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Bias-Related Attitudes Towards Black Women Of Transgender Experience in Nonprofit,  
Community, and Government Leadership

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Nonprofit Studies

April 23, 2021

A Paper Presented to Fulfill the Course Requirements  
for NPS 590U Integrative Seminar  
Professor: Dr. Abbi Leinwand Haggerty

### **Abstract**

This study examines explicit attitudes and implicit biases that are learned and perpetuated against Black women of transgender experience. These behaviors and beliefs contribute to broader impacts around policy support and community safety. Long-term discrimination against Black women of transgender experience create various disadvantages in social, educational, and economic arenas. The primary research question will explore the ways in which personal and external experiences influence how society responds to Black transgender women. An additional research tool, which will involve qualitative and quantitative data sampling, this researcher will explore the experiences, attitudes and perceived behaviors of both Black transgender women and a mixture of community members with various roles in government, community organizations, and nonprofits. This study will begin its focus on how public opinion on Black transgender women presents based on human experiences, television and media presentations, public office representation, and policy creation that impact beliefs and behaviors. There is some scholarly research already contributing to this topic by finding that implicit bias and explicit attitudes do play significant roles in how society responds to Black transgender women through various racist and sexist structures. There are however, some gaps in the areas of effective interventions that increase visibility and disruption of the root causes of hetero and cis-normative white supremacy. This work contributes to previous conclusions about the impacts of long-held structural sexism, racism, and transphobia being major contributors to the challenges faced by and health disparities among Black women of transgender experience.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*“It is revolutionary for any trans person to choose to be seen as visible in a world that tells us we should not exist.” - Laverne Cox*

There have already been at least 13 violent deaths of Black women of transgender experience in the first 4 months of 2021 (Roberts, 2021). The year before, the “pandemic within a pandemic” brought with it horrific patterns of violence, death and destruction against this community. These women, who are dying before the age of 35, face enormous levels of discrimination from outright violence to systemic inequities through intersecting lenses of oppression. They are Black. They are Women. They are Transgender. (Forestier, 2020). Some refer to it as a war because there are attacks to all facets of a thriving life to include housing, employment, safety and legal protections, income, and the list goes on. The first question asked here is that if our values are shaped by experiences or ideas around cultural norms, expectations of behaviors within community or group settings, and even the societal privileges that are afforded to some, then where does the extreme bias against Black trans women originate from? Another question explores whether or not and how those biases, individually and collectively, create long-term barriers that are very deeply rooted in discarding Black trans women out of American society? Even though our values may change over time and circumstance and privilege may become more recognizable, what may not be so easily discernible are how some of those collective values then create the dynamics of power and oppression that in turn create the root causes of some of the highest levels of discrimination and inequity that Black women of transgender experience face. My hope for this research is to identify ways in which these levels of discrimination transfer across media and popular culture, inter and intra personal behaviors to those in positions of leadership in community organizations, legal and governmental arenas, and

nonprofit organizations as they relate to Black women of transgender experience. Another goal is to focus on making a compelling argument for examining what is called explicit and implicit bias in giving proper attention to addressing the historical contexts and experiences that contribute to violence against Black trans women. Explicit bias focuses on conscious, intentional behavior that is able to be controlled by an individual. Implicit bias refers to more complex, learned, and subconscious attitudes that affect someone's view from topics of interest to groups of people (Carruthers, 2017). This research will lean on the work of other research scholars who have addressed the impacts of bias-related ideals and behaviors on marginalized identities to support or refute any theories around the experiences of these women. For example, I presume that each of those entities that include popular culture or community groups, government, and nonprofit organizations are able to influence or be influenced by one another. The nonprofit sector could be considered one of the most ethically compromised among the group because they are historically led by white, cisgender people. Currently over 80% of nonprofits fit this profile (Suarez et al., 2021). These organizations promote missions and visions that are significantly directed at marginalized communities and the challenges they face. Black women of transgender experience are marginalized significantly more than other demographics of people. In the last ten years they have experienced unemployment at four times the general population, homelessness at a rate of more than five times the general population, and extreme poverty at four times the general Black population (2011). According to the 2016 Independent Sector, there were over 37,800 nonprofit organizations in Virginia at that time. Over 26,000 of those organizations identified as a public charity that potentially claims to support underserved populations (2016). Comparatively, the Transgender Assistance Program of Virginia lists 14 Statewide Resources for transgender people and 5 Transgender Rights resources. Presumably, there should be more nonprofit organizations

supporting Black trans women populations. On the other hand, this lack of alignment with societies needs could be perceived as also influencing the significant disparities experienced by Black women of transgender experience. A recent blog written by The Spark Mill Staff talks about the racial makeup of nonprofit leadership and how those roles remain inaccessible to people of color even though their educational backgrounds, aspirations, and skills did not differ from their white counterparts. In fact, the blog cited a statistic that showed that the percentage of people of color in nonprofit leadership overall has remained below 20% for the last 15 years. The history of nonprofit organizations is built on colonialism, which creates a theory of white saviorism, which includes the benefits of white supremacy. The inequities that come along with largely white-led and staffed nonprofits greatly impact communities such as Black transgender women. (Gilbreath & Edwards, 2020).

Another major point of this research is to collect data from a sampling of people that operate within the entities mentioned earlier. This will potentially give some insight on a cisgender individual's personal experiences, with transgender people, that predetermine beliefs around identity within social, political, and religious structures. It will explore how bias-related attitudes, individually and in groups, are connected to how Black trans women are perceived and treated in various aspects of life and society. The intent is to make connections between those perceptions or attitudes and Black women of trans experience lacking accessibility to, among others, safety in affirming their identities, stable housing, leadership opportunities in employment and community, and protection under the law. In addition, the research will examine how resources are allocated to or become accessible for communities of Black women of transgender experience and how needs are assessed through nonprofit and governmental organizations. This information is critical since nonprofit organizations typically exist to meet

the needs of underserved or not served populations. According to a 2016 U.S Transgender Survey Report, transgender people who also identify as people of color are more likely to experience challenges around medical care, accessibility, and safety. Other research indicates that variances in the actual numbers of people who identify as transgender also present unique challenges, both for the individual in need and for the entity with limited knowledge or scope of services. Even a person recognizing themselves as transgender becomes a challenge because there may be different perceptions of what transgender means. Gender identity data is also commonly left out of population-based surveys and the result is a distorted point of view of a crisis that has reached epidemic proportions (Nolan et al., 2019, p. 184-186). Further examination of nonprofit, community and government leadership will focus on these structures as white and cisgender controlled spaces that perpetuate, intentionally or unintentionally, the biased attitudes that lead to violence faced by Black trans women. One theory is that the impacts of a lack of visibility of diverse Black women of transgender experience in leadership and frontline community roles contributes to underwhelming solutions that do not solve long-term issues.

