ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	FROM BLACK LIVES MATTER TO WE DON'T EVEN MATTER: THE INVISIBLE HAND OF POWER ON SOCIAL MOVEMENT PARTICIPATION AND ACTIVISM IN URBAN AND RURAL SPACES
	Danielle Melvin Koonce, Doctor of Philosophy, 2024
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The field of social movement research is vast and evolving as technological advances continue to expand the field of movement space to include virtual worlds and digital platforms, ensuring new research endeavors. However, as movement spaces expand, one constant is the pursuit and exchange of power between competing groups and within groups with similar collective identities. My research focuses on identifying and tracing some of the diverse paths within social movement spaces that power dynamics manifest. Specifically, I ask the following three questions. What do participants in Black Lives Matter reveal about the movement and internal power dynamics? How does power manifest itself in public hearing spaces? How do Black people living in the rural South engage in the Environmental Justice Movement?

I explore power within groups such as Black Lives Matter participants in local chapters, participants in state-regulated public hearings, and development of a local movement center within rural, eastern North Carolina through engagement with the Environmental Justice Movement. Through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and discourse analysis, I investigate, analyze, and interrogate the various pathways of power within movement spaces. I find that participants in local Black Lives Matter chapters negotiate power through their activist identity. Also, residents can be rendered illegitimate because they do not speak the language of those in power even though they have the power to participate in public hearing spaces. Finally, there is a shift from indigenous funding sources within rural, Black communities which potentially disempowers those communities from advocacy and engagement.

FROM BLACK LIVES MATTER TO WE DON'T EVEN MATTER: THE INVISIBLE HAND OF POWER ON SOCIAL MOVEMENT PARTICIPATION AND ACTIVISM IN URBAN AND RURAL SPACES

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the women who paved the way for me and the women I am paving the way for. My maternal grandmother, Geneva Estelle Lamb Ellis was never far from pen and paper, always writing and taking notes in her spiral notebooks. My paternal grandmother, Dixie Dee Williams Melvin, was headed to Shaw University in the 1940's when her father asked her to return home to help take care of her younger siblings. My mother, Janet Denise Ellis Melvin, who graduated at the top of her high school class, wanted to go to college so badly. She took that passion and instilled a love for education in all five of her children. She, along with my father, Jimmy Melvin, supported all of us through college, several master's degrees, and finally a PhD. Thank you, Mama.

To Jasiah, Lexie, and Bella, my beautiful, intelligent nieces, please know that I've got you. If you choose this path, it will be so much easier, and I will be there every step of the way. Finally, to Sarah, my daughter and future, I dedicate this dissertation to you as proof that you can do hard things, new things, and scary things. You will never do them alone. Great women throughout your ancestry have sacrificed so you could take full advantage of every opportunity that comes your way. Whether you ever read a word of this dissertation, the proof that it exists will be evidence that whatever you put your heart to do, you can do it.

Acknowledgements

As a descendant of enslaved African people, I want to first acknowledge their role in farming, paving, maintaining and developing the land that is the University of Maryland today.[1] As a descendant of Native Americans, I also acknowledge that the land that enslaved people of African descent were forced to labor upon is also the Ancestral Lands of the Piscataway People, the traditional stewards of the land.[2]

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[1] https://diversity.umd.edu/resources/enslavement-acknowledgement
[2] https://diversity.umd.edu/resources/land-acknowledgement

To every elementary, middle school and high school teacher and coach that poured into me, encouraged me, and pushed me, thank you. To my professors at East Carolina University, the English and Sociology departments, thank you for demonstrating new possibilities and the pathways to get there. To my former coaches at East Carolina University, those alive and those who have passed on, thank you for the invaluable life lessons that basketball teaches. You equipped me to win in the ultimate game, life.

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changes-thank you. We've established we can do hard things. Now let's go do great things.

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Chapter 1: Movements, Activism, Space and Power

"My intuitive idea of power, then, is something like this: *A* has power over *B* to the extent that he can get *B* to do something that *B* would not otherwise do."

Robert Dahl[3]

"The plantation and the ghetto were created by those who had power, both to confine those who had no power and to perpetuate their powerlessness. Now the problem of transforming the ghetto, therefore, is a problem of power, a confrontation between the forces of power demanding change and the forces of power dedicated to the preserving of the status quo."

Dr. Martin Luther King[4]

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

My journey into social movement research began with the onset of North Carolina's Moral Mondays movement in 2013 when I witnessed thousands gathering in peaceful protest to publicly denounce the slew of legislation that ensued from the state's governing body. Moral Mondays began as weekly, non-violent protests decrying discriminatory laws and practices and presently, the movement continues to frequently rally against discrimination in various states.[5] At the time, North Carolina

[3] Dahl, R. 1957. "The Concept of Power." *Behavioral Science*, 2, 201-215.

[4] King, ML. 1967, August 16. *Where Do We Go From Here?* [transcript] Retrieved from https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/where-do-we-go-here

[5] https://abc11.com/moral-monday-movement-rev-william-barber-protests/13171984/

had a conservative majority in both the House and Senate as well as a Republican governor, Pat McCrory, elected in 2012. Republican control of the executive and legislative branch of government had not happened in North Carolina since 1870. Moral Mondays protests led in part by Reverend (Rev) Dr. William J. Barber II, president of the North Carolina chapter of The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) erupted around the state. The similarities to the Civil Rights Movement were hard to ignore as I worked through my Master's in Sociology at East Carolina University. Rev. William Barber, in my opinion, was utilizing the same tactics (peaceful marches, and non-violent sit-ins) made popular by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other clergy leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Thousands of individuals from all ethnic, racial and gender backgrounds were gathering in urban cities throughout the state to protest immigration rights, worker's rights, criminal justice, and environmental issues.

As a budding scholar in Sociology, I had a front row seat in watching the Moral Mondays take off as news media inundated our viewing screens with pictures of Rev. William Barber in handcuffs being led away from the state legislative building. Something was happening socially and politically in North Carolina, and I wanted to study as much of it as I could in real-time. I wanted to focus on the impact and participation of Black-led churches and Black ministerial leadership in Moral Mondays. However, pursuing my PhD at the University of Maryland offered a change of scenery. Rather than continuing to focus on Moral Mondays in North Carolina, I focused on Washington D.C. and the surrounding areas.

After settling into the University of Maryland, I continued my social movement research by focusing on a local chapter of Black Lives Matter that had developed and was organizing throughout Washington, D.C. and surrounding areas. Although my landscape had changed geographically, my line of social movement investigation was the same. I wanted to understand and investigate current social movements that seemed to either be potential extensions or departures of the modern Civil Rights Movement. From 2016 until 2020, through participant observation, interviews, and content analysis, I studied Black Lives Matter DC, a local chapter of the broader Black Lives Matter Movement to learn about movement participation, similarities and departures to the Civil Rights Movement, and to understand the internal voice of the movement as opposed to relying on media sound bites and social media. Determining components of the internal movement provided me with research strategy for investigating developing, contemporary movements.

By 2020, COVID-19 and the subsequent shut-down of most public spaces caused another move for my family and we returned to North Carolina to adapt to the new reality of virtual school, work, and the pandemic. Upon returning to North Carolina, I became engaged with the Environmental Justice Movement in my rural hometown as a novice volunteer organizer. The role happened by chance as I sat in on a virtual community meeting at my mother's suggestion. During the virtual meeting, I learned about several environmental challenges such as a local, toxic landfill and agricultural industrial waste pollution. Recognizing that organizing was developing in real time, I decided to focus my research endeavors on this development in rural, Black communities. For the past four years, I have continued to investigate current

social movement activity in much the same light as I did in 2013, but now through a more refined research lens.

Investigating Power

Looking back over the last 10 years of research material, memos, meetings, media analysis, and interviews, my research focuses on different movement spaces and agendas, but the same central challenge: the pursuit of and resistance to power. Moral Monday activists felt disempowered by state legislation. Black Lives Matter activists felt disempowered by the criminal justice complex from policing to excessive bail, and the overall disparities in who was being criminalized. Environmental Justice Movement activists and advocates felt disempowered by agricultural and corporate operations that profited from their communities and left behind environmental burdens. Beyond the obvious resistance to power that the different movement spaces reflect, there are also power dynamics and negotiations happening within movement spaces. These are the pathways of power that I investigate: the internal and often invisible pathways that power manifests within.

One may argue that the idea that power existing is a moot point in Sociology. For example, Russell (1938) said, "the fundamental concept in social science is Power, in the same sense in which Energy is the fundamental concept of physics" (p. 4). I argue, however, that the work of Sociology and more narrowly social movement scholarship is to explore not that power exists, but how power explicitly manifests and how it is diffused within groups. By doing so, we position ourselves to fully identify how power is transferred, modified, and controlled in the social world. My research focuses on groups representing marginalized communities that are

simultaneously resisting external power structures while navigating internal power structures. Determining how marginalized groups within movement space navigate internal power structures and dynamics leads to my guiding research question: How are power dynamics revealed in and throughout social movement spaces and movement activity?

To determine internal and external power dynamics within movement spaces, I investigate the Black Lives Matter Movement, and the Environmental Justice Movement via interviews, participation observation, and discourse analysis. I specifically analyzed how Black activists residing in both urban and rural settings make decisions to participate in protest activity, join movement organizations, and leverage and utilize their agency to negotiate power within movement spaces. My three-paper dissertation explores power through various research questions that I describe in more detail below.

Research Questions

My overarching research inquiry is how power dynamics are revealed in movement activity and movement spaces. Streaming from this broader perspective, I have three interrelated sub-questions: 1). What motivations of Black Lives Matter participants from various local chapters? 2). How does power manifest itself in public hearings through language in rural spaces? 3). How do rural Black people living engage in the Environmental Justice Movement? Each of these questions are addressed in a dissertation chapter, and I provide an overview of each.

Overview of Chapters

Guided by the attempt to uncover how power dynamics are revealed in and throughout social movement spaces and movement activity, I approach my investigation in three distinct ways. In Chapter 2, "Determining Agendas. Describing Motives. Dissecting Leadership: Exploring Local Chapters of Black Lives Matter," I investigate the motivations of Black Lives Matter participants from various local chapters throughout the eastern part of the United States, ranging from New York to Tennessee to participate in local movement chapters. Having thoroughly engaged with the scholarship on Black Lives Matter, I find that articles and books devoted to uncovering the interior of the movement are sparse. Research on the digital hashtag, #blacklivesmatter makes up the majority of literature. Relying on a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020) and utilizing semi-structured interviews from participants who spent time in the physical Black Lives Matter movement spaces, I ask what do participants' experiences with and attitudes about Black Lives Matter reveal about the movement and internal power dynamics within the movement? Through analysis of interviews, I trace movement participant's individual negotiations of power through merging their individual activist identity with the collective identity of Black Lives Matter.

Chapter 3, "Public Hearings and Environmental Justice: How Language Is Utilized as a Tool of Power," investigates the ways in which residents in rural communities and stakeholders utilize language in public hearings about biogas development to wield power in supposedly democratically neutral public spaces. Through my discourse analysis investigation, I seek to understand how power manifests itself in public hearings. Centering public hearings as a space for resistance

through language, I explore the power embedded in word choices and rhetorical posturing. By rhetorical posturing, I mean the ways in which speakers position themselves through their language to reflect the dominant language structure. Through discourse analysis and coding of three publicly accessible public hearings hosted by the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, I highlight the intersectional connection of asserting power through linguistic choices and rural vernacular.

In Chapter 4, "Rural Resistance and Environmental Racism: Understanding How Rural Black Communities in Eastern North Carolina Engage in Environmental Justice," I utilize a comparative analysis technique to understand how Morris' (1984) conceptual framework of "local movement centers," work within present-day rural Black communities. Through this framework, I ask the question, how do Black people living in the rural South engage in the Environmental Justice Movement? By engage, I mean advocate, organize, and disseminate information to challenge environmental harms to their community. By learning more about individual and communal experiences regarding agency and advocacy efforts, I identify areas power manifested through community networks. Through my fieldwork, I develop the term, indigenous social power; the organic community network, which channels the community's collective agency, thereby empowering the community to create change.

Defining Power

One reason for the lack of "power" scholarship in social movements is the fact that power is either too diffuse, difficult to define, or conceptualized in multiple ways

(Russell, 1938; Dahl, 1968; Wrong, 1979). By no means do I plan to narrow the definitions and explanations of power. Rather, I engage with social scientists that inform my understanding of power to allow me to define power in a way that aptly describes the internal dynamics I investigate in movement spaces. From these diverse scholars and their philosophies on power, I build my investigation of power foundationally and more definitively.

Foundationally for my investigations of power, Weber's classical conceptualization of power provides the starting point. According to Weber, power is the ability to exercise one's will over another even when others resist (1922). This ability to exercise power or dominate as Weber asserts, can manifest through various forms of authority: traditional, charismatic, and rational. Irrespective of the form of authority, it is the followers who legitimize this authority through their adherence and acceptance. This cycle of power through domination, authority, and followers is at the crux of why activism occurs. Followers no longer feel convinced that those in positions of authority have their best interest at heart or they have long recognized that those in positions of authority were inadequate to represent them and now have an opportunity to challenge that authority (McAdam, 1982). However, the pursuit or rejection of power is not a linear process and within movements it is better to describe power dynamics as an origami. I argue there are power contentions internally as well as externally, and they fold upon each other to build the movement. Weber's assertions of exercising one's will over another does not just manifest with one individual or group dominating another individual or group, but there are also within-group power contentions for dominance, psychologically, emotionally, and spatially.

In this dissertation, I engage in the discussion of power in three distinct ways. I focus on *within-group dynamics*. Likewise, I pay attention to power dynamics *within public hearings* and various layers of power that residents assume *within their rural communities*.

The internal power mechanisms at work within movement space is what I believe Du Bois refers to as social power. In an article entitled "The Training of Negroes[6] for Social Power," written in 1903 for the magazine, *The Outlook*, Du Bois focuses primarily on regaining power for Black Americans. A prolific writer, scholar, sociologist, and activist, Du Bois is no stranger to confronting power dynamics. It could be argued that the central thesis of his combined 60-year writing career could be demonstrating the ways in which Black Americans post-slavery had been stripped of power and how they could potentially regain power. In his article, Du Bois writes: "The responsibility for their own social regeneration ought to be placed largely upon the shoulders of the Negro people. But such responsibility must carry with it a grant of power; responsibility without power is a mockery and a farce" (p. 410). He continues the paragraph and references the word, 'power,' three more times culminating his assertions that Black people must have power, but not just any power. Du Bois (1903) specifically asserts that Black people need "social power."

Unlike Weber, Du Bois alludes to power from the social dimension and urges readers to understand the necessity of coupling Black America's need for self-responsibility with social power. This early conceptualization of power is separate

[6] I am utilizing the original title and usage of the word, 'negro' to preserve authenticity of the speaker. Discussions are ongoing regarding how the term should be utilized in academic writing

from Weber's theoretical underpinnings on power because Du Bois focuses on a group of people who have largely been deprived of power within American society and deprived of serious study within American scholarship. Thus, I argue that Du Bois is introducing a definitive way of thinking about power within marginalized communities. It is not just overriding another person's will despite resistance. It is as Du Bois (1903) explains, "...the growth of initiative among Negroes…the spread of independent thought…and the expanding consciousness of manhood…" (p. 410). Initiative, independent thought, and consciousness are the buzzwords for Duboisian social power and later in the article, Du Bois continues to expand on the dimensions of social power. Social power is "knowledge of the forces of civilization that make for survival, ability to organize and guide those forces, and realization of the true meaning of those broader ideals of human betterment…" (Du Bois, 1903, p. 413). Moreover, the best way to acquire social power, according to Du Bois (1903), is through higher education.

Du Bois' treatise on developing Black Americans through attainment of social power is an early attempt to not only define an aspect of power but to also quantify it so readers can understand what the finished product would look like for those who had assumed power. From this vantage point, Du Bois' idea of social power is psychological, having to do with becoming fully aware and conscious. It is more of an internal singular domination of oneself. In this view, social power could be perceived as an individual's agency to achieve their maximum capabilities. As it relates to internal movement groups, I envision Du Bois' definition of social power as an opportunity to consider the various decision making that happens within

movement group spaces that allows participants to fully exist within the movement. My research on the Environmental Justice movement in rural, eastern, North Carolina allows me to understand social power in contemporary development of a movement organization. By focusing on the agency of Black residents in rural, eastern, North Carolina, I interrogate Du Bois' notions of social power in rural space.

I also see Du Bois' social power being a pre-derivative of Morris and Braine's (2001) explications of "oppositional consciousness." Morris and Braine define oppositional consciousness as the mental preparation of a subordinate group to effectively challenge the power of the dominant group. Du Bois' ruminations on social power are not to challenge the power of the dominant group, however. It is more so to challenge the dormant possibilities and potentials within individuals that have been marginalized and oppressed. Nonetheless, both Morris and Braine and Du Bois suggest that preparation, often psychological in nature, must take place before marginalized individuals or groups can exert their power towards group and self-improvement. Morris, Braine, and Du Bois undergird the importance of focusing on developing power indigenously. Similarly, the aim of my research is to focus on power dynamics and development within movement space as opposed to how this power is harnessed to challenge external structures and systems.

Du Bois' description of social power predates social exchange theory, a concept based on the idea that a relationship between two individuals is a relationship determined by what each actor exchanges in the form of value, such as, status or rank (Homans, 1958; Blau, 1964). However, Du Bois implies that social exchange of power was not possible for Black Americans post-slavery because they lacked the

ability to participate in relationships outside their own culture. Life post-slavery largely maintained the divisions that slavery had implemented (Roark, 1978). Du Bois also infers those social exchanges needed to occur within the Black community first (i.e., educated Blacks teaching and developing Black students) to fully empower Black Americans at the beginning of the 20th Century.

Homans (1958) and Blau (1964) and other social exchange theorists were insightful to conceptualize social relationships as places of behavioral or social exchange, but I argue because their focus was on small groups and individuals that already shared power, Du Bois' assertions on social power are important in understanding who gets to participate in exchanges of power. By foregrounding Du Bois' concept of social power, it is possible to envision how Black individuals in particular who have been deprived of power and excluded from political, economic, and educational processes transmit power. These transmissions of power happen internally to Black communities and Black organizations and reflect the ways marginalized groups resist and pursue power. Because social movement literature has often minimized race in the scholarship or as Oliver (2017) says, "White movements in the U.S. have often been theorized in ways that are blind to their Whiteness, while the importance of the "minority-ness" of movements peopled by minorities is often neglected," it is important to focus on minority movement space. Dubois' social power is an early rendering of this. Furthermore, Morris and Braine (2001), Bracey (2016) and Oliver (2017) extend the emphasis on centering minority voices in social movement research by centering race. I continue this work by focusing on Black

people's involvement in movement organizations and activism and how power manifests within these spaces.

From a socio-political perspective, conceptualizing power leads to understanding how systems are structured to preserve power. According to Lukes (1974), missing from the classical analyses of power has been a multidimensional view of power. Rather than consider power from the level of who gets to make decisions or the level of who gets to set the agenda, there is a third dimension of power that must be considered. Lukes asserts that there is a latent, third-stage of power, which is revealed through the groups that do not participate in the political process but are impacted through influence by the actions of those that do participate in the political process. For Lukes, it is this third-level of power in which power behaves invisibly so to speak. That is, the group influenced by those with power are not aware that they are being influenced. Du Bois's social power definitions in some ways speaks to Lukes' latent stage of power in that historically the dominant group, white America, had largely deprived Black America of power and thus invisibly influenced them to be disempowered by its own machinations. I engage in this discussion by exploring how marginalized speakers are influenced by invisible power dynamics in public hearing spaces.

Another invisible power machination is considering the ways in which power manifests in space. Delpit's (1988) contribution was exploring these power dynamics through pedagogical practices. Hearkening back to what Du Bois calls social power and what Weber would have alluded to as dominance, Delpit coins the term "culture of power" to describe the dynamics of power existing within classrooms (p. 282,

1988). Moreover, Delpit uses five distinct descriptions to categorize the various aspects of this culture of power:

> 1. Issues of power are enacted in classrooms.
>
> 2. There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a "culture of power."
>
> 3. The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power.
>
> 4. If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier.
>
> 5. Those with power are frequently least aware of— or least willing to acknowledge — its existence. Those with less power are often most aware of its existence. (p. 282, 1988)

Delpit's description of the culture of power prevalent in school classrooms provides a viable framework for understanding the spatiality of power. By spatiality I am referring to the space that power operates within, and for Delpit this space is the classroom. Delpit's conceptualization of the classroom as a space of power enables a broadening of how places that power lurks can be perceived including public hearing spaces or geographic locations. I also argue that Delpit's culture of power is an opportunity for scholars to think of power from the perspective of the marginalized as opposed to the traditional dominant-group narrative.

My dissertation centers marginalized perspectives by focusing on the spaces where power exists separately from dominant power structures. I focus on participants in local Black Lives Matter chapters and how power manifests within

their decision making processes to join the movement. I focus on public hearing spaces and how hidden power dynamics potentially obfuscate marginalized speakers' agency. I focus on a contemporary local movement center highlighting power differentials within community leadership and residents. These power dynamics intersect through gender, education, and experience, to name a few, and this work in combination creates an intersectional approach to tracing power.

Similarly, in "The Difference That Power Makes," Collins (2017) makes the claim that utilizing an intersectional framework would allow for a more "complex" analysis of power (p. 21, 2017). This intersectional framework is the basis for what Collins describes as a power analytic and which offers not only explanations of oppression but also how to resist it (Collins, 2017). Utilizing *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* as a building block for the power analytic, Collins (2000) describes the analytic as multifaceted. The power analytic reflects the shape-shifting matrix of domination, reveals the underbelly of systems of oppression, while also highlighting the necessity of understanding the collective within communities that enables political action from subordinate groups (Collins, 2000). Collins, like Du Bois and Delpit continues the tradition of reconceptualizing power from the place of the marginalized and building outward. I extend this tradition in my research investigations into the internal spaces power manifests within movements organized by Black leadership or within Black spaces. By doing so, I align with scholars who create space within the academy or marginalized perspectives that can veer from the dominant group perspectives which historically exacted and withheld power from marginalized groups.

