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TO CHANGE EVERYTHING, WE NEED EVERYONE:  
BELONGING, EQUITY, AND DIVERSITY IN THE U.S. CLIMATE MOVEMENT

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of  
Antioch University New England

In partial fulfillment for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by

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May 2023

TO CHANGE EVERYTHING, WE NEED EVERYONE:  
BELONGING, EQUITY, AND DIVERSITY IN THE U.S. CLIMATE MOVEMENT

This dissertation, by Clara Fang, has  
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Antioch University New England  
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **TO CHANGE EVERYTHING, WE NEED EVERYONE: BELONGING, EQUITY, AND DIVERSITY IN THE U.S. CLIMATE MOVEMENT**

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Climate change affects everyone but lack of racial diversity in the U.S. climate movement makes it challenging for it to be truly inclusive, champion solutions that are equitable, and affect transformative change. This dissertation describes a two-part study of diversity, equity, and belonging in the U.S. climate movement using a survey of 1,003 climate activists and interviews with 17 people of color who work or volunteer in the U.S. climate movement. The mixed methods study used descriptive statistical analysis and qualitative content analysis to analyze differences between Whites and people of color in terms of their (a) demographics, (b) engagement in climate action, (c) experience of climate impacts, (d) worries, (e) challenges and barriers to participation, and (f) proposed strategies for diversity, equity, and belonging.

My research provides the following takeaways: (a) Progress has been made in terms of diversity in the U.S. climate movement, but diversity is insufficient without equity and belonging. (b) Anti-racism must go beyond symbolic gestures towards deep transformation at the individual, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic levels. (c) Racism intersects with other oppressions of gender, age, class, physical ability, among other identities. (d) People of color and those with marginalized identities contribute essential perspectives and skills to the climate movement. The discussion includes implications for theory, practice, and further study.

This dissertation is available in open access at AURA (<https://aura.antioch.edu>) and OhioLINK ETD Center (<https://etd.ohiolink.edu>).

*Keywords:* climate change, social movements, diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, racial justice

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The years in which I undertook my research on diversity in the U.S. climate movement, 2018-2022, were years of profound crisis and change in the United States. There was the growing climate crisis and the rising public outcry to address it. The warmest eight years on record have all been since 2015, with 2016, 2019 and 2020 being the warmest (World Meteorological Organization, 2023). In 2019, Greta Thunberg, a teenage girl from Sweden, led the largest public demonstrations in history on climate change with more than nine million people participating worldwide. This was followed by a pandemic that killed millions of people and disproportionately harmed people of color in the United States. In 2020, the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbury set off protests for racial justice worldwide and a reckoning in U.S. institutions to deal with the consequences of slavery and racism. In 2022, Hurricane Ian caused more than \$100 billion in damages, the most costly hurricane in the U.S. since record keeping began in 1980 (Smith, 2023). The simultaneous coming to a head of these social crises led to growing awareness that they are interrelated; racial justice is needed in climate solutions, and addressing climate change must be a part of racial justice.

Social problems give birth to social movements, and as the climate crisis intensified around the world, the climate movement in the United States has seen rapid growth and change. Beginning with the publication of Bill McKibben's *The End of Nature* (1989), public awareness of the climate issue grew before there was any large-scale activism. Then in 2004, Billy Parish, a college student at Yale University, founded the Energy Action Coalition (later known as Power Shift Network) to bring together student groups from around the country to work on climate change (Parish & Aujla, 2012). In 2006, former Vice President Al Gore released the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* and launched the Climate Reality Project, which is a

nonprofit organization that trains people to educate others about climate change and how to take action (The Climate Reality Project, n.d.). In the spring of 2008, Bill McKibben and students at Middlebury College founded 350, a grassroots advocacy organization focused on fighting climate change (350, n.d.). Together these organizations launched large scale mobilizations around climate change.

Since then, more organizations building the grassroots climate movement have been founded, including Citizens' Climate Lobby (2007), Sunrise Movement (2017), and Extinction Rebellion (2018). In September 2019, the global climate strikes inspired by Greta Thunberg culminated in 7.6 million people demonstrating for climate action around the world (350, n.d.). In 2021, The Pew Research Center estimated that 24% of U.S. adults had made efforts to support climate action during that year, including donating money to organizations focused on addressing climate change (16%), contacting elected officials to urge them to address climate change (10%), volunteering for an activity focused on addressing climate change (10%), and attending protests or rallies to show support for addressing climate change (6%) (Tyson et al., 2021). What started as a few college student groups has turned into a global social movement encompassing people from all walks of life.

Despite this remarkable growth, the U.S. climate movement continues to be dominated by White people. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, racial makeup of the general U.S. population was 59.3% White, 18.9% Latino, 13.6% Black, 6.1% Asian, 2.9% mixed race, and 1.3% American Indian and Alaskan Native (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). In the same year, a group of climate organizations partnered with the Climate Action Campaign to understand the demographics of the climate movement by matching their members to their voter profiles. The study included 28 participating organizations, including Citizens' Climate Lobby, 350, Climate

Reality Project, Union of Concerned Scientists, The Sierra Club, NRDC, Environmental Defense Fund, Environment America, Friends of the Earth, and Interfaith Power and Light. Their combined membership was 83% White, 7% Hispanic, 5% Black, 2% Asian, and 0% Native American or Other. Because of confidentiality regarding the data, the study is not available to the public and cannot be cited. I gained access to the data because I was staff at one of the participating organizations.

**Table 1**

*Racial Makeup of U.S. General Population vs. Climate Movement*

Race	U.S. Census 2020	Climate Action Campaign
White	59.3%	83%
Latino	18.9%	7%
Black	13.6%	5%
Asian	6.1%	2%
Mix Race	2.9%	N/A
American Indian / Alaskan Native	1.3%	0%

Diversity, equity, and belonging in the climate movement are important for many reasons. First, people of color are projected to make up more than 50% of the U.S. population by 2045 (Frey, 2018). If the climate movement continues to be predominantly White, it will be seen as out of touch with the general public. Second, people of color in the United States disproportionately suffer the negative impacts of climate change (Cox, 2018; Morello-Frosch et al., 2009; Patnaik et al., 2020, Tessum et al., 2021). Like in many social movements, those who are the most affected have the most motivation to address the problem and advance solutions that would work for their community. Third, studies show that people of color are more concerned about climate change than Whites and are therefore more likely to take action. A study by Yale

Program on Climate Change Communication (YPCCC) found that 69% of Latinos and 57% of African Americans say that they are alarmed or concerned about climate change compared to 49% of Whites (Ballew & Maibach et al., 2020). In addition, more than one in three Latinos (37%) and African Americans (36%) say they would “definitely” or “probably” join a campaign fighting climate change, compared to about one in five Whites (22%) (Ballew & Maibach et al., 2020).

In addition to the reasons cited above, diversity brings strategic advantages to climate organizations. Like businesses, climate organizations today operate in a competitive environment. These organizations compete with each other for funds, supporters, and talent. CEOs, COOs, and HR Directors of major U.S. based environmental organizations and foundations said that they overwhelmingly believe that diversity helps environmental organizations appear more connected to communities, increase creativity, and bring in additional fundraising networks (Beasley, 2017). More than 50% of environmental NGO leaders believed that diversity also increases productivity, creates a more genuine meritocracy, and produces better management-employee relations (Beasley, 2017).

When asked about the benefits of diversity to the environmental movement specifically, 70% of the leaders from environmental NGOs, foundations and search firms agreed that diversity (a) helps attack environmental problems from multiple perspectives, (b) increases focus on environmental justice, (c) helps brand the movement by making it appear more heterogeneous, and (d) increases support for the movement by widening its constituents (Beasley, 2017). Lack of diversity is a brain drain, leading to talented people leaving organizations and the environmental movement when they feel that they are “undervalued, unappreciated, burned out, and pressured

to conform to organizational cultures that do not allow them to be who they are or do their best work” (Park, 2007, p. 42).

In addition to diversity enhancing morale and problem solving, the climate movement needs a broad coalition to be successful. The traditional coalition of White, progressive, middle and upper class, and middle aged or older activists is insufficient to tackle a global challenge that affects all populations and every sector of society. In order to have equitable and effective solutions, we need people of color not just in the ranks of the climate movement but also in leadership. We need to recognize that communities most affected by climate change are also the source of solutions needed by communities that will be affected in the future. In addition, people of color bring essential skills to the fight on climate change, including understanding of non-White cultures, indigenous knowledge of land and wildlife, and cultural resources such as art and spirituality. A more diverse and inclusive climate movement is a stronger one that can mobilize people in numbers needed to win politically and socially. As the rallying cry for the People’s Climate Movement says, “to change everything, we need everyone.”

## **Research Summary**

My research explored perceptions of climate change and the U.S. climate movement through a racial lens. The research contained two major parts: (a) a survey of 1,003 climate activists recruited from a range of climate organizations, and (b) interviews with 17 BIPOC climate activists and professionals. The survey compared White and BIPOC climate activists in these aspects:

- Demographics: race, age, gender, political ideology, and socioeconomic status;
- Engagement with the climate movement: length of engagement, roles, and actions;

- Impacts and worries: How has climate change impacted them? What are they worried about?
- Challenges and strategies: What are the challenges and barriers to participation in the climate movement? What are the strategies for overcoming these challenges and barriers?

The interview portion of my research explored the experiences of BIPOC climate activists and professionals in first person. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in 1-hour increments during a 9-month period in 2021. The questions included how participants came to the climate movement, what were their barriers or challenges, what they thought about diversity in the climate movement, resources that have helped participants stay involved, and strategies they believed would help the climate movement become more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. The barriers and solutions they uncovered are individual, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic. The result is a personal and in-depth look at the experiences of people of color in the climate movement.

### **Positionality of the Researcher: My Story**

I have been a climate activist since 2001 when I was a first year student at Smith College. Climate change was not a popular advocacy issue at the time, but the energy crisis brought on by 9/11, and my involvement in the campaign to protest drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, made me aware that climate change was the biggest issue of my generation. Five years after my Bachelor's degree, I earned my master's degree in environmental management at Yale University. For the next five years, I worked on sustainability and climate action plans at various institutions. In the early 2010s, environmental justice was not a big topic in the sustainability industry. Solving climate change was almost strictly seen as a technocratic issue, a matter of

reducing emissions as much as possible. The people I interacted with—mostly energy managers, building engineers, transportation managers, and waste managers—were overwhelmingly White and male, and it was difficult to be taken seriously as a young Asian woman. I was too assertive. I was not assertive enough. I looked like a student. I had a hard time relating to people whose lives and backgrounds were completely different from mine. I did not feel a sense of belonging.

Then in 2016 I joined Citizens' Climate Lobby (CCL), a nonprofit organization that builds political will for climate solutions through grassroots organizing and advocacy. I found their mission of educating ordinary people in policy advocacy welcoming and empowering. Because I was experienced working in higher education, I became the volunteer higher education coordinator and the Detroit chapter leader almost immediately. The work grew quickly and I needed a job, so I made a case for why organizing students and higher education should be a priority for CCL and that a staff position was needed. CCL's executive director told me that instead of hiring people their approach had been to wait for volunteers to lead areas they are interested in. I explained that I was qualified to do the job, had already been doing the work for six months at that point, but I could not put in the hours needed to meet the demand unless I was paid. If they wanted a volunteer to do this work full time, it would likely be a White retiree. For a role that involves leading young people, the only way they would get a young person is if they paid them.

I was offered a contract to work part time as a contractor for CCL for \$22,000 per year. It was a pittance but I believed that I would prove my worth and I would be doing work that I loved. I had just started my PhD at Antioch University, so I filled my time with work and study. However, this combination was nearly financially impossible. Even though I had the president's merit scholarship, I still paid over \$10,000 a year in tuition, and spent thousands traveling back

and forth between my home in Detroit and the campus in New Hampshire the first year. I was determined to not take on student loans. So, in order to survive, I worked multiple odd jobs on top of my work with CCL and Antioch. I rented my apartment on Airbnb for \$800 a month; I did freelance editing; I took on a work-study job for the Antioch Center for Climate Preparedness and Community Resilience.

After one year, I wondered if I would be promoted to full time staff for CCL. Instead, I was told that the organization did not have the money, but they renewed my contract at \$30,000 per year. Two years in, my job continued to expand to fill a full time position. Even though I tried to constrain my work to twenty hours a week, it was impossible to not respond to all the requests I had to work with young people on climate advocacy. I also took on interns and eventually fellows to help with my work, with the result that on top of my own work I managed as many as ten student workers at a time. Again, I was told that there was not enough money in the organization to hire me, even though the organization hired ten new staff that year.

After three years, my work was having a significant impact. The percentage of people under age 25 joining CCL expanded from less than 1% to 25% per year, which was faster than any other age demographic. CCL was desperate to recruit more conservatives and people of color, and the young people joining were contributing a lot to those demographics. Young people in CCL were also winning climate legislation. In 2018, Piper Christian, a college student from Utah, convinced the Utah state legislature to pass a climate resolution. In 2019, a group of high school students from Michigan convinced their Republican Representative in Congress to co-sponsor the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act. Their stories were widely touted throughout CCL. In nearly every meeting on lobbying, I heard people say that young people

were more effective advocates because members of Congress and their staffers were more interested in listening to what they had to say.

In the fourth year, I was promoted to full time staff at CCL. Still, I was told I needed to make some “adjustments.” Could I be better about communicating my work to the rest of the staff? Even though as a contractor, I was excluded from all staff meetings and never invited to regional coordinator calls. Could I not step on other people’s toes by doing work that should be done by other departments? Even though the vice president had asked me to do work for other departments, and when I turned it in months later, she forgot that she had asked me. My title at that point was student engagement coordinator, and I asked if that could be changed to director, same as the conservative outreach director and the diversity outreach director. It made no difference internally, but since my role was outward facing, I explained that people would be more inclined to take me seriously when I contacted them about collaborating with CCL if my title was director instead of coordinator. My request was denied, even though the conservative outreach director and the diversity outreach director made the same argument.

In March 2020, Covid hit. Like many other employees, I was worried about how this would affect the organization’s finances and our jobs. My job became even busier as we fully pivoted to virtual organizing and turning our annual June conference—with planning well underway—into a virtual conference. In a regular check in call with the vice president, she expressed uncertainty about CCL’s financial position and said to me, “CCL is not the place to work if you’re looking for job security.” While I do not believe it was her intent to make me feel anxious, the subtext of what I heard her say was, “We don’t want you.” The next day, the executive director said in the all-staff meeting, “We have enough money to get our organization through the next two years without laying off any staff. We will institute a hiring freeze, but we

are committed to keeping everyone on board.” He then went on about self-care and how we should all take as much time as we needed to take care of ourselves and our families. As I looked at the sea of White faces on Zoom, I was keenly aware that what the vice president said to me the day before was completely different from what they were saying to the rest of the staff. To the rest of the staff they were nothing but reassuring; but to me, the newest and most vulnerable member, they didn’t care. I immediately started looking for a new job.

In September 2020, the executive director called me to say that I was promoted to student engagement director and my salary would be increased to \$65,000 per year. At that point, I was managing eight part-time fellows, one volunteer youth coordinator, and helping with internal organizational diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). I conducted a DEI survey for CCL in 2018 and contributed to creating the diversity strategic plan. I was regularly called upon to conduct DEI workshops at CCL conferences around the country. Forty-five percent of the young people I recruited were Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), so I was doing the lion’s share of diversity recruitment as well.

I needed help with my work, so I asked if the organization would hire a student engagement coordinator to support me. The conservative outreach director already had a conservative outreach coordinator and one was approved for the diversity outreach director as well. I was told that I did not need help since my programs were doing so well, and I already had help from the eight fellows. I explained that managing eight fellows is much more work than managing one full time employee, who I had to constantly rehire and retrain, and the amount of help I got from them was about as much work as I put into them. Rather than being rewarded for my performance, I felt like a victim of my own success.

However, it was clear that help was needed in my department, particularly in the area of youth engagement, and CCL was willing to accept help. More and more young people under the age of 18 were joining the climate movement and there were many adult volunteers interested in helping them. Among those volunteers was Susan, a retired White woman, and Amy, one of my first climate advocacy fellows. The two of them had been leading a robust youth action team for three years but they were feeling the limitations of being volunteers. Susan and I put together a proposal in January 2021 making a case for a full time paid youth engagement coordinator who would organize the under age 18 group as well as help me with the age 18-25 demographic. By June 2021, I had been told repeatedly that there was no money in the budget, even though fundraising was at an all time high and the organization hired ten new staff that year. Meanwhile, senior leaders were happily touting how impressive the teenagers were and what can we do to get more of them in CCL. The fact that the leaders would praise our work and use it as justification for why funders should give the organization more money, then deny salaries to the people doing that work, made me feel sick to my stomach.

By June 2021, I told the vice president that I would be leaving CCL to join Citizens' Climate International (CCI), CCL's sister organization. I said I would work for CCL until the end of August, enough time to hire my replacement without leaving a long gap in the work. The vice president said diversity would be a priority for this hire. As I was drafting the job description, I was told that instead of a student engagement director, CCL would hire a student engagement coordinator, with a corresponding decrease in the salary. Without saying what a slap in the face it was to be told that I could be replaced with someone much less experienced, I provided a list of reasons why I thought this was a bad idea. First, my job was a complicated one that needed someone with a lot of experience. Second, the program was bursting at the seams

and needed to expand, not contract. Third, the position was at the same level as the conservative outreach director and diversity outreach director, and by giving an inferior title to this role, the person would be made to feel inferior and not belonging from the start. If CCL wanted a highly qualified person of color for this role, why would they give them an inferior title and salary compared to comparable roles in the organization? After wasting nearly a month deliberating the title for the position, the vice president said she would compromise by conferring the title of student engagement manager. I was so disgusted I did not even reply to her email.

On my last day at CCL, the supervisor who I had worked most closely with sent me a huge bouquet of flowers and prepared an appreciation speech about me for the all-staff meeting. A lot of staff had been departing and it had become a ritual for the executive director to say some words of appreciation (and shed a few tears) and invite other staff to say words of appreciation for the departing staff member. At my last staff meeting, the executive director announced in an upbeat tone that I was joining CCI and therefore not really leaving CCL. He did not invite the staff to give their appreciations, even though my supervisor jumped in anyway. I also did not get the customary electronic good-bye card.

As unhappy as this account sounds, this was by far not the worst experience I have had working for an organization. At CCL, I was deeply immersed in policy advocacy and grassroots organizing. I met wonderful colleagues and incredible volunteers. I watched students that I mentored graduate and flourish. I have a lifelong friend in my immediate supervisor, who supported me and advocated for me through all the ups and downs. I was never micromanaged and was given many opportunities to implement ideas and try new things. I am forever grateful to CCL for all that it taught me and for giving me a second chance at a career that I almost gave up on. CCL's values of gratitude, integrity, relationships, optimism, and personal power have

stayed with me and served me in my other roles in the climate movement. It also inspired me to pursue this research.

My experience in the mini climate movement of CCL formed the starting point of my understanding of DEI. As I listened to volunteers, BIPOC climate professionals, and DEI experts in the course of my research, much of what I heard corroborated my own experience. I heard about microaggressions and tokenism, the dominance of “one right way” when it came to climate solutions and advocacy strategies, the way White men dominated lobby meetings, and many other examples. I also learned from individuals who had a much different experience, but for the most part, the experiences of marginalization, struggling with a sense of belonging, feeling inadequate or like an imposter, and being tokenized were common among BIPOC in the climate movement. Doing this research not only helped me make sense of my experiences, but it also gave me the opportunity to support others who experienced the same thing, thereby building the community of those who care about a more diverse and inclusive climate movement.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

My literature review covers common terminology, theories, prior research about diversity in climate movement, and how my research fills gaps in the existing research.

### **Terminology**

This section explains some of the key terminology used in this paper and why I chose to use them. These terms are belonging, equity, justice, diversity, and inclusion, people of color, BIPOC, racism, anti-racism, and White supremacy culture.

### ***Three Goals and Two Practices***

The acronym DEI stands for diversity, equity, and inclusion. I use DEI to refer to institutional initiatives focused on diversity, even though it is increasingly recognized that diversity alone is not enough and may in fact be harmful. Inclusion also does not go far enough in that it implies a power dynamic that privileges the dominant group. Equity is important in that it refers to policies and cultural changes that elevate traditionally marginalized groups.

I have come to see the framework of liberation as composed of three goals and two practices. The three goals are diversity, equity, and belonging. The two practices are inclusion and justice. The work of inclusion and justice leads to the goals of diversity, equity, belonging. The acronym BEDJI is used to indicate the aspirational framework of adding belonging and justice to DEI. I do not use the acronym JEDI in recognition of the critique about the term's problematic associations with the Star Wars franchise (Hammond et al., 2021). Below is a more detailed explanation of these terms.

**Belonging** refers to a state in which one feels an integral part of a larger whole without losing one's individual identity. It is a state of relation in which we are able to be our whole

selves with others and accept others as their whole selves. The conditions of belonging include being present, invited, welcomed, known, accepted, supported, heard, befriended, needed, and loved (Carter, 2021). Harvard Business Review defines belonging as the intersection between mattering, identification, and social connection. “The unifying thread across these themes is that they all revolve around the sense of being accepted and included by those around you” (Carr et al, 2019). Belonging is different from fitting in, in that by belonging, people are able to express their individuality without fear of being judged. “True belonging doesn’t require us to change who we are; it requires us to be who we are,” said Brene Brown in *Atlas of the Heart* (2023).

Belonging is extremely important for people because it is a hardwired fundamental human need. Lack of belonging is acutely painful and detrimental for humans. Research has found that humans experience exclusion the same way as physical pain (Eisenberger et al., 2003). Exclusion or lack of belonging has been correlated with lower organizational commitment and engagement and self-sabotage (Carr et al., 2019). The goal of diversity, equity, and inclusion is that people feel a sense of belonging, a quality that is essential for human beings to flourish and for societies to be resilient.

An illustration of the spectrum from exclusion to belonging is Figure 1 (Carter, 2021) and summarized in *Integrating Equity in Climate Resilience and Planning and Action* (Fang et al., 2022) as the following:

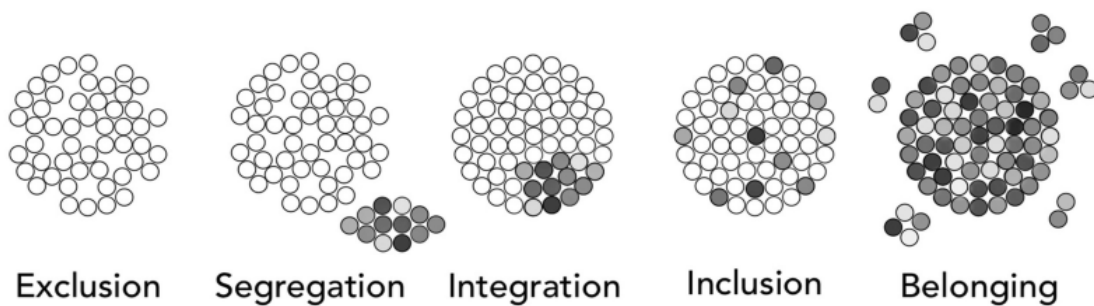
In the first representation from the left, “exclusion” is represented as a homogenous conglomeration of individual white balls where marginalized groups are invisible. In “segregation,” a small group of colored balls appear next to the conglomeration of white balls, indicating that the marginalized group is segregated from the mainstream group. In “integration,” the collection of colored balls is integrated into the conglomeration of white balls, but they remain a distinct group in the community. Farther along in “inclusion,” the colored balls are dispersed throughout the community, indicating a more embedded presence, though the colored balls

remain distinct. Finally, “belonging” is represented by all the balls being colored, which doesn’t mean that there are no White individuals, but that everyone is recognized as a unique individual and there is no distinction of an in-group or an out-group. In addition, smaller congregations of individuals appear alongside the main group, conveying that in belonging, multiple communities can exist in relation to each other without all of them being integrated into one main community. As our understanding of equity in community relations advances, we may discover stages beyond belonging that manifests equity even more profoundly.

