



**MA Equity and Diversity in Society, UWTSD**

**Module: The Social (Re)Production of Inequality**

**Module code: ECED7002**

**Assessment 2: Identify ONE activist/campaigning group in the news and critically reflect upon why this movement has developed, the aims and objectives of the group and consider what barriers to equity need to be resolved.**

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## **Introduction**

The aim of this paper is to critically review the formation, progression and impact on equity of the social movement #Black Lives Matter (also commonly referred to as #BLM). The #Black Lives Movement was formed in 2013 ‘in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin’s murderer’ (Black Lives Matter, 2021). This paper will examine the reasons behind the formation of the organisation and why it could be argued had a global impact and why it is different to historical movements such as the Civil Rights movement of the 1960’s led by Martin Luther King – in particular the movements objective to create change for ‘ALL Black Lives’ (Black Lives Matter, 2021) which includes briefly examining the inclusion of the concept of intersectionality which will be defined and discussed later. The paper will consider what changes if any the movement has had on society and has it had a positive impact on the barriers to equity in society including any changes made by central Governments. Included in the critique will be supporting evidence of the arguments of those that do not share the movements aims and evidence the claims by some that the movement has not achieved these aims and that progress has not been made for the lives of Black people.

## **Paper Methodology**

In order to undertake this critical review this paper will use a mix of ‘effective analysis, argument and reflection’ (Cottrell, 2017) but will also use sources of data and a range of literature to be ‘constructive and interpretive’ (Cresswell, 2013). However, as the movement’s roots are firmly based within social media the paper will therefore by necessity include ‘narrative inquiry’ as defined as ‘the acceptance of stories as valuable sources of data’ (Bell & Waters, 2018). The underlying ethnographical assumption is that by taking a pragmatic approach to writing this paper then by studying #BLM the paper will follow the argument made by some that ‘participatory studies often begin with an important issue or stance about the problems in society’ (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998)

## **#Black Lives Matter Movement**

#BLM was created in 2013 by three women - Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors - as a 'a rallying cry for ALL Black lives striving for liberation' (Black Lives Matter, 2021). The movement records publicly on its website that it was formed as a direct result of when '17-year-old Trayon Martin was post-humously placed on trial for his own murder and the killer, George Zimmerman was not held accountable for the crime he committed' (Black Lives Matter, 2021). However, it could be argued this was simply a trigger point following 'decades of frustration within the African American community over the continual exoneration of those who had taken Black lives' (Clare, 2016) . Others have subsequently argued that the formation and rise of the movement was a more because of a general and widespread 'response to state and vigilante violence against Black People' (Ransby, 2018) and that 'protests were sparked and accelerated by roughly a dozen high profile police killings over an extraordinary two year period, but they are part of a much longer trajectory' (Park & Lee, 2017).

The movement is a 'Social Movement Organisation' (Jones, 2020) and this is where it differs to many historical movements such as the Civil Rights movement in that 'the Internet is pivotal to that movement' (Hooker, 2016). Because of this use of social media and the wider internet the movement quickly 'established itself as a worldwide movement' (Howard University of Law, 2021). Evidence includes research that between 2013 and 2017 'the term Black Lives Matter was tweeted over a hundred thousand times per day' (Ransby, 2018) and further research included that as a result of this social media coverage 'over 40% Americans were sympathetic to the Black Lives Matter movement' (Horowitz & Livingston, 2016)

The result was that #BLM was able to successfully use their social media presence and internet foundation as 'an infrastructure for this movement project—moving the hashtag from social media to the streets' (Garza 2014). Others argued that the reason #BLM grew so quickly and globally was that 'new communications technologies have enabled the conversations that formerly occurred in geographic communities to go online' (Noble & Tynes, 2016).

Many commentators claimed that the organisation was a ‘decentralised global network that campaigns for justice, equality and an end to racism’ (BBC, 2021). The #BLM movement itself claims its ‘objective is to ‘eradicate white supremacy’ and that the organisation is ‘working towards a world where Black people are no longer systematically targeted for demise’ (Black Lives Matter, 2021).

