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Black Generational Politics and the Black Lives Matter Movement

How Political Opportunity Structures and Respectability Politics Affect Movement Support

ABSTRACT Despite its advocacy for justice and accountability in the American political system, the Movement for Black Lives is still considered controversial among groups of Americans. The in-your-face and unapologetic tone of today's movement stands in contrast to romanticized narratives of the peaceful, nonviolent activism of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. The movement's titular organization, Black Lives Matter, openly rejects respectability politics—the notion that individuals and groups must conform to the expectations of white mainstream norms to protect themselves from the harms of white racism and discrimination. In this article, we examine whether generational politics affect Black attitudes toward protest movements, focusing especially on the Black Lives Matter organization. We expect that protest politics are affected by generations of Black Americans who have been socialized in different eras of social and political advocacy with differing views about the actions that are acceptable for Black politics. Consistent with prior literature, we anticipate that generational differences in attitudes toward contestation, varying awareness about the political and social goals of new movements, differences in access to political information, and overall generational socialization toward respectability politics will all affect the degree to which Black Americans support the Movement for Black Lives. Using national-level data from the 2016 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (CMPS), we find that prior theories of generational politics do not fully explain support for Black Lives Matter. Unexpectedly, we find that older generations of Black Americans are more supportive of the movement than younger generations of Black Americans. We do not find strong evidence of generational effects interacting with awareness of the movement, political opportunity structures, or respectability politics, which suggests the diminishing effects of generational differences along with traditional factors that influence support. Our results underscore the need for research on generational effects to consider the context of political socialization, which varies across generations.

INTRODUCTION

The Movement for Black Lives (MBL) emerged in 2012 in response to the killing of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed Black teenager. Martin died at the hands of his non-Black assailant, a member of the neighborhood watch named, George Zimmerman, who shot and killed Martin during an altercation. Local law enforcement evoked Florida's "stand your ground" law to release Zimmerman, who was arrested after Martin's killing. It was only in response to protests that the local prosecutor eventually charged Zimmerman with second-degree murder. However, after an infamous court trial that played out before the American public, Zimmerman was found not guilty of Martin's murder.

Steeped in a long-standing history and recognition among Black people of racial violence and extrajudicial vigilantism, the case evoked sentiments of disappointment with racially unjust judicial outcomes. It was reminiscent of the ways that Black lives are devalued in the public lynchings of Black Americans, historically and in the more recent past (Equal Justice Initiative 2017). In a somber, yet agentic response to the Zimmerman case, co-founders Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Khan-Cullors, ignited a movement with the hashtag *#BlackLivesMatter*. This movement became a clarion call to fight the injustices of vigilante and police-related killings of Black people. In the post–civil rights era, Trayvon Martin's killing became the site of a modern movement for Black people to fight for justice, equality, and their human dignity.

In a five-year span between summer 2013 and spring 2018, the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag "[w]as . . . used nearly 30 million times on Twitter, an average of 17,002 times per day," and engagement with the hashtag over this time period fluctuated in tandem with the high-profile incidents of police-related killings of Black people (Pew Research Center 2018). With the #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) organization playing a central role, the broader MBL has since expanded to include a network of local and international organizational chapters collectively known as the Black Lives Matter Global Network.

Despite its impressive reach, the movement has not met with equal enthusiasm across or within groups. For example, the specific focus on Black people evokes feelings of racial resentment and reactionary mantras, such as "All Lives Matter" for some white Americans (see Parker and Barreto 2014). And especially in the earlier days of the movement, some Black Americans disagreed with the tactics and ideological priorities of Black Lives Matter because they appeared to run contrary to the style of civil disobedience associated with the Civil Rights Movement.[1] Given this backdrop of support and contention, a puzzle emerges: Is there generational variation in support for Black Lives Matter among Black Americans, and, if so, what explains it?[2]

Upwards of 65 percent of Black Americans expressed some support for the Black Lives Matter movement (Horowitz and Livingston 2016), but expressed support was neither unanimous nor universally strong. While a plurality expressed strong support, about 41 percent—a sizeable share of Black Americans—are less enthusiastic. Twenty-nine percent reported that they somewhat supported the movement, 22 percent are neutral, and around 8 percent either somewhat or strongly opposed Black Lives Matter (Barreto et al. 2017). President Barack Obama's response to the movement exemplifies Black

America's ambivalence toward new movement approaches (see Price 2016; Shear and Stack 2016). He repeatedly advises against social media critiques and confrontational politics (Shear and Stack 2016; Obama 2019), instead encouraging formal political engagement—e.g., voting, contacting elected officials, donating to campaigns—and validating traditional forms of nonviolent protest—e.g., marches, boycotts, speeches—so long as the necessary permits are obtained.

If the MBL represents organizations collectively seeking justice for all Black people, why do Black Americans express different levels of support? Are there generational differences in Black support for Black Lives Matter? Are MBL tactics unpalatable to some Black group members? Do some members of the Black public view the political goals of Black Lives Matter as antithetical to Black progress? To what extent do influences like access to new media, knowledge about current protest movements, and respectability politics differ across generations?[3]

To answer the above questions, we consider whether support for BLM—the marquee organization of the Movement for Black Lives—varies across generations. We theorize that generational differences arise from the different ways that individuals across generations are socialized to evaluate the respectability of movements.[4] These evaluations are informed by Black attitudes toward movement tactics and BLM's leaders and activists (who historically would have been deemed marginal or deviant), as well as knowledge of movement goals and access to Black information networks. We expect that older Black Americans will have less awareness of BLM, show less use of Black-focused news media, and be less open to the inclusivity that is a hallmark of BLM leaders and activists. For these reasons, older generations will be less likely than younger ones to express support for Black Lives Matter.