(Fang et al., 2022)

**Figure 1**

*Five Representations of Community*



(Carter, 2021)

**Equity** is defined as the guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups (U.S. Climate Action Network, 2019). Equity and equality are not the same thing. Equality is treating everyone the same, while equity is ensuring everyone has what they need. While equality aims to promote fairness, it can only work if everyone starts from the same place and has the same needs and goals (Williams-Rajee, 2019). However, since some people are born with more privilege than others, equity is needed to even the playing field. Racial equity is one part of racial justice and must be addressed at the root causes and not just the manifestations. This includes the elimination of policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race (U.S. Climate Action

Network, 2019). Equity also includes accounting for historic injustices, such as reparations to African Americans for slavery and discrimination in the past.

**Diversity** refers to psychological, physical, and social differences that occur among any and all individuals; including but not limited to race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, age, gender, sexual orientation, mental or physical ability, and learning styles (U.S. Climate Action Network, 2019). Efforts to increase diversity in organizations usually focus on the selection, promotion, and retention of people from underrepresented backgrounds.

While diversity in representation is an important marker of equity, diversity itself is no indication of belonging, inclusion, equity, or social justice. The mere existence of difference does not mean the equitable treatment of all individuals, nor does it mean an inclusive culture that values social justice. Diversity, in the form of representation without belonging and inclusion, is tokenism. However, inclusion and belonging without diversity is an indication that equity and justice have not been fully integrated. Equity means that one is not only inclusive and open to everyone's participation but also proactively addressing past wrongs for historically marginalized people. Equity means diversity AND inclusion, not one or the other (Fang, et al., 2022).

**Justice** refers to the work of dismantling systems that have historically oppressed marginalized persons. It is the "proactive reinforcement of policies, practices, attitudes and actions that produce equitable power, access, opportunities, treatment, impacts and outcomes for all" (ICMA, 2021 as cited in Hughes et al., 2021). Racial justice leads to the actualization of racial equity (Hughes et al., 2021).

**Inclusion** is the act of creating environments where any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate where differences are embraced. Researchers at the University of Massachusetts Medical School identified eight factors that create inclusion in a group context: (a) common purpose, (b) trust, (c) appreciation of individual attributes, (d) sense of belonging, (e) access to opportunity, (f) equitable reward and recognition, (g) cultural competence of the institution, and (h) respect (Jordan, 2009 as cited in Plummer, 2018, p. 26).

The inclusion of these eight factors enables individuals to experience: (a) access to information and social support (b) acquisition of or influence in shaping accepted norms and behavior (c) security within an identity group or in a position within an organization (d) access to and ability to exercise formal and informal power (Jordan, 2009 as cited in Plummer, 2018, p. 26).

Inclusion is also problematic in that it implies the presence of an in-group and an out-group. The dominant group is the in-group into which marginalized groups are integrated and perhaps expected to conform in order to take part. Belonging goes farther along the spectrum towards equity and meaningful participation (Carter, 2021).

### ***POC vs. BIPOC***

I use both “people of color” and BIPOC to refer to non-White people in this dissertation. The term people of color (frequently abbreviated as POC) has been in the English language since 1796. The acronym BIPOC—which stands for Black, Indigenous, people of color—has its earliest reference in a 2013 Tweet (Garcia, 2020). BIPOC is now commonly used to mean people of color and to highlight the unique and extra oppression that Black and Indigenous people experience in the U.S. compared to other people of color—namely, Latinos, Asians, and mix-

race people. Indigenous people, in particular, were often left out of conversations about people of color. BIPOC is also used for specificity when talking about non-White people. “It is lazy to lump us all together as if we all face the same problems,” said Sylvia Obell, a host of the Netflix podcast *Okay, Now Listen*. “When you blend us all together like this, it’s erasure. It allows people to get away with not knowing people of color and our separate set of issues that we all face. It allows people to play it safe and not leave anyone out, and it also allows you to not have to do the work” (Garcia, 2020).

Because my research is mainly concerned with differences between Whites and Non-Whites, and not the distinctions between minority racial groups, I mostly use “people of color” when contrasting them with Whites. In the workplace, DEI efforts typically do not make a lot of distinction between different racial groups. In environmental organizations where there have been so few people of color, lumping them together is often a strategic way of signaling solidarity. In addition to racial equity, DEI initiatives also address gender, age, ability, sexuality, and other identities. However, I use the term BIPOC when discussing environmental justice or situations where it is appropriate to acknowledge that Black or Indigenous people suffer disproportionately compared to other people of color. While BIPOC does not name all communities of color it is a step in the direction towards going beyond a binary and acknowledging that racial identity is multifaceted and on a spectrum.

### ***Racism and Anti-Racism***

Racism is not just prejudice, but a system of oppression that manifests at different levels of society: individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural. The following definitions are adapted from the Interaction Institute for Social Change (Parker, 2023):

**Internalized Racism.** A set of privately held beliefs, prejudices and ideas about the superiority of Whites and the inferiority of people of color. Among people of color, it manifests as internalized oppression. Among Whites, it manifests as internalized racial superiority.

**Interpersonal Racism.** The expression or behavior of individuals toward other individuals that reinforce the superiority of Whites over people of color. It occurs when individuals interact and their private beliefs affect their interactions.

**Institutional Racism.** Discriminatory treatment, unfair policies and practices, and inequitable opportunities and impacts within organizations and institutions that routinely produce disadvantages for people of color and advantages for White people.

**Structural/Systemic Racism.** A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations and other norms work in various—often reinforcing—ways to perpetuate racial inequality. It is racial bias among institutions and across society. Structural racism involves the cumulative and compounding effects of societal factors. These include the history, culture, ideology and interactions of institutions and policies that systematically privilege White people and disadvantage people of color.

If racism is individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural, anti-racism is also individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural. The following are some examples of anti-racism measures:

**Internal.** Unconscious or implicit bias training.

**Interpersonal.** Employee resource groups or affinity groups, mentoring programs, and trainings on conflict resolution and cultural differences in communication.

**Institutional.** Evaluating recruitment and hiring processes to address bias; Transparent salary information that all employees can view; Scholarships and financial assistance for professional development.

**Structural/Systemic.** Lobbying for environmental justice policies at the state or federal level; creating intersectional alliances with other organizations to address racism and climate change.

### ***White Supremacy Culture***

Developed by Tema Okun and Kenneth Jones in the 1990s and built over time by a growing community, White supremacy culture is defined as a set of norms and standards that reinforce White supremacy in the organization, institution, or society. It is characterized by either/or thinking, worship of the written word, objectivity, individualism, quantity over quality, power hoarding, fear of open conflict, a sense of urgency, defensiveness, paternalism, progress is bigger and more, belief in one right way, right to comfort, and perfectionism. White supremacy culture can exist in White dominated groups and non-White dominated groups. It harms both BIPOC and White people. Tema Okun argues that most of our institutions and professions have defined success based on the characteristics of White supremacy culture. A good professional, for example, is someone who is perfectionistic and individualistic. However, White supremacy culture denies other ways of being and knowing as valid and elevates the practices of one cultural group above others. Recognizing and countering White supremacy culture is therefore very important if we are to achieve belonging, equity, justice, diversity, and inclusion.

## **Theories**

The academic theories most relevant to my research are critical race theory, critical theory, and Social Movement Theory. This section gives a brief overview of each one and their relevance to my research.

### ***Critical Race Theory***

In early 2020, Kennedy Mitchum, an African American woman who had recently graduated from Drake University, was bothered by the definition of racism in the Merriam Webster dictionary. The dictionary defined “racism” as “a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race.” Mitchum wrote to the editors that “racism is not only prejudice against a certain race due to the color of a person’s skin, as it states in your dictionary. It is prejudice combined with social and institutional power. It is a system of advantage based on skin color” (Noor, 2020). Merriam-Webster agreed to revise its definition of the word for the next edition of the dictionary.

Mitchum’s argument that racism is a “system of advantage based on skin color” (Noor, 2020) is derived from critical race theory (CRT). Officially recognized in 1989 at the Workshop on critical race theory, CRT is the study of the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 3). It maintains that racism was not an unintentional byproduct of the U.S. Constitution, rather, racism is intentionally built into the laws and legal institutions of the U.S. since its founding in order to maintain White supremacy (Parker and Lynn, 2002). CRT argues that systemic racism continues to marginalize people of color, especially African Americans, in all aspects of society including criminal justice, education, housing, healthcare, etc.. According to Parker and Lynn (2002) one of the main goals

of CRT is to present stories about discrimination from the perspective of people of color and challenge dominant narratives that marginalize people of color (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 30). Thus, critical race theorists are generally dedicated to the eradication of systemic racism and other unjust hierarchies.

Critical race theory came under fire in the backlash to racial justice efforts after 2020. The term became a catch all phrase for opponents of racial justice to include all diversity and inclusion efforts, race-conscious policies, and education about racism, whether they actually represent CRT (NAACP Legal Defense Fund, 2023). Opponents sought to ban CRT from school curriculums, including banning the teaching of racial inequality in American history and discussions of racism in general. Nikki Haley, a former South Carolina governor and hopeful presidential candidate, tweeted that “CRT is un-American” (Gabriel, 2023). One of the outcomes of the backlash towards CRT is that the College Board decided to purge its Advanced Placement course on African American Studies of readings on CRT, the queer experience, and Black feminism (Hartocollis & Fawcett, 2023).

### ***Critical Theory***

CRT is derived from critical theory which harkens back to Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. Rather than viewing the world as a discernable, objective, and unchanging reality, critical theory sees reality through the constructs of gender, race, class, and culture relative to every individual and subject to change over time (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 205). Critical theory is critical of normative behaviors and systems in society in order to uncover the assumptions and beliefs that prevent us from making enlightened choices from a stance of agency (McKenzie, 2014). Marx and the original critical theorists focused on class as a structure of oppression. Later theorists examined race, gender, sexual orientation, and postcolonial and Indigenous identities in

their impact on one's access to power and resources in society (Felluga, 2015; McKenzie, 2014). The goal of critical theory is to empower human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender (Fay, 1987 as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 29).

Critical theory's perspective on methodology is based on its belief that reality is subjective based on one's identity. Under that framework, knowledge is obtained through dialogue between the investigator and the subjects of inquiry. This means that the values of the investigator and subject inevitably influence the findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 205). Ethics are fundamental to critical theory. It is not enough to understand why things are the way they are without trying to change them to create a more just and peaceful society. The goal of the researcher involves "the critique and transformation of the social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender structures that constrain and exploit humankind, by engagement in confrontation, even conflict" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 211). Critical theory fights racism and other "isms" by challenging the rigid notions of hierarchy based on the biological "inferiority" of women, people of color, the disabled, etc. Marxist theory challenged class structures and championed the rights of working-class people. Critical race theory and postcolonial theory deconstructed discourse around race and ethnicity used to justify imperialism and the oppression of people of color. These theories have also been used to champion the rights of women, sexual minorities (members of the LGBTQ+ community), the disabled, the insane, the criminal, children, animals, and even nature itself. These different branches of critical theory form the theoretical foundations for the modern feminist movement, the civil rights movement, and the labor movement that are relevant to this day.

Critical theory prioritizes the voice of the marginalized as the source of knowledge and liberation. Paul Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000) writes that we are all dehumanized

by systems of oppression. The only way we can become liberated is to recognize each other as human beings and our roles as oppressors and the oppressed at some point in our lives (Freire, 2000, p. 32). Freire defines “conscientization” the process of becoming conscious of our roles and our need for liberation (Freire, 2000, p. 32). Liberation is not just about conferring benefits of the oppressor to the oppressed as if they were recipients of charity. Rather, it is about enabling the oppressed to be agents in their own liberation. Those in power, including the critical theory researcher, should step aside to allow the voices of the oppressed to take precedence (Freire, 2000, p. 32).

While I agree that marginalized people need to lead in fighting oppression, if that was all that was required, we would have all been liberated a long time ago. The oppressed are usually very aware of their oppression, and constantly trying to resist it, but even well-organized efforts to resist are often unsuccessful or end in retaliation. The dominant social structure is so entrenched that a “conscientized” researcher, or even an entire “conscientized” institution, is not likely able to transform that institution—let alone all of society—simply by bringing the oppressed to the table. Leadership of the marginalized towards their liberation is essential, but the work of liberation must be done by all, including those who benefit from the status quo.

### ***Social Movement Theories***

My research also looks at how social movements create change, a topic explored by social movement theory. Bill Moyer in *Doing Democracy* defined social movement as “collective actions in which the populace is alerted, educated, and mobilized, sometimes over years and decades, to challenge the powerholders and the whole society to redress social problems or grievances and restore critical social values” (Moyer et al., 2001, p. 2). Social movements are composed of individuals who share the goals, values, and culture of the

movement, and whose actions are coordinated without formal structures or obligations.

Organizations may help to define and organize movements, but they are not synonymous with it.

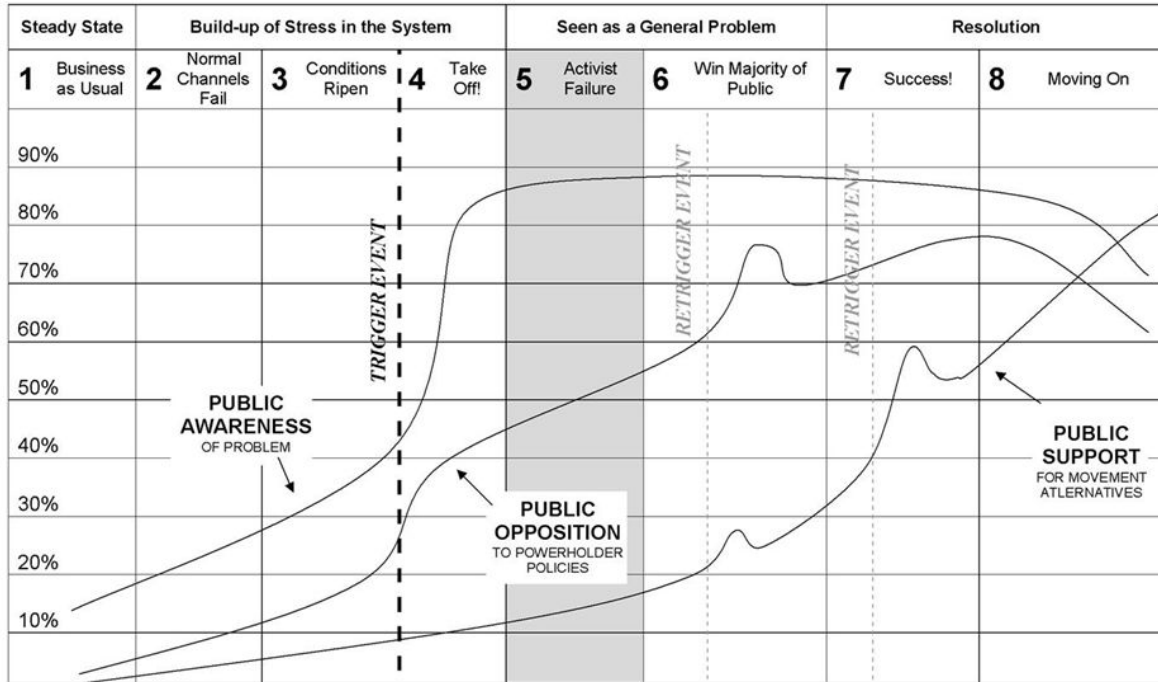
People may be part of movements without being part of organizations, and organizations may dissolve or form without destroying movements.

Over the last few decades, researchers have developed theories on how social movements form, grow, and change over time. Some of the most influential theories are deprivation theory, resource mobilization theory, political process theory, structural strain theory, and new social movement theories. According to proponents of the deprivation theory, social movements are born when a group of people in a society feel that they are deprived of a specific good, service, or resource (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1988; Opp, 1988). The resource mobilization theory posits that social movements form when those who want change are able to mobilize necessary resources—such as money, labor, knowledge, social connections—to affect change (Dobson, 2001; Foweraker, 1995; McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1988; Phongpaichit, 1999). The political process theory adds that social movements form when political forces are favorable and opportunities for change are present in the government (Dobson, 2001; Foweraker, 1995; Phongpaichit, 1999; Tilly, 1978). Structural strain theory argues that social movements depend on six conditions: people experiencing some type of problem (deprivation); recognition of the problem by people of that society; the spread of a solution to the problem; an event or events transpire that convert this nascent movement into a bona fide social movement; the society (and its government) is open to change; and the movement is able to mobilize sources to enable it to grow (Smelser, 1965; Sen & Avcı., 2016). New Social Movement Theories move away from the typical Marxist framework of analyzing collective action from a primarily economic perspective to focus on other motivations, such as ethnicity, gender, and sexuality (Sen & Avcı., 2016).

Published in 1987, Bill Moyer's Movement Action Plan eight stage model of social movements (MAP) gained popularity among activists because it demonstrated several improvements over prior social movement theories. First, MAP provides a comprehensive theory to describe all stages of social movements. Prior theories usually described social movements as one arc from formation to victory (or failure), but MAP describes social movements as a long process with periods of success followed by periods of retrograde. MAP also describes social movements as composed of sub-movements, each of which go through their own eight stage process. This encourages activists to see slumps not as failures or death of the movement, but as a temporary condition preceding victory in a longer trajectory. MAP emphasizes the agency of activists in pushing social movements from one stage to the next rather than depending on resources or political conditions. The model helps activists by identifying pitfalls to avoid, strategies to pursue, and outcomes to celebrate in each stage. The model defines the different roles that activists can play—citizen, change agent, rebel, and reformer—showing how there are many ways to contribute to change. Finally, MAP goes beyond other social movement theories by positing that social movements “can be vehicles for revitalizing our democracies, calling us back to our most cherished values and transforming our societies into more compassionate and sustainable communities” (Moyer et al., 2001, p. 114).

**Figure 2**

*Movement Action Plan Eight Stage Model of Social Movements*



(Moyer et al., 2001, p. 82-83)

We see Moyer's eight stage MAP model in the progress of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the climate movement:

**Stage 1: Normal times.** Normal times are defined by a lack of racial diversity in the climate and environmental movement. In 1992, a study of 63 mainstream environmental organizations found that 32% of the organizations had no people of color on their staff and 19% had no volunteers who were people of color (Environmental Careers Organization, 1992 as cited in Taylor, 2014). There is little to no public awareness that this is a problem.

**Stage 2: Prove the failure of official institutions.** Public realizes that governmental policies violate widely held beliefs, principles, and values. Critical members of the movement begin to speak up and demand change. In 1990, a broad coalition of environmental justice

organizations, led by the Southwest Organizing Project of New Mexico, sent a 12-page letter to the leaders of the 10 largest environmental nonprofits in the U.S at the time highlighting the lack of diversity in the staff of environmental organizations. The letter, and the people of color Environmental Leadership Summit that followed, brought awareness and momentum in environmental organizations to address diversity, equity, and inclusion in the environmental movement (Polsky 2020).

**Stage 3: Ripening conditions.** As more people speak out and build awareness of the problem, the buildup of stress in the system leads to ripening conditions. In 2007, Emily Enderle's *Diversity and the Future of the Environmental Movement* brought together thought leaders such as Angela Park, Charles Jordan, and Marcelo Bonta on laying out a case for why diversity is a concern and an opportunity for the environmental movement. By 2013, concern had built enough that organizations wanted to conduct quantitative studies to understand diversity in the environmental movement and how to improve. Dr. Dorceta Taylor's study, *State of Diversity in the Environmental Sector* (2014) fulfilled this need. Demand for research on diversity also led to the creation of Green 2.0, a nonprofit dedicated to researching and promoting diversity in environmental organizations. Beginning in 2016, Green 2.0 began producing an annual transparency report card that shows the institutional racial diversity of mainstream environmental organizations.

During this time, conferences, programs, and organizations were founded to promote people of color in the environmental field. Efforts included Center for Diversity and the Environment, Center for Whole Communities, Environmental Leadership Program, PGM One, and Environmental Professionals of Color Network. These efforts cultivated environmental

professionals of color and built the foundation of awareness and competency to address diversity, equity, belonging in environmental organizations.

**Stage 4: Take off.** A trigger event produces widespread media coverage and public concern on an issue. Widespread protests are often ignited and the movement gains unprecedented momentum. In the movement for racial justice, this event was the killing of George Floyd by police officers in Minneapolis. On the same day, a video showing White woman in a racist confrontation with Christian Cooper, a black birder in Central Park, ignited public awareness of racism in the conservation field. Around the same time, Ruth Tyson's open letter to the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) catalyzed urgency in environmental organizations to address internal DEI (Tyson, 2020).

**Stage 5: Perceptions of failure.** The movement sees that goals are unachieved, power holders are unchanged, and numbers go down at demonstrations.

**Stage 6: Majority public opinion.** Majority public opinion is reached. The phrases "I can't breathe" and "Black Lives Matter" became rallying cries in real life and on social media. Protests continue all summer of 2020 (Amnesty International, 2020). A two block area near the White House is renamed "Black Lives Matter Plaza" (Government of the District of Columbia, 2021). Statues of White supremacists were torn down in cities throughout the world (Amnesty International, 2020). A petition on change.org asking for justice for George Floyd gained 20 million signatures, more signatures than any petition ever circulated on the site (McHugh, 2020).

**Stage 7: Success.** The movement achieves substantial wins. Communities all over the country finally begin to take the issue of police brutality seriously. Some move to defund the police (Amnesty International, 2020). The George Floyd Law Enforcement Trust and Integrity Act was proposed in Congress to reduce police brutality and establish national policing standards and

accreditations (Siegel, 2020). It eventually gained 133 co-sponsors (U.S. Congress, 117, 2021). In a huge step forward for racial justice, police officer Derek Chauvin was convicted for murder and manslaughter on April 20, 2021. He was sentenced to twenty-two and a half years in prison. The other three officers at the scene were also later convicted of violating Floyd's civil rights (AP News, 2022).

In the climate movement, Ruth Tyson's letter sent shock wave throughout environmental organizations. UCS acknowledged the toxic culture that continues to harm employees of color and stated their intention to work towards equity and inclusion (Union of Concerned Scientists, 2020). Her colleagues told me that her letter supercharged the leadership to take DEI initiatives more seriously, whereas before it was often given lip service. One colleague told me that her letter encouraged other BIPOC staff at UCS to speak up as well, resulting in a manager being put on paid leave and eventually resigning (S.S. personal communication, June 25, 2021). The executive director of UCS also resigned in the same year and was replaced by a BIPOC leader (Rest, 2021; Union of Concerned Scientists, 2021). Other organizations also had their leaders replaced with people of color, including Environmental Grantmakers Association, Sierra Club, Greenpeace, and NRDC.

**Stage 8: Continuing the struggle.** Extend successes, opponents attempt backlash, paradigm shift. In Green 2.0's 2022 report card, 100% of the 68 participating NGOs said they had committed financial resources to DEI efforts, 90% had DEI goals written into their strategic plan, 82% had a policy explicitly addressing DEI, and 72% had a DEI committee (Green 2.0, 2022). Many organizations are implementing strategies aimed at diversity and inclusion such as implicit bias training (76%) but fewer are engaged in equity measures such as having a

transparent salary pay scale for all positions within the organization that employees can view (54%) (Green 2.0, 2022).

Success also leads to backlash. As the events of 2020 recede further into the past, momentum for belonging, equity, justice, diversity and inclusion wanes until actions by activists or another trigger event builds it up again.

(Moyer et al., 2001, p. 44-45).

