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How organizations can show support for BLM Movement from inside out

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Dr. Amber Kelly, PhD, MHS, MS (Photo provided)

Across the United States and throughout the world, nonprofit and for-profit organizations have shown their solidarity for Black Lives Matters during the COVID-19 pandemic via social media, sending countless emails to supporters and posting announcements on their websites. Although these messages of solidarity show a collective awareness, they do not embody authentic support. Organizations have to move beyond actions that garner public attention. The first step is to assess whether organizational practices align with messaging. It is time to ask the tough questions that have

gone unaddressed and contribute to the inequities in our society.

Current injustices, including police brutality against Blacks, are not new; however, some organizations felt compelled to publicly express their support of Black Lives Matter in fear that their silence would negatively impact their bottom line and standing in the communities they serve. The continuous posting of solidarity statements that do not reflect an organization's climate is disingenuous and does not help the Black Lives Matter movement's progression. Here are a few steps organizations can take to move in the right

direction.

Diversity in leadership

Showing support for Black Lives Matters includes showing support for Black leaders within your organization. Does your organization have Black representation within leadership roles? If so, do they feel supported? If not, how does your organization plan to address this lack of support for Black leadership? Is your established leadership willing to build a pipeline and mentor Black leaders to improve their upward mobility and success? Is leadership open to creating new roles? Is there a salary gap between Black and White employees; leaders in particular? Do the current organizational make-up, structures, and culture allow Black leaders to have a meaningful voice within the organization?

Supporting Black businesses

When your organization has the opportunity to employ a contractor, make supporting a Black

business a priority. Hire Black-owned organizations to meet your vendor needs. Consider working with Black-owned businesses in the neighborhoods where your organization resides and or serves. Also, consider helping fund new companies that are Black-led.

Listening and applying Black voices

Some organizations have offered Black employees opportunities to share their thoughts, concerns, and feedback with leadership during this time. Beyond listening, there has to be consistent measurable follow up to show that these opportunities were not for optics but towards addressing change. How is feedback applied in your organization's practices, policies, and procedures? What is taking place to prevent workplace bullying toward Black employees and to address cases that have already occurred? Does your work climate allow for Black employees to feel comfortable being their authentic selves?

A few months ago, my nonprofit organization, Community Engagement Collective, hosted the Midwest Psychological Association Society for Community Research and Action's first virtual conference. Ninety-four attendees participated in the daylong conference, shared their research and insights on current affairs, and highlighted their experiences of actively engaging in community work in the Midwest.

There was a consensus throughout the conference that addressing the multiple layers within systems that have contributed to our current social climate is critical. As individuals, it may be strategic to choose an area of focus within these systems that best fits our knowledge, skills, and passions to avoid being overwhelmed by the task. For example, you may focus on health disparities, educational achievement gaps, police reforms, judicial practices, fair housing policies and practices, economic development in communities of color,

etc. As a society, we need to dedicate resources to these areas of focus and collaborate with existing organizations and individuals striving to promote change in addressing systemic racism.

Supporting the Black Lives Matters movement is a collective effort and will require coalitions to collaborate across focus areas. Now is the time for actionable measures that genuinely reflect organizations' support of Black Lives Matters and stakeholder accountability. It is effortless to write a statement of solidarity, but it is another to live out its meaning.

#BlackLivesMatter

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Controversy over 'Blackness'

By Faith Lana Fuller
Herald Contributor

Musical genius Prince wrote a hit song titled, "Controversy," the lead single and title to his 1981 album. The song addresses speculation about Prince and the public scrutiny and curiosity of who he was. The public wanted to

know about his sexuality, gender, religion and racial background. Essentially, people wanted to label him and put him in the proper category. Prince didn't fit the stereotype of what society felt a Black man should be. Fans and critics alike were stuck and confused.

Like Prince struggled to

understand the curiosity surrounding him, I often feel the same. Mainly, because people briefly have made me question myself. Well, they used to anyway. In middle school, I was labeled an "Oreo" - not because I'm of mixed race and have fair skin and silky fine hair, but because of how I

carry myself, how I speak, how I dress, and who my closest friends were. I'm what many of my peers consider a basic White girl (BWG), which means I like Uggs, Starbucks, and Lulu Lemon leggings. I'm articulate and hold education in high regard. I'm respectful and witty and growing more sophisticated with age. On the other hand, I'm not sporting a weave (not that there's anything wrong with that), or speaking loudly while rolling my neck and waving my fingers in your face. My vocabulary isn't limited, so I don't need to shout profanities to make up for it - all stereotypes created so others can feel comfortable with labeling you and therefore know how to treat you.

Here's the main problem with that thought process. Is there really only one way to be White and only one way to be Black in society? Can't I be Black and appreciate the Black culture and White culture? Can I be feisty but not ratchet and still be accepted by both Caucasians and African Americans alike? Can I engage in stimulating dialogue without being a



Dr. Faith Lana Fuller (Photo provided)

sellout or wannabe?

Why do some sectors of society put so much emphasis on racial stereotypes? What is Blackness? I see 'Blackness' in the great accomplishments of the first Black female entrepreneur millionaire in America, Madam CJ Walker. When I think of Zora Neale Hurston, an author, anthropologist, and filmmaker who portrayed racial struggles in the early-1900s and a talent who was way ahead of her time, I see Blackness. I have even witnessed 'Blackness' up close and personal having had the great honor to meet the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, the legendary Civil Rights activist, who led the fight against segregation and other forms of racism, and

who was a strong pillar in our local community who graced our city with his presence for decades. Or, Mrs. Marian Spencer, Cincinnati's former vice mayor and woman who dedicated herself to Civil Rights activism and racial equality. And finally, I also see 'Blackness' in my father, Curtis Fuller, WLWT-TV Anchor/Reporter, and Emmy award-winning journalist and community icon/servant.

So when you think someone isn't Black enough or is too Black, please give pause and educate yourself about what that even means. If it means anything.

No matter what I wear, who my friends are, what neighborhood I live in, my parents' social-economic status, or educational advancements, I will always possess that #blackgirlmagic and my Black is most definitely Black enough! I can't be anyone other than the person God created me to be, so I'm going to be unapologetically my most authentic self. My Black is beautiful, intelligent, tenacious, strong, diverse, and so much more...And I'm okay with that.

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Hank Willis Thomas (American, born 1976), *Branded Head*, from the series *Branded*, 2003. Chromogenic print, 99 x 52 x 3 inches. Private Collection. Image courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. © Hank Willis Thomas

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