Structure of the Article

This article proceeds by first explaining the context in which older generations of Black Americans make comparisons between the Movement for Black Lives and the Civil Rights Movement and come away less supportive of the newer movement as a result. We highlight two key features of the Movement for Black Lives that depart from the Civil Rights Movement and influence interpretations of the current movement's respectability: commitment to contestational politics, and an inclusive emphasis on gender and sexuality. We expect older Black Americans to rely more heavily on respectability politics (normative considerations of Black Americans behaving in ways indicative of better comportment and counter to negative stereotypes to be deserving of respect and equal rights in white Americans' view; see Higginbotham 1993; Jefferson 2019) in their evaluations of Black Lives Matter than younger people do. We theorize that this generational departure is a response to changes in political opportunity structures, which affect Black Americans' political knowledge regarding the Movement for Black Lives and, thus, affect their interpretations of the movement with respect to contestation and respectability.

We argue, ultimately, that generational variation should respond to: (1) individual awareness about the goals of Black Lives Matter; (2) the types of Black information networks available and who accesses them; and (3) movement emphasis on broadly

inclusive gender and sexual identities. We also consider the cross-generational role of respectability politics as a means of evaluating the efficacy of BLM. Because the MBL characterizes itself as being antithetical to antiquated notions of respectability that deny marginalized in-group members access to respect, and because the MBL defies bourgeois, gender, and sexual norms of the past (see Higginbotham 1994; Gaines 1996; Jefferson 2019), we expect older generations of Black Americans to be less supportive of the Black Lives Matter movement than their younger counterparts.

Using data from the 2016 Collaborative Multi-Racial Post-Election Survey (CMPS), we examine the degree to which generational differences influence support for Black Lives Matter. Our theory suggests that Black Americans' support for BLM will not be monolithic. Support will vary by generation, and will be moderated by Black Americans' awareness of the movement's goals and by the information they consume. Generational differences in attitudes toward respectability politics will also influence BLM support, marking a dividing line between older and younger Black Americans.

We analyze the data using multivariate logit and ordinary least squares regression. As expected, our analysis shows generational variation in BLM support. Unexpectedly, we find that in 2016 older generations of Black Americans were more likely to support Black Lives Matter than younger generations. Although our finding departs from existing literature on Black generational divides and social movement politics, we offer some explanations for why this counterintuitive result makes sense. Taken together, our results suggest that the narrative about Black support for the Black Lives Matter movement must incorporate a nuanced understanding of political socialization across generations—spanning across time, varying resources, and access to different information networks.

HOW THE MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES DEPARTS FROM THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The Movement for Black Lives calls attention to injustices that prompt comparisons to police and vigilante killings in previous eras, such as the 1955 murder of Emmett Till.[5] Like the Civil Rights Movement, one of the primary goals of the MBL has been to raise collective consciousness about the nature of extrajudicial violence against Black people, whether at the hands of white vigilantes enacting racial terror to uphold white supremacy (Ritterhouse 2006) or at the hands of law enforcement using excessive and disproportionate force to control Black bodies (Nunnally 2010, 2012).

The MBL similarly intends to disrupt spaces and call attention to ongoing injustices experienced by Black people around the world, and especially in the United States (Taylor 2016; Ransby 2018). However, a notable feature of the current movement is that the tactics of MBL are not universally considered to be "civil" or "obedient," and some detractors claim that the movement does more harm than good (Reuters 2016; Shapiro et al. 2016). Although activists have been met with state-sanctioned violence throughout the history of Black rights advocacy in the United States, the fiery contestation of today's activists departs from the style of civil disobedience associated with widely accepted narratives about the Civil Rights Movement, which tend to emphasize

well-dressed, trained, and nonviolent protesters who demonstrated using sit-ins, marches, and boycotts.

A second key feature of the Movement for Black Lives is its commitment to the declaration that *all* Black lives matter—regardless of sexuality, gender, or political ideology (see blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe). This choice to dismantle cisgender privilege alongside its goals for racial justice represents an important political difference from the Civil Rights Movement, which fell short of making anti-sexism and anti-misogyny central to its efforts (Theoharis 2018).[6] For older generations, respectability politics are more than forced conformity and concern about white approval (Gaines 1996; Cohen 1999; Gillespie 2010; Nunnally and Carter 2012; Nunnally 2018; Jefferson 2019) and blaming Black people for their own failed progress and enterprises (see Price 2009; Nunnally and Carter 2012; Spence 2015; Nunnally 2018).[7] Respectability is also about a moderate vision of peace that relies on appeals to whites' sentimental paternalism (Brooks 2017). Black Lives Matter tactics have encouraged civil-confrontational protest tactics and the inclusion of all Black group members. The MBL contrasts Black rights movements of the past whose norms of exclusion placed women and LGBTQ members on the margins, sometimes resulting in the outright dismissal of in-group members' subgroup politics (Cohen 1999). We anticipate that the norm-defying behavior of Black Lives Matter philosophy and activism will lessen support among older Black Americans. This expectation is consistent with burgeoning research that finds older Black Americans subscribe more readily to respectability politics than younger Black Americans (Jefferson 2019). We expect older generations of Black Americans whose experiences may be more reminiscent of the Civil Rights era to disagree with the inclusive emphasis of the MBL.

POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES AND THE APPEAL OF THE MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES

Our intuition is that older generations of Black Americans will differ in their orientations toward the Movement for Black Lives from their younger counterparts, with older cohorts' familiarity with the Civil Rights Movement standing as a key point of comparison. In anticipating these generational differences we must also account for the passage of time.