### **Prior Research on Diversity in the Climate Movement**

My research explores the following aspects of the climate movement:

- Demographics: race, age, gender, political ideology, socioeconomic status;
- Engagement: length of engagement, roles, and actions;
- Impacts and worries: How has climate change impacted them? What are they worried about?
- Challenges and strategies: What are the challenges and barriers to participation in the climate movement? What are the strategies for overcoming these challenges and barriers?

This section presents what others have found these topics.

#### ***Demographics***

**Race.** Despite our understanding that the climate movement is predominantly White, there is little research available on the demographics of the climate movement. Organizations like Green 2.0 collect demographics of employees in environmental organizations, but there isn't a parallel effort to collect the demographics of volunteers/supporters/donors. There are several major challenges to data collection in this area: a) Difficulty identifying who is a part of the climate movement. Are they the registered members of climate organizations? Does it include donors and supporters? Does it include those who participated in a rally but are not registered with any organization? b) Organizations typically do not collect demographic information such

as race, age, gender, and political affiliation when people join because collecting such information off the bat might be off-putting to potential supporters. c) Even if demographic information is collected, organizations often do not want to make it public because they do not want to be seen as lacking diversity or discourage those in the minority from joining. As a result, our understanding of the demographics of the climate movement is very limited.

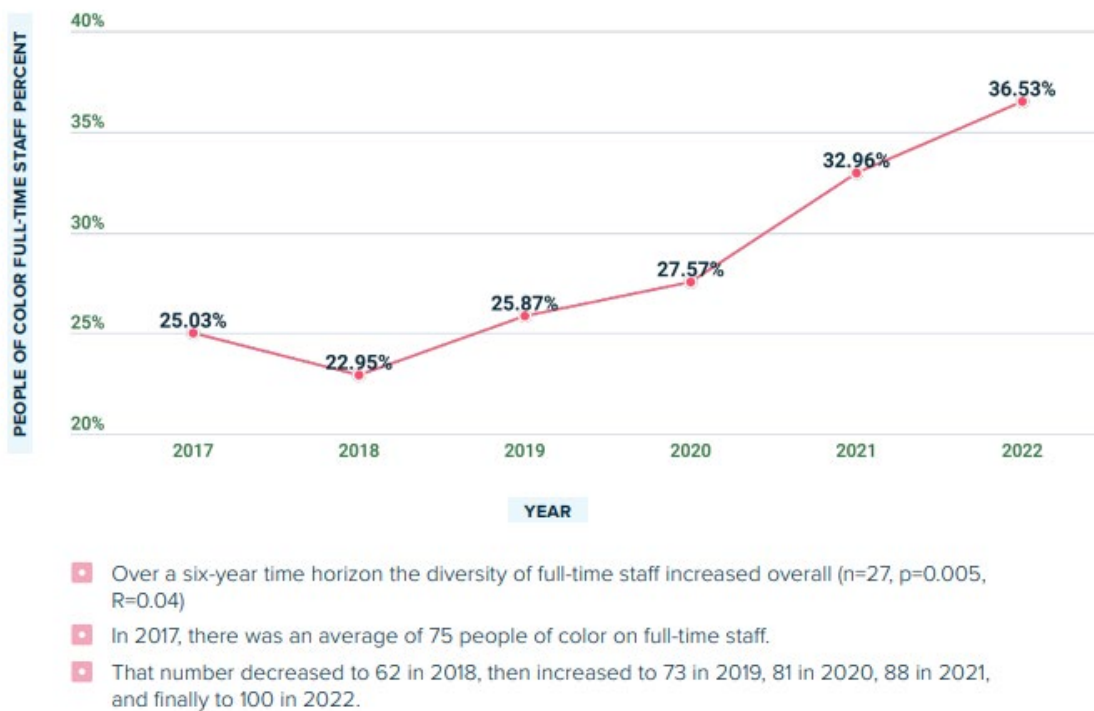
The best study of the demographics of the climate movement is a 2020 study from the Climate Action Campaign which matched members of U.S. climate organizations to their profiles in the Catalyst voter file. The study included 28 organizations, including Citizens' Climate Lobby, 350, Climate Reality Project, Union of Concerned Scientists, the Sierra Club, NRDC, Environmental Defense Fund, Environment America, Friends of the Earth, and Interfaith Power and Light. They found that members of the participating organizations were 83% White, 7% Hispanic, 5% Black, 2% Asian, and 0% Native American or Other. The study also found that 24% of the members were under age 35, 30% ages 35-54, and 47% age 55 and above. The members were also 49% Democrat, 17% Republican, 16% no party, 10% unknown, and 7% other. Most of the members (56%) were in the middle income brackets of \$30,000-75,000 a year. Because of confidentiality regarding the data, the study is not available to the public.

Another source of information on the demographics of environmental organizations comes from Green 2.0. Their 2022 report card shows that from 2017 to 2022, the percentage of people of color on the staff of environmental organizations grew from 25% to 36.5% for full-time staff and 25% to 30% for heads of organizations. The percentage of BIPOC senior staff at environmental organizations increased from 17% to 33.4%. BIPOC made up 34% of the board members of these organizations in 2022, a significant increase from 18% in 2017 (see Figure 3)

(Green 2.0, 2022). In 2017, the report card contained data from 40 environmental organizations and in 2022 it included data from 64 NGOs and 20 foundations.

**Figure 3**

*Percentage of People of Color on Full-Time Staff at Environmental NGOs*



(Green 2.0, 2022)

**Gender.** While we do not have statistics on gender in the climate movement, women dominate the staff of environmental organizations. A 2018 study found that 60.8% of the full-time staff and 75.1% of the part time staff of environmental organizations were women (Taylor 2018). However, men occupied more than 50% of the positions in senior leadership and on boards (Taylor 2018). Research shows that on average, women are slightly more likely than men to have stronger pro-climate opinions and beliefs (Pearson et al., 2017). According to the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, 69% of women say they are worried about climate change compared to 58% of men (Yale Program on Climate Change Communication & George

Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication [YPCCC & Mason 4C], 2022).

Women in general are also more inclined to volunteer for organizations and causes they care about. In 2015, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that 27.8% of women in the U.S. volunteered compared to 21.8% of men, a lead that appeared across all age groups and educational levels (U.S. Bureau of labor Statistics, 2016). The prominence of young female climate leaders like Greta Thunberg may also be inspiring more young women to join the climate movement.

**Age.** The global climate strikes of 2019 show that young people are increasingly engaged in climate change and leading the movement. Research shows that Millennials or younger Americans are more concerned about climate change and more likely to take action than older generations in the U.S. (Marlon et al., 2022, Tyson et al., 2021). In fact, 70% of young adults ages 18-34 are worried about climate change compared to 57% of adults age 55 years or older (YPCCC & Mason 4C, 2022). One study estimates that a third of Gen Z adults (32%) and 28% of Millennials have participated in some form of climate activism in 2021, including attending rallies, contacting elected officials, volunteering, and donating money to an organization working on climate change. This compares with smaller shares of Gen X (23%) and Baby Boomer and older adults (21%) who have taken the same actions (Tyson, et al., 2021). Millennial and younger adults are also more likely than Baby Boomers or older to say they would personally engage in nonviolent civil disobedience to protect the climate; with 8% saying they “definitely would” compared to 5% for Gen X and 2% for Baby Boomers and older (Campbell et al., 2022).

**Socioeconomic status.** Research shows that those involved in the climate movement tend to be of higher education and income levels, corresponding with research showing that higher income and education correlates with greater concern about climate change (Dietz et al., 2007;

Leiserowitz et al., 2012; McCright, 2009). Among those with a bachelor's degree, 69% are worried about climate change compared to 59% for those with a high school level of education (YPCCC & Mason 4C, 2022). Among different income levels, 68% of those who make \$100,000 or more are worried about climate change compared to 62% of those who make less than \$50,000 a year (YPCCC & Mason 4C, 2022).

People of color in the U.S. have much less wealth than Whites. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, non-Hispanic White householders had a median household wealth of \$187,300, compared with \$14,100 for Black householders and \$31,700 for Hispanic householders. Asian householders had a median household wealth of \$206,400 (Bennett et al., 2022). Higher education is also linked to more household wealth, with those holding graduate or professional degrees holding about twice the median wealth (\$408,700) of bachelor's degree holders (Bennett et al., 2022). Wealth and education level could be a factor in why people of color are less involved in the climate movement.

**Political ideology.** Research shows that concern about climate change is strongly divided by political ideology, with progressives being much more likely to be worried about climate change and support actions to address it than conservatives. According to the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, 90% of Democrats say they are worried about climate change compared to 36% of Republicans and 92% of those who identify as somewhat liberal say they are worried compared to 34% who identify as somewhat conservative (YPCCC & Mason 4C, 2022). Democrats are more than three times as likely as Republicans to say dealing with climate change should be a top priority for government (78% vs. 21%) (Kennedy & Johnson, 2020). About half of Democrats (49%) say addressing climate change is a top concern to them personally, and another 43% say it is one of several important concerns. By contrast, just 10% of

Republicans say addressing climate change is a top personal concern and 32% say it is one of several important concerns (Tyson et al., 2021).

### ***Engagement***

The research shows that a small fraction of Americans are engaged in advocacy actions on climate change. One study found that 1% of Americans said they are currently participating in a campaign to convince elected officials to take action to reduce global warming, although 9% said they would “definitely” join such a campaign and 18% said they would “probably” join one if asked by someone they liked and respected (Leiserowitz et al., 2022). In the same study, 8% of Americans said they have volunteered their time to an organization working on climate change in the past year; 9% said they have contacted their government officials about climate change in the past year; 17% say they would engage in nonviolent civil disobedience against corporate or government activities that make global warming worse (Leiserowitz et al., 2022). Another study by the Pew Research Center showed that 24% of U.S. adults have made efforts to support climate action in the last year, including donating money to organizations focused on addressing climate change (16%), contacting elected officials to urge them to address climate change (10%), volunteering for an activity focused on addressing climate change (10%), and attending protest or rally to show support for addressing climate change (6%) (Tyson et al., 2021).

Many prominent climate scientists have said talking to people about climate change is important to fighting the climate crisis (Chiu, 2022). Talking about climate change motivates concern and establishes a social norm that it is ok to be worried about climate change and seek solutions (TED, 2018). But climate change is not often a topic of conversation among Americans. According to the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, 67% of Americans say they “rarely” or “never” discussed global warming with their friends and family

(Leiserowitz et al., 2022). Along the same lines, Pew Research Center found that 56% of Americans said they talk about climate change to their family and friends at least sometimes (Tyson et al., 2021).

Even though people of color are less engaged in climate organizations, many say they would be willing to take action on climate if invited to do so. YPCCC found that more than one in three Hispanics/Latinos (37%) and African Americans (36%) say they would “definitely” or “probably” join a campaign to address climate change, compared to one in five Whites (22%) (Ballew et al., 2020). People of color are also more likely than Whites to say they would personally engage in non-violent civil disobedience in defense of the climate; about one in six Hispanics/Latinos (6% “definitely would” and 11% “probably would”) and one in five Black Americans (5% “definitely would” and 17% “probably would”) say they would engage in such actions, if asked to by a person they liked and respected (Campbell et al., 2022). In addition, 37% of Hispanics and 29% of Blacks say they discuss global warming compared to 33% of Whites (YPCCC & Mason 4C, 2022).

### ***Impacts***

Climate change disproportionately impacts people of color in the United States. A majority of Americans (57%) say climate change is having at least some impact on their local community, but Black and Hispanic adults are more likely to say their local community experiences environmental problems such as air pollution, water pollution, lack of green space, and excess garbage (Tyson et al., 2021). Four in ten (43%) Americans say they have personally experienced the effects of global warming (Leiserowitz et al., 2022) with a disproportionate number of them being people of color. From 2018-2022, 58% of Hispanics and 55% of Black Americans say climate change is harming them personally compared to 38% of Whites (YPCCC

& Mason 4C, 2022). In addition to direct impacts, 60% of American adults say climate change caused them to change behaviors that contribute to climate change (American Psychological Association, 2020).

### ***Worries***

Americans are increasingly worried about climate change, but people of color are more worried than Whites. In fact, 65% of Americans said they are worried about global warming in 2021 (Leiserowitz et al., 2022), compared to 53% in 2010 (Leiserowitz et al., 2010). From 2018-2022, 78% of Hispanics and 73% of Blacks say they are worried about climate change compared to 60% of Whites (YPCCC & Mason 4C, 2022). In addition, the Pew Research Center found that 31% of Americans said addressing global climate change is a top concern to them personally with Hispanic (39%) and Black (32%) adults being more likely than White (28%) adults to say climate change is a top concern (Tyson et al., 2021).

Climate change is also a threat to mental health. According to a survey by the American Psychological Association, 68% of American adults today experience some climate anxiety (APA, 2020). Young people ages 18-34 experience climate anxiety even more, with 47% saying the stress they feel about climate change affects their daily lives (APA, 2020). In addition to existential worries and fears about the future, natural disasters can lead to displacement, food insecurity, and illness, which can affect mental health directly or indirectly. For example, high temperature and humidity have been associated with increases in emergency department visits for mental health reasons (Vida et al., 2012).

### ***Challenges and Barriers***

Even though 65% of Americans say they are worried about climate change, only 1% say they are actively engaged in a campaign to address climate change (Leiserowitz et al., 2022).

Understanding challenges and barriers to participation in the climate movement, including differences between Whites and POCs, can help organizations increase engagement and participation.

When it comes to challenges and barriers, YPCCC conducted a study on barriers for Latinos to contacting their elected officials about global warming. They found that for non-Latinos, the top responses were “nobody has ever asked me to” (77%), “It wouldn’t make any difference” (63%), “I am not an activist” (62%), “I don’t know which elected officials to contact” (55%), and “I wouldn’t know what to say” (53%) (Ballew et al., 2020). For Latinos, the biggest barriers to contacting elected officials about climate change were “nobody has ever asked me to” (73%), “I don’t know which elected officials to contact” (64%), “I am not an activist” (55%), “I wouldn’t know what to say” (54%), and “It’s too much effort” (54%). In addition, 37% of Spanish-speaking Latinos said they feared that it might attract unwanted attention from immigration authorities (Ballew et al., 2020). For people who had already changed behaviors to address climate change, the American Psychological Association found that 1 in 4 (26%) participants cited not having the resources, such as time, money or skills, to make changes (American Psychological Association, 2020). Among those who have not made changes to their behavior to address climate change, 29% said nothing would motivate them to do so (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Studies show that racism is a significant barrier to participation for people of color in the climate organizationst (Taylor, 2014; Johnson, 2019; Warren, 2021). A study by Green 2.0 found that people of color had lower perceived fairness in development, evaluation, and promotion practices and had lower intent to stay than Whites (Johnson, 2019). They also found that perceived fairness in development, evaluation, and promotion practices predicted intent to stay

(Johnson, 2019). These practices included transparency around pay, transparency around promotions, development opportunities, use of DEI metrics, and top leadership buy-in in DEI (Jonson, 2019). Other barriers BIPOC professionals identified to their professional advancement include (a) the dominant culture of the organizations they worked that is alienating to ethnic minorities, and (b) discriminatory hiring practices that prevent minorities from obtaining jobs in environmental organizations (Taylor 2014). Environmental justice organizations and those focused on people of color also received fewer grants and grant dollars than mainstream environmental organizations (Taylor & Blondell, 2023).

### ***Strategies***

There are many theories on why the climate movement is not very popular and how to change that. One school of thought is that the climate movement needs greater narrative capacity, which in the words of Dr. Zeynep Tufekci, is “the ability of a movement to frame its story on its own terms and to spread its worldview” (Tufekci, 2017). Her theory is that the climate movement is not telling stories in a way that compels people to see it as an urgent issue that affects them personally. Others, such as Dr. Katherine Hayhoe, believe that we need to communicate about climate change in a way that appeals to people’s existing values and those values do not have to be those of the progressive movement (Citizens’ Climate Education, 2021). Dr. Hayhoe is renowned for sharing about how unlikely allies, such as evangelical Christians, coal miners, and even fossil fuel companies have a stake in fighting climate change and can be brought to the table. Some feel that the focus on reducing individual carbon footprints distracts from political mobilizing for policy change (Mann, 2019; Fang, 2021). Others, especially those in the environmental justice movement, feel that sociolinguistic injustice in the climate movement impedes frontline community members' participation in the climate movement (Fine,

2022). By this they mean the prevalence of technocratic or esoteric language that are difficult for laypeople to understand. Finally, many feel the climate movement needs to be more diverse, inclusive, and equitable in order to attract and retain BIPOC and other minority groups (Bonta & Jordan, 2007; Park, 2007; Taylor, 2014; Johnson, 2019).

### **Gaps and Contributions of Current Research**

My literature review showed that there are significant advances and gaps in the understanding of BEDJI in the climate movement. In quantitative research, the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication and the George Mason University's Center for Climate Change Communication have tracked Americans' perceptions of climate change—their beliefs, attitudes, worries, and willingness to take action—over time. Others, such as the Pew Research Center, have studied Americans' perceptions of climate change broken down by race, age, gender, education, income, and political ideology. However, these studies are focused on the general public rather than people in the climate movement and their samples tend to be too small to be representative of minority racial groups (J. Carman, YPCCC personal communication, November 12, 2022). They also do not have qualitative components that would do more to illuminate why people think about climate change the way they do.

Dr. Dorceta Taylor and Green 2.0 provided research specifically on people of color in the environmental movement, but their focus was on staff and not volunteers. Their inclusion of environmental organizations was also very broad, including zoos and aquariums, government agencies, NGOs and foundations. Taylor's interviewees conveyed first-hand BIPOC experiences in the environmental movement. However, her interviewees came from a broad range of environmental organizations and those interviews are now almost a decade old, before DEI became a main topic in the environmental sector.

My research is new and different in several ways. First, my focus on the climate movement distinguishes it from prior studies on the environmental movement, even though the two are closely related. The climate movement has evolved into a distinct movement separate from the environmental movement, with its own organizations, goals, and grassroots constituency. Many people, especially young people and people of color, who care about climate change do not necessarily identify as environmentalists or affiliate themselves with environmental organizations. Therefore, a study on diversity in the climate movement gives us more understanding about this unique movement. Second, my survey participants were mostly volunteers in the climate movement rather than employees, who have different barriers, motivations, and patterns of engagement. My study also compared the characteristics of Whites and BIPOC in the climate movement, which most studies have not done. Third, my interviews with BIPOC climate professionals provide in-depth insights into their perceptions, experiences, and recommendations for diversity in the climate movement. While many of my participants' insights are not new, they were provided in the fresh light of a country still grappling with the Covid-19 pandemic, a racial reckoning catalyzed by repeat instances of police brutality and gun violence, and the unfolding of the climate crisis that is becoming worse over time.

There are not many well documented instances of the experiences of people of color in the environmental movement, partly because sharing experiences of marginalization is not easy for people of color. Notable exceptions include Dorceta Taylor's *State of Diversity in the Environmental Sector* (2014), Marcelo Bonta's *Transforming a Movement* report (2019), Johnson and Wilkinson's *All We Can Save*, and Emily Warren's 2021 dissertation. For one, people of color experience marginalization and oppression so regularly in all fields that it seems banal to share those experiences. They may also not wish to share their stories openly due to fear

of retaliation, that nothing would change, or of appearing as complainers. Sharing stories about racism requires a tremendous amount of emotional labor, which is often painful and traumatic. A researcher provides a container for people of color to share their stories and performs the labor of documenting, analyzing, and publishing those stories so that they may be of benefit to all.

### **CHAPTER III: METHODS**

The study design had two primary components: (a) mixed-method surveys with multiple choice and open ended questions with results are presented as descriptive statistics and themes derived from responses to open-ended questions; (b) qualitative research involving interviews with 17 people of color in the U.S. climate movement with results presented as emergent themes. The surveys were designed to capture a broad picture of the climate movement and the differences between Whites and BIPOC in engagement, perceptions of worries, challenges, and strategies. The interviews provide in-depth investigation of the challenges, barriers, strategies, and resources for equity, inclusion, and belonging.

#### **Part 1: Surveys**

The survey portion of this study was a mixed-methods semi-participatory action research with qualitative and quantitative components. Participatory action research (PAR) is a research method where “researchers involve participants as active collaborators in their inquiries” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 25). PAR differs from conventional research in that participants are engaged in the research design (writing questions, determining how the data will be collected and analyzed) and informing a course of action. In PAR, researcher and participants undertake a reflective cycle—data is collected, analyzed, a course of action is determined and implemented, then more data is collected to evaluate the action, which leads to a new course of action (Baum et

al., 2006). PAR also considers the context of the research. Instead of isolating the object of study, PAR attempts to look at how participants interact in the context of their environment (Baum et al., 2006).

Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998) described participatory action research as having these qualities:

- Participatory action is recursive or dialectical and is focused on bringing about change in practices.
- It is focused on helping individuals free themselves from constraints found in the media, in language, in work procedures, and in the relationships of power in educational settings.
- It is emancipatory in that it helps unshackle people from the constraints of irrational and unjust structures that limit self-development and self-determination.
- It is practical and collaborative because it is inquiry completed “with” others rather than “on” or “to” others.

(Kemmis and Wilkinson, 1998 as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 25)

My survey study was semi-PAR because it involved the participants in the design and execution of the study but did not have the iterative component. I chose this method in order to facilitate buy-in from the participating climate organizations. The organizations needed to email their supporters and receive results just from their supporters. Collaborating enabled the participating organizations to customize the survey questions and integrate the results of the study into their DEI strategic plans.

### *Selection of Participants*

Climate activists who volunteer or work at climate organizations were the target population for the survey phase of my study. While numerous environmental organizations in the United States work on climate change, I was primarily interested in organizations whose theory of change involved grassroots organizing and advocacy to affect policy change. I reached out to organizations that met the following criteria:

1. More than 50% of their work is devoted to climate change
2. Recruit and engage the general public to work on climate change
3. Conduct policy advocacy
4. Have more than 1000 members/volunteers/supporters
5. Work at the national level

Criteria 1 eliminated organizations that do not work primarily on climate change, including most natural resource organizations and social justice organizations. Criteria 2 eliminated foundations, think tanks, legal organizations, and those that do not do grassroots organizing. Criteria 3 excluded organizations that engage in non-policy solutions, such as sustainability strategy, research, or education. Criteria 4 and 5 eliminated organizations that work only locally or regionally. In the end, I found 13 organizations that met these criteria and reached out to them to collaborate on the research. In the end, three organizations agreed to collaborate and administer the survey to their supporters and staff.

Climate activists in this survey were defined as people participating with a climate organization in some capacity, such as volunteer, supporter, donor, staff, or board member. These are defined as:

- Volunteers: actively involved with their organization through regular communication and participation in actions.
- Supporters: officially joined in some capacity, by signing up for an online account on the organization's internal website, joining a chapter, but are not necessarily participating actively.
- Donors: make monetary contributions to the organization but may not be actively volunteering or supporting.
- Staff: employed for pay part time or full time at a climate organization.
- Board members: in a decision making capacity on the board of an organization and is usually an unpaid role.

### ***Survey Design***

The survey questions were designed in consultation with staff at the three participating climate organizations, each successively for their own surveys. At organization A, they were the vice president of programs, the director of strategic planning, and the director of education; at organization B, it was the DEI director; at organization C it was the executive director. First, the stakeholders at each organization and I discussed the goals and process of the study. Second, the stakeholders were given a draft questionnaire for the survey, to which they provided comments and edits, including adding questions they wanted or taking out questions that they did not. Third, I integrated the edits and created the survey in SurveyMonkey Pro. Fourth, the survey was emailed to supporters or included in a regularly scheduled communication. Fifth, I collected the data through SurveyMonkey and compiled it into a report for each organization. In the end each organization received a customized report of the results from just their supporters.

