McGill University

McGill Human Motivation Lab

Gender Differences in the Effects of Covid-19 and BLM on Black Young Adults in Montreal

BCRC

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1. Background

COVID-19.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected Black Canadians; they make up a significant percentage of frontline healthcare workers and mortality rates from COVID-19 are higher in areas where they live (Statistics Canada, 2021).
- Epidemics, the COVID-19 pandemic included, tend to increase the burdens of women socially, economically and emotionally because women make up a significant percentage of frontline healthcare workers, are primarily responsible for caring for and organizing their households, and are a greater risk of being victims of domestic violence. (Connor et al., 2020; Enguita-Fernàndez et al., 2020; Hawkes et al., 2020).

Motivation and Autonomy.

- Black women are socialized to be more self-reliant and competent from a young age and this could contribute to feelings of control over their own actions leading, in turn, to increased feelings of intrinsic motivation and autonomy (Deci & Flaste, 1995, pp. 31-33; Sharp & Ispa, 2009).
- Men tend to be socialized towards achieving higher self-esteem and subjective well-being through goal oriented means, whereas women are encouraged to find satisfaction through interpersonal relationships and are encouraged to focus on meeting the needs of others (Dedovic et al., 2009; Schmid, 2020; Shap & Ispa, 2009). Therefore, safety measures put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic have deprived women of a means through which they achieve satisfaction, and meet their needs related to self-esteem and well-being.

Activism.

- Critical consciousness is defined as "an understanding that social inequalities exist, are unjust, and should be challenged" (Conlin et al., 2021). Critical consciousness is necessary for activism.
- Engaging in activism has been shown to be linked with higher levels of well-being (Klar & Kasser, 2009).
- Findings suggest that Black and female young people are more engaged with activism and that this could be positively affecting their well-being (Campos-Castillo & Laestadius, 2020; Hope et al., 2018).

Subjective Well-Being

- The APA (2018) defines subjective well-being as a person's own assessment of their happiness and life satisfaction.
- Perceived injustices have an indirect link to women's well-being through the vehicle of their autonomy—the more women feel like they have a choice in the way the world works, the higher their well-being (Fischer & Holz, 2010).
- Strongly identifying with the reason for one's activism is associated with positive outcomes for both men and women, furthermore evidence suggests that political activism and striving for the welfare of others is associated with positive well being (Dwyer et al., 2019).

2. Present Study

Our research aims to **investigate the effects of COVID-19 and BLM on the lives of Black young adults in Montreal through the lens of gender differences.**

We asked:

1. Are there sex differences related to BLM activism in Montreal's Black community during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. Do men and women exhibit different levels of autonomy in their motivation towards BLM activism?
3. How is subjective well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic affected by BLM activism?

3. Participants and Procedure

Participants.

- Sample consisted of 106 Black young adults from Montreal
  - Mean Age = 25.51 SD = 4.81
  - 59% Female
  - 39.6% full-time students
  - Read and write English or French
  - Participant retention was 84%

Methods.

Behavioural Engagement. To assess behavioural engagement with BLM, we asked participants to rate the following two statements on a 7-point scale from "not at all" (1) to "very frequently" (7): (i) *I attended protests this year in support of Black Lives Matter;* and (ii) *I shared content on my social media this year in support of Black Lives Matter.*

Emotional Engagement. We measured emotional engagement with BLM by asking participants to use a 7-point scale to rate the following statements from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7): (i) *I support the Black Lives Matter movement;* (ii) *I feel inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement;* and (iii) *I don't think the Black Lives Matter movement will lead to long-lasting change* (reverse-scored).

Motivation. For the measure of motivation in relation to BLM, we used another 7-point scale asking participants whether their motivation "got a lot worse" (1), "stayed the same" (4) or "got a lot better" (7). We then followed up that question with two more asking them to indicate what the biggest challenges for them were and what had improved for them during the BLM movement.

Goal Progress. We asked participants to write down a personal goal that they had prior to the pandemic and then answer questions whilst keeping it in mind. The relevant questions consisted of three 7-point scales measure: the reason participants were pursuing their goal, their progress in relation to their goal, and the impact they felt the COVID-19 pandemic had on their progress with regards to their goal. Participants rated statements associated with their goal progress from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7).