The MBL began in 2012 and made extensive strides in its public awareness campaigning heading into the 2016 election when our data was collected. We look to social movement theory and build on the political opportunity structure framework to argue that changing political opportunity structures help explain contemporary disjunctures in Black attitudes toward the Movement for Black Lives. Here, we suggest that the *degree* of access available for new actors to join a new social movement also influences evaluations of the movement.

Today's movements use new forms of communication including social media, such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook (see Tillery 2019); internet platforms, such as YouTube and other websites that feature user-created content; and other related technological advances, such as text messaging and the use of cell phones to record police misconduct and other forms of violence. The heavy reliance of the MBL on online

information networks may limit access among older generations of Black people, shaping their awareness of and support for the movement.

Political opportunity structures describe a series of expectations around social movements based on the idea that sudden, community-wide shifts in alignments of power and opportunity have created space for new mobilizations (Tarrow 2011). These expectations revolve around shifts in access, political realignment within the polity, coalition building, disagreements among elites, and an unwillingness or inability to control dissent.[8]

Existing research suggests that the Movement for Black Lives is particularly salient in the communities most impacted and mobilized by these sudden shifts in power (see Lebron 2017; Tillery 2017). Although Black Americans appear to express widespread aggregate support for the Movement for Black Lives, many Black people also express reservations about movement goals, tactics, and outcomes. Given the distinct socializing experiences across generations of Black communities described previously, we do not expect Black political attitudes to be monolithic. For our purposes it is helpful to think of the various generations as separate communities that may not share the same awareness of, engagement in, or support for the Movement for Black Lives.

In sum, we argue that older generations are part of different *experiential* communities than younger Black generations, particularly with respect to their information networks, political ideologies, and preferred tactics. These generational differences should help explain why support for the MBL, though widespread, falls short of unanimity.[9] However, given the social pressures embedded in contemporary Black politics that push Black Americans toward a common worldview as evinced in voting behavior among other things (White and Laird 2019), we should also consider the possibility that older generations of Black Americans would move increasingly into alignment with the Movement for Black Lives—our analysis demonstrates this outcome.

The political opportunity structures framework allows us to identify three relevant measures to assess variation in attitudes toward the Movement for Black Lives: awareness of movement goals, access to information networks, and respectability politics. The first two measures are connected. New actors must access information networks to successfully join and politically align themselves with a movement. As sociologist Aldon Morris (1984) notes, expanding information networks across college campuses were a necessary component of the changing political opportunities afforded to Blacks as the Civil Rights Movement emerged in southern states and as tactics began to shift from seeking legal remedies to direct action.

Online networks have redefined the boundaries of what constitutes a community. Shifts in information networks over time may redefine who is in *active* community with others. We expect access to movement-related information, and the sources of that information, to affect movement support. We expect that older Blacks who are more likely to consume information from traditional sources such as mainstream media will also be more likely to view protests through the lens of respectability politics, and therefore less likely to express support for BLM. Limited access to Black social media information networks that spawned the movement will suppress the understanding and support of the movement for older Black people. We expect such media connections to

vary by generation; existing data show that in 2016 only 34 percent of seniors age 65 and above reported using social media networks (Anderson and Perrin 2017).

HYPOTHESES

The preceding discussion leads us to several hypotheses related to generational differences in support among Black Americans for the Black Lives Matter movement. We argue that generational effects will be moderated by political opportunity structures such that older generations of Blacks will be less supportive of the Black Lives Matter movement. Generations will differ in their support of the movement in the following ways:

1. Awareness*Generation: Older Black Americans will be less knowledgeable about Black Lives Matter because its messaging has circulated mostly through social media and online platforms. Therefore, we expect the interaction between awareness and generation to be associated with weaker support for the movement among older generations.

2. Information Networks*Generation: Older generations of Black Americans will have less access to online and social media information that could assist in their political learning about Black Lives Matter. Therefore, we expect the interaction between political opportunity and generation to be associated with weaker support for BLM among older generations.

3. Inclusion and Respectability Politics*Generation: Older Black Americans (from the Boomer generation and earlier) have likely been socialized about respectability politics more than younger generations, resulting in entrenched norms about *which* Black Americans should be foremost in setting and representing a collective Black agenda. We expect that close ties between the Black political agenda and the interests of mainstream, middle-class Blacks, operationalized as an interaction between respectability politics and generation, will be associated with weaker support for BLM among older generations.

DATA AND METHODS

The data used in this study are from the 2016 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (CMPS).[10] The CMPS is a national survey of 10,145 online self-administered interviews conducted from December 2016 to February 2017. CMPS data are ideal for examining racial attitudes because the survey contains a much larger sample of non-white respondents than other nationally representative surveys. Respondents were recruited and randomly selected from seven sources: the national voter registration database email sample, Federated, Poder, Research Now, Netquest, SSI, and Pordege. Each respondent received a $10 or $20 gift card as compensation for their participation.

Our analysis uses two main dependent variables. The first dependent variable is a dichotomous measure that asks, *"When it comes to the Black Lives Matter movement, which statement do you agree with more?"* Respondents were asked to select from two possible options: "They have forced politicians and the media to discuss openly issues

about race that help race relations and the future of Black people's influence on politics" (coded as 1) or "They have forced racial issues on the political agenda in a way that hurts race relations and the future of Black people's influence on politics" (coded as 0). Because the measure is dichotomous, we employ logit regression analysis to assess the probability that a respondent will express that Black Lives Matter helps, rather than hurts, race relations.