Two versions of the survey were administered. Organizations A and C administered a version of the survey that included questions about belonging and justice (see Appendix A). Organization B and participants recruited through the snowball method used a version of the survey which did not include the belonging and justice questions (Appendix B). Instead, they included the questions “How does climate change impact you?”, “What are you most worried about when it comes to climate change?”, “What challenges or barriers do you experience to participation in the climate movement?”, and “What systemic or structural changes would make participation in the climate movement easier for you?”

After reviewing the results from organizations A and C, I came to the conclusion that questions regarding belonging and justice were more relevant for staff and board members but less relevant for volunteers, supporters, and donors who have limited interaction with their organization. Volunteers and supporters of the organizations had most of their direct experience with organizations through their local chapters, which varied widely depending on the local leadership and membership, so the results could not be generalized to the entire organization. In addition, most supporters and donors were not active volunteers, and had little interaction with the organization beyond reading emails or taking part in a few events. Therefore, they had difficulty answering questions regarding belonging and justice and often skipped those questions or answered “I don’t know.” The responses to those questions were provided to the organizations but are not included in this dissertation.

The questions in the survey for organization B were more relevant for volunteers/supporters and easier to explore in a survey. If Whites and BIPOC responded differently to the question, “How does climate change impact you,” that would indicate a lack of equity in how climate change impacts people. If Whites and BIPOC responded differently to

“What are you most worried about when it comes to climate change,” this would also indicate lack of equity in how climate change impacts people. Responses to “What challenges or barriers do you experience to participation in the climate movement” would give an indication of the level of inclusion experienced by respondents. Finally, “What systemic or structural changes would make participation in the climate movement easier for you?” would provide insights to the strategies necessary to create more diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and belonging. If BIPOC experienced different climate impacts, worries, challenges, and barriers compared to Whites, then this information would help organizations develop strategies that would be more inclusive and appealing to POC. No personal identifying information such as names or emails were collected from the respondents of either survey.

Once the surveys and reports were completed for organizations A, B, and C, I consolidated the data from all survey participants and analyzed the data for the entire study.

### ***Data Collection***

The primary method for distributing the survey was as an email link to the staff, volunteers, supporters, and donors of participating organizations. All versions of the online survey were programmed into SurveyMonkey Pro and filled out digitally. The survey—which took between 5 and 25 minutes to complete—was administered during a twelve-month period from January 19 to December 31, 2021. Participants were allowed two weeks to take the survey. Organization A randomly selected 2500 White supporters and 2500 BIPOC supporters to receive the survey. Organization B sent the survey in a newsletter to 15,000 supporters. Organization C sent the survey to 3,000 supporters. Each organization except for A also utilized one reminder email (see Table 1).

**Table 2***Organizations and Response Rates to Surveys*

Organization	Survey Distributed	Respondents	Response rate	% of Total Number of Survey Responses
A	5055	476	9.4%	47.5%
B	15,000	292	2%	29%
C	3000	49	1.6%	4.9%
Other	not available	186	not available	18.5%
TOTAL	not available	1003		

I utilized a snowball method to recruit participants beyond the three primary participating organizations. For the organizations whose national leadership declined to participate in the study, I emailed the leaders of their state and local chapters and asked them to email the survey to their local members. I did this with 30 state and local chapters of the climate organizations that met the participating criteria. I posted the survey to environmental forums, including those for the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, the Association for Environmental Studies and Sciences, Green Leadership Trust, and the Yale School of the Environment DC alumni. I posted the survey to a website I created for the study and on social media—Facebook groups, Twitter, Instagram, and Reddit. I asked anyone who identified as a climate activist—those who spent any amount of time volunteering with a climate organization—to take the survey. For respondents recruited through the snowball method, I relaxed the requirement that they volunteer for an organization that met the criteria outlined for participating climate organizations and allowed them to be defined as anyone who volunteered on climate action with an organization. About 90% of the participants recruited through the snowball

method volunteered with an organization that met the participating criteria and most of them were involved in more than one organization. All together, 18.5% or 186 of survey respondents were recruited using this method (see Table 1).

To guard against individuals responding to the survey more than once, a setting was applied in SurveyMonkey Pro that allowed individuals with the same IP address to take the survey only once.

### ***Data Analysis***

Data analysis was completed in stages for data from each collaborating organization (Citizens' Climate Lobby, Climate Reality, Young Evangelicals for Climate Action), and then for the combined data from all participants. For the results involving quantitative data, I used a chi-squared test of independence to ascertain statistical significance on the effect of being White or BIPOC on demographic factors and engagement metrics. For this type of test to be appropriate, there must be one dependent variable and two independent variables, with at least two categories each (O'Dwyer and Bernauer, 2013). In this case the independent variable is race (White or BIPOC), and the dependent variables are age, gender, political ideology, and socioeconomic status, measured by frequency of counts. The chi-squared test was also used to test the effect of being White or BIPOC on length of time involved with organization, contact with elected officials, conversation about climate change, participation in public demonstrations, and time spent volunteering. The tests were performed by feeding data for each survey question result into R and calculating the p-value. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. For a two-tailed hypothesis, the recommended sample size per group is 24 to consider a p-value below 0.05 statistically significant (Zhu, 2016). Since my sample size was 1,003, a p-value of 0.05 was used instead of 0.01.

Written responses to the open-ended questions were imported into NVIVO, separated by White vs BIPOC, and coded based on emergent themes from the data. This included responses to the open-ended questions “How does climate change impact you?”, “What are you most worried about when it comes to climate change?”, “What challenges or barriers do you experience to participation in the climate movement?” and “What systemic or structural changes would make participation in the climate movement easier for you?” Quantitative data analysis using descriptive statistics was completed in SurveyMonkey Pro and in Microsoft Excel. Graphs, charts, and tables were prepared in Excel and NVIVO.

### ***Notes on Survey Questions***

**Political ideology** in respondents was measured on a spectrum from very progressive to moderate to very conservative. I did not use words describing political parties such as Democrat, Republican, Libertarian, Independent, Green, etc., recognizing that not everyone affiliates themselves with a political party, and party affiliation is not always aligned with political ideology. While Republicans almost always identify as conservative or moderate, Democrats often identify as progressive, liberal, moderate, or conservative. Independents are likely to identify as conservative, moderate, or progressive (Banda, et al., 2018). In recent years, the word progressive has sometimes been used to indicate political ideology further to the left than liberal, though research shows that people who identify as progressive do not differ substantially in their political views or issue priorities compared to liberals (Banda, et al., 2018). The word “liberal” has also come to be associated with the establishment Democratic party represented by Hilary Clinton during the 2016 presidential campaign, while the word “progressive” has come to be associated with the anti-establishment left, as represented by Bernie Sanders during the same campaign (Banda, et al., 2018). I use the term “progressive” to indicate the left end of a political

spectrum opposite of conservative instead of “liberal” which is more associated with the ideology of the Democratic party.

**Engagement** refers to participation in the climate movement, which can vary greatly in method and intensity. In this study, engagement is defined as participation in advocacy actions such as contacting elected officials about climate change, volunteering for an organization that works on climate, and participation in protests and public demonstrations on climate. In addition to these common advocacy measures, I also include talking to family and friends about climate change and length of time involved. Results of BIPOC and Whites were disaggregated and chi-squared tests were performed to compare differences between the two groups.

**Challenges and Barriers** refer to difficulties and impediments in participating or engaging with the climate movement. Challenges are personal difficulties that usually require personal resources (such as time and money) to overcome. Challenges can also be emotional and psychological, such as frustration, anxiety, and lack of a sense of belonging. Barriers are systemic and structural. They require institutional or systemic change to overcome, such as education being a barrier to entry to participation in the climate movement, or racism being a barrier to the advancement of people of color in society.

## **Part 2: Interviews**

The interview phase of this study used phenomenological design and methods. This approach to qualitative research aims to “describe the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). The phenomenon may be insomnia, grief, the experience of adoption, or in this case, the experience of diversity or lack thereof in the climate movement. To understand the phenomenon in question, the phenomenological researcher collects data from persons who have experienced it and

develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75).

To recruit participants, I reached out to individuals I knew, asked for recommendations, and emailed my networks: Green Leadership Trust, Switzer Fellows Network, Green Schools list, and the Association of Environmental Studies and Sciences. Participants were offered \$25 for their participation. The practice of providing research participants with cash or other incentives has become increasingly common within social science. Incentives make it easier to recruit participants, and payment can be a means of equalizing power relations between researchers and participants (Warnock et al., 2022). Especially in the case of research involving people of color, where there is a history of exploitation, compensating interviewees is a means of recognizing the emotional labor provided and the value their stories hold (Scharff et al., 2010).

The interview portion of this study included 16 semi-structured interviews with 17 participants over a period of seven months. One of the interviews contained two participants because they worked closely together in the same organization. This interview method had been used and evaluated by many researchers as a valuable method for gathering information from people who work closely together (for example, a married couple, or a patient and caretaker) (Bjornholt & Farstad, 2014; Caldwell, 2014; Morgan et al., 2013; Morris, 2001). Having two participants in the same interview enabled each participant to build on what the other said and form a more complete picture of their experience in the same organization.

The 17 participants came from a variety of backgrounds and professional roles in the climate movement. All of them identified as BIPOC: 8 Black, 4 Latino, 4 Asian, and 1 mixed race. There were 13 women and 4 men; 10 young professionals, 5 mid-career, 1 late-career, and 1 college student; 11 work in the nonprofit sector, 3 in corporate, 2 in government, and 1 in

academia; 4 of the participants were DEI officers in their organizations and 10 were or have been volunteer climate activists (Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Interview Participants with Pseudonyms*

Name	Race	Age	Sector	Position
Antonia	Latina	30-40	NGO	Director
Aubrey	Black	20-30	NGO	Coordinator
Brandon	Black	20-30	Corporate	Consultant
Brianna	Mixed Race	40-50	Government	Coordinator
Carmen	Latina	40-50	NGO	DEI Director
Celeste	Latina	30-40	NGO	DEI Coordinator
Debbie	Black	30-40	NGO	Director
Diana	Black	30-40	Academia	Postdoc
Ella	Black	20-30	NGO	Director
George	Black	50-60	NGO	Board member
Janice	Asian	40-50	NGO	Director
Jordan	Black	30-40	Corporate	Engineer
Julia	Asian	30-40	NGO	Manager
Marian	Asian	30-40	Corporate	Director
Paisley	Black	30-40	NGO	DEI Coordinator
Pedro	Latino	50-60	NGO	Director
Sarita	Asian	20-30	NGO	Associate

*Interview Protocol*

The interview protocol was designed to explore the participants' personal and professional backgrounds, how they came to climate change, their thoughts about BEDJI in the climate movement, their challenges and barriers to participation, and resources and strategies for advancing BEDJI (see Appendix D). Sometimes questions were asked in a different order,

skipped, added, or slightly different questions were asked. Questions were asked in a different order if the flow of conversation led to participants answering questions in a different order. Very often participants answered a different question in their response to one question, in which case the later question was skipped. For example, participants often talked about resources and strategies while talking about challenges and barriers. Additional questions were asked for clarity if I wanted the participant to elaborate on their response. In one case, not all of the questions were asked because the participant ran out of time.

The interviews were conducted virtually over Zoom between June 10, 2021 and December 13, 2021. All participants signed a consent form describing the study and the list of interview questions ahead of time. The interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 2 hours. Each interview was recorded to my cloud drive and later transcribed by a research assistant into Google Docs. Participants were given the chance to review their transcript in Google Docs a few months after the interviews. Edited interview transcripts were uploaded into NVIVO software and coded and analyzed using NVIVO.

### **Biases and Limitations**

My study sought to capture perceptions and insights from a diverse sample of climate activists in the United States, but it had certain biases and limitations. My participants were drawn heavily from the members of organizations and other networks that I was a part of, which helped me gain a sense of trust from the participants. It was more difficult to draw participants from organizations that I was not a part of. My identity as an Asian American woman in the climate movement enabled me to elicit more from the participants than I think I would have if I had been White or male. My role as an academic researcher also helped to inspire confidence (two of the participants were academic researchers themselves).

### ***Difficulty Reaching Organizations***

I identified 13 national climate organizations who met the study criteria, but only three organizations were interested in collaborating on the study and distributing the survey to their members. As a result, these organizations were most represented in the survey sample. Some organizations declined to participate and others could not be reached. The rest of the survey respondents were recruited through networks, social media, and other communication platforms.

### ***Self-Identified***

Climate activists were defined as staff, volunteers, supporters, donors, and board members of a qualifying climate organization. This definition is somewhat self-interpreted and wide ranging, including those who take part in rallies and meetings, and those who receive mailings or donate to their organization. Respondents recruited outside of the participating organizations were self-identified as “anyone who spends any amount of time volunteering for a climate organization.” I asked for their affiliations but did not check to verify them, which meant some organizations did not meet the criteria for qualifying climate organizations. However, 90% of the respondents recruited through the snowball method ended up being affiliated with a qualifying organization.

### ***Self-Selected***

Respondents were self-selected, which tended to bias them towards people who were already active in the climate movement and interested in the issue of equity. Self-selection also biases towards people who have more time and interest in filling out surveys. Because I was interested in the opinions of BIPOC, I explicitly encouraged those who identified as BIPOC to take the survey, which means that my sample probably had a greater proportion of BIPOC than actually in the climate movement.

### ***Covid-19***

The surveys were administered in 2021, the second year of the Covid-19 pandemic and one year after the murder of George Floyd. These events accelerated widespread public awareness of racial inequities and catalyzed efforts at climate and environmental organizations to improve DEI. Organizations and individuals may have been more receptive to participating in a study on diversity in the climate movement as a result. The pandemic also made certain forms of activism more difficult and contributed to general activist burnout, which could have made it more difficult to respond to research inquiries.

### ***Survey Unevenness***

Because organizations were allowed to customize questions for the survey, not all respondents received the same questions. However, customization only involved adding or deleting questions, not changing the wording of questions that were included, which helped to ensure integrity. In the end only two versions of the survey were used.

### ***Convenience Sampling***

The interview participants were drawn from my own associations and networks. Most of the interview participants were professionals in influential roles with high levels of education. Thirteen of the interview participants worked full-time in the climate movement, four of them on DEI in their organizations, and had deep insights due to their broad experience and commitment to the climate movement. However, their relatively privileged positions meant that they did not experience the same challenges and barriers as grassroots volunteers or frontline communities in the climate movement.

### ***Interview Format***

The interviews were all conducted virtually via Zoom. This meant that it was sometimes hard to hear what participants said, read their body language, or establish a personal connection. Simultaneously, the virtual format made it easier for participants to take time out of their day to do the interviews as well as bypass the restrictions posed by the pandemic.

### **Research Assistance**

I received assistance while conducting this research in the form of student interns who I hired and supervised to assist with this project. The interns typically contributed five hours a week and were paid \$15 an hour. The tasks they helped with were:

- Transcribing interviews
- Compiling survey data into spreadsheets
- Calculating descriptive statistics
- Creating tables and charts
- Editing presentations
- Formatting references
- Copyediting
- Recruiting participants for survey

I personally checked their work and did all of the analysis and writing by myself. All of the interns signed non-disclosure agreements and only one was given limited access to confidential information from interviewees.

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

### Part I: Surveys

The first part of this study was a survey of 1,003 climate activists. The characteristics I explored were (a) demographics—including race, gender, age, class, and political ideology; (b) level of engagement; (c) climate change impacts on participants; (d) what participants were worried about regarding climate change; (e) challenges and barriers to participation; and (f) recommendations for strategies to increase engagement. Data were segmented based on two racial demographic indicators (BIPOC and White) and analyzed for comparison.

#### Demographics

The demographic characteristics I explored were age, gender, race, political ideology, and socioeconomic status. The climate activists in my sample were mostly progressive, White, middle class, women, over age 55 and under age 35. BIPOC respondents differed from Whites in that they tended to be younger and in a lower socioeconomic class. In all other aspects, BIPOC respondents were similar to Whites.

**Table 4**

*Summary of Respondent Demographics (n = 1,003)*

White	70%	BIPOC	30%
Women	59%	Men	39%
Over 55	46%	Under 35	33%
Progressive	83%	Moderate or Conservative	17.5%
Middle class	89%	Upper or lower class	11%

### ***Racial/Ethnic Affiliation***

The largest racial/ethnic group among the respondents were White (78%), followed by Asian (12%), Latino (11%), Black (6%), Native American (2%), North African/Middle Eastern (1%), and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (1%). Respondents were able to select more than one category if they were mixed race.

**Table 5**

*Racial/Ethnic Affiliation of Respondents (n = 967)*

Race	Number	Percentage*
African American/Black	59	6%
Asian/Asian American	112	12%
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	6	1%
Latino/Latina/Latinx	105	11%
Native American/Indigenous	21	2%
North African/Middle Eastern	11	1%
White/Caucasian only	677	70%
White/Caucasian including mixed race	745	78%

\*Percentages do not add up to 100 because participants were able to select more than one.

To compare survey results between White and BIPOC respondents, respondents were also asked to self-identify as BIPOC or White. Thirty percent of the respondents identified as BIPOC and 70% identified as White. Those who selected White in addition to another race as their identity most often chose to identify as BIPOC (n = 967).

**Table 6***BIPOC vs. White Respondents (n = 967)*

Identity	Total	% Total
BIPOC	286	30%
White	681	70%

***Gender***

Among the respondents who answered this demographic question (n = 996), female climate activists (59%) significantly outnumbered male climate activists (39%), and a small percentage identified as nonbinary (2.5%). Among BIPOC respondents, 65% identified as female compared to 57% of White respondents. With a p-value of 0.06199, the difference between BIPOC and White was not large enough to be statistically significant (p-values are statistically significant if less than 0.05).

**Table 7***Gender of Respondents (n = 996)*

Gender	Total	% Total	POC	% POC	White	% White
Female	587	59%	160	65%	411	57%
Male	384	39%	82	33%	289	40%
Nonbinary	25	2.5%	3	1%	18	3%

p = 0.06199

***Age***

About one-third (31%) of the climate activists were above age 64 and one-third (33%) under age 35. With a p-value of 0.0004998, BIPOC and Whites differed significantly in that 53% of BIPOC were under 35, while only 26% of Whites were under age 35. Among White respondents, 37% were over age 64, while only 13% of BIPOC were.

**Table 8***Age of Respondents (n = 1,001)*

Age	POC	% POC	White	% White	Total	% Total
Under 18	8	3%	7	1%	15	2%
18-24	61	25%	74	10%	137	14%
25-34	64	26%	109	15%	174	17%
35-44	42	17%	65	9%	112	11%
45-54	22	9%	73	10%	101	10%
55-64	19	8%	123	17%	149	15%
Above 64	32	13%	269	37%	313	31%

\*\*\* $p < .001$ ***Political Ideology***

Thirty nine percent of the respondents in this study self-identified as very progressive, 44% as moderately progressive, 14% as moderate, 3% as moderately conservative, and 0.5% as very conservative. A p-value of 0.3933 indicated that there was virtually no difference between BIPOC and White responses. Two percent of BIPOC identified as conservative compared to 3% of Whites. This is very different from the American population in general, which the 2021 Gallup poll showed identifying as 36% conservative, 35% moderate, and 25% liberal (Saad, 2021).

**Table 9***Political Ideology of Respondents (n = 961)*

Political Ideology	POC	% POC	White	% White	Total
Very Progressive	90	40%	267	38%	372
Moderately Progressive	97	41%	312	45%	418
Moderate	40	17%	91	13%	135
Moderately Conservative	4	2%	23	3%	31
Very Conservative	1	0.4%	3	0.4%	5

p = 0.3933

***Socioeconomic Status***

Respondents were asked to self-identify their socioeconomic status as upper class, upper-middle class, middle class, lower-middle class, or lower class. Respondents were told, “Socioeconomic status is defined as the social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation. Which of the following best identifies your socioeconomic status?” In total (n = 994), the majority (80%) of respondents self-identified as upper-middle class (41%) or middle class (41%). A small percentage (7%) identified as upper class, and 3.5% identified as lower class. An extremely small p-value of 2.2e-16 indicated that BIPOC were four times more likely to identify as lower-middle class and lower class than Whites.

**Table 10***Socioeconomic Status of Respondents (n = 994)*

Socioeconomic Status	POC	% POC	White	% White	Total	% Total
Upper Class	12	5%	57	8%	70	7%
Upper-Middle Class	78	32%	323	45%	408	41%
Middle Class	86	31%	287	40%	388	39%
Lower-Middle Class	55	22%	32	4%	93	9%
Lower Class	14	6%	19	3%	35	4%

\*\*\* $p < .001$ **Engagement**

Whites and BIPOC exhibited differences in terms of their engagement on climate change. Whites were more likely to be involved for longer in their organizations, and more likely to contact their elected officials about climate change than BIPOC. BIPOC were less likely to talk to their family or friends about climate change. There was no statistically significant difference between Whites and BIPOC in terms of how often they attended public demonstrations on climate change or how much time they spent volunteering.

***Length of Time Involved with Organization***

Respondents were asked how long they had been involved with their organization, ranging from less than 1 year to more than 10 years. Using a chi-squared test to compare results from Whites and BIPOC, a p-value of  $< 2.2e-16$  indicated a significant difference between the two. BIPOC reported being involved for far less time than Whites; 46% reported being involved for less than one year compared to 36% for Whites. Only 4% of BIPOC reported being involved for more than 10 years, while 10% of Whites did.

**Table 11**

*Length of Involvement with Organizations (n = 459)*

Years	POC	% POC	White	% White	Total	% Total
≤1 year	43	46%	132	36%	175	44%
2 years	22	24%	59	16%	81	20%
3 years	8	9%	45	12%	53	13%
4 years	5	5%	34	9%	39	10%
5 years	2	2%	23	6%	25	6%
10 years	9	10%	37	10%	46	12%
More than 10 years	4	4%	36	10%	40	10%

\*\*\* $p < .001$

***Contact with Elected Officials***

Contacting elected officials—including calling, emailing, and writing letters—is a common advocacy action that climate activists engage in or are asked to engage in by their organizations. Respondents were asked, “How many times have you contacted your elected officials (call, email, or message) about climate change in the last year?” The difference was statistically significant ( $p\text{-value} = 1.078\text{e-}06$ ). Twenty percent of POC said “none” for the number of times they’ve contacted an elected official about climate change in the last year compared to 12% for Whites. Nineteen percent of POC said they contacted their elected officials 10 times or more compared to 27% of Whites. Overall BIPOC reported contacting their elected officials less than Whites ( $n = 948$ ).

**Table 12***Contact with Elected Officials in the Last Year (n = 948)*

Contact w/ Elected Officials	POC	% POC	White	% White	Total	% Total
None	48	20%	81	12%	133	19%
1-3 times	98	41%	185	27%	291	41%
4-6 times	38	16%	162	24%	208	30%
7-9 times	11	5%	60	9%	72	10%
10 times or more	45	19%	185	27%	244	35%

\*\*\* $p < .001$ ***Conversation About Climate Change***

Respondents were asked how often they talked about climate change with their friends and family, with choices ranging from more than once a week to almost never. The respondents in my survey talked about climate change significantly more than average Americans (99% vs. 56% respectively). For both Whites and BIPOC, the most common response was “more than once a week” (47%), followed by “once a week” (26%). Whites reported talking to their family and friends about climate change more often than BIPOC did (p-value = 0.004998).

