Black Love, Activism, and Community (BLAC): The BLAC Model of Healing and Resilience

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to describe the Black Love, Activism, and Community (BLAC) model of healing and resilience. The assumption of the BLAC model is that Black activism is inspired and sustained by love and community. Building on empirical research, liberation psychology, and African-centered psychology, the BLAC model identifies four culturally grounded domains of resilience (relationships, spirituality, identity, and active expression) that are hypothesized to serve as protective factors. These domains are also postulated to be critical components of culturally centered healing practices. Within the context of anti-Black racism, it is important to understand how activism can mitigate mental health outcomes among Black activists. The BLAC model also describes culturally centered intervention approaches for healing and wellness. Finally, applications of the BLAC model are discussed.

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Love for the Black community animates engagement in Black liberation activism; this love is both emotional and spiritual. Oral histories shared by activists of diverse races reveal that the guiding principles and emotions of activism are love, faith, and joy (Doetsch-Kidder, 2010). A recognition of the emotional and spiritual foundations of social justice activism is an important, often overlooked motivator and sustainer of participation. Connected to the Freirean concept of armed love, activism creates community from which emerges sustainable healing and justice (Stern & Brown, 2016). Healing has been described as an individual journey toward wellness (Chioneso et al., 2020) and involves some level of emotional growth. The community context of activism is a reminder that activism cannot be captured by the analysis of an individual engaging in a set of behaviors but it is an interconnected collective of people guided by love for each other working to create a better, more just society (Bryant-Davis & Comas-Díaz, 2016). For example, Pope and Flanigan (2013) argue that the Black Panther Party's engagement in service, safety, and resource provision to the Black community were acts of compassion, protection, and love. In contemporary times, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement represents a convergence of love and justice that is foundational to radical, restorative healing (Ginwright, 2015). As deep grief is rooted in deep love, it is not surprising that for some Black mothers, grief is the catalyst that draws them into the BLM movement (Al'Uqdah & Adomako, 2018); the murder of their beloved children and the children of the community summon them to action.

Activism has been defined as advocacy for a political or social cause that is expressed through action and includes a range of activities from signing petitions to participating in civil disobedience (Klar & Kasser, 2009). Activism can exist in many forms that reflect acts of resistance to social injustice and oppression, as well as acts of social change targeting policies and systemic transformation. The actions and roles of activism include protests, providing care to protestors, political action (e.g., countering voter suppression), promoting policy changes, and written and artistic expression (Collins et al, 2019; Mosley et al., 2021). Locating activism within psychology brings attention to the work of liberation psychology scholars who argue that psychology should be focused on transforming both people and societies (Martín-Baró, 1996; Moane, 2010; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). Liberation psychology, emerging from Latin America, promotes consciousness raising and addresses oppression while advancing healing and liberation (Comas-Díaz & Torres-Rivera, 2020). Psychological wellness is compromised by oppression and develops optimally in the context and pursuit of justice. Activism thus reflects individual and political behaviors toward both liberation and wellness (Collins et al., 2019; Prilleltensky,

2012). The psychology of resistance to oppression suggests that participation in activism is a path to positive psychological outcomes such as self-esteem (Leach & Livingstone, 2015). The application of liberation psychology to Black Americans builds on the pioneering work on oppression and liberation by Pan-Africanist, psychiatrist, and activist Fantz Fanon (Thompson, 2019). Black liberation psychology incorporates liberation from internalized racism, empowerment, reclaiming of identity and agency, and the collective fulfillment of purpose and even joy (Bryant-Davis & Moore-Lobban, 2020). Thus, the development of a psychology of Black activism, activism by Black people that serves to promote the interest of Black people, can continue to elevate the role of activism as a beneficial component of healing that attends to the interdependence of the psychological and collective liberation of Black persons.