## **Barriers to Equity**

Having discussed the reasons the Black Lives Matter movement established itself this paper now considers what barriers to equity it faced in making the changes the movement wanted. For the purposes of this paper the definition of equity is from the World Health Organisation definition that equity is ‘the absence of avoidable, unfair, or remediable differences among groups of people, whether those groups are defined socially, economically, demographically or geographically or by other means of stratification.’ (WHO, 2008)

### **#Black Lives Matter and Intersectionality as a barrier to equity**

The term ‘intersectionality’ is attributed to Kimberlee Crenshaw who is an American lawyer, civil rights advocate, philosopher, and a leading scholar of critical race. Crenshaw framed the term to describe how individual characteristics such as gender, race, class are not mutually exclusive, and that policies and society need to consider as a whole not individually. Previous movements such as the Civil Rights movement of the 1960’s have been criticised for being binary in their approach and ‘sexist to the core’ (Reynolds, 2105). The evidence to support this latter claim can be seen through leading females being excluded in key meetings and rallies by the male leaders such as Martin Luther King including the 1963 March on Washington. (Theoharis, 2013).

As previously commented the #BLM was created by three women thus ensuring the female voice was not excluded but the founders want the movement to be more than gender or race and it can be argued the foundations include intersectionality through their specific statement that ‘We affirm the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, undocumented folks, folks with records, women, and all Black lives along the gender spectrum’ (Black Lives Matter, 2021) . Some argued that this statement ‘simultaneously aimed to deepen both constructs by widening the circle of Black lives to incorporate Black trans people and others who face discrimination’ (Hill Collins, 2019) but others argued that it ‘demonstrates the challenges of developing intersectional strategies’ (Romero, 2018) and therefore could be considered that this is one of the reasons #BLM has been met with barriers to equity. In the UK the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities was formed to look at race in response to #BLM and in the report produced it also confirmed that barriers existed as ‘Creating a successful multicultural society is hard, and racial disparities exist wherever such a society is being forged’ (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, 2021).

### **Opponents to #BLM as a barrier to equity**

Another barrier to equity was that the movement did not have support from all parts of society including powerful politicians such as when ‘former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani called the movement “inherently racist” ‘ (Kendi, 2019).

This is amplified by theorists around white supremacy which is defined as “‘a racist ideology that is based upon the belief that white people are superior in many ways to people of other races’ (Saad, 2020) and that ‘white people will not struggle sufficiently against racist injustice and the exploitation of people of colour because they actually benefit from it’ (Aouragh, 2019). The implication being that the argument is that until white people see some benefit to them from racial equity, they will not support it and this is one of the underlying obstacles and struggles the Black Lives Matter movement must address.

Even with thin the Black community there were arguments that the movement would not succeed as it used ‘confrontational and divisive tactics’ (Reynolds, 2105) compared to the non-violent protests of the 1960’s Civil Rights Movements.

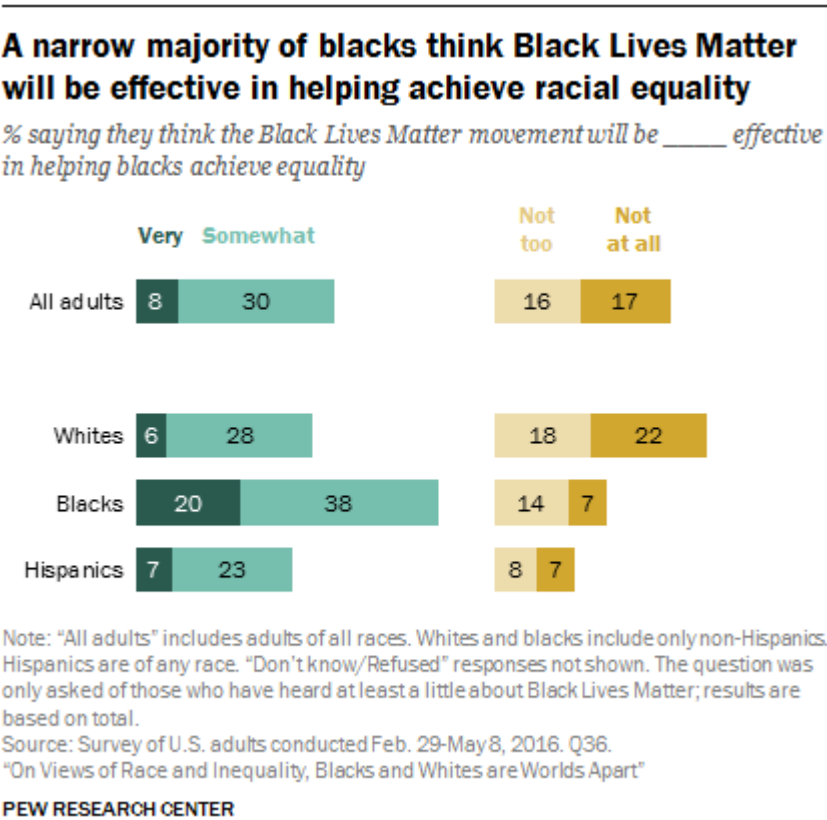
### **Quantitative Research on the impact of #BLM**