Power in Social Movement Literature

My dissertation seeks to identify the manifestations of power within movement space. Rather than focus on the power struggle between groups, I investigate power dynamics within a movement group and resistance spaces. By doing so, I contribute to centering an understanding of power dynamics within social movement scholarship. For example, there is a rich field of research on how social movement participants build collective identity and the psychological and cultural process involved (Melluci, 1995; Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Foyminaya, 2010). As it relates to framing, Benford and Snow (2000) suggest that framing has developed into such a significant aspect of understanding social movement development alongside resource mobilization theory and political opportunity processes (p. 612). From Goffman (1974) to Snow et al (1992) and Gamson (1993) whose collective work provides foundational understandings of framing to more recent scholars such as Shemtov (2006), Hon (2016), and Walker and Stepick (2020) who reconsider and test foundational social movement framing themes, the scholarship is burgeoning. I argue that underneath each aforementioned scholar's contribution from collective identity to framing-internal power negotiations between movement actors are taking place. Although this may be implied through the scholarship, I argue it is rarely explicitly stated. Rather the emphasis is on cultural and psychological processes. My goal is to explicitly investigate and articulate the power negotiations within movement and activist spaces.

There are exceptions such as Fligstein (2001) and his conceptualization of social skills-the ways "actors have to motivate others to cooperate" (p. 105). Fligstein

directly addresses how organizational actors utilize and reproduce their power through their social skills:

The reproduction of the power of groups is not always certain. There are always challengers to any given group's social power. Moreover, the basis of a group's power, its claim over resources and rules, can be undermined by periodic social crises. These crises can have their origin from outside the field or within the field. As these crises intensify, the role of skilled social actors in the reproduction of a given set of social power increases. (p. 123)

Moreover, Fligstein explicitly inserts power and the potential transfer of power amongst actors. My research is an opportunity to explicitly articulate and conceptualize the role that power plays within movement spaces internally to ultimately understand how many foundational concepts of social movement studies are underpinned by these very dynamics.

Han et al. (2021) is a recent example of power-focused social movement research. Han and colleagues explore how leaders of movement organizations negotiate power and people power, their constituent base, when their power is threatened. How they negotiate the power within their constituent base is their prism to organize (2021). Although my research investigates power within this constituent base as opposed to the leadership level, Han et al., (2021) reflect an attempt to investigate power dynamics internal to the movement.

Power Defined

As a guiding definition for my research, I interpret power as: the unspoken and invisible force that prevails and provokes individuals and groups to employ their

agency to obtain or share dominance within marginalized spaces. I intentionally focus on spaces as opposed to activities or organizations because I want to emphasize that resistance and activism manifests where activists are. A school bus was a mode of transportation until Rosa Parks decided to resist giving up her seat and moving to the back of the bus, shifting the school bus to a space where resistance takes place. By centering space as opposed to organizations or groups, I broaden the opportunities to investigate power. Therefore, participants transitioning from local Black Lives Matter chapters to new movement spaces in primarily Washington, D. C., virtual web and in-person public hearing spaces, as well as rural, southern geographical spaces become evidence that power like movements are fluid and dynamic.

Methods

A Grounded Theory Approach

I go into specific details regarding methods and analysis within each subsequent chapter, I do want to provide an overview of the theoretical methodological approach that best fits my research endeavors, grounded theory. Grounded theory is defined by Creswell (2009) as; "a qualitative strategy in which the researcher derives a general abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of the participants of the study" (p. 229). Charmaz and Thornberg (2020) conclude that "the defining purpose of this method is to construct a theory that offers an abstract understanding of one or more core concerns in the studied world" (p. 305). Thinking about power dynamics and how they manifest requires a research strategy that is both iterative and centers participants' views over

any preconceived ideas that I bring into the research field (Charmaz 2015). From a grounded theory approach, I employ participant observation, interviews and discourse analysis and use this inductive data to study power.

Through interviewing activist participants, investigating external power structures and dynamics in language through discourse analysis, and observing organizing activities in eastern, rural, North Carolina, I employ these methods to study power. What follows are three empirical papers that capture power dynamics at play at various levels of activism. The culminating chapter revisits the notions of power in various movement spaces and spaces of activism and discusses the potential implications of my research and future work.

Positionality Statement

I understand the research process and the pursuit of knowledge as a guided practice to understand an ever-changing world. The research process is guided by our methodological training, and it is a practice because there is no perfect method in understanding human processes. I have elected to study power dynamics in predominantly Black urban and rural movement spaces to understand how activists and participants negotiate, develop, and resist power. I believe studying power dynamics as a social movement scholar provides me with a broad foundational framework to investigate a variety of themes within literature.

I also recognize that positionality statements can function as extensions of coloniality, creating invisible power channels in knowledge production where whiteness is centered and women of color are marginalized (Gani and Khan, 2024). In the spirit of self-reflexivity, I acknowledge my viewpoint as an educated Black

woman, raised in the rural South who has always been intrigued by social justice in the Black community. I mainly align with the ideals and missions of both Black Lives Matter and the Environmental Justice movements, and I have observed and interacted with these movements, advocated for social justice, and I am intrigued by the ways power manifests in these spaces. I acknowledge that my positionality influenced this project to some extent and my experiences as a graduate student living in the DC area as well as my lived experiences in the rural South created organic connections to participants that I interviewed and interacted with.

Although my race and gender created organic connections, my training as a sociologist enabled me to center the voices, views, and experiences of the participants. My research reflects the conglomeration of the voices of Black men and women in urban and rural spaces fighting for change within their communities. It is these voices and views I both reveal, protect and honor throughout my dissertation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored why I am researching often unnoticed movement and activist spaces where power manifests and how power manifests. I situated my own definition of power and made connections within the ongoing scholarly conversation on power drawing from Weber, Du Bois, and Collins to name a few. I also provided an explanation of why grounded theory was the best approach for my research and introduced each qualitative method I utilized. What follows are three empirical papers that capture power dynamics in play at various sites of activism. The culminating chapter revisits the notions of power in various movement spaces and

spaces of activism and discusses the potential implications of my research as well as implications for future work.

Chapter 2: Determining Agendas. Describing Motives. Dissecting Leadership: Empowerment through Local Chapters of Black Lives Matter

Introduction and Background

To identify how power manifests in movement spaces, Black Lives Matter presented itself as a viable option given my proximity to one of its local chapters in Washington, D.C. Also, my previous experiences observing and participating in events that the Black Lives Matter local chapter hosted had already revealed to me the external power derivatives opposing the movement. Through media depictions, participation in local events, following the digital presence via social media and email listservs, I had a clear understanding of the aims of the movement and the specific target of oppression that Black Lives Matter positioned itself to resist-namely state-sanctioned violence carried out by police primarily within Black communities.

What I was much less clear about was how Black Lives Matter operated internally and how power could be manifesting internally. Thus, my research endeavor was to learn about the interior of Black Lives Matter as a developing social movement relying on a grounded theory approach in order to be as open as possible to what my research would reveal. My research investigates the voice of those within the organization.. The voice of six participants affiliated with local chapters of the Black Lives Matter Movement from 2016 to 2019. Through semi-structured interviews with participants and members of the Black Lives Matter local chapters, I aim to allow their narratives to reveal how these individuals developed into

participating Black Lives Matter activists. Following an overview of Black Lives Matter, a review of the literature and methodological explanation, I utilize the narratives of members of local Black Lives Matter chapters to illustrate my findings. Through the narrative responses of how Black Lives Matter participants became involved in the movement and embraced the mission of Black Lives Matter, I examined how activists were empowered and negotiated power internally through local chapter participation. When I use power here, I am explicitly referring to the unspoken and invisible force that prevails and provokes individuals and groups to employ their agency to obtain or share dominance within marginalized spaces.

Overview of the Black Lives Matter Movement

The Black Lives Matter Movement began chronologically when three Black women, Alicia Garcia, Ayo (formerly known as Opal) Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors, in 2013 resisted artistically and collectively the acquittal of George Zimmerman from all charges in the death of 17-year-old, Trayvon Martin. Their artistic and collective resistance manifested through the development of a "movement building project" called #BlackLivesMatter (Herstory). Through their hashtag moniker, #blacklivesmatter, social media awareness and activity grew to viral proportions, generating both digital activism and simultaneously laying the groundwork for a national movement complete with local chapters, membership, and executive leadership. Spanning the past 10 years since the conception of Black Lives Matter, celebrities, corporations, entertainers, professional athletes, and politicians have taken up the cause and increased the movement's platform which invariably increased funding, brand recognition, and participation in the movement. For example, two

professional basketball sports teams, the NBA and WNBA, had Black Lives Matter displayed prominently during televised games either on the court or as lettering on players' jerseys and shirts during the 2020 season. Corporations such as Ben and Jerry's released statements affirming that Black lives matter and urged individuals to dismantle white supremacy (benjerry.com).

Despite the mass appeal of Black Lives Matter in the current economic and social atmosphere, there is still a marked difference in recognizing the prominent hashtag, #BlackLivesMatter, and understanding the movement organization, Black Lives Matter. As discussed in the following literature review, much of the published research on Black Lives Matter relies heavily on the digital presence of the hashtag movement or historical and theoretical comparative assertions and assumptions regarding Black Lives Matter. However, when you consider the internal workings, attitudes, and behaviors of participants on the ground affiliated with Black Lives Matter, research is insufficient. Given the short-life span of the movement, the tumultuous shifts in leadership, along with the internal and external organizational challenges such as the withdrawing of multiple local chapters from Black Lives Matter[7] and litigation with its financial manager and foundational partner, Tides (Daniels, 2024), being able to ascertain an insider's perspective becomes critical.

Because Black Lives Matter is a global movement that has undergone several organizational structural shifts while also existing as an umbrella organization with many separate local chapter-organizations, movement activity and membership is and can be disparate, homogenous, and incohesive all at the same time. For example, one

[7] https://www.blmchapterstatement.com/

of the local Black Lives Matter chapters that I studied, includes the following asterisk in the footer of its emails: “BLMDC is NOT part of the national BLM organization.” By the end of 2020, multiple local chapters of Black Lives Matter chose to separate itself from the Black Lives Matter Global Network.[8] I begin with this background knowledge recognizing that when I conducted interviews in 2019 and initiated my background research beginning in 2016, there have been organizational shifts that my research may not mirror or reflect. Although my focus on participants from several local chapters may not directly represent the national and global organizational shifts, it can potentially reveal internal attitudes and internal collectivity that is vital for organic, social movement development (Melucci, 1989; Morris & Braine, 2001). Following a review of the literature and culminating with a broad review of activist identity, I will describe my methods, data analysis, and explore the impact of activist identity as an empowering agent for Black Lives Matter.

Research Question

My overarching research question is what do participants in Black Lives Matter reveal about the movement and internal power dynamics? Rather than thinking about how participants resist external power structures, I want to focus on the ways in which power manifests internally between movement participants within movement space. To determine internal power dynamics, I rely on semi-structured interviews via my interview protocol (See Appendix C) and cover questions ranging

8 https://www.blmchapterstatement.com/?link_id=8&can_id=0b369ebe26fb562da0480a5a55995a95&source=email-2nd-secure-dc-vote-today-take-action-by-2pm&email_referrer=email_2231464&email_subject=today-is-the-final-vote-on-secure-dc-crime-bill-take-action-now

from entry point into joining or affiliating with Black Lives Matter to connecting with the mission statement of Black Lives Matter.

Literature Review

Because Black Lives Matter itself is a relatively nascent movement, the scholarship on the movement is also emerging in an extremely multidisciplinary fashion, ranging from ethnic studies (Esposito & Romano, 2016), politics (Hooker, 2016), communications and media (Harlow & Benbrook, 2019), and social work (McKoy, 2020). I loosely categorized the scholarship on Black Lives Matter into four areas: 1) Social Media Activism and Black Lives Matter, 2) Black Lives Matter from a Comparative Historical Perspective, 3) Theorizing Black Lives Matter, and 4) Black Lives Matter Participation. I emphasize the word, "loosely" because these categories are fluid and expanding as more scholarship is published yearly on Black Lives Matter. Following the review of literature on Black Lives Matter, I provide an overview of the literature on activist identity.

Social Media Activism and Black Lives Matter

Black Lives Matter began as a digital hashtag on Facebook (Tometi, Garza & Cullors, 2016) and it is not surprising that initial research on Black Lives Matter also focuses on the hashtag and digital activism that ensued from the usage of the hashtag. Ray et al. (2017) analyzed 31.65 million tweets and identified that the hashtag Black Lives Matter digital activism and counter activism grew parallel to the Black Lives Matter Movement activity on the ground. Cox (2017), also focused on the social media presence of Black Lives Matter by interviewing college millennials and asking

them about what they know of Black Lives Matter and how they view Black Lives Matter. When most of the students responded that they understood Black Lives Matter based on their social media interactions with the hashtag, #Black Lives Matter, Cox suggests that scholars must begin to access social media as an informational source.

Byrd and colleagues (2017) also believe social media analysis is important to understanding the movement and those that the movement impacts, suggesting that by analyzing social media data, Black lives can be understood more deeply. Hashtag activism is also a way to understand allyship according to Clark (2019). By analyzing the narratives of 14 white-identified social media users of the hashtag Black Lives Matter, Clark found that they were intentionally using their platforms to lift the voices of the marginalized (Clark, 2019). Ince and colleagues (2017), deduced another perspective from their analyses of social media hashtag activism of Black Lives Matter. They believe that social media analyses of digital activism is an opportunity to understand how a movement is framed for a broader audience similar to the way other media outlets have framed movements in the past. Van Haperen and colleagues (2016), echo these sentiments. The hashtag activism of the phrase "Black Lives Matter" is revealing multiple layers of digital activism from celebrity impact (Duvall & Heckemeyer, 2018, Harlow & Benbrook, 2019), to innovative techniques (Carney, 2016; Ince, Rojas, & Davis, 2017; Nummi, Jennings, & Feagin, 2019). I argue the impact of Black Lives Matter in digital activism should not be taken for granted and the binary existence of Black Lives Matter as a digital hashtag and physical

organization positions it to continue to unveil innovative ideas and frameworks for understanding social movement activity in the era of social media and beyond.

Black Lives Matter: A Comparative Historical Perspective

Comparative historical approach allowed scholars to both engage with a movement in early stages without pigeonholing the movement. An example of this comparative historical approach is Arnold (2017) in their scholarly review of the Black Lives Matter movement and its extensive impact culturally and socially. Arnold suggests Black Lives Matter is "empowering a new generation to challenge the racist practices and institutions" (p. 8, 2017). Arnold specifically connects the Black Lives Matter movement with the Black Panther party as a continuation of Black liberation movements emphasizing the "people power" of the two movements. Morris (2017) reflects on W.E.B. Du Bois' influence on contemporary movements such as Black Lives Matter by demonstrating Du Bois' influence on Dr. Martin Luther King and Du Bois' support of the youthful protest at Fisk University in the early 1920's. Morris reminds readers that Du Bois was both "scientifically and politically engaged," suggesting the two are inextricably linked (p. 12, 2017).

In a slightly different comparative frame, some scholars are connecting Black Lives Matter with previous movement eras to remind scholars of legacy ties (Taylor, 2016; Hooker, 2016). Taylor's (2016) book, From #BlackLivesMatter to Black liberation, historically situates the arrival of Black Lives Matter protests and uprisings in the broader historical Black liberation movement astutely connecting the advent of Black Lives Matter to the political, economic, and social environments created through sustained historical oppression by dominant culture. Hooker (2016)

references Ralph Ellison and Hannah Arendt's assertions on the justification behind school desegregation battles to make inferences on how certain groups are reacting to actions by Black Lives Matter protest activity in relation to the unrest in Ferguson, Missouri following the death of Michael Brown.

Chura (2019) also utilizes a comparative lens to compare Black Lives Matter to the Kent State and Jackson State shootings in May 1970. Students were killed at Kent State during an anti-war protest, and students were also killed at Jackson State during a student protest of mistreatment by white drivers through Jackson State's campus. Chura suggests that by looking back in time, the current political and cultural environment can better be understood. Lebron (2017) does similar work by demonstrating the historical connections but also demarcating the differences in the Black Lives Matter agenda and motives. Oliver (2021) in an introductory essay to a larger volume devoted to the Black Lives Matter movement, connects the budding Black Lives Matter in 2020 to previous Black liberation movements such as the Civil Rights Movement and Black Radical Congress. Moreover, historical comparative analyses of Black Lives Matter in the literature are multidisciplinary to include social work (Jones Eversley et al., 2017; McKoy, 2020) philosophy (Pierce, 2020), and public health (Nelson, 2016). Historical comparative analyses in reconnecting or disconnecting the Black Lives Matter movement to and from the larger complex of Black liberation movement creates linkages for tracing internal power dynamics within the Black liberation movement historically. How participants contend with internal power dynamics currently could mirror how participants contended with internal power dynamics in previous generations.

Theorizing Black Lives Matter

Black Lives Matter is impactful politically, culturally, and socially (Arnold, 2017; Morris, 2017). Additionally, some researchers have devoted time using Black Lives Matter as a theoretical framework or tool site of analysis to posit, reimagine, or reconsider historical, current, and future eras (Locke, 2016; Agozino, 2018; Ransby, 2018; Morris, 2023). Theorizing Black Lives Matter also provides a backdrop for critique of the movement as scholars decide the merits of Black Lives Matter as a social movement organization or model for social change (Rickford, 2016; Szetla, 2019). Alternatively, theoretical scholarship around Black Lives Matter provides a platform to test specific frameworks such as Pellow's Critical Environmental Justice (CEJ) framework (2016). The CEJ framework comprises four environmental justice areas where limitations and tensions can be explored:

> 1) questions concerning the degree to which scholars should place emphasis on one or more social categories of difference (e.g., race, class, gender, sexuality, species, etc.) versus a focus on multiple forms of inequality;
>
> 2) the extent to which scholars studying EJ issues should focus on single-scale versus multi-scalar analyses of the causes, consequences, and possible resolutions of EJ struggles;
>
> 3) the degree to which various forms of social inequality and power—including state power—are viewed as entrenched and embedded in society; and

4) the largely unexamined question of the expendability of human and non-human populations facing socioecological threats from states, industries, and other political economic forces (p. 223, 2016).

Pellow's call to examine how social inequality and state power are embedded in society is crucial for environmental justice activists championing institutional reform as the solution for environmental injustice. According to Pellow, "such an approach leaves intact the very power structures that produced environmental injustice in the first place" (p. 224, 2016).

Washington and Henfield's (2019) call for the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies to take into consideration Black Lives Matter and the legacy of anti-Black violence when training counselors to create a more ethical professional counseling framework. Moreover, theorizing allows scholars to analyze race from the framework of reactions to Black Lives Matter such as Bracey (2021) who asserts that the larger movement for Black Lives should be viewed as a Black movement against aggressive whiteness that denies Black humanity as opposed to the more traditional notion of Black movements being viewed as a striving for civil rights. Esposito and Romano (2016) explore how critics of the Black Lives Matter Movement are often resorting to what they call "benevolent racism." They view this as the act of condemning white privilege and racial inequality while simultaneously upholding systems that suppress and oppress Black communities.

Theorizing scholarship, particularly Pellow (2016) and Bracey (2021), suggest ways to interrogate power being exacted from external dominant structures. My research contributes theoretically by showing the potential ways power is exacted

within internal structures such as between participants or how participants experience movement space.

Black Lives Matter Participation and Engagement

Although literature regarding digital activism centered on the hashtag, "Black Lives Matter" has resulted in analysis of millions of social media posts, participation in Black Lives Matter, the organization, and its events is much narrower. Some research focuses on how groups identify with the movement such as Black Catholics (Winstead, 2017), Afro-Caribbeans (Crooks-Allen, 2019) and Afro-Asian (Hope, 2019). Other scholars such as Williamson and colleagues (2018), focus more on the total number of participants per protest rather than who is drawn to participate. Participation, solidarity building as well as movement cooperation have also been reflected in the literature illustrating a shift created by BLM's growth and duration over a 10-year period (Durham, 2023; Petitjean & Talpin, 2022; Morimoto, 2019). Woodly (2021), relying on interviews from Black Lives Matter organizers and activists, uses the engagement and participation in the movement to shed light on the political underpinnings of the movement as well as illustrating the role of the movement in the larger picture of American democracy. I contribute to the expansion of Black Lives Matter scholarship by utilizing participant interviews to explore how they utilize their agency to negotiate their power within the movement, which continues to shed light on the inner workings of the movement as opposed to the digital presence of the hashtag.

From digital activism, comparative historical analyses, theorizing and movement participation and identification with the movement, Black Lives Matter as a central fieldwork for social movement scholarship and has proven to be diverse and broad. Yet, despite the scholarly reach, Black Lives Matter is still understudied in several areas which is to be expected of a movement that is ever evolving while being in existence for 10 years. Beyond the writings of the actual cofounders of the movement (for examples see Garza, 2015; Khan-Cullors & Bandele, 2018; Tometi, 2020), specific research on Black Lives Matter that focuses on membership, internal movement activity, and motivations behind participation in the movement is under-developed. My literature review suggests that much of the research is topical to Black Lives Matter as an organization. I seek to contribute to the internal investigation and analysis of the movement through the analysis of six interviews with participants and supporters of Black Lives Matter.

Data and Methods

Following approval from the University's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A), participants were recruited using a snowball sampling strategy. Snowball sampling is the process where a chosen sample becomes the initial contact providing names of other subjects who fulfill the research protocol (Heckathorn, 1997). This method was useful for this project because the population of study had previously shown great distrust and largely refused to be interviewed when I directly reached out to Black Lives Matter participants. Because I had previously attended local chapter events as a participant-observer and had listened to participants share personal stories of surveillance, I understood that surveillance concerns were real, and

leadership was being incredibly careful regarding communication with people they did not know. I also understood that the police killings of unarmed men and women were continuing to happen, and participants in the movement were reacting in real time to public issues that Black Lives Matter groups were addressing.