The purpose of the current article is to introduce the Black Love, Activism, and Community (BLAC) model as a framework for a psychology of Black activism. The BLAC model is offered to (1) illuminate the role of Black activism on mental health, (2) identify culturally grounded protective processes to strengthen preparation for activism and enhance the resilience of Black activists, and (3) inform healing efforts to address the mental health and wellness of Black activists with attention to the risks and psychosocial costs of engaging in the work of activism. The BLAC model draws on the empirical literature on protective factors and psychological interventions for Black people, and the African-centered psychology literature reflecting central themes of African cultural knowledge, wisdom, and healing. From these sources, emerges the centrality of the concepts of love and community. In *Salvation: Black people and love*, hooks (2001) contends that love is "the fundamental source of our power and strength" (p. xxiii) and "a necessary dimension of liberation" (p. xxi). Cornel West has stated, "justice is what love looks like in public" (Mendieta, 2017, p. 169). The model is a call-to-action to better prepare, protect, and provide psychocultural resources in the service of enhancing the power of Black activists to contribute optimally to the dismantling of anti-Black racism and its devastating effects on the individual and collective lives of Black persons.

Benefits and Risks of Activism

The BLAC model proposes that Black activism can have multiple influences on Black life. Historically, Black activism has been pivotal in the fight against police brutality and racial injustice. For example, the BLM movement, started in 2013 in the wake of the killing of Trayvon Martin (BLM, 2020), has been the center of Black activism in recent years. BLM has continued to push for

racial equality and criminal justice reform while centering its efforts on Black joy which is instrumental to the continued work for social justice. With respect to benefits, some studies have found that activism is associated with a sense of personal significance, positive affect, self-actualization, flourishing, and hope (e.g., Klar & Kasser, 2009; Watson-Singleton et al., 2021). A recent study examined the moderation effects of BLM activism on depressive symptoms among African Americans (Watson-Singleton et al., 2021). The study found that BLM-support moderated the association between racial discrimination (lifetime and recent) and depressive symptoms such that the positive association between discrimination and depressive symptoms was significant at relatively lower levels of BLM-support but not significant at relatively higher levels of BLM-support.

Watson-Singleton et al. (2021) also noted that activism fulfills an individuals' higher order psychological needs (e.g., sense of meaning, self-expression, and psychological empowerment). This suggests that engaging in Black activism may serve as a protective factor against anti-Black racism or racial stress. Involvement in Black activism, a behavioral manifestation of critical consciousness, can potentially contribute to empowerment and positive mental health outcomes such as life satisfaction, sense of meaning/purpose, self-esteem and collective esteem, personal mastery, connectedness, and psychological well-being (Chioneso et al., 2020; Hope et al., 2018; Mosely et al, 2021). A recent study found that endorsement of stronger racial identity or racial centrality was associated with spending more time in civic engagement (Chapman-Hilliard et al., 2020).

Santos and VanDaalen (2018) postulate that it is important to distinguish between low- and high-risk forms of activism that may be associated with different outcomes. For example, low-risk activism (e.g., donating funds or community organizing meetings) has been associated with resilience and positive outcomes (Hope et al., 2019). On the other hand, high-risk activism (e.g., frontline protesting in emotionally charged settings) may pose some threat to mental health, increasing risk for anxiety, depression, and other psychosocial adjustment outcomes (Hope et al., 2019; McAdam, 1986; Santos & VanDaalen, 2018). The psychological, financial, and social costs of activism can lead to activists' burnout, which can result in activists disengaging from the movement. Furthermore, activists' burnout threatens the sustainability of the movement and compromises attainment of the movement's goals for liberation and justice. Some studies find that activists report that the following factors as contributors to burnout: a culture of martyrdom, emotional-dispositional causes, structural causes, backlash causes, and in-movement causes (Gorski, 2019). Hope et al. (2018) found that Black students who engaged in higher levels of political activism experienced higher levels of racial/ethnic

microaggressions and more stress and anxiety than Black students who engaged in less political activism.

