

Racial Differences in Response to COVID-19: Solidarity, Vulnerability, and Social Justice

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By Dr. Frederick Weil, Samantha Ramey,
Oliver Garretson, Jiabin Fan, and Alison Qi, LSU & Columbia U.

Rick Weil
Department of Sociology, LSU
fweil@lsu.edu
www.fweil.com

Methodology

- Sampling: not probability, but diverse
- Demographics
- Open-ended, qualitative with a questionnaire protocol
- Future plans: quantifying the responses

Student Interviewers & Transcribers

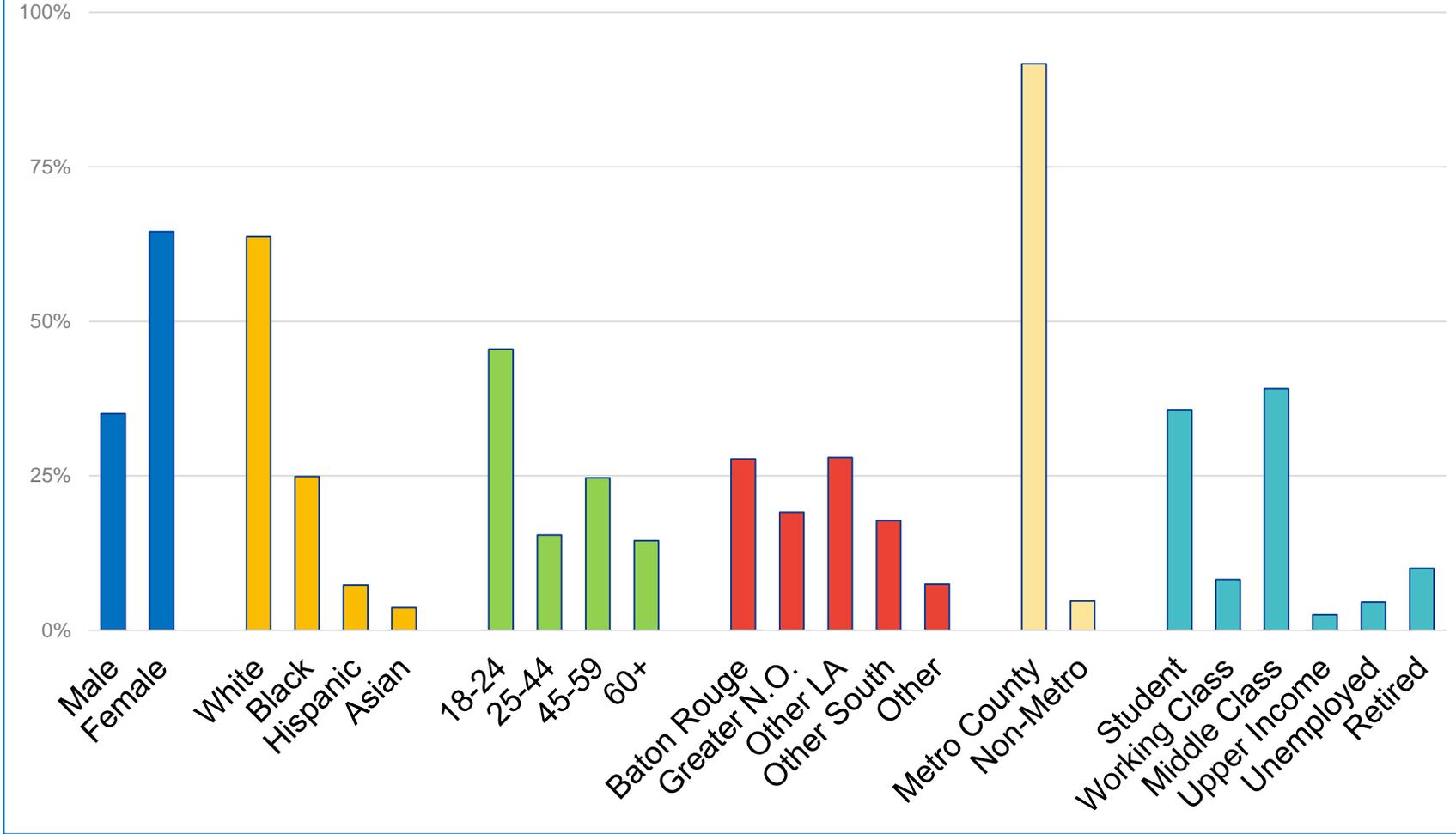
		NSF Interviewers		
		No	Yes	
NSF Transcribers	No		15	15
	Yes	38	65	103
		38	80	118
Interviewed for class credit			141	