To begin the snowball sample, I contacted various individuals that I knew had some type of affiliation with Black Lives Matter. Reaching out to people that I had some type of relationship with (introduced through a friend or connected via another graduate student) became the best way for me to initiate and receive interviews. I would either email or social media-message a person that I had met during my participant experiences and ask them for an interview (see Appendix B). If the person declined, I would also ask them if they could recommend someone that would be open to an interview. This process began in spring, 2019 and concluded by fall, 2019. I realized after finishing an interview, respondents were more likely to suggest new people that I could interview as opposed to responding directly to my email request which led to a slower sample process since it was only after conducting an interview, that I would potentially receive a new contact. The snowball sampling continued until I had six respondents. Although my target sample was 15, I settled on six respondents due to the time of the onset of Covid19 and its health challenges.

Eligible participants had to acknowledge that they had participated in a Black Lives Matter meeting or event beyond a protest. I determined this acknowledgement by simply asking respondents directly or via email if they had attended meetings and events held by Black Lives Matter that were not protest events. I wanted to ensure participants would be familiar with a local chapter internally through attendance. I

also wanted to make sure participants in the study had diverse experiences within Black Lives Matter. For example, some participants might have only attended events or meetings while some held leadership positions.

These six individuals represented local Black Lives Matter chapters that were in Ohio, Illinois, Tennessee, and Washington, D.C. Despite their representation of a broad group of Black Lives Matter chapters, all the individuals were residing in the Washington D.C., Maryland, and Virginia (DMV). Therefore, I investigate participants' previous experiences in various local chapters of Black Lives Matter who during the time of my research inquiry, resided in the DMV. I will discuss the implications of this in the conclusion.

Utilizing semi-structured interviews, I wanted to explore the motivations and attitudes behind participation in the Black Lives Matter movement to understand power dynamics within movement space. I also wanted to understand what was happening internally within the movement because so much of the media coverage was on the protest events and the digital hashtag, #blacklivesmatter. To determine these motivations and attitudes, I crafted several open-ended questions (see Appendix C) to ask movement participants. These inquiries assisted me in understanding various aspects of the burgeoning, social movement development taking place in Black Lives Matter.

Of the six total interviews, five interviews were conducted in person, and one interview was conducted via telephone due to time constraints on the travel schedule of the individual I interviewed. All interviews were recorded and uploaded to the online transcription software program, Otter.ai (Otter.ai, Inc, Mountain View, CA).

Interviews lasted on average about 30 minutes, ranging from 12 to 48 minutes in length. Although I utilized Otter.ai to transcribe the interviews, I edited each transcribed interview to fill in transcription errors created by the software's inability to detect the correct wording of the speaker's pronunciation. To maintain each interview's rhetorical style and voice, I did not edit their narratives. I included the "ums and repetitive words to suggest that the individual could be in contemplation while responding.

Analysis

Upon finishing each interview, memo notes were recorded on the same day to capture my initial thoughts and reflections on the interview (Lempert, 2007). Memo writing would continue throughout the coding process. Once the interviews were transcribed without errors, and after repeated personal analysis and synthesis of the interviews, I hand coded each interview and recorded relevant themes, opting for open coding to highlight similarities and differences in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Coding software was available, but I preferred to hand code the interviews as it created more attachment to the data. In this first stage of coding, I based coding along the question, 'What is happening here?' (Charmaz, 2015). This allowed me to maintain the originality of the data in which codes came directly from quotes from respondents. After a few rounds of coding, I reduced the codes and categories into six strategic themes. Five of the six themes developed from respondents' interview narratives, and I utilized social movement terms from the literature to help categorize respondents' quotes. I also included an additional sixth theme that I did not derive from social movement literature. I derived this theme from responses from

participants discussing how Black Lives Matter may not be living up to the ideals they inspired. For example, respondents may have started their response by saying "Black Lives Matter needs to" or "I wish Black Lives Matter did…" Below, I discuss my findings for each coded theme.

The interview findings are organized around six key themes that are based on participants' insight and developed from various underlying codes: 1) Networks and Recruitment, how individuals get involved in Black Lives Matter 2) Collective Memory, the individuals that motivated participation in Black Lives Matter 3) Collective Identity, how individuals connected to Black Lives Matter ideals 4) Gender, how gender impacted involvement in Black Lives Matter 5) Leadership, how women-centered leadership impacted involvement in Black Lives Matter and 6) Critique, how Black Lives Matter can improve and align more closely with its ideals. Before delving into each theme, I will provide a deeper description of my study sample.

Findings

Description of Study Sample

Table 2.1 introduces respondents. I use pseudonyms to protect their identities. I did not directly ask participants how they identified racially. I determined their race during our in-person interviews based on their skin-tone or through their interview narratives (i.e., "as a Black woman I…"). As it relates to gender, I interviewed three females, one non-binary fem, and two males. I was able to identify one participant as

non-binary fem because this is the way they identified themselves to me during the interview.

As far as the role that each participant played within the local Black Lives Matter chapters, only two individuals, Tonya, and Malcolm, articulated that they held leadership positions while the other four individuals participated actively in events authorized by Black Lives Matter chapters, but they did not disclose that they held leadership roles like Tonya and Malcolm. Tonya self-described herself as a "leader in the movement" throughout the interview, and Malcolm also referred to leadership meetings and making decisions with leadership. I cannot specify the exact leadership role because I did not ask directly. Beyond the leadership roles held by the respondents, four of the six interviewed were graduate students. Malcom and Tonya did not discuss pursuing their graduate studies. Additionally, none of the respondents were native to Washington D.C.

Table 2.1: Profile of Respondents

Pseudonyms	**Identity**	**Chapter Affiliation**	**Home State**	**Role During Interview**
Kara	Black Female	BLM Nashville	Tennessee	Grad Student
Denise	Black Female	BLM Cincinnati	Cincinnati	Grad Student
Aaron	Brown Male	BLM Chicago	Chicago	Grad Student
Malcolm	Black Male	BLM DC	Florida	Co-Founder of Stop Military Violence

Cheryl	Black Female	BLM DC	Philadelphia	Grad Student & Current Member of BYP
Tonya	Black Non-Binary Fem*	BLM DC	New York	Co-Leader of BLM

**Tonya self-identified as a "Black, non-binary fem" during the interview*

Networks and Recruitment

In determining what participants in Black Lives Matter reveal about the movement and internal power dynamics, I began by focusing on networks and recruitment. Informal networks developed on college campuses were mentioned as integral to the recruitment and participation process of the Black Lives Matter organization for the individuals I interviewed. Additionally, the respondents acknowledged that their undergraduate and graduate institutions were primarily predominantly white institutions (PWIs). For example, Kara was working with other students to have the name of a Ku Klux Klan (KKK) grand wizard removed from a campus building when she connected with an individual who participated in the leadership of Black Lives Matter, Nashville chapter.

Tonya was a graduating senior at a PWI in New York, who was helping other students of color make sense of the police shooting of Mike Brown in Ferguson, Missouri.

Aaron was teaching as an instructor at a college which connected him to students that were protesting the police shooting of Laquan McDonald in Chicago, Illinois.

Only one respondent, Malcolm, was already directly engaged in activism as he referenced his experience participating in the antiwar movement and participating in events hosted by Dream Defenders. Dream Defenders is a human rights nonprofit in Florida that focuses on ending policing and abolishing prisons.

All the respondents were recruited into participating in Black Lives Matter local chapters through individuals that were already involved in the movement suggesting strong ties were integral to participation. Only Denise could not connect her participation back to a specific individual that she knew intimately (Granovetter, 1973). Denise was the only respondent who recalled her recruitment process vaguely: "*...I'm not a big social media person, so no, I was not following the hashtag. Like, I met the girl, I can't remember her name, but she just had like different events. And I can't remember initially how I got involved. Eventually once I was there, I signed up in the email listserv.*"

Networks mattered for most participants I interviewed, and collegiate networks were instrumental in encouraging participation in activism. Malcolm was the only person that cited previous resistance activity not specific to a college campus. He cited participation in the anti-war protests and participation in events hosted by Dream Defenders. The decision to participate in Black Lives Matter does not come without negotiating and renegotiating power within already established networks as movement participants determine what their participation will look like in Black Lives Matter. How participants engaged on their respective campuses or prior activist experiences seem to pre-determine how they would serve in local

chapters of Black Lives Matter as they utilized these previous experiences to shape their experiences in Black Lives Matter.

For example, Tonya recalls her early campus experience organizing: *So I was super senior. But I had done this on purpose because I didn't really have a place to live yet. And I didn't have next steps. And so, I just happened to be on campus, when Michael Brown was killed. And it's important that I was on campus, because being on campus and being someone who was like one of the oldest people on campus, a lot of people had come to me like, feeling the turmoil of watching the videos of Michael Brown's body lying on the ground… And so, people were coming to me like, what do we do...I'm part of the black experience on campus. And we decided to have a community meeting…And so we just had a community meeting outside off campus, because we didn't want it to have any, like, we didn't want it to be based on what the university was saying…during that time, all over the country and Black Lives Matter groups popped up. And we decided just to call ours black instead of Black Lives Matter.*

Tonya's admission that the organizing she did was in concert with the Black Lives Matter organizing happening across the country reflects Tonya's agency and sense of understanding of the moment which enabled her to enter local Black Lives Matter space fully able to decide how to leverage her power within Black Lives Matter space.

Collective Memory

Memory matters and memories can help mobilize and incentivize individuals to action (Morrison, 1995; Griffin & Bollen, 2009; Kubal & Becerra, 2014; Fleming & Morris, 2015). Every respondent except for Kara, identified a nationally recognizable police/civilian killing of an unarmed Black man as one of the specific events that motivated them to act. As mentioned in the previous networks and recruitment theme, for Kara, her motivation stemmed from working to remove a former grand wizard of the KKK from a campus building. For others, the deaths of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin (Tonya, Cheryl, and Malcolm), 18-year-old Mike Brown (Tonya and Cheryl), 17-year-old LaQuan McDonald (Aaron), and 19-year-old Quintonio LeGrier (Aaron) were all referenced as individuals that compelled them to get involved.

One other respondent, Denise, simply highlighted the "the many shootings in 2016." In 2016, both Alton Sterling and Philando Castille were killed by the police and their deaths drew national attention. Only one of the individuals named, Quintonio LeGrier, was actually named as someone the participant, Aaron, knew personally. Aaron had worked with LeGrier in the Chicago school system when he was killed. This suggests that the national media and social media attention given to these violent killings helped to magnify the memory of the deceased, with limited personal interaction except for Aaron (LeGrier), on a national scale, similar to the media's influence in making Emmit Till a national collective memory of the Civil Rights Movement (Hudson-Weems, 1998; Ladner, Ladner & Mosnier, 2011; Anderson, 2001).

Similar to the ways in which the death of Trayvon Martin instigated the original founders of Black Lives Matter to create the hashtag, #BlackLivesMatter, in 2013, subsequent killings of unarmed young Black men have spurred involvement in resistance from the participants I researched. This finding suggests a connection between memory and action in that respondents specifically connected their desire to get involved in Black Lives Matter with the memories of previous killings of unarmed young Black men. Just as Emmit Till's open-casket picture in Jet magazine in 1955, seared the memories of people from all over the world, the videos of unarmed Black boys and young men seared the memories of the participants that I interviewed, motivating them to action. The symbolic memory making created through the nationally photographed and televised killings of unarmed Black men and women is foundational to understanding Black Lives Matter and other contemporary Black liberation movements. Images are powerful, and media images and social media as well as phone cameras have become conduits to transmit this power which in turn ignites and fuels movement activity and organizational development.

Collective Identity

Collective identity is the invisible but palpable connection between activists or participants within a movement organization. It is the psychological-based shared identity that exists between individuals interacting in collective action which contributes to the internal development of social movement formation (Melluci, 1985; Polleta & Jasper, 2001; Fominaya, 2010, 2016; Ghaziani, 2011). To conceptualize collective identity, I borrowed a portion of the mission statement from Black Lives Matter which is still a part of the "About" section of the Black Lives Matter website

(see blacklivesmatter.com). I used aspects of the mission statement as a tool to measure to what degree the respondents were similarly connected to the ideas disseminated through the organizational website. The portion of the mission statement is:

> *"Black Lives Matter affirms 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. It centers those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movements. It is a tactic to rebuild the Black liberation movement."*

After reading this aloud, I asked respondents how they felt about Black Lives Matter focusing on the marginalized and those who have been left on the sidelines. Kara, Tonya, Cheryl, and Aaron, shared thoughts, or views on the mission statement while Denise and Malcolm did not. Kara and Tonya were very affirmed by the statement.

Kara said, "I *don't think I was expecting that. It was very affirming for me, and I think it's affirming for a lot of people who don't really, are never really put at the forefront when it comes to social movements.*"

Tonya, who self-identified as a non-binary fem, shared similar thoughts to Kara: "*I don't think that…I would have thought that there'd be space for me in the Black liberation movement*."

Aaron wanted to see the mission statement being reflected in actual events and meetings: "*We need to make sure they're [marginalized voices] good before we do anything else. And that includes in organizing spaces, making sure that they have a voice, right. Listen to their voice.*"

Cheryl, who transitioned from Black Lives Matter to Black Youth Project, shared a different sentiment altogether regarding the mission of Black Lives Matter in centering the marginalized. In her opinion, the lack of actual centering the marginalized in tangible ways voices led her to join the Black Youth Project (BYP): "*...that's one of the things that actually pushed me to be BYP, is that our organizational goals were always, we were always exclusively centering, um, women, Queer folks, Trans folks, poor folks, um, sex workers, um, always thinking about how to support the most marginalized.*"

From the reactions of the respondents to the mission statement of Black Lives Matter, we can see the development of a broad identity that includes a collective emphasis on centering the marginalized. For some participants, the mission statement also acts as an affirming catalyst. Identifying with the mission statement is reflected in the respondents' responses with only Cheryl suggesting that the mission in theory is not necessarily being utilized in practice. But Robnett (2005) explains that agreement is not always necessary for collective identity formation as actors can realign their personal identities with the overall identity of the movement. Cheryl's questioning of the mission statement's goal to center the most marginalized as well as Aaron's emphasis to make sure the marginalized really had a voice, according to Robnett, is their own activist identity coming to terms with the movement's identity which is also an integral part of collective identity building (Robnett, 2005).

The respondents represent the indigenous identity building that participants through their own views and norms weave into Black Lives Matter organizational views and norms. This collective identity formation process through Cheryl, Tonya,

Aaron, and Kara responding to a mission statement does not suggest causal claims of collective identity. However, their narratives suggest a viable way to determine how participants, through their individual identities, respond and adapt, or not, to the larger overall identity of a movement. Collective identity formation also mirrors the ways in which power can be shared within movement spaces as participants bring in their views and decide how to negotiate their individual perspectives with group perspectives.

Gender

One of the critiques of new social movement theory conceptualizations, such as collective identity, is the lack of recognition that class and gender can, and in many ways does, impact identity building (Robnett, 1996). With an emphasis on the gender aspect, intersectional scholarship asserts that gendered differences along with race and class are crucial to understanding people's lived experiences and these lived experiences carry over to movement experiences (Davis, 1972; Brewer, 1989; Collins, 1990, 2000). By focusing on gender through the idea that Black Lives Matter was a woman-centered movement in both its leadership and mission, it is helpful in assisting to uncover individual participant's views and experiences from a gender-perspective.

Overall, there was a consensus among the respondents, that Black Lives Matter being categorized as a woman-centered movement was a good thing for the movement as well as historically accurate.

According to Malcolm: "*That's just an honest representation of something that has always existed…I grew up in church and you know, the women, they were the best organizers and the best administrators.*"

Aaron, who also thought it was "*great*" to consider Black Lives Matter a woman-centered movement, still desired to see more men attending events. "*I personally would love it to see more men in a lot of these spaces…I usually find myself being one of few*."

Neither Kara, Denise, Cheryl or Tonya, notably the women and non-binary fem, saw anything out of the ordinary with the notion that Black Lives Matter was considered a woman-centered movement, although Cheryl hoped the leadership could move to be more inclusive of more marginalized individuals: "*Where are the trans women? Where are the trans women who do sex work? Where are mothers? Where are midwives and doulas? Where are trans men? We always talk about centering the most marginalized and we don't.*"

Tonya confirms Cheryl's comments by referencing her own position in leadership as a non-binary individual: "*I think that it [women-centered leadership] is positive. But I also have felt, experienced backlash, and it has been used as a negative statement as in like, we don't care about all Black people, because we're centering the most marginalized*." These sentiments suggest that gender dynamics are fully realized beyond the traditional male-female dichotomy and various dichotomies of gender are experienced within local movement spaces.

Moreover, Tonya and Cheryl suggest that even among activists that share similar aims in making sure the marginalized voices are centered, there is debate as to

who is included as the marginalized. Tonya, as a non-binary fem, felt that Black Lives Matter was centering the most marginalized such as people like herself, while Cheryl wondered where trans men, mothers, midwives, and doulas were in Black Lives Matter leadership spaces. Cheryl and Tonya, a female and non-binary fem respectively, suggest how gender dynamics potentially manifest within movement space. On the one hand, Cheryl's inclusion of mothers, midwives, and doulas as marginalized and least represented in leadership, suggests multiple dissections of who is considered marginalized. On the other hand, Tonya as a non-binary person, centered marginalization and leadership around her own identity and leadership position.

The comments particularly from Cheryl and Tonya connect gender identities closely with leadership and the overall mission of Black Lives Matter demonstrating an intersectional dynamic within the movement along the lines of gender, movement identity, and leadership. With leadership being the external face of Black Lives Matter, it is important to consider how leadership is viewed and understood by participants. It is equally important to examine how power further complicates this discussion of gender and leadership as argued in the historical backdrop of Black women's erasure from the Civil Rights Movement (Robnett, 1997; Slate, 2022).

Admittedly, the respondents acknowledged that women are at the forefront of leadership in Black Lives Matter, but the interviews reveal that when gender itself is viewed from multiple categories, there could be erasure of certain groups, reinforcing power structures unintentionally. Similarly to how Kislev and Marsh (2023), argue that singlehood should be an intersectional subcategory to help expose hidden power

structures, my research contributes through my analysis that gender as a multiple category could also be an intersectional subcategory for analyzing hidden power structures. The narratives of the respondents suggest that more research is needed in this area and complicates our understanding of gender in the Black Lives Matters movement. The respondents provide a preview of what the findings could be.

Leadership

Leadership is integral to social movements, develops in multiple ways, and potentially dictates movement success and failure (Zald & Ash, 1966; Robnett, 1997; Morris & Staggenborg, 2004; Bob & Nepstad, 2006, 2007; Dorius & McCarthy, 2011). Respondents varied widely in their views of leadership within Black Lives Matter with Kara and Denise focusing on the national leadership perspective and Malcolm, Aaron, Tonya, and Cheryl focusing on chapter-leadership.

Kara recognized that the leadership in Nashville was "*youth-led*."

Denise admitted that she really did not know what to think about the leadership of the Cincinnati chapter but it "*was very multi-gendered…it was diverse for men or women*."

Malcolm asserted that the best way to describe the leadership "*is to say that a lot of the organizations under the Movement for Black Lives umbrella, they tend to have a more collective style of leadership*."

Aaron believed the leadership style is "i*ntentional and deliberate*" due to "*surveillance and just violence against previous movement leaders*."

Tonya echoes Aaron's sentiments acknowledging that the leadership of Black Lives Matter was "*decentralized on purpose*." She continues: "*The intention was, if*

we don't pick specific leaders, and we make sure that everybody has a role, right, that the work will get done. And it will be a lot harder to snuff us out."

Cheryl brought up a class perspective on the organizational leadership she has experienced in Washington, D.C. after attending a counter rally against the Unite the Right 2 rally in August 2018. Cheryl noticed that the formal organizations of Movement for Black Lives, Black Lives Matter and Black Youth Project seemed afraid to speak and acknowledge certain groups of people that were not affiliated with their organizations: "*It's not lost on me, especially as a transplant from a city that is also gentrifying, that most organizers that I know are not actually DC natives. The divide is a class divide. It's a location and access-divide. It's an educational divide. We have a lot of work to do on that.*"

Cheryl's comments on the geographical divide amongst organizers in Washington D.C. being "transplants" are confirmed physically by Malcolm and Tonya who both moved from other cities in the past ten years and are now heavily involved in organizing within the Movement for Black Lives. Cheryl highlighting the migrant nature of leadership that represents Black Lives Matter as well as the class divide, does not necessarily imply underdeveloped leadership or unprepared leadership. Urban cities attract diverse groups of people and when you include college and university populations there are certain to be transitions. The multiple divides that Cheryl speaks to-class, location and access, and education speaks to the question of how power dynamics are revealed in movement space. Embedded in those divides are power structures that impede certain groups and advance others. How can Black Lives Matter chapter leadership make sure they are connecting with

the needs of the people they want to serve and center, when there is the potential for so many divides between leaders or organizers and the people experiencing the most harms? Through their interviews and my reading of these narratives, the respondents indirectly raise this important question in lieu of thinking of movement decline and abeyance.

Critique as Power

I have found that in some ways, Black Lives Matter confirms traditional social movement concepts and theories, and in other ways, Black Lives Matter sharply departs. Participants within the movement suggest that networks still matter, and collective memory is a strong motivator for encouraging activism. Gender matters and leadership dynamics as perceived by participants do not seem to dictate how or why participants remain affiliated with a movement.

Moreover, critique does not necessarily equate to disillusionment with the movement. At the end of each interview, I asked respondents if there was anything else they wanted to share with me and all of them took the time to share their views on various aspects of Black Lives Matter. Kara opined that "*people who love to say hashtag, Black Lives Matter, you just want to be seen…rather than being a leader and doing the work*."

Malcolm wanted people to understand that "*organizations come and go, organizers and activists come and go…the struggle itself never actually stops, so the work can never stop*."