Black activism can increase exposure to racism, a significant health risk factor for Black people. Multiple studies indicate that higher frequencies of exposure to racism among Black people predict poorer mental health outcomes, including but not limited to fatigue, shame, dissociation, anxiety, depression, psychological distress, diminished well-being, and sleep disturbance (Carter et al., 2020; Kwate & Goodman, 2015; Pieterse et al., 2012). Exposure to racism can take the form of acute life events, chronic life conditions, microaggressions, vicarious stress, observation of collective disparities, and transgenerational trauma (Harrell, 2000; Turner, 2019). According to a qualitative study of activists of color, in-movement stressors may also result in part from engagement with some White activists who practice performative allyship as demonstrated by expressions of racist views, undermining racial justice work of activists of color, being unwilling to take action when it is needed, exhibiting white fragility, and taking credit for the work of activists of color (Gorski & Erakat, 2019). Involvement in these types of interactions among Black activists with White activists are a potential psychological cost of engaging in Black activism. Racism as trauma reflects the multiple ways it threatens safety and survival, leaves Black people unprotected, and presents life-threatening dangers through structural, cultural, interpersonal, and psychological violence (e.g., Carter et al., 2020; Helms et al., 2010. The psychologically deleterious consequences of this race-based traumatic stress have been demonstrated in multiple studies and reviews (Paradies et al., 2015; Pieterse et al., 2012).

The BLAC Model of Healing and Resilience

The BLAC model (Figure 1) builds on existing empirical research to provide a conceptual model that describes how Black activism is related to risk, protective, and healing processes that can impact mental health outcomes among Black individuals who engage in activism. The BLAC model proposes that culturally centered processes grounded in a communal orientation (love and community) are critical for Black activists in order to sustain their mental health. When Black activism is characterized by love and a communal orientation, it is of optimal benefit to the well-being of activists and the effectiveness of Black activist organizations is enhanced toward liberation. Love is realized in Black activism through caring and loving relationships, love of Black people and African diasporic culture, love of God and knowing that one is loved by God, and expressions of love in the form of collective joy and collective grief.
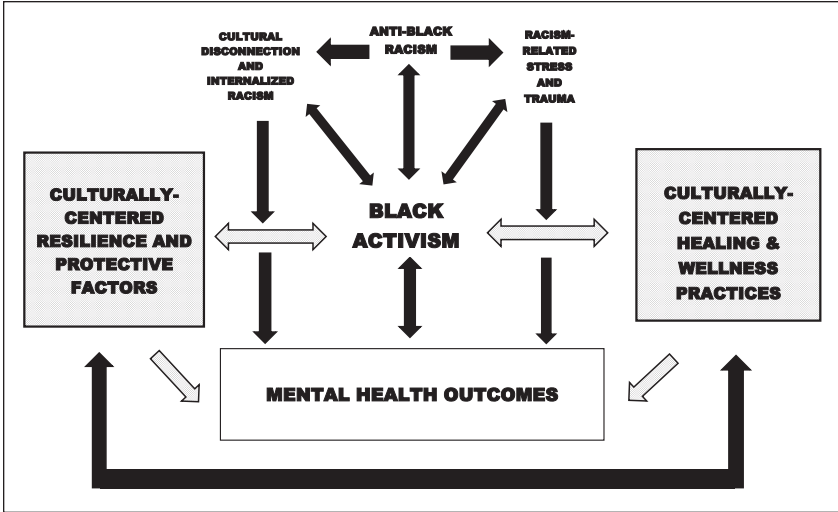
Figure 1. The Black Love, Activism, and Community (BLAC) Model of Healing and Resilience.

The constructs of love and community reflect a collectivist-communal orientation that infuses an African-centered cultural orientation into the BLAC model. From an African-centered perspective, Black activism can be located within a broader frame of liberation reflecting the full realization of our interconnected humanity, grounded in love and communal connection. African-centered principles emerging from African spirituality and wisdom traditions inform a cultural understanding of paths to optimal well-being and mental health for Black persons (e.g., Grills & Rowe, 1998; Turner, 2019). These principles may include communalism, harmony, balance, orality, rhythm, emotional expressiveness, creativity, authenticity, self-determination, compassion and caring, justice, historical groundedness, and the veneration of all persons through interconnectedness (Grills & Rowe, 1998; J. M. Jones, 2003; Myers, 1988; Nobles, 2006). The African centered ethos of ubuntu provides an ethical-moral grounding for the model in its emphasis on living from a foundation of a spiritually infused interconnected humanity. Ubuntu holds that a person's humanity cannot be fully realized outside of communal connection which centers spirituality as not an individualized experience, but a relational and communal one (Mazama, 2002; Washington, 2010). From an African-centered perspective, Black activism contributes to the full realization of our interconnected humanity, grounded in love and communal connection.