Total Interviewers	221
Total Transcribers	103
Total Undergrad participants	259

Methods Notes

- Focus on community response – beyond vulnerability, impact, & material resources
- Weil a survey analyst since 1970s. Previous work:
 - Democratization surveys in Europe, 1945-1990s
 - Disaster surveys since Hurricane Katrina
 - 7,000 response survey
 - 100 response survey of Neighborhood Assn Presidents
 - 150 Open-ended qualitative interviews
 - Neighborhoods Portraits interviews
- Covid. Decided not to do quantitative surveys. Rather, qualitative, using a protocol.
- Took page from traditional European quota sampling. Leveraged LSU student diversity.
 - Students interviewed people they know, remotely on Zoom or in household
 - Produced more intimate interviews
 - Hired 118 students thru grant to do interviewing and transcribing
 - 141 students also did interviews as part of classwork
 - Total: 221 student interviewers
 - Total: 259 total undergraduate participants
 - Half dozen grad students have also worked on the project

Respondent Demographics



Sample & Analysis Notes

- Collected ca. 650 interviews, of which 450 are good.
 - Interviewing took place from March/April, 2020, to Dec. 31, 2021, covering the initial arc of the pandemic, from the outbreak to the current extent of vaccination
 - Interviews mostly in Louisiana, but some elsewhere
 - Not a probability sample, but diverse, reflecting the population
 - Demographics
 - Note: 118 interviews with Blacks
- Interviews recorded & transcribed, yielding 10,000 +/- pages of transcripts.
- We have done several levels of mark-up of transcripts.
 - Incl 4 Black undergrads, Samantha Ramey, & Weil, meeting through last summer, in preparation for this paper.
- We are now processing transcripts for themes, and are part-way through.
- We also plan to quantify the survey responses, yielding a non-probability sample of 650
 - We also use external quantitative polling results and public health data to put our qualitative findings into perspective

Key Themes

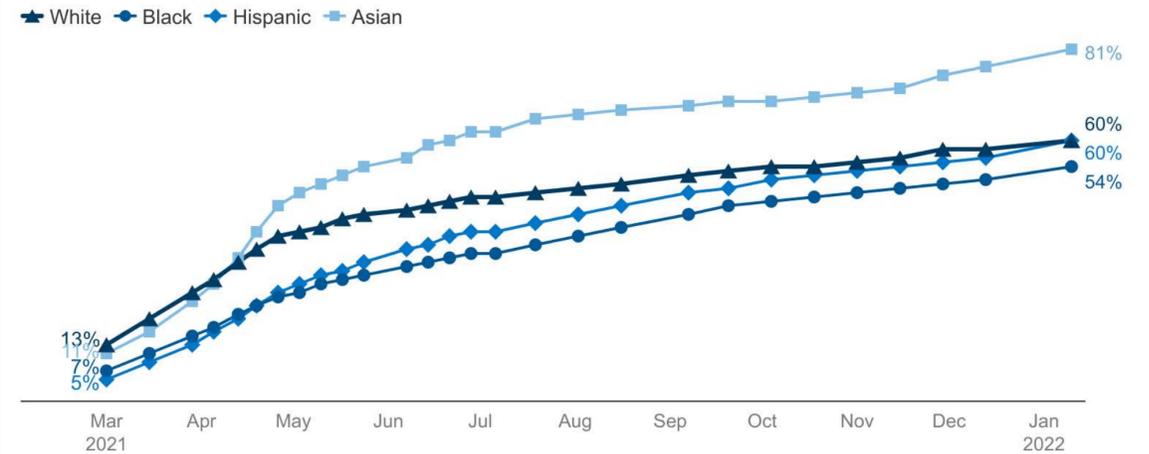
- Pandemic Safety Measures
- Vulnerability
- Psychological Distress
- Trust and Doubt
- Development of Resilience
- Social Justice

Pandemic Safety Measures

- Attitude towards-
 - Masks
 - Quarantine/Reopening
 - Social distancing
- Strong reaction to vaccines

Figure 3

Percent of Total Population that Has Received at Least One COVID-19 Vaccine Dose by Race/Ethnicity, March 1 to January 10, 2022



SOURCE: Vaccination data based on KFF analysis of publicly available data on state websites; total population data used to calculate rates based on KFF analysis of 2019 American Community Survey data. Number of states included in analysis varies based on available data at time of data collection.