Chapter 2 begins with delving into how we begin to recognize biases and their potential sources. Processing through self reflection is a tool that this research will rely heavily on in an attempt to create some opportunities to measure the attitudes and ideals of others. Other tools such as observation of behavior or recounting experiences through interviews, may not be as effective without context and analysis of a person's motives. It will offer some differing perspectives on whether bias even exists and, if so, if it actually shapes our attitudes and ideals. Does bias, as a human trait, show up in systems linked to other community resources such as law enforcement and how they engage with certain people? These questions will hopefully help to

draw conclusions about representation of the intersections of race and sexual or gender identity and how they have historically been related to instances of violence and the erasure of Black women of transgender experience. It is important to note the historical contexts that exist in sustaining toxic and oppressive experiences. Toxic masculinity, which is normalized in many countries, also contributes to influencing opinions on Black women of transgender experience through upholding cisgender people being in power and control. When this happens, structures are created so that privilege favors those in power and anything that becomes a disruption to that power is deemed abnormal (Jones, 2019).

Prior research also suggests that there are standard assessment tools used by various scholars to measure bias in individuals that belong to certain racial groups. My interests lie in comparing the findings from those prior assessments to the data collected in this particular study that will hopefully shed some light on where the disruptions and interventions need to occur. At the onset of this research, presumed interventions that could cause disruption in bias-related attitudes include providing complex diversity in race/class/gender identity and relatable models of transgender identity within mainstream settings, institutionalizing knowledge around transgender history and contributions to society, and recognizing the violent disparities that Black trans women face everyday as an affront to the progress of society.

The research in Chapter 3 focuses more on analyzing contextual data. The results will give a better picture of how people perceive their experiences related to Black transgender women and also what actions, if any, are taken when bias-related consequences are recognized. The question of action taken is of significant interest in this research because individuals may, in a moment of self-accountability, acknowledge their bias-related attitudes, but that does not translate to actions that disrupt oppressive systems. The data may reveal more concrete evidence



about the impacts of normalizing bias against Black women of transgender experience. It will also attempt to draw connections, and distinctions, between methods of prevention and transformation.

In Chapter 4, the data gets a closer look and I will attempt to relate statistical findings to real world experiences and implications for Black women of transgender experience. The research will also come to conclusions about individuals in society who create or belong to specific collectives, whether it be community, nonprofit, government, or educational, and are being influenced by their explicit or implicit biases to make decisions that affect Black trans women. We will discuss what points of data can be useful in further research or in actual practice to effect change.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Explicit attitudes and implicit biases are both behavioral qualities that reflect verbal and non-verbal assessments of memories, stereotypes, and abilities to freely choose what we believe. Explicit attitudes refer to a person's verbally reported position about a group of people or topic of discussion (Carruthers, 2017). Many psychologists believe that they are conscious and chosen behaviors based in association or in-the-moment judgements. For example, an individual may be overtly racist and regularly makes comments to indicate their discriminatory beliefs. Implicit biases may be a little harder to identify because they are the underlying attitudes that we may not be conscious of and have formed over time. These behaviors are more likely to contribute to predicting real-world behavior because the representation of the biases comes from the core of a person's life experience. Institutions such as education, religion, and politics are susceptible to collective and individual discernment that converts to judgemental behavior and the implications affect culture, policies, resources, etc. (Carruthers, 2017). Carruthers also cross-references an article written by Mandelbaum (2015) that distinguishes between attitudes, associations, and how we arrive at an explicit or implicit bias. This author ties in shared theories with an example that explains a more logical arrival at a particular implicit bias than merely just associating with an experience or memory which results in explicit bias. The article argues that long-term conditioning is the distinguishing factor between the behaviors. There are other arguments presented, such as those by Greenwald and Nosek (2018), that focus on the presentations of biased behaviors and attitudes in that the learned experiences which result in bias may not be the same, but the results have shared implications. Their findings also indicate that there is no

significant conflicting evidence on whether two distinguishable behaviors can actually be accounted for versus there being no distinction between the two (Greenwald & Nosek, 2018).

**Evidence of the problem.** Contributing to a counter argument for the way in which humans arrive at implicit and explicit biases is an article also co-authored by Nosek that gives the opposite definition of implicit bias and explicit attitudes. This study conducted evaluations of participants who had been given information on a particular person's behaviors, positive and negative. The participants were pre- and post-evaluated for any generalizations made about the subjects based on the information provided. What was concluded was that implicit bias did not affect attitudes and behaviors that evolved over time. Internalized judgements were made in the moment and any outward generalizations were not revealed. Other conclusions stated that it was the explicit bias that followed a more logical or deliberate pattern when associating individuals with generalized stereotypes over time (Ranganath & Nosek, 2008). The present study aims to explore the effects of adding multiple intersections of a Black transgender woman's identity to the framework of theories around biased internal and external behaviors and attitudes. According to Catalano and Shlasko (2007), transgender refers to a person, whose gender identity differs from what was assigned when they were born, transcending societal gender norms. The term also refers to intersections as applying to social and political characterizations around gender, sexuality, race, class, etc. that are used to create systems of oppression and discrimination for a shared group of people.

Black women of transgender experience do not normally experience spaces where their intersections of identity are truly supported due to the influences of bias within several sectors of our society. These include white feminist spaces, white masculine queer spaces, Latinx, and Black cisgender-heterosexual (cis-het) communities alike. This results in these women

experiencing a range of challenges with health and wellness, employment and housing instability, assault and other experiences of violence (Cerezo et al., 2020). The risks for Black trans women increase when affirming their gender identity because it increases the intersections of oppression that can be experienced. These risks are not only associated with HIV and STIs, but depression and other mental health challenges as well (Bödeker & Iwamoto, 2011).

**Indoctrination into toxic culture.** The adoption of Western colonial norms of gender and masculinity by Black, White and Latinx communities mean that many view Black trans womanhood as an insult to Black masculinity (Paramo, 2020). Society has adopted social and gender classification as the determinants for levels of economic stability, health, and other outcomes. This widely accepted form of masculinity determines that femininity is inferior and trans women are viewed by cisgender (i.e., non-transgender) people in a series of non-human, systemic, and violent responses based in cultural hatred and discrimination for people who do not subscribe to a binary system of identity expression. The women are often also subjected to similar physical objectification, policing of bodies, hyper-sexualization, and stereotyping discriminations as Black cisgender women. These claims are evident in the increased statistics around rape, domestic violence, harrassment, and murder of transgender people of color and cisgender Black women. Global statistics around violence against cisgender women shows that at least 35% of women around the world have experienced sexual, domestic, or intimate partner violence. This percentage did not even include the crime of stalking, which could potentially double that percentage (UN Women, 2020). According to the Office for Victims of Crime report on responding to transgender victims of sexual assault, there are significantly high numbers of sexual abuse and assault for transgender people. These assaults are often coupled with other forms of physical abuse. The trauma around sexual abuse is higher in subcommunitites of

transgender people, such as Black transgender women (Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), 2014). On all levels of society, through various forms of individual and systemic violence, Black trans women are seen as threats to certain constructs of human culture.