The second dependent variable is a measure of support for Black Lives Matter that asks, *"From what you have heard about the Black Lives Matter movement, do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the Black Lives Matter movement activism?"* Respondents selected from a 5-point scale where 1 = strongly oppose, 5 = strongly support, and 3 = neither support nor oppose. The Black Lives Matter support variable is assessed using ordinary least squares regression analysis.

Generational cohorts are defined by each respondent's birth year. We use the generational cutoffs defined by the Pew Research Center (Dimock 2019): Generation Z (born 2012 and after), Millennials (born 1981–96), Generation X (1965–80), Boomers (1946–64), and the Silent Generation (born prior to 1945). Thus, five generations are included in our analysis, ranging from Generation Z (coded as 1) to Silent Generation (coded as 5).

We include several measures to assess respondents' awareness of the Black Lives Matter movement, its goals, and overall effectiveness. The variable "BLM Heard" asks, "How much have you heard about the Black Lives Matter movement?" Responses range from 1 (nothing at all) to 4 (a lot). We feel that it is important to control for awareness about the movement because people with less awareness may have unclear understandings about the movement and its intentions. The variable "BLM Goals" asks, "How well, if at all, do you feel you understand the goals of the Black Lives Matter movement?" Responses range from 1 (not well at all) to 4 (very well). The variable "BLM Effective" asks, "How effective do you think the Black Lives Matter movement will be in helping Blacks achieve equality in this country?" Responses range from 1 (not at all effective) to 4 (very effective). We created an additive index variable called "Awareness" that adds responses across BLM Heard, BLM Goals, and BLM Effective for each individual. The awareness variable has a range of values from 3 (low awareness) to 12 (high awareness). The awareness index items produce a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.67.

We include a dichotomous "Black Information Network" variable to measure levels of exposure to Black media sources. People with greater exposure to Black information networks should have keener understandings about the movement because such networks enhance their political opportunities to access information about the movement. The information variable asks how respondents watch TV and online news when it comes to news and current affairs. Respondents could choose from six options ranging from mostly mainstream to mostly Black-oriented TV, with gradients of Black programming in between, or indicate that they never watch TV or online news. Responses were later categorized as either mostly mainstream news (coded as 0), or as consuming Black-oriented news to any degree (coded as 1). Respondents who indicated that they never watch TV or online news were excluded from the analysis.

The variable "Black Inclusion" is an additive index that asks how important it is for Blacks to address the challenges facing a number of groups including Black gays and lesbians, Black transgender people, Black women, Black undocumented immigrants, and formerly incarcerated Black people. For each group, respondents indicated on a 3-point scale whether it was not important at all (coded as 1), somewhat important (coded as 2), or very important (coded as 3) for Black people to address the challenges of each respective group. The Inclusion index sums the responses across categories for each individual, resulting in a range of 5 (low inclusion) to 15 (high inclusion). The inclusion variable serves as a proxy for respectability politics, because it accounts for several non-traditional groups that have been historically marginalized from the Black political agenda (Cohen 1999) and accounts for groups that had not been respectably constructed as the norm of "Blackness," e.g., heterosexual Black men.[11] The inclusion index items produce a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.8, indicating that the items have high covariances and likely measure the same underlying concept.

We include several control variables in our analysis. "TV Only" is a measure that asks whether the respondent has watched Black television programming or visited a Black website or blog in the past month. Individuals who have watched Black television but did not consume online media are coded as 1, and all other individuals (who visited a blog or website *and* watched Black television, as well as those who consumed only online Black media) are coded as 0. Like Black information networks, exposure to messages about Black Lives Matter presents political opportunities for political learning that can enhance support of the movement.[12]

We control for ideology on a 5-point scale where 1=strong conservative and 5= strong liberal. We expect that respondents who express liberal ideology will be more inclined to report that Black Lives Matter helps race relations, and express stronger support for the movement.

"Female" is a dichotomous measure that categorizes respondents as female (coded as 1) or nonfemale (coded as 0 and including male and nonbinary responses). Prior research has demonstrated the influence of gender on political attitudes; in general, women express more progressive attitudes on social issues than men (Hutchings et al. 2004; Hope, Keels, and Durkee 2016). The fact that the Black Lives Matter movement was founded by Black women may also be an important factor influencing gendered support for the movement.[13]

We control for income using a measure that asks respondents to report their annual household income. "Protest" is a variable measuring how effectively respondents believe nonviolent protest activities solve social problems on a 4-point scale, where 1 is least effective and 4 is most effective. "Neighborhood Percent Black" is a continuous measure that asks respondents to estimate the percentage of Black residents they perceive to live in their neighborhood, ranging from 0–100 percent. Although our neighborhood variable is not an objective measure of propinquity, it helps us gauge whether respondents have some close interactions with Black neighbors in their daily lives.

Two additional controls account for the degree to which group consciousness may be influencing attitudes regarding Black Lives Matter. The "Linked Fate" measure asks respondents, "Do you think what happens generally to [people in the respondent's

Generation	Age	BLM Helps	BLM Support	BLM Heard	BLM Goals	BLM Effective	Information	Inclusion	Ideology	Income
Generation Z (N=167)	22	0.66	4.09	3.31	3.13	2.95	0.67	12.1	3.52	4.58
Millennials (1,143);	31	0.67	3.94	3.32	3.05	2.86	0.62	12.1	3.37	4.21
Generation X (967)	46	0.72	3.99	3.28	3.01	2.75	0.53	12.0	3.32	4.93
Boomers (787)	63	0.80	4.06	3.22	3.04	2.70	0.44	11.9	3.32	5.25
Silent (90)	79	0.83	4.03	3.07	2.97	2.77	0.41	12.1	3.42	5.28
Col Means (N=3,154)	44	.72	4.0	3.27	3.04	2.81	0.54	12.0	3.35	4.74