Pandemic Safety Measures Notes 1

We find that our respondents, for the most part, were willing to follow pandemic safety protocols. With regards to specific measures, respondents did not consider the mask mandates, social distancing, quarantine practices to be unfair, but necessary, and something that everyone should take part in to slow the spread of the virus. Some respondents also expressed a desire for reopening at some point for the sake of helping small and local businesses.

Many of these same respondents also tended to admonish those who chose not to follow these guidelines.

We believe that the respondents are paying a bit of LIP SERVICE to these safety measures, as the respondents were quick to express their support of these measures, with little dissent presented or commented on. However, we found there to be stronger reactions when questioned on the idea of receiving a vaccine. A few people were accepting of the idea of getting vaccinated. More commonly, however, respondents expressed their issues with trust in the vaccine itself and/or the medical system administering it.

Pandemic Safety Measures Notes 2

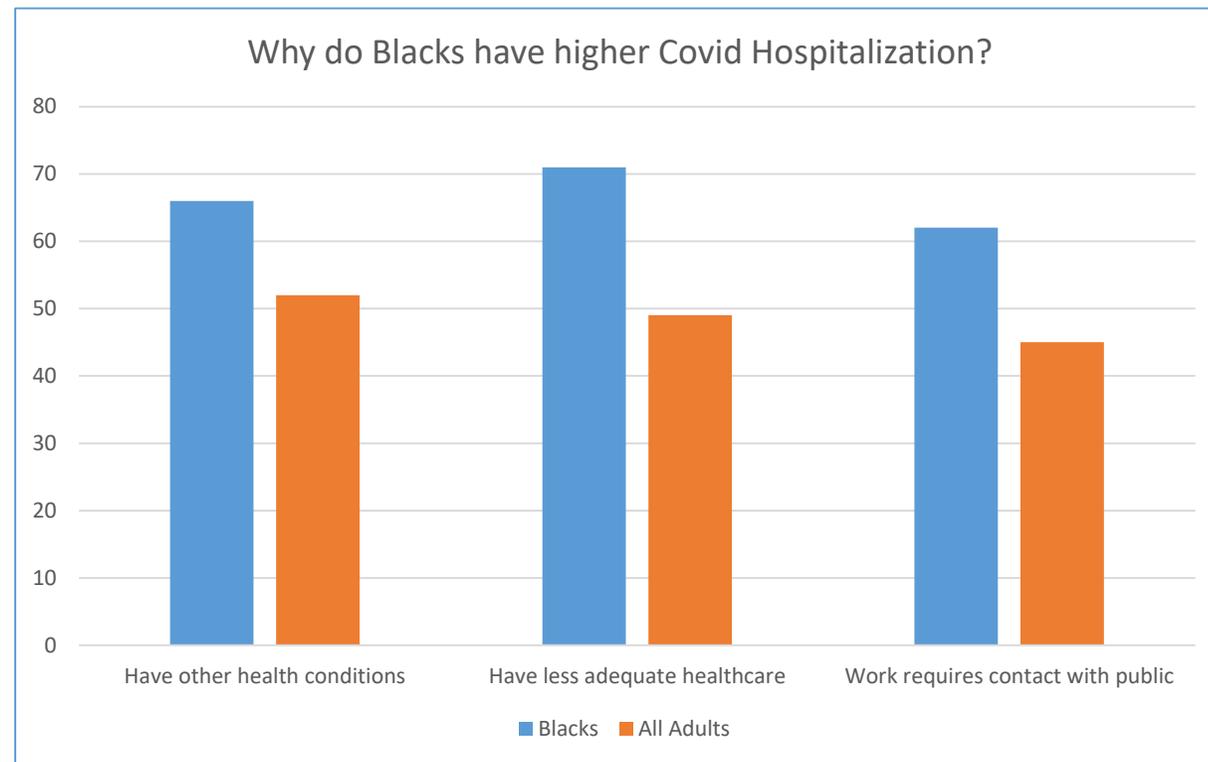
For example, a different 20 year old Black Female from the Greater New Orleans Metropolitan Area referenced the Tuskegee Syphilis experiments as a major deterrent for receiving the vaccine. Others would cite other reasons such as the vaccines not having been tested properly, possible side effects, religious reasons, or that they had contracted COVID already and now have antibodies. Then you also have the people who are just antivaxxers and avoid all vaccines anyway.