### **Public Opinion and Presentation Through Television, Media, and Public Office Influence**

Film and media representations as early as the 1950s sometimes presented a very narrow view of transgender individuals, layering them with the identities of cross dressers or drag queens (Anderson, 2015). Sometimes they were depicted as predators or dangerous in some way. These narratives reinforced the stereotype that transgender people are disconnected from humanity and effectively reduced them to spectacles for entertainment purposes (Reitz, 2017). Although film and television began portraying a broader spectrum of “queer” culture in the early to mid 2000s, transgender people were still significantly underrepresented. Transgender women have had more of a presence in media and television due to the last 10 years being referred to as a “transgender tipping point”, according to Time Magazine, where the narratives and experiences of transgender people have become more included and necessary for public discourse that leads to a transformational society. Advancements in technology and changes in public attitudes contribute to trends in film and television evolution so that diverse representations of even Black women of transgender experience are reaching a broader audience (Anson et al., 2020). The television show *Pose*, for example, brings visibility and awareness to experiences had and issues faced by the trans and gender non-binary communities. It focuses on a time in history when the AIDS epidemic was peaking in the LGBTQ+ community and how ball culture, competitions that consist of individuals, often drag queens, who perform different drag genres and categories connected people across intersections of race, gender and sexual orientation. Grinnell College’s

Subcultures and Sociology says that it originated around the 1920s in and around New York (n.d.). *Pose* gives audience members an inside perspective of the lives of people who have been abandoned and shunned by society. The show features tv's largest transgender cast and speaks to the importance of finding a family where you feel at home. In spite of this, media continue to focus significant coverage on gay, white, cisgender male experiences as the standard representation of what it means to be acceptable to society (Fitzgerald, 2017). Black trans women still face daily obstacles, violence, and discrimination. These obstacles come, in part, from the way that the media benefits from upholding white supremacist ideologies that support the erasure of these members of society (Reitz, 2017).

There has been an influx of LGBTQ+ citizens running for political office and, subsequently, winning. Transgender people are more visible in politics now more than ever. That is evident by trans and non-binary politicians, including Sarah McBride, Taylor Small, Brianna Titone, Mauree Turner, and Stephanie Beyers (McDaniel & Garcia, 2020). In 2017, there were 25 candidacies of transgender or nonbinary U.S. citizens with 10 of them going on to victory. By 2020, numbers of candidates had doubled with 16 of those being winning campaigns (Casey, 2020). These more recent victories are critical in social and political justice movements centering transgender people still being susceptible to discrimination in their rights around housing, employment, public accommodations, and schools. A survey conducted by the UCLA School of Law Williams Institute examined general public opinions regarding transgender people and their rights in the United States. The data points indicated that 73% of cisgender respondents felt that transgender people should be protected from discrimination and 51% of those same participants wanted the country to do more to protect and support people of transgender experience. Transphobic attitudes and beliefs, that contribute to the above conditions, go largely unaddressed

or challenged (Solomon, 2016). This particular survey contributes to the already sparse research and literature reviews on attitudes and misperceptions held by the general public against transgender persons. Although it is unlawful to discriminate, harass, or treat someone unfavorably based on sexual orientation, it was not until 2020 that federal protections invoked sex-based anti-discrimination laws or policies, which involves unfavorable treatment and/or discrimination based on gender identity, sexual orientation, or sex, as upheld in *Bostick v. Clayton County, Georgia* (Title VII, 29 CFR Part 1604, 2020). Transgender and non-binary elected officials are potentially in positions to disrupt systems from within because those protections do not account for other issues related to religious and employment freedoms, dress and bathroom protections. State-level statutes and policies will need to serve as protections for their most marginalized citizens.

### **Inter- and Intra-Community Violence Against Black Trans Women**

Culturally, there are overt and covert lessons that we learn about people who are different from us. White culture has inherently been labeled as the moral compass that we should hold ourselves to and all other racial backgrounds do not measure up. In a study that focuses on the white worldview of understanding racism, Fitzgerald's (2017) framework references various stereotypes, ideologies, and cultural narratives that contribute to acts of discrimination and the subsequent justification of those acts against people of color. This creates the perception of Black people as threats to society as a whole. Acts of violence may not take place in an outright way, as referenced earlier in this research, but as systemic and covert practices that work to eliminate threats to white supremacy and its benefits, destroying Black communities down to their roots.

**Interpersonal violence.** Harmful acts against a person that involve crimes such as assault, murder, or other violations of person or personal property are experiences that affect victims on an intimate level. In 2020, Virginia lawmakers expanded the definition of hate crimes to include acts based upon a victims' gender, gender identity, and/or sexual orientation. Although some protections are now in place, previous data shows that at least 30% of reported hate crimes involve sexual orientation. In 2013, 72% of murders involving the LGBTQ+ population were of Black and Latinx women of transgender experience (Fitzgerald, 2017).

**Intra-community violence.** On June 1, 2020, Iyanna Dior, a Black transgender woman, was brutally beaten by a group of Black cis men. The incident occurred over a minor car accident. Black LGBTQ+, transgender, and gender non-conforming people have to defend themselves, simultaneously, against multiple oppressions. Even though Black trans women have historically led liberation movements, they are largely excluded from these same movements (Jones, 2019). In a video entitled, *The Power of Exclusion*, Tiffany Yu talks about the impacts of exclusion and how it increases the perpetuation of isolation as a form of violence (TEDxTalks, 2018). Since the early 1600s, Black people have been engaged in oppressive political struggles around control of their lives and way of thinking. The strategy around Black liberation includes following a deep rooted history in individual and familial survival during deplorable conditions. This evolved into collective work for the survival of Black values during times of war and heightened politics to address current issues of disrupting formalized violence in the form of police brutality, surveillance, and oppressive military tactics against Black communities (Jones, 1971). According to the Black Lives Matter website, the movement was created to “affirm 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”. This movement was founded by three queer Black women.

### **The Subjectivity of Blackness and Trans Identities**

According to an undated Human Rights Campaign article, there were at least 40 known Black women of transgender experience murdered in 2020. Significant impacts of explicit and implicit biases that take place specifically due to a person’s gender identity and race can be linked to selective acts of harm against Black transgender women. For example, Snorton (2017) talks about how various media platforms repeatedly practice recounting murdered Black people and even more specifically, Black trans women, as a quantifiable list that also contributes to racist capitalistic structures. It translates to Black lives only being valued at or considered based on the economic impacts to the state and the erasure of Black transgender women (Snorton, 2017).