**Table 13***Frequency Talking about Climate Change with Friends and Family (n = 946)*

Frequency	POC	% POC	White	% White	Total	% Total
More than once a week	97	41%	333	49%	445	47%
Once a week	71	30%	160	24%	242	26%
Once a month	29	12%	114	17%	147	16%
A few times a year	37	16%	56	8%	97	10%
Once a year	3	1%	2	0%	5	1%
Less than once a year	0	0%	1	0%	1	0%
Almost never	1	0%	8	1%	9	1%

\*\*p = 0.004998

***Participation in Public Demonstrations***

Respondents were asked how many times they had participated in a protest or public demonstration on climate change in the previous two years. More than half (57%) of the respondents said they had participated in at least one protest or public demonstration on climate change in the prior two years. For both BIPOC and Whites, 8% said they had attended more than five such events in the last two years. There was no difference between BIPOC and Whites across answer choices. Many respondents said in the comments they would have attended more demonstrations if it had not been for the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Table 14***Participation in Public Demonstrations on Climate Change in the Last Two Years (n = 939)*

Frequency	POC	% POC	White	% White	Total	% Total
None	114	48%	277	42%	407	43%
Once	51	22%	138	21%	194	21%
Twice	24	10%	116	17%	144	15%
Three times	17	7%	45	7%	63	7%
Four times	9	4%	27	4%	39	4%
Five times	4	2%	12	2%	18	2%
More than five times	18	8%	52	8%	74	8%

p = 0.2487

***Time Spent Volunteering***

Respondents were asked how many hours they spent volunteering per week on climate actions. More than two thirds (77%) of the respondents said they volunteered some time for a climate organization, and the rates were slightly more for BIPOC than Whites (82% vs. 75%, respectively). The most common response for both groups was 1–3 hours. A p-value of 0.2144 indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups in how much time they spent volunteering on a weekly basis.

**Table 15***Hours Spent Volunteering per Week (n = 942)*

Hours	POC	% POC	White	% White	Total	% Total
None	43	18%	165	25%	218	23%
Less than 1 hour	57	24%	155	23%	220	23%
1-3 hours	83	35%	184	28%	277	29%
4-6 hours	26	11%	73	11%	101	11%
7-9 hours	10	4%	25	4%	36	4%
10 or more hours	20	8%	66	10%	90	10%

p = 0.2144

**Personal Impacts**

The survey asked, “How does climate change impact you?” in the form of an open-ended question. BIPOC were more likely than Whites (64% vs. 44%, respectively) to say they experienced direct impacts such as heat, fire, flood, drought, sea level rise, and extreme weather. Their comments also reflected more life-and-death urgency regarding direct impacts than Whites. For example, a BIPOC participant would mention their home being flooded or being hospitalized for heat stroke; a White participant would say they had less opportunities to go skiing or their children had fewer days to be able to play outside. Whites were three times more likely than BIPOC (49% vs. 15%, respectively) to mention mental health impacts, including depression, anxiety, fear, and stress. Twice as many BIPOC than Whites (28% vs. 14%, respectively) said climate change prompted behavior change, from driving less to being civically engaged. BIPOC were four times more likely than Whites (16% vs. 4%, respectively) to mention environmental justice, or the disproportionate impact that climate change would have on BIPOC and vulnerable populations. Whites were ten times more likely than BIPOC (10% vs. 1%,

respectively) to say they experienced no or mild impacts because they were privileged. Twelve percent of Whites mentioned impacts to future generations while none of the BIPOC did.

**Table 16**

*Impact of Climate Change on Respondents (n = 382)*

	POC		White
Direct impacts (heat, flood, fire, drought, sea level rise)	64%	Mental health (depression, anxiety, fear, stress)	49%
Behavior change	28%	Direct impacts (heat, flood, fire, drought, sea level rise)	44%
Environmental justice	16%	Behavior change	14%
Mental health (depression, anxiety, fear, stress)	15%	Impacts to future generations	12%
Loss of biodiversity	12%	Loss of biodiversity	12%
Impacts to livelihoods	6%	No or low impacts	10%
Economic impacts	3%	Impacts to livelihoods	5%

## Worries

Respondents were asked an open-ended question, “What are you most worried about when it comes to climate change?” Whites and BIPOC were worried about many of the same things but differed in how they prioritized their worries. White respondents were eight times more likely than BIPOC (25% vs. 3%, respectively) to mention worrying about impacts to children and future generations, while BIPOC were more likely than Whites (25% vs. 10%, respectively) to mention extreme weather impacts to themselves and their communities. Both groups were equally worried about government inaction on climate change (26% BIPOC vs. 24% Whites). Whites were also three times more likely than BIPOC (24% vs. 7%, respectively) to worry about impacts to plants, animals, and ecosystems.

**Table 17***Climate Change Worries (n = 406)*

Worries	POC	Worries	Whites
Government inaction	26%	Future generations	25%
Extreme weather	25%	Government inaction	24%
Inequality	17%	Extinction and destruction of ecosystems	24%
Food insecurity	16%	Inequality	17%
Displacement, refugees	11%	Displacement, refugees	17%
Death	10%	Food insecurity	16%
Violence and social unrest	10%	Violence and social unrest	11%
Irreversibility	10%	Extreme weather	10%
Extinction, destruction of ecosystems	7%	Survival of the human species	7%
Future generations	3%	Irreversibility	7%
Health	3%	Health and economy	6%
Heat	3%	Heat	4%
Sea level rise	2%	Death	3%
Economy	1%	Sea level rise	1%

### Challenges and Barriers for Engagement

Respondents were asked an open-ended question, “What challenges and barriers do you experience to participation in the climate movement?” The results showed that BIPOC and Whites experienced many of the same challenges in being more involved in the climate movement. However, BIPOC tended to experience more direct barriers to participation than Whites. While both groups cited lack of time as the biggest barrier to participation (25% for BIPOC vs. 18% for Whites), BIPOC were burdened by more demands on their time, such as caring for extended family members, dealing with immigration issues, working extra jobs, and dealing with more health problems. BIPOC also cited racism and lack of representation (20%) as

a direct barrier to their participation. This included discrimination, microaggressions, tokenism, not feeling seen or heard, and lack of a sense of belonging. Interestingly, White respondents also said they experienced microaggressions and discrimination, with sexism and ageism being the most common complaints.

After lack of time, White respondents mentioned indifference from the government and general public to climate change as their biggest barrier (17%). Many of their responses focused on indirect barriers that made climate action difficult or frustrating, such as (a) resistance from government officials to take action on climate change, (b) indifference from the public, (c) Covid-19, (d) obstruction from fossil fuel companies, and (e) the politicization and polarization of climate change as an issue. More BIPOC commented that not knowing how to take action—or lack of opportunities—was a barrier, while White activists were more likely to say there were too many opportunities and they felt spread too thin.

**Table 18***Challenges or Barriers to Participation in the Climate Movement (n = 395)*

Challenges	POC	Challenges	White
Lack of time	25%	Lack of time	18%
Lack of representation	20%	Indifference from government and public	17%
Burnout	9%	Physical and mental health	8%
Indifference from government and public	9%	Lack of alignment and focus	8%
Discrimination	8%	Lack of opportunities	7%
Lack of money	7%	Covid-19	7%
Challenge with democracy	6%	Obstruction by fossil fuel companies	7%
Lack of opportunities to get involved	6%	Lack of money	7%
Youth	6%	Spread too thin	6%
Lack of confidence or hope	6%	Resistance to change by those in power	5%
Distance or lack of transportation	6%	Discomfort with activist activities	5%
Lack of alignment and focus	5%	Politicization of climate change	4%
Lack of resources	5%	Lack of confidence or hope	4%
Resistance to change by those in power	4%	Challenges with democracy	3%
Covid-19	4%	Age	3%
Physical or mental health	3%	None	3%
Politicization of climate change	2%	Distance or lack of transportation	3%
Spread too thin	2%	Burnout	2%
None	1%	Discrimination	2%
Technology	1%	Technology	2%

## Strategies to Increase Engagement

Respondents were asked the open-ended question, “What systemic or structural changes would make participation in the climate movement easier for you?” The results showed that BIPOC and Whites had many of the same ideas of strategies that would make participation in the climate movement easier for them, but they prioritized them differently. BIPOC were more likely than Whites (17% vs. 12%, respectively) to say that training and education in climate activism would help them be more engaged. More Whites than BIPOC (20% vs. 16%, respectively) prioritized government action on climate change as something that would encourage their participation. Interestingly, similar percentages of BIPOC and Whites (13% and 15%, respectively) said diversity and inclusion would be helpful. Whites (6%) were more likely to mention coordination among the climate organizations and reducing the number of emails, calls, and text messages they received; in contrast, BIPOC (13%) were more likely to mention more opportunities for action. Also, more BIPOC than Whites prioritized elevating frontline communities (13% vs. 3%, respectively) and youth engagement (11% vs. 1%, respectively).

Ten percent of BIPOC and Whites mentioned economic system change as a strategy. By this they meant policies that would reduce their economic burden and free them to have more time to participate in climate action, such as student loan debt forgiveness, universal healthcare, subsidized housing, subsidized childcare, living wage, etc. While these are beyond the scope of the climate movement to address, they showed that these issues impact each other, and social movements could benefit from supporting each other in addressing these systemic challenges.

**Table 19***Strategies to Increase Participation in the Climate Movement (n = 355)*

Strategies	POC	Strategies	White
Training and education	17%	Government action on climate change	20%
Government action on climate change	16%	Diversity and inclusion	15%
Diversity and inclusion	13%	Training and education	12%
More opportunities for action	13%	Democracy reform	12%
Elevating frontline communities	13%	Economic system change	10%
Youth engagement	11%	Intersectionality	7%
Economic system change	10%	Climate jobs and funding	6%
Intersectionality	8%	Changing the narrative	6%
Climate jobs and funding	4%	More opportunities for action	6%
Changing the narrative	4%	More structure	5%
More structure	3%	Coordination between climate organizations	3%
Technology	3%	Resilience and motivation	3%
Time off	2%	Fewer communications	3%
Democracy reform	2%	Elevating frontline communities	3%
Transportation	1%	Technology	2%

## Part II: Interviews

This section presents the topics and themes that emerged from the interviews with 17 BIPOC climate professionals (see Appendix D for interview protocol). Results are presented as narrative summaries, tables, and quotes from participants (see Table 3, p.55 for list of participants).

### Interest in Climate Change

Participants were asked, “How did you become interested in climate change?” Responses ranged from experiences in nature, to education, and exposure to environmental injustice. Their responses show that people of color are extremely diverse in their experiences of the environment, have a wide range of privileges and disadvantages, and come to the climate field as a result of diverse influences.

**Table 20**

#### *Sources of Interest in Climate Change*

Number	Source of Interest in Climate Change
3	Experiences in nature
6	Education
7	Witnessing or experiencing environmental injustice

Three of the participants said they became interested in climate change because of their experiences in nature. Pedro, who grew up in Mexico City and immigrated to the United States as a young adult, said his parents took him scuba diving at the beach throughout his teenage years. Through scuba diving, he became interested in marine biology and became aware of the impact of climate change on the oceans. Sarita, who grew up in the United States, said her love for the environment was inspired by her Indian father who had a love of gardening. Celeste said

as a child she was inspired by pictures of Yosemite National Park and Yogi bear in issues of National Geographic Magazine from the library.

Six participants said they became interested in climate change because they learned about it in school. Marian said she knew she wanted to do something about climate change by the time she was in high school. She said, “My interest in climate really came from my desire to support and benefit as many people as possible through my life and my career, and it also aligned well with my personal interests of studying science and ecosystems.” Ella, a researcher with a PhD in marine and coastal science, said she was interested in applied research as an undergraduate and “climate change and coastal resilience had a big sense of urgency, and it was where I thought I had the most opportunity to make an impact.” She decided to focus on the impacts of climate change and ways to combat them through habitat restoration and nature-based solutions. All of the participants who mentioned education as their entry into the climate movement said the urgency, relevance, and magnitude of the issue drew them to focus on it for their careers.

Many of the participants who did not have a science background came to climate change because they witnessed or experienced environmental injustice. Antonia said when she was growing up her mother taught at an elementary school that was located close to a freeway and refineries. “A lot of the school children and teachers there would get frequent headaches from some of the fumes. Many of the school children even developed asthma.” Antonia now works with the state government on air quality. Aubree got involved in the climate movement after making the connection of climate with social justice. She said:

Climate change was something I had heard about before college, but I had only ever heard of it referring to as global warming and had the sense that it was just about things like polar bears, melting ice caps, and eating vegetarian .... I think once I actually sat down and did my own research to understand the environmental justice aspect of climate change, I understood that it wasn't just about polar bears, but it's

really about people. That's when I started to really understand that I needed to do something.

I got very frustrated by the magnitude of this issue and being someone who's African learning that the issue would have the greatest impact on my home and my people, not as many people here in America. I felt a very personal motivation or a higher personal stake than others might have felt towards this issue. Now, I'm doing whatever I can to advocate for people back home who aren't able to have a voice in these Western spaces.

Paisley grew up in Louisiana's cancer alley. The people in her predominantly Black community frequently had cancer, asthma, migraines, and other illnesses. Growing up, she frequently had severe nosebleeds. She shared:

During my worst nosebleed, a blood vessel in my nose burst and blood came out of my nose, mouth, and eyes. I actually passed out and ended up in the hospital, throwing up everywhere. They gave me an emergency treatment. Because of that when I was 16, I still have a lot of issues with my nose. It's something that can't be medically treated, so I'll always have to deal with and worry about it. In the morning and evening, I have to ice or heat my nose or I'm left with severe pain and discomfort. It's been over 20 years, and I still have to worry about and deal with it every single day.

At the time, she thought this was just a normal part of life since everyone around her experienced similar problems. But having left the community and learned that communities like hers are targeted by industry for pollution, she became a climate activist, fighting for the health of her community and the planet.

### **Diversity in Organization**

Participants were asked, "How would you rate diversity in your organization?" Diversity in an organization refers to the extent that people of different races and identities are represented. Four people said "very diverse," three said "somewhat diverse," and ten said "not diverse."

**Table 21**

*Perceptions of Diversity in Their Climate Organization*

Number	Perception of Diversity
4	Very diverse
3	Somewhat diverse
10	Not diverse

The two participants who said they felt their organization was very diverse both volunteered in a youth climate advocacy organization. Antonia, who came from a background of working in frontline communities in California, said the extent to which one perceives diversity in the climate movement depends on the framing. “Environmental justice organizations that have been doing this work for decades are abundantly diverse,” she said.

But if you’re only looking at it from the thread of mainstream climate change organizations, it’s not as strong. The top organizations which lead many of the conversations around climate are not POC-led. There may be people of color within the staff and board, but they’re not necessarily leading.

Three participants who said their organization was somewhat diverse all worked in a well-known, top 40 environmental organization which had put significant resources into DEI. For example, Janice said her organization had recently hired five staff and two senior employees who were BIPOC. Briana noted that even if the overall staff in an organization is diverse, the leadership is often not. She said, “When I was working with the nonprofit organizations and leading a coalition of environmental groups, everyone that was in positions of power were White.” She added:

They were mostly White women, which is at least a step-up from White men. But the people who were actually doing the work within the community were all Brown.

The outward-facing folks were Brown, and the people making the decisions were White.

The majority of participants said that their organizations were not diverse. Ella estimated that diversity at her NGO was under 10%. The two participants who came from prestigious academic institutions had the lowest perceptions of diversity. Jordan, who earned his PhD in engineering from 2013 to 2018, related that in a department of 180 to 220 students, he was one of only two African American students during the time he attended:

I think there were two or three years I overlapped with one other [Black] student who I never actually met. I only knew they existed from looking at the graduate statistics online. So yeah, I had never actually interacted with another African American or Black student during my entire graduate career.

However, he did meet BIPOC students in the campus Fossil Free club, which consisted of undergraduate and graduate students.

### **Inclusion in Organization**

Participants were asked, “How would you rate inclusion in your organization? Inclusion is defined as the extent to which people feel welcome, a sense of belonging, and able to be their whole selves.” All of the participants said they struggled with feeling a sense of inclusion and belonging in their organizations. Even organizations that had diverse representation struggled with inclusion because the leadership was White, the dominant culture was White, and people of color were often tokenized. Many said organizations have good intentions but their actions are not always inclusive. Ella’s sentiment was typical:

I think my organization has a lot of good intentions, but sometimes I feel like there can be a disconnect with the work that’s needed to create an inclusive and equitable type of environment. I think it's a challenging experience, and what [leadership] might feel is progress and good steps forward, others might perceive as very small

steps toward [inclusion]. I think that there are good intentions, but there's a disconnect with the amount of work that it really entails to [work towards inclusion] meaningfully.

### **Changes to Organization from a DEI Perspective**

Participants were asked, “How has your organization changed from a DEI perspective relative to a year ago?” All of them said that their organizations have made progress on DEI from compared to a year ago, and this progress felt slow to them. Changes that their organizations implemented included:

- More scheduled conversations about DEI among staff and volunteers
- Creation of employee resource groups and affinity groups
- Hiring a DEI officer
- Offering resources on DEI to staff or supporters
- Making DEI commitments
- Issuing statements on racial justice and racial violence
- Making Juneteenth a holiday
- Elevating the role of community partners in environmental justice work
- Receiving more money for environmental justice and DEI work
- Regranting money to community partners
- Hiring more BIPOC at all levels
- Intentional efforts to recruit BIPOC as members and supporters
- Intentional efforts to educate staff and members on DEI
- Elevating BIPOC voices in meetings, conferences, publications

Several participants said there was a “check-the-box” mindset about DEI. Organizations want to be seen as doing something but are not willing to commit to the deep transformation needed to create change. Brianna said:

Yes, and no. I mean we've gotten some stuff done. We've written policies around translations, because we didn't have any translation policies in place before, even though a lot of our country speaks Spanish. But again, that's kind of checking off boxes and making sure you're doing stuff. There have been no real breakthroughs for the core group. We're still walking on eggshells; we still tiptoe around conversations. For example, I have to say “dominant culture” as opposed to “white supremacy culture.” I can't say white supremacy in any context because people will fly off the handle. It's hard, especially when I'm trying so hard to get everyone to have shared language and we're still having to tiptoe around some of the words that we're using.

Part of the transformation involves shifting from a focus on diversity to a focus on equity and belonging. Carmen said, “I feel like I'm forever saying that the effort is to get visual representation right now. That is all it is. There is no equity in the work or sense of belonging occurring.”

### **Influences on Shifts in DEI**

Participants were asked, “What do you believe has shifted people's thinking or behavior on DEI in the last year?” All of the participants said that George Floyd, the racial reckoning and protests that followed, and the pandemic of 2020 pushed people towards becoming more conscious and active on racial justice. Some organizations also had employees and members who spoke out about problems surrounding DEI in the organization (Tyson, 2020). Many of the participants said that the focus on racial issues in society in 2020 and 2021 catalyzed deep reflection in themselves, even if they had been struggling with it all of their lives. Sarita said:

I think that obviously the uprisings last summer were a wake up call for a lot of people who had the privilege to float through the world with rose colored glasses on. I think COVID also played a part in that. I'd say for me, it has been a time of deep self reflection, and so I think I'm going to make an assumption that other people have also been doing that kind of reflection as internal work, too. It's giving people the time and space to really think through how they're showing up in the world, for the good or for the bad.

## Challenges and Barriers

Participants were asked “what challenges or barriers do people of color face in participation in the climate movement?” The barriers mentioned were economic, social, cultural, systemic, and institutional:

**Table 22**

*Barriers for People of Color Participation in the Climate Movement*

Number	Barrier
10	Lack of representation
9	Lack of commitment to DEI
8	White supremacy culture
8	Tokenism
5	Market based solutions
4	Unexamined White privilege
3	Environmental injustice
3	Access and education
3	Communication barriers
3	Age
2	Inadequate human resources

### ***Lack of Representation***

Participants cited lack of representation most frequently as a barrier for people of color trying to engage with the climate movement. This included not just the lack of people of color volunteering or working on climate change, but also the lack of people of color in leadership or decision-making positions, which translates into a lack of mentors. Diana, whose advisor was denied tenure, experienced the loss of her mentor as a major setback in her career. Other participants said that they found mentors in White superiors but they lacked mentors who could understand and help them specifically with issues that people of color experience. The participants shared that lack of mentors has meant that people of color are not given the support they need to progress in their careers, which could lead to talented people leaving the field.

Jordan related:

There are psychological aspects to being one of a few people from a particular background. I struggled so much with that directly and with environmental issues. It definitely impacted the broader sort of trajectory of my graduate career in general.

Participants noted that one consequence of not having diversity in the climate sector is a lack of diverse viewpoints and approaches to problems. Ella summarized this by saying:

I think there's a misconception that people of color do not care about climate change. Statistically, that has been shown to be false. People of color actually care THE MOST about climate change. But because they're not generally in the room and making decisions because of such assumptions, their viewpoints are generally not being considered.

They noticed that when BIPOC are those most impacted by climate change but the people making the decisions are all White, it can lead to less-than-ideal solutions at best and outright harm at worst.

Diana highlighted how a lack of diverse viewpoints also means lack of acceptance of diverse methodologies. “There are multiple layers of diversity, and it’s not just about physical bodies,” she said. “A lot of environmental fields do not appreciate feminist methods, creative methods, and methods that critique objectivity. It’s hard for them to be open to other systems of knowledge and ways of organizing information.” She also said that many White people think of climate change as a technocratic issue, but “most people of color that I know are coming from a justice framework. We do not always get taken seriously.” When the methodologies or frameworks that people of color prefer are dismissed as less valid, those scholars sometimes leave the field.

### ***Lack of Commitment to BEDJI***

Lack of commitment to BEDJI was a barrier mentioned by almost all the participants. Virtually all of the participants said their organizations expressed good intentions, and some made efforts to try to address this issue, but often the commitment was not strong enough, or did not have enough accountability or resources attached. Debbie, a field organizer, said her organization decided to make DEI a priority, but because of its decentralized organization structure, there was not any accountability at the local level:

The national team decided that DEI was something we all should be doing and wanted to encourage their local chapters to do it, but then they didn’t provide many resources and kind of left it up to the local groups to figure out how to implement that.

Debbie also said since she was the only Black woman in her corner of the organization, she was often called on to provide resources or lead conversations on DEI even though that was not part of her job.

One way that organizations can show commitment is buy-in from senior leadership. Usually when the DEI work is relegated to a DEI director or a volunteer DEI committee, without strong support from top leaders, it is not a recipe for success. Julia said,

We do a lot of public applause and whatnot, but a lot of important things that we don't hear about involving those people in power happen in private. It doesn't matter that the rest of us are doing the work. It needs to be a top-down approach, not a bottom-up one.

George said, "We need to get enough people to drive change in DEI on the staff side, but we also need to adequately empower them and give them the capacity they need to drive change." More people of color in leadership positions may be the key. "It's like having one woman on a Board," said George.

It doesn't mean anything. All that woman does is educate men, which doesn't often translate to anything. When you get to three women, they start to accomplish something. Analogously, having one Person of Color in a sea of White faces, it doesn't change anything. It's when you have three or more non-White faces that you begin to see change.

Another way that organizations can show commitment is through funding, and the lack of it is a barrier. Julia said,

Right now, DEI is sexy, right? A lot of people are funding it and talking about it, but I think people need to put their money where their mouth is. Funding can be used to hire DEI directors and people of color and to pay them more. People of color who would like to work on climate change may be deterred because of low pay.

Diana pointed out:

A lot of the big funding still goes to the folks who have the scientific degrees. To make matters worse, such folks aren't encouraged to collaborate as much with the people who are not doing engineering work. Certain STEM disciplines still dominate the conversation around funding.

## *White Supremacy Culture*

Participants overall agreed with Marian's statement that "certain features of organizations that tend to be true across organizations led by White people" are alienating to people of color and marginalized communities. White supremacy culture refers to a system of practices and values that reinforce the dominance of Whiteness in society (Okun, 2021). Debbie shared:

I think that when working in the climate movement, there's a lot of White supremacy culture and norms that are both explicit and implicit. People lean into those norms, and it makes it hard to do the work because people's analysis around the root causes of the climate crisis are not necessarily always based in an understanding of the racial capitalist lens. It's like we're always starting from a deficit because people's political analysis is not up to par with what it needs to be.