Then we had some who were initially hesitant, but came around to accepting the vaccine due to: seeing peers or people in authority take it, a desire to protect their loved ones, and to just follow mandates.

We also see on the right side in the chart from Pew that blacks lagged behind other races when it came to receiving vaccinations, but soon caught up.

Vulnerability

- Pre-existing vulnerabilities are well-known inside and outside the black community-
 - Medical, economic



Source: Pew, June 2020

Vulnerability Notes

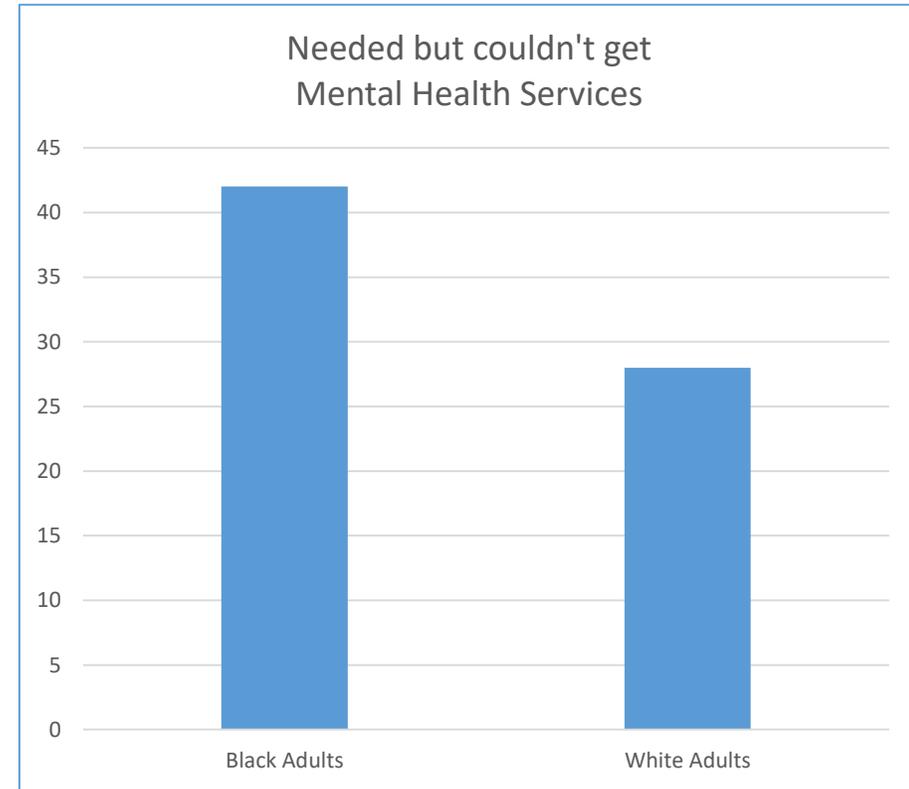
The COVID-19 pandemic brought to light the pre-existing vulnerabilities within the black community. For example, on the medical side, respondents would speak on how black and brown people have been disproportionately affected by the virus due to having more underlying health issues/comorbidities.

On the economic side, you have respondents stating that members of the black community cannot easily follow COVID safety measures due to living with more people in smaller homes. Respondents also bemoaned the loss of jobs in the hospitality industry, especially in Southern Louisiana, which is a tourist-haven that, understandably, would need to have a plethora of jobs in hospitality. Specifically, a 37 y/o black female from BR states that those jobs, the one in the restaurants, hotels are “our jobs”, and since many of them are gone or on hold or what have you, the Black community has suffered economically as a result.

The chart in the slide taken from PEW shows these vulnerabilities as well.