TABLE 1. Descriptive Statistics (Variable Means by Generation)

racial/ethnic group] in this country will have something to do with what happens in your life?" Respondents indicate their responses with a yes (coded as 1) or no (coded as 0). "Linked Fate Valance" asks respondents to indicate whether the feelings they associate with linked fate are positive (coded "3"), neutral ("2"), or negative ("1"). We expect more positive valence to be associated with stronger support for Black Lives Matter and the belief that the movement helps race relations.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for key explanatory variables by generation. The mean age of the sample is 44 years. The largest generation in the sample is Millennials with slightly more than 1,100 cases, while the smallest generation are those from the Silent Generation with a little fewer than 100 cases. The sample shows strong support for BLM overall, with an average score across generations of 4.0 on a 5-point scale. Most respondents share the view that BLM helps rather than hurts American race relations and advances Black politics with an average score of .72 on a 0–1 scale.

Few differences are evident across generations in the disaggregated awareness variables. Older generations were somewhat less likely to have heard of BLM or to report understanding movement goals. Younger cohorts were more likely to report having heard about BLM, expressed greater awareness of the movement's goals, and expressed more positive views on the movement's effectiveness than older generations. Generational differences in access to Black information networks also emerge, with the two youngest generations reporting a greater degree of news consumption from Black programming sources. There is no discernible variation across generations on our inclusion/respectability measure and little ideological difference with the sample leaning somewhat liberal on average (3.35 on a 5-point scale). With the exception of Millennials, income levels appear to increase across generations.

TABLE 2. Logit Regression Results

	Dependent variable:		
	Black Lives Matter Hurts / Helps		
	Baseline	Awareness Disag.	Generation Interact.
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Awareness	0.31***		0.23***
	(0.03)		(0.09)
BLM Heard		0.08	
		(0.07)	
BLM Goals		0.33***	
		(0.07)	
BLM Effective		0.52***	
		(0.07)	
Information	−0.12	−0.13	0.21
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.32)
Inclusion	0.03	0.02	0.15**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.07)
Generation	0.26***	0.26***	0.59*
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.32)
TV Only	−0.08	−0.09	−0.07
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Ideology	0.18***	0.16***	0.18***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Female	−0.02	−0.02	−0.03
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Income	0.01	0.02	0.01
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Protest	0.13**	0.08	0.12**
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Black Neighborhood	0.003	0.002	0.003*
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Linked Fate	0.21*	0.24**	0.21*
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Linked Fate Valance	0.37***	0.35***	0.37***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Awareness x Generation			0.03
			(0.03)
Information x Generation			−0.12
			(0.11)
Inclusion x Generation			−0.04*
			(0.02)
Constant	−4.79***	−4.50***	−5.70***
	(0.42)	(0.42)	(0.98)
Observations	2,471	2,471	2,471
Log Likelihood	−1,253.80	−1,243.44	−1,251.31
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,533.60	2,516.88	2,534.62

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Results from our analysis of whether Black respondents felt that the Black Lives Matter movement helped or hurt race relations and improved Black peoples' political fortunes are presented in Table 2. We ran three logit regression models to examine the effects of awareness and generational differences on evaluations of the movement using our dichotomous dependent variable. The first model in Column 1 presents a baseline analysis of generational effects along with effects of the additive index "awareness" variable measured as whether respondents had heard of BLM, were aware of the movement's goals, and saw BLM as effective. In Column 2, the second model shows the effects of the disaggregated awareness variables on evaluations of whether BLM helps or hurts race relations. The model in Column 3 examines the effects of both the awareness index and the interactive effects of generation on awareness, information, and inclusion. We include interaction terms to model our theoretical prediction that generational effects will be moderated by political opportunity structures such that older generations of Blacks will be less supportive of the Black Lives Matter movement. We anticipate that the relationship between generational cohorts and attitudes toward Black Lives Matter will vary depending on the values of the awareness, information, and inclusion variables. Statistically significant generational effects are evidenced across all model specifications.

The baseline model shows that respondents in older generations are more likely to agree that BLM is beneficial for Black politics. For every increase in generational cohort, the log odds of believing that Black Lives Matter helps race relations increase by 0.26. Among the control variables, only ideology, protest, and linked fate valance produce statistically significant results in the baseline model.

As expected, more liberal respondents and those who express stronger levels of positive linked fate with other Black people are more likely to see BLM in a positive way. Black respondents who see nonviolent protests as a useful means of solving social problems are more likely to express that BLM is helpful to American race relations. Information, new media sources, gender, income, and whether respondents lived in Black neighborhoods do not appear to statistically influence beliefs about whether BLM helps or hurts Black America.

Model 2 shows the effects of the disaggregated variables in the awareness index. In this model, we see that Black respondents who felt they understood BLM goals well and those who viewed BLM as an aid in helping Black people achieve racial equality were more likely than others to see BLM activism as helpful for the general goal of Black advancement. For each one-unit increase in "BLM Goals" and "BLM Effective," the log odds of believing that Black Lives Matters helps race relations increase by 0.33 and 0.52, respectively. As a building block of the composite awareness variable, whether respondents had heard of BLM at all was less relevant to their evaluations than assessments of its goals and effectiveness. Ideology and linked fate valance also significantly influence the likelihood that Black respondents will express that Black Lives Matter helps race relations.