Aaron also wanted to share his observations on organizations in Chicago: *Certain spaces seem to be more organized than others. I couldn't tell you why that is. BYP [Black Youth Project], they really got their shit together. In Chicago, they're a powerhouse. Assata's daughters, they are also very organized. BLM meetings tend to have different agendas and are less organized, I feel.*"

Tonya, who transitioned from a participant in 2014 in Ferguson, MO to a leader in a local chapter in 2017 wanted to make sure to differentiate between activism and organizing: "*We want to make sure that we have the understanding of the difference between activism and organizing. And the act of organizing is something that the Black Lives Matter organization did not create, right, like folks have been organizing for years and centuries. And that is something that when you think of like, what is the Black Lives Matter chapter, it is to be an organization of organizers and activists, right?*"

Cheryl's insights in addressing the open-ended question focused on Black men taking leadership positions and the challenges of having Black men in movement space: "*Men, and this is a function of white supremacy like teaching all of us that masculinity must be centered and Black men internalizing that. But they take up space. They shut down voices that are not theirs. I've even encountered this in spaces with queer men…we need to move beyond that. We need men to like, start doing a lot of internal work, and internal healing.*"

Cheryl's directives toward men that enter Black Lives Matter (or affiliates) space to do the work to heal, along with Tonya's reminder that organizing is not a creation of Black Lives Matter, reveals the diverse perspectives of how individuals

that participated in Black Lives Matter events experience the movement. These experiences in turn help to create an internal, cultural identity for the movement itself that helps to shed light on how Black Lives Matter transitioned from a digital hashtag to a committed organization. Moreover, this internal identity seems to stem from individuals who come into the movement with an in-tact activist identity, like Cheryl and Tonya, that was self-empowering and collectively empowering. Therefore, the ability to critique but also align with the overall mission of Black Lives Matter is an exercise of power.

Discussion

By teasing out the attitudes and opinions of those directly involved with various participatory levels in local chapters of Black Lives Matter, respondents illustrate how they negotiate their identities and thus their power within the larger Black Lives Matter organization. Hearkening back to Weber's concept of power as the ability to impose one's will (1922), I argue each participant utilize their lived experiences and activist experiences to not impose their ideas, but rather to merge those ideas and negotiate with the broader movement's mission and leadership structure to contribute to the movement in a way that makes sense to them. Therefore, the participants offer critiques or even transition to another movement space in solidarity with Black Lives Matter, such as Cheryl did, by joining Black Youth Project. This negotiation and recognition of self-power developed through their individual activist experiences allows participants to support Black Lives Matter without removing themselves entirely from the organization of Black Lives Matter.

This merging and negotiating of power happening with the participants in Black Lives Matter as they utilize their own sense of identity to determine their place in the collective identity of the movement supports my previous assertions regarding power dynamics within marginalized spaces. I defined power as the unspoken and invisible force that prevails and provokes individuals and groups to employ their agency to obtain or share dominance within marginalized spaces. My findings reflect that power is shared within marginalized spaces through internal, individual negotiations that movement participants make to merge their own activist identities with the movement's overall collective identity.

While more research will need to be conducted to unpack these power negotiations, the narratives from Kara, Denise, Cheryl, Tonya, Aaron, and Malcolm suggest how there is some awareness of both the strengths and weaknesses of the movement; how their own agency empowered them to be participants even in offering critiques of Black Lives Matter; and how their proposed suggestions have the potential to improve the Black Lives Matter organization. These negotiations of how to share and contribute to internal power dynamics is similar to what Robnett (1997) discusses as bridge leadership as the method that Black women were able to strategically maneuver the organizational male-dominated structure of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Black women operating as informal bridge leaders without ever receiving formal titles or positions connected the entire Black community to the Civil Rights Movement.

Where Robnett refers to Black women acting as bridge leaders to support and work within the SCLC organization and the broader Civil Rights Movement, I argue

that this is an early example of how marginalized actors must make negotiations with their own identities and actively selected which ideals from the organization that they could identify with in an effort to participate and contribute. Potential future research would be revisiting movement spaces of the marginalized to focus on marginalized groups within those organizations to determine how they reconcile their marginalized identities with the overall collective identity of the movement.

Conclusion

As I mentioned previously in the methods section, the DMV, the areas surrounding the nation's capital, Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia, was the larger field of study where I identified individuals that had previous activism experience in other states and often through their university experiences. As noted earlier, Kara from Tennessee, Aaron from Chicago, Denise from Cincinnati, Malcolm from Florida, Cheryl from Philadelphia, and Tonya from New York all diverged on the DMV and brought their activist identities with them. In this light, the DMV becomes an empowering mechanism or incubator to promote activism, and create spaces where activism occurs. The DMV has a historical reputation as a place where resistance occurs. For example, Washington D.C. has been a central place for groups to gather to voice displeasure with federal policies and to organize groups such as the 1913 Women's Suffrage Procession, 1963 March on Washington, 1970 Kent State/Cambodian Protest, 2017 Women's March, and the 2018 March for our Lives. Could the DMV be a natural attraction for activism like its attraction as a lobbyist site? There does seem to be some connections between activists and the DMV as a

space for activism and resistance, but future research would need to focus directly on making these connections more distinctive.

When I started this project in 2019, I wanted to discover more about the internal workings of Black Lives Matter. I followed the hashtag, #blacklivesmatter. I read news media articles on Black Lives Matter. I even attended events organized by Black Lives Matter. Yet, I had no idea what people within the movement space were thinking and doing. When I began my interviews, I wanted to allow the individual responses of how Black Lives Matter participants became involved in the movement and embraced the mission of Black Lives Matter, tell the larger story of Black Lives Matter. Grounded theory provided the methodological tools for me to discover Black Lives Matter from the interviews I collected. What the respondents taught me and what I learned about power dynamics within the movement space of Black Lives Matter reinforces the idea of how power pervades and spreads internally within a movement not necessarily to exclude and overtake actors' wills, but to allow actors to negotiate their own identities into the overall collective identity of the movement.

Chapter 3: Public Hearings and Environmental Justice: How Language Is Utilized as a Tool of Power

Introduction and Background

In Chapter 2, I argued that within movement spaces, negotiations of power take place between participants' identities and the overall collective identity of the movement. In recognizing that power diffuses in multiple ways, is it possible to identify additional power dynamics within movement or resistance space through language dynamics? How might discourse analysis reveal undisclosed power dynamics in spaces of resistance? To investigate these questions, I focused on public hearings focusing on biogas, an energy source derived from animal waste, development in eastern North Carolina. I wanted to understand how individuals used language to wield power through their public hearing comments. Additionally, because of my volunteer work in the community I knew the Environmental Justice Movement in eastern North Carolina was targeting biogas development very heavily. Studying public hearings was an opportunity for me to investigate a potentially new space to identify power dynamics at play through public hearing participants' speeches.

The Environmental Justice Movement

The Environmental Justice Movement speaks to the historical and present collective actions that have aligned to challenge, resist, and oppose environmental racism, pollution, and contrary environmental praxis (Mohai & Bryant, 1992; Bullard & Wright, 1993; Cable & Benson, 1993; Edwards, 2000; Baptista et al., 2023). It is

an ongoing social movement that arguably began in full earnest in Warren County, North Carolina, in 1982 (Skelton & Miller, 2016). Although there had been previous environmental movements and protests in the 1960's such as the Farm Workers Movement and protests in Houston and Harlem against city dump sites and sewage treatment plants respectively, none had drawn the national attention that the Warren County protests drew (Skelton & Miller, 2016). The state of North Carolina chose Warren County, a predominantly Black majority township, as the recipient of a toxic waste dumping site for Polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) chemicals. Warren County residents and supporters staged marches and nonviolent protests that lasted over six weeks and included over 500 people being arrested (McGurty, 2007). Despite the massive grassroots protests and marches and overwhelming rejection of Warren County becoming the home of the PCB waste site, the North Carolina state government still chose to build and construct the PCB waste site in Warren County.

The national attention created by the Warren County protests, buttressed by former leaders and participants in the Civil Rights Movement, became the nexus for the Environmental Justice Movement to expand and grow. This growth included federal government investigations into toxic waste site locations (United Church of Christ, 1987; Bullard, 1983; 1996). Additionally, there was the coining of the term "environmental racism" by Rev. Ben Chavis, a Civil Rights organizer and preacher integral to the Warren County resistance in the 1980's. Environmental racism as a reference to the biased environmental experiences Black and Brown communities were facing was critical in naming the environmental injustice experienced primarily by Black and Brown communities (Lazarus, 2000).

For eastern North Carolinians, ongoing legislative initiatives coupled with industrial agricultural lobbying power has created multiple opportunities for residents to engage and confront the multi-billion-dollar, hog controlled animal feeding operation (CAFO) industry. The three public hearings hosted by the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NC DEQ), centered around legislation that would impact hog CAFO farms and the residents living near those farms. Hog CAFOs or hog farms as they are commonly called can contain thousands of pigs in restricted mobility pens to expedite the maturation process of the piglet to a mature pig (Driscoll & Edwards, 2020). Upon reaching maturation, a process that takes 5.5 months (Driscoll & Edwards, 2020), the pigs are sent to slaughter and packaged in a meat-processing plant for delivery to local, state, and national food stores. A by-product of the hog CAFO industry is determining how to handle the excessive amounts of hog waste excrement which accumulates when thousands of pigs are housed together in narrow confines. The most common strategy has been to dispose of the waste through the lagoon-sprayfield system. The lagoon-sprayfield system which operates to spray the hog waste onto adjacent fields has created problems for communities that reside near these hog farms (Driscoll & Edwards, 2020). These problems include ground well water contamination, poor air quality due to high levels of methane gas emission, and property devaluations (Wing et al., 2000; Wilson et al., 2002; Wing, 2008).

Due to heightened awareness of the burdens experienced by predominantly Black communities living in North Carolina and specifically Sampson and Duplin

counties, the two largest hog-production areas in the nation (Skinner, 2023), alternative measures have started to be initiated such as the biogas digester method (Wagner, 2022). Rather than spray the hog waste on adjacent fields, the hog fecal and urine waste would be contained and covered, the methane gas would be removed and converted to a potentially renewable energy source. Because of state legislation that mandates that a percentage of energy sources must come from methane-production, Sampson and Duplin counties have become the center of biogas development (Wagner, 2022). Consequently, the NC DEQ has conducted public hearings to ascertain community residents and stakeholders' opinions on the methane digester process (biogas development) and potential impacts on communities (see Appendix D).

Research Question

Since my research into power dynamics includes investigations of the Environmental Justice Movement in rural, eastern North Carolina, I interrogate the tension between the democratic public hearing process and the way speakers wielded and leveraged their power during their allocated speaking time. My broad research question is: How does power manifest itself in public hearing spaces? My research into investigating power dynamics within public hearing transcripts is an attempt to determine if current state-level orchestrated public hearing settings are welcoming to full participation.

Utilizing three public hearings hosted virtually and publicly by the NC DEQ, in rural eastern North Carolina, I investigate how speech acts, which I define as the transcribed speeches from participants in the public hearing, empower or disempower

community residents from full participation in public hearing spaces. Through discourse analysis of public hearing transcripts, I explicate how language in the form of public hearing comments can potentially reveal power dynamics between speakers and policy makers as well as establish authority and power for some and disempower others in rural settings.

By reviewing the publicly accessible speech transcripts compiled after three public hearings, I demonstrate how speech is potentially utilized as a tool of power to encourage or discourage support for and against biogas development in eastern North Carolina and assess how well these public hearings are reflecting specific principles of Environmental Justice. Following is a review of the literature on public hearing research and power dynamics in language.

Literature Review

I begin this review by approaching language as power from the theoretical perspective. Second, I follow up with how various researchers have approached studying language as it relates to social movements, activism, and civic engagement. Lastly, I review the literature on public hearings, the angle of study within literature on public hearings, and how my research potentially can make several contributions across various disciplines and within the discussion of power.

In *Rhetoric*, written during the 4th Century, B.C. Aristotle outlines the art and strategy behind persuasive speech. The strategic utilization of appeals to ethics (ethos), logic (logos), and emotions (pathos) determine the persuasive abilities of the speaker and thus the effectiveness of the speaker to not only convey their thoughts and ideas but to establish their authority. Written almost 2,000 years ago, *Rhetoric*

asserts that the power of language, whether composed or spoken, has historical, cultural, political, and economic impacts. Yet well before Aristotle's assertions, scholars understood through archeological research and discovery that spoken and written language has always helped to preserve, shape, and empower culture and society. Because of the span of research on rhetoric, I narrow my review to focusing on language as derivatives of power and language dynamics at play in public hearings. I also include theoretical underpinnings regarding language formation and power.

Language As Power

In his seminal 1986 work, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Ngugi, asserts that "language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history" (1986). Exiled for many years from his homeland of Kenya, Ngugi chose to write his books in his native tongue to connect with his intended audience and leverage the power of native language simultaneously contesting the dominating power of written and spoken English. Ngugi, as well as Bourdieu (1991), Foucault (1971), and Morrison (2007) to name a few, recognized that language can be wielded as a tool of power, by determining authority, and revealing positionality (Ngugi, 1986).

Discourse is shaped by power according to a diverse array of scholars-from Ngugi (1986), Foucault (1979), Bourdieu (1991), and Delpit (1988). The notion that the effectiveness of speech is undergirded by the power of the speaker, is an almost unconscious truth that we experience when we participate in art, entertainment, worship, and politics. Beyond the voice and the speaker's actions is the speaker's

access to power. This power through language is so forceful and simultaneously potentially damaging that Kenyan author, Ngugi, refused to write his novels in English for a period of time and wrote *Decolonising the Mind* to warn of the dangers of writing in English over one's native tongue. English, according to Ngugi, had become a tool used to colonize native Africans not so much physically but mentally by reinforcing English as the dominant language for knowledge production. For Foucault (1979), this access to power was ascertained through knowledge and discourse. For Bourdieu (1991), the social and political conditions impacted language formation, and the language became an instrument of power. Delpit (1988) similarly suggests that a "culture of power" exists particularly in the classroom and that culture of power reflects those that already have power.

Language and Public Hearings

In 1969, Arnstein, who was working as a Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of what was known then as the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, authored a paper entitled, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation." Arnstein's (1972) paper is still considered impactful across various academic disciplines. Early in her paper, Arnstein declared, "... citizenship participation is a categorical term for citizen power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future" (p. 24, 2019). Arnstein goes on to explain the rungs that make up the ladder to full citizen participation. Although public hearings were not the subject of her paper, Arnstein's paper and subsequent papers (1972, 1975) focused

centrally on making readers aware of the challenges to full citizenship participation from all groups.

In 1981, Checkoway, who has written extensively on citizen participation, community change and youth participation, wrote an article entitled "The Politics of Public Hearings." The article was somewhat of a literature review of scholarly research and articles on public hearings. For Checkoway (1981), since public hearings were the most traditional method that citizens could participate at all levels of American government, there should be more emphasis on the dynamics of public hearings. Checkoway's review stated that most research on public hearings at that time focused on structures of the public hearings-location of public hearings, attendance, advertisements, and usage of public hearings. Specific to my research agenda, Checkoway references a few researchers that actually paid attention to the communication interaction of the public hearings (Friedmann, 1973; Mueller, 1973; Perfater, 1975). Upon reviewing their research, I found, similarly to Checkoway, that the focus on communication was primarily situated around how public hearing officials disseminated their messages to hearing attendees and how those messages were interpreted. How language in these settings is used to maintain or deconstruct power were not mentioned.

More recently, Farkas (2013) focuses on power dynamics regarding public hearing meetings in Ohio. Through analyzing discourse and exchange sequences in five years worth of city council meetings, Farkas noted how public officials controlled the discourse generated in the meetings as well as controlling the legislative process, thereby controlling the meeting. While Farkas focuses on the

power embedded within controlling the legislative process around public hearings, my research fills a gap in the literature by focusing on the power with the speech acts from *all participants* in the public hearings, including public officials. To further address this gap in the literature, I investigate the notion of the invisible ways power can manifest through word choice.

Public Hearings and Activism

Although it has become commonplace within activist scholarship to think of activism in terms of what actors do, there are scholars who are contributing to activist studies by focusing on what actors say and how they say it specifically as it relates to public hearings and other government-sanctioned arenas that allow the public to comment on governmental affairs (Hunt et al 2016). According to Hunt and colleagues (2016) the intersection of public participation and social movements has been neglected. These scholars set out to fill this void by analyzing the neglected speech of public hearings. In other words, the speech that is removed from public notes during public hearing settings. The researchers suggest that these speech violations or "indecorous acts" as the authors characterize them, are actually rhetorical moments that reveal a lot about the resistance and activism at play during public hearing meetings (Hunt et al., 2016).

Similarly, other scholars have asserted that public hearings and public meetings have become a place of collective action (Kashefi & Mort, 2004; Chen & Reichwein, 2016; Lama-Rewal, 2017). Research that investigates speech patterns or violations, suggests the multiple ways in which speech can empower and disempower

individuals (Hunt et al., 2016). For these and other reasons, my research into speech acts can contribute to understanding activism in new ways.

As it relates to social movement scholarship, language as a unit of analysis is often investigated from the perspective of how the spoken and written word frame a movement. Literature around social movement framing does summarily emphasize the power of activists and activist organizations' usage of language and messaging to encourage movement participation as well as the power of media to impact movement activity and participation (Snow et al., 1986; Entman & Rojecki, 1993; Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993; Hon, 2016). Analyzing speech transcripts provides an additional investigative layer into activism by exploring the ways in which language in almost invisible and often unconscious ways can operate as a power dynamic to undergird or undermine movement goals, and participants' efforts to engage in public speaking events.

Data and Methods

The public hearing events that I analyzed spans November 2020 to April 7, 2022. During that period, I along with a group of researchers attended, participated, and documented 12 public state-sanctioned or community-based meetings regarding industrialized biogas development in eastern North Carolina. I focus on three public hearings hosted by NC DEQ (see Table 3.1 for more detail). I chose to focus on these three hearings because they were all hosted and recorded by the same organization, NC DEQ, and carried out in the exact same fashion at each hearing. This allowed me

to cross examine the transcripts, maintain consistency in the time allotted to speakers, and make sure biogas development was the consistent frame of reference.

Between November 2020 and April 2022, the NC DEQ, voluntarily held three public hearings both virtually and in-person to provide communities and residents impacted by hog CAFO farms and the potential development of biogas digester systems in Sampson and Duplin counties to ask questions and provide comments regarding NC DEQ's potential granting of operating permits. The permits would allow multiple hog CAFO farms to add biogas digester operations as part of their hog waste elimination strategies. The first two public hearings were held virtually, via Webex or by dialing in via a telephone number provided by NC DEQ. The last meeting held April 7, 2022, was in-person. Each hearing occurred in the evening beginning at 6:00 p.m. The two virtual hearings hosted a 30-minute question and answer session before beginning public comments at 6:30 p.m., while the in-person public hearing did not offer a question and answer session. There appeared to be no sign-up for question and answer sessions as meeting hosts simply asked if anyone had any questions and did not call on people by name. For open comments, meeting hosts utilized a sign-up sheet that was created prior to the hearing. Names were called in the order that the individual signed the roster according to instructions from the hosts which are part of the speech transcripts.

For 2020 and 2021 to adhere to COVID-19 precautions, the public hearings were held via Webex and call-in by telephone. The public hearing held in April 2022 was held in person. I will further discuss the impact of virtual versus in-person public speech transcripts during analysis. Public hearing speech transcripts provided names

of all speakers as speakers had to sign up to speak prior to the event. Names were used to notify potential speakers when they would have their time to speak. Gender, age, and racial information was not recorded unless a speaker self-reported their gender, age or race. Each public hearing speech transcript averaged 48 pages of speech acts.

Table 3.1: Descriptions of Public Hearings

Public Hearing Demographics	**Public Hearing 1**	**Public Hearing 2**	**Public Hearing 3**
Hearing Date	November 16, 2020	January 26, 2021	April 7, 2022
Hearing Location	Virtual via WebEx	Virtual via WebEx	Clinton, NC
Time of the Hearing	6:00 pm	6:00 pm	6:00 pm
Topic of the Hearing	Permit Modifications for Biogas Development on Selected Farms	Permit Modifications for Biogas Development on Selected Farms	State General Permits for Swine, Cattle and Poultry Operations with Liquid Waste Treatment Systems.
Number of Total Speakers	63	40	21
Number of Transcribed Pages	64	61	21
Q&A Session	Yes	Yes	No

Using discourse analysis as my primary qualitative method, I focus on understanding how power dynamics can be traced through the speech acts of all participants who spoke during the public hearings. Hardy et al. (2004) defines discourse analysis as "a methodology for analyzing social phenomena that is qualitative, interpretive, and constructionist" (p. 19). I chose discourse analysis as opposed to content analysis because of the emphasis that discourse analysis

scholarship places upon power dynamics (Foucault, 1980; Hardy et al, 2004). Unlike the grounded theory approach which calls for robust, iterative coding techniques (Charmaz, 2015), I chose to select two broad themes, tone, and diction, prior to analyzing each individual speech act of a participant's public hearing comments. As a researcher, I also remained open to additional themes emerging from the data. I prioritized the themes of tone and diction prior to analysis because my research interest was not in what participants said, but how they said it. In other words, how might power be embedded in the rhetorical strategies employed as opposed to the rhetoric? Tone, the way something is said, and diction, the word choice speakers make when they speak, are two primary rhetorical devices utilized by speakers to make appeals (Posch, 2017). As Hardy (2001:28) states rhetoric is "created, supported, and contested through the production, dissemination, and consumption of texts; and emanates from interactions between the social groups and the complex societal structures in which the discourse is embedded" (Hardy, 2001: 28).

Analysis

After reading each individual speech transcripts, I first coded each individual speech act into six descriptive speaking groups based on how speakers introduced themselves. For example, most speakers introduced themselves via a title: "I am a professor at…I have been farming for…I have worked in agriculture for…"

Identifying speaking groups led to the development of six emergent-coded descriptive groups: 1) Technical Stakeholders, 2) Farmers and Farming Industry, 3) Academics/Institutions/Organizations, 4) Community Members, 5) Politicians, and 6) Other. Table 3.2 provides a brief description of each group.