Psychological Distress

- Sources of distress-
 - Impact of disconnection and isolation



Source: KFF, March 2021

Psychological Distress Notes

Our respondents shared how remaining separated from others at the beginning of the pandemic negatively impacted their mental health. Common sentiments include feeling lonely or cut off in the first few months, which resulted in the development of anxiety and depression. A 61 y/o Black female from BR lamented over how even though she could talk to people over the phone, no one could come visit her at her house, and the only people that would come would be food deliverers who dropped off food at your door “like you’re a cat.” Some even believed that the physical impacts of contracting COVID was small compared to the overwhelming and devastating loneliness that one felt as they stayed separated from loved ones.

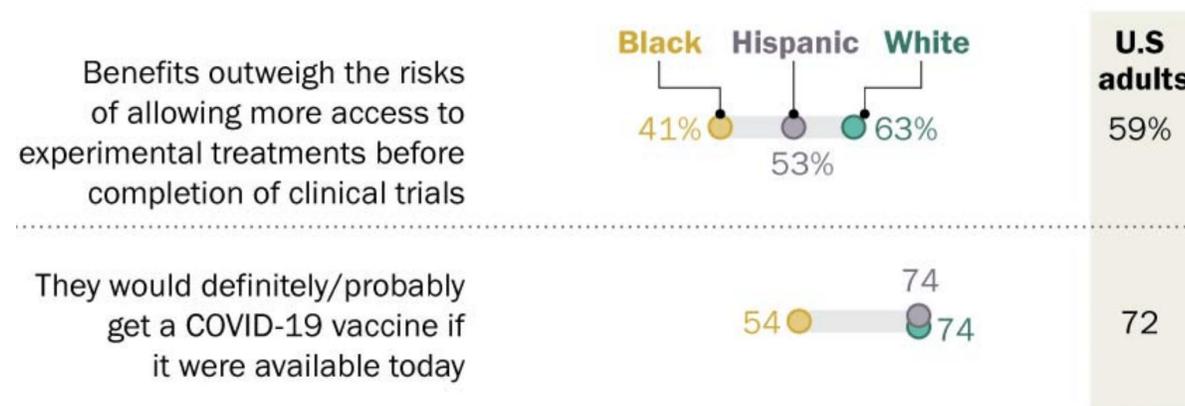
The chart on the side shows how a higher percentage of blacks, as opposed to whites were unable to find mental health services.

Trust and Doubt

- Differing levels of trust towards-
 - Medicine and healthcare
 - News sources
 - Government
 - Politicization

Black Americans are more skeptical of experimental treatments, potential COVID-19 vaccine than Hispanic and white adults

% of U.S. adults who say ...



Note: Whites and blacks include those who report being only one race and are non-Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Survey conducted April 29-May 5, 2020.

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Trust and Doubt Notes

Respondents expressed varying levels of trust towards specific topics, which include medicine and healthcare, news sources, the government, and politicization of the pandemic.

We have already touched upon distrust regarding the vaccine at the beginning of the presentation, so I'll go into a little more detail.

Of course, we had people cite the history of medical abuse of the black community, having cited Tuskegee by name. Some also said that racism in the medical field continues to this day and that it's not just an issue that occurred in the past, which for them is a valid reason for not getting vaccinated. On the other hand, we have some that said, yes, we know these things happened in the past, but times are different now. We've come a long way. So once again, differing opinions popped up in the interviews.

We see instances of this distrust in the chart on the right.

A Story...

- ...of two middle-aged black women that vividly illustrates the black community's ability to overcome adversity :
 - Both had COVID-19 and felt close to death
 - Both lost husbands to COVID, one lost a cousin, sister, and best friend
 - But they remained resilient. How did they do it?

A Story... Notes

Another story, a bit more personal, that illustrates the black community's ability to overcome adversity.

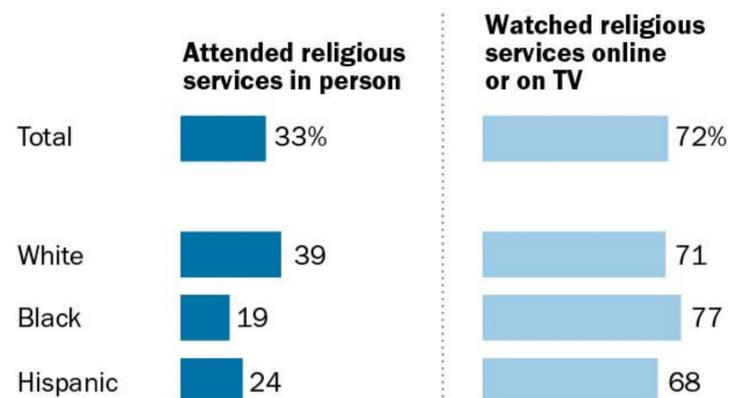
We had two middle-aged black women in our pool of respondents. Both were supervisors in the field of social services. Both had contracted COVID and felt close to death at the peak of their illness. Both lost their husbands, with one also losing a sister, cousin, and best friend. However, both of these women maintained a striking level of resilience in the midst of these tragic times. We will now look into how they, and our other respondents, developed such resiliency.