Subjective Well-Being. In order to measure the subjective well-being of participants, we used the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Pavot & Diener, 1993) and the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression (CES-D) Scale (Radloff, 1977) for depressive symptoms. In addition to those two measures, we also administered a self-report happiness measure that consisted of 9 descriptors of affective states that participants rated on a 7-point scale from "not at all" (1) to "extremely" (7).

4. Results

Figure 1

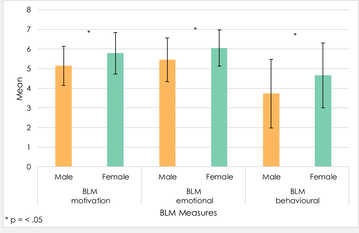
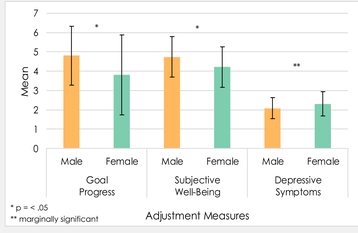


Figure 2



T-tests were used to compare the means of men and women on both BLM activities (Fig. 1) and general indicators of adjustment (Fig. 2).

6. Conclusions

Hypothesis 1: There are sex differences related to BLM activism in Montreal's Black community during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Confirmed. As seen in the results women scored higher on all BLM measures and were more engaged emotionally and behaviourally in activism than men.

Hypothesis 2: Women exhibit higher levels of autonomous motivation related to BLM activism.
Confirmed. Results show that women demonstrated higher autonomous motivation related to the BLM movement.

Hypothesis 3: Women experience different levels of subjective well-being than men in relation to their involvement in BLM activism.
Confirmed. The data suggest that although women are more involved with BLM activism they are also suffering more psychologically. Given the existing research showing that the burdens of women increase during times of crisis, these results are in line with the literature.

Findings are in agreement with Conlin et al. (2021) who suggest that critical consciousness is associated with greater subjective well-being for women, but only when it is associated with activism. When critical consciousness is not accompanied by activism, it is associated with lower subjective well-being in women.

The data shows that Black women are at the core of the BLM movement in Montreal; they are more involved than men both emotionally and behaviourally, and they identify more strongly with the movement. These findings also suggest that Black women's behavioural engagement serves as a protective factor with respect to their subjective well-being which was more negatively affected by the pandemic. Behavioural engagement with activism allows women to meet their relational needs that affect their well-being, life satisfaction, and self-esteem, all of which have been negatively impacted by the advent of COVID-19.

This research can guide the provision of services for Black students taking into account their unique struggles in the context of both the pandemic and BLM.

5. Results

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, t-tests and significance levels of the BLM and adjustment measures with respect to gender.

TABLE 1

BLM and Adjustment Measures with Respect to Gender

		GENDER	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	T-TEST	SIG. (2-TAILED)
BLM ACTIVISM	BLM MOTIVATION	Male	5.1429	.99832	-2.774	.007
		Female	5.7833	1.06698		
	BLM EMOTIONAL	Male	5.4500	1.11081	-2.973	.004
		Female	6.0503	.92149		
	BLM BEHAVIOURAL	Male	3.7308	1.75036	-2.675	.009
		Female	4.6557	1.64454		
ADJUSTMENT	GOAL PROGRESS	Male	4.8095	1.52814	2.433	.017
		Female	3.8095	2.05818		
	SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING	Male	4.7471	1.04718	2.469	.015
		Female	4.2241	1.04804		
	DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS	Male	2.0875	.55479	-1.858	.066*
		Female	2.3131	.62723		

*marginally significant

To examine longitudinal change in subjective well-being associated with BLM related emotional and behavioural engagement we conducted hierarchical multiple regression analyses in which BLM emotional and behavioural engagement in December were regressed on baseline emotion or behaviour. This analysis was done separately by gender and is reported in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Subjective Well-Being Associated with BLM Emotional and Behavioural Engagement

	GENDER	BETA	T-TEST	SIG.
BLM EMOTIONAL	Male	-.279	-1.679	.103
	Female	-.349	-2.448	.018
BLM BEHAVIOURAL	Male	.306	1.843	.075
	Female	.447	3.138	.003

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our participants and the Montreal Black Community Resource Center (BCRC) without whom our research would not have been possible.

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