Table 3.2 Descriptive Speaking Groups

Technical Stakeholders	**Farmers & Farming Industry**	**Academics Organizational Leaders**	**Community Members**	**Politicians**	**Other (excluded)**
This group includes all of the NC DEQ officials who hosted and proctored the public hearing	This group includes any speaker who identified as a farmer or working in or with the farming industry	This group includes any speaker who introduced themselves as an academic, leader of an organization, or member of an institution.	This group includes everyone who identified as a resident of either Duplin or Sampson County and neighboring counties	These individuals identified themselves through their political office	These individuals did not provide a name or title

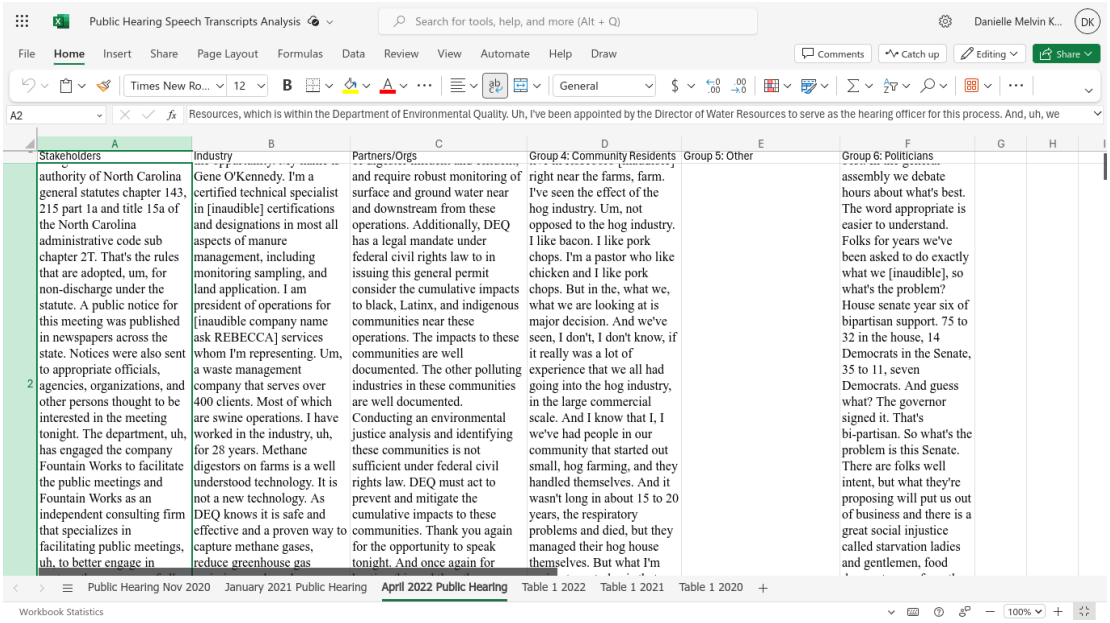
Upon finalizing my speaker groups, I then analyzed the tone and diction of each speaking group. First, I will provide more detail on the speaker groups. Technical experts described staff members of NC DEQ who facilitated the public hearings. Farmers and Farming Industry described individuals who self-identified themselves as farmers or self-identified as working on behalf of farmers or within the farming industry. Academics and Organizational Leaders described individuals who self-identified through their titles that they were affiliated with a university or organization. Community residents did not identify themselves by titles. They identified themselves by stating where they resided and how close they lived to a hog farm. Politicians did not have to self-identify as they were acknowledged at the beginning of the public hearings by Technical Experts and were addressed by their political title (i.e., Senator, Representative). The Other category consisted of

individuals who provided no title or background to preface their comments. I did not note whether the speaker was for or against the NC DEQ granting permits for biogas production. Rather, I wanted to focus on how the linguistic choices of tone and diction could potentially reveal invisible power dynamics embedded in these choices.

To analyze diction, I printed out the speech transcripts and began circling and highlighting word choices within each speech act that reflected the sentiment of the speaker. For example, when a speaker identified themselves as a 'family farmer,' I underlined this wording and underlined the words any other time they arose in that particular speech act. If the speaker mentioned 'swine,' I would circle or highlight this word as many times as it was mentioned in the speech act. Although coding software was available, by annotating by hand, I became very familiar with the speech acts. The notation also helped me categorize each speech act.

I attempted to analyze tone in the same way that I analyzed diction, but I found my personal bias impeding the progress when reading the transcripts. Due to my bias and familiarity with various speakers due to my volunteer organizing, I chose to focus solely on diction. After hand-coding, I copied and pasted each speech act into an excel spreadsheet under one of the six speaking groups that I had previously identified. Below is an example screenshot, Figure 3.1, taken from my analysis database.

Figure 3.1 *Screenshot of Sample Analysis from Public Hearing Transcript Database*



Findings

After reviewing over 100 pages of speech acts from three public hearing meetings, there were distinct differences in diction as it related to community members and technical experts, farmers and farming industry, and academics and organizational leaders. I used the technical expert group which I define as NC DEQ employees who conducted and proctored the public hearings, as the group containing/embodying the most power since they controlled and maintained the decorum and protocol of the public hearings. Through their verbal instructions regarding time restraints (each speaker was allotted two minutes), and the order in which names would be called to speak, the technical expert group were the most empowered to start and stop any other speaking groups. For example, the following comments from the NC DEQ facilitator to a speaker exemplifies their power in controlling the flow of public statements:

Facilitator: *"I'm sorry, Mr. Jones. Um, your two minutes to speak are up. Um, thank you for your comments. Okay.*

Community Member: *So didn't I lose some time at the beginning?*

Facilitator*: Uh, no, sir. Uh, uh, uh, our timer, uh, was, was, um, um, started at the appropriate time. I will encourage you at the end of the evening to give you an email address and a telephone number to include any further comments, any written comments. We wanna make sure we, we've got several other people who need to speak, and we wanna make sure that we give them an opportunity."*

Thus, the technical experts, through their diction, limited the exercise of power by placing time constraints around their speech and I conceptualized the other groups as speaking to vie for participation in this power dynamic of controlling the time allotment for public speaking.

In addition to the community resident group, I focused on two other groups: academics/organizational leaders and farmers/farming industry. As I progressed with my analysis, the "other" group was excluded for two main reasons. First, I was not sure who was represented in the other group because these individuals did not introduce themselves or qualify their statements. Second, these individuals spoke during the question-and-answer session that NC DEQ staff provided at the beginning of the virtual meetings. Therefore, rather than make public comments, they merely asked questions of the NC DEQ staff. During the question-and-answer period, names were not called from a pre-registration list which was used for everyone making

public comments. Because I wanted to account for every speech act in my transcripts, I coded these speech acts as "Other" to maintain methodological integrity.

The politician group was represented during the first virtual public hearing in 2020 and for the in-person public hearing. Although I analyzed their speech acts, due to the small sample (six politicians between two of the public hearings), I chose to focus on analyzing how community residents, farms/farm industry, and academics/organizational leaders attempt to assert and assume power through the diction of speech acts. As politicians, this group already possessed power because NC DEQ only acknowledged the politicians who had signed up to speak prior to beginning the public comment period: "*If you're having technical difficulties with WebEx, you can use a chat feature in WebEx to ask questions or seek assistance… The following elected officials have registered to speak: Representative Raymond Smith, North Carolina agriculture commissioner, Steve Troxler, Senator Norman Sanderson, Senator Brent Jackson, and Representative Jimmy Dixon. Other officials may also be in attendance.*"

By acknowledging politicians that signed up to speak and acknowledging that others could be present in the virtual space, and after careful and extensive reads of the transcripts, the naming of the politicians seemed to signal a respect to the offices these North Carolina legislators and officials represented. Therefore, I argue that the power transmitted through the technical experts was shared with the power established through the political positions of the individuals in office.

Community residents, farmers/farm industry, and academics/organizational leaders were the most consistent groups over the three public hearings. Table 3.3

illustrates the overall representative groups and participation numbers. Note, no group ever exceeds 25 people participating per public hearing with community members coming close during the November 2020 virtual public hearing.

Table 3.3: Participants Per Public Hearing from 2020 to 2022

Participants Per Public Hearing	**Hearing 1: November 2020**	**Hearing 2: January 2021**	**Hearing 3: April 2022**
Technical Stakeholders	3	3	2
Farmers & Farming Industry	18	9	10
Academics Organizational Leaders	12	18	6
Community Members	24	4	2
Politicians	5	0	1
Other	1	6	0

The speech acts reveal three descriptive differences. First, community members' participation in the public hearings declined from the first virtual public hearing in November 2020 to the in-person public hearing, April 2022. Second, the farmer/farming industry and academics/organizational leaders remained steady over all public hearings. Third, the virtual public hearings garnered the most participation with a drastic decline for all groups during the in-person public hearing. I speak to this decline in more detail in the conclusion, but through my observations of attending the virtual public hearing and in-person hearing, Covid19 impacted in-person participation.

The NC DEQ staff facilitated and thereby controlled the flow of the meeting. In each public hearing transcript, this group was tasked with opening the meetings, explaining the meeting process and proper decorum for making verbal statements. Before comments were received by participants, an individual representing NC DEQ provided instructions on how to participate in the virtual public hearings: "*Due to the number of registered speakers, oral statements will be limited to up to two minutes for each speaker in order to hear as many citizens as possible. Likewise, speakers will not be allowed to yield a portion of their allotted two minutes to other speakers. You may still submit full written comments to the DEQ. I will call the names of each of the pre-registered speakers in order. And our WebEx host will unmute the speaker when it is their turn to speak. I will also announce the names of the next speaker in the queue so they can prepare to provide their comments when their names are called to speak. Please do not start speaking until the WebEx host has indicated that your microphone has been unmuted. Your time will begin. When the WebEx host has unmuted your microphone, the WebEx host will keep track of your time…*"
NC DEQ's explanation of when and how public speakers would be able to speak illustrates the extent of the power that the NC DEQ exerted over the public hearing process.

The NC DEQ also provided a general overview of the biogas permitting process: "*…Tonight. I will provide a brief overview of the applications that we have received for permit modification at four swine farms related to the Align, renewable natural gas or RNG project. Each of these applications were received in December 2019 and have been reviewed for compliance with applicable laws and rules…"*

Both the diction or word choice of the technical expert group, NC DEQ, reads as professional, formal, and reflective of language that appears void of emotion or bias. When the technical expert group, NC DEQ, discusses biogas permits, they continue this professional and formal language referring to hog farms as ‘swine farms’ and ‘modification’ as opposed to changes. In my observation data, the term "swine" is not used in the everyday language of the communities I engaged, interacted, and volunteered alongside. Because the technical expert group dictates meeting flow and tempo, word selection and tone is also dictated when NC DEQ officials speak. Therefore, the formal and professional style of communication has already been established, and it is up to the speaking groups represented to either shift or control the narrative. Within public hearing space, both virtual and in-person, NC DEQ established the flow of communication and thus the flow of power. Through analysis of how the other speaking groups respond, I can determine power exchanges if any.

Despite the number of participants at the virtual and in-person meetings, the data suggest that there is still a marked difference in diction, word choice, between community residents and other speaking groups as it related to supporting or opposing the NC DEQ approving permits for the development of biogas digesters on hog farms. As it related to community residents, this group utilized diction that was the most distinct from the technical experts and all other represented speaking groups. Community residents, which included citizens of both Sampson and Duplin counties as well as individuals who had ties to Sampson and Duplin counties via their proximity to the counties or connections to people within the counties, used fewer

words in their speech acts, largely avoided technical jargon, and spoke as representatives of themselves or their families.

One community speaker in response to biogas development on hog farms responded: "*I mean, I'm 58 years old. I have children that's coming up behind me. I mean, where we live, we, we just won't have, uh, they won't have a future with the smell of this hog waste. So I don't care what you do with it. If you get rid of one problem, the other problem is gonna come on the other end. So that's what I'm, that's, that's what I'm complaining about tonight.*" The community resident refers to biogas as hog waste, references their children and age, but provides little technical details or knowledge of the details of biogas development.

Another community resident responds with a similar diction and tone: "*I thought we were getting natural gas, and then I find out that we're getting biogas to help, uh, five or six family farms. And I'm all, and I'm all for that because a lot of my family work for the family farms and we needed something to offset the spray and the lagoons overflowing, killing our fish and all of those things. But I just don't understand why we weren't notified in a different manner than just at a town's meeting, where it was okay to start this project in Duplin and Sampson County*."

Although biogas was mentioned or referenced at times by community members, community members continued to resort to focusing on hogs and waste rather than the more specific terms of 'biogas' or 'swine.' As one community member proclaimed, "Y*es. So I think that, um, they should, um, abolish that act because, um, we, uh, our Black neighborhoods have been here for so long and we have been dealing with these hogs for about 30 years and anytime you dealing with hogs it's*

always on the bad end of what we, uh, what we need for our community. I think that, uh, um, having gas running through our community should not be permitted. I think that we should also have a meeting and have everybody in that community to vote on what they want in their community. And I think that, uh, it is the wrong idea for, to try to make gas out of this here, uh, hog. Thank you."

The continual references to 'hogs' and waste' by community members rather than 'biogas' and 'swine' suggest the community's decision to insert their language and thereby attempt to assert their power at a hearing that had already been created to reject this language. Community members reference family and speak plurally regarding the impacts of the biogas development. The focus on family and lack of focus on biogas development, contrasts the institutional stakeholders, farmers/farming community, and academic partners who primarily centered their comments around various aspects of biogas development, thereby, I argue, setting the topic of discussion allows for controlling the narrative. These examples illustrate that community residents are not contributing to the narrative already predicated by the public officials of NC DEQ that arranged and facilitated the meeting leaving them at a disadvantage to be able to control or be included in the narrative around biogas development. By not utilizing the language choices of the meeting facilitators, as well as farming community and academic/organizational leaders, community residents are effectively stripped of accessing power through language despite showing up and providing testimonials. Despite their being a social exchange of words, there does not seem to be an exchange of power. Rather power is being exerted on the community members by virtue of NC DEQ controlling the narrative.

The farm/farming industry and academic/organizational leaders on the other hand, utilized more words, including technical jargon, and spoke primarily from an individual perspective or representing an organization. The farm/farming industry included farmers that described themselves as third and fourth generational farmers as well as farming industry leaders such as a representative of the North Carolina Pork Council. The following farmer made their case for biogas development: "*…and as a local farmer, I am excited about the new opportunities that RG [renewable gas] has to offer for our community. Eastern North Carolina is positioned to become a leader in this RNG [renewal natural gas] production. The project converts existing methane into clean, renewable energy, which reduces carbon emissions. This project gives North Carolina farmers and families the opportunity to lead the charge in this new manure management practice that facilitates increased sustainability and invites new renewable energy businesses investments to our area*."

The farmer utilizes shared language in describing the biogas development as the technical experts, but also shared language with community members. This ability to code switch, I argue, is a demonstration of how the status quo is maintained in the public hearing space.

Academics/Organizational leaders were represented by speakers who introduced themselves as professors and doctors as well as community organizers. A nonprofit organization representative had this to say regarding biogas development: "*... The process of throwing a tarp over swine cesspools capturing some methane and touting it as sustainable and renewable, as I have stated before, is a band aid over the larger issue. That issue is the perpetuation of the lagoon and sprayfield system of*

waste management on swine CAFOs. The system is not and never has been a sustainable system. It is antiquated. It has no place in our environment and in our communities…"

The nonprofit representative utilized the word, swine, and methane, in describing the biogas process, similar to the farmer and technical experts. By aligning with the technical expert group in terms of vernacular diction, I argue the academic/organizational leader-group and farm/farming industry-group were able to participate fully in the predetermined power-structure created by rule-making within the NC DEQ government organization. Because the community speeches largely failed to exhibit the technical language and verbal lengthiness, their public opportunities did not align with the diction that was established through representatives of NC DEQ.

Figures 3.2 and 3.3 are word clouds created to provide a visual of speech acts from academic/institutional and farming groups on the left and community groups on the right.

Figure 3.2: Academic/Institutional/Technical

Figure 3.3: Community Residents

Discussion

Words carry power, but all words do not carry the same amount of power. My findings suggest word choices dually reinforce and destabilize power dynamics within public hearing spaces. Analysis of the transcripts suggested community speakers rarely utilized technical language within their speech acts and when they did utilize technical language it was not the focus of their speech. For community members, the lack of technical language usage and shorter speech verbiage seem to reflect a lack of access to the embedded power created through the process and protocol of public hearings. As Miller-Travis (2024), an environmental justice leader who helped develop the United Church of Christ's *Toxic Waste and Race* report, public hearings have to be managed effectively: "Fannie Lou Hamer already said, "I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired." We need to prepare for the spaces." By preparing, Miller-Travis explained that residents needed to articulate their concerns through the right language, which is more technical, data-driven, and reflects understanding of the policy and rulemaking at play. Drawing from Miller-Travis, I refer to this jockeying as rhetorical posturing. I coin and define rhetorical posturing as the ways speakers position themselves through their language to reflect the dominant language structure. The community speech acts that I analyzed, although personal and emotional, did not reflect the overall technical sophistication that Miller-Travis encouraged which would allow community members the rhetorical posture to be effective. Thus, community residents were unable to access power through their speech acts although they were able to access participation.

Participating in public hearings without accessing the tools to exact power through speaking, confirms previous research on public participation particularly as it relates to environmental decision-making, legitimacy and fairness (Dietz et al., 1989; Beierle, 1999; Smith & McDonough, 2001). Community residents, despite showing up in public hearings, are rendered illegitimate because they do not speak the language of those in power even though they have the power to participate. I see this relationship being an illustration of what Lukes (1977) would call the "latent stage of power." The NC DEQ officials dictated the dominant narrative of the public hearing via its technical vernacular, influencing community members who did not utilize this language to not be taken as seriously by NC DEQ as the speakers who did utilize the dominant language.

Rhetorical Posturing

Although community members did not speak the same language of the technical experts, academics/institutional organization leaders did, and they utilized their language to largely advocate against biogas development. Yet, NC DEQ still made the decision to authorize biogas permits. One could argue that language did not matter since academics/institutional organization leaders used the language of the dominant group, the technical experts, and they too mostly opposed biogas permitting. NC DEQ had already determined its course of action, and the public hearings were just window dressings. Perhaps this is the case. I argue that the most subordinate group, community members, did not truly get to participate in the exchange of power, because of the rhetorical posturing that NC DEQ and other speaking groups were engaging in. Rhetorical posturing from stakeholders speaking

for or against at-risk communities unconsciously diminishes their advocacy efforts by ostracizing those communities even further by utilizing different speech acts. Due to rhetorical posturing, it is difficult to determine community members' full agency and advocacy until they can fully participate as their organic selves.

Environmental Justice and Power

There are 17 guiding principles of Environmental Justice which were drafted and adopted in 1991 in Washington, D.C. at the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. These principles outline how best to advocate, protect, and resist environmental degradation and harm to communities of color, past, present, and future. One of the principles, principles #7, focuses broadly on policy and participation:

7) Environmental Justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.

To determine how well industries, policy think-tanks, academic institutions, and governments are contributing to public policies that are “free from any form of discrimination or bias” and allowing marginalized communities to “participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making," I examined public hearings as a research focus. As it relates to the 12 Principles of Environmental Justice developed in 1991, principle #7 “*...demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level*…” continues to set the bar and take to task public hearing spaces as places of equality. Despite open access and inclusive, technical measures, how a person speaks

is often more important than who gets to speak. From this vantage point, there is still much work to do to make sure participants are "equal partners at every level."

Creating equality on every level and every space requires understanding the dynamics of power on every level and every space. Delpit (1988) would most likely suggest increasing equality is also understanding the culture of power, the "codes or rules for participating in power" (p. 282). Public hearings spaces have their own cultures of power created primarily through language. Ngugi (1986) also asserts that language creates culture: "...language transmits the images of the world contained in the culture it carries. Language as communication and as culture are then products of each other" (p. 15). Analyzing the speech transcripts reveal the codes or rules for participating in power through public hearings and they reflect why the 12 principles of Environmental Justice were forward thinking to include the right to equal participation at every level of decision making as one of their 12 tenets. Language produces culture, and culture produces power. The type of language employed determines who participates in the production of power.

Because I focused on public hearings in rural counties and communities, it would be ideal to compare public hearings within urban settings to determine if similar rhetorical power tactics are at play during speaking opportunities. It is also important to understand the socioeconomic environments of the communities that participate in public hearings. For example, Sampson and Duplin Counties have 23 and 20 percent, respectively of their residents living in poverty compared to Wake County, home to the state's capital, at 8%. In future research using an intersectional

lens, I am prepared to explore how socioeconomic demographics may impact speaking opportunities during public hearings.

With the drop-off in speech acts during the in-person public hearing, this could suggest that in-person public hearings have created other invisible barriers that residents experience but do not articulate. Further research could investigate if this is indeed the case because the number of speech acts for each categorized group decreased during the in-person public hearing. Arguably, the virtual hearings could be operating similarly to social media space where participants feel more galvanized and comfortable to express themselves behind the safety and protection of their technological devices than in person. Also, the impact of COVID-19 on participation in public, in-person meetings could also be a factor contributing to less participation. Ultimately, future research should pay close attention to analyzing virtual public hearings created by circumstances surrounding COVID-19 from 2020-2021 and compare in-person public hearings that occurred in 2022 and 2023 to determine if individuals participated in greater numbers virtually than in-person.

Conclusion

After several public hearings beginning in November 2020 and ending April 2022, on July 1, 2022, the NC DEQ issued general biogas permits for swine, cattle, and wet poultry operations despite the opposition from community members, academics, institutional and nonprofit leaders who provided virtual and in-person testimony at public hearings. Farmers, the farming industry, and politicians unanimously supported biogas permitting and development in Duplin and Sampson County. Environmental activists and organizers decried the general permits citing that

communities most impacted by the hog and poultry operations will have little to no input on the process of biogas development and the emission of waste from farms that utilize this technology (Olgesby, 2022).