We display interactive generational effects in Model 3. Here, we are interested in examining whether generational differences in awareness, information, or inclusion influence assessments of BLM as a help or detriment to Black politics and race relations. None of the interaction terms in Model 3 are statistically significant at the .05 level, indicating

that generational effects do not moderate the awareness, information, or inclusion variables in our logit regression. However, generation interacted with the inclusion variable is significant at the .01 level and the inclusion variable is statistically significant on its own. Although we are mindful not to overstate the significance of this result, we interpret this finding to mean that respondents who express more inclusive attitudes toward undocumented immigrants, LGBT people, Black women, and formerly incarcerated people—our measure of respectability politics—are more likely to see the movement as helping to advance Black political aims. A positive effect of this variable on evaluations of BLM as helpful is evidence of the effects of respectability politics. Respondents with high scores on this variable are more tolerant of groups often viewed as "deviant" or outside of the mainstream and thus outside the confines of traditional "respectability."

The findings in Model 3 support our hypothesis that respectability politics make Black respondents less likely to see BLM as helpful. Direct generational effects are weakest in this model, achieving statistical significance only in a one-tailed test. Liberal ideology, positive linked fate valance, and positive views of the effectiveness of protests all increase the likelihood of Black respondents evaluating BLM as helpful.

Overall, the results in Table 2 underscore the connections between political opportunity structures, political socialization, and group consciousness, all of which influence the likelihood that Black Americans will express positive evaluations of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Table 3 presents the results of models of Black support for BLM using ordinary least squares regression. Our dependent variable measures support for Black Lives Matter using a 5-point scale that ranges from strong opposition (1) to strong support (5). We treat Black Lives Matter support as a continuous variable.

Once again, three models are presented, the first as a baseline, the second showing the effects of disaggregated awareness variables, and the third examining awareness and interactive generational effects. The independent and control variables remain the same across the two sets of analyses. The key explanatory variables—awareness, inclusion, generation, and the disaggregated awareness variables—are statistically significant across all models and are the strongest indicators of support for BLM across all models.

The baseline model finds that the additive index awareness variable has a statistically significant effect on Black support for BLM. Older generations express more support for BLM than their younger cohorts. Inclusion/respectability works in the expected direction and exerts a modest effect on the strength of support for BLM. Among the control variables, liberals, women, linked fate, and linked fate valance have modest positive effects on BLM support.

Model 2 presents results of the analysis using the disaggregated awareness variables; all of the composite index variables produce statistically significant results. Respondents who have heard of BLM, who understand the goals of the movement, and who believe the movement to be effective are all more likely to express support for the Black Lives Matter movement. Surprisingly, those respondents who positively view protests as means of solving social problems are less likely to support BLM, but this variable is not statistically significant in the other two models.

TABLE 3. OLS Regression Results

	Dependent variable:		
	Support for Black Lives Matter		
	Baseline	Awareness Disag.	Generation Interact.
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Awareness	0.30***		0.34***
	(0.01)		(0.03)
BLM Heard		0.07***	
		(0.02)	
BLM Goals		0.37***	
		(0.02)	
BLM Effective		0.46***	
		(0.02)	
Information	0.05*	0.05*	0.08
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.10)
Inclusion	0.03***	0.03***	0.05**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)
Generation	0.06***	0.06***	0.26**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.10)
TV Only	0.03	0.02	0.03
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Ideology	0.11***	0.10***	0.11***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Female	0.07**	0.08**	0.06*
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Income	−0.005	0.0001	−0.01
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Protest	−0.02	−0.05***	−0.02
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Black Neighborhood	0.0003	0.0001	0.0002
	(0.001)	(0.0005)	(0.001)
Linked Fate	0.15***	0.17***	0.15***
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Linked Fate Valance	0.07***	0.06**	0.07***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Awareness x Generation			−0.01
			(0.01)
Information x Generation			−0.01
			(0.03)
Inclusion x Generation			−0.01
			(0.01)
Constant	0.07	0.36***	−0.51
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.31)
Observations	2,471	2,471	2,471
R^2	0.42	0.45	0.42
Adjusted R^2	0.42	0.45	0.42

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Models 2 and 3 show similar results across the core variables. The direct effects of awareness and inclusion/respectability are all stronger in the interactive generational effects model. The direct generational effects are strongest in this model by a factor of 4.

Taken together, our results suggest that direct generational effects, expressions of respectability politics, and awareness of the movement help explain support for Black Lives Matter. These effects operate independently of other control variables that we would expect to influence attitudes toward the Movement for Black Lives, such as ideology, linked fate, and gender.

A modest interpretation of the evidence in Table 1 suggests that although measures of awareness about the goals of Black Lives Matter and access to information about the movement vary somewhat across generations, preferences for inclusive politics are relatively consistent across generations (as evinced in our Inclusion index variable). We do not find strong evidence of generational effects interacting with awareness of the movement, political opportunity structures, or respectability politics, which suggests that the generational effects in our model do not depend on the values of these other variables, as demonstrated in Tables 2 and 3.

Although our initial theory would suggest that Black Americans' interpretations of the Black Lives Matter movement would vary by generation and by structures of political opportunity, our counterintuitive finding suggests that older generations, rather than younger cohorts, express more positive evaluations and stronger support for BLM. Our results stand in contrast to a long-standing literature on political opportunity and black generational politics, and ultimately gesture toward a path forward in scholarship on generational effects to consider the context of political socialization, which varies across generations and emphases on political messages (Nunnally 2010).

Given that the interactive generational effects did not operate as we expected, we take a closer look at the characteristics of the minority share of respondents who reported that BLM hurts rather than helps race relations in Table 4. A little more than one-third of Black respondents in the sample agreed that BLM has "forced racial issues on the political agenda in a way that hurts race relations and the future of Black people's influence on politics."

Across generations, younger cohorts were more expressive of the belief that Black Lives Matter hurts race relations, with 32 percent of respondents in Generation Z and 33 percent of Millennials reporting negative attitudes.[14] Respondents who negatively perceive BLM also tended to have less education and stronger conservative ideology.