Characteristics of White supremacy culture participants mentioned include sense of urgency, power hoarding, quantity over quality, paternalism, and right to comfort. Debbie said:

I think the main thing is the urgency. I understand, like yes, the climate crisis is urgent. But there's this thing that goes on in the mainstream climate movement where people act like it's so urgent, that we don't have time to build the kind of transformational relationships that are needed with the communities most affected, so they get left out of a lot of the conversations around campaign strategy or organizing strategy. There's a sense of needing to act immediately, and that while building relationships is important, we just don't have time for that. My counter argument is that people have been organizing around climate for 50 years and you haven't. Now that the doomsday clock shows us we only have six years left, you didn't think to build those relationships over the last 50 years? If you didn't put in the due diligence, then why should these communities and people be left behind because you didn't do the work that needed to be done?

Regarding power hoarding, Marian said:

In the US, because we are a relatively heterogeneous community with a huge disparity between the haves and the have nots, that lends itself to a situation with people at the top holding all of the power feeling scared that people will threaten their power. That often falls along racial lines. There's almost this need for people

in power to be protective over their power and not wanting to let other people, especially People of Color, in the room. In climate, that's a huge issue because the people who are most impacted by climate are not the ones who are at the table.

Regarding quantity over quality, Sarita said:

Ultimately, the white supremacy culture remains apparent through all of it. It's straight to business; no check-ins about how you're doing or how the team's doing. Especially with the recent social unrest, it's been hard. Speaking to your inclusion part, it's hard to bring myself into this space. I think an example of that would be the pandemic. Being overwhelmed by the stress of everything around us, and then having to come and show up at work and be productive in the same way [we were before], but we've all been stretched so far that it's been really hard.

Regarding paternalism, Sarita said:

Then there's this sense of paternalism, where certain people hold the information or understand what's going on, but then other people are unclear about how decisions are being made or how strategy is being set up. There's this assumption that because people aren't "trained organizers" that they don't understand strategy and power.

Regarding the right to comfort, Carmen said:

People will say that important work can't be done because it's going to be uncomfortable for this group or that group, but it's been uncomfortable for me this whole entire time! Do you think I like being a minority inside this big white organization? It needs to be just a little bit uncomfortable just so that we can talk about something that is very, very important to us. Because we're all here at the end of the day. They're not going to care what political party you are. They're not going to care what your facial features are. We're in this together, or we're not in this together.

Tokenism

Eight participants talked about tokenism as a form of marginalization. Tokenism refers to the experience of being singled out because of your race or being used to showcase an

organization's diversity. Tokenism often leads to a feeling of exclusion, exploitation, and being treated differently because of one's race.

Participants named ways that tokenism manifests in the climate movement:

- Being asked to lead diversity initiatives because you are a person of color
- Being asked to speak for or represent your race, gender, age group, etc.
- Being showcased to represent diversity in the organization
- Being called a “diversity candidate” or “diversity hire”
- Being showcased in media as a person of color doing climate work
- Being asked to sit on a committee or board while still marginalized as a participant
- Being underappreciated for doing the work
- Being praised as an exceptional member of their race or age group for doing the work

Brandon, who started an environmental organization at a young age, said he was frequently featured in the media because he was a young black kid doing environmental work. However that attention did not always translate into other forms of support. He said sometimes it felt like he was being treated like a novelty and not taken seriously. He said:

I was often the only Person of Color in rooms when I was doing this work. To some degree, that helped me. White people wanted to have a pretty diverse picture, but they didn't really know what it took to keep people there. I think there was a desire to get urban youth and at-risk kids involved, so there was some awareness around that. But, how to do that meaningfully is still a question that a lot of organizations are trying to answer.

Aubree, who worked on a campaign for a youth-led climate organization, said, “There is definitely a sense of not just exclusion, but exploitation.” She relayed a remarkable story illustrating this:

[The group] organized a long hike throughout the U.S., trying to march all the way to D.C. or something like that. This member was a Black woman and she experienced some difficulties during the trip because it was a very, very, very long walk. Despite her telling the organizers that she wasn't feeling well and that she wanted to go home, she felt forced to stay there because they wanted her story. She thought that if other people were not feeling good either that she could go, but people just kept telling her that she couldn't leave because it was important for her to be there. People started telling her that if she left, she would be doing something bad to the movement. This was a prime example of tokenization and ignoring people's actual feelings. They wanted to prop up her story so they could show people that this was who climate change was affecting and this was who they were fighting for without actually fighting for the person.

Tokenism has a profoundly dissonant effect on people of color. Diana shared:

I never had noticeable mental health issues until I was a tokenized woman of color in these White environmental spaces. That kind of situation really impacts your mental health. You deal with imposter syndrome, sabotage, loneliness, and alienation.

### ***Market-based Solutions***

Five of the participants mentioned market-based solutions as a barrier for people of color engaging with the climate movement. Market-based solutions include:

- Carbon pricing
- Technology solutions
- Solutions based on capitalism and consumption

Regarding solutions based on capitalism and consumption, Brianna said, "Leaning into solutions that are still based in capitalism, like buying green, are exclusionary towards those who don't have the resources and financial means." The alternative is policy solutions that enable people to save energy, use public transit, access renewables, etc. Antonia said that the people in

her community already understand about saving energy and conserving resources, but when it is framed in technocratic terms, it does not resonate with them.

### ***Privilege***

Five participants mentioned unexamined White privilege as a barrier. White privilege is associated with a lack of commitment to BEDJI, microaggressions, and not recognizing barriers for people of color. As Brandon put it:

I think there are a lot of well-intentioned people that are actually creating harm because they are not using their intentions to examine themselves and their biases and the ways in which they may be creating harm. By not being an anti-racist, and by not actively counteracting inequitable systems, they are passively perpetuating harm.

Julia said that White privilege enables White people to assume that the problem can be offloaded to DEI staff, who are often people of color. Debbie said, “Relying on people of color to teach you about racism is a form of White privilege,” and:

I’d say particularly last year, when so many White folks were finally realizing just how bad police brutality was, they were wanting to do the work, but then it meant that the burden was placed on me to teach them. Do you have a computer? Can you just Google it? Why do you think I’m an authority on these things? It is a huge burden to have to develop you when that’s not my labor, it’s yours.

### ***Environmental Injustice***

Four of the participants jumped straight into environmental injustice as a barrier. George described three kinds of environmental injustice:

The first process, which is the most commonly cited one, is the siting of polluting facilities in Black and Brown neighborhoods. The second process is the unequal protection under the law, which as we know is a Constitutional offense. In America, we ostensibly have equal protection under the law. But oftentimes, we see the law

being applied in a discriminatory fashion. The third process is the failure of organizations to include marginalized voices in decision making.

Another aspect of environmental injustice is that people of color often face stressors and obligations that make it more difficult for them to volunteer or perform in their jobs. Carmen, for example, said she spends a lot of her time helping her family and people in her community with immigration issues. She said:

It takes a year now to even be able to do paperwork for residents, something as simple as biometric screening. I know because I've been doing it for both of my uncles here. They're going to wait more than a year before they get residency, something that should only take less than three months.

Celeste, who comes from El Paso, added:

All my friends and I didn't just not have money, we didn't have health insurance, so all of us were on public assistance. We didn't see a better life. We just lived each day fighting a pipeline or fighting the wall. That's how the past 20 years of my life has been. One day fighting an oil company, the next day fighting border militarization. It was all of that on top of trying to take care of myself.”

The stress of helping family members with immigration and the myriad challenges of everyday life as a Latina immigrant takes a toll and makes it difficult for them to do their jobs; challenges that their White, more privileged colleagues do not have to deal with.

### ***Framing***

Three of the participants discussed how the way climate change is framed as an issue is sometimes off putting to people of color. Brianna, who works for the county government and frequently makes presentations to communities of color, said, “Some organizations will tell you exactly what they expect you to say to everyday people and volunteers, but sometimes, those

things are not what resonates with them.” Instead, she recommends getting to know the audience first:

When you're doing community building and relationship building, it takes two cups of tea before you even start having a conversation about the things that you thought you wanted to have a conversation about. It takes that relationship building and the understanding of where they're coming from and what their needs are before you make your own asks.

Some participants noted that political advocacy is difficult because people do not trust the government. Paisley said,

Where I live, politics is not empowering. It's very scary and stressful, and there's a lot of room for hurt. I feel like if there had been more space for people who did not want to jump into advocating for a bill to do this type of work, that would have helped a lot.

For them, a lot of groundwork towards building trust and efficacy has to be laid before people can do the work of political advocacy.

### *Age*

Three participants mentioned age as a barrier for diversity. For Brianna, most of her colleagues or superiors are middle aged or older. She said that their mindset is often not one of learning. “The older the folks are, the more they're just stuck [in their ways]. They're also just not doing much thinking or innovating.” Several participants mentioned older folks not being willing to retire and make room for younger folks. As a result, young people of color often leave their organizations because there is no room for promotions. Brianna said:

[Older folks] are in positions of power, like the Deputy Director or the Division Chief. You know they don't want to give that [power] up, so they're not going to retire and let somebody else come up in the ranks. That's the biggest issue that has been identified by the people of color that I have talked to in my meetings. They work there for a little bit and then they leave because there's no upward mobility.

Really, the only way you can get a promotion is if you leave to go to another organization. That's it.

Age is also a barrier when you are a young person and you have trouble getting taken seriously. Julia, who runs the internship program for her organization, said:

There are so many instances where politicians and corporations will offer a 10 minute soapbox for young representatives to offer their thoughts, but behind closed doors, they're not really going to do anything in response. So, I think the biggest challenge is having their voice, not just heard, but actually inspire people in positions of power and influence to take action.

This phenomenon amounts to tokenism, regardless of the race of the young person, when they are held up as special because they are young and have an interest in climate change, but their opinions are not really taken seriously.

### ***Access and Education***

Three people mentioned education as a barrier for engagement. Aubree, a college student who joined the climate movement as an organizer, said the biggest barrier for her was needing to be well-trained and well-spoken. "I think the barrier that I faced was this sense of needing to be highly accomplished in order to be in the movement," she said.

The people in the movement to me at least seemed like they were able to do everything well. For me, it was a little bit more daunting than anything to be able to join, because I wasn't sure if I had the skill to be able to exist in a space like this.

Ella, who got her PhD in biological environmental science, sees a pipeline issue:

Speaking in terms of climate science, I feel like Students of Color from a young age are not encouraged towards this field and are not seeing a lot of role models for them to look up to. In some ways, they're not even seeing this career path as an option for themselves. When I was in school, it was not highly publicized in the curriculum, and it was not characterized as a viable career option. In communities

that are predominantly made up of people of color, there are less opportunities than areas that are predominantly White.

George, who switched to environmental science from engineering as an undergraduate, said he received pushback from the Dean for this decision:

I sought a transfer from the Engineering School to the School of Natural Resources. The Engineering Dean looked at me as if I had grown another head and asked what I wanted to do with that kind of a degree. He said I would never earn any money in that field, and that I should just stay in engineering because I was doing quite well. When I asked him to just sign the transfer form, he kept telling me to reconsider because I would have no future [in environmental work].

Sometimes the pushback comes from family members who are not understanding. Ella said:

Family members would ask what I was studying, and when I'd talk about urban planning, they wouldn't understand. It's a different kind of job. It's not law, medicine, science, engineering, or economics. It was totally new to a lot of people who didn't go to college, and to them, it was questionable as to whether I'd make any money and be able to sustain myself.

The barriers continue as one gets further along in their career. Antonia said:

I knew that my skill set was valuable: outreach, being bilingual, and knowing how different sectors work together for environmental solutions. But applying it [to my job] was kind of hierarchical. It had a lot of science requirements, and it was hard for me to move up. That was a barrier that affected not just me, but everybody. It probably was just because I didn't have a science degree. Anyone who didn't have a science degree was probably having an issue trying to get into that agency.

Even those who make it past the barriers sometimes do not stay because the pay is not high enough. Antonia related:

I work in the nonprofit sector, and it tends to provide a lower salary than other sectors. That in and of itself is a barrier. Sometimes, folks are overworked and have to wear multiple hats, but they're underpaid. I see a lot of folks go to consulting or

local government to avoid this barrier, but then they get stuck in bureaucracy and wonder if it was worth it. Did they really even make a change?

The requirement that people have advanced science degrees to enter many sectors of environmental work is a reflection of White supremacy culture's privileging of objectivity, worship of the written word, and belief in one right way.

### ***Human Resources***

The two oldest participants saw inadequate human resources infrastructure as a major barrier for BEDJI in their organizations. For Janice, better human resources meant that managers would get training in BEDJI and processes like staff performance evaluations would be standardized:

I think a lot of what we are investing in now is the improvements to standardize the HR and people management and culture building aspects of our organization. Because we know that this will have a positive impact on particularly our BIPOC colleagues, right? In a world where you don't have that, those who suffer tend to be more of your BIPOC colleagues or your more junior colleagues. So if you can put those in place, we think those populations will see probably the greatest difference. But, we do think it will have benefits for everyone in general when we do that as well.

### **Challenges Faced as a Person of Color**

Many of the challenges the participants faced in their own careers were related to the challenges they described BIPOC facing in general in the climate movement. Specifically, a lot of microaggressions, tokenization, and White supremacy culture. The microaggressions described by the participants in this study include:

- Being complimented for their intelligence, knowledge, and engagement on climate

- Being ignored, dismissed, questioned, and challenged regarding their expertise and contributions
- Being intentionally or unintentionally excluded
- Being underappreciated, not recognized, or rewarded for their work
- Being otherized for their culture
- Intersectional challenges with being a woman, young, from another culture, or other marginalized identity
- Lack of a sense of belonging in White culture, but also being excluded and not belonging in their own and other cultures.

Several participants said that people had complimented them for being articulate, knowledgeable, and engaged. Pedro shared, “I’ve faced people who are just, frankly, morons that ask why I speak good English if I’m not from the United States. I was a PhD student, and clearly, people thought that PhD students couldn’t be non-White.” Carmen added, “You know the whole ‘you speak so well for someone who didn’t grow up in this country’ thing? That continues in my life, even now that I’m 47. I’ve heard that throughout my entire life.”

Participants also talked about being dismissed, ignored, or overlooked for their expertise. This was often accompanied by discussion of intersectionality, where prejudice against women, young people, immigrants or other marginalized identities also play a role. Marian said:

For example, there’s this common stereotype of Asian people being quiet, studious, and not standing up for ourselves. There’s also intersectionality to this, right? I am a woman and I am Asian American. I’m not a huge person, so my physicality is not imposing. All of that intersects into people expecting me to be an admin. I’ve had so many meetings where I walk into the room and I’m supposed to be representing some sort of strategy, but people just expect me to take notes and be quiet.

Aubree said that because she put herself in a leadership position, she is not as easily ignored, but she felt unappreciated:

As a coordinator, I obviously tried a lot, did my best, and worked really hard to make sure things happened, but I never quite felt appreciated. Instead, I felt a little bit overshadowed by the other members who also definitely deserved attention for what they did. But, there was definitely a sense of feeling like everything I did was being glossed over.

Debbie said people of color are treated more harshly:

There's this emphasis around strictly adhering to deadlines. Meanwhile, White staff would regularly blow past deadlines and not be so harshly criticized. There was very intense micromanagement of Black staff versus White staff, who had more like free rein to get work done. Black staff ended up being hovered over constantly.

Participants who came from a different country and culture spoke about the microaggressions they received in the form of comments about their culture. Celeste gave the example of the Disney movie *Coco*:

In the movie, you can only cross over the bridge if your family has a picture of you on the other side. [In real life], If these people had nobody, they couldn't cross because they needed passports and social security numbers, you know. Then, there was a part where all the characters are drowning in the Carnation bridge, and it just reminded me of asylum seekers we lost to the river trying to cross over with their babies.

What appears to everyone else like a sweet movie celebrating Mexican heritage is, for Celeste, a horrifying legitimization of exclusionary policies towards refugees and immigrants. "I just thought that was a really shitty move on Disney's part," she said.

Diana related how a faculty member's attempt at small talk at a department party turned into a microaggression when the conversation turned to lynching:

She just kept insisting that I watch this one particular movie, and that turned into a conversation about harms towards Black people and lynching. I don't want to talk about Black people being lynched as small talk! My grandmother only got to go to college for two weeks before the KKK burned crosses at the university she was at. For me, that kind of stuff is not theoretical. My family has been impacted by such hate crimes. My grandmother never got a college degree because they were burning crosses.

Marian also shared how people's fascination with her culture feels microaggressive:

If I bring different food to the office or if I celebrate certain Chinese holidays, people are like, 'Tell me more! Tell me more about this thing that I've never heard of before!' It's exotification of my people and my culture. I'm happy to share this part of my life and help educate you about what these things mean to me, but I don't need you to other me and treat me like this really exotic, foreign thing just because my culture is different from yours.

Several of the participants said they struggled with being recognized and promoted for their work. Antonia said:

I myself have been successful in trying to leverage my experience to get raises and promotions, but sometimes I feel imposter syndrome and get too shy to [advocate for myself]. That might be because I'm a woman, it might be because I'm a Person of Color, and it might be because I'm a trailblazer in both my family and my field. I try to empower others to speak up for themselves. It's kind of tiring to speak up for myself, knowing that my skills and experience are really valuable. But, I always try to be moving forward. In terms of barriers for others, I see that you really have to put yourself out there. For people who are shy, that's even harder.

Interestingly, participants also mentioned microaggressions from people of color, and a feeling of not belonging in their own communities. This aspect was particularly painful, when people of color are alienated by their own families or communities where they feel they should belong. Brianna shared that being biracial, half White and half Black, leads to many assumptions about her ethnicity. She said, for people like her, they feel like "shadow people; we walk in the shape of whoever is seeing that shadow."

Because I present as curly haired and brown skinned, most people think that I'm Latina. So, they will just come up and speak Spanish to me or get upset when I don't speak Spanish fluently you know. I am constantly asked, 'what are you?' There are other things, but at this point, I don't even hear them ... If my hair were kinky or my nose was wider or something, then people would just know that I was Black. But because I'm in that really weird gray area, I could be anything. I'm not even necessarily seen as Black by Black people. I'm not seen as Asian by Asian people. I'm not seen as Hawaiian. I'm not seen as any one thing which makes it even more tricky ... I'm definitely not White, but where do I fit?

Janice, an Asian woman in senior management, shared how being in a leadership position made it difficult for her to be an ally to BIPOC, since she had to negotiate the interests of the leadership with the interests of the employees:

I have wondered whether some of the perception of me has been driven by reverse-colorism of, 'Oh, she's not dark enough, so she might not know enough about that perspective.' Because I've been pretty open with people. I said from the first time I met a bunch of people that I'm not a deep DEI expert, because I'm not, and that's not what I was hired for. But, I think for a lot of my BIPOC colleagues, that was like a deep disappointment. What do you mean you're not?

Janice's story illustrates the complexity of identity where a person might be marginalized in some identities but in a position of power in others. Even though she identifies as a person of color, there are huge differences along the spectrum of privilege that one inhabits.

The comments from the participants show the persistence of microaggressions in their lives and its corrosive effect over time. As human beings, belonging has always been critical to our survival, and not feeling as though one belongs is a deep source of distress and even trauma. Carmen said,

This is why your work is so needed, Clara. We know everybody is going through some sort of identity crisis, so we keep reliving the things that we have known since childhood. I'm supposed to be working on climate change here, but the trauma keeps

coming up and it's never good enough ... I feel like there's no particular space where BIPOC can just be themselves and be accepted.

### **Strategies for Dealing with Challenges**

Due to microaggressions, lack of support, and institutional and systemic racism, people of color face many obstacles in pursuing a career in climate change and environmental sustainability. All of the participants in this study have navigated these challenges and named many strategies that have helped them along the way. The strategies they used were:

**Table 23**

#### *Strategies for Dealing with Challenges*

Number	Strategies
15	Mentors
15	BIPOC colleagues, affinity groups
7	Networks and programs for BIPOC
4	Media (books, podcasts, online resources)
4	Funding
3	Leaning in
3	Humor
6	Self care
4	Focusing on the positive
5	Culture and Hobbies
4	Learning about DEI

#### ***Mentors***

Many participants mentioned mentors as important sources of support and motivation in their careers. Even if the mentors were not people of color, they supported the participants in important ways. The mentors encouraged them in their education, helped them find jobs, or

helped them navigate difficult situations. In contrast, the lack of mentors is clearly a detriment.

Diana relayed her struggle in finding mentors after her advisor left the university:

The department called me and [my advisor's] other advisees the 'Orphans.' We mentored each other, but we also found mentors in other departments and universities. It's just that it required a lot more social capital as well as emotional and intellectual labor because I had to piece everything together myself. There was no one with [my advisor's] expertise left in my department. I did eventually join the lab of [another scholar]. She was very supportive, and I don't want to take away from that fact, but it still wasn't the same alignment I had had before with [my advisor].

### *Colleagues*

Four of the participants mentioned colleagues, particularly BIPOC colleagues, as allies.

Sarita shares,

If it weren't for all of my BIPOC colleagues and friends, I don't think I would ever have been able to feel more liberated in being who I am. They have been so open to me and who I am as a person. I had never felt that radical type of love and acceptance from many others.

Janice, on the management team, said that what helped her to keep going was the support from colleagues in management, most of whom were White:

There have also been a number of colleagues throughout the organization that have reached out very intentionally. Some in very repeated and personal ways, like 'Hey, want to get together and have an outdoor drink?' You know, those kinds of things. Some will say, 'Hey, I just want to have a regular touchpoint with you.' Others just now and then sending a random email, like, 'Hey, I really appreciated that last thing you did.' And so, I think that has been really helpful for me in particular on a personal level.

## ***Community Support***

In addition to mentors and colleagues, participants benefited from networks and programs for BIPOC. A few of the participants were recipients of the Switzer Foundation Fellowship, an award that includes a \$15,000 scholarship as well as networking and support. A few of the participants are in a support group for equity officers, whose members are involved in some way with DEI work. Diana said:

I had a spiritual purpose to be in the environmental field, but I knew that to make my involvement sustainable, I needed a mentor. I joined Dorceta Taylor's Environmental Fellows Program. I started going to all these conservation-related conferences that were promoting diversity in the environmental field. I joined a few other mentorship programs for folks in STEM. There was MSPhDs, which was for Minority Students Striving for Higher Degrees in Earth Sciences. There was Switzer, which is now much more diverse than it used to be. The lack of diversity was killing me, literally and spiritually. I wanted to stay with it and get my PhD so I could be the first one in my family to do that, and I knew I couldn't do that if I wasn't surrounding myself with community.

She added, "being intentional about those BIPOC mentorship networks saved my life."

## ***Media***

Some of the participants turned to media as sources of information and support, including books, podcasts, and social media. Julia shared:

It's important to look outside of your work, look outside of your personal space, and look outside of your own immediate sector to see what [resources] you can draw from. Maybe there's a lot more commonality than you might think in some places, and maybe the issues are really different and you need to know the context. But, I think the only way that the DEI movement can kind of move forward as a whole—whether it's in government, an NGO, or whatever space—is by talking to one another.

## ***Funding***

Some of the participants received funding that was critical to their careers. These might be in the form of scholarships, fellowships, and grants. Antonia said:

I also got a lot of scholarships when I was younger to go to undergrad and grad school. That kind of financial security is a big deal for people who want to pursue higher degrees. That really helped me to pay off debt and accept a job in the nonprofit field. I still need to figure out if I'm eligible for public loan forgiveness, but I know that for some social workers and doctors, that program is life-saving. They wouldn't otherwise be able to pursue [the schooling] required for their job. It just wouldn't be worth it if they couldn't have their loans forgiven.