My analysis of speech transcripts suggests how the speech acts exempted certain groups, community residents from sharing within the transfers of power between various speaking groups. Through diction or word choice, it becomes evident that technical language, the language of both the facilitators of the public hearings, farmers/farming industry, politicians, academics and institutional leaders, disadvantages community residents who speak from their own vernacular from participating fully as power is transmitted through language. Additionally, although I am not directly investigating public hearings in virtual and public space as places of activism, from my reading of the literature, I argue the need for more scholarship that examines the idea of seeing public hearing spaces as places where activism and resistance take place through speech acts. Despite community residents showing up and participating in the public hearing space, their diction choices segregated them from the other speaking groups demonstrating how power can be wielded through language to silence groups that show up and speak loudly.

Chapter 4: Rural Resistance and the Environment: Understanding How Rural Black Communities in Eastern North Carolina Engage in Environmental Justice

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

From Black Lives Matter participants to public hearing participants, I explored multiple ways that power manifests within movement space and spaces of activism. I argued that Black Lives Matter participants engaged in power negotiations when reconciling their individual activist identities with the collective identity of the movement. I also argued that in public hearing spaces, power is transferred through language between speakers as they use their rhetorical posture as a form of agency to assert their ideas through their speech acts. Recognizing that negotiations of power are happening within movement spaces and within spaces of resistance such as public hearings, is it possible to identify other pathways where power dynamics are at play when social movement development is just beginning? The development of engagement in the Environmental Justice movement in eastern, rural, North Carolina, offered me the opportunity to investigate additional pathways where power dynamics were taking place. Through participant observation and impromptu and semi-structured interviews in Sampson County located in rural, eastern, North Carolina, I investigated how Black people living in rural areas engage in the Environmental Justice movement organizations and how this engagement reflects potential power dynamics.

Sampson County

According to the Census Bureau (2022), Sampson county, with an average median income of $43,000 is second respectively regarding hog farm operations, in the state of North Carolina and combined with a neighboring county, Duplin, account for 40% of the state's 9 million hogs creating a ratio of 29 pigs for every one person (White, 2018). County residents have experienced documented health impacts such as upper and lower respiratory and gastrointestinal problems due to living near hog farm operations (Wing & Wolf, 2000). Additionally, Sampson County shares a biogas facility along its borders that will convert hog waste into a usable energy source (Sorg, 2021). Beyond the impacts of CAFOs and the biogas industry is the fact that Sampson County is also home to the largest landfill in the state (one of the most toxic in the nation), a wood pellet mill, and meat-packing plant.

Invariably, Sampson County is experiencing considerable environmental challenges notwithstanding the counties' general vulnerability to natural disasters such as hurricanes due to its proximity to the coast of North Carolina. Additionally, residents from Sampson in 2018 and 2019 were plaintiffs in federal nuisance lawsuits against hog farms resulting in juries initially awarding $550 million in damages (Newsome, 2021). Residents from Sampson County have also successfully challenged toxic waste from being brought to the landfill as well as fought to receive a roughly $14 million grant to build a water well for a community that has been plagued by groundwater well challenges for decades (Atwater, 2023; Berendt, 2022). These examples show that Sampson County has an extensive history handling natural environmental disasters and environmental challenges created by industry. This also

provides a foundation to explore aspects of the environmental justice movement within Sampson County.

Research Question

Due to Sampson County's background in mitigating environmental pollution through litigation and community advocacy, as well as my personal experiences as a former resident, I wanted to determine how individuals and communities were engaging in aspects of the environmental justice work that was ongoing throughout the county. Ultimately, my overall research question is twofold: How do rural, Black community residents in eastern North Carolina presently organize themselves to engage in environmental justice and how do environmental justice organizations in rural Black communities in eastern North Carolina engage residents. By engage, I mean obtain and disseminate information, strategize and employ tactics to fight against environmental racism and inequality. By investigating these interactions, the process of power-building can be realized. I use power-building to describe the processes I observed through data analysis to specify them in rural space. I define power-building as the ways communities develop advocacy and organizing skills to empower themselves to challenge the status quo. To determine how power-building takes place, I turn to Aldon Morris (1984) conceptualization of the local movement center.

When Morris coined the phrase "local movement centers" to describe the collection of local groups and organizations that coordinated collective action during the Civil Rights Movement, he argued how the Civil Rights Movement was sustained by local, preexisting networks rather than outside resources and networks (1981,

1984). According to Morris, these local movement centers were components of the internal engine system that helped the Civil Rights Movement build and successfully execute its mission. I utilize the local movement center framework as an investigative tool to understand how rural, Southern communities in eastern North Carolina are engaging in the environmental justice movement. In the literature review below, I present gaps in the literature, expound on the local center movement process, and end with a brief review of environmental justice literature on community engaged research and capacity building.

Literature Review

The Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, The Women's March Protests, and the Say Her Name Movement have been cited, studied, and researched for a myriad of reasons including to name a few, digital activism, participation patterns, intersectionality, as well as media and movement framing tactics (Khamis & Vaughn, 2012; Penney & Dads, 2014; Ahy,2016; Nummi et al., 2019; Ray et al., 2017; Brown et al., 2017; Ince et al., 2017; Fisher et al., 2017; Nicolini & Hansen, 2018). These movements speak to a broad array of literature that compares, contrasts, and investigates ways in which social movement activity is evolving, remaining stagnant, or adapting for a new generation of activists and movement empathizers. Lost within this research is how contemporary movement activity exists within rural environments. From Cairo to Ferguson, scholarship has focused on urbanized environments in major city hubs and industrial locales. However, very little attention has been paid to rural environments, particularly rural *and* southern environments *as well a*s Black communities in the United States.

At one time the South was the epicenter of social movement scholarship centered largely around the Civil Rights Movement spanning the late 1940's and into the early 1970's. Scholars benefited from the rich field of information that resulted from extensive data collection from interviews, print and news media sources to test ideas, theories and concepts (Morris, 1981; McAdam, 1982, 1988; Killian,1984; Jenkins & Eckert, 1986; Robnett, 1997). From the historical and well-known Civil Rights Movement, spanning the early 1940's to late 1960's, much of the sociological theoretical knowledge that we are privy to is the result of research stemming from the Civil Rights Movement. The era, the widespread media coverage, the access to Civil Rights Movement leaders and participants allowed scholars the opportunity to measure, assess, identify, theorize, and articulate insights about social movement emergence, recruitment, mobilization, framing, collective identity, and repression to name a few. This era also provided foundational frameworks such as Morris (1984) *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, which I utilize to reconsider social movement organizing in rural space.

Local Movement Centers

Morris (1984) published *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement* which introduces local movement centers. The local movement center concept closely aligns with Morris' previous notions that collective action is dependent upon internal organization (Morris, 1981). Both local movement center and internal organization speak to resource mobilization theory posited by McCarthy and Zald (1977). McCarthy and Zald (1977) theorized that resources are mobilized both internally and externally and often by constituents who are not committed to values that the

movement projects. Resource Mobilization pushed back on collective behaviorist theory, which focused on the irrational and spontaneous nature of social movements (Blumer, 1969). Also, Morris rejected the external mobilization concept and the de-commitment of movement actors. Morris, through his indigenous perspective theory, argues that local movement centers and local actors working within the tenets and values of the overall Civil Rights Movement and gathering resources locally were the engine driving the movement and not outside movement actors (Morris, 1984; 2021).

Morris emphasizes that it was the local movement centers, organized by local Black communities, that provided the organizational framework for the collective action that developed throughout the South. Morris emphasizes several components of the local movement centers: 1) leadership, 2) organizational structure, and 3) fundraising. According to Morris, the Civil Rights Movement benefited from young, charismatic clergy such as Rev. Martin Luther King Jr and Rev. T.E. Jemison (Morris, 1984). Organizationally, the local movement centers united community actors in tactics and strategies. Lastly, financial resources were homegrown, culminating from donations and gifts that were derived from within the community.

Morris' conceptualization of the local movement center provides the theoretical framework from which I conduct my research into Black, rural communities engaging in environmental justice in eastern North Carolina. When I first read and learned about local movement centers through Morris' writings, I immediately connected local movement centers with how I experienced organizing growing up in the rural south and experiencing the role of the Black-attended church within rural communities. From the components that Morris identifies within a local

movement center, networks, leadership and fundraising, I have largely focused my literature review along those three sections to provide context for how my scholarship engages with the previous and current academic social movement conversations.

Networks and Engagement

“However successfully a movement mobilizes consensus, however large its mobilization potential, if it does not have access to recruitment networks, its mobilization potential cannot be realized” (Klandersman & Oegema, 1987, p. 520). These recruitment networks that Klandersman and Oegema speak of are ultimately the focal point of my research. I seek to understand these networks in rural space and their connections to the environmental justice movement. Network research within social movement literature largely hinges upon determining who participates or engages in a movement or movement activity and how they are engaged or recruited to participate (Snow et al., 1980; Cable, 1992; Edwards & McCarthy, 2004; Powell, 2011). These social networks can be preexisting (Gould, 1995; Kitts, 2000) or can be tied to already participating activists (McAdam, 1988; Gould,1995; Passy, 2001).

Regardless of ties, social networks reveal much about the ways in which social movement activity transpires because these networks provide portals where information can be exchanged, and social movement organizations can be enriched. Researchers have been identifying these networks in local grassroot environmentalism (Andrews & Edwards, 2006; Ferguson, 2015; Staggenborg, 2020, 2022). However, understanding networks and how power is embedded in these networks presently in rural, southern, predominantly Black communities can add nuance to previous literature. As it relates to rural space and social movement

networks, this paper contributes to scholarship by including current experiences of residents living in rural spaces in eastern North Carolina who have shifted to become movement actors and provides insight into how power is achieved and maintained within these spaces.

Leadership

Crucial to the success of the Civil Rights Movement, according to Morris (1984), was the fact that local organizations benefited from young, educated, charismatic leaders such as Rev. Martin Luther King, Rev. Fred T. Shuttlesworth, and Rev. Ralph Abernathy. These men who were all in their late 20's, recent college graduates and licensed ministers, helped connect local Black communities, the Black church, and Black organizations seeking change to the expansive call to liberation and freedom from Jim Crow laws and regulations. In *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, Morris (1984) argues the interconnectedness of Black communities, churches, organizations, and charismatic leadership. Leadership and social movements have led scholars to consider various aspects of the relationship between social movements and leadership.

The characteristics of leaders and the types of social movement leaders as well as the changing personas of social movement leaders has helped researchers clarify the connection between social movement success, intersectional approaches to leadership, and gender's role in leadership (Eichler, 1977; Meyer & Whittier, 1994; Morris & Staggenborg, 2004; Schussman & Earl, 2004; Andrews & Edwards, 2006; Nepstad & Bob, 2006; Kretschmer & Meyer, 2007; Dorius & McCarthy, 2011; Trigg & Bernstein, 2016; Milkman, 2017). Additionally, the relationship dynamics of social

movement leaders and their followers according to scholars reveals insights on movement strategies, role defining, as well as tensions between inter-group experiences (Melucci, 1997; Robnett, 1997; Magnuson, 2007; Lin, 2010; Reger, 2016). In terms of theoretical approaches to social movement leadership beginning with Weber's (1978) conceptions of leader's style of authority (traditional, charismatic, ration), Ganz's (2008) assertions on new age leadership, and DeCesare's (2013) re-conceptions of defining a social movement leader, they provide several ways to think about social movement leadership. Their conceptualizations inform my research by providing models to conceptualize how power manifests in leadership development in rural spaces.

Funding

Morris (1984) revealed over 40 years ago that the Civil Rights Movement was funded primarily through indigenous funding rather than outside organizations and individuals that did not live in the south. Morris, in a push-back to early resource mobilization theorists (i.e. McCarthy & Zald, 1973), wanted to illustrate and debunk the notion that poor, Black people could not fund their own activism and were at the mercy of the resourcefulness and benevolence of wealthy donors and organizations living outside of the South. The subject of movement funding is not just illustrated by Morris' claims of indigenous funding because during the same era, there was a group of scholars publishing on the fundraising efforts behind the Unificationist Movement (Lofland, 1977; Bromley & Sharpe, 1980; Bromley, 1985). Whereas Morris reveals how vital Black communities' contributions living in the South were to the Civil Rights Movement, the Unificationist Movement reveals a sophisticated, tax-sheltered,

incorporated caravan of international and national companies that contributed to the growth of the Unification church and thus the movement. During this same time, Lo (1984) argued the impact that elite donor support could have on movement mobilization as it related to the California Tax Revolt in the late 1970's. Lo emphasizes that the "emergent multistate alliances," a term that he created, were crucial in making sure the property tax revolt movement was sustained by activism on the ground and funding from elite professionals (Lo, 1984). This professionalization status is also reflected in Staggenborg's (1988) in-depth review of multiple pro-choice movement organizations as some transitioned from informal to formal social movement organizations. Staggenborg argued that as social movement organizations moved to a formal organizational state, they increased funding and this increase in funding helped maintain the organization (Staggenborg, 1988).

The contrast of external versus internal funding for movement organizations will be critical in understanding the ways in which Black environmental organizations in the rural South are positioning their organizations financially and organizationally. Moreover, funding trends and who controls the funding collection and distribution process suggests the direction power is flowing within the community. Valocchi (1996) asserts that it was a funding shift of the NAACP to white liberals in the North that shifted the NAACP from being equal rights focused to integration in the 1930's (Valocchi, 1996). Barker (2008) elaborates on the influence that financial backers can have on a movement by illustrating the powerful foundations, Ford and Rockefeller that helped fund and shape the Environmental Movement in the 1960's. Determining and assessing funding mechanisms that support current environmental justice

advocacy will help shed light on whether new funding trends are developing, the role of local individual donorship, how rural communities are positioning themselves to monetarily support operations, and the power dynamics that manifest during this process.

Environmental Justice literature largely focuses on emphasizing the risks and health impacts of environmental racism but as Pellow (2000, 2013) asserts, more emphasis must be placed on the role of stakeholders including community organizers and organizations. Wing (2016) emphasized the role of community organizers but focused largely on their role in helping mitigate the health impacts of environmental inequalities. Moreover, understanding rural social networks amongst minority communities as it relates to environmental justice and environmental inequalities is understudied. Williamson (2020, 2022) focuses on community networks in rural spaces through her work on community engagement frameworks and capacity building but does so by assessing Environmental Justice literature that currently exists. However, the work of Williamson (2020, 2022) is very promising in centering the importance of capacity building through community networks in both urban and rural spaces.

Data and Methods

To investigate how Black people living in eastern, rural North Carolina engage in the Environmental Justice movement, I relied on a grounded theory approach during 3.5 years of participant observations and in-depth interviews (Timmermans and Tavory, 2007; Babchuk and Hitchcock, 2013). Participant observation began in the fall of 2020 and continued until the spring of 2024 in

Sampson County, North Carolina (see Appendix E). These residents have been impacted by the environmental strains created by largely unregulated poultry farms, dense populations of hog farm CAFOs, construction of a biogas facility, natural disasters such as flooding and hurricanes, as well as the location of a landfill and wood pellet mill in Sampson County. While immersed in the field of rural southern North Carolina, my fieldwork identified how individuals utilized their social networks to advocate for themselves and how environmental justice organizations tap into these networks through local movement centers. My ethnographic fieldwork also interrogated how power is negotiated and exchanged between community members and community leaders as advocacy and resistance takes place.

Observing and interacting with Black people living in the rural South in eastern North Carolina enables me to utilize Morris' (1984) local movement center as a theoretical and methodological framework within a region that is similar to the southern regions he described and depicted in his general body of work around the Civil Rights Movement. These southern regions were often impoverished, rural or slightly suburban, and situated economically between agricultural and service-related industries. By focusing on Black rural Southerners and their organizational capacity, networks, and affiliations, many other lines of research are developed including perspectives that have policy, political, and economic consequences. I used the local movement center conceptualization as a framework by focusing my observations, field notes, memos, and interview protocol on what I consider the three primary tenets of a local movement center. These tenets are 1) pre-existing and indigenous networks 2) charismatic leadership, and 3) financial support from home-grown,

indigenous communities. Although I have not yet identified other scholarship employing the local movement center as a theoretical methodological framework, Staggenborg (1998) does conceptualize "movement community centers" and describes the theoretical features of these community centers similar to how Morris described local movement centers.

In order to investigate the development of and explore preexisting local movement centers, I relied on my field memos and notes collected over a three-year period as a participant observer to investigate the invisible engagements and networks that do not show up strictly through interviews. According to Staggenborg (2022), participant observation allows observation of "movement dynamics" (p. 10, 2022). Staggenborg's participant observation study covered seven years of studying environmentalism in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and allowed her to intimately explore the relationship building and transitions that occurred within movement groups (Staggenborg, 2022).

Similar to Staggenborg (2022), by living within one of the rural communities, Highsmith, that I observed and served through volunteer organizing, I organically situated myself as a participant observer. Also, I relied heavily on the fact that I had been born and raised in Highsmith, and I would not be treated as an outsider. I shopped at the local grocery store. I attended church services within local communities. I frequented local restaurants, banks, and parks and encountered individuals as someone who was raised in the community, left, and had now returned. Because the community did not view me as a researcher, but as either a resident, extended family member or acquaintance, I was able to participate, observe, and talk

freely to community members. I did not hide the fact that I was conducting research, and I always asked permission to take notes, photographs, or recordings of any environmental degradation that I saw on their properties. As an additional site for participant observations, I volunteered at an environmental organization, Justice Energy.

Justice Energy began as a nonprofit organization in July 2020, and I began attending meetings around November 2020. Justice Energy provides resources and advocacy on behalf of community members living in Sampson County and surrounding counties. In my role as a participant observer, I began serving in Justice Energy as a volunteer and eventually joined the board of Justice Energy. As a board member, I continued to serve in a volunteer capacity receiving an occasional gas mileage reimbursement for travel. As a volunteer and board member, my responsibilities were varied. I primarily served to determine the needs of community members throughout Sampson County. I also helped identify and write grants for Justice Energy.

Additionally in my role as participant observer, I volunteered with the Water Support Team (WST), a group of environmental organizations and university partners throughout North Carolina. My primary role was to serve as a community liaison since I was a native of the county and secondarily as a graduate student researcher. As a researcher, I developed a Qualtrics survey to collect demographic information, information on environmental challenges impacting community members, and an option to be interviewed later (see Appendix G). As a participant observer, I was also a community liaison. In this role, I connected various communities in rural Sampson

County with academic researchers and environmental organizations to offer free water testing for residents concerned about their water quality. Over a two-year span, almost 200 residents had their water tested.

The field notes and memos included over 30 meetings that I attended beginning October 24, 2020, and ending February 22, 2024. Most meetings were held locally, predominantly Black attended churches while some were held in school gymnasiums and town halls. All the meetings held in 2020 and 2021 were held virtually via Zoom for safety purposes. By 2022, meetings were conducted in-person with options to log in virtually, via Zoom. I attended most meetings in-person and infrequently, I attended virtually.

I conducted both informal and formal interviews with community members impacted by environmental pollution. The majority of the informal interviews were captured during WST water testing events which occurred two to three weekends out of the year in 2021, 2022, and 2023. When I was present, I would speak with residents, introducing the WST and engaging with residents. Usually, these interactions would lead to longer conversations with community residents who wanted to share the history of their water woes. Because I was working in tandem with a team of researchers, I considered these talks to be impromptu interviews because I did not utilize my interview protocol directly. Instead, I went with the flow of the conversation, listening and asking questions in tandem with one or two other members of the WST. Based on my field notes, I spoke in-depth with 15 individuals.

Additionally, from the water survey results, 28 individuals noted they would be open to being interviewed further. Having been granted permission by the WST

team to use respondents in my own study, I conducted follow-up interviews with eight individuals, utilizing my interview protocol (see Appendix F). I failed to secure more interviews for two primary reasons. First, I waited too long between the time some respondents agreed to be interviewed and my initial contact. For example, some of the surveys were administered during spring of 2022, and due to personal reasons, I did not reach out until spring and early summer, 2023. Secondly, I lost opportunities to conduct more interviews because some of the people who agreed to be interviewed joined a lawsuit which prevented them from being interviewed outside of their legal representation.

Out of the 30 meetings I attended, there were several occasions where community members shared testimonials regarding their experiences with environmental harm to their air and water, during town-hall style community meetings (see Appendix H). During these meetings, community members were able to share their experiences managing environmental harms to their residence and or health. During these opportunities, I took copious field notes as community members shared their stories. During organized public meetings, I did not ask permission to take these field notes since most people in attendance would take notes, record via their phones, and sometimes take pictures. Moreover, I often volunteered to take meeting notes or compile emails that were later sent to community members. In the emails, I would share future meeting times, recap county commissioner meetings, and explain potential local and state policies that may impact communities. Some meetings did not take place in community settings such as churches or community buildings. Occasionally, I attended the local county commissioner's meetings held

every first Monday of the month. These meetings were recorded, and the agenda and meeting minutes were made available to the public. I attended these events in support of other community members who were making public comments and a few times, I made public comments as well. Below is a table describing my ethnographic methods in summary.

Table 4.1 Description of Ethnographic Methods and Data

Method	**Duration**	**Data Collection**	**Results**
Participant Observation	Fall 2021-Spring 2024	Note Taking Photographs Video	+700 hrs. of participant and observation time
Semi-Structured Interviews	Spring-Summer 2023	Recorded Interviews Transcribed Memos	Conducted 8 interviews-avg 25 minutes
Impromptu Interviews	Fall 2021-Fall 2023	Note Taking Photographs	Conducted 15 interviews
Meeting Attendance	Fall 2021-Spring 2024	Note Taking Photographs	Attended +30 meetings

Analysis

From a grounded theory ethnographic approach, I built my analysis by synthesizing my observations, field notes, meeting notes, memos, general note taking, and interview transcripts. To streamline my synthesis, I coded the data by the major tenets of Morris' local movement centers since it was my theoretical methodological framework. These tenets are leadership, organizational structure, and financing. Through these components of local movement centers, I compare and contrast the local movement center structure currently in place in predominantly Black rural

spaces with Morris' conceptualization of local movement centers during the Civil Rights Movement. Note: all names are aliases to protect the privacy of the residents in the county. In some cases, I do not include a first name but refer to the individual via a title so I can provide further protection to residents.