Within the BLAC model, involvement in Black activism not only contributes to dismantling racism, but is also hypothesized to strengthen protective processes among activists who can find a place of belonging, purpose, support, and vehicle for expression of social justice values and commitments. The following section describes the components of the BLAC model and identifies proposed associations among the constructs, as well as, provides an understanding of activism and mental health outcomes.

Anti-Black Racism and Black Activism

The top level of the BLAC model identifies mental health risk factors relevant to Black activism. Anti-Black racism is understood as dehumanization and injustice, violence, exploitation, marginalization, and exclusion that is embedded in an ideology of White supremacy and operates systemically such that it is woven into multiple domains of life for Black persons (Harrell, 2000; Neville & Pieterse, 2009). Living in the context of anti-Black racism compromises the quality of life for Black people on just about every social indicator such as health, education, employment, economics, safety, criminal justice, and knowledge production (Alvarez et al., 2014; American Psychological Association, 2015; Chae et al., 2017). It is important to be explicit in noting that our conceptualization of anti-Black racism is fundamentally intersectional and inclusive of the ways that racism is gendered, as well as intersecting with social locations such as socioeconomic status, LGBTQ+ identification, and age. The BLAC model displays anti-Black racism as generating experiences of racism-related stress and trauma that threaten health and well-being (Carter et al., 2020; Neville & Pieterse, 2009). It also exerts its damage through the degree to which Black persons reject blackness and African cultural connections, internalizing messages of white superiority that are embedded into social spaces and dominant social narratives (Mosley et al., 2021).

The BLAC model posits that Black activism has a bidirectional relationship with anti-Black racism. It can be an empowered response to anti-Black racism with involvement in Black activism increasing when awareness of anti-Black racism is heightened (Brown & Tylka, 2011; Dollarhide et al., 2018; Neville & Cross, 2017). In addition, the strategies of Black activism operate to disrupt and dismantle racism through a variety of methods to enact change, as well as to elevate and empower Black persons. Thus, Black activism both emerges from and changes manifestations of anti-Black racism.

Within the model, Black activism is also hypothesized to have a bidirectional relationship with racism-related stress and trauma. Increased exposure to the damage of racism-related stress and trauma may serve to motivate and

inspire Black activism (Szymanski & Lewis, 2015). For example, the vicarious racism-related stress and trauma experienced through the wide availability of social media videos of police brutality and killings appear to have played a significant role in increased protest and other activism strategies. For those engaged in Black activism, immersion in the systemic nature of racism and its far-reaching effects increase vicarious racism exposure. Activists on the front lines have a greater likelihood of direct exposure to the terrors and various expressions of anti-Black racism. Thus, Black activism may increase racism-related stress and trauma (Hope et al., 2018) and place activists at greater risk for both new racial traumas, as well as retraumatization of previous personal racism experience and the historical trauma of enslavement and its ongoing aftermath. However, involvement in Black activism can function as a protective factor that can potentially mediate the impact of racism-related stress and trauma on mental health outcomes (Hope et al., 2018). Szymanski and Lewis (2015) found that racial-cultural stress was a unique predictor of activism among African American young adults.