## ***Leaning In***

Several BIPOC participants said they made headway in their careers by working harder and leaning in. Marian, an Asian American who does not find a lot of support in her workplaces, said being aware of her disadvantages and leaning in to her assets has been an important part of her journey:

Part of my learning has been forcing myself to lean in and be okay and confident with what else I can offer, and to not fall into the broader societal troupes. It has also meant not allowing my otherness to define me in the workplace. Part of my journey has been defining how I want to exist and portray myself in the workplace on my own and not defaulting to societal stereotypes or what I think people are thinking about me. There's an element of leaning into pride and owning the diversity and richness of my personal experiences and seeing that as an asset, rather than a liability.

## ***Self-Care***

Three of the participants mentioned self-care as a coping strategy. For many this means having work-life balance. Pedro said:

As soon as 5:30 rolls around, I do not have any more meetings. At that point, I am my kid's soccer or basketball coach, I help work on their homework, and just

basically be with the family. If I have to travel, they know I'll have some days off so I'll make up for it. I'm very, very strict [with myself], but I'm flexible enough with people who work for me, and I expect people that I work for to be flexible with me, when necessary.

For Debbie, taking care of herself has meant finding another job that was more enjoyable and supportive of BEDJI:

I did go on to find a new job because [my old one] was not feeding me in the way that I needed to be fed. It was kind of a waste of time. I didn't know better, but it was also just a waste of talent to just keep trying to make changes that people didn't actually want to make. I can do all the work, but if people don't actually want to change, then I'm going to keep hitting up against a wall when trying to actually do the work that I was hired to do. It's not actually worth the time.

### ***Focusing on the Positive***

Several participants said they try to focus on the positive and not to let the negatives overwhelm them. Ella said:

I try my best to not take things personally, which is easier said than done because DEIJ is very personal to me. When facing conflict associated with racism or unconscious biases, I try to recognize that this is the other person's problem and not mine, to help mitigate the hurt or impact that I may be left with. I also try to reaffirm myself, my capabilities, and my training to be more confident in working in this field.

Carmen said she keeps emails from volunteers that thank her and remind her that her work is important. She said, "this work is extremely lonely, and sometimes it's not appreciated. When I see those emails I mentioned earlier that actually give me something good to think about, they help me fight. They motivate me to keep on going."

Along with focusing on the positive, two participants said humor helps a lot. Petro said, "I use humor a lot. I like people smiling and feeling comfortable. People are amazed at how

many jokes I can tell about almost any topic.” Brianna said she practices laughing yoga. She said,

I will tell you that that has been the saving grace for all of this. I think laughter and taking time [for yourself] are really important right now. I do have friends that really take [those setbacks] really personally. I just keep reminding them that they’re not going to be able to change everyone all the time. I just really love laughing too, so I remind them to try to laugh. It just feels so good.

### ***Culture and Hobbies***

Several participants said cultural activities and hobbies keep them sane. Diana said she enjoys social and partner dancing, AfroBeat and Salsa. It also helps her think flexibly and innovatively. She elaborated:

Another thing that helped me was realizing that just because I am a scientist doesn’t mean that I can’t also be spiritual or be a dancer. Dancing kept me sane, and it even influenced my research and allowed me to understand topics that I wouldn’t otherwise get. [In school] only using tools like textbooks to guide our discussion of certain topics just didn’t resonate with me. But through dance, I could embrace the feminist method of employing my embodied knowledge. It allowed me to integrate the mind, body, and spirit. That’s what activism itself is all about for me. It is about simultaneously applying theory and action, not feeling like a victim, and getting involved in my local community.

### ***Learning About BEDJI***

For some participants, learning about BEDJI and racial justice had been liberating and empowering. As I said to one participant:

Before I did all this learning about DEI, it always felt like there was something wrong with me and I couldn’t quite put the finger on it. I was just so uncomfortable all the time. Now that I understand what is actually going on I realize there’s a whole system of problems that has nothing to do with me. I don’t have to feel responsible for my own oppression.

Carmen responded:

That is so incredibly true. I think the more that we keep on winning more people we can have conversations like this. It does feel empowering and it also makes us feel less lonely. We're thinking we're the only one in the struggle trying to make this thing happen, and then we find that there's so many other people and everybody is going about in a totally different way.

Sarita said that spending the previous year learning about race had helped her be more grounded:

In this past year especially—and I feel that this is a privilege—the time that I've been able to reclaim and teach myself about history that wasn't taught to me in the U.S. has been extremely profound in my understanding not only my self-identity, but also what needs to progress in order for us to feel like this is a more inclusive space to be and work. I think a part of that narrative for me is believing the story of redemption: to give people the capacity to grow after explaining to them things that have occurred.

### **Motivations for Staying Involved**

Participants also named some motivations that helped them stay involved and cope with the challenges:

- Having an impact
- Making space for marginalized people
- Appreciations from volunteers and staff

Having an impact was an important motivator for participants. Natalie said:

I think the climate movement brings a lot of people together in the sense that these issues are interconnected and the urgency of all of it is felt now. I draw inspiration from knowing that the work I'm doing is very relevant to the now.

Several participants shared that they believed taking up space in the climate movement as BIPOC helped to create space for others who are like them. They wanted to represent their communities even if it felt tokenizing and uncomfortable at times. Marian sees it as her responsibility to show-up and not give-up:

Part of what motivates me to stay involved is the fact that there aren't that many people who look like me where I work. Therefore, it's almost my responsibility to stay here and prove on behalf of my people that we can do this. It's the cross I have to bear. It's tough, but I feel a responsibility to my people—and to people of color in general—to be here. I want to be the person to demonstrate to my White colleagues that we are here, we're smart, we're capable, and our work should be valued as much as yours. That responsibility drives me and links to a sense of pride in being someone who is underrepresented in my field. I think of my role as a change agent. By interacting with my colleagues, I am proof for them of the need to internalize equitable mindsets.

For Carmen, doing DEI work at a climate organization is a continuous struggle, and she considers quitting often. She said,

Each week is different. Sometimes, I think that it's my week and I'm going to go figure out what I need to do, and then the week after that I'm ready to quit and be done. Then, something happens and you come back to it.

She said that appreciation from volunteers is helpful:

I often think of the volunteers. I've been saving nice emails from time to time because it's so rare to see someone actually tell you that you're doing a great job. Sometimes, someone just surprised me. Someone told me that they saw my presentation from two years ago and now they're doing this work because they saw my presentation. It's just nice to know that someone listens, especially since sometimes I can't help but think that no one listened to my presentations at previous conferences, so there's no reason to even bother to try with upcoming presentations.

## **Strategies for BEDJI (Staff)**

Participants discussed strategies for BEDJI for employees within their organizations, and strategies for BEDJI volunteers and external partners (covered in the next section). Many of the strategies emerged from discussing the participants' challenges and what helped them in their journeys. Strategies for internal BEDJI include:

- Working from an equity lens
- Accountability and data
- Training
- Human resources
- More representation in leadership
- Resources for employees
- Programs supporting BIPOC
- Supporting youth
- Countering White supremacy culture

## ***Working from an Equity Lens***

Many of the participants made high-level observations that organizations should be working from a lens of equity instead of focusing on diversity. Equity is treating everyone fairly and ensuring that people have the same opportunities. Conversely, diversity is usually focused on representation and visuals. For example, Debbie said:

There were a lot of people who were more focused on how to be diverse, and not necessarily how to be more equitable. They needed to be asking themselves how they are making their work and their organizing space more equitable. It is through equity that diversity and inclusion come.

## *Accountability*

Three participants emphasized the importance of accountability—and using data to support accountability—when it comes to BEDJI. Accountability can take place in the form of calling out harmful actions and practices, performance reviews, and evaluation reports. Sarita shared how lack of accountability contributed to mistrust and the perpetuation of harm at her organization. She recounted an experience where a manager at her organization was put on paid leave and eventually resigned after several BIPOC staff shared their grievances against him:

When he resigned, he sent an email to all staff only highlighting his success at the organization. He only talked about all of the great things that he did and never acknowledged anything about the employees' experiences with him. There was no accountability that we saw from leadership up until another staff member—a White male ally—spoke out against him and said that his actions were not okay. So that's what I mean when I say accountability: you can't just let people continue doing these things, and you have to acknowledge that certain things are just not okay because they perpetuate harms.

Brandon highlighted the usefulness of data for holding organizations accountable. He said:

I think that organizations can do more reporting on their staff makeup. I think it'd be really cool if foundations even listed not only the racial makeup of their staff and their Board, but also split it out between executive staff, mid to mid senior staff, and entry level staff. That would help ensure that we are having conversations about these things. I would also love to see foundations add how to track who they're giving to, like black-led organizations versus predominantly White organizations. Asking them to report on the money they give, whether their Board has a DEI Committee, and what their hiring process is like would be good.

He also said BEDJI should be everyone's responsibility:

Anybody within an organization should be able to ask questions about BEDJI, regardless of who the person is. Whether it's a White person or a Person of Color, everyone should have a response about what they're doing in their work and what

their values are. That should be considered when deciding who's going to be joining a team.

### ***Training***

Four participants wanted to see more training on environmental justice, BEDJI, and anti-racism. This also involves White people who are willing to educate themselves instead of relying on BIPOC to do the work for them. Debbie said:

I'd like the climate movement as a whole to undergo an intense political education program. This would entail understanding the root causes of climate change, racial capitalism, and how it's important to have an economic analysis. It would also involve understanding possession of land, body, and labor and the interconnectedness of climate and the cultural system, thinking through how climate as a whole can adopt an abolitionist framework around organizing and campaigning. That's where I'd like the movement to start.

Debbie reminded us that trainings do not mean much if they do not translate into action. Building awareness is good, but “once you've done that internal reflection, what shifts are you going to make? What changes are going to happen now?”

Janice said requiring managers and supervisors to go through a two day training has been helpful:

It's the one that's offered by the Management Center: Managing for Racial Equity and Inclusion. We actually worked with them to create in-house sessions for us, for just our people. And it's actually been exciting. Some of the data from the people who went through in September particularly found value in the hiring aspects. How do you write a job description that doesn't intentionally exclude people? How do you run a hiring process in a way that is more inclined to produce strong DEI results? And that actually has informed our most recent hiring efforts in terms of how those have been run, so I think that's been very exciting.

## ***Human Resources***

Training, management, professional development, and hiring are all functions of human resources, which three participants said need to be strengthened to support BEDJI. Julia emphasized the importance of entrenching DEI throughout the organization:

Ultimately, DEI work is successful when there are champions everywhere. There need to be supporters and sponsors at different levels of things. You can be really active in our Employee Resource Groups, but maybe you're not as active in our internship work. The reason we're trying to entrench this everywhere is because there is something for everybody to be doing on DEI. So hopefully, the DEI Team members can retract themselves.

George spoke to the need to hiring more DEI personnel:

We haven't done it yet, but we need to bring more professional capacity to deal with DEI issues on the staff side. We have the resources available to do this, but none of the few million dollars have been allocated for that purpose. More walking the talk needs to be done. They need to not just bring in one DEI person, but to bring in several folks and give them the resources they need. One DEI person is never enough.

## ***More Representation in Leadership***

Since more investment in HR, DEI, accountability, and training require commitment from leadership, it is important that senior leaders are committed to DEI. Jordan said:

People who are champions of this work are often not people in the organization who are underprivileged, because underprivileged folks have other things to deal with and are often soft-spoken. If the goal is better diversity and inclusion, then you need to be willing to implement it from the top-down, promote it, and support it as best you can. Once an organization is established, it's hard for it to change purely from the bottom-up.

Many participants said that more BIPOC in leadership positions would make a huge difference. Marian said:

There's this common phrase used a lot in my industry: 'Don't make decisions for me without me.' How can you understand how to effectively create programs to support people of color if you don't have people of color making those decisions? There's an issue of representation ... Part of the problem is that our leadership is very White, which is not uncommon in large organizations. It's very common to see in large organizations that leadership becomes Whiter and Whiter as you go up the ladder. When you don't have people in those decision-making levels representing or being able to convey the interests of people of color, it's hard to actually develop really authentic programs, support systems, and infrastructure. The people making decisions are not the right people.

### ***Resources for Employees***

With all of the challenges that BIPOC face in the workplace, many said that resources for employees have helped and need to be expanded. In many cases, BIPOC created these resources to help each other. Julia said:

One of the major things that the DEI Team did was working on an employee resource group. These are affinity groups for people who identify with a certain demographic. They started out with five and we now have seven. In the future, we will hopefully have eight or nine. We have one for Asian American Pacific Islander or Asian Pacific Islander staff, women, LGBTQ+, Black employees, parents, and early career professionals. We have one in the making for Latinx employees and one combining veterans and people with disabilities.

### ***Programs Supporting BIPOC***

Several participants said programs for BIPOC pursuing environmental careers helped them and they wished they were available to more younger colleagues. These programs enabled participants to connect with mentors and peers and to be a part of a supportive community. Sometimes these programs also have trainings, retreats, funding, and notifications of job

opportunities. Diana, who intentionally sought out BIPOC supporting spaces during her career, said:

I think we should be supporting more mentorship and being intentional about that as well. We need to create intentional safe spaces just for people of color, too, a good example of which is Environmental Professionals of Color and chapters of that group around the country. There could be more support for that. I think that's part of the retention question like, how do we retain you know Black people who are already in this profession? You have to keep them supported. You have to keep people of color supported in those roles.

### ***Supporting Youth***

Julia, whose job involves supporting youth in the environmental movement, spoke about the importance of listening to youth:

As we see younger generations participating in the movement in a way that is influencing policy or other actions that make a difference, I think the biggest thing we can do is leverage our sponsors and supporters to make more space for them and really listen to their ideas earnestly. We can try to implement some of their ideas or mediate dissent and disagreement towards their ideas so that they can have more room to converse with others.

She also explained a concept called reverse mentoring, where instead of an older person mentoring a younger person, a younger person mentors an older person by teaching them perspectives and skills that the young person has:

If you were a student and you came to me because you wanted to work, I could give you an informational interview. But, you have a story as well. You know things that I don't have the insight to know as a youth. So, I think one of the greatest resources we can give is time to each other.

One of the benefits of reverse mentoring is that it builds a more equitable relationship between older and younger generations and between those who have more experience and those who have less.

## ***Countering White Supremacy Culture***

While discussing barriers, participants pointed to White supremacy culture as the big obstacle to creating more equitable and inclusive work environments and volunteer organizations. They call out urgency, paternalism, emphasis on quantity, individualism, among a host of other issues that need to be addressed. On paternalism, Diana shared:

They also need to make space for people to show up as their whole selves and embrace creativity. [My advisor] is a feminist geographer and an artist. She brings all of that creativity into her science and communication. [At our institution] that wasn't appreciated because it was different. It was tolerated [for a little while], but not appreciated. Rigor looks different when it comes to creative methodologies. Redefining what rigor is will also be very important. There's a very rigid way of understanding rigor. I don't think creative approaches are less rigorous, they're just different. All the innovation you see comes from creative thinking. We shouldn't punish people for being creative, different, or interdisciplinary, and yet, we repeatedly do. We shouldn't punish folks for not following the dominant, traditional approaches [to science and research].

Julia mentioned a culture of care:

I got started in between the transition of trying to keep your head down and trying to speak up and be your authentic self. Now, the goal is to be your entire transparent self, and this is the standard that we expect for people in the workplace. We definitely have to try to push out this culture of care. I know we're very unique in that and not everybody has that. But, I think having the time to offer someone who is younger than you or different from you in some way help, advice, and the chance to share their story while also expecting them to be willing to listen to yourself [is so important].

## **Strategies for BEDJI (Volunteers)**

Participants also discussed strategies for creating equity, belonging, and inclusion among grassroots volunteers. These include:

- Shifting the framing

- Uplift BIPOC engagement
- Co-design
- Mutually beneficial partnerships
- Building relationships

### *Shifting the Framing*

Several participants discussed the need to change the framing around communicating about the climate crisis. Jordan felt that moving the climate out of academic discourse and connecting it with the concerns of ordinary people helps:

I care about climate change because I'm an ordinary person and this affects me and all of us. I think that's a better way of framing things than saying that I'm a well educated scientist who understands the physics of this issue and I'm going to tell you the answer. I think that sort of reinforces one of the things I learned at [school], which is that the attitude of having 'the right answer' that you have to bestow upon the world and expecting the world to accept my wisdom has not worked. And it has continued to work even less than it used to in our increasingly polarized political environment.

Diana expressed the importance of making the connection to social justice:

I think the big challenge connecting these barriers is making sure that people understand the justice connection, that climate change impacts everyone, and that there are everyday solutions. We don't just have to rely on things like geo-engineering. There really are everyday solutions that are accessible to everybody, and we need to change the narrative about this.

Brianna, who often talks to communities of color about climate change and sustainability, said she rarely used the terms "climate change" or "sustainability." People of color understand conserving resources and how these solutions save money, she said, so she did not need to talk down to them about it. She explained:

I try not to ever say save money or save energy, because those phrases have just been used so much that they're too vague and watered down. Instead, I get into the nitty gritty. I'll tell them that they paid \$10 more than they needed or that by switching to LED light bulbs, they could keep \$10 in their pocket every month.

### ***Uplift BIPOC Engagement***

Several participants discussed the importance of lifting-up BIPOC engagement, listening to their concerns, and appreciating their contributions. At the same time, organizations need to avoid tokenizing people of color by praising or highlighting their participation because they are BIPOC. Aubree said that in order to recruit more people of color, leaders need to listen to current BIPOC members and address their concerns:

I want them to try and recruit people of color. I think that even before that, the very first step they can take is to talk with current BIPOC members of their organization to hear about their experiences and the things that they've struggled with in the past. I think that's the first and most important step, and then afterwards they need to maintain a very thorough follow-up. Sometimes people come together to make resolutions, submit them, and then watch nothing happen. That can be very frustrating, and it's something that happens a lot.

Jordan expressed optimism that people who are not White and male are getting more attention in the climate movement:

I think it has helped to have some of the more outspoken people be more ordinary people instead of the leaders. I highly respect Al Gore, John Kerry, and all those folks, but I think it's a good thing that people with more humble beginnings are also starting to get more attention in the movement. Greta Thunberg started protesting outside of school and is now invited to every climate summit because if they don't invite her, they'll look terrible. Once they do invite her, she just berates everybody and she is completely within her rights to do so. I think that's great. And I think she's like bringing folks from other backgrounds with her on that journey, which I think is great as well. I definitely hope to see more of that.

## *Co-Design*

Paisley and I had a conversation about co-design, through which communities take part in designing the climate plan that is supposed to be for their benefit. This developed after seeing how the climate organization's messaging and solutions did not resonate with the frontline communities she was trying to engage. Instead, organizations could empower volunteers to contribute in ways that are more aligned with their interests and values:

Something I noticed when I first came in is that you're almost being told what you should do by people who are extremely smart and have an agenda for you. When you come into a space like that, it feels like you're being bossed around and taken advantage of. For some personalities, that's just not okay. Personally, I want to be able to come here as an artist. I want to be able to come here with my actual full self and what I'm doing and feel like it's okay to not do things a specific way. I think the co-designed action plans would really help that. When you have communities involved with creating the framework of what should happen, they're going to be much more invested. The whole movement is going to see much more commitment, and there wouldn't be so much separation [between individual organizations].

She added that organizations could work with communities to co-design action plans that are mutually beneficial:

I think it would be great to see more community co-designed action plans. You could keep [the organization's] existing action plans that are created by leadership, but complement them with community-designed action plans that members of frontline communities come in to create to offer more ways for people to do this work. Then, it wouldn't be just a tunnel vision of doing things one particular way. I think so many unexpected and really valuable things would come out of those co-designed action plans and the conversations they would create....I don't think it has to be one or the other. I think it could all work together.

## ***Mutually Beneficial Partnerships***

Four of the participants talked about building more mutually beneficial partnerships and collaborations. Paisley echoed a common sentiment that there were a lot of divisions in the climate movement, a lack of collaboration and sometimes reinventing the wheel:

Something that shocked me a lot when I became fully invested in climate work was seeing the separation between individuals and organizations. There were separations between academia, people on the frontlines, race; there were separations everywhere. If people were just more collaborative and willing to build on each other's ideas, the movement would be better off. And then, it would be great if under-resourced communities could then be given the resources and funding they need, rather than outside organizations trying to "save them" and not listening to what they would actually benefit from.

Pedro added:

More collaboration is a no-brainer. If organizations think they can do it all by themselves, more power to them, but I really have yet to see a single organization be able to tackle issues of this magnitude. I'm not saying that we should just make a large coalition and put everyone under the same umbrella, because everyone has different tasks, roles, and skills. There is a great value to what environmental justice groups do in their communities and on the frontlines. There's also key roles that middle and larger organizations play on Capitol Hill. But, there has to be a synergy. Everybody has a role, so we need to talk to each other almost on a daily basis. There needs to be an effective method of transparency, communication, and strategizing. We still have a ways to go.

## ***Building Relationships***

Many participants discussed the importance of building relationships to engaging people, especially if they have a marginalized identity. Paisley said:

I think there could be more effort put into getting to know each other in ways that are not based entirely on greater narratives perpetuated by society. We talk about race, what it means to be a woman, and what it means to be LGBTQ, but at the

same time, why can't we just talk about how we feel as people and what drives us to this work?

I told Paisley that when I helped to organize the Asian Pacific Action Team, the action teams director said to me, "Maybe the Asian Pacific Action Team could lobby Asian Members of Congress and get them to endorse the bill." I reflected to Paisley:

But not everything had to be action oriented, right? Sometimes these people just want a safe space to be together. I feel like the primary goal of these affinity groups is for members to develop relationships in a supportive space, where people can make friends with others who have common interests and backgrounds.

Paisley responded,

That's the thing, right? It doesn't always have to go back to that. I'm sure your groups are so powerful and effective the way they are because people are getting to know each other and really bringing their whole selves to what they're doing. I think that sometimes, that's enough. There doesn't have to be immediate action.

### **Resources Needed to Succeed**

Participants were asked what resources organizations needed to become more equitable and inclusive? They mentioned:

- DEI personnel
- Funding
- Non-monetary resources
- Incentives
- External consultants
- External resources
- Willingness

## ***DEI Personnel***

All of the participants said that hiring more DEI personnel or supporting existing ones to do their work is needed. Debbie said:

We need skilled people who have robust training and experience with DEI work. They also need to have a fleet of people who can do the work, not just one person who holds together a whole DEI department at an organization. That makes no sense. There should be a dedicated department with robust staff who are also organizers and campaigners. We need to work with people who are doing that work to make sure that it is implemented from the beginning. Knowing and doing that work, not only internally, but also throughout your membership base or volunteer basis, is so important.

Organizations that do not have an internal DEI department may need external consultants to help them. Marian said:

Because we don't have the right internal capacity to pursue these types of strategies authentically, I would say that we need external consultants and experts to get us to where we want to go. Part of that is the whole crux of this work, which is taking a step back from places where you know you can't authentically advance because of the White dominant culture and the lack of representation. You can use your voice and your resources to support the experts who can lend that really thoughtful, specialized, and compassionate expertise.

Participants felt that both internal and external DEI personnel support gave accountability to DEI efforts and provided the capacity to do the work. Organizations relying on volunteer committees (mostly composed of people of color) had difficulty implementing DEI strategies and being able to sustain the work over time.

## ***Funding***

Funding is necessary for hiring and supporting DEI personnel, creating mutually beneficial partnerships, and implementing environmental justice programming. Pedro talked about the need for regrants, through which well-funded mainstream organizations give part of the

grants they receive to smaller organizations they work with. Pedro said that funders can make it easier for organizations to regrant and partner with organizations to do environmental justice work. They can relax reporting requirements, or give the grant to the partner organization directly. This requires organizations to not be possessive with grants if regranting it to a partner organization enables them to be more effective.