Findings

The local movement center framework suggests pre-existing organizational networks existed during the Civil Rights Movement, leadership was young and charismatic, and funding came from within the communities that faced the most severe oppression (Morris, 1984). Before introducing the local movement center framework, Morris describes why the local movement structure was so critical to the success of the Civil Rights Movement, the tripartite system of oppression-economic, personal, and political oppressive assault (Morris, 1984.) This system led to an environment of hopelessness over Black communities within the South.

In field research, I wanted to explore if environmental oppression had created some type of despair within the rural communities I was engaging with. The main question driving my inquiries with community residents became "who do you reach out to for help when you experience environmental challenges." Responses to this question reached saturation quickly. Residents either responded they did not know, indicted the local and state officials, or they attempted to mitigate the harm created by environmental pollution on their own. During a visit to Gwen Moore, a 70-year old community resident living near both hog and poultry farms, to collect a water sample, I asked her who she would contact to assist her with her possible water contamination, "*Well of course I can't think of anybody but myself that would be the*

one that would have to maintain my water. I would have to be willing to take the effort to do that. I would think-but I will say the county knows we need clean drinking water. And as a tax paying citizen, the county should be the one who helps us to get what we need."

Another woman, Mary Parker, who had experienced such severe groundwater contamination that it required a new filtration system to be installed, held the state accountable: "*I was thinking the state, I would think that the governing bodies of the state are supposed to do that. And as I was telling you before I read a long time ago, North Carolina lacks high environmental standards in the country."*

Both of these responses were typical, but the most typical response came from individuals who really struggled to think of anyone to call or advocate on their behalf. During one of my community visits in which I and other researchers would canvas the neighborhood, I encountered Rosa Fisher, a retired educator, who I had known since childhood. After catching her up with details on my extended family, my life post-high school graduation and my current research endeavor, she began to share her own family's issues with poor air and water quality due to the location of a landfill in her community. When I asked her who she contacted to share her concerns about air quality and water, her response was quick and to the point. "*No one. It is like we don't even matter. It is like we don't even matter.*"

Rosa continued by sharing with me that in the past she had made efforts to contact local officials such as county commissioners, and local NAACP officials, but after years of being ignored and seeing the environmental degradation continue, she had no confidence that her voice mattered. Residents responded similarly, telling me

they had little confidence that anything could or would change about their current environmental struggles through water and/or air pollution. The residents reflect a sense of hopelessness about the environmental harm impacting their communities. This was the general sentiment that I encountered when I began my research endeavors in the fall of 2020, and the local movement center framework would help me understand how engagement and advocacy could potentially develop within these rural, Black communities.

Leadership

According to Morris (1984), "A movement center exists in a subordinate community when that community has developed an interrelated set of protest leaders, organizations, and followers who collectively define the common ends of the group, devise necessary tactics and strategies along with training for their implementation, and engage in actions designed to batting the goals of the group." (p. 40, 1984). Integral to the local movement center was young, educated, charismatic, and what Morris describes as possessing, "newcomer status" (p. 44, 1984). The newcomer status describes the fact that the leaders of different southern organizations, Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), Inter Civic Council ((ICC) (, and the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR), were new to the cities that they represented. Morris cites that Rev. TE Jemison had only been in Baton Rouge for four years when he helped lead the first bus boycott in a southern city. Dr. Martin Luther King, president of MIA, had only been in Montgomery for two years, and Rev. C.K. Steele, president of ICC, had been in Tallahassee for four years (Morris, 1984). This newcomer status, according to Morris, helped leaders avoid

division and tactics utilized by white leadership to deter resistance within Black communities.

In eastern North Carolina, movement leadership has taken on a different face in some respects and aligns perfectly with Morris claims in other ways. One of the obvious differences was the demographics of leadership. In eastern, rural, North Carolina, leadership is senior in age and status and includes females in significant leadership positions. Justice Energy was founded by a 60+ year old, Black woman, Wanda Nicholson, who returned home after a highly successful career. As a well decorated professional and native of Sampson County, Nicholson returned to bring an environmental organization to a region that has been dominated by environmental challenges stemming from hog and poultry CAFO operations, a toxic landfill, a wood pellet mill, and a meat-packing plant. Like Morris' perspectives on the newcomer status-lacking familiarity with the current location in which one resides-Nicholson also reflected this status in that her return home occurred after leaving for over 40 years.

While talking with Nicholson about the history and reasoning behind establishing her nonprofit organization, Nicholson proclaimed that she aims to utilize her "lived experiences and prior contacts that I've had from prior positions" to leverage opportunities to highlight environmental injustice within primarily Black communities while also providing solutions and resources to community members (Nicholson, 2022). The prior contacts that Nicholson speaks of are derived from jobs that vary from working at an organization with mission based on various environmental protections to serving in North Carolina politics. Nicholson's

extensive federal and state network position her well to lead a nonprofit organization which will be discussed more fully under organizational structure. Clearly, through Nicholson's extensive lived experiences and wisdom, she veers from the youthful and hopeful young, educated Black men that Morris (1984) described in *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, potentially revealing a new leadership dynamic in place within Black, rural communities as well as a more nuanced conversation about gender and power. As reflected in my findings on local participants in Black Lives Matter, women are assuming leadership and auxiliary positions while utilizing their activist identity to fully express their agency within movement and organizational space.

Nicholson's first hire was a Black woman, Deborah Bright, who had retired and returned to the home and property bequeathed to her by her relatives making her also a newcomer. Beyond the newcomer role, the women do not directly reflect Morris' descriptions of leadership within the indigenous local movement centers driving the Civil Rights Movement by virtue of their gender and age. However, they do reflect leadership trends characteristic of the environmental movement at large in terms of gender and age (Wright et al., 2003; Rainey & Johnson, 2009; Gomez et al., 2011).

Beside the women leaders on the front lines of organizational development within the environmental justice context, there were many men also contributing leadership similarly to the charismatic leadership of the 1950s and 1960s despite the drastic age difference. These individuals are all Black men in their mid-50's and early 70's. Rev. Morris is a pastor of a local church experiencing water contamination at his residence and at the church he presides over. He is also very involved in a local

community watch program. Deacon Newkirk returned home after a career in law enforcement and is dedicated to bringing clean water to his community. Mr. Ellis serves in the leadership of a civil rights organization. Nicholson, Morris, Newkirk, and Ellis community residences are kept informed regarding environmental issues, policies, and legislation that impacts them. These men reflect Morris' assertions by serving in ministerial positions and organizational positions although they do not reflect the age demographic that was so integral to the leadership dynamic of the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. In Morris' scholarship, while the men holding leadership positions were often just a few years removed from their college and graduate studies, the male leadership in rural eastern North Carolina is much more senior in age and experience.

With respect to leadership, however, there are individuals that provide leadership similar to what Robnett (1996) described as "bridge leaders" (p. 1676). According to Robnett (1996), Black women assumed the role of bridge leaders because titled positions were largely unattainable and when women received titled positions, their agency to freely work within the movement was stifled by the title. Thus, "rather than focusing upon their limited positions within the movement, women shifted their leadership efforts toward bridging the movement to communities" (p. 1676).

In the case of the bridge leaders that I observed, these individuals were not just women but men who assumed no titles such as pastor, deacon, or executive committee member. These individuals consistently showed up for meetings, doing the unnoticed work of contacting community members, sharing information, and

effectively linking the environmental organization with the various communities throughout the county. By their consistent presence and actions, they built bridges creating trust within various communities so when individuals and organizations presented information, they had already been vetted through these individuals. For example, consider the work of Mr. Abdul, a retired Black man in his late 60's, and Ms. Munroe, a Black woman and retired nurse who suffered from various health conditions.

Having known Mr. Abdul as a young child, I reacquainted myself with him by attending a local county commissioner meeting. After the meeting, I went up to talk to Mr. Abdul and share some of the information from Justice Energy. Mr. Abdul let me know very quickly that he had been attending every county commissioner's meeting for years and questioned me where I had been. Although our reacquaintance started off rocky, by year two, Mr. Abdul had supplied an extensive file of documents chronicling his community's efforts to fight against environmental degradation. His documentation and eventual presence at community meetings ushered in new members that most likely would not have participated without Mr. Abdul's participation.

Similarly, Ms. Munroe provided documents from 20 years ago to support community advocacy for clean water. She provided historical evidence of the community's fight to access public water as opposed to their contaminated groundwater well sources. In addition, she called members of her church and encouraged them to attend monthly meetings hosted by Justice Energy. Ms. Munroe rarely spoke during these meetings, but her name resonated through every meeting

and during planning times, she was often the first person called to determine logistics and strategies. Ms. Munroe's and Mr. Abdul's presence as bridge-leaders was critical to organizing and developing plans to confront environmental injustice. Table 4.2 describes the leaders that reflect the shift from Morris' (1984) characterization of leadership.

Table 4.2 Local Movement Center Leadership Demographics

Name	**Age**	**Occupation/Role**	**Leadership Profile**
Wanda Nicholson	60+	Co-Founder, Justice Energy	Newcomer, Retiree, Female
Deborah Bright	60+	Administrator, Justice Energy	Newcomer, Retiree, Female
Rev. Morris	60+	Community Leader and Local Pastor	Native, Retiree, Male
Deacon Newkirk	50+	Community Leader and Deacon	Newcomer, Retiree, Male
Mr. Ellis	70+	NAACP Leader	Native, Retiree, Male
Mr. Abdul	60+	Bridge-Leader	Native, Retiree, Male
Ms. Munroe	60+	Bridge-Leader	Native, Retiree, Female

Organizational Structure

Morris (1984) asserted that the local movement centers that were developing in various southern cities and enabled successful bus boycotts in those cities provided an organizational framework that initiated the widespread activism and resistance

throughout mainly southern states that is historically and largely recognized from the 1960's (Morris, 1984). This organizational framework developed from several factors: the attacks on the NAACP which effectively suppressed the NAACP's ability to host offices in southern states, the network between the ministerial leaders of various southern cities that shared direct action tactics, and the unification of Black communities through the local movement center organizations such as the MIA, ICC, and ACMHR (Morris, 1984). This framework developed from the pre-existing local movement centers with ties to the NAACP, indigenous community groups such as the Women's Political Council, in Montgomery, Alabama, and young charismatic leadership such as Dr. King and Rev. Shuttlesworth. It also left an indelible blueprint for future movement organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and the Congress of Racial Equality to develop and deploy tactics and operations rapidly (Morris, 1984).

During 3.5 years of fieldwork and observing organizing develop from the ground-up, I note some similarities but very marked differences in the local movement centers developing within rural eastern North Carolina. First, there is a network of familiarity between community leaders that creates a loose but tight connection between leaders. For example, Wanda Nicholson, Deacon Newkirk, Rev. Morris, and Mr. Ellis were all standing members of the NAACP. They attended county-wide functions and attended various church services. It was virtually impossible for these individuals to not know each other because they shared mutual friends, affiliations, relatives, and childhood acquaintances. This homegrown network of relationships is very reflective of Morris' (1984) pre-existing indigenous network

that supported the Civil Rights Movement in that leaders knew of each other through other people that had either the same church, organizational or school affiliations and recognized the work that each other was contributing to the movement.

These affiliations were very apparent after only a few weeks in the field observing and engaging with community residents. For example, as a volunteer organizer, Rev. Morris provided contacts and made calls prior to me visiting certain communities and introduced me to Deacon Newkirk. Deacon Newkirk, in turn, introduced me to his pastor and church family, and Mr. Ellis invited me to give a presentation at a monthly NAACP meeting. Despite being a native of the area, there were so many communities in which I still needed to develop a contact to establish trust (in other words, know someone who knew someone) before I would be accepted. Beyond the NAACP which supplied the pre-existing organizational network to connect community leaders, the stronger pre-existing network was the interconnectedness of relationships. This supports Morris' overall assertions of the importance of indigenous, pre-existing, home-grown networks to fortify the Civil Rights Movement. From my observations and experiences, rural spaces still predominantly operate through making internal connections amongst community members.

Beyond the homegrown network shared between leaders, a crucial and distinct difference in the local movement center framework that I observed manifesting in rural, eastern, North Carolina is the contributions from and connections with PWI's, Predominantly White Institutions, relationships with Justice Energy and the at large rural, Black community. Through my participation and access to communication

channels with WST, the Water Support Team, I experienced firsthand the impact of the collaboration with academic institutions, the environmental organization, Justice Energy, and community residents and leaders.

Justice Energy, through its collaboration with several academic partners, has connected researchers and resources to community members through community leaders. This relationship thrives off of native Black community leaders trusting the newcomer, Black leadership of Justice Energy who in turn introduces them to academic researchers to conduct research and provide workshops at their respective community churches. Ultimately, this leads to an organizational dynamic where the Black community leaders provide access to predominantly white academic and institutional partners to provide research and resources back to the Black communities. This dynamic departs emphatically from Morris' assertions and truths that the work within the Civil Rights Movement was occurring indigenously to the movement (Morris, 1984). Moreover, the consequences of this intersectional relationship between white institutions, Black community leaders, and Black communities are yet to be fully realized.

In the last six months of collecting research, however, while concluding my fieldwork, community members who previously had been connected to Justice Energy, decided to discontinue attending meetings and communication with Justice Energy. According to the community members in private off the record meetings, Justice Energy was not representing their issues the way they wanted by opting for litigation and data collection rather than more dynamic public forms of resistance. Additionally, community members that severed ties wanted to control the data

collected on their communities. Due to maintaining relationships with community members, and in our casual conversations, this group is developing their own plans to incorporate as a non-profit and maintain leadership that resides within their own communities. Determining the success of partnerships between institutional partners within rural, Black communities will be critical to understanding contemporary local movement center success.

Funding

Morris effectively argued that the lion's share of not only organizational support but financial donations to the Civil Rights Movement was derived from predominantly poor, Black communities in the urban and rural south (Morris, 1984). Morris believed it important to debunk the popular notion that funding from the north and other wealthy donors made up most contributions to the Civil Rights Movement. For Morris, any local movement center framework also had a fiduciary component. As it relates to financial support of organizational development in rural, eastern, North Carolina, my fieldwork and observational data provided a vastly different landscape. As a researcher in the field and serving as a volunteer board member for Justice Energy, I was privy to financial statements and grant allocations. Based on data derived from board meetings, financial statements, and various conversations over three years in the field, donations came from grants and very little if any came from direct donations solicited from community members.

On the contrary, during one or two small, localized community meetings separate from Justice Energy, I observed and contributed to the call for donations to support individual community measures such as back-to-school events and

developing a larger community environmental justice presence. There could have been more localized giving opportunities, but these are the only two I observed. This suggests that communities were still utilizing "pass the plate" funding options in which residents donated in cash to the cause at hand with no clear fundraising objective except the call to "give what you can."

For the established environmental justice organization, Justice Energy, grant support and institutional grant support made up the total monetary funding budget during my duration as a board member, 2020-2023. Institutional grant support was grant funding through a university that also necessitated having a local community partner as part of the grant requirements.

This shift between organizational grant-funded support and community driven collection of local funds reveals some community groups are indigenously supporting their own direct community endeavors on a very small scale. However, the larger environmental organization, Justice Energy, that serves the surrounding communities derives its funding from grants and support of institutional partners. Because the organization has only been established less than four years, it remains to be seen what the consequences of grant funding as opposed to community-based funding will be regarding the aims and objectives of environmental justice organizing. Below is a comparative summary of Morris (1984) local movement center and what my findings revealed.

Table 4.3 Local Movement Center Compared Past & Present

Local Movement Centers	**Morris (1984)**	**Koonce (2024)**

Leadership	Young (20s-30s), Charismatic, College-Educated	Elders (60s-70s), Retirees, Life-Educated and College-Educated
Organizational Networks	Pre-Existing Organizations Interconnected Relationships, NAACP ties	Pre-Existing Relationships, NAACP ties, Developing PWI relationships
Funding	Indigenous funding through Black communities	Grant-supported and Institutional Funding from external partners Limited indigenous funding

Discussion

The local movement center framework enabled me to investigate over three years of fieldwork how engagement with the Environmental Justice movement developed in its burgeoning stages. The framework enabled me to explore how Black people living in the rural South engage in the Environmental Justice Movement and the ways communities develop advocacy and organizing skills to empower themselves to challenge the status quo. Throughout my discussion section, I utilize my analytic framework to tease out areas where power-building is developing, being strengthened or possibly weakened.

Power-Building

I began my analysis by attempting to describe the general tone of hopelessness that emanated from conversations either through structured or informal interviews with community residents. Residents did not see their environmental challenges-a toxic landfill, the proliferation of both hog and poultry industrialized farms, industrial

plants spanning a wood pellet mill and a meat-packing plant-improving any time soon. I argue that this hopelessness is similar to what Du Bois (1903) describes in asserting that Black people, post-slavery needed social power: "knowledge of the forces of civilization that make for survival, ability to organize and guide those forces, and realization of the true meaning of those broader ideals of human betterment…" (p. 413). I emphasize Du Bois' assertions of "knowledge of the forces of civilization that make for survival" and "ability to organize" (1903, p. 413). Community's residents' hopelessness stems from their lack of knowledge about how to mitigate environmental issues they face, and they lack the ability to organize around those issues which lessens their ability to build power.

Knowledge and organizing skills are vital components of power-building. Dorceta Taylor (2016) discusses the influential power-building strategies of the power-elite who were the progenitors of the American Conservation Movement. By brokering their wealth, power, and privilege, the power-elite controlled the social, economic, and policy impacts of the movement while also excluding minorities and most women from participation. The ability to build a dominant movement necessitates power, and throughout my analysis I explore how power develops through leadership, organizational networks and funding.

As it relates to leadership in rural Black communities, my findings highlight a common lived experience in rural areas; the younger generations move to more urban spaces, leaving no choice but for elders to maintain leadership positions for long durations of time (Cromartie, 1992; Massey, 2020). My fieldwork did not unpack a clear understanding of why the elder leaders were consistently maintaining leadership

positions. Occasionally, I would hear residents pushing for the need for more "young people to get involved."

It is important to note that even the youthful leaders that Morris highlights such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., were positioned in urban cities such as Mobile, Alabama as opposed to extremely rural towns and communities. This highlights a distinct geographical difference in the Black urban organizing cities such as Mobile, Alabama, Tallahassee, Florida, and Baton Rouge, Louisiana compared to small rural towns and communities without bus transit, taxi services, and the like are non-existent. Future research is required to determine if elder leadership in very rural areas void of urban transportation systems is the norm. My fieldwork provides some evidence that, continued elder leadership is by virtue of a lack of youthful, college graduates living within their communities are continuing to remain in leadership positions to cover those generational voids.

Reflecting on the young, diverse, gender non-conforming, and largely female-led leadership within the Black Lives Matter movement that I encountered and comparing it to the elder female and male leadership status of community leaders and organizational leaders in rural space suggests the potential for a sharp divide between urban and rural movement spaces. Where participants in local Black Lives Matter chapters organized to resist police brutality and overt and covert state-sanctioned violence against Black communities, participants and leaders within the rural communities were organizing around the need for clean water and/or clean air. This differing leadership demographics and mission objectives needs rigorous investigation as it may speak to broader social and political differences between

Black urban spaces and Black rural spaces that also speak to different power differentials.

I connect these differences explicitly to recent presidential political campaigns of the Democratic Party. For example, in March 2020, Senator Bernie Sanders hired Philip Agnew, a co-founder of the social justice organization, Dream Defenders, as a senior advisor to his presidential campaign. Dream Defenders like Black Lives Matter was established after the death of Trayvon Martin and was dedicated to ending gun violence and mass incarceration. Senator Sanders as well as Vice President Joe Biden were seeking to win enough votes to be the democratic nominee for president. Philip Agnew represented the youthful, charismatic leadership that was apparent in many social justice organizations. Bernie Sanders had rallied the college vote through strong progressive ideas on student debt and universal healthcare (Altamura and Oliver, 2022). However, despite the mass youthful appeal and support for Senator Bernie Sanders, Vice President Joe Biden secured the nomination after 79-year-old Representative Jim Clyburn from South Carolina endorsed him to be the presidential candidate (Oprysko and Caputo, 2020). Despite Bernie Sanders' progressive platform and the support of social justice leaders such as Agnew, the elder leadership and political power of Rep. Clyburn sealed the deal for the eventual President of the United States, Joe Biden. I argue my research findings suggest that elder leadership in rural southern space reflects the power that Black elder leadership in southern states continues to maintain. Although urban social justice movements illustrate a different image of leadership in gender, ideology, and age, the elder leadership depicted by my

research findings is important in understanding political environments, social policies, and the Black South in general.

Since several of the community leaders I mentioned held religious titles and were directly affiliated with churches, it is important to highlight the lasting impact that the role of the Black church within rural communities contributes to organizing efforts. Lincoln (1974) says "to understand the power of the Black Church it must first be understood that there is no disjunction between the Black Church and the Black community" (p. 5). Out of the 30-plus meetings that I attended over the last 3.5 years, less than five were held in non-church facilities. Although clergy did not dominate leadership actively, it was clergy who authorized the usage of their fellowship halls and church sanctuaries to be utilized for planning, meetings, and workshops. Through passive, invisible leadership of the Black church, Justice Energy thrived by connecting with surrounding Black communities. This suggests the church's role, whether active or passive, contributes significantly to a community's ability to build power, organize and be educated around environmental issues (Patillo-McKoy, 1998; Barnes 2005).

The new local movement center structure I identified in the rural south, however, has the potential to threaten power-building dynamics such as indigenous financing and youthful, charismatic leadership, that some scholars such as Morrison, argue are the hallmarks of the Civil Rights Movement (1984). I argue that this possible threat comes from the reliance of outside funding by grants and heavy reliance on relationship connections with predominantly white academic institutional partners. Rather than indigenous movement center frameworks, rural communities are

potentially developing institutionally driven movement center frameworks where the Black community becomes the subject, and outside academic institutional partners become the subject experts.