DISCUSSION

In this article we theorized that variation in Black evaluations of and support for the Black Lives Matter organization and broader Movement for Black Lives could be explained by generational differences, particularly in light of favorable attitudes toward respectability politics among older Black generations. We tested the direct effects of generational differences: awareness of BLM, informational sources, and respectability on Black evaluations of Black Lives Matter. Based on our theory we

TABLE 4. Respondents Who Say Black Lives Matter Hurts Race Relations

	N (Total = 876)	Row Percentage
Generation		
Generation Z	53	32%
Millennial	373	33
Generation X	271	28
Boomers	164	20
Silent Generation	15	16
Gender		
Male	290	30%
Female	586	27
Education		
Grades 1–8	4	21%
Some High School	60	37
H.S. Graduate / GED	260	32
Some College	341	29
4-Year College	133	21
Post-Graduate	78	22
Ideology		
Strong Conservative	70	37%
Moderate Conservative	105	65
Independent	331	28
Moderate Liberal	119	19
Strong Liberal	100	20
None of These	151	42

also tested the interactive effects of awareness, information, and inclusion/respectability across generations.

The results present a mixed bag for our theory. Generational effects were statistically significant across both sets of models (although not always in the expected direction). Likewise, the awareness additive index consistently explained evaluations of BLM and support for movement activism. However, we did not find support for our primary contention that evaluation of and support for BLM by older generations of Blacks would differ systematically from younger generations based on access to Black-centered social media information sources, awareness of the movement and its goals, or a penchant among older Blacks for less aggressive and more respectable forms of protest or civil disobedience. Not only did the interaction terms fail to reach statistical significance in

either of the two sets of models, but direct generational effects also operated such that older Blacks evaluated BLM more favorably and expressed more support for BLM than did younger generations.

An empirical explanation for this counterintuitive finding is beyond the scope of this article. However, the communal impetus behind Black politics—particularly the connections to the Civil Rights Movement, feelings of linked fate, and the prolonged salience of the MBL—may provide useful insights. Perhaps we are seeing precisely what social movement theory would predict: the mobilization of resources around community organizations, developing consensus around shared values and issues, and shifting political agendas of outside actors (such as state officials or countermovements) toward movement goals may serve to suppress differences across generations and bring Black support for BLM into alignment (see Dawson 1994, 2001). It may also be the case that, while younger generations are more aware of BLM and more deeply immersed in Black social media news information, they have become less optimistic and more cynical about protest than older generations that are likely to be more intimately connected to the nuances and outcomes of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s (Dawson 2011). Older generations of Black Americans may be more optimistic in the long term about the tactics and goals of BLM activists than younger generations will be. They may also be more driven by pride to show intraracial support.

Ultimately, we believe the story of support for Black Lives Matter may be less about generation outright, and more about *political socialization that varies by generation*. Our results underscore that the social movement literature must expand to account for a more nuanced understanding of political socialization across generations. In addition, our work encourages the race and ethnic politics literature to reimagine respectability politics as potentially masking deeper issues of integration into contemporary information networks. We do not suggest that movement critiques of respectability are invalid; rather, scholarly understanding of these critiques must not elide ongoing needs for mobilization, heightened awareness, and consciousness-raising efforts.

Taken together, our findings may also point to a disconnect between the perceptions of elite Black leadership and those of everyday Black people across generations when it comes to evaluations of BLM and support for the movement. Despite criticisms from some Black politicians and celebrity voices, there seem to be modest generational differences across the Black public when it comes to BLM, and those that exist are not very deep.

CONCLUSION

This article considered the question of whether generational gaps exist in Black support for the Black Lives Matter movement. Existing literature on generational differences in Black attitudes, a changing opportunity structure that makes it difficult for older Black Americans to access the same information as younger generations (especially from social media sources), and the likelihood that older cohorts would prefer respectable tactics to the disruptive politics of Black Lives Matter all suggested that support for BLM in the Black community could fracture along generational

lines. The broad support for BLM across generations suggests that, counter to our initial hypotheses, generational divides may no longer be as prevalent as we theorized, and certainly not in the direction we expected.

Our multivariate analysis showed that, although generational differences exist, they operate such that older generations are actually more likely to see BLM as advancing race relations, and more likely to express support for the movement than younger generations. This may be indicative of racial moderation (Tate 2010) and Black elite-driven messages that emphasize respectability politics and personal responsibility in ways that have challenged young Black Americans to become more introspective and judgmental about Black public behavior. Is this the manifestation of the "neoliberal turn" about which political scientist Lester Spence (2015) warns us? Perhaps this is further evidence of a millennial-of-color political reimagination described by scholar Cathy Cohen (2010).

Our results encourage us to reconsider what draws older, Black generation members to Black Lives Matter. Are older generations expressing reverence for the work of Black youth, as they assume the reins of work left unfinished by the Civil Rights Movement? For Black youth, are there unaccounted for ideological fissures in Black political thought that influence their assessments of Black politics? Many Black youth in our sample would have been in the formative years of their political socialization in 2016—the year of Charlottesville "Unite the Right" rallies and the emergence of Donald J. Trump's presidential administration. Did this particular political moment spark an attitudinal shift in Black consciousness among Black youth that could not be fully captured in a cross-sectional analysis or survey research design? These questions present a path forward for future research on generational differences and Black social movement activism.