The BLAC model also hypothesizes a bidirectional relationship between cultural disconnection and internalized racism, and Black activism. Internalized oppression and subordination can manifest as negative attitudes toward other Black persons and the Black community, devaluing and rejecting African cultural ways of being. It is also expressed in the idealization of whiteness and imitation of characteristics of a dominant/oppressive and colonial cultural orientation including individualism, high value on material acquisition, domination over persons and nature, and competition. (James, 2020; Harrell et al., 2020). When activism is motivated by an individualistic cultural orientation (e.g., personal elevation, material gain, desire to dominate) and characterized by egoism and competitive behaviors, divisiveness and toxic interpersonal/group dynamics can occur. However, involvement in Black activism has the potential to increase awareness of the complex and sometimes subtle ways that anti-Black racism is internalized and expressed. The intense and dedicated attention to racism among activists may unveil the deeply embedded places (internally and externally) where the ideology of White supremacy operates to maintain the status quo of racial oppression. Heightened awareness of potential ways that racism has been internalized may ultimately increase congruence and clarity in the work of Black activists. It is also important to note that for those who have higher levels of initial internalized racism and disconnection, yet feel called to activism, these culturally centered protective processes can potentially help to strengthen cultural pride and build resilience (as discussed later). Black activism might also buffer the potential impact of cultural disconnection and internalized racism on negative mental health outcomes.

It is important to not only identify how anti-Black racism, racism-related stress and trauma, and cultural disconnection potentially affect individuals who become activists but also to identify how these processes affect the structure and experience of Black activism collectively. For example, the functioning of an activist group or organization will likely be affected by the degree to which racism-related stress and trauma is present and the degree to which it has been processed among its members. Similarly, Black activists whose cultural orientation is more individualistic can contribute to the emergence of challenging group dynamics and impact the collective experience. Black activist leaders might benefit from increased awareness of signs that such risks are present and when their expression is at a level of concern to refer for mental health services.

Culturally Centered Protective and Resilience Factors

What protects and sustains the mental health and well-being of Black activists? On the left side, the BLAC model proposes that culturally centered resilience and protective factors can play an important role in the individual and collective experience of Black activism, as well as prevent negative mental health outcomes. Anti-Black racism is a systemic and multilevel condition of adversity that has revealed the incredible capacity for resilience among Black people throughout history. The growing body of research on Black resilience highlights multiple variables that reflect cultural and community strengths (Brown & Tylka, 2011; Dollarhide et al., 2018; Henderson et al., 2016; McCrea et al., 2019). A review of theory and research on protective factors among Black people informed the identification of culturally centered resilience and protective factors organized into four interrelated domains that are grounded in love and community: relationships, spirituality, identity, and active expression. Within these broad domains a number of cultural assets and strengths are identified that can reduce risks for negative mental health outcomes, buffer and mediate stress, as well as, enhance resilience and positive mental health. The BLAC model suggests that strengthening protective factors increases resilience and facilitates optimal engagement in Black activism such that the work toward liberation can be more positively sustained.

The first domain within culturally centered resilience and protective factors is relationships. The relationships domain includes constructs such as social support, sense of community, neighboring, family and kinship, and communal rituals. Activism centers on countering oppression and simultaneously can create a space of belonging (Bhuyan, 2018). Sense of community has been found to be positively associated with psychological empowerment

(Lardier, 2018), which suggests the psychological benefits of activism through enhancing community. Research indicates that social support offers a psychological and physical buffering effect for Black people facing racism, including racial microaggressions (Salami et al., 2020). Church-based social support among Black people facing racism has also been found to be associated with decreased anxiety (Graham & Roemer, 2012). While encounters with racism can diminish optimism for Black men and women, social support has been found to be positively associated with optimism (Mattis et al., 2003). Mattis et al. (2003) found that a supportive and loving relationship with God predicted optimism in the context of racial discrimination among African Americans. Given these benefits, relationships can be considered a strong protective resource for Black activists that can contribute to the promotion of resilience. Cultural connection and spirituality, both enhanced through communal rituals and community support, have been suggested to be particularly important for resilience in racism-related stress and trauma (Livingston et al., 2017; Salami et al., 2020).