Brandon spoke to the need to simply pay people more. One of the barriers participants named was low pay in the environmental field. Low pay plus long hours and a high stress environment is a recipe for burnout.

### ***Non-monetary Resources***

Resources can also come in the form of non-monetary help. For example, George said:

My organization needed to move offices, and [another organization] lent us their office space. We couldn't pay them for the space, but they didn't mind. They didn't even tell us how to get this new organization started. When we needed access to resources, they gave them.

Other kinds of non-monetary support might be advising. For example, the Climate Advocacy Lab provided trainings and peer learning circles for staff at other organizations to learn about BEDJI. The Raben Group provides support staff and IT to Green Leadership Trust, an organization that supports BIPOC who are on the boards of environmental organizations.

### ***Incentives***

Brianna and Antonia said that incentives would help leaders and staff engage in BEDJI and be accountable. Brianna said:

First of all, it should be part of their job description, and they shouldn't have to ask special permission to [participate in a DEI group]. [DEI work] should be part of your work hours, for sure. If anything, I would say that people may get additional time off or an extra mental health day because if you're doing this work in the right

way, it is emotionally taxing. An awesome incentive would be to let the participants all choose a day of their own choosing for mental health. That could be amazing.

Some organizations pay their employees to participate in DEI activities. Antonia said:

At my organization, we have professional development funds up to \$1,000 for each person to engage in more racial equity training. Not having this kind of an allocated professional development fund could definitely be a barrier for other organizations.

### ***Educational Resources***

Participants also noted that there are a lot of educational resources available on BEDJI, such as books, articles, webinars, Ted talks, workshops, and websites. Organizations do not always need to create their own. Brianna said:

We don't always have to look externally, especially with the Internet. You can Google stuff and find a Ted talk about [DEI work]. Also, as far as resources go, I just named a whole bunch of books. But, if you don't have access to those books, how are you reading them? We have to make sure people have the resources that they need to physically pick up those books. The ones I mentioned are all super popular, so you can't just go to the library and pick them up. The employees have to be provided with them so that [leadership] is not just hoping they pay for it on their own.

### ***Willingness***

Some of the participants expressed that organizations are not lacking in available BEDJI resources, what they do need is willingness and commitment to doing the work. Brianna said:

We don't really need anymore resources; we have what we need. At the county level, they hired a Director of Diversity & Inclusion, and they have created leaders to run related programs for each of the departments. They train us to run these programs and to facilitate these conversations. At this time, I don't think we need a lot, we just need the willingness to learn continuously. That's the only resource we need. Like I said, all the other resources are available online or in books. There's so many resources out there. We don't need more external resources; what we need is the willingness to have conversations [about DEI].

Sometimes willingness means that you have to be willing to lose people who might not be supportive of what you are trying to do. Jordan said:

Incorporating deliberate initiatives focusing on DEIJ that are public facing with clear messaging for our membership is also important. Organizationally, being okay with losing people along the way who might not be supportive of this kind of messaging [promoting equity, inclusivity, and diversity], rather than trying to tame it [the message] and make those people feel better solely because they're bringing in money. An organization would need to be fully dedicated to DEIJ in order to do meaningful work.

### **Impacts of Covid-19 Pandemic**

The Covid-19 pandemic brought huge changes to the workplace and the climate movement. Diana said that she saw a huge improvement in people's awareness about climate change and the way it disproportionately impacts people of color. She said:

Before, [climate change] seemed so far off. But now, people are realizing that it's right in front of their face. It also helps that you have [proposed legislation] like the Green New Deal and all of the different variations of Building Back Better under the Biden-Harris Administration. People are realizing that they need to think about where their energy and water are coming from, especially considering the fact that some folks still don't have access to clean water 24/7. These issues are just more in people's faces than they used to be....We've been screaming about [all of these issues] for decades, but now people are starting to pay attention as it impacts more people. The pandemic shed light on how our social and physical and infrastructure in this country are just in shambles.

Marian said that even though the pandemic had been worse for BIPOC communities, it also accelerated the broader effort to adopt DEI. She said:

We realized that our status quo before the pandemic wasn't working. It made us realize that some points of our organization don't work that well. Part of it is because we don't have enough resilience when it comes to our workforce. [Our organization] is known for having a strong culture of work-life balance and support.

But, I think that because of the pandemic, we are now starting to realize that it was very one-sided and certain people didn't have say in that conversation. In some ways, the pandemic has actually kickstarted our effort to be a fully inclusive, anti-racist, multicultural organization. So, the pandemic's impacts on us were both good and bad.

Doing remote work during a pandemic also presented many challenges and inequities. Marian, who started at her organization in the second year of the pandemic, said it was a big struggle to become integrated into the organization while working remotely. She pointed out that working virtually is difficult for building relationships, which are very important for representation, belonging, and inclusion. Julia and Brandon, who work with volunteers, mentioned how difficult it was to motivate and work with volunteers in a remote setting. In addition, the stress and anxiety of the pandemic negatively impacted their ability to focus on climate work. "Getting people to volunteer virtually is hard," he said. "You can't entice people to work when they are stressed."

Diana said she thought remote work was great for people of color because they do not have to go into the office and experience microaggressions. "I feel like remote work can continue to be beneficial for DEI efforts because people can do their work without having to experience [White dominant culture] in the office." Remote work also allowed those who have disabilities to work more comfortably. She said:

I myself have some invisible disabilities, and a friend of mine who's an environmental engineer with the EPA has a lot of health issues that have made it difficult for her to do her work. But now, people like us who are differently abled can participate. If my friend needs to take a nap or rest in the middle of the work day, she can do so without judgment from colleagues. She is getting her work done in a flexible way that accommodates her different health issues. Remote work is beautiful, and we should keep doing it.

Unlike the participants who saw virtual communication as a barrier, Brianna found that it increased engagement in her work. She said:

It's been easier to have people come together. You have more participation because people are at home and they just have to log in. There's less absenteeism and less tardiness in this format, and there's more engagement....I have more honest conversations on Zoom than I ever did in person. In person, all we ever had were quick, passing interactions. On Zoom, we're stuck looking at each other. And if you're in a breakout room, you have to answer the question.

In certain organizations where advocacy depends on a lot of group work, some have found virtual organizing to be more inclusive. Carmen said:

Our virtual lobby meetings can have a lot more participants, whereas the in person lobby meetings would be constrained by how many people could fit into those tiny offices. Our virtual conferences had thousands of attendees, most of whom would have been unable to travel to attend in person. Even though a lot of the local chapters can meet in person now, many of them are choosing to continue meeting virtually because it's easier and they are able to be just as effective that way. In many ways the pandemic has made grassroots organizing easier and more inclusive.

The varying impacts of the pandemic—remote work, highlighting racial inequities, greater access through technology—have made it both easier and harder for people of color to participate in the climate movement.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

People are increasingly recognizing that diversity, equity, and belonging are not just additions to the climate movement but critical to its mission. The traditional coalition of White, middle class, and educated activists was never adequate to solve the greatest challenge of our lifetime. To change everything, we need everyone. We need research that is actionable and can guide us towards greater climate justice and resilience. This chapter discusses the implications of my research for practice, theory, and further study.

### **Implications for Practice**

Many organizations recognize the need to advance diversity, equity, and belonging but have a hard time knowing what strategies to employ. They need evidence-based research on how to allocate their resources for diversity, equity, and belonging. This section presents implications from my research on what organizations can do to implement an effective BEDJI strategy. The recommendations are presented in the same order as the research results: diversity, demographics, engagement, impacts, worries, barriers, strategies for BEDJI, strategies for engagement, and impact of the covid-19 pandemic.

### ***Diversity***

Progress has been made in terms of diversity in the climate movement in recent years, but diversity is insufficient without equity and belonging. All of the survey participants said that their organizations have made efforts to improve BEDJI but progress has been slow and often superficial. At many organizations, the emphasis tended to be on diversity and representation in the early stages. Equity oriented initiatives such as collaboration with environmental justice

organizations and frontline communities, pass through funding, and programs to support BIPOC professional development tended to come later or not at all.

Participants frequently said that anti-racism must go beyond symbolic gestures towards deep transformation at the individual, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic levels. Examples of symbolic gestures included updating the website and promotional materials with pictures of BIPOC, issuing DEI statements, conducting trainings without putting learnings into action, and even hiring DEI personnel if they are not given the resources or authority to implement institutional change. Initiatives on individual and interpersonal DEI, which are usually voluntary, were more common than initiatives on institutional and structural DEI, which rely more on policies and norms. Symbolic gestures were also usually short lived and lacking the commitment, resources, and accountability for long term viability. Transformation involves changing policies, practices, culture, and norms--things that are essential to the operations and mission of an organization. Transformation also means lasting change, with the structures to maintain those changes beyond those who implemented them.

### ***Demographics***

**White and BIPOC climate activists are different.** BIPOC climate activists in my survey tended to be younger, female, and from middle or lower classes. White climate activists tended to be older, female, and from middle or upper classes. Prior research shows that women, young people, and those with more education and wealth tend to be more concerned and active on climate change (YPCCC & Mason 4C, 2022). My study shows that among BIPOC, being young and female may have a stronger effect on climate action than class. Those with privileged identities may have more time and money to be engaged in the climate movement, but those with marginalized identities have more motivation since they are more directly affected.

**People of color are not all the same.** The interview participants came from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences and as a result had different challenges and motivations when it came to climate work. Black descendants of slavery, Native Americans, Asian immigrants, Latinos, and others, all have very different challenges and assets that need to be acknowledged and accounted for when it comes to their engagement in the climate movement. For example, Asian Americans on average have greater net wealth than other racial groups, but there is great disparity among Asian Americans, which encompass people from more than 50 different countries of origin. African Americans have less net wealth but more established networks for civic engagement through churches, universities, and civic organizations. Many BIPOC communities have strong collective values (loyalty to family and community), conservation ethic, and roots in countries that are strongly impacted by climate change. Each group has unique assets and challenges when it comes to engagement on climate change.

**You do not have to be privileged or a nature lover to care about climate change.** The interviews showed that people of color come to climate change from a multitude of ways—experiences in nature, family, friends, school, work, media, hobbies. They came from very poor backgrounds as well as very privileged backgrounds. Their experiences showed that you do not have to be privileged or a nature lover to care about climate and contact with nature does not have to be at a grand scale for it to make a profound impact. Concern for people and justice were powerful motivators. Personal experience with pollution, poverty, and environmental injustice provides an advantage working in the climate movement that those with only scientific knowledge lack. This counters the stereotype that people of color do not get involved in environmental issues because they are mostly urban dwellers who do not spend much time in

nature or that they are more concerned with issues of immediate survival (DeWese et al., 2020; Mock, 2014).

**People of color and those with marginalized identities have assets that make them more effective as climate activists.** Members of society with privilege may have superior education and connections, but members of society who are marginalized have unique assets and resources as well. Many of the survey and interview participants identified motivations for their work derived from their identities as BIPOC. For example, they experienced or witnessed environmental injustice and were motivated to fight for themselves and their communities. They were driven to be exemplars of their community and be the first in their family to earn a Ph.D. or a middle-class income. They wanted to show up for their communities and mentor others. They had additional skills that benefit their work, such as languages, being able to navigate other cultures, values of conservation and collectivism, indigenous knowledge of the land and wildlife, and cultural resources such as artistic expression and spirituality. Many of them overcame enormous odds to obtain advanced education and professional experiences. Plenty of studies show that people of color care more about climate change and are more willing to take action than Whites. This research also presents evidence that people of color have unique background, motivations, and skills that may benefit climate work.

### ***Engagement***

**BIPOC and White activists are different in terms of engagement in the climate movement.** BIPOC tended to be engaged with their organizations for less time than Whites. This could be an indicator that more BIPOC are joining the U.S. climate movement in recent years. Many of them are also younger and have had less time to be civically active. The trend reflects the change in the demographics of younger people who are joining the U.S. climate movement.

BIPOC were less likely to contact their elected officials about climate change than Whites (80% vs. 88% respectively). This may reflect the fact that historically, Blacks, Latinos, and Asians have lower voter registration and turnout rates than White Americans (Igielnik and Budiman, 2020). Willingness to contact elected officials probably correlates with willingness to vote, with Whites being the more comfortable contacting elected officials to voice their opinions and feeling that their actions make a difference. Barriers like language, lack of legal status, low-income, lack of transportation, and unfamiliarity with the American political process have been identified as factors contributing to low civic engagement among Latinos (Arreola & Altamirando, 2016).

Survey respondents talked about climate change with their family and friends far more than Americans on average. Virtually all of the respondents said they talked about climate change with their family and friends at least once a year. Forty-seven percent of the respondents said they talked about climate change more than once a week (Table 12). Whites were slightly more likely to talk about climate change with their friends and family than BIPOC ( $p = 0.004998$ ).

Many prominent climate scientists have said talking to people about climate change is important to fighting the climate crisis (Chiu, 2022). Talking about climate change motivates concern and establishes a social norm that it is ok to be worried about climate change and seek solutions (TED, 2018). But climate change is not often a topic of conversation among Americans. According to the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, 67% of Americans say they “rarely” or “never” discussed global warming with their friends and family (Leiserowitz et al., 2022). Another study by Pew Research Center found that 56% of Americans said they talk about climate change to their family and friends at least sometimes (Tyson et al.,

2021). The results of this study suggest that those who are engaged in climate activism are more likely to talk about climate change with their friends and family.

Fifty-seven percent of the survey respondents said they have participated in at least one public demonstration on climate change in the last two years (2019-2021) compared to 6% of the U.S. general population (Table 13) (Tyson et al., 2021). Many commented that they would have attended more if it had not been for the pandemic. There was no statistically significant difference between Whites and BIPOC in how many times they participated in a public demonstration on climate change. Going to a rally or protest is often a first step for those interested in climate action. Public demonstrations have been posited to increase solidarity among climate activists, increase motivation, and be a force for change (Tufekci, 2020). Greta Thunberg chose public demonstration as the principal strategy in her campaign to raise awareness about climate, and she succeeded in getting millions of people all over the world to join her. Most of her followers were young people getting involved with climate for the first time. In doing so she brought climate to the forefront of mainstream media and forums of government leaders.

More than two thirds (77%) of respondents said they spent some time volunteering for an organization that works on climate, compared with 10% of the U.S. general population (Table 14; Tyson et al., 2021). BIPOC were slightly more likely to be volunteering than Whites (82% vs. 77% respectively). Volunteering on climate change includes a wide range of actions, many of which are not considered direct advocacy. This could be strategizing, organizing meetings, providing food, designing flyers, data entry, and many other essential tasks that support direct advocacy. While some find volunteering in a non-advocacy role to be less glamorous, others may find it a less intimidating way to contribute than contacting elected officials. An emphasis on

volunteering could engage activists on a day-to-day basis more than infrequent direct advocacy can.

### ***Impacts and Worries***

**BIPOC are more directly impacted by climate change.** BIPOC and White survey respondents both felt personally impacted by climate change, but BIPOC were more likely to be directly impacted (64% BIPOC vs. 44% Whites). Direct impacts include heat, fire, floods, drought, air pollution, and sea-level rise. Indirect impacts include mental health, behavior change, and worrying about future generations. Direct impacts for Whites tended to be less life threatening, such as impacts to recreational activities, career choices, and where to live. Impacts to BIPOC tended to be more life threatening, such as harm to their health, housing, and livelihoods. Having more privilege in the form of better housing, living in neighborhoods and areas of the country less subjected to climate impacts, and work that isn't impacted by climate, contributed to being less impacted by climate change. Several White respondents explicitly said they were not experiencing impacts because they were privileged. BIPOC were more likely to say that they changed their behavior (because of climate change (28% vs. 14% respectively), such as driving less or using less energy at home. BIPOC were more likely to mention environmental justice as an impact, explicitly naming climate change's inequitable impact on communities of color.

Worries reflected impacts, with BIPOC survey respondents being more worried about extreme weather than Whites (25% BIPOC vs. 10% White). Whites were much more likely to be worried about impacts to future generations (25% White vs. 3% BIPOC) and wildlife (24% White vs. 7% BIPOC). Both groups worried a great deal about government inaction (26%

BIPOC vs. 24% White) and inequality (17% vs 17%). BIPOC worries tended to be more immediate, both in terms of time scale and proximity.

The comments also reflected many existential worries respondents had about climate change. For example, both BIPOC and White participants worried about mass migration and death of refugees. They worried about conflict and wars over land and natural resources. They worried about the breakdown of civilization and the survival of the human species. They worried about climate change's irreversibility and runaway feedback loops. It is not surprising that these worries would negatively impact mental health. These types of impacts are frequently talked about in climate literature, but very rarely in mainstream media, which could make climate activists feel isolated and like they are in *Don't Look Up*, a fictional film where the main characters know that an asteroid is about to collide into earth but no one else seems to care.

### ***Barriers***

**BIPOC experience more direct barriers to participation.** BIPOC tended to cite direct barriers to participation that affected them personally, such as lack of time, representation, burnout, discrimination, lack of money, challenges with democracy, and lack of opportunities to get involved. Whites also mentioned lack of time most frequently as a challenge. "Indifference from government and the public" on climate change was the second most mentioned challenge from Whites and BIPOC. Whites were more likely to cite obstruction by fossil fuel companies, resistance to change by those in power, and politicization of climate change as challenges. These reflect frustration with challenges to climate action in general, and less about challenges to their personal participation.

**BIPOC experience significant barriers due to racism and White supremacy culture in the climate movement.** Interview participants, who were explicitly asked about what

contributes to lack of diversity in the climate movement, expressed remarkably similar views in their responses. Most identified lack of representation, lack of commitment to BEDJI, White supremacy culture, and tokenism as challenges. Participants also experienced microaggressions and lack of support, including skepticism from family about their chosen career and lack of belonging among people of their own culture. These had significant negative impacts, including physical illness, mental health issues, burnout, and wanting to quit the profession. Participants pinpointed many aspects of White supremacy culture, such as paternalism, power hoarding, urgency, perfectionism, right to comfort, as detrimental to their sense of belonging, equity, and inclusion. White survey respondents practically never mentioned these as challenges to their participation. This seems to indicate that BIPOC are more able to perceive White supremacy culture and are more harmed by it.

**Oppression is intersectional.** Participants frequently described race intersecting with other identities to complicate their experiences of oppression. Interview participants who were women of color said their gender contributed to their marginalization in addition to race, and it was often hard to tell which is more important. Being young was often associated with being less competent and authoritative, while being an immigrant add another layer of alienation for people who are outside of the dominant culture. Participants who did not fit the typical profile for someone of their race expressed feeling more isolated or oppressed, even among their own people. Racial oppression does not occur in isolation. Instead, it is layered with other oppressions that an individual might experience due to their identity and background such as age, gender, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and physical ability. Those with more marginalized identities experience more oppression but they also may relate to more aspects of society and the human condition.

**BEDJI is important to both BIPOC and Whites.** Lack of representation was named 20% of the time as a barrier by BIPOC survey respondents, but BIPOC were not alone in reporting microaggressions, discrimination, and tokenism. White people also reported discrimination or microaggressions in the climate movement due to their age, gender, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, or other identity. Addressing inclusion and belonging is not only beneficial to those with a marginalized racial identity, it also raises awareness of the power dynamics that are inherent in all social relations, including for White people and those with dominant identities (such as being male, wealthy, or heterosexual).

**Barriers are personal, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic.** Barriers exist at multiple scales and levels in society. At the personal level, people of color felt inadequate, imposter, or not belonging even when they are extremely qualified or spent a lot of time in the climate movement. At the interpersonal level, BIPOC participants frequently experienced microaggressions, tokenism, and discrimination in their interactions. At the institutional level, BIPOC participants found that they were not treated equitably, not appreciated or recognized for their work, and encounter obstacles to obtaining the education and experiences that are required to work in their field. At the systemic level, environmental injustice, challenges to democracy, capitalism, and the legacy of slavery constrained people in a structure of oppression that can only be challenged collectively.

The survey results also showed that physical barriers, such as lack of transportation and access to technology, were relatively few for both BIPOC and Whites. Interpersonal challenges (lack of representation and discrimination) were mentioned often by BIPOC and rarely by Whites. Institutional and systemic challenges (indifference from government, lack of opportunity

to get involved, challenges with democracy) were mentioned frequently by both BIPOC and Whites.

A recurring theme throughout the survey responses was the way systemic challenges in other aspects of society impact their ability to participate in the climate movement. These include the state of democracy, capitalism, education, and healthcare. People mentioned the need for more climate jobs that would allow them to make a living making a difference on this issue. They mentioned the need for healthcare, childcare, and student loan debt forgiveness that would free up more of their time and mental resources for climate action. They identified the problems of democracy, such as voter suppression, the electoral college, winner takes all, and gerrymandering that makes it difficult for the will of the people to be represented in the U.S. government. While not all of these can be addressed through climate action, they highlight how the climate movement is embedded within the constructs of society, which can make it easy for social movements to flourish or not. The impetus to maintain those already in power and resist forces that seek to reconfigure that balance is always at play in society.

### ***Strategies for BEDJI***

**Strategies are personal, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic.** Just as barriers exist at multiple scales and levels of society, strategies to improve BEDJI are also personal, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic. Personal strategies included self-care, leaning in, humor, and self-study. Interpersonal strategies included mentors, affinity groups, anti-bias training, and conversations about race. Institutional strategies included programs to support BIPOC engagement, pay transparency and equity, professional development programs, and HR functions. Systemic strategies involved environmental justice, democracy reform, economic justice, and government action on climate change. In the survey, BIPOC and Whites named

training and education, government action on climate change, and diversity and inclusion as the top three strategies that would increase participation. BIPOC wanted to see more strategies to elevate frontline communities, engage youth, and create opportunities for action.

**BEDJI requires deep, uncomfortable commitment and accountability.** A frequent complaint about institutional DEI initiatives was declaring good intentions and strategies without commitment and accountability for following through on intentions. Participants said commitment needs to come from leadership who are willing to make a stand for BEDJI and invest resources to achieving it. Accountability can occur in the form of annual reports, performance reviews, audits, and incentives/punishments. Institutions need to undergo some reflective process on a regular basis where progress is measured and people are held responsible. What appears to be a lot of change and progress to White people may be very little to marginalized people. It is important to get feedback from BIPOC in order to get a true sense of progress.

**Invest resources.** Given how deeply entrenched White supremacy culture is in most institutions, changing it requires significant investment of resources. Resources that help organizations to succeed participants identified were also personal, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic. Personal resources included books, media, and the values and commitments that an institution adopts. Interpersonal resources included mentors, affinity groups, and peer resource groups. Institutional resources included consultants, DEI personnel, professional development programs, institutional strategic plans, and funding for BEDJI. Systemic resources came from movement wide collaborations. For example, Climate Advocacy Lab has resources on BEDJI for all climate organizations. Green 2.0 collects and publishes data on DEI from environmental organizations. Green Leadership Trust and Center for Diversity and the Environment help

BIPOC advance professionally in the environmental movement. Resources also came in the form of scholarships to individuals, funds to organizations, or federal budget allocations like the Inflation Reduction Act.

**Importance of leadership.** Five of the interview participants mentioned the importance of BIPOC in positions of leadership. People of color in leadership makes BEDJI appear much more authentic rather than symbolic. They are also more likely to be able to identify gaps in current DEI efforts and the strategies needed to move towards BEDJI. Barriers to BIPOC seeking leadership positions included the “glass ceiling”, where people of color work their way up but are then unable to reach the executive level. They also faced the “glass cliff,” a phenomenon where people of color who make their way to executive leadership are expected to perform miracles to turn around a failing institution or make them succeed. If they don’t succeed, they are blamed for the outcome.

**BEDJI is an iterative process.** