after the Second World War, ethnic minorities were encouraged to stay and help with the demands of the labour market in the UK.

Refugees:

Political refugees make up a lot of the numbers of people of African descent in European countries. For example, the increase in Islamic terrorist activity in countries such as Nigeria and Somalia have been the main cause of refugees heading over to Europe to escape these atrocities (Kingsley, 2015).

Economic/Labour Market:

The opportunity for work is certainly a leader in reasons for an increase of Black migrants entering European countries. Many of these European countries (particularly Southern Europe) have become reliant on migrant labour to sustain economic development (De Hass, 2008).

Students:

An example of this is when the Soviet Union offered scholarships to students from African countries to study at their universities (Carew, 2015). This was in a bid to change the racist perception of the Soviet Union and to instead, present an open and tolerant front. In more recent times, in 2013 there were 170,432 African students studying in countries in the EU, this made up 49.1% of African students studying in countries outside of their own (Marshall, 2016).

Though these categories hold much relevance, they have the ability to change over time. For instance, the UK have gone from labelling people of Caribbean descent "Coloured" to "African-Caribbean". Furthermore, the inclusion of Black British on the census signifies the acknowledgement of long-term settlement of Black people in the UK as an ethnic minority (Clarke, 2012). However, the same cannot be said for other European countries, particularly those with more recent accounts of immigration where instead of being acknowledged as communities in their own right they are instead regarded as a percentage of immigrants.

What holds true is that Europe still has a long way to go in not only integrating ethnic minorities, but also acknowledging the value they add to society. It's imperative for Europe to remedy where they have failed to adapt their policies with the ever-changing population, ideals and culture (Taylor, 2018). A lot of work is needing to be done to address how Member States of the EU advocate for their "values" in the integration of immigrants that only regurgitates the disparaging claim that non-EU-immigrants hold values that do not compliment the cultural norms of their host country. Furthermore, the European Network Against Racism (2016) suggests that we should be encouraging "a two-way process of understanding and respect of the rights of all" (24).

Representation Matters: Mass Media and how we Formulate Opinions

Outside of the obvious discussions of BLM in terms of violence and injustice towards black people, we must also look at the wider discussion in terms of representation (not just of black people but ethnic minorities in general), both online and through other levels of media output (newspapers, news channels, virtual personas, etc.) and how sometimes, unconscious/unintentional (and sure enough conscious/intentional) bias may be at work in these areas and how this ultimately plays a role in the forming of opinions. Taking into consideration the categories above helps to understand and give perspective to the range in histories and cultural context when it comes to representation of Black people across Europe.

It has been documented that social movements collectively challenge the status quo by taking the necessary steps to alter structural power as well as fight for accountability (Beckwith, 2007). Though historically social movements have been able to credit mass media for the spreading of their agendas beyond their immediate networks, gaining support and putting pressure on the social and political agendas, (Oliver and Myers, 1999; Smith et al., 2001; Amenta et al., 2017) mainly via rallies, protests, occupation of highways & police stations and boycotts (Rickford, 2016; Leopold & Bell, 2017) - they've also been able to credit them for playing a role in their demise. On one hand, Smith (1999) reported that viewing media coverage on environmental movement organisation 'Friends of the Earth' was attributed to the 25% increase in membership. Similarly, Vliegenthart et al (2006) also reported an increase in membership to a Dutch environmental organisation as a result of visibility in local newspaper. On the other hand, Gitlin (1980) discusses the New Left movement of the 1960s and describes how the medias framing of the movement (focusing

on internal dramas, discrediting their leaders, etc.) played a role in the movements demise and loss of public faith. This highlights the fact that the intentions of social movements and mass media do not always coincide. While social movements want to share their message and values via mass media - mass media agents are primarily concerned with what is newsworthy which isn't always the cause.

More often than not, organisers felt that news coverage of their actions didn't always portray their aims and intents as they'd have liked them to (Smith, et al., 2001; McLeod, 2007; Weiner, 2010). This is more noticeable of issues in relation to race (predominantly the black & Latinx community) with such reports being more likely to present damaging perceptions and incorrect information (van Dijk, 2015). Often times as a form of demonization when covering protests, news coverage would focus on images and videos showing destruction and violence without giving much airtime to the reasons behind the protests to begin with (McLeod, 1995, 2007). This issue of media representation will be important in this study as it will be reflected in how participants have come to their conclusion, whether the media sources that influenced their opinion built their empathy and support towards the movement or whether it heightened their disregard for it.

There have been incidences where mass media has worked in support of movements such as the 15-M who have been leading the anti-austerity movement in Spain since 2011 (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). Over the years they have received mostly favourable press in both local and national outlets challenging the observation in previous literature in that gaining positive news coverage for movements that operate outside the barriers of institutions is rare (Gitlin, 1980). Correspondingly, Pamment (2016) discusses transmedia storytelling within diplomatic campaigns (such as human rights, climate change and anti-terrorism) and the importance of having multiple entry points (mass media being one of them) to help shape agendas, gain support and circulate the right information for the movement. What both Pamment & Bennett and Segerberg fail to mention is the fact that movements such as 15-M and those pertaining to climate change and anti-terrorism have an effect on all people – we are all (or the majority of us are) at risk of falling victim to austerity or the effects of climate change. Black Lives Matter or the DREAMer's on the other hand aren't on the same scale as it's still an "us and them" dynamic, it still predominately only impacts a particular group of people whereas climate change affects us all. It's easier for social movements such as Occupy or climate change to garner support because ultimately it impacts the majority of us

collectively (some more than others, but we all still feel the effects of it to some degree), austerity or climate change has a disregard for skin colour whereas movements such as BLM are far more specific in nature and don't appeal to everyone (nor can everyone relate). To that end, the narratives perpetuated by some mass media outlets do not always simply reflect social reality and instead operate as "agents of racialization" (Drew, 2011, p. 355) and work to define it within their discriminatory systems (Reskin, 2012).

In their 2017 textual analysis of news coverage relating to Black Lives Matter, Leopald and Bell discovered the presence of blame attribution across the media platforms they focused on. They characterized blame attribution as placing blame on the protest or protesters of acts of violence in the absence of evidence to confirm the protesters had anything to do with the act. Their suggestion that this occurrence may be unique to Black protesters and used to fuel the criminalization of Black people in America is something I'd agree with. What their findings don't expand on, is the effect of the framing of BLM to diverse audiences (considering that Black and White people have different views when it comes to police misconduct (Wiezer and Tuch, 2004)). They open the gateway for consideration over how differences in race, age, ethnicity, sex, (and geography I might add considering the outlets they surveyed were only US based) showcase variations in attitudes towards BLM. Though the basis of my research isn't to determine race relations it is to establish how preconceived stereotypes and reporting across various types of (social) media platforms is having an impact on how people support BLM.

Representation Beyond the US

Whilst the above is based on the experience of ethnic minorities in America, much of the same can be said about ethnic minorities in Europe and the UK, for studies have shown that media coverage of ethnic minorities is rarely accompanied by range in themes, but also that its content is often at the detriment to the community at hand (Saeed, 2007). One of the reasons for this is down to representation. In his book 'Covering Islam', Said (1981) highlights that what we lack in the coverage of Islam is people of an Islamic background representing themselves in and to the West. Instead, the West have on staff a collection of reporters, scholars and commentators which ultimately limits the information that is shared about Islam.

There are similar accounts in Germany where it was found that the media industry rarely gave an account of what asylum seekers were escaping from or drew a bigger picture of the trials and tribulations they were running from, "Newspapers almost never gave a voice to asylum seekers or their representatives" (Trebbe and Köhler, 2002: 136). Instead, the narrative around the increase of asylum seekers arriving in the country was clouded by language that suggested danger to the social and economic make up of Germany. Interestingly though, Ruhrmann et al. (1996) suggest that the more contact German nationals had with foreigners, the less racist their views were. This becomes important in racial based social movements such as BLM when looking at how people from other backgrounds become allies and suggests that proximity to the cause or culture plays a role in giving better context and getting people to empathise with the cause. Having said that, such discussions (such as BLM) at times, can appear to incite guilt and discomfort which can lead to participants in the conversation denying or challenging the topic (Trebbe and Köhler, 2002).

Comparatively, a slightly different story is told in the Netherland's, where though the reporting continues the negative themes associated with ethnic minorities, Dutch TV programs have made efforts to depict ethnic minorities as people who add value to the country (Van der Valk, 2002). Leurdijk's (1997a, 1997b, 1999) study of Dutch television programs (namely TV shows, reality TV and documentaries) found that these types of broadcasts preferred to ensure that ethnic minorities were the ones that were telling their stories as opposed to expert journalists and commentators as mentioned above, "Consequently, ethnic minorities were the objects rather than subjects of reporting" (Van der Valk, 2002: 294).

Representation Matters: The Internet and the Social Media Effect

In his book 'The Innovators: How a Group of Hackers, Geniuses and Geeks Created the Digital Revolution' Walter Isaacson (2014) states that "Just as combining the steam engine with ingenious machinery drove the Industrial Revolution, the combination of the computer and distributed networks led to a digital revolution that allowed anyone to create, disseminate, and access any information anywhere." The internet in its creation, was seen to symbolize a new turn in connectivity, the opportunity to be taught, to learn, to produce and to be a part of something seemingly bigger than ourselves. Over the years though, that same desire to connect, to be taught, to learn, to produce and to build a network has increasingly been utilised by those who insight hatred of varying degrees.

The manifestation of racial hate speech in a networked era can be seen as far back as 1983 when the first computer bulletin board system was created by neo-Nazi publisher George Dietz. Far from sophisticated, and with access limited to those who had access to dial up telephone modems and a computer, the site was mainly text based and allowed for discussions in the form of comments (Levin, 2002). 12 years later and Stormfront is created by Don Black and is now known to be one of the oldest and largest neo-Nazi sites (Hern, 2017).

A blend of accessibility and the space for anonymity has seen the internet and social media platforms be used to racially intimidate and harass (Christopherson, 2007). Alongside this goes the leaderless resistance tactic which allowed many alt-right groups to promote more efficiently through the internet (Leven, 2002).

> The Internet is an important piece of the leaderless resistance strategy. It allows lone wolves to keep abreast of events, changes in ideology and discussions of tactics—all of which may influence his own choice of target. Far more than hard copy publications, the Internet allows the lonewolf to remain a part of a larger movement even though he attends no meetings, puts his name on no lists, and generally tries to remain invisible. A good example of this is Matthew Williams, the self-confessed murderer of a gay couple in California, who used the Internet to privately explore a variety of extremist ideologies before picking up the gun. (Potok, cited in Levan, 2002)

The invisibility the internet offers makes it difficult for behaviors to be corrected and makes online hate crimes somewhat harder to police, left unchecked, these behaviors have the potential to extend beyond the screen and into "more physically threatening offline incidents" (Feldman et al., 2013, p.11).

Though we know that social media offers a greater ability to globally mobilize, have open discussions and shape the narrative, its decentralized nature leaves social media-based movements susceptible to misinterpretation, misrepresentation, co-option and at times the convolution of their message (Samuels, 2011). The idea that the movements' message and the way this is communicated outwardly is seen to be complicated. This is in part due to the decentralized structure of social media and therefore gives way to various people to speak on the behalf of the movement or for chapters to prioritise a particular narrative/policy over the others.

When looking at the impact of the internet and how we form opinions but also how the offline is reflected in online activity we must question whether the online landscape is really as forward thinking and progressive as once assumed, or whether it instead reinforces stereotypical cultural narratives (Nakamura, 2002). In her exploration of identity tourism and racial passing in text based virtual reality spaces (in this sense, particularly tied to Asian men and women), Nakamura (2007) found that players who were seen to textual identify themselves as:

> "Asian, African American, Latino, or other members of oppressed and marginalised minorities, are often seen as engaging in a form of hostile performance, since they introduce what many consider a real life 'divisive issue' into the phantasmatic world of cybernetic textual interaction".[297]

She continues to discuss throughout her study how the very nature of these text based virtual reality spaces perpetuate the suppression of racial identity which ultimately discourages Asian men and women from taking part and ultimately, "driving race underground" [303]. Whilst I agree this is true, I'd argue that this is no longer reflected in social media communities such as Twitter, particularly in the last 10 years. If anything, I'd argue that ethnic minorities are more motivated to tell their stories through these platforms to ensure they are represented well. This act alone was key to the rise of BLM.

It is for this reason that many participants take to social media to be able to zealously engage and ultimately shape the discussion (Bjornstrom et al., 2010; Wanda, 2014), giving them the opportunity to challenge a lot of the opposing ideologies. This is also seen in the midst of backlash from #AllLivesMatter campaigners online which saw BLM supporters take control of the discourse by using the ALM hashtag in conjunction with the BLM hashtag to organise protests as opposed to continuing to acknowledge the racist nature of ALM (Carney, 2016).

Online vs Offline Communities

The debate around the question of the legitimization of online communities versus the credibility of offline communities is longstanding. Those in favour of online communities such as Rheingold (1993) and Wellman and Gulia (1999) consider them extensions of offline communities or, in some cases, as a new classification of community altogether. This is in contrast with scholars such as McClellan (1993) and Lockard (1996) who approach online communities with skepticism, questioning just how much of an impact they have on

individuals and society. Siding with the group in favour of, online communities (and the internet in general), cannot be seen as an isolated social phenomenon. In any respect, online communities should be seen as an extension of our offline lives – not as a separate reality. Furthermore, the judgement of the legitimacy of online communities is in vain as it causes us to disregard the seriousness with which individuals participate in online communities to begin with. I question whether this is something scholars can accurately hypothesize given its individual nuances – discussion will always be ongoing, but I doubt a conclusion will ever be drawn with conclusive evidence.

Kaplan (2014) draws on the idea that the usage of hashtags offline in formats that cannot be clicked or tracked (such as written on posters at protests and rallies) further highlights just how much online and offline are connected in that ultimately online and offline are one in the same. Deen Freelon says it best in that "The information that comes out over social media fuels the protest itself and the content of what happens flows back into the online realm" (cited in Kaplan, 2014). In many ways, the offline world used to drive traffic to online destinations in search of information and now the online conversations dictate the offline actions. Again, relating back to #MarchForOurLives we see a clear correlation between the online and offline feeding into each other.

Though Levy (1999) is talking mainly about collective intelligence I think it is relevant to the discussion of collective identity in social movements (amongst other things) by suggesting that homogeneousness is not a prerequisite for strong collective identity. If you also add the complexity of transnational/global social movements where the participants engagement with said social movements is motivated by both direct and indirect reasoning. While a movement like Black Lives Matter is directly related to policy and prejudice unique (only in law enforcement, not in race issues) to the American system and originated in a local sphere, it is symbolism and core aims extrapolate to a transnational and global sphere inviting a plethora of identities (Della Porta, 2005). In this sense, the participants motive to engage with the social movement comes from a place of wanting to amplify their critical ideas and opinions on a collective level as opposed to simple homogenous rationality (Milani and Laniado, 2007). We have to take into consideration that participants are made up of a range of social constructs such as religion, gender, values geography and ethnicity that unfold in a broad span of occurrences which enables them to engage at different levels with different

reasoning. It does not mean that one is the better than the other, but more so that it is too complex for us to pit them against one another.

I mention this as I think it is important to understand how individual values and norms which play out within our lifestyle choices and every day decisions not only add to the recognition of collective identity but also add to the participation and thus development of social movements which is vital to this research. The idea that though we are one in shared goals and values as a community and within collective identity that path towards collective identity is an individual one that comes with its own reasons why and their own restrictions with just how engaged we want to be. These nuances are key to forming better understanding of not only participation in social movements but civic life in general. Particularly as we continuously move into new advancements that allow for new levels and variations of engagement, new tools to tackle concerns but equally new reasons to be more critical of tools we use for good to engage and inform. The thought that technology creates novel human behavior is unfounded. Instead, it creates another arena for these behaviors to manifest. As Tufekci (2017) says "Think of it as the same players, but on a different board game." (131). It is offline or online activism participants are still in pursuit of the same things – a means to draw attention to their cause, to expand their networks and connect with likeminded people, to pursue an authoritative voice with a hope of creating change.

From the Old to the New Social Movements

As a concept, social movements have long been established and date back centuries with each century presenting new causes, new tactics and new forms of engagement. The on-going debate regarding whether "new" post Marxism social movements really offer anything unique in comparison to the old comes with its pros and its cons. Researchers such as Tarrow (1989) who stand on the fence of the legitimacy of the new social movement do so with the idea that in part, new social movements have grown out of preexisting movements and therefore don't offer anything new. Brand (1990) supports this by describing NSMs as the latest manifestation of a recurring pattern in response to cultural crises.

Buechler (1995) raises a question around political and cultural movements and whether new forms of cultural social movements are intrinsically apolitical in the sense that there is less regard for the system and more emphasis on the individual lifestyle choices. I'd argue that at this point both cultural and political movements are intertwined. Especially now more than

ever if we consider how commodified cultural movements are - think about social media platforms and how they make their money, how they shape agendas and to some extent curate our newsfeeds (algorithms etc.).

Comparatively, Pichardo (1997) suggests that NSMs place greater priority over lifestyle and quality of life concerns over economic redistribution (much like working class movements). They advocate for cooperative styles of social organisation whilst also challenging the make-up of representative democracies. This is achieved primarily by engaging in disruptive tactics and using their (social) networks to increase public opinion. Pichardo goes on to discuss how NSMs are not categorized by their structural (geographical) location, instead, their focus tends to be on common values pertaining to social issues.

From a European perspective the idea of a new social movement has been viewed "less as organizations of common interest and more as new forms of collective identity engaged in discursive struggles that not only transform people's self-understandings but also contest the legitimacy of received cultural codes and points of view" (Carroll and Hackett, 2006, 87).

One of the key elements of social movements (and movements in general) is the idea of community but over time, the construction of community has been altered and taken on new compositions. Researchers such as Jones (1995; 1997) have mainly focused on group cultures deriving from communication with online participants therefore treating the online communities in isolation from daily "real life" experiences of individual participants. Researchers of virtual communities such as Putnam (2000) have been known to bemoan the age-old notion of community and question whether technology is the cause of the problem or an accessory to the solution. One thought that I consider to be important to this thesis is best explained by Amin and Thrift (2003:47) in that it's "the community of taking place, not the community of place," furthering the idea that the location is irrelevant, what matters is the action of taking part (in whatever form this may be). This is further supported by Hooks (1991) who refers to community as no longer being about or stationed in one place but in various places.

Participatory Culture

Participatory culture presents itself as a relevant aspect of my overall research in that by its very nature, it enables civic engagement, creates a network to share one's artistic creations

while also creating an environment where people feel like their contributions hold weight (Jenkins et al., 2007). With the role of producer and audience converging (Bruns. 2008) and therefore aligning in creating and sharing culture the rise of the new participatory culture can in some ways be credited to the advancement of digital tools that allow/enable user-generated content (Jenkins, 2006; Benkler 2007). Similarly, the intersection between production and consumption of content, and the flows of cultural information have been blurred and challenge the ideas of authorship, copyright, identity and cultural governance to name a few (Valtysson, 2010). Nevertheless, with the development of technology and social media platforms individuals have become digitally empowered and are now the vanguards of community organisation (Ramasubramanian, 2008) using these platforms to promote, debate and inform on a range of social and (pop) cultural issues.

Though this may be true, we cannot neglect the fact that the advancement of technology and the autonomy it provides is not without its faults. Consider issues regarding the culture of surveillance from media platforms turning users into mere data sets and viewing them as passive beings as opposed to active agents of culture (Andrejevic, 2007), or issues around scraping net neutrality and how internet service providers being in control of what content, media platforms and applications their users have access to ultimately bars access to a free and open internet (Higgins and Regan, 2016).

Equally important is the matter of algorithmic manipulation that sees platforms such as Facebook attempt to personalise their users' online experience by using their past consumption behavior to suggest similar content making variations of opinions harder to find/have access to subsequently creating a filter bubble (Pariser, 2011). Tufekci (2017) looks at how Black Lives Matter came up against Facebook's algorithmic barriers. She describes how during the early days of the Ferguson protest while her Twitter newsfeed (which was chronologically organised) was filled with discussions that involved people from all over the world – her Facebook newsfeed on the other hand painted a completely different picture and discussions around Ferguson were nowhere to be seen, with media heavy posts around the ALS challenge[1] seemingly taking precedents. She found that their algorithm favored ALS challenge posts that were media heavy (pictures & videos), had comments and mentioned other people. Whereas Ferguson sat on the other side of the fence in a noticeable silence

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[1] The ALS challenge was a trend that saw people throw buckets of ice and cold water over their heads to bring awareness to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.

given it's hard to comment on topic regardless of whether they were interested or not. Though a slight diversion, I find this particularly interesting given the discussion about participation gaps which I will expand on below – was the silence a symbol of lacking the skills to be able to comment on such issues effectively and with confidence? This analysis causes us to question whether had other platforms such as Twitter not been available for this discussion, and ultimately which gave people the ability to dominate the discourse and therefore give it local, national and even global prominence whether Ferguson would have propelled into the national agenda as it did (Tufekci, 2015).

I mention these as a means of highlighting that whilst the web and its supporting technologies have done a lot to lower the barriers, and therefore increase engagement, we can't neglect the fact that these platforms have agendas of their own that serve different (commercial) purposes. This applies directly to the aspect of my research that wishes to understand the intake of information individuals engage with when wanting to support social movements – a process that is heavily instigated by (for profit) digital media platforms as it begs the question of what entry points individuals use to key information, and what rationale they use to determine its validity particularly in the time of fake news and campaigns of misinformation. This also speaks to the level of engagement that determines how far individuals get in their search for information when forming opinions – if their news feed is full of one point of view, do they put in effort to find alternatives?

In the same instance that we talk about some of the technological barriers to participation (and ideas that inform our participation), we must also look at the complexities and the multiple layers to the participation gap (Jenkins et al., 2016). A lot of the scholarly research throughout the 90s placed great significance on access to technology as a reason for the digital divide (Katz and Aspden, 1997; Caterinicchia, 1999; Rogers and Oder, 1999), without necessarily giving thought to the wider social-cultural restraints. Jenkins et al. (2007) places emphasis on the access to opportunities, skills, experiences and knowledge for a more inclusive participatory culture. Whilst access is important, individuals also need to have the skills to know how to navigate and dissect the information available to them, they need to have mentors that guide them through developing their ideas and opinions, whilst also helping them build their confidence and sense of agency to then be able to share those ideas and opinions with others.

Political Participation and Political Efficacy

Research such as Muñoz (1989) and Kohstall (2015) show that often times it is those who are on many levels marginalised and vulnerable who are at the center of powerful political movements from the Civil Rights Movement to the Arab springs. Accordingly, research has found it common place that young ethnic/racial minorities gain their entry points to political activism using non-traditional methods be it youth led social movement groups or artistic self-expression such as poetry or music (Watts & Flanagan, 2007; Ginwright, 2010). The same can be said about engagement in politics from the younger generation in general. The assumption has been that they are not interested in institutional politics, however, what's happening is that they are finding alternative ways of engaging that aren't attributed to the more traditional routes (electoral politics, government etc.). Instead, their involvement is geared towards more creative and informal practices that are noninstitutionalized and at times, nonhierarchical – particularly in the form of internet networks (Kahne et al., 2012; Ito et al., 2009; Bennett, 2008). Rosanvallon (2008) puts the shift to new political practices down to disengagement with conventional forms of politics and distrust in government and other institutions.

In many ways, it can be thought that the fact that more marginalised groups are getting involved with politics and political activism comes down to there being better representation (using Obama's presidency as a reference point). A clear example of marginalised groups being more politically involved can be seen through their turn out for the 2008 Presidential elections. Whilst there was an increase of 4.7% of Black voters at 64.7%, an increase of 2.7% of Hispanic voters at 49.9% and an increase of 3.5% of Asian voters at 47.6% we saw a 1.1% decrease by White voters down to 66.1% (File and Crissey, 2012). The symbol of hope and inspiration Obama's presidency gave plays a big part in this increase in Black voters (Reyes 2008; Smith, 2008) but arguably minority voters in general. Strong effects of having role models (and representation in general) are seen particularly when said role model is the same race or gender (Marx and Goff, 2005; Lockwood, 2006) as the individual mainly as a result of them feeling like they too, can overcome the negative stereotypes associated with their group (Marx and Goff, 2005).

Whilst the inclusion social media brings should be seen as a positive, Fraser (1992) classed social media as public sphere unstable suggesting that collective campaigning online doesn't have the power to make any real change, however, I'd argue that collective organising online

does apply pressure on decision makers via organising protests and raising awareness (Carney, 2014) thus having a lasting effect. Just take the example of the #MarchForOurLives protest on March 24th 2018 in response to the mass shooting in Parkland, Florida where 17 high schoolers were murdered. The march alone saw an estimated 800,000 people ascend onto Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington DC (Reilly, 2018) but the hashtag on Twitter alone was exposed to 56.96m people on the day (Ritetag, 2018). These numbers make it difficult to downplay social media's role in message amplification and raising awareness, but also makes it difficult to deny the power and influence young generations have over their ability to apply pressure to powerful figures. This march was spearheaded by them – a group of 17-year old's (Shabad et al., 2018) (with the help of more seasoned organisational players) who will be able to vote in the next election and exercise their "traditional" political muscles.

The Different Levels to Political Participation and the Motivations Behind Them

While reading the white paper by Cohen et al. (2012) on participatory politics as it pertains to new media and youth engagement, I felt like greater emphasis was placed on the online practices as opposed to the offline. It made me question whether offline participatory practices were valid in the current conversation being that they in part reflect older models of participation. That's not to say the research didn't discuss offline participatory politics or didn't highlight it as a model that is (still) thriving but that there was less consideration for how the two are interlinked in understanding the motivation for engaging with both levels.

With that said, there's an ongoing discussion regarding how we determine levels of engagement online with overall social movement impact. On one hand, there are arguments that simply being active online whether signing a petition or sharing a tweet is a form of slacktivism ideal for a "lazy generation" (Morozov, 2009) and that this form of activism doesn't create any real change and takes the attention of active political participants away from the more traditional and effective routes (Putnam, 2000).

On the other hand, Dalton (2006) suggests that we should view this as a diversification of how individuals get involved with political matters. In any case, the participation gap as a whole (as explained above) has several layers to it and so to dismiss the influence so called slacktivism has in the way it adds to the collective conversation can be seen as a flippant remark. Furthermore, consideration should be given to the fact that slacktivism can be

viewed as an influential way to encourage participation in other well-established modes of participation (Cantijoch, et al., 2016).

Part of participating in any area of civic life is the ability to form ideas and opinions on various topics, my research is concerned with the how and the why people form particular ideas and thus participate in a particular area or don't and what the relationship between these ideas and participation is. Important to this topic is the ladder of citizen participation which was introduced by Arnstein (1969) which is an eight-step ladder of different levels of participation. The ladder essentially looks at the level of power citizens have in decision making which ultimately has an impact on the process and outcome. Though she created this in relation to federal social programs it can be applied to various parts of civic life. The ladder is made up of three levels of power – the lowest being non-participation (manipulation and therapy), the next up is tokenism (informing, consultation and placation) and the highest level being civic control (partnership, delegated power and citizen control).

This can be compared to Shirky (2009) in which he uses the analogy of a ladder to discuss the dynamics of group organisation (without formal organisation) as in each rung on the ladder increases the level of participation going from sharing to cooperating to collective action. A distinction between the 3 levels is that sharing can be viewed as a solo activity that doesn't require much input from others, whereas one of the key components of cooperating is to engage in conversation with those who identify with the same values, to then collectively taking action offline (and therefore responsibility to some extent) on the overall message of the movement.

My issue with Arnstein's ladder is that it implies that those at the top of the ladder hold all the power. If relating it to Shirky's ladder we're saying that those who only share articles, petitions and tweets about any given subject online are powerless. It makes me question who gets to say what levels of participation are more important or offer more empowerment than the other. It also makes me question whether those on the bottom levels of both ladders are exercising agency as to some extent it assumes that engagement with these levels are done without much thought and consideration and to some degree, as bragging rights as she notes "After signing their names, the proud grassrooters dutifully spread the word that they have "participated" in bringing a new and wonderful center to the neighborhood" [218].

The one-dimensionality of Arnstein's definition of citizen engagement places much emphasis on the citizens' ability to participate in formal decision-making. Such definitions disregard the nuances in motivations and methods to participate and are consistent with comments made earlier in the discussion relating to the idea that there are many different ways to participate outside of core "high level" politics (voting, policy change, etc.) and many reasons why people do so. This linear outlook fails to account for the evolutionary nature of participation across the board, nor does it account for the agency participants have in deciding what they will participate in, when they will do so and which methods they will utilise in doing so.

It's for this reason that Shirky's ladder feels more applicable to my research as there is less emphasis on the power dynamic (i.e. those involved in collective action being more powerful (and almost more importantly, more empowered) than those who are only on the sharing rung. It also gives a better sense of a journey between rungs that are open to be explored and questioned. I say this particularly because though both discussions of ladders don't give much insight into how someone would move up the ladder and what those motivations would be - I feel like Shirky's ladder (placed in current times) has more of a cumulative relationship between each level being that each subsequent rung piggybacks off the one prior.

The above literature review has drawn attention to some of the significant theories around not only BLM, but social movements in general. It found that whilst there has been some extensive research in BLM since its inception, understanding how location plays a part in the movements' success outside of the US is an area of research that has not yet been looked at.

It looked at how representation both in being able to see ourselves in key figures but also media representation plays a part in how people participate in and respond to politics/political and social movements. Individual Identity and how we frame our identity seemed to be at the root of such decisions and the main influencer when participating in civic life. My intention is to focus on people outside of the US and to highlight the different reasons for participation in a social movement that is distant in location and how people frame their perception of the movement.

Methodology

In my literature review I discussed the body of research surrounding various elements of Black Lives Matter. With the social movement very much in its infancy, research has mostly looked at it with a focus on tactics and overall impact with their large social media presence. This leaves much room to explore areas such as determinants of participation based on a range of intersectional strands, predictions of their effectiveness long term, looking at the narrative, whose story matters and who gets to tell it as well as considering the consistency and fluctuations in participation.

With that in mind, the three focus areas of my research are as follows:

1. To consider if where the movement is happening both in the geographical sense (where an incident has been the catalyst for the movement e.g. the death of Mike Brown) and the sites, platforms and channels through (and on) which BLM's message is disseminated and debated on has an effect on how and why people support the movement.
2. To look at the reasons behind participation and how individuals move through different levels of participation e.g. if they only participated online, what would encourage them to participate offline.
3. To examine the relationship between how online and offline communities interact and how participants place importance on these.

This chapter will highlight my methodology for this research project and the rationale behind my usage of particular methods. The decision to focus on collecting qualitative data was guided by the overall aims of my research project as these are not only exploratory in nature but are also grounded in being able to develop general understanding of a topic that is yet to be properly investigated. There are a range of things that can make it difficult to quantify qualitative data such as the method(s) used, the type of data that is being collected and where the data is being collected from, however, it allows for beneficial insight into opinions and idiosyncrasies that are not always accessible via quantitative methods. The exploratory nature of qualitative research puts acquiring new information at the heart of its purpose (Naderer and Balzer, 2007). In this instance, based on the aims of my research I believe the

qualitative methods I have chosen will aid in me being able to explore the topic in greater detail. By allowing respondents the space to in some sense, delve into their reasoning themselves and tell it their way, I believe it opens up the opportunity for new perspectives and opinions to be shared and further examined.

Research Model

The Phenomenological Approach

As a whole, qualitative research methods are dominant in social science fields such as psychology, philosophy or sociology. For the purpose of this research, I adopted a phenomenological approach being that phenomenology addresses the very essence of a phenomenon by exploring the lived experience of those closest to the phenomenon in question (Sayre, 2001; Patton, 2002). As per Patton (2002: 132) phenomenology helps you to answer the following question: "What is the meaning, structure and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?" In doing this, the main objective becomes exploring the intrinsic depth of lived experiences. Patton (2002) describes phenomenology as focusing on two different angles – the first being more descriptive in that it takes a more subjective perspective regarding the way people experience the world. The second is more analytical in that it homes in on what that experience means to them. The aim is to study the characterization of shared experiences within a particular group. This is vital to this research project as not only does it create a means to allow the respondents the opportunity to talk about their experience with Black Lives Matter, what led them to participate in the movement and the ways they have engaged with the movement, but it also allows for us to be given a glimpse into the reasons why – why did that particular incident make you share that post? Why did that particular thing make you want to go to a community event to discuss what can be done to tackle police brutality? We have got the data to say how people are participating and where they are participating but we have not got the data that begins to look at the rationale behind that participation.

It is important to note my position in this study, not just as researcher, but as someone who would be seen to be a beneficiary of the movement as a black woman. It is not lost on me that I fit the criteria of someone I had hoped would partake in my research as someone who has played their part both in the online conversation and the offline action of the BLM movement by attending protests, having discussions online, sharing information, etc. Whilst

Reason and Bradbury (2001) take a participatory worldview and argue that being in and amongst your research subject leads to better research findings as you approach it with less preconceptions, Cohen et al. (2007) suggest factors that may lead to bias which impacts the integrity of the findings. These factors include the tendency for researchers to approach questions from a suggestive point of view so that the answers may fit with their preconceptions or misconceptions on both parts of what is being asked and how it is being responded to. To combat this, I kept the usage of leading questions to a minimum where the respondent may be led down a particular path. Instead, questions were clear and offered explanation without enforcing a particular type of answer for example, instead of asking "Do you think Black Lives Matter protests have been effective?" I asked instead "Where do you think Black Lives Matter are most effective?" (Adam and Cox, 2008).

The difficulty when using qualitative research methods is that unlike quantitative methods, the absence of transparency in the analytical procedure, and the limitation in scientific rigor makes it hard for findings to be justified given that for the most part, they are based on the opinions of individuals and at times, dictated by the bias of the researcher (Sandelowski, 1993 and Rolfe, 2006). When testing the validity of qualitative data, the researcher sees their work as valid if the respondents are seen to have responses that are consistent with each other and where responses show repeatability. The ability to draw a conclusion that shows consensus in the merit of said reality is the aim here (Sandelowski, 1993). The key thing to remember with research methods that are centered around opinions of individuals is that people change, circumstances change, environments change and therefore, so does their worldview.

The process of working to ensure reliability and validity needs to be embedded in the data collection process by means of appropriate sampling, considering how the method complements the aim(s) (and being flexible enough to change this if necessary), not collecting and analysing data in isolation but instead doing them concurrently, and being able to consider the bigger picture (Morse et al., 2002). With that in mind, my approach to ensuring that my chosen method not allowed me to explore the full extent of my aims but allowed me to gain access to a large number of people who fit the set criteria proved vital to building credibility for the findings. Furthermore, taking into consideration how the data collected either corroborates previous studies or developed something new was also important, not

only to build the foundation for this area of study, but to also consider how it may encourage other researchers to take it a step further.

Methodological Individualism

In my literature review I briefly discuss the importance of the individual within collective action. Similarly, in my methodology I place great emphasis on the individual and how their decisions have an impact on collective groups. Hodgson (2007) explores the range of ambiguity of 'methodological individualism' by looking at the context of how previous researchers have used the term. The most accepting definition of methodological individualism is that which places significance of the individual and their behavior.

Variations include Hayek (1967: 70-71) who says

> The overall order of actions in a group is in two respects more than the totality of regularities observable in the actions of the individuals and cannot be wholly reduced to them. It is so not only in the trivial sense in which the whole is more than the mere sum of its parts but presupposes also that these elements are related to each other in a particular manner. It is more also because the existence of those relations which are essential for the existence of the whole cannot be accounted for wholly by the interaction of the parts but only by their interaction with an outside world both of the individual parts and the whole.

In this case, Hayek is suggesting that society is not made up of solely individuals but is reliant on the interactions between them as well as other aspects of their socio-economic make-up and the influence this has on them.

On the other hand, Popper (1945) takes a somewhat more holistic viewpoint saying that "the important doctrine that all social phenomena, and especially the functioning of all social institutions, should always be understood as resulting from the decisions, actions, attitudes, etc., of human individuals, and that we should never be satisfied by an explanation in terms of so-called 'collectives' (states, nations, races, etc.). [91]". While there have been many variations of the usage of methodological individualism, for the sake of my research I have found that Popper (1945) works directly with what I am wanting to achieve. It is not enough to look at the collective as a standalone institution, especially when it comes to studying social movements. In order for us to understand the collective we must look at the individual first, for in many respects, they are what make social movements worth studying – their

nuances, range of intentions, motivations and subsequent actions are part of the reasons social movements fail or succeed. By studying the individuals, we are able to see clear patterns in behavior as well as potential outlier attributes which are just as useful and tell a more in-depth story.

Data Collection

Online Survey

The decision to host my survey online was driven by reasons such as the ability to reach people that I wouldn't have ordinarily been able to reach (Wright, 2005), the idea that less administrative time is required and that I could collect data whilst working on other things (Llieva et al., 2002), being able to collect both quantified answers and narrative based answers (Yun & Trumbo, 2000), and most importantly, the opportunity it allowed for dialogue with those willing to engage (Barrett and Lenton, 2010).

Whilst I shared the survey on my personal social media accounts, Reddit was my main chosen platform for online recruitment and where the majority of my responses came from. More than 50% of my responses came from the r/AskEurope subreddit, the nature of this particular community is to discuss all things related to Europe, be it political discussions, comments on articles and general discussions around the different experiences. Whilst the opinions varied, the community were open to debating the topic and offered their arguments in constructive and respectful ways.

Figure 1 shows the full list of SubReddits I engaged with during the data collection period. They were chosen based on their level of activity both in terms of how often people posted and the level of engagement on posts. I felt it necessary to target subreddits that had a good level of engagement, which offered reassurance that it would get in front of a lot of different people. Outside of their level of engagement, subreddits were also chosen based on their purpose and who they were targeting, again, in order to ensure I had access to range of different people, from different backgrounds and different opinions. Whilst posting in such a forum definitely increases the possibility of reaching more people, I was aware that the research topic may encounter problematic responses e.g. answers not being taken seriously, potential abuse, unconstructive commentary etc. This could have added difficulty to the analysing phase of my research project in terms of being able to gather constructive opinions

and categorise them. Nevertheless, Reddit offered a great opportunity to reach a global
community who were willing to engage, at no cost, in their own time (Jamnik and Lane,
2017).

Name of Subreddits	Description	No. of Subscribers
r/SampleSize	A place for both surveys and polls to be posted.	68.1K
r/WorldPolitics	Reddit's free speech political subreddit.	492k
r/UKPolitics	Political news and debate concerning the United Kingdom.	137k
r/AskEurope	Ask Europe!	30.3k

Figure.1 Subreddits the survey was distributed to

Understanding that while I may be able to gather a large data set on a particular subject,
surveys make it difficult to not only understand more complex issues but also retrieve in-
depth answers being that participants may not want to write that much in their worded
responses (Bell, 1996). I found this was the opposite with my survey, a lot of respondents
took the time out to write lengthy responses when written answers were required. What this
meant was that whilst I could say that 25.77% of my respondents believe that BLM are least
effective when it comes to political campaigning, I could also start to paint a picture as to why
they felt this based off of their written responses when explaining.

An important thing to mention when infiltrating online communities for the first time, is
taking the time to engage with the moderators or gatekeepers of said communities (Murray
& Sixsmith, 1998; Smith & Leigh, 1997). Without the support and approval of moderators,
posts can be deemed as spam and therefore bypassed and neglected (Im et al., 2007; Koo
and Skinner, 2005; Mendelson, 2007). To get around this, and to ensure I was approaching
these community with respect, I sought the approval of mods prior to posting in any of the
subreddits I posted in. For the majority, consent for me to post was given but wasn't
communicated, the only time it was communicated was when I posted in the r/AskEurope
Subreddit (see Figure 2 for approval) – gaining their support was vital in the success of this
discussion (Mendelson, 2007). An extension of the trust built with the moderator meant that
the users also trusted that I respected their opinion and space within this setting and were

therefore willing to not only do the survey, but have an open discussion within the forum which garnered 186 comments as seen in Figure 3.
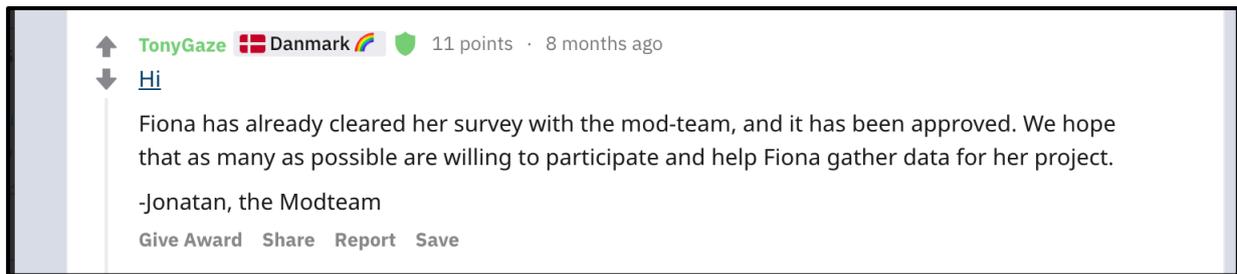
Figure 2 Approval from r/AskEurope Moderator
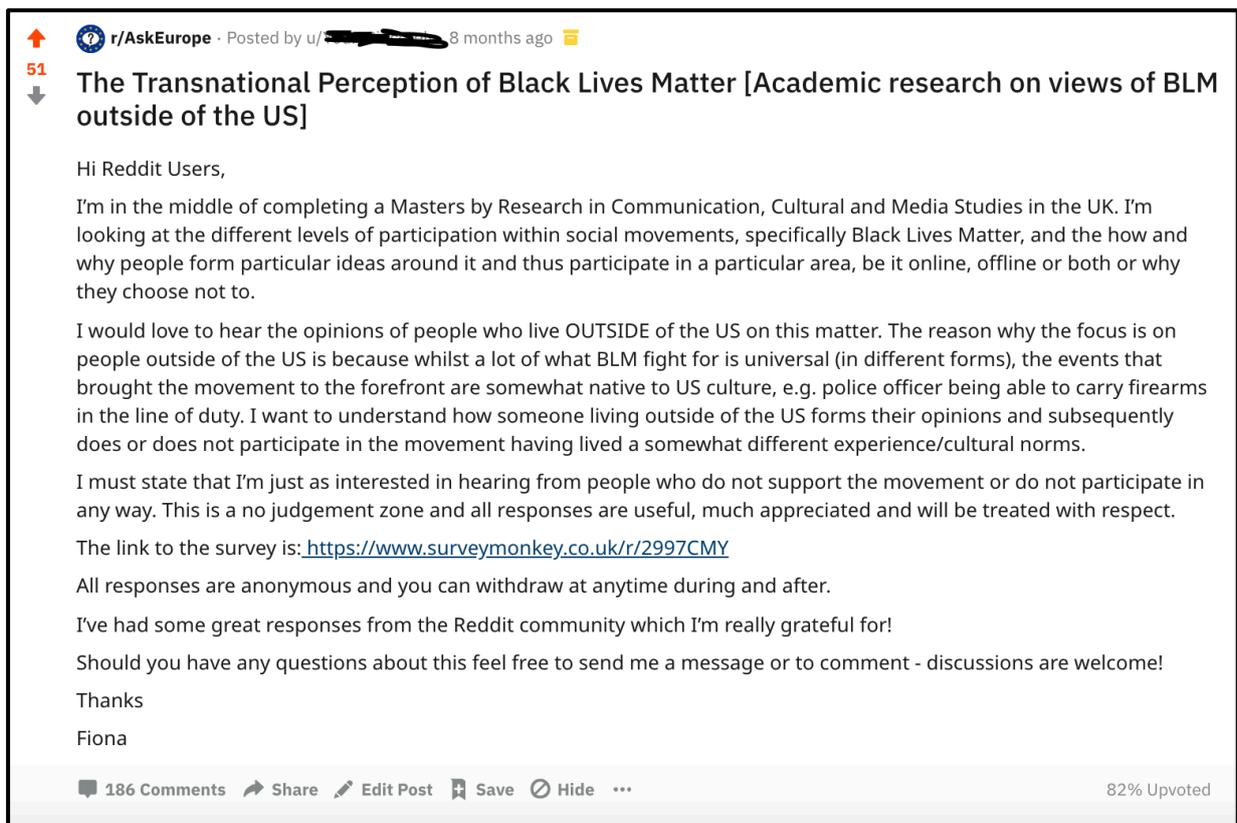
Figure 3 Approved post and number of comments it received

Issues with Survey Questions

In going down this route I encountered issues that made me reconsider my line of questioning and therefore, continually reworded and repurposed questions in order to convey the true essence of what I was trying to find out. One of those issues was the splitting of online and offline participation and exploring them separately. It was initially suggested by my supervisor that the way in which the question was worded suggested that my aims of the question were based around people participating on a high or low level and to some extent the frequency at which they do so. A question that flagged this initially was "How do you

participate in Black Lives Matter?". The options were: only online (using #blacklivesmatter on social media, signing petitions, creating online content, having online discussion in my day to day life), only offline (Attending community events/meetings, going to protests/demonstrations, volunteering at events, financial contributions, having discussions with people in my day to day life offline) and both online and offline. The worry was that though someone may choose only offline, that may only equate to them just having conversations in passing in the office, this in turn does not tell us much about how active they are in the movement. After some consideration, I decided to leave the questions as they were on the basis that both this question, and the follow up question gives an insight into how they participate and why they have chosen a particular mode of participating as opposed to testing how active they are and whether this makes them more active than others.

Another issue was within my line of questioning towards people who either opposed BLM or were indifferent towards it. I had initially used the word "oppose" throughout these sections in different ways such as pages entitled "Online participation in opposing Black Lives Matter" and questions such as "Was Black Lives Matter the first time you participated in opposing a social movement?". The issue with the usage of this word is that it has the potential to put people who are within this category on the defense because of its negative connotation. Though in essence the sentiment is true, they do oppose Black Lives Matter (whether that be particular areas of the movement or the entire thing), the aim was not to make them feel bad for their opinions or to make them feel like they have to justify it. In order to ensure I was able to still explore their reasons why they do not support Black Lives Matter I changed the wording to be less negative and to go down a more exploratory route. Instead of pointing the finger I gave them space to tell me about their thoughts by changing the wording of the question to "Was Black Lives Matter the first time you participated in voicing your opinions on a social movement?" and "What online methods do you use to participate in expressing your opinions towards Black Lives Matter?". In doing this, the respondents were less likely to feel attacked for their opinion and therefore more open in wanting to share their opinions.

Ethical Considerations

With the heart of my research project being based on the testaments and experiences of people, I had to consider how my research may impact them in the long run. The overall nature of my research project explored a social movement that was born out of excessive

violence, violence which has been shared across several mediums including the video of Eric Garner being choked, the picture of Mike Brown's body lying in the middle of the street or the Facebook live stream of the aftermath of Philando Castile's murder.

Though I do not reference individual incidences, discussions of Black Lives Matter alone have the potential to cause emotional distress. It was my responsibility as the researcher to ensure that I was offering the highest level of care to potential respondents from the outset, however, within a survey this becomes difficult to manage. In order to safeguard my online participants, I issued a trigger warning at the beginning of the survey and made sure I expressed that the following questions discuss themes that are race related. I reminded them that they can withdraw from the research at any time and that their responses will not be recorded as a result. I also offer an email address should they have any concerns they need addressing before they take part. Towards the end of the survey I supplied links to resources that could give them further support should they have needed it such as charities like Mind, Samaritans, Sane, Young Minds and The Mix.

The nature of my research project had the potential to attract hostile opinions directed at myself as the researcher, particularly when shared on platforms like Reddit. There was no real telling how such interactions would impact me until I was in that situation, however, I was ready to exercise my ability to report and block accounts that had sent threatening messages. Should the hostility have been on-going I would have utilised student services at the university in order to talk through how it was making me feel which would hopefully help me move forward. Should it have reached a level where it was impacting my work I would have discussed my options with my supervisor, particularly if time out was needed.

Separately, I also had to consider the types of people that would come into contact with my survey in order to understand that they will be of different educational backgrounds and learning abilities. In order to make the survey understandable on as many different levels as possible, I was careful with my wording of things and provided them in their simplest form in order to make sure it was easy to understand. Doing this took out the potential alienation respondents experience sometimes by not being able to understand the language used within questions. This was very important especially because I am not there to help clarify wording or to explain the question fully.

Sample Design

From a survey point of view, the recruitment strategy was not based on me heavily dictating what kind of person I wanted to take the survey. Outside of them being over 18, living outside of the United States of America and knowing what Black Lives Matter was, the rest of the survey was guided by their own experiences and interactions with the movement (Barker, et al., 2016). The initial aim was to have 150 responses in a two-week period, however, by the time the two-week period had passed, the survey had received 386 full responses, majority of which came from the UK and Europe. The sampling population in this case was initially determined by whether or not someone knew about Black Lives Matter and what country they lived in. If in the initial screening stage, they expressed that they did not know about Black Lives Matter or lived in North America, they were disqualified. This was key in order to develop a better transatlantic view towards BLM considering there is already a lot of data regarding how US citizens feel towards the movement. By only focusing on people from outside of the US I am given insight into how different cultures view BLM and how these views have impacted how people react towards the cause. I acknowledge that this may appear to be too broad a selection which may in turn be a hindrance to my overall research project, however, I believe that this is a beneficial starting point for beginning to explore the movement outside of its cultural confines which has not been done before. Furthermore, it will give greater context to how cultural differences have an impact on social movements and how different cultures may place greater emphasis on particular forms of participation to others which are all key things to understand in this area of research to further aid research that may come as a result of my findings.

Outside of that, I decided against putting in further screening questions on the basis that regardless of whether they agreed with the movement or not, or whether they participated in the movement or not there were questions I still wanted to find out from those perspectives be it probing their non-participation or their opposition of the movement. This is in alignment with purposive sampling in that respondents have been chosen (or given access in this case) to the survey based on their relationship with the topic at hand and their location.

This chapter has discussed the choice of method deemed suitable for the topic and its associated aims. The chosen method will allow me to explore the motivations behind participating in Black Lives Matter as well begin to understand some of the obstacles people

face when it comes to participating. The importance in these views being told in the respondents' own words and being as honest and without prejudice from the researchers' point of view in order to capture the true sentiment at the time of the research was stressed throughout in accordance with the grounded theory.

Following on from my literature review I stressed the importance of looking at how the individual sits in the make-up of the collective. Understanding that the success and/or downfall of any movement (or even brand or product) is for the most part down to the individual's interaction with it, their reasonings behind the choices they make in relation to the entity in question. By looking at a sample size of individuals we are able to draw conclusions on the innerworkings of their choices to participate and engage in the ways that they do.

The constraints did not go un-noted, I drew attention to the issues around engaging communities on large forums such as Reddit and the possibility of gathering data that is intentionally problematic and unconstructive. The following chapter will examine the data collected via the survey by focusing on key themes that arose. The data will be used to explore the views people have on BLM and how they have arrived at their conclusions as well as any emerging themes.

Data Analysis

This chapter will unpack the data gathered through the online survey that predominantly looks at the reasons why people participate in BLM. The aim was to focus on places outside of the US to explore whether the distance from the catalyst events impacted the way and the reasons why people get involved. The sample size for this survey was 383 with 32% of respondents coming from the UK with 55.45% of respondents coming from EU. For the purpose of this research project the EU excludes the UK, this decision was made in response to some of the distinctions respondents from the UK and those from European countries made that were easier to explain separately.
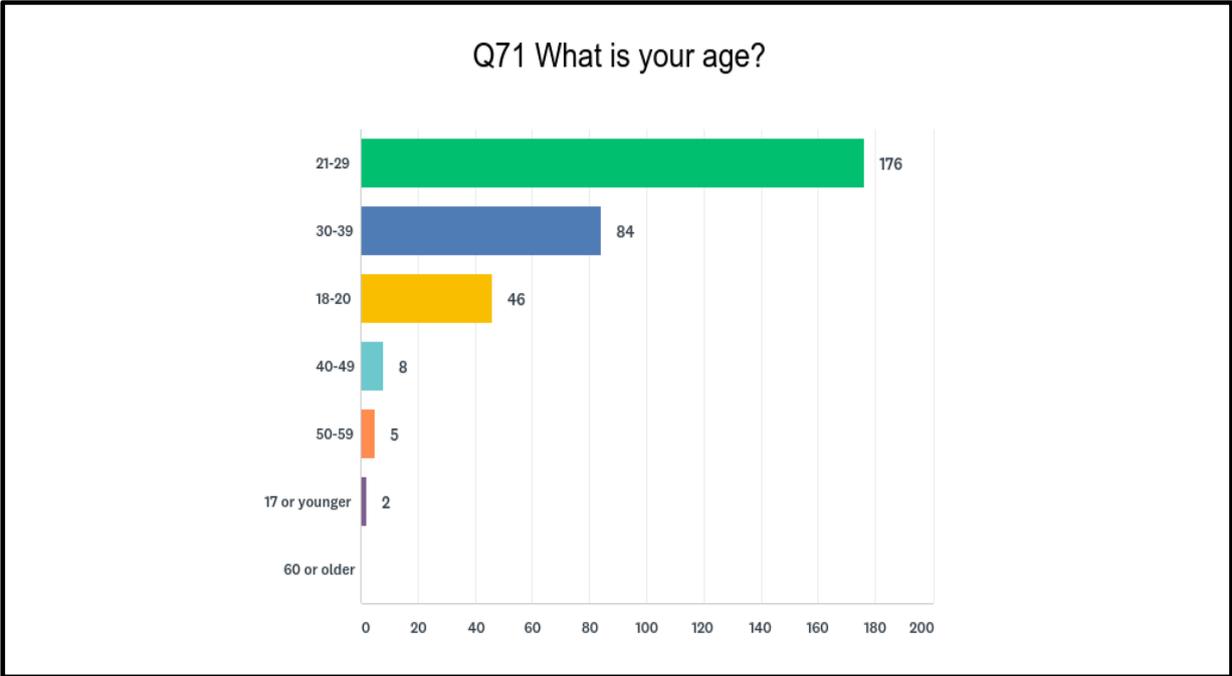
Figure 4 Age of Respondents
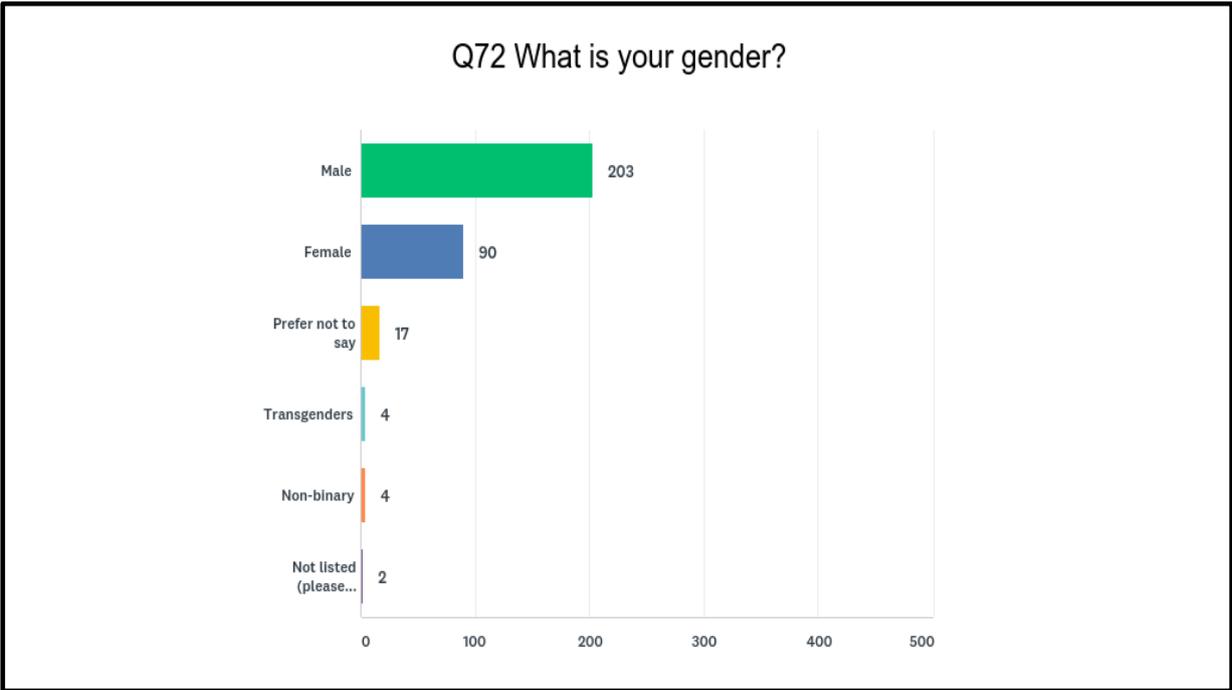
Figure 5 Gender of Respondents
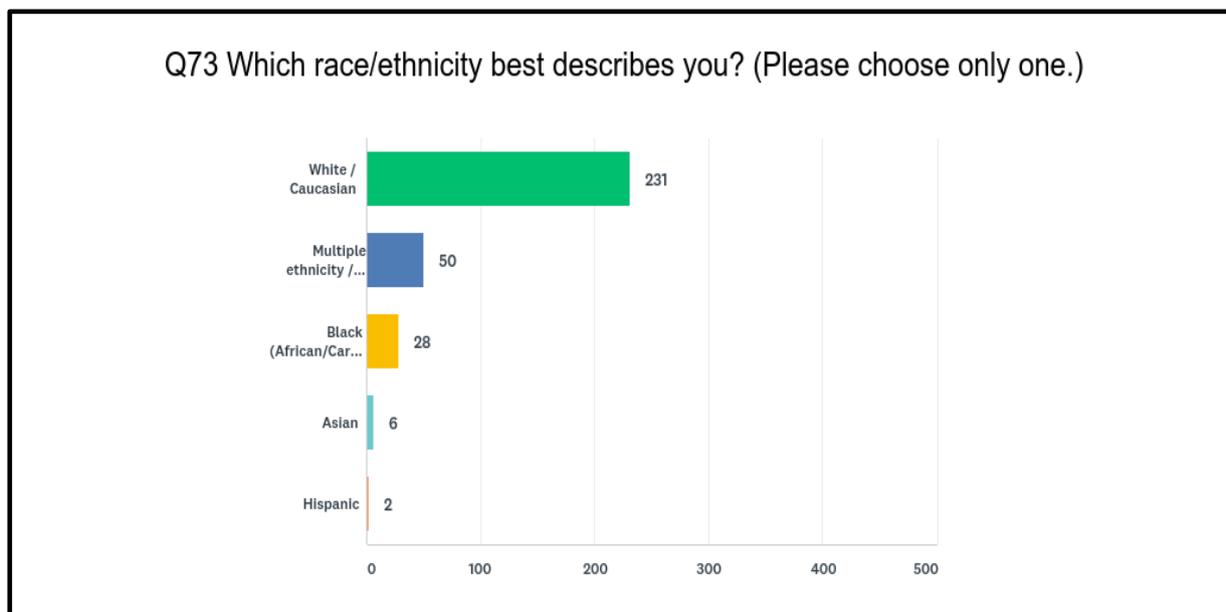
Figure 6 Race/Ethnicity of Respondents

Throughout the following chapter respondents will be split into 3 groups – supporters (those who felt very positively/positively towards the movement), sceptics (those who felt neutral towards the movement) and opposers (those who felt very negatively/negatively). To provide context, of the 347 people who shared how they feel about BLM, 39.19% were supporters, 26.51% were sceptics and 34.29% were opposers.

The concept of social proximity is the thread throughout this chapter as this appeared to be the token by which respondents in all groups placed their reasons behind whether or not they supported/participated in the movement. The key factors of this came down to whether they lived in a country that saw high levels of racial tension (predominantly from the police towards citizens), whether police brutality was a major issue in their country, whether there were enough black people in their country for BLM to be positioned there and whether they were the main BLM beneficiaries.

With that in mind, the key themes this chapter will focus on that came directly from the data collected are relevance, relatability, participation (this covers online, offline, non-participation and how people move between these levels), effectiveness and the future of BLM as described by respondents. I discuss each theme with social proximity in mind in order to build distinctions between reasons for and against supporting/participating in the movement.

Respondents were asked whether they felt there was a need for BLM in their country, and the question of relevance was a key theme amongst them all regardless of where they stood on the supporting of the movement spectrum[2]. For the purpose of this study, relevance refers to the process of information being shared, how the information is framed, the effort it takes to frame it and the conclusion of its importance (Macagno, 2018).

In discussions of relevance, the concept is based on the speaker (in this instance, my questions) hinting at what they intend on communicating, therefore making their intentions known, and the hearer (the respondent) interpreting the intention whilst building a link between the information, the context, and where they sit within that context to then decide whether it is worth their attention.

Within this, the notion of informativeness which confronts the matter of determining the validity of information that is given is key here. Validation comes from highlighting two key determining factors – 1) what is deemed as informative by the respondent (in this case, information the respondent has previously engaged with regarding BLM) and 2) deciding whether it is worth the respondents' attention (i.e. does this information apply to them) (Wilson and Sperber, 2012).

To that end, something is deemed irrelevant if a) new information is offered but this information does not marry up with the information that exists within the context presented b) the information is in context but does not add to the strength of the argument or c) the information is incompatible with the existing preconceptions and is not strong enough to convince the individual otherwise (Sperber and Wilson, 1995).

Looking at the data set as a whole, 67.70% of respondents felt like there was not much need in their country whilst 16.85% felt that there was and 15.45% being unsure. Of those that felt there was not much relevance in their country, 49.79% of them were opposers of the movement. Their reasoning stemmed primarily in the lack of black people in their country and in the stark differences in history from a racial tension point of view. Comments from some of these respondents included:

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[2] All quotes in the 'Relevance' section are from the question "Do you think there is a need for a Black Lives Matter presence in your country and can you explain why?"

Black people in the Netherlands do not have the same history as black people in America; therefore, we need a very different solution for very different issues regarding racism.

Respondent #354

First reason is we don't have an immediate problem with trigger-happy police, second reason racism here is different. We don't have structural racism from a history of slavery.

Respondent #269

Sweden doesn't have a history of oppressing minorities because of skin colour, nor is there a significant black minority.

Respondent #290

This begins to highlight the cultural (e.g. excessive force by the police) and historical (e.g. slavery) differences between the US and Europe but also how the lack of these make the entry points to participating in such a movement difficult. Respondents in the group from Europe suggested that there is less of an issue of race and more focus on social-economic disparities referring to the "rich vs poor" argument and the idea that society is "divided by economic and cultural differences". Where respondents did refer to racism in their country, they explained it as being towards people of Arab, Turkish and Middle Eastern descent with one also referring to Eastern Europeans being on the receiving end of racism.

It seems that problems with minorities in the USA stem from racism, but in Greece from xenophobia. And black people are neither the most common not the most maligned demographic.

Respondent #202

As well, most anti-"something" sentiment is anti-immigrant, not explicitly anti-black.

Respondent #234

General/ casual racism against anyone non-white is more common, as is racism by the police/State/system towards the larger minorities such as Turks, Arabs, Slavs, Gypsies, etc.

Respondent #312

Some respondents referred to minorities in their countries being their nationality first whilst introducing the idea of integration saying:

The question of "integration" is super important here. It tends to bother people to talk about the differences. France is very centralized, has been for a long time. Its policies have always been to give everyone the fairest chance possible (through a very

centralized school system) and to consider everyone French. As an example: I read recently about some comment an American journalist made about an African team winning the soccer world cup because a large part of the group is black. Sure, there are people who comment on it here too but there is no doubt in anyone's mind that these men are French and, here at least, pointing out their differences was perceived as a way to "minimize their Frenchness", if you will…If you're French, you're French. Nobody is going to give you abuse for being in touch with your roots, but you can't be "a little less French" because your parents weren't born here - you're French + something. I'm saying this because in many people's mind, acknowledging simply a skin colour (and not a country) makes little sense. Most people here, no matter how far their ancestry on French soil goes back, know where their ancestors come from and so, there hasn't been a clear need for non-white people to really rally around their skin colour.

<div align="right">Respondent #228</div>

Blacks in Russia are Russians in the first place, and not some separate community that counterpoises itself against other people.

<div align="right">Respondent #293</div>

Amongst such responses were calls for people to put less emphasis on their race when it comes to their identity. This brings to light questions around the interrelationship between race and national identity and how this plays a part in how people respond to movements such as BLM. With places like America, London, Germany and other cities around the world being deemed as "melting pots of culture" one must question whether this is to some extent an easy way to down play the existence of racial specific policies towards minorities (Miller and Heisler, 1998).

The response to the need of BLM from respondents in the UK was different to respondents in Europe. A number of UK based respondents discussed the overt racism in the UK and how they felt this experience differs to other countries. It is important that the difference in attitudes towards BLM in this particular way are explored as it highlights some of the roadblocks to participating with BLM from different cultural perspectives. Whilst the respondents from Europe have stated that racism is not a major concern, the respondents in the UK refer to it being somewhat more systemic and nuanced in the UK which makes the situation in the UK more problematic as it is harder to call out and openly identify.

There is a lot of black oppression within the UK, but it takes place in more insidious ways as opposed to America where people tend be more straightforward.

<div align="right">Respondent #370</div>

Black is an international identity and the problems in the UK are more nuanced, systemic and therefore more poisonous than it is in the US.

The UK struggles with very insidious anti-blackness which can rarely be seen elsewhere as it isn't so overt or direct, the damage is does could long outweigh that in other countries as it is so normalised and also continually trivialised amongst other diaspora.

Hirsch (2018) suggests that as a result of racism in the UK becoming more overt and subtle, we have subsequently become complacent. She goes on to say that discussions around race, ethnicity and national identity are uncomfortable and complex given Britain's colonial history which a few respondents also referenced with comments such as "The UK has had a major role to play in the belittling of black lives for centuries; it seems we have an ability to hide that very well." The reason this is important when thinking about why people participate in BLM is that it highlights how different cultural norms help us to arrive at our conclusions. For the UK respondents, the subtleness of racism in the UK amplifies the need, whereas the perceived lack of racism in European countries dampens it.

What was interesting about the UK respondents is that they did not only think about how a strong BLM in the UK would challenge race relations between minorities and the police, but rather that they looked at all areas of life and where there were disparities around access to resources, opportunities etc. between white people and minorities. Respondent #237 is a 30 – 39 years old, white woman from the UK who is a supporter of BLM. She raises issues around education and financial prosperity similar to Child (2017) which found that whilst the number of minorities in the UK between the ages of 16 – 64 with a degree had doubled, such numbers had not been reflected in the amount of people that were in employment nor has it helped to close the income gap. She said:

> The black experience (and therefore racism) is very different in the UK, and whilst police brutality is far less of a thing (with the exception of Mark Duggan, which is a whole other complicated thing) black people generally aren't being killed or brutalised by the police like it happens in the US. Educational and financial outcomes for black men (and there definitely appears to be a gender component in this) are far lower than for any other group. Also, the attitude from some quarters that knife crime in London is a "black cultural problem".
>
> #Respondent #237

She highlights the fact that the black experience in the UK is vastly different to the US and therefore, so are their outcomes. However, she also refers to some of the other factors that

emphasize the need to address some of the disparities between cultural groups. It is here we see similar arguments to the European respondents with there being a focus on the socio-economic factors in this discussion.

Respondent #237 was one of many to refer to the knife and gang culture in the UK when talking about the need for a BLM presence in the UK. Many referenced the relationship between the police and black men in the UK highlighting stop and search policies and how "black people have higher stop and search rates here [UK]". However, not all responses were only aimed at systematic failings, some looked at the rise in gang culture, the far-right and how a BLM presence could challenge these things saying:

> 1) A lot of gang violence involving black youth. BLM Community projects are essential in order to help minimise these problems long term 2) The recent Windrush scandal has shown how little the government regard black migrants. Major BLM style campaigning would send a message that it is not ok! 3) The rise of the far right is a major concern. We need a BLM movement to stand up to them.
>
> Respondent #362

What these respondents were able to do was to see the wider picture of BLM and analyse how it could be placed in their own country. They had built up an idea of what BLM is mainly through online platforms compared to offline methods as shown in figure 7 and whilst it has been documented that the media coverage BLM have received over the years has mainly been negative (Leopold and Bell, 2017) their perspective found positive angles. With 40.39% of these respondents being of ethnic minorities [see figure 6] perhaps the framing of BLM was always going to be different owing to the fact that to some degree, the experiences minorities face are similar (though sometimes at a different rate).

Though the overall difference between UK and European respondents is prominent, they both refer to police brutality being the root of BLM and what they are most known for, and therefore, their reason why there is no need for a chapter in their country being that it is not a major issue where they reside. UK respondents who feel there is a need in the UK have done so by focusing on areas that BLM are not prominently known for, instead, discussing UK specific issues such as knife crime, systematic and socio-economic disparities. This suggests that BLM on its own merits do not necessarily translate well across the Atlantic and that it would be required for subsequent chapters to be based around real lived experiences that

are a source of contention for black citizens in said country in order to engage with more people.

Relatability

Whilst the relevance discussed above related to how much notice/attention respondents gave to BLM; the conversation of relatability focuses more on how people connect and or empathize with BLM. Respondents referred to the lack of relatability with BLM throughout the survey, but before I had been able to look at the data in more detail, what was apparent, was that those who are obvious BLM beneficiaries (e.g. black people) were not as represented in the data gathered as I would have hoped/thought. Respondents were made up of 72.87% White/Caucasian, 15.77% had multiple ethnicities, 8.83% were Black, 1.89% were Asian, 0.63% were Hispanic. It is no surprise then, that there were a high level of respondents citing lack of relatability as an influence in how/if they participate in or support BLM.

Caliendo et al. (2010) makes a valid case when discussing how people respond to other cultures. They state that those who are reliant on cultural perspectives they are accustomed to in order to approach, interpret and ultimately, solve problems, are more reluctant to consider the problem from a different perspective by stepping away from their conventional cultural perspectives but further still, critically analysing their beliefs. They go on to discuss how those with strong ties to their heritage culture may view accepting other cultures as a threat to their identities. This mainly stems from the fact that their identity is deeply rooted in their heritage culture. Equally, Mackin (2016) makes similar claims in his discussion around aesthetically transformative dimensions of politics and cognition and communicability relating to Black Lives Matter. He expresses that it is not necessarily that those (white people] that do not support the movement do so because of the lack of access to information that would inform them of the existence of the racial injustice they fight for, but rather that "the dominant order of sense—the distribution of identities, spaces, and topics—is premised on not perceiving the system of white supremacy as such. [463]". This is based on the notion that some people are unable to see the actions of protesters as a means to challenge a society that views them as other. This is mainly due to their white identity being rooted in a different lived experience that sees the current happenings related to BLM as routine and justified. I must add that in accordance with Mills (2007) the above is not to say that those who do not support BLM, do not see the real issue or do not believe that black people are

treated badly are racists, but rather that a combination of loyalty to their norms and different views towards others could be the cause. Being able to empathize with movements (or any given thing) that challenges our cultural norms requires us to question how the world operates and who we are within it. Such analysing of self is a laborious task and without emotional ties or being able to see yourself in a situation which is often an encourager for people to change their behavior or thoughts towards something (Lockwood, 2006) may prove to be an unnecessary usage of time.

The lack of emotional investment in BLM hindered how people judged their relatability with one opposing respondent who felt negatively towards the movement using the phrase "they have no horses in the race" to describe their indifference. In another instance, a respondent acknowledged that they had benefitted from black lives seemingly not mattering but that they ultimately supported the movement because as the title says – black lives matter. The emotions in the decision to support/participate in BLM are important because "there's no cognition without feeling" (Melucci, 1996: 45). To Melucci, emotional investment is the driver when it comes to mobilisation. This, tied in with cultural influences as discussed above are part and parcel of reconstructing understanding.

In any case, Shields (2018) draws attention to the weight social proximity carries when we are presented with opinions we disagree with and therefore, find reasons for these claims to be invalid by saying that "moral judgments are shaped more by sentiments than by reason". It is interesting then, to look at how the respondents who felt positively towards the movement who were white (and therefore, distant in social proximity in the sense that their lived experience is different) framed their opinions around the movement. Much of their comments around why respondents supported the movement referred to there being a need for equality and their distaste for people being treated like second class citizens as well as indicating the need to listen to unpresented voices.

Supporters referenced wanting to be a good ally from a privileged perspective with one respondent saying "I think it is important for white people to play an active role in dismantling systematic racist policies across the world. I like to think of myself as a good ally and good allies support others who cannot speak and advocate for themselves." This syncs in with what Shields (2018) was saying when talking about why the identities of those we are at odds with matter. In his story, he teaches a course on American evangelicals and studies a

book with his class made up of evangelical students by one of the most influential evangelicals in America, Mark A. Noll, that points out faults in the evangelical tradition. He explains that though his students were skeptical of the book, they still managed to engage in the discussion on the basis that they knew that Mark A. Noll was ultimately one of them and so they were more inclined to listen, engage and discuss. Similarly, another respondent referred to non-black people being more vocal by saying "I would like to see more non-black people actively demonstrating support for the campaign visually through media". What strikes me about this comment is its reference to being more visual, particularly through media. The representation of BLM via media channels are often one sided and negative, what I inferred from this comment is that adding a different layer of relatability, i.e. being able to see yourself in a situation, could be an encourager for self-reflection for people who are not BLM beneficiaries, which could lead to the reconstructing of understanding. I think this creates an interesting area of future research when a) considering how non-black people can be allies and use their non-blackness to be a voice in places where black voices are not heard or represented, b) understanding whether it matters who tells the story i.e. would people pay more attention if it was coming from a white person? and c) how (if at all) this helps to change perceptions and gain more support.

Online and Offline Participation

The above discussion explored two of the key reasons why people do or do not participate/support the movement in the first instance. This following section will discuss how respondents differentiated the impact of online and offline participation in regards to the movement.

The discussion around whether online and offline participation is equal was varied. On one hand, online was found to have more of an impact by the 42% of opposing respondents for its ability to reach a bigger audience and the belief that ideas spread quicker online. These respondents felt that it was easier to shape public opinion online and therefore a powerful tool for encouraging people to rally around a movement/brand/product/etc. This is reflected in the fact that online platforms played a big part in them forming their opinions about BLM as seen in figure 7. Interestingly, one respondent stated the idea that "offline discussions effectiveness depends on the area in which its set, while online discussion is available to anyone". Here, I have taken their usage of the word area as relating to places where there was a clear need for BLM (e.g. America) and therefore, they felt that offline participation

anywhere else was pointless because it did not change anything or rather, there was nothing needing to be changed where they were and instead, caused disruption to other people. Whilst I understand the sentiment and acknowledge the clear indications that show that such offline activity fuels the online conversation whether it is in solidarity from across the pond, or in locations that are a direct response to an event (Ferguson for example), I think the important idea here comes down to, again, relevance, but may also lean into the idea of how people think they can make a difference. The notion that BLM is an isolated problem was a key issue across all respondents, the feeling that those across the pond cannot do much to make an impact in ways that matter because they too, are an isolated factor (far away, not under the same laws, etc). However, they acknowledge that though the offline participation might be "frivolous" for them, the easy access to online participation is seen as an advantage in being able to be part of the conversation regardless of where they are located.

On the other hand, they also expressed that not much change can come from the use of a hashtag because "offline discussions are more productive".

> Not specific to BLM, but for any activism/social change/political activity - I live in a tiny country (Scotland). If I post online about what I believe and champion - who cares? How do you even know who I am or what my motives are? If I go and knock on doors and talk about what I believe to people who are willing to listen, I can connect with people. Not everyone is receptive, but if they are - it makes a difference.
> Respondent #120

Respondent #120 brings questions of intention, how intention is inferred online and how they believe offline action changes this due to its ability to allow people to connect with the idea that though not everyone is receptive it is still a better opportunity to encourage discussions.

Some opposers referred to the safeness in discussing things offline amongst friends and family because generally, you all believe the same thing so there is less likelihood for repercussions due to unfavorable opinions. An opposing respondent stated that due to the nature of the topic they tended to only discuss the topic in their close circle which ultimately meant that the discussions never evolved or left room for other opinions.

> I only talk to people close to me who share the same opinion. Since the topic is incredibly sensitive there would be no chance of any of us sharing our thoughts with those we don't consider close - thus, no debates are sparked etc.
> Respondent #47

Respondents commented on their lack of interest in wanting to change people's minds in online discussions due to them having no relation to people online and therefore, their opinion not mattering.

> Who gives a hoot what an anonymous person thinks online?
>
>   Respondent #328

> People don't care about the opinions of strangers on the Internet.
>
>   Respondent #320

> I feel like you can't really convince people you don't know online due to forming echo chambers (on both sides). Discussing the issue with friends is much more likely to give you additional input.
>
>   Respondent 259

> People care more about the opinions of people they know rather than random people online.
>
>   Respondent #184

They felt that the offline discussions were more likely to give you additional points and to allow for more in-depth conversations allowing us to give context to our points of view which make the exchange more wholesome, and to some extent, more trustworthy. This heightened the perspective that relationships (or being able to develop relationships) hold a lot of weight to how effective discussions are. Understanding the balance between report (or content) and command is crucial here as the report is based on the words and language used whereas the command is in non-verbal cues relating to facial expressions, tone of voice and body language (Watzlawick, et al., 1967). With offline discussions, the ability to analyze these non-verbal cues are essential for giving context and avoiding mis-communication.

Additionally, a few supporting respondents alluded to the abundance of trolls online across platforms such as Twitter, Reddit and 4Chan which they felt made it difficult to have in-depth conversations.

> The movement opened up a huge forum for discussion with today's youth but police brutality in the U.S has always existed. The problem with online forums is that there are lots of trolls out there.
>
>   Respondent #55

> Depending on where the online conversation is taking place, it's hard to allow for nuance and complex topics. On Twitter, for example, character limits prevent in-

depth discussion. Online conversations also don't allow for tone of voice, facial expressions, etc. Plus, some people online just want to be trolls.

<div align="right">Respondent #80</div>

It gets easily hijacked by trolls.