### **Implicit Bias**

In order to become more aware of our implicit biases so that we are able to address the root causes of discrimination, such as anti-Blackness and transphobia more directly, an organization called Project Implicit has created a “virtual laboratory” for collecting data on implicit bias. This data collection takes place through an Implicit Association Test (IAT) that refers to a list of questions and topics related to race, gender, and sexual orientation. The user navigates through the “laboratory” by answering a series of questions related to attitudes or behaviors around a particular demographic such as Black trans women. Responses are analyzed and reported to the user to show areas in which they display implicit bias.

The claims made from this research are that there may be some valuable self-realizations that come from answering the questions from your own understanding. The IAT also aims to compare differences between people and groups to determine whether discrimination is prevalent within that specific group. In a critique of the reliability of the IAT, Tetlock and Mitchell (2009) present the argument that this implicit bias testing method is revered as a solid determinant in the likelihood of a specific class/race/group, namely White people, engaging in discriminatory behavior. However, they conducted a study where the results determined that the evidence was lacking in building a strong case for the predictability of the IAT. Jost, Raudman, Blair, Carney, and other contributors (2009) set out to counter this argument and present evidence that implicit bias exists without a doubt. Not only does implicit bias exist, they dissent, but the research around it is backed by years and years' worth of work within a well-established discipline, by knowledgeable researchers. They do acknowledge that researchers can be wrong, however; hundreds of experiments and case studies have established that "people can possess attitudes, stereotypes, and prejudices in the absence of intention, awareness, deliberation, or effort (Jost et al., 2009, p. 42-43)."

Prior research of various peer-reviewed content regarding implicit bias against transgender people suggests that the Implicit Association Test is widely used by those who explore the study of measuring implicit transgender attitudes. The present study will engage in similar measurements as they relate to the effects of personal, potentially intimate, contact with a transgender person and what level of interaction influences the likelihood of bias-related attitudes and behaviors decreasing and the disruption of systemic oppression increasing (Axt, Conway, Westgate, & Buttrick, 2020). Shifting public opinions could lead to the interests of trans people in some areas to go widely ignored. There is still mixed support for theories around

interpersonal contact influencing positive interactions and they potentially translate to fewer instances of implicit bias. This is evidenced in academic journal articles where comparisons are made between research results that range from "...finds no such effect of contact on support for nondiscrimination polices..." to "...mere exposure to information and images of transgender people...reduces transphobia..." (Jones, Brewer, Young, Lambe, & Hoffman, 2018)."

### **Social and Cultural Interventions**

American culture normalizes toxic masculinity through structures in which male dominance is institutionalized. This is evident in an Ipsos polling conducted in 2018 that focused on 16 countries, with the most accessibility to the poll, in finding what global attitudes were in regards to transgender people. America consistently polled lower in areas such as wanting the country to do more to protect transgender people and the use of correct pronouns, still while also showing some progress in becoming more tolerant of transgender people. Countries such as Spain, Canada, and Argentina displayed more favorable attitudes and behaviors toward transgender people.

**Lack of knowledge and exposure.** Thirty-two percent of Americans believed that transgender people display a mental illness as well as 32% believing that it is a sin to exist as a transgender person. This polling method was not without challenges in that the word transgender is not used widely outside of English speaking countries and does not necessarily translate well in other languages. Substitutions for clarifying the meaning includes phrases such as "people who dress and live as one sex even though they were born another". This leaves interpretation about proximity and awareness surrounding transgender people as unclear. (2018). Imposing

heteronormative gender expression on an individual who may not present themselves in ways associated with those expressions is called gender policing.

**The roots of transphobia.** These impositions reinforce and contribute to the violence and misogyny within masculine social constructs. Shaped by ideas around anti-Black, anti-queer, and anti-transgender presentation, the policing of individual bodies is grounded in white extremist practices and structures (Jones, 2019). Capitalism is also rooted in white exxtremism and both systems depend on each other to continue to sustain systems of oppression. If we refer back to Fitzgerald and the topic of understanding violence in the white racial framework, we see that social organizations such as the police, military, and the state can operate from places of structural and institutionalized oppression in justifiable ways, based on white extremist practices. Because of this, LGBTQ+ people of color are less likely to seek protection and help from the legal system.

**Reporting and protections.** The Human Rights Campaign has been tracking violence against transgender and gender non-binary people since 2013. According to their website, at least 27 transgender or gender non-binary people had been killed by violent means in 2019 and, as mentioned earlier, almost doubling in 2020. 22 of those individuals killed by violent means in 2020 were Black women of transgender experience (2020). In 2019, according to the Department of Justice's FBI Hate Crime Statistics, 16.8% of single-incident hate crimes were based on sexual orientation. This data breaks down to 224 bias offenses being related to gender identity with 173 of those offenses being anti-transgender (2020). HRC's tracking of violent crimes against transgender persons compared to the reporting data of state police and other government supported entities supports claims that there is a lack of significant hate crime reporting in an effort to seek protection from the legal system.

**Visibility.** In the past ten years, trans people have experienced increased accessibility in spaces like television and film, as previously mentioned with the popular tv show *Pose*. A 2018 journal article exploring gender dysphoria among transgender teens conducted a survey that found more than 80% of the youth in the sample reported being assigned female at birth. Although this particular study was controversial in the questions it raises about “social contagion” among teens expressing a trans gender identity, and a correction of the derogatory term had to be issued based on those concerns, it still speaks to the increase in awareness of self and access to information that helps identify what it means to be transgender (2019). Social media and the internet have been important catalysts to increasing trans visibility. Even with these advances, media outlets still struggle to empathize with and convey the experiences of transgender people.

**Institutionalizing transgender studies.** Normalizing transgender representations and history in all levels of the educational system would create opportunities for individuals to gain knowledge and a certain perspective around what it means to empathize with transness. McLaren (2018) talks about how changing the discourse around trans people is able to influence other conversations around gender. If you give audiences or students complex stories and presentations of a transgender person, it provides a critical perspective that could be helpful in redirecting miseducation and misrepresentation (McLaren, 2018). In August 2020, the League of Women Voters of the US (LWVUS), along with 189 other organizations addressed Congressional leadership through a letter calling for them to take federal action against the institutionalized policing of Black bodies, specifically Black women and other women of color. The letter detailed how several women’s rights movements have been dominated by white, cisgender women while neglecting the needs of the most marginalized people in the communities (2020). Interpersonal

and institutionalized or state-sanctioned violence are tragic realities in the experiences of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian American and Pacific Islanders, and other people of color.

**Policing violence against transgender people.** Tony McDade, a Black trans man from Tallahassee, FL, was killed by police after a stabbing altercation in May 2020. McDade was assaulted by a group of cisgender men the day before, was overcome by his mental illness, and retaliated against one of his attackers. Upon arriving on the scene, police subsequently escalated the situation which resulted in McDade's death. This speaks to just one example of the type of contact Black and Brown LGBTQ+ people have with law enforcement. All of the intersections of -isms and a culture of violence in the US contribute to the conspiracy of denial of safety, healthcare, and stable employment for transgender persons of color.

### **Outcome Disparities**

Through this research, it has not been difficult to arrive at various conclusions around disparities that affect BIPOC people. Discrimination and inequities do not always take the form of physical violence. Broken relationships with structures based in the healthcare system, policing and the legal system, and economic challenges come from a complex multi-layer of anti-liberation tactics against Black and other people of color. These impacts last for generations while people stay caught in a network of violent, racist patriarchy. We must take into account the roles that implicit and explicit biases play in perpetuating social and health inequities. Media and television have serious power in being able to create space for Black trans femmes and gender non-binary people to see themselves as accepted members of society. Risks of decreased wellness, on all levels, increase when transgender people do not have equitable access to

supports that address the vulnerability of their experiences. A lack of federal anti-discrimination laws act as justification for continued state-sanctioned violence.

Over time we know that legislators and healthcare professionals used race, class, and politics to conduct nefarious actions against Black people. Discrimination has weaponized inequitable access to healthcare, poor overall health and nutrition, and lack of an ability to thrive in poor living environments. Nemoto, Bödeker, and Iwamoto (2011) conducted a study that reported higher proportions of transgender persons being psychologically affected by experiences of assault and transphobia. This particular study was conducted on a small yet diverse sampling of a state population, so even though it determined that Latina and White transgender femmes were more likely to need social supports, there were only slight differences to the African American participant numbers. In my opinion, if we were to provide equitable supports for Black women of transgender experience, instances of suicide, depression, sex work, STIs, and HIV would decrease while increasing feelings of confidence, support, and ability to thrive. Healthcare professionals, insurance entities, pharmaceutical companies, and others should invest in funding research around the disparities experienced in these communities so that we are better able to address them, from an equitable lens. Advances in trans liberation will only move forward if those members of society who intentionally uphold white supremacy actively work to dismantle the structures which threaten those advances.

In an attempt to connect previous research and theories related to bias related violence against Black trans women, this researcher will attempt to explore and analyze the attitudes and beliefs held by community, nonprofit and government leaders or decision makers within a local context. The intention is to reveal how individuals, who may hold significant bias against Black

women of transgender experience, can become collectives of leaders who negatively impact the progress of equity in these women receiving resources or legal protections.

### **CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND FINDINGS**

This study will examine interpersonal and various experiences of modern society and how people respond to Black transgender women. The initial goal of using a survey was to engage at least 30 cisgender people, from various backgrounds, in answering questions that could potentially offer some insight into how Black trans women are impacted across personal, professional, and political spaces. The request for information targeted 48 people who were previously identified as nonprofit professionals, government employees, students, personal connections, community members, and community organizers. These individuals were selected because they represent various entities within society that impact the treatment of Black transgender women. These individuals were also a mixture of cisgender and nonbinary identified individuals. Recruitment for this survey took place via email for those individuals who I, as researcher, intentionally identified as likely to participate in the survey. There was also general promotion for the survey that took place via the researcher's personal social media platforms. Anyone interested was asked to forward their email address to the researcher so that they were able to receive the consent form, along with the survey. There was some small interest garnered from that specific ask. As the researcher, I also encouraged those who had been identified via email to share within their networks, so there was little control over who ultimately completed the survey.



Although I have personal and professional networks that include Black women of transgender experience, I did not include them in the survey request because the aim of this research is to examine the views and perspectives of others toward Black trans women. I also did not promote the survey to those under the age of 18 as the research focused on adults who legally have some stake in society. Ultimately, there were 22 respondents to the survey who identified themselves through a series of demographics questions based on sex assigned at birth, current gender status, and age. The survey asked respondents to identify who they were affiliated with or employed by (i.e. nonprofit organizations, political office, government). The aim in focusing on these areas of influence was to connect some data to my question regarding the presence or lack of influence by Black trans women in leadership and policy creation. Whether or not significant data was collected in that area could potentially present or prohibit some conclusions on the impacts of implicit bias within professional settings. I also wanted to determine how much familiarity people had upfront with the term transgender so they were asked to reflect on the statement “I am familiar with the definition of the term transgender”. This survey was made public for the timeframe of one week. I would presume that the short return time was a contributing factor in not being able to get 30 or more responses. I would have liked to post the survey for a minimum of two weeks. Responses to the survey came in slowly, however, I sent reminder emails, text messages and reposted on social media platforms. This effort increased the response of participants during that time.

**Instruments and Procedure.** The data were gathered significantly via a Likert scale survey, with some open-ended questions to give more context on specific feelings or responses to Black women of transgender experience. It asked participants to rate statements on a scale of Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Some questions also asked for yes/no/maybe responses. This survey

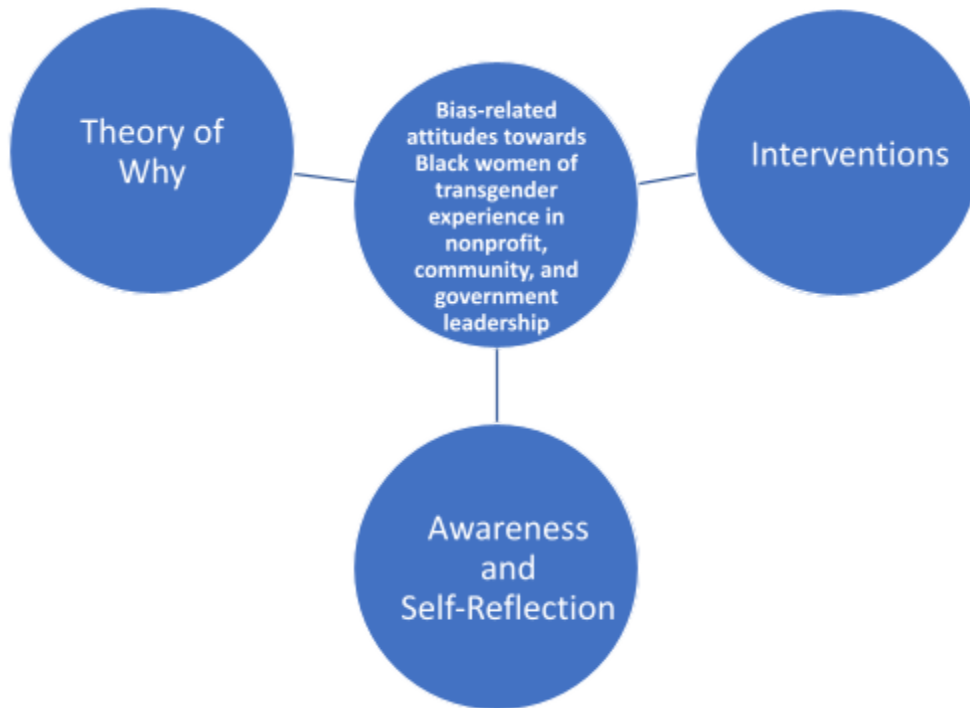
was aimed at being as physically accessible as possible, however, it was not presented as a multilingual document or with some other accessibility feature. Using Google forms was the more effective and socially relatable way to collect and easily analyze the data for this purpose. Each participant was able to click the link on the consent form or in the flyer and give consent to be asked questions or delete the request to complete the survey. After answering the questions, many of which were optional, the respondent could submit their responses and exit the survey. As mentioned earlier, open ended question response was also optional, however, it provides context to some of the participant responses. For example, a survey question asked participants to list three adjectives that describe their reactions to and/or thoughts about Black transgender women. The responses to this question were able to help this researcher provide deeper context to the overall theme of what the data, at first glance, showed. Survey questions originated from what I wanted to know and address in the course of my research. These questions measure implicit bias by how significantly respondents agree or disagree with various statements and beliefs about Black transgender women. I think it is also important to note data collection points on the survey such as “I believe that transgender people deserve the same civil rights as cisgender people” and “I believe that American culture normalizes toxic behavior towards Black transgender women” were aimed at getting a preview of what beliefs the participant held at the time of the survey. Other survey questions included: “Black transgender women should call the police if they are experiencing violence” and “I believe Black on Black crime is real”. As you can see, these questions were very sensitive in nature because they caused the respondent to reflect on a myriad of experiences that led them to hold overall attitudes or ideals about systems and stereotypes. The data was analyzed using a mixture of descriptive and inferential analysis. The research will focus on identifying and describing patterns of information through the

percentages shown in the data results, but it must also examine the root causes for the statistics showing up the way they do. By examining a small sample of people, I may not be able to draw solid conclusions about a more representative number of people. This analysis does not claim to offer a definitive answer to the root causes of implicit bias against Black transgender women. It will, however, attempt to reach some more clarity on my general assumptions around the impacts of these biases on the work to liberate Black women of transgender experience from oppressive circumstances.

**Limitations.** The challenges experienced during the collection of this data included time restrictions for disseminating the survey, the sensitivity of the subject matter may have caused hesitation or total disinterest in participating, and an initial review of the data showed that the majority of participants were not affiliated with the targeted industries such as nonprofit organizations, political, and governmental entities. That could also create a gap in data or present challenges in showing the impacts of implicit bias in those fields or areas of leadership. Another factor that was beyond my control was the length of time between the survey being sent and when the participant was aware of it. By sending the request for information to people we consider in community, leadership or highly engaged roles in society, there was a chance that people would be too busy to participate or see the email in time. I also think there was a limited amount of information that I could get within the time of completing the survey. Attitudes and beliefs, in my opinion, should be measured over time. This allows the researcher to further identify trends and shifts in knowledge, ideals, levels of societal and personal acceptance, and political power that shows the effects of bias over time. The measurements would not just occur one time per individual. It would be a series of evaluations that could correlate to particular life milestones such as age, class, professional and personal development, and even how various

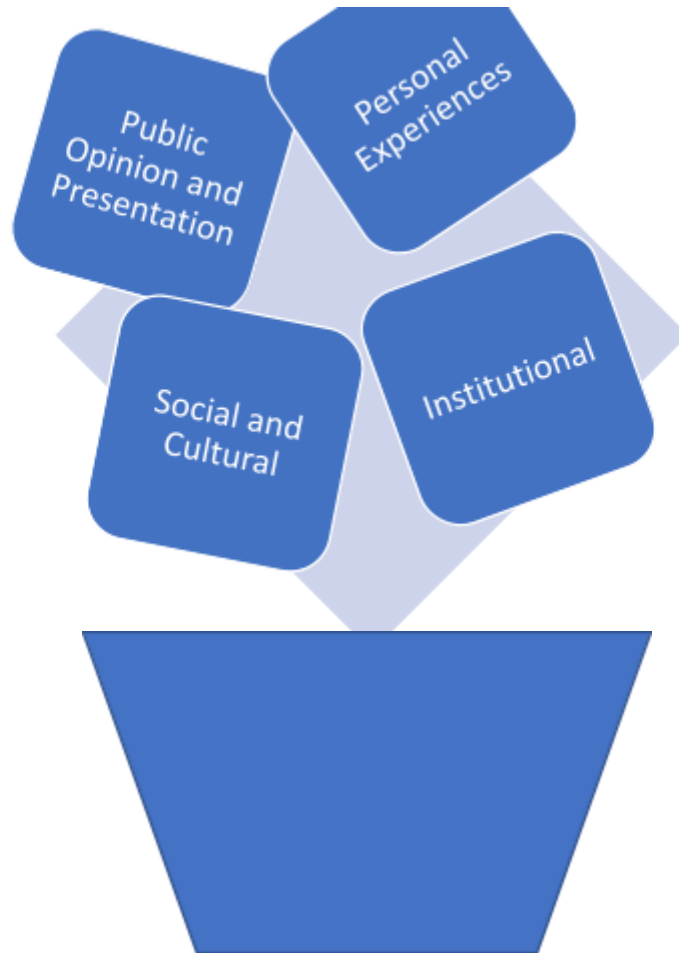
experiences of violence that impact attitudes and beliefs. The small sampling of data that I've collected will likely not be enough to influence major shifts in community or political spaces is also a significant limitation of what I hoped to do with this research.

**Findings.** Thinking back to the original question of how do interpersonal and cultural experiences influence how certain facets society respond to Black transgender women, this researcher focused on which parts of the data collected were able to answer this. The survey was designed to result in more quantitative than contextual data, however, I will explore the themes in those open responses in order to make some connections to the hard data. Below we will focus on a model that represents something similar to a relationship solar system. It was adapted from the Mind Mapping concept of organic or “radiating” thinking. Thoughts on a topic radiate out from a single idea and are not required to follow a strict structure. The survey was designed to allow the participant to reflect on their relationships to self, each other, and systems of oppression. The data results were found to illuminate relationships between any potential outcomes or effects of bias-related attitudes towards Black transgender women. We can link the data to theories around why and how certain messages influence public opinions, the implicit bias that may be reported or not, and even any disruptions to the entire relationship through interventions.



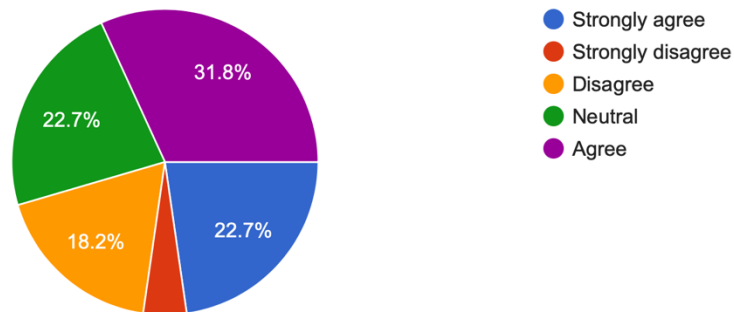
Within these intermingling relationships are worm holes or alternate universes. This is different from a black hole analogy because we imagine that things get lost in a black hole or are never to be found again. The attempt here is to find an effective way to consistently examine root causes of violence and bias against Black trans women and transformative solutions to those biases that, in turn, affect each tenet of the model. These subsections of theory, interventions, and self-reflections that are hypothesized about or connected to other peer reviewed research in Chapter 2 can look different depending on the reader's perspective. As the researcher, I tried to visualize each tenet of the relationship solar system as the container of bias that has been created against Black trans women. It keeps everything inside intact as long as the system isn't damaged.

What is inside each of the tenets are the social, institutional, public, and interpersonal experiences that become the recipe for the bias-related attitudes and behavior.

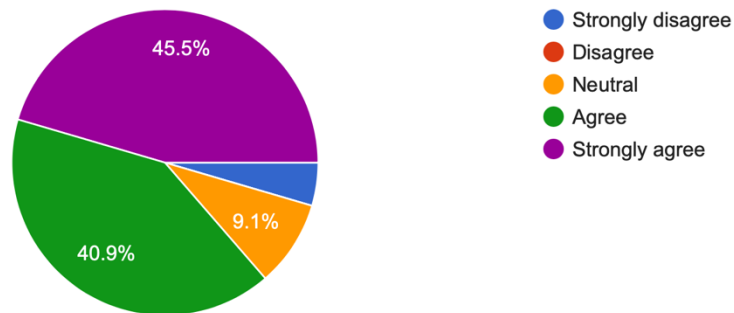


More specifically, data collected showed that over 50% of respondents also agree that American society has made progress in becoming more accepting of transgender identities while still believing that American culture normalizes toxic behavior towards Black trans women.

I have close relationships with Black women of transgender experience as an adult  
22 responses

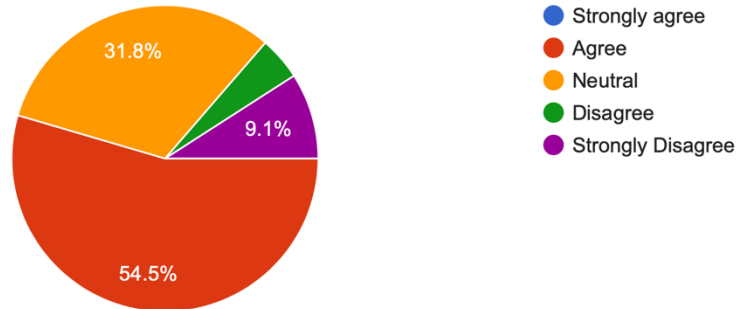


I believe that American culture normalizes toxic behavior towards Black transgender women  
22 responses



I think that American society has made progress in becoming more accepting of transgender identities

22 responses



Respondents also had the opportunity to express some feelings, in their own words, that could potentially help to analyze the statistical data further. Over 72% of participants indicated that they regularly speak up for transgender equity in the workplace or community or that they work to educate themselves and others.

*“When I hear derogatory statements, I address them immediately. When questions arise, I answer them honestly. I search for resources for my students. Above all else, when conversations demand confidentiality, I inform my students and colleagues that I will keep the information confidential as long as they aren't self-harming or planning to harm someone else. I call people to be themselves.”*

*“Educate friends and family members about transgender issues and discrimination”*

*“At church I am starting a support group for trans people.”*

It is also important to note the relationship of respondents being in positions or roles that affect change to the positively reported experiences of equitable workplace practices. Over fifty-two percent of survey participants indicated that they make organizational decisions, however, 59.1% denied that Black trans women serve in leadership capacities within their organization, company or office. In addition, an overwhelming 68.2% strongly disagreed with the statement that they would not be happy to have a Black trans woman as a supervisor, director



or CEO. These connections could potentially lead the research to explore the implications of bias, or even performative allyship, in professional settings that will be discussed in Chapter 4. Eighty-one percent of 21 survey responses indicated that the belief is that society views Black women of transgender experience differently than white transgender women and that white trans women have an easier time fitting into popular culture. We can revisit Fitzgerald (2017) and examine racial oppression as just one tenet of a systemic approach to overall oppression. Also, Snorton (2017) attributes some responsibility in cultivating racial implicit bias to various media resources and American culture being a critical source to the sharing of information. Other findings worthy of mentioning was that there was a noticeable amount of responses that indicated neutral or no to survey questions and yet the survey still yielded telling data and that 95% of those surveyed indicated that violence against Black trans women is a problem in our community. There were very few responses that could be interpreted as having a different perspective than the majority of the other respondents.

While Chapter 4 will discuss the implications of these findings in more detail, there is some clear messaging in the survey responses that multifaceted representation is critical to combating bias against Black trans women. Childhood experiences, television storylines and movie characters are influenced by popular culture and current events (McLauren, 2018).

## CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

The data found from the small sampling in the previous chapter will be what is used to determine potential impacts that implicit bias has on Black women of trans experience. Overall, it is important to note that the initial presumptions I had about the data results were not necessarily what was presented when I analyzed the findings. It resulted in more positive suggestions of individual beliefs based on the high level of respondent knowledge about transgender terminology, and some exposure through politics, film, and television even though there was no significant formal education about trans people involved. From the specific data around levels of knowledge and exposure, I would conclude that there is a connection to varying degrees of accuracy, stories that harm, and/or stories of resilience that are disseminated through popular culture media and results in the bias shown towards Black women of trans experience.

**Impacts of childhood experiences.** Fifty-nine percent of respondents also expressed a lack of significant childhood experiences with transgender family and/or friends, but also exhibited a more varied range among the responses related to experiences as an adult. This could potentially affect how cisgender people relate, or not, to other aspects of a trans person's life. The disconnection may not allow a non-trans person to see a trans person through the full spectrum of humanity. We relate to each other as human beings, even strangers, through sharing stories and experiences. If that connection is missed, we can very well draw our own conclusions based on personal beliefs and inconsistent experiences.

**Implications of popular culture.** Another important data point to analyze would be that over 86% of respondents have the idea that American culture consistently normalizes toxic behavior towards Black trans women and, comparatively, 54.5% believe that American is becoming more

accepting of trans identities. It seems that these two points conflict with each other in that American maybe has not shown tangible progress towards trans liberation or potentially has, but progression is slow. For clarification, I do not presume that acceptance of trans identities translates into the actionable disruption of the oppressive structures that affect them. There is a clear difference in where a person is in their beliefs about black trans women and their ability to make decisions and take action based on those attitudes and beliefs.