In order to understand the impact of the #Black Lives Matter movement this paper now considers the use of ‘quantitative data’ defined as ‘data in the form of numbers’ (Punch, 2000). This is useful to help understand what barriers remain if equity in society is to be achieved through movements such as #BLM.

The movements objectives include an ambition that ‘We are working for a world where Black lives are no longer systematically targeted for demise’ (Black Lives Matter, 2021). This paper has already commented that #BLM is founded through social media and therefore it is interesting to start with looking at how this aim is having an impact online. Research suggests that ‘13% of White people say they have been subject to racist or prejudiced insults on social media, the figure rises to 19% for people from the Pakistani ethnic group and 22% for Black people’ (Katwala,2021). Therefore, it can be concluded that despite 8 years since the movement was founded Black people are still more likely to be abused online than white people – although this paper acknowledges that the research provides a moment in time figure and no comparable data to pre 2013 is available to understand whether 22% is any improvement.

Research has also been undertaken to understand whether society believes that Black Lives matter ‘will be effective in helping achieve racial equality’ (Horowitz & Livingston, 2021). Chart 1 below provides the results of this research suggesting only 20% of Black adults think #BLM will be ‘very’ effective (Horowitz & Livingston, 2021) despite this research being conducted soon after the formation of the movement and arguable at its peak in populist views.

CHART 1:



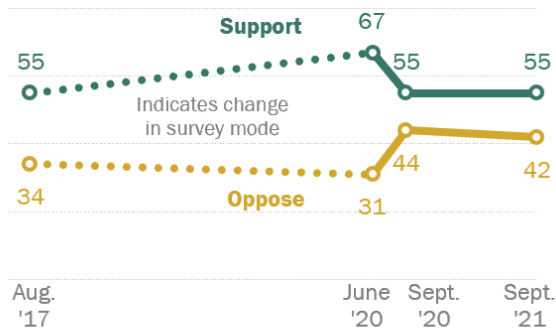
(Horowitz & Livingston, 2016)

The same research in Chart 2 below looked at trends in the US for support specifically for the Black Lives Matter. This indicates that following the launch of the movement the support grew to a peak of around 66% it has now waned and decreased to around 55% and then was constant for 2 years (Horowitz, 2016).

CHART 2:

## Support for Black Lives Matter is unchanged from a year ago

% saying they strongly or somewhat \_\_\_\_\_ the Black Lives Matter movement



Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown. The 2017 survey was conducted by telephone; all others used the Center's online American Trends Panel.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 13-19, 2021.