The next domain, spirituality, includes constructs such as religious coping, religiosity, faith, meaning and purpose, relationship to God/Spirit, Black Liberation Theology, and the centrality of spirituality for persons of African descent. The Black church and activism often go hand in hand for many Black people. Black religious communities, particularly churches, historically played a central role in organizing anti-racism revolts, uprisings, and movements (Adedoyin et al., 2018; Wilson, 1960). According to Livingston et al. (2017), when Black people are more involved in attending church, they are more likely to be exposed to political discussions and opportunities, and they are also more likely to become involved in more collective forms of political activity. However, while historically Black churches were centrally involved in Black activism, one study found that church membership suppressed nonelection related activism (Swain, 2010). In other words, Black churches continued to encourage voter registration and voter turnout but were less engaged in activism focused on social justice issues or criminal justice reform. This finding is consistent with the contemporary BLM movement which operates as a decentralized organization aimed at addressing anti-Black, racially motivated police brutality and criminalization as opposed to the civil rights movement which rallied around religious leaders such as Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. or Malcolm X (Adedoyin et al., 2018).

Although the church may be less central as an organizing base for activism, research suggests that spirituality and religious coping continue to be protective. Prosper (2018) found that intrinsic spirituality, quest religiosity, the view of religious development as a journey, and race-related stress were positively associated with engagement in racial justice activism. Religious

engagement and racial socialization that involves religious and spiritual coping have found to be protective factors for Black youth (Jang & Johnson, 2001; Stevenson, 1994). With respect to gender, Lewis-Coles and Constantine (2006) found that, among Black women, experiences of institutional racism were predictive of spiritual-focused coping. Religious coping with institutional racism, in conjunction with activism and social support has specifically been found to be adaptive for Black women coping with racism in health care encounters (Abrums, 2004). Additionally, one study found that Black men who were active in a local church were also more likely to indicate participating in volunteerism and community organizations such as political and social justice organizations (Mattis et al, 2003).

The third domain, identity, includes constructs such as racial-ethnic identity, racial socialization, and values. hooks (2001) contended that "Black identity is forged in triumphant struggle to resist dehumanization" (p. xxi). Racial socialization has been described as implicit, explicit, purposeful, and unintended ways in which parents' beliefs and behaviors convey their views about race to their children (Harris-Britt et al., 2007; Stevenson, 1994). It also includes to the promotion of psychological and physical health through parenting in a society where African features may lead to discrimination and racism (Coard et al., 2004). One study explored racial socialization practices of African American parents following the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin (Thomas & Blackmon, 2015) and found that Black children were taught very specific strategies for dealing with racism, racial profiling, and circumstances in which violence may occur. Research indicates that when African Americans parents discuss potential discrimination and prepare their children to cope with negative bias that these racial socialization messages serve as a protective factor against mental health outcomes such as poor self-esteem, depression, and anxiety (Harris-Britt et al., 2007; Thomas & Blackmon, 2015; Turner, 2019). Cultural pride may be particularly important to buffer against racism (Harris-Britt et al., 2007).

Generally, positive racial-ethnic identity has been associated with resilience in the context of racial injustice among youth of color (Zimmerman et al., 2013) and reduced psychological distress among African American young adults (Sellers et al., 2003). For example, Caldwell et al. (2004) found racial identity to be a protective factor, moderating risks of violence and discrimination in African American youth. According to one study among African American adults, racial centrality and critical awareness and activism were interrelated (Livingston et al., 2017). Specifically, the authors found that when race was perceived as a core of one's self-concept, participants reported engaging in higher levels of activism. Another recent study indicated that when Black people endorse a stronger self-concept about race (i.e.,

racial centrality), they spend more time engaging in civic engagement or activism (Chapman-Hilliard et al., 2020).