In conclusion, our analysis suggests that Black Americans, in the aggregate, are relatively united in the view that the new tactics of civil disobedience launched by BLM are helping to improve Black political prospects in this country. This degree of shared assessment across generations of Black people of a controversial movement further suggests that Black communities are finding ways to connect, despite having different sources of information, varying levels of awareness, and shifting views on respectability in activism aimed at challenging and changing the American political system. ■

NOTES

1. For a discussion about how national myth-making of civil rights memory is used to chastise present-day movements, see Jeanne Theoharis 2018.
2. Generational differences are uniquely relevant given the potential transition we are seeing in Black politics, spurred by, among other things, the election of Barack Obama and the Movement for Black Lives. While this article emphasizes the primacy and relevance of generational differences, future research will also incorporate alternative considerations around questions of Black support for political candidates, movements, and policies. This can include content analyses, more survey data, and different modeling choices.
3. Contemporary respectability politics refers to a process of racial socialization that encourages Black people to project "respectable" images to white communities with the aim of securing the respect of white people and broader society for Black rights. When perceived as "civil" and "level-headed" by whites, Black people may seem less threatening and more accommodating in

ways that facilitate crossover appeal. (For more information about the racial palatability of political actors, see Gillespie 2010.) The politics of respectability has significantly transformed from what Higginbotham (1993) described to what Bill Cosby and President Obama practice (see Nunnally and Carter 2012; Price 2016). It is central to our argument that we recognize racial projects (including contemporary respectability) that reinforce oppressions within racial groups. In this case, we are particularly focused on heteronormative gender and sexuality being deliberately *decentered* by movement founders and organizers. To this extent, all Black group members can have access to political expression, activism, and justice.

4. Respectability politics has a dynamic history. Ours is not the definitive prescription for its definition or measure. Our work builds upon scholarship that highlights the role of in-group norms (Kelley 1996; Cohen 1999; White 2010) rather than focusing more explicitly on the connection between these norms and out-group acceptance (Higginbotham 1994; Nunnally and Carter 2012; Price 2016; Chong 1991; Gaines 1996; Jefferson 2019).

5. In 1955 fourteen-year-old Black teenager Emmitt Till was brutally murdered at the hands of two white men, J. W. Milam and Roy Bryant. The men were found not guilty by an all-white jury within minutes of deliberation. Months after their trial, Milam and Bryant retold their story to a magazine, stating outright that they had committed the crime and that Till had to pay for violating Jim Crow racial etiquette. (See also *Look* magazine, 1956, as reported by PBS, www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/till-killers-confession/.)

6. Although Black women were crucial to the activism of the Civil Rights era, the movement tended to center the voices and experiences of Black men (Theoharis 2018). Neither Black support for nor tactics in the Civil Rights Movement were monolithic. Shaped by demands for interracial cooperation and concerns about the presentation of "blackness" through moral comportment and respectability politics (Chong 1991; Gaines 1996), the Civil Rights Movement produced various forms of political engagement that operated outside of traditional political norms or expectations (Kelley 1996).

7. Respectability politics have long guided the moral comportment of Black people, and have remained a key ideological undercurrent in Black politics throughout the 1980s and 1990s, e.g., support of the Clinton crime bill, and into the early 2000s, e.g., rejection of social policies around issues of abortion, immigration, and LGBTQ+ rights.

8. Political opportunity structures are traditionally defined in four or five dimensions: "(1) opening of access to participation for new actors; (2) the evidence of political realignment within the polity; (3) availability of influential allies; and (4) emerging splits within the elite." The fifth consideration speaks to "the state's and other actor's capacity or will to control dissent" (Tarrow 2011, 165; Tilly 1977; Zepeda-Millán 2017).

9. In comparison, Black support of Democratic presidential candidates is considerably higher than their embrace of BLM. According to exit poll data from the 2016 election, 88% of Black voters cast ballots for Hillary Clinton. Barack Obama received 93% of the Black vote in 2012. Younger blacks, 18–24, were much less likely to vote for Clinton in 2016, at 83% compared to the 90% of Blacks 65 and over who voted for the Democratic nominee (www.mic.com/articles/159402/here-s-a-break-down-of-how-african-americans-voted-in-the-2016-election).

10. Matt A. Barreto, Lorrie Frasure-Yokley, Edward D. Vargas, and Janelle Wong. 2017. the 2016 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey (CMPS), 2016. Los Angeles, CA. See also Matt A. Barreto, Lorrie Frasure-Yokley, Edward D. Vargas, and Janelle Wong (2018) Best Practices in Collecting Online Data with Asian, Black, Latino, and White Respondents: Evidence from the 2016 Collaborative Multiracial Post-Election Survey. *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 6:1, 171–180.

11. Class status is not captured in the analysis due to the lack of an appropriate measure in the survey instrument. We also acknowledge the burgeoning research, as Jefferson (2019) squares his work with classical treatments of respectability politics in Higginbotham (1991) and Gaines (1996), in order to conceptualize these politics and translate them into quantitative measures.

Jefferson finds evidence to support the development of a respectability politics scale. His Respectability Politics Scale (RPS) is based upon Black Americans' subscriptions to displays of public behavior that placate the perceived demand that Blacks should be respected based upon their comportment in the face of whites, who perceive Blacks and their protection of rights through the lens of proper behavior. Herein, the 2016 CMPS data set does not include such measures referencing Black behavior, as those noted in Jefferson (2019), which could help account for respectability measures. We turn to the notion of in-group acceptance of certain group members, as another measure that translates into a tenet of respectability politics—Black normativization.

12. Exposure via TV may be more limited in capturing the up-to-date, real-time messaging of online media.

13. For additional historical discussion about the Black feminist theoretical underpinnings of the movement, see also Ransby 2018.

14. Results are reported as a percentage of each generational cohort. Results do not sum to 100%.

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