<div align="right">Respondent #183</div>

Though respondents note that the access online participation gives to a huge network is vital in these discussions they also acknowledge its negative side. Respondents believed that online conversations are seen to be highly polarized and quickly devolve into echo chambers – a theme that recurred several times. Respondents implied that it is difficult to have meaningful and educational exchanges online with most people being dismissive of differing points of views and/or people being so tied into a particular view that they are not responsive to others. Whilst this idea of echo chambers being the main driver for a lack of diverse opinions is prominent, a study by Dubois and Blank (2018) found that the opposite is happening, and that people actually have more access to a pool of diverse viewpoints. With the worry that these online platforms create echo chambers resounding throughout the respondents, it is somewhat surprising then that online communication methods had a higher level of influence on them compared to offline methods as seen in Figure.7.
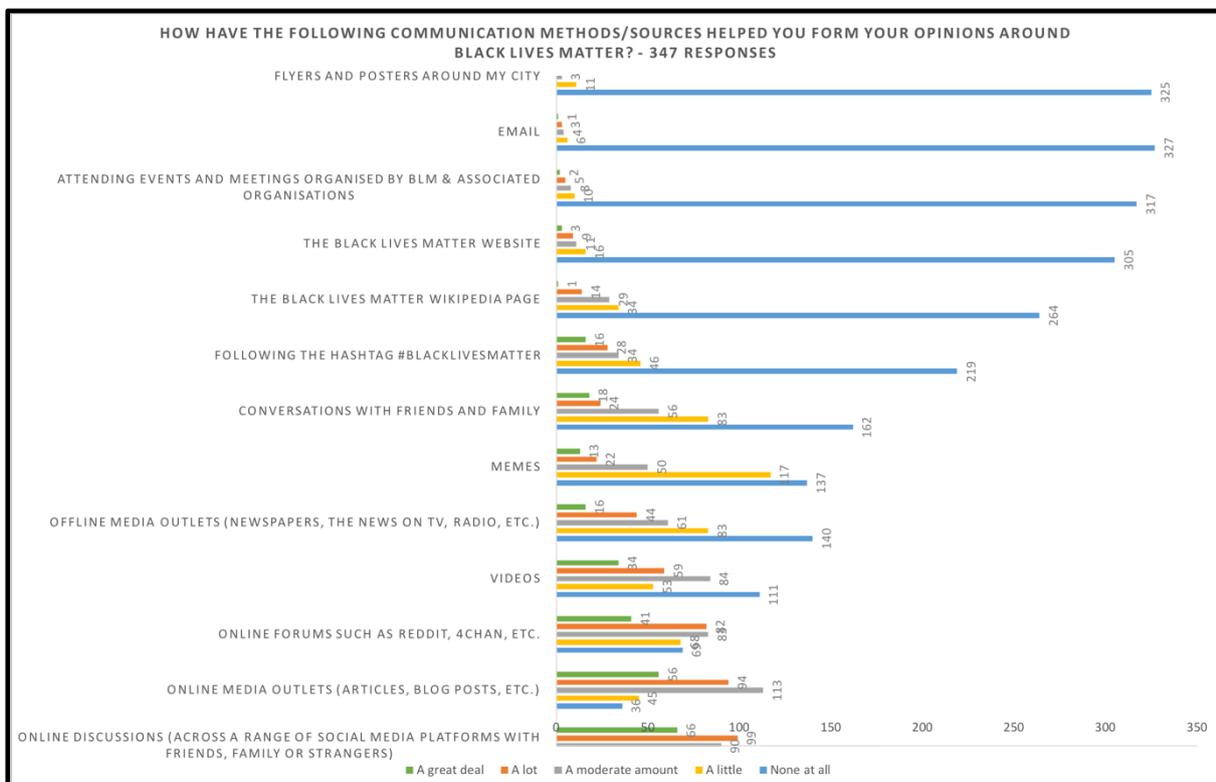

Figure 7 Full response to the question "How have the following communication methods/sources helped you form your opinions around Black Lives Matter?"

Although this highlights the different ways people arrive at their conclusions regarding BLM, it also highlights how people may interpret the same information differently. Sandvoss (2013) goes into detail about how fans chose from a pool of text and paratext in order to support the opinions they already held (in his case, he was referring to Sarah Palin's campaign for presidency). He goes on to say that "In selecting between different texts from blogs to network news, they inevitably shift from conviction to identification, from substance to form." [280]. In that respect, whilst these respondents may have used the same forms of online media on their journey to form their conclusion, the difference in what they believe to be true and the difference in what their identity is rooted in are both different but incredibly important because they reflect their different world views and lived experiences. This includes a number of factors such as how/where they were raised, how integrated they have been with other cultures, the types of messaging they heard the most as they were growing up, etc. Here, context is everything.

Worries were also expressed that the hashtag feels like a commercial campaign, much like Nike's #JustDoIt which takes away from the message of the movement which becomes diluted and forgotten. This is further highlighted by Colin Kaepernick's recent campaign for Nike with the slogan "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything.". The campaign generated $43million in media buzz for the brand in 24hrs (Novy-Williams, 2018) and a 31% surge in sales (Pengelly, 2018) – all off the back of the NFL stars' protest of the oppression of minorities by taking the knee. Cause related marketing campaigns have long been integrated in branding strategies (Smith and Higgins, 2000) but such concerns over diluting the heart of the cause ultimately comes down to how such campaigns are more about the profitability for the brand than highlighting the importance of the cause. This can be associated with Banet-Weiser (2013) who when talking about her book 'Commodity Activism' stresses the difference between commodification and branding. She explains the difference by saying:

> Commodification is a marketing strategy, a monetization of different spheres of life, a transformation of social and cultural life into something that can be bought and sold. In contrast, the process of branding impacts the way we understand who we are, how we organize ourselves in the world, what stories we tell ourselves about ourselves.

With this in mind, 9.53% of all respondents believed that the hashtag #blacklivesmatter was where the movement was least effective. They referred to US politics being "a form of entertainment", online discussions using the hashtag as a means to "promote themselves" as

opposed to the movement and the idea that the hashtag is too easy. With responses like this, and much like Banet-Weiser says, we as consumers/audiences must look at how we give context to the ways we are informing ourselves but also how we are acting on the information received. Online media outlets (articles, blog posts, etc.) and online discussions across a range of social media platforms were seen to be the majority of ways these respondents formed their opinions on BLM. These information sources helped them to explore the different perspectives without agenda pushing and made them more aware. One particular respondent said, "Speaking to people and listening to their stories helps us remember how real this is- at times I find I can get a little desensitized to what is shown via social media." This speaks largely to the politics-as-entertainment idea which takes the seriousness out of the matter and reminds us that outside of the jokes and the memes real work still needs to be done. Simply put by Schiess (2017):

> Instead of being the consumers who motivate this bent toward entertainment, Christ-followers have an obligation to seek truth, justice, and understanding. Watch some Saturday Night Live and take some jabs against a bill on Twitter, but resist the temptation to turn everything political into nothing but another form of entertainment.

Surprisingly, not as many people referred to online participation as a form slacktivism, though one respondent suggested that since the Occupy movement most social movements have adopted an "almost-protest" mentality where everyone with access can feel like they are participating in a meaningful way without being accountable or having to do very much.

Contrastingly, some respondents expressed the positive side of the hashtag as it acts as an archive where people around the world can read/watch the day to day experience of what it means to be black in proximity to overt micro-aggressions from whiteness. This in turn removes the geographical barriers that helps to give a different cultural perspective to those who have different lived experiences.

Effectiveness

The question around where respondents felt BLM were most/least effective was mainly aimed at a) understanding where the respondents know them from the most and b) where they felt the movement had made the most impact. As a whole 38% of respondents saw getting media attention as where the movement were most effective followed by protests at

19%. Whilst getting media attention was where BLM were seen to be most effective, the comments show that this was as a result of their protests:

> There have been a number of protests, which seem to develop more media and worldwide coverage.
>
> Respondent #76

> Because they get a lot of media attention. Not necessarily positive attention, often they cover the riots while ignoring the peaceful protesters.
>
> Respondent #99

> Their protests and resulting counter protests often end badly, gathering media attention.
>
> Respondent #58

> Via BLM's huge numbers of supporters and diversity of tactics in protest that have brought international attention to the campaign and its politics.
>
> Respondent #56

In relation to protests, the dismay of their disruptive behavior and issues with their decentralized nature were recurring themes. Whilst looking through the responses from skeptics of the movement, alongside the movement not appearing uniform in their ideology, I found that whilst they could agree with the movement, their ability to completely support it was tainted by their disruptive nature. Gaining sympathisers seems to be a roadblock for the movement with protest coverage generally perpetuating an "Us vs. Them" narrative with much focus being on the destruction lead by the minority. Whilst respondents experienced a level of sympathy for the movement, they struggled to separate those empathetic thoughts from their angry feelings towards the act of destroying communities, the disruption to the lives of innocent people (blocking roads, blocking airports, etc.) and causing high levels of destruction (resulting in tax payers having to foot the bill). Abdullah (2017) explains why protests are key for visibility saying:

> As our ranks swelled and our presence became more intentionally targeted at White epicenters of escapism (including tourist attractions like Hollywood and Highland), we began to understand the power of disruption. In disrupting these spaces, we refused to allow our collective pain to be confined to Black communities. Others may not see their own children in the face of Trayvon, but they would not be permitted to dismiss us.

Here, it is about being able to share in the pain and make it less possible for people to ignore by causing disruption to public spaces. Though skeptical respondents denounced such

activities/outcomes, what was not abundantly clear or uniform outside of some calling for less violence and more peaceful displays of activism was what these respondents felt was a better tactic in order to gain more sympathisers given that the premise of political activism is to be disruptive. What I inferred from what they did say was that political activism is fine from a distance, for the most part, so long as it does not interfere with their day to day lives. What still remains is the fact that this disruption they speak of does nothing to help them understand or gain a better perspective. Briscoe et al. (2015) found that whilst disruption is necessary to draw attention, evidence-based tactics "the provision of information and/or material evidence to enhance the credibility of activists and the practices they seek to bring about "(304) need to be deployed in order to eventually change minds – ultimately, playing good cop/bad cop roles.

Another area respondents felt the movement needed to work on is political campaigning with some saying that "the movement automatically became diluted when it tried to move into the political sphere due to the preconceptions associated with them", e.g. that they are a hate group with one respondent saying "I think the media and maybe radicals in the movement have ruined chances for the movement to gain much political ground by painting them as "too aggressive" Similarly, another respondent said "Breaking things is not a form of political campaigning" which heightens the idea that the inconvenience sometimes outweighs the cause.

Equally important, the incoherence of their message and lack of visible leaders makes them seem less credible with comments such as:

> Again, its kind of goes back to the framing issue. They somehow ended up with a decentralized movement that can stand for whatever people say it stands for and once you have a huge junk of the people supporting the establishment believing you are angry, violent, ungrateful, unreasonable children, political campaigning is going to get way harder than it would have been coming from a cohesive group with clear leadership and goals.
>
> <div align="right">Respondent #193</div>

> Their message seems frequently to be incoherent and with no clear goal in mind nor visible leaders, seems doomed to failure and being pushed under the carpet by authorities.
>
> <div align="right">Respondent #136</div>

What is apparent here is that the perceived lack of leadership and the movements decentralized nature seems to be an important element in how people perceive the movements effectiveness, however, Hill et al. (2016) found that this is not always the case in a study that was in reference to Castells (2015) claim that movements are more powerful when seen to be leaderless due to them being harder to govern or take over. Their study of internet-mediated protest movement, Stand Against Modern Football found that "Without firm identities, hierarchical leadership or constitutionalised goals, multiple groups feel able to connect to StandAMF" (703). In their case, people had various access points to the movement and were able to connect on multiple levels. They discuss how soft leaders whose positions are not official are key in such scenarios to disseminate information across the movements' network. These soft leaders come equipped with the informational capital required to mobilise both within their networks but also within wider media frames in order to gain traction. Much like BLM, the study found that individuals and groups associated with StandAMF took it upon themselves to expand on certain goals within their communities that they were most passionate about in the same way that BLM chapters focus on different protest frames in accordance to their community.

It is important to acknowledge that the methodological approach Hill et al., (2016) took is different to mine in that their study only focused on people who supported the movement, whereas mine looks at people across the spectrum. In that respect, supporters mentioned nothing regarding having issues with the leaderless approach whereas opposing and skeptical respondents commented on the issue saying that they would like "more structure, so I know who/what exactly I am supporting" [skeptic] and that a "leaderless structure leads to mixed message" [opposer]. Another respondent said:

> The problem with loose movements like this, is that it is very hard to gatekeep. Gatekeeping is important because it excludes the minority with extreme opinions (like kill all cops) and people who act the wrong way (violent protestors). Without some control, these people stay part of your movement and will just give the opposition fuel to damn the whole thing.

Of course, there are many factors to such a response that are rooted in who this individual is in regards to their need for structure and how having such clear-cut definitions of who is running the movement has an impact on their participation. Still, the apparent lack of visibility and control over who speaks for the movement compromises how much people trust the information shared about the movement.

The effectiveness of protests was also attributed to the fact that they fuel online content and conversations. It is also talked about from the point of view of visualising the issue and creating contagion to even more widespread spaces of society, e.g. like the NFL players taking the knee to highlight the oppression of marginalised communities as spearheaded by Colin Kaepernick in 2016 (Bixby, 2016). Granted, this is not the first-time activism has crossed over with sports with instances such as Muhammed Ali's refusal to be drafted in the Vietnam War in 1967 (Agyemang, 2011) and Tommie Smith and John Carlos' Black salute during the 1968 Olympics (Agyemang et al., 2010) being well documented at the time. It is a reminder that acts of protest come in many different shapes and sizes.