Finally, the active expression domain reflects culturally congruent engagement in the world in ways that demonstrate authenticity, agency, efficacy, self-determination, innovation, and empowerment. It includes constructs such as storytelling and communal testimony (Akinyela, 2005; Banks-Wallace, 2002; Chioneso et al., 2020), artistic and creative expression (e.g., visual art, music, dance, theater, poetry, and spoken word), physical movement and activities (e.g., athletics, gardening, farming), celebration and expressions of joy, and opportunities to express strengths such as service and caregiving, leadership, courage, and humor (Harrell, 2018; Mattis et al., 2003). Such vehicles for expression can counter the suppression of emotion, silencing, and invisibility of racism-related experience. Amplifying cultural narratives and sharing the truth of lived experience enhances processes of voice and visibility (Bryant-Davis & Comas-Díaz, 2016; Grills et al., 2016). Expressiveness, innovation, and spontaneity have been identified as reflections of an African cultural orientation (Drake-Burnette et al., 2016; J. M. Jones, 2003). In an African American context, soul music is viewed as both healing and a resonating expression of lived experience that provides a sense of connection and shared experience (Mena & Saucier, 2014; Ward, 2004). Research suggests that for Black women the expressive arts have been a historical and contemporary form of resistance that brings coping, healing, empowerment, and cultural connection, utilizing diverse forms from dance to spoken word (Drake-Burnette et al., 2016; Mena & Saucier, 2014). For Black men, musical expression such as Hip Hop, has been found to be a healing, strengths-based, culturally congruent vehicle for emotional wholeness, connection building, healing grief, and resisting oppression (Tyson, 2012). Reed (2016) also notes that Black queer performers utilized the expressive arts and spirituality as activists to counter racism and intersectional oppression. As highlighted in the BLAC model, these resilience and protective factors including relationships, spirituality, identity, and active expression are important when considering how they can reduce negative mental health outcomes among Black activists.

Culturally Centered Healing and Wellness Practices

Turning attention to the right side of the BLAC model, it is proposed that engagement in culturally centered healing and wellness practices can influence the way that Black activism affects mental health outcomes. Attention to both individual and communal healing and wellness can prevent negative mental health outcomes, as well as promote optimal health and well-being.

However, involvement in activism can be so immersive that activists are at risk for ignoring their own health and well-being (e.g., Santos & VanDaalen, 2018; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011; Watson-Singleton et al., 2021). Healing and wellness practices can occur in multiple contexts including community-based interventions, psychotherapy and counseling, and psychoeducation and self-care.

Community-based interventions can target whole communities for healing since racism creates emotional pain and threatens optimal functioning even in the absence of psychopathology. Within an African-centered communal cultural orientation, group-based interventions may be particularly beneficial. A nonpathologizing and destigmatizing emphasis on prevention rather than on labeling illness is a benefit of this category of interventions. The emotional emancipation circles developed by the Community Healing Network and Association of Black Psychologists are one example of community programs in the service of healing from racism (Grills et al., 2016). Chioneso et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of community healing to promote justice-informed wellness. As presented in the BLAC model, these culturally centered healing practices are hypothesized to help reduce racism related stress and negative mental health outcomes among Black activists.

Psychotherapy and counseling occur in health care settings and target people who are experiencing higher levels of distress. Increased attention to Black mental health and activism have brought awareness to the psychological impact of racism which has resulted in Black people increasing their utilization of psychotherapy services (American Psychological Association, 2015; Turner, 2019). The BLAC model proposes that in order for counseling and psychotherapy services to be culturally centered, the protective factors of relationship, spirituality, identity, and active expression should be incorporated. When providing therapy and counseling services with Black people, it is important to engage in treatment that is culturally responsive and culturally attuned. According to research, culturally competent interventions are necessary for treatment success among Black clients (Harrell et al., 2020; Turner, 2019).

Psychoeducation and self-care emphasize providing accessible information about mental health and wellness that targets Black people. Wellness practices such as meditation and mindfulness are increasingly being taught in culturally responsive ways (e.g., soulfulness) to improve the health and well-being of Black people (Harrell, 2018). Psychoeducation and self-care interventions are also increasingly being offered through social networking platforms. Examples include podcasts such as the "Homecoming Podcast" by Dr. Thema Bryant-Davis (2019-present) and "The Breakdown with Dr. Earl Mental Health podcast" by Dr. Erlanger Turner (2019-present). Additionally,

events hosted on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter from Black psychologists and wellness professionals are increasingly providing information and tips for black mental health. Our Mental Health Minute is another example from two Black psychologists, Drs. Riana Anderson and Shawn Jones, whose short YouTube videos aim to reduce mental health stigma in the Black community and provide culturally relevant resources regarding mental health care (S. C. Jones & Anderson, 2020). Culturally centered healing and wellness practices that are informed by African-centered values and target specific concern for Black mental health are important resources for Black activists. These interventions can infuse Black activist groups with preventive strategies to minimize the psychological risks of activism. The facilitation of empowerment and improvement of mental health among activists can serve restorative and healing functions and ultimately enhance the experience and effectiveness of activism to address anti-Black racism and enhance individual, relational, and collective liberation (Mosely et al., 2020).