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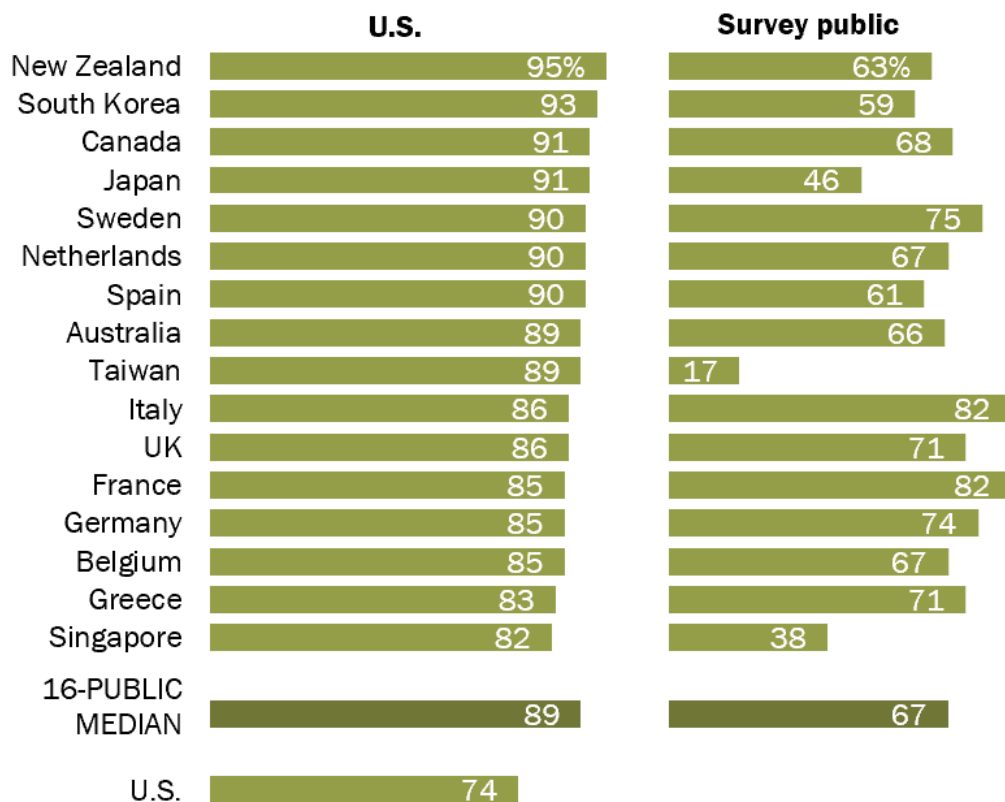
(Horowitz, 2021)

This paper has previously stated that the #BLM is a global campaign and therefore it is useful to also look at trends in the United Kingdom. This similarly suggests that the movement has not improved Black lives as evidenced by the fact that 'The total of police recorded race-related hate crime for England and Wales has leapt up in recent years, increasing by 131% in the 9 years to March 2020' (UK Government Home Office, 2021). Interestingly further research suggests people in the UK more people consider racial, ethnic discrimination as problem in the US, than at home' (Silver, 2021) . This is evidenced in Chart 3 below where 71% of people surveyed in the UK believed there was an issue in the UK but in the same survey population 86% believed it was an issue in the US. (Silver, 2021).

Chart 3:

## In every place surveyed, more people see racial, ethnic discrimination as a problem in the U.S. than at home

*% who say discrimination against people based on their race or ethnicity is a **serious** problem in ...*



Source: Spring 2021 Global Attitudes Survey. Q28a, b.

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(Silver, 2021)

The quantitative research suggests that whilst there is broad support for the Black Lives Matter movement it has not yet eliminated the barriers to equity and in particular examining how society understands the issues. It further suggests that outside the US – in this case the UK- there is a need for education to understand the issues and why Black Lives Matter.

## Conclusion

This paper has critically looked at the Black Lives Matter Movement (Black Lives Matter, 2021). It can be strongly argued and evidenced that this was a movement of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century built through social media as a Social Movement Organisation (Jones, 2020) which is radically different compared to other Black movements such as the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's. The movement became global as a result of the reach of social media and prompted governments across the world to act as evidenced in the UK in the Government response and report on Race and Ethnicity including introductory comments 'the spirit of BLM was the original trigger for our report' (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, 2021).

However, as the paper has discussed the paper has failed to win support for all parts of society. For example, the US elect its first Black President, Obama it was argued by some that 'that the U.S. had entered a new "post-racial" era' (Rivera & Plant, 2016). However, others argued that the combination of the election of a Black President and the formation of #BLM in fact 'heightened the fears of many white Americans that the racially conservative era that had prevailed since 1980 was over, putting them and their accustomed advantages in danger' (Smith & King, 2020). It can therefore be argued that until the white population understand and are educated in the struggle of Black Lives and why equity is important – we will never overcome the barriers to equity and equality.

The conclusion of this paper is that research and arguments support that #BLM has impacted society and effected change as a result. However, the evidence of alternative research – both qualitative and quantitative – is that the movement still has a long way to achieve equality and its mission of 'a world where Black lives are no longer systematically targeted for demise' (Black Lives Matter, 2021).

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