**Leadership and decision-making roles.** That takes us to additional important data results in this survey. Respondents were asked whether they held public office, nonprofit, student or government roles and the overwhelming responses were no. This was important to me as a researcher because I initially identified several individuals who represented these employment or educational fields and had predetermined that the responses would reflect that. Instead, respondents represented roles in instruction, management, administrative, supervisor, and entrepreneurship. These earlier attitudes and experiences led me to predict that later survey questions about decision-making or using the role as a platform would not yield any definitive results. My hope was to draw connections between what could be considered highly regarded societal roles and the ability to make decisions that affect change where Black women of transgender experience are concerned. In turn, it would've given more evidence to my argument that overall treatment of Black trans women depends on the explicit or implicit biases presented by individuals operating in these facets of society. The data did still reveal some other important observations. Even though the respondents did not represent the intended roles for the survey, 52.6% were still in positions to make decisions that affect the work of the organization. Survey responses indicated that knowledge about workplace policies or culture was forward thinking in that there were discrimination policies, outreach was available in the workplace on intersectional

identities, very little restrictions on gender identity expression, and 78% of respondents feeling that their workplace hiring practices were equitable. Ironically, over 59% of these same respondents indicated that Black women of transgender experience do not serve in any leadership capacities within their company, office, or organization. Approximately 68% of the same individuals who indicated that they were in positions to make decisions that affected change also significantly indicated that they had no Black women of trans experience as employees.

**Implications for inaction in community, nonprofit, and government leadership.** In my opinion, the implications for those connections could be performative allyship. This refers to individuals from nonmarginalized groups, in this instance cisgender people, who only claim to support and advocate for a particular marginalized group of people, in this instance Black women of transgender experience, for selfish reasons or public praise. This particular display of inauthentic allyship causes more harm because it does not result in any tangible, system disrupting results (Kalina, 2020). There can be specific consequences associated with performative allyship. Organizations may only seem to be showing up and speaking out on advocacy efforts when acts of violence go viral or are “trending” in the moment. Performatively checking off tasks that indicate solidarity for specific social justice issues is not useful because it allows “allies” to avoid personal accountability for the systemic issues that contribute to the bias experienced by Black trans women. Communities affected by violence everyday may wonder where the same white-led and staffed organizations stand on other days when the pain and violence is not making national headlines. Event though some small versions of accountability may be visible in those moments, the bigger issue is that it gives us a sense of permission in being complicit at other times. Even more troubling is that these entities countered efforts by receiving public praise and centering their own voices by portraying themselves as “good” and

“on the right side of history”. These types of marketing tactics ultimately decenter the voices of those who are being brutalized and impacted by biased beliefs everyday. It is not enough to understand, and be outraged by, the power and oppression dynamics that contribute to bias-related beliefs against Black women of transgender experience. Those in leadership and decision making roles must take effective action through investing in the people who are working to find solutions within these movements. This could include diverting funding resources away from white and cis-led organizations to Queer, Black, Trans and other People of Color-led organizations. Individuals and institutions within American society must authentically address systemic and interpersonal violence, influenced by explicit and implicit bias, through community led solutions and measures that challenge white supremacy, transphobia, and toxic masculinity. Recognizing that police and law enforcement are not solutions, we must ask ourselves the big questions about what it means to organize, all of us, around safety for Black trans women. Building relationships with Black trans people and organizations is critical to creating trust within a community. We have to make ourselves aware of the most critical of issues and create a plan for how we respond when they arise. There are so many more steps that we can take and this movement around the liberation of Black trans femmes is not done by far. The ways in which Black women of transgender experience engage with violence, trauma, and discrimination on a daily basis due to bias related attitudes and behaviors lead to the regular criminalization of Black trans youth and femmes.

**Solutions to performative allyship.** - Simply acknowledging that performative allyship is a major barrier to true activism or the disruption of oppression and marginalization is not enough. This only works to ease the individual guilt a person may feel and does not address the root causes of why actionable advocacy and activism for a particular issue is necessary. Asking

questions like what is happening at this moment in time that could be a barrier to a person of color accessing services and a path to a safe life can change the way conversations are held in moments of trauma. Communities need to invest in tangible solutions such as mutual aid and direct cash assistance programs that aren't tied to nonprofits or the grant objectives that they depend on for funding. This could potentially reduce misrepresentation and biased allocation of funding within those sectors. Investing in the communities of people who are most affected provide some reparations for the inequities that have historically been barriers to liberation and ability to thrive in life. True activism also involves getting up from behind the social media or blog post and engaging in conversation with those directly around you. For white community members, it means calling out their biased counterparts, publicly, and demanding change. This means potentially disrupting biased conversation at dinner tables and family functions or company events. In order to hold these vulnerable spaces for each other, we must also invest in educating ourselves and reflecting on how we play a role in being complicit. The IAT is just one way someone could get a foundational sense of how their beliefs affect their behaviors towards Black women of transgender experience or other oppressed demographics. It is helpful to understand that there is some level of privilege that each person benefits from and how to use that to the advantage of others. Also, advocacy does not have to constantly be publicized as big displays of speaking out or taking action. Small and daily steps towards dismantling the causes of violence are more important than one or two performative displays. Discontinue purchasing items from a violent manufacturer, turn down an employment opportunity from an employer who does not have diverse representation and intersectionality within their organization, address racism immediately and publicly.

**Resiliency against bias.** Despite being constantly dehumanized throughout society, Black trans women continue to exist and live fully realized lives. Black trans culture continues to remain strong, providing a community and safe haven for those who need it most. Increased public engagement in the trans liberation movement demonstrates an increasing amount of support for the centering of society's most vulnerable members in social movements and an increasing acknowledgement of how we must do better for Black trans individuals. Critical organizations like The Okra Project, The Marsha P. Johnson Institute, and the Emergency Release Fund center transgender and gender non-conforming individuals as well as cater to a majority Trans People Of Color client base. These organizations also demonstrate the transgender and gender non-conforming community's continued dedication to intracommunal resiliency through community led mutual aid and activism. Institutionalizing transgender studies can, again, prove to be a tool by which decisionmakers around societal health, policy, and cultural practices can make better informed decisions around the quality and equity of caring for Black women of transgender experience.

To Black women of transgender experience: We know each year is tough, and sometimes feels like there's no end in sight to suffering and oppression. Please know that our community is resilient and we acknowledge that transgender people have existed for centuries. You won't be erased, you can't be ignored, and we will support each other. Thank you for existing in all your brilliance. We know you deserve better, and we believe in a future where Black women of transgender experience, specifically, are loved and affirmed throughout every part of their lives.

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