Development of Resilience

- Social support-
 - Religion
 - Community
 - Family
- Personal growth

Black, Hispanic worshippers less likely than their white counterparts to attend in-person services during pandemic

Among U.S. adults who typically attend religious services at least monthly, % who say that in the last month they have ...



Note: White and Black adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Source: Survey conducted July 13-19, 2020, among U.S. adults.

“Americans Oppose Religious Exemptions From Coronavirus-Related Restrictions”

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Development of Resilience Notes 1

These women both adhered to a specific form of religious faith. One woman felt she was designated by God to carry on and help those in need. The other woman said, regarding the experience, that “it’s made me grow spiritually, for sure.”

They both also had a commitment to their ethnic community since they provided social services. Also, they’re both social people so they relied on their family and social circle for extra support. This allowed them to overcome their crippling sense of loneliness from the isolation.

Of course, all this information does not just apply to these two! People started prayer journals, attended bible studies—people felt that God was on their side, that if they would only place their trust in him, He would protect them through it all.

People also aligned with their community to give back to those who lost so much during the pandemic, opting to participate in organizations specializing in, for example, blood drives, mental health, or domestic abuse. Some also referenced past disasters (Hurricane Katrina being an example) when explaining their reasonings for participating in these organizations, saying we know what it’s like, so we’re gonna go out there and help others).

Development of Resilience Notes 2

Also, there was a reliance on family members. For many, family is often the front line of solidarity. Some stay home with family to help care for them, or younger people receive help from their family. Many young people take special care not to become infected & bring it into the household, where some family members might be especially vulnerable.

With these pillar of support, members of the black community could then turn inward and reflect on what is truly important in their lives. Some respondents stated that they had already begun their journey of personal growth before the pandemic, and that this time finally gave them the chance to change for the better.

We see this reliance on religious support, as well as desire to follow pandemic safety protocols, for blacks in the right-side chart from PEW.

Social Justice

- Views on-
 - Inequality
 - Black Lives Matter movement and demonstrations



Source: Pew, June 2020

Social Justice Notes 1

Even though our findings show that members of the black community can remain resilient in the face of hardship, the story does not end here. In fact, it continues to this very hour, as the black community struggles to remain resilient in the face of present-day inequality.

To quote a 29 y/o black female from Michigan:

“But, also it can be very draining on an energy level, on an emotional level, even on a spiritual level to deal with what we're dealing with in society, all while through a pandemic. I saw something somebody posted somewhere that black people are going through two pandemics, COVID-19 and racism. And I saw another post that said black women are going through three pandemics.”

To give an example of such racism, some respondents expressed concern at the idea of wearing a face covering in public due to fears of looking like a criminal, as shown in the chart on the right side.

Let's talk about some respondent opinions on the BLM protest. The interviewees agreed that the demonstrations were an immediate response to the threat of police violence against the black community. Also, most agreed that these demonstrations were necessary despite fear of infection/violence.

Social Justice Notes 2

Actually, most of our black interviewees had noted that the demonstrations did not cause a spike in infections, which directly goes against the claims made by whites that the demonstrations would spread infection.

An interesting note is that our interviewees did not agree on whether these protests were a by-product of boredom from being the house for the past few months, or a genuine desire to seek change in society. Despite this, there was wide-spread agreement that the demonstrations were necessary in order to show people, especially white people, that what is happening in our country is real. It's not just a video you see on social media, or some passing story someone covers on the news. This is happening, and it needs to be shown so people truly understand what's going on.

In closing,

The Black Lives Matter protests were not the first iteration of civil rights movements, and it certainly will not be the last. As such, the story is far from over. We will have to remain resilient as we wait for what the future holds.

Thank you!

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