Pellow and Bruelle (2005) are more explicit in their assertions about grant-supported funding taking the place of community support: many environmental justice organizations have little to no membership base, even in their own backyards. Instead, these groups have survived hand-to-mouth on grants awarded by foundations and by government agencies and through collaborative ventures with larger environmental groups. What happens in many cases is that these activists become token "representatives" for their entire communities, vested with the authority to speak not only "for themselves" but also for thousands of others" (p. 14). How this will impact power-building efforts in Sampson County remains to be seen through future research. However, the recognition that local movement centers may not be indigenously financially supported as they were in past movement spaces surrounding the Civil Rights Movement indicates a considerable shift in how scholars conceptualize movements in predominantly Black spaces that are represented by outside predominantly white institutional partners.

I argue that the power-building experienced during the heyday of the Civil Rights Movement will not be duplicated by external partnerships steering the aims and objectives of Black communities because rural communities are very much tethered to preexisting and indigenous networks. It also raises questions about the state's additional role in environmental justice activism and advocacy. Public academic institutions are institutions of the state, and thereby could potentially favor

environmental outcomes that favor the state rather truly advancing environmental justice (Pellow and Brulle, 2005)

Another major institutional role in local community organizing was the role of PWIs, Predominantly White Institutions. During the Civil Rights Movement, public universities, whether PWIs, or Historically Black Colleges and Universities, HBCUs, were forbidden to participate in activism and organizing because southern states threatened to freeze funding. This is not the case for public and private universities today, as community engaged research is a very popular and growing aspect of academic research and scholarship (Christopher, McCormick & Young, 2008; Vidra, Gallagher & Wilson, 2019; Hood, Campbell & Baker, 2023; Young et al., 2024). I argue that this creates a new paradigm for scholars studying contemporary movement spaces. PWIs are able to gain access to Black movement spaces through research endeavors. These are endeavors that Black community leaders invite and support. Do these partnerships improve Black communities or endear Black communities to the resources provided by the academic institutions? Boston et al. (2023) suggests the answer is mixed. Through interviews with community members in an Environmental Justice organization, Boston and colleagues found that inequalities existed in how empowered the communities were to contribute and solve their own problems when partnering with research partners (Boston et al., 2023). The local movement center framework according to Morris (1984) was so integral to the success of the Civil Rights Movement because it ensured that Black communities could solve their own problems. The new local movement center structure that I investigated questions if

this is still the case when so much of the power lies outside of the community's control.

Conclusion

Utilizing Morris' local movement center-framework provided several contributions to the field of knowledge. First, the resiliency of Morris' ideas surrounding local movement centers can be explored in a contemporary landscape. Second, I provide context for contemporary rural networks. Lastly, I cast light on the interactions between rural community members at the individual level, and environmental organizations at the macro-level Future research endeavors will be interviewing community leaders and academic partners to more fully understand the relationship cycle developing in real time in eastern North Carolina. Moreover, I want to examine in what ways, if any, community residents are recognizing the places of advocacy that have been developing around their communities in the past four years. I also plan to utilize Morris's theoretical framework on local movement centers and engage this framework with the current Environmental Justice Movement to explore its existence in rural, southeastern North Carolina. Morris' framework was grounded in financing, leadership, and organizational networks being rooted within Black communities, but my research demonstrates that some components of local movement centers are no longer from indigenous sources but are derived from external sources. I believe my findings build and extend the local movement center and with further research, I can determine if other aspects of local movement centers have shifted from indigenous to external stakeholders and organizations. Additionally, since national migration patterns for Black Americans have re-shifted to

the south, understanding rural networks becomes even more important (Falk, 2004; Frey, 2004; Hunt, 2008, 2013; Pendergrass, 2013). I look forward to interrogating these questions and continuing the work of exploring new trends in movement activity power dynamics in rural Black spaces.

Chapter 5: Concluding Thoughts on Power in Movements and Activist Space

Bell (2022) in identifying the courtroom as a space of resistance explained that "...resistance happens in space—it is not devoid of spatiality. Marches, for example, happen somewhere, resistance takes place. And the character of that space both enables and constrains resistance practices" (p. 1540, 2022). My research investigates the space of resistance in various ways by analyzing power dynamics that develop internally and externally when movement actors gather, advocate, participate, and organize. I focus on power dynamics in three unique spaces of resistance: 1) Black Lives Matter local participants in urban areas 2) Public Hearings in the rural South, and 3) Environmental Justice advocates and participants in the rural South.

From the urban to the rural, Black activism and advocacy is happening through different venues, platforms, and engagements. Age matters. Lived experiences matter. Networks matter. Weaving through all the activism, participation, and movement encounters is the invisible but palpable notion of power. I defined power as the unspoken and invisible force that prevails and provokes individuals and groups to employ their agency to obtain or share dominance within marginalized spaces. Through interviews, participant observation, and discourse analysis, I investigated and isolated power dynamics and exchanges through activists' decision-making processes, speech patterns, and organizing and advocacy.

In the introductory chapter, Chapter 1, I referred to power as an origami. The layers of power that manifest within movement space can fold upon one another,

building matrices that often remain hidden in plain sight. Weber alludes to the power matrix as domination of a subordinate despite resistance. Du Bois (1903) argues that social power is necessary to overcome a subordinate state. Lukes (1974) emphasizes focusing on the invisible, latent stage of power that manifests and influences people unknowingly. Delpit (1988) implores scholars to recognize the culture of power and the unspoken but clearly articulated rules that guide it. Collins (2017) asserts intersectional approaches unveil new opportunities to identify power structures. I add to the already full repository of power scholarship by arguing that beyond the larger and obvious fight for power between marginalized groups and hegemonic opposition is a hidden sphere of power internal to the movement spaces of the marginalized. No movement space is perfect, and the fight externally often happens while internal power shifts and dynamics are taking place internally. As Robnett (1997) reminds us, women became bridge leaders not because they simply acquiesced to the patriarchal leanings of the Civil Rights Movement. Rather, they negotiated ways to exist within the Civil Rights Movement space exercising their agency and self-empowerment. Their lack of a title did not eliminate their power.

Chapter Reflections

Overall, I examined how the manifestation of power was occurring in multiple ways and how movement actors responded in multiple ways. Specifically, in Chapter 2, "Determining Agendas. Describing Motives. Dissecting Leadership: Exploring Local Chapters of Black Lives Matter," I investigated empowerment through the voices of participants in various local Black Lives Matter chapters along the east coast ranging from New York to Tennessee. Through the interviews, many people I

interviewed (Cheryl, Tonya, Malcolm, Aaron, and Kara) brought strong, individual activist dispositions to the local chapters of Black Lives Matter that they represented. Their organic dispositions towards activism highlighted the power of activist identity as a precursor and catalyst for movement building. Activist identity broadly defined is the collective of individual markers that indicate a person's proclivity to be deemed an activist or participate in activism (Braungart & Braungart, 1990; Bobel, 2007; Corrigall Brown, 2012; Horowitz, 2017, Craddock, 2019). Through activist identity, I provided how personal experiences, and activist environments nurtured the ability for participants to negotiate their individual activist identities as they merged with the broader collective identity of Black Lives Matter.

I also reported the negotiations made between participants' individual identity in Black Lives Matter and the overall group identity of Black Lives Matter. Citing Robnett (2005) who asserts that participants in movements do not always agree and connect with all values and ideas purported by the movement organization, I utilize participants' narratives as they critique and challenge tenets of Black Lives Matter's movement statement, but still identify and support the movement. These negotiations suggest internal transitions of power as participants grapple with how much of their personal identity they will maintain while accepting the collective identity created by the movement.

In Chapter 3, "Public Hearings and Environmental Justice: How Language Is Utilized as a Tool of Power," I investigated the invisible power dynamics embedded in language that manifested in speech transcripts taken from three public hearings in rural, eastern, North Carolina. I utilized discourse analysis to identify the ways in

which power manifests through speech acts in public hearing transcripts. Some research suggests public participation is subjective (Arnstein, 1975; Irvin and Stansbury 2004; Baker et al, 2005). My research proposes that one place of subjectivity can be in the vernacular. By analyzing speech transcripts based on hearings held in the rural south, I provided a new way of reconsidering public hearing spaces as sites of power dynamics. I suggest that speech acts can be disempowered by invisible barriers such as rhetoric. As Delpit (1988) reminds us, there is a culture of power, and those with primary access to culture spaces control the power dynamics within those spaces. The NC DEQ, the organizing, proctoring, and facilitating body within public hearing spaces, controls the direction that power will flow specifically through language. For community members who don't frequent government-controlled spaces, language annunciation differences and diction choices can severely hamper their advocacy efforts. Moreover, when advocates for marginalized communities engage in rhetorical posturing, the ways in which speakers position themselves through their language to reflect the dominant language structure, they themselves run the risk of further impeding advocacy efforts by verbally signaling separation from the group they claim to defend.

Lastly, in Chapter 4, "Rural Resistance and Environmental Racism: Understanding How Rural Black Communities in Eastern North Carolina Engage in Environmental Justice," I utilized my agency as a native of eastern North Carolina, a volunteer organizer and PhD candidate to determine if local movement center frameworks similar to Aldon Morris' (1984) conceptualizations in *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement* were applicable to today's rural Black spaces. Is it possible

that developing environmental organizations and community organizations are becoming power-building tools for rural, Black communities to engage within the Environmental Justice Movement? Through the local movement center framework, I examined the similarities and departures from Morris' (1984) original conceptualization of local movement centers. I suggest that leadership has aged in comparison to Morris' description of charismatic, youthful leadership. I further argue that funding is no longer primarily from indigenous community support but has in turn become almost fully grant-supported. However, it seems clear the Black church is still integral in the rural, southern environment of eastern North Carolina. The continuing prevalence of the Black church coupled with elder leadership is a viable framework for continuing to gain understanding of rural networks in rural, Black geographies.

Environmental Justice and Power

Although I conceptualized my research framework from a social movement perspective primarily, it is important to highlight that Environmental Justice scholars have and are continuing to contend with power. The Environmental Justice Movement itself, reflects a rich history of power contestation against local, state, and federal institutions regarding zoning procedures, environmental laws and federal orders or a lack thereof (Bullard, 1983; Mohai and Bryant, 1992; McGurty, 2007; Taylor, 2014). Moreover, Taylor (2011) suggests that environmental justice activism was occurring long before Warren County, North Carolina but is reflected in Harriet Tubman's reliance upon the environment for both guidance and strategy. Thus, from

this vantage point, Environmental Justice work is a continuation of Black liberation, and I argue more subtly Black power.

Theoretically, Environmental Justice scholars writing about the movement's resistance to the dominant power structures of the state, racism and class articulate various notions regarding power and powerlessness. I previously pointed out Taylor's (2016) description of power-elites and their ability through their wealth and privilege, to monopolize the American conservation movement and in the process exclude minorities and most women. Power-elites as a theoretical focus would be significant and helpful in pushing Environmental Justice literature theoretically, a point that Taylor makes in her conclusion on future direction of Environmental Justice research (2014). Bryant's (1985) paper, "Building Ideology and Organization for Social Change and Environmental Change" I argue is an implicit environmental justice power manifesto for environmental justice organizational building that extends power and does not contain it.

Pellow's (2016) theory of critical environmental justice provides a foundational theoretical underpinning that I utilized in Chapter 2 within the literature review to articulate the significance of the Black Lives Matter movement as a site for theoretical analysis. Pellow asserts that there are four main areas that a critical environmental justice framework can potentially address. These areas, according to Pellow, were understudied by "first generational" environmental justice scholars who were primarily focused on environmental injustice based on race and class dynamics (2016, p. 223). Within those four areas, Pellow explicitly articulates one area as the opportunity to assess perceptions of inequality and power and their entrenchment

within the state. Pellow (2016, 2018) calls for scholars to consider approaches for environmental justice that do not include the state, warning that due to the state's history of systematic inequality and hegemony, it is unfit to provide viable solutions to the communities most impacted by environmental racism and environmental injustice. During my fieldwork and participant observations for over three years, community members and legal organizations disagreed on the best pathway forward to environmental justice. Where litigation seemed like an obvious solution, community members were often looking for more practical and immediate solutions. Morris (1984) makes a similar point in clarifying why the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was able to advance its mission so quickly in the Black south. The NAACP's litigation strategy, although effective, was slow and procedural. Bus boycotts and sit-ins, although strategic, were not extensive processes that took multiple years.

Additionally, I argue Gaventa (1980) was doing the work on power that Pellow (2016) is describing. Gaventa, doing fieldwork in the Central Appalachian Valley amongst working poor, rural, and white people, set out to discover how power and powerlessness work in tandem to stymie rebellion. Through emphasis on industrial, unionism, and government regulatory agencies, Gaventa (1980) argues the entrenchment of power and inequality within the state that Pellow describes (2016, 2018).

The Environmental Justice scholarship is replete with literature and scholarship that contends power implicitly and explicitly. My research on public hearings in rural space, and the development of the Environmental Justice movement

in rural eastern North Carolina engages in the ongoing conversation about power that is rooted in slavery and abolition and being reimagined currently. For example, I consider the 17 Principles of Environmental Justice to be an early discursive framework to identify hegemonic power structures that restrict participation in environmental justice. Pellow's (2016) Critical Environmental Justice framework is another example of attempting to identify power structures possibly hindering organizing efforts. My research grounded in social movement scholarship and extending environmental justice literature is a continuation to imagine and reimagine new ways power manifests in movement space.

Future Research: AI and Power

When I consider the possible applications of my research and future research that interrogates power dynamics within movement spaces and internally to movement organizations, I immediately think about the spaces created through technological advances through artificial intelligence (AI) powered by machine learning's infinite consumption of knowledge. Artificial intelligence creates opportunities for power negotiations between humans and machines or perhaps more correctly stated, machines and humans since the strength and uniqueness of AI technology is its ability to learn without input (Burrell, 2016). This signifying difference positions AI to be a powerful tool of support and potentially as a threat to traditional systems and institutions of power. The study of AI's powerful data processes and technological evolutionary ability to learn on its own void of human input is ever-expanding in the field of social science (Prieto-Guitierrez et al, 2023). Holton and Boyd (2021) asserted that sociological analysis of AI is critical in making

sure sociology as a theoretical discipline is not undermined. Determining the impacts of machine learning and artificial intelligence-supported mediums and identifying how these new spaces of power disrupt more culture, governance, are vital (Hauer, 2019; Holton & Boyd, 2021; Pedwell 2024).

I argue conceptualizing new and futuristic frameworks from traditional frames to study dynamics of power within AI technologies would be beneficial from a theoretical and empirical perspective. By synthesizing new methodological frameworks to study artificial language (language created through AI) and artificial spaces (the spaces that AI technologies exist) as locations of power expands how we can process and theorize about power. Empirically, because AI technologies are both individualized and corporate, global and local, much work could be done through observation and experience in the micro and macro levels of AI research.

Appendix A: IRB for Black Lives Matter Research

Appendix B: Recruitment Emails

Appendix C: Interview Protocol for Black Lives Matter Participants

Can you tell me how you got involved with the Black Lives Matter (M4BL) movement?

1. Is there a specific event that really motivated you to take action?
2. I want to read you a portion of the mission statement from the Black Lives Matter movement website. It says "*Black Lives Matter affirms 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. It centers those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movements. It is a tactic to rebuild the Black liberation movement.*" So now that I've read that to you, how do you feel? What are your thoughts on, on the fact that Black Lives Matter is trying to focus on the marginalized and those who have been left on the sidelines?
3. It has been said that Black Lives Matter is a woman- centered movement. How do you feel about it?
4. What is your perspective on leadership in the movement on the local and national level?
5. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your involvement with the movement or the movement itself?

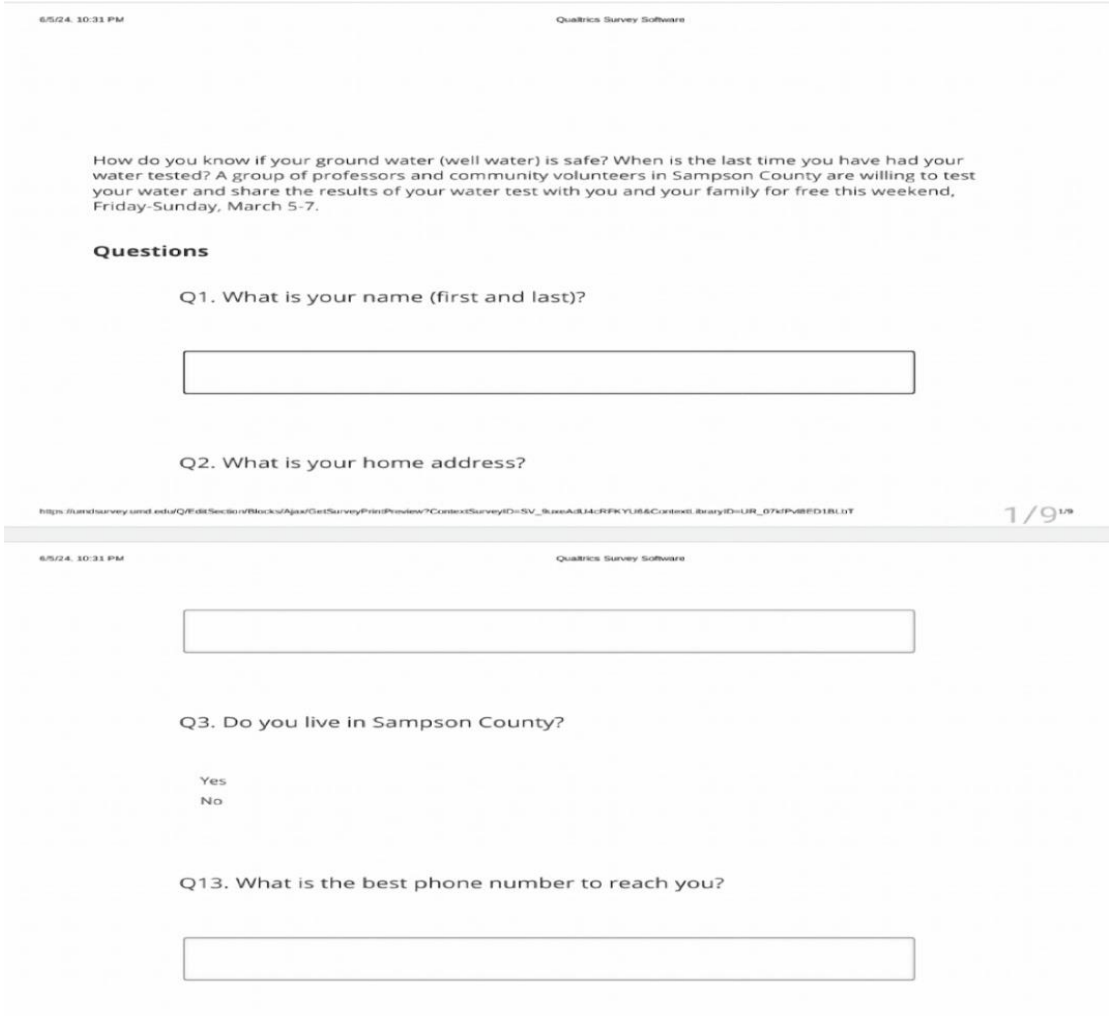
Appendix D: NC DEQ Advertisement via NC DEQ Website

Appendix E: IRB for Environmental Justice Movement Research

Appendix F: IRB-approved Interview Protocol for Paper 3

6. How long have you and your family lived in Sampson County?
7. What do you like most/least about living in Sampson County?
8. I know that you live near a (landfill, hog farm high flood plain or some combination of the three). What is that like?
9. Have your finances been impacted by the environmental hazard? Can you elaborate?
10. Has your health been impacted by the environmental hazard? Can you elaborate?
11. Have you reached out to anyone for help? What were their responses?
12. How does the rest of your family feel about the environmental hazard?
13. Are you aware of any organizations that could help you deal with the environmental impacts that you have experienced?
14. Is there anything you would like to add that I have not covered?
15. Are you willing to do a follow-up interview?

Appendix G: Example of Qualtrics Survey Created for Water Testing Group



6/5/24, 10:31 PM Qualtrics Survey Software

How do you know if your ground water (well water) is safe? When is the last time you have had your water tested? A group of professors and community volunteers in Sampson County are willing to test your water and share the results of your water test with you and your family for free this weekend, Friday-Sunday, March 5-7.

Questions

Q1. What is your name (first and last)?

Q2. What is your home address?

https://unclsurvey.unc.edu/Q/EditSection/Blocks/Ajax/GetSurveyPrintPreview?ContextSurveyID=SV_9uxeAdJ4cRFKYU6&ContextLibraryID=UR_07klPv8IFD1BLhT 1/9

6/5/24, 10:31 PM Qualtrics Survey Software

Q3. Do you live in Sampson County?

Yes
No

Q13. What is the best phone number to reach you?

Q4. Do you use well (ground) water at your home?

Yes
No

Q7. How deep is your well? (If you don't know, just leave blank)

Q8. Do you live near a landfill?

Yes
Maybe
No

Q9. Do you live near a hog farm?

Yes
Maybe
No

Q10. Do you live near a poultry (chicken or turkey) farm?

Yes
Maybe
No

Q4. Do you use well (ground) water at your home?

Yes
No

Q7. How deep is your well? (If you don't know, just leave blank)

Q8. Do you live near a landfill?

Yes
Maybe
No

Q9. Do you live near a hog farm?

Yes
Maybe
No

Q10. Do you live near a poultry (chicken or turkey) farm?

Yes
Maybe
No

Q24. Do you drink your tap water or do you use bottle water or a filter?

Q20. What is the best time of day to get a sample of your tap water (We have bottles to collect water that we will provide you)? Water testing will happen March 6-8

- Anytime this weekend will be fine.
- Saturday between 9am-12pm
- Saturday between 1pm-5pm
- Sunday between 9am-12pm
- Sunday between 1pm-5pm
- Monday between 9am-12pm

Q15. Would you be willing to share your experiences living near a landfill, hog farm, or poultry farm? If you choose to share your story,

your information will be kept confidential and will not be publicized without your permission.

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- Might or might not
- Probably not
- Definitely not

Q19. Is there anything you would like to share about your drinking water?

Appendix H: Example of Community Meeting Advertisement

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