Applications of the BLAC Model

As Hunter and Lewis (2010) recommend, interventions that attend to the reclaiming and restoring of Black people's spirit are a central component of healing in the context of anti-Black racism. Nobles promotes the role of African healers in affirming humanity and healing the spirits and minds of African people (Jamison, 2017). Applications of the BLAC model must be grounded in these fundamental commitments to optimize Black mental health and well-being. Resisting anti-Black racism and facilitating both psychological and collective liberation are the overarching goals of Black activism. The BLAC model seeks to inform the experience and effects of Black activism through explicit attention to culturally centered protective factors and healing strategies.

The BLAC model can be applied in multiple contexts and is relevant for Black people whether they identify explicitly as activists or not. For those who are struggling with the effects of anti-Black racism, critical consciousness interventions that lead to Black activism can increase empowerment and agency. The BLAC model highlights some areas Black activist organizations and community-based programs might more explicitly integrate. This includes orienting new activists in a way that emphasizes approaching their involvement from an orientation of love and community and incorporating the four protective/resilience domains (relationships, identity, spirituality, and active expression). Training Black activist leaders to identify both risk and protective factors could be a helpful preventive strategy. The BLAC model can also be a resource for mental health practitioners as guidance for

increasing the cultural relevance of interventions with Black persons involved in activism.

With emphasis on the four domains of Black resilience, the BLAC model can be taught in community-based psychoeducation groups based in social justice organizations, faith-based settings, Black student organizations on campuses, Black bookstores, and peer-led support groups. The BLAC model can also be distributed beyond the academy through social media and with the assistance of media psychologists in television, radio, and podcasts. Additionally, Black liberation psychotherapists can incorporate the strategies from the model in their individual, family, and group interventions. Dissemination of the model can also be included in undergraduate and graduate level psychology courses as a way to train future psychologists in providing care for activists and engaging in care for themselves as activists. In terms of policy implications, the authors recommend Black activist organizations create routine procedures to support the mental health of their members, such as inviting guest mental health professionals to assist with developing and teaching strategies for community care before, during, and after engagement in protests. Finally, the BLAC model could inform training for police officers who interact with protestors to sensitize them to the psychology of Black protests that highlights the foundations of love and community. Additionally, the model supports efforts to reduce police presence in Black communities in general and at protests in particular, while instead utilizing those funds to support initiatives that address the needs of the community.

Conclusions

Ultimately, the importance of optimizing the experience and impact of Black activism is in the service of liberation of Black persons and dismantling of anti-Black racism. Whereas Black activism is rooted in love and community, it is important to encourage activists to care for themselves to prevent negative psychological consequences such as burnout, stress, or hopelessness. Some note that activists within the BLM movement are unapologetic in their mission to fight societal racist oppression (Hargons et al., 2017). The BLAC model offers a cohesive framework to promote resilience and healing while in the midst of striving to improve the lives of the Black community. White supremacy aims to discredit and disempower Black activists in order to destroy Black activism, yet the love of Black people for each other and for liberation refuses to bow. Lifting up our activists through caring for their health and well-being reflects gratitude for the risks that are taken on our behalf. This work is critical for the protection of Black mental health and the

perseveration of those committed to Black life, love, and liberation. As hooks (2001) reminds us:

> Love is profoundly political. Our deepest revolution will come when we understand this truth. Only love can give us the strength to go forward in the midst of heartbreak and misery. Only love can give us the power to reconcile, to redeem, the power to renew weary spirits and save lost souls. The transformative power of love is the foundation of all meaningful social change. (pp. 16-17)

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