Not all respondents saw the effectiveness in political campaigning with supporters of the movement raising issues of there not being (to their knowledge) any prominent political figures in America that has expressed clear support for BLM or used their position to publicly champion the movement. There is a lack of distinction between whether they are solely a protest movement or if they are trying to be a more political one but either way, respondents feel like they lack political clout and acceptance. This, in part, fueled by their perceived lack of focus and leadership as above, makes it difficult for them to be seen as a constructive force. Furthermore, respondents feel like the movement struggle to make good connections with those who really need to hear their message. It appears that BLM are more concerned with direct action than prioritising trying to convince those on the other side. To combat this, one respondent suggested:

> Do a bit more to communicate in non-jargonistic ways that at least have a chance of winning over older white liberals and centrists who are a bit stuck in their ways, interpret ideas like white privilege as personally hostile and miss the days of universalist anti-racism they associate with old MLK quotes etc, and end up hearing more hostility than a message about how bad things are for a lot of PoC. Some people are too far right wing for it to be worth bothering trying to reach them. But there are people who would be more sympathetic if they heard things phrased differently.

Doing this makes it easier to have constructive dialogue with politicians and policy makers on all levels who can enact/suggest change from the inside.

Amongst the discussions of effectiveness, respondents across the spectrum alluded to the movement having an image problem relating to how they are portrayed. Respondents referred to the information they saw coming from BLM representatives speaking to the

apparent disagreement within the movement which supports the notion that the movement is not organised. Furthermore, questions were raised about who speaks for BLM with respondents saying that most of the messaging they see from the movement seems to come from other people which therefore makes them less trustworthy.

With it being so disorganized and with there being so many negative incidences (respondents referred to the hijacking of Pride events, the blocking of roads and airports and the interruptions during presidential rallies) respondents said that these things make it difficult for them to listen/have sympathy. Such comments were also seen from those who favored the movement who worried that the excessive negative portrayal was having a negative impact on the movements' progression but they also felt that there was nothing that could really change that because "the conservative mainstream media would treat the movement negatively no matter what it does" being that negative news travels faster than positive news (Hornik, 2015).

There are many references to the imagery protests/marches invoke with some saying that the physical presence of people intimidates governments into action. It gives stronger evidence to their strength and adds to the impact and possibility of international media coverage, this perspective of course, coming from those who favored the movement. Undoubtedly, these protests that have gone from being peaceful to escalating to violence have a negative effect which sides with those who already feel negatively towards BLM and the types of people that would support BLM. A respondent put it this way, "Some protests have escalated to violence and looting, which for their opponents, confirmed their view on blacks."

If we could change one thing about BLM what would it be?

Given the range in feelings towards the tactics BLM use, the messages they portray and the way the organisation is lead, the question around what people would change about the movement was an important one in order to give further depth into how their supporters feel they can improve. I must note that this particular question was only posed to those who expressed that they felt very positively/positively towards the movement – a similar question was posed to those who felt very negatively/negatively/neutrally too which I will explore at the end of this section.

The key themes in their responses related to the movement becoming more political, less violent/antagonizing, more inclusive (in terms of including other races in their cause but also working with non-black allies more) and less online based. Comments surrounding its placement in the US and the fact that the same issues do not translate in Europe were noticeable too. The above themes are linked to how the movement is ultimately portrayed and what effects this may have for them moving forward.

One respondent referenced the exclusionary nature of the name saying "I would change the name to 'Black Lives Matter Too' because the critics will embrace their willful ignorance to decry BLM as suggesting that we are trying to say that 'only' black lives matter. The "too" would kill that criticism stone dead." This sentiment of the name being a barrier was represented in the data with 57.26% of respondents who did not support the movement believing that the movement is inherently racist and exclusionary. These same respondents said they would be able to support the movement more if it had relevance in their country (33.50%) and if it was less aggressive (17.96%). I observed language in some of the written responses that had a blame undertone. Comments such as the following stating that they would support the cause more if "they stopped the victim mentality and stopped spreading blame" and if "they stopped acting as if black people are discriminated against" tie in with the discussion earlier about how social proximity and how the ability to see other perspectives is key to how people draw upon their conclusions. In light of this, there is no surprise that 60% of these respondents felt negatively towards the movement due to its lack of acknowledgement of Black on Black crime and the general lack of discussion about the criminality in the black community.

Moving Between Participation Levels

With there being multiple methods and levels to participation in any given movement, it is interesting to unpack why people participate in a particular way but also what would encourage them to engage on a different level. Respondents who only participated online both to support and oppose tended to do so in similar ways, engaging in discussions online (Twitter, Facebook and Reddit seemed to be the networks of choice) and sharing posts. They were unified in their top 2 reasons for participating online being that it is quicker to gather and share information and better access to a wider network. However, they stood divided on things that would encourage them to participate offline.

For supporters of the movement, 44% said having more time, 40% said having access to more resources (financial, material, etc.) and 32% said living in a bigger city would encourage them to participate offline. Given the fact that the various online methods of participation garnered more than a 50% response rate in influencing how they have formed their opinions on BLM the convenience and reach of online is clearly of importance here especially when 52% of these respondents believed that their participation online had a different impact to them participating offline. This came down to references to living in a digital world, the level of impact our direct connections have and public opinion primarily being formed online, with one respondent saying that online is better "Especially since a lot of public opinion is now formed on the internet, I think it is an important part of activism today" and another saying that "Whilst interacting with people in real life has a big impact, the pool of people I can reach is small. The pool of people I know online, those who follow me etc, is far higher."

On the other hand, those who oppose BLM said that for the most part, nothing would encourage them to move their participation offline with some stating not being interested enough, others alluding to worries of safety and the rest reverting to previous arguments of relevance. The idea of security is an important one here with the rise in trolls and the effects of anonymity, especially when it comes to sensitive topics. The anonymous nature of the internet allows counter normative behaviors to manifest (Bishop, 2013) which leads to people saying and doing things online that they would not freely express offline (Suler, 2004). It is important to highlight the idiosyncratic nature when it comes to the discussion of safety as it comes down to various factors such as where they live and the general consensus of their environment.

Reasons for participating offline for supporter and opposers rested on the ability to make stronger connections offline, the idea that actions speak louder than words, but more importantly, how insular online conversations can be. 90% of opposers participated online only because they felt it was easier to have respectful discussions with people. A further 70% said that they would be encouraged to participate online if they were able to have discussions with people without being insulted. "Call out culture" is rife online with people regularly holding others accountable for their problematic behavior instead of letting this behavior go unchecked (Senne, 2018). This call out is often done in public, sometimes seen as performative to show how quick witted one can be. Whilst holding people accountable is important, the negative side to call out culture is that it does not leave much space for people

to engage and correct their behavior (Ahmed, 2015). Here, respondents agree that offline participation is mostly less dismissive and creates opportunities for conversations and perspectives to be explored respectfully.

With the comments around safety, anonymity and trolls it is important to acknowledge social context both online and offline and how this plays into how and where people participate in any given movement. As Suler (2004) says, being anonymous on the internet allows people to be versions of themselves they cannot freely be offline. That is not to say their online and offline identities are separate, but to highlight that being online and having the option to be anonymous gives a level of safety to those with opinions that appear problematic.

Non-Participation

Of the 383 people who took part in the survey it is important to mention that 208 of them declared that they did not participate in the movement regardless of where they stood or how they felt towards it. 61.5% of these respondents felt very negatively to neutral towards the movement, whereas the remaining 38.5% were supporters. For the latter group, their support of the movement did not result in their desire to participate with 63% putting it down to the movement not being aimed at them. Contrastingly, when looking at the comments in response to the question asking what would encourage them to participate, a lot of them referred to living in America or there being a need in their country.

Though there is no reference to location in the question that asks what would encourage them to participate, 45% of respondents who selected the "Other" option and wrote their own answers all referred to them not being in America (where there are more options to get involved on the ground) or there not being anything active in their country/town/city that they can participate in. I flag this as this response suggests that the relationship between location and participation are not mutually exclusive. These respondents are effectively saying that a) if I am not close to the root e.g. I am not in the US or b) close to where people are already active then I cannot/will not/do not want to participate.

This type of response was unexpected given the current climate of movements that have thrived online such as #MeToo and #OscarsSoWhite. This response suggests that people tie participation to the physical act of doing something being that if online participation held the

same amount of value to them, their location would not matter given the worldwide access of the internet. It also challenges the idea that people are more concerned about appearing to participate by retweeting and posting information online than actually being active.

Looking at the choice and framing of words between how the three separate groups talk about location/proximity I found that those who supported the movement used phrases loaded with a desire to get involved such as "If I'd noticed things happening in my city" or "If I was asked and taught to participate as a white British person", whereas, those who did not agree with the movement were more dismissive saying things like "It's not my issue, I'm not American nor do I live in America" or "If I'm not black, why would I participate?". This goes back to the point made earlier about how people contextualise things differently with some being able to place themselves in other people's shoes and some not, but furthermore, how this influences how they respond. In this case, there is no link between the latter group and BLM and no level of connection or context has been formed in order to challenge their initial framing of BLM.

This chapter has reported on not only the sentiments towards BLM outside of the US but also how individuals have drawn their conclusions as to whether or not they participate, if they do, by what means and which methods they feel hold more value.

Central to this discussion has been the idea of relevance and relatability and how this is reflected in how they participate. In this case, it was rooted in the difference in cultural and historical context outside of the US that did not always translate well to other countries. Where efforts or suggestions were made to replicate the movement outside of the US, they did so by making it applicable to the issues experienced outside of the US. Doing this raises questions around the messaging of BLM and perhaps the freedom to skew the messaging in order to serve a different purpose.

The difference in perspectives between UK respondents and European respondents again, challenged how people viewed/participated in the movement. The variation in focal points with UK respondents referring to the UK's issue with race and European countries stating that their issues were more socio-economic related divided the reasons why people participated.

With online and offline participation, it was found that whilst online had its pros, respondents still referred to offline having more impact. They appreciated the online methods for its ability to grow a network, build awareness and the ease of being able to build a community but this was counteracted with comments relating to the strength in numbers and the need for them to be disruptive in order to make people look up and take notice.

The following chapter will reiterate some of the key findings whilst also pinpointing areas for future research.

Conclusion and Future Research

This research has begun to unpack some of the ways in which people respond to movements. Though it is not a representative sample, it raises many questions around how people judge relevance and relatability and how these are used to frame our conclusions which ultimately move us into action or do not. It has highlighted that the ways in which things are framed as well as how we place ourselves in the midst of everything has an impact on how we respond to movements. It revealed unexpected ideas such as how national identity plays a part in how we engage with things that have different cultural context to that which our identity is fully rooted in.

From the opposing perspective their reasons for not participating were not necessarily because they do not believe that black lives matter, but that the movement is not something that can be replicated in their country. In order for it to have relevance there, they felt like it needed to be more inclusive of other minorities who are seen to be treated just as bad, if not worse, than black people. For sceptics, though they sympathised with the movement, the decentralisation of it all makes it difficult for them to understand the messaging. They alluded to the inconvenience of protests and how this element of the movement is one of the main detractors when it comes to whether they participate or not. Even though supporters saw the need for BLM, they too, questioned some of their tactics and how they impact the way people view the movement. Many of these respondents suggested ways the movement could be more inclusive and better received by the public by including non-black people in their messaging and allowing them to lend their voice to the cause. For future research it would serve well to look at how the movement works with non-black allies and how them lending their voice to such a movement impacts the way it is received, but furthermore, what that

might say about a black movement not being able to use their own voice, tell their own stories and gain support and sympathisers on their own merits.

Our interpretation of different media sources is almost quite a difficult thing to understanding given that our range in context differs. We may be influenced by the same media but infer different things from it. Arjun Appadurai (2006:1) says:

> We now live in a world, articulated differently by states and by media in different national and regional contexts, in which fear often appears to be the source and ground for intensive campaigns of group violence.

Part of this is incredibly important when looking at how our opinions are framed which influences how people participate. It reminds us that we have to be critical of the information we internalised, but also remind ourselves that we have a choice in how we respond to these things. The thing about BLM and its framing in the media is that for the most part, it is framed negatively with agendas that benefit those who oppose them without giving people the opportunity to view things differently.

Greg Akil who is an organiser associated with Civil Rights, Black Power and Black Lives Matter discusses the fundamentals of organising by saying that it is about "getting people to move on their own behalf and in their own interest" (as cited in Abdullah, 2017). Ultimately, what this study has started to uncover is how different and limited our experiences are, particularly how hard the journey of taking stock, internalising and particularly, analysing where we sit in the midst of societal systems truly is – this is a difficult journey, one that challenges people to confront their identities and how they have benefitted from certain societal norms that go unchecked.

The data signified that social movements need to work on strategies that invoke global empathy be it cognitive empathy where people have the ability to absorb and acknowledge the emotions another person is feeling (Mitsopoulou & Giovazolias, 2015) or affective empathy where they are able to apprehend a situation, see themselves in it and respond accordingly to the emotions people are displaying (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004). Without this, movements will struggle to create beneficial alliances with potential sympathisers but to also address the problem of relevance that was a recurring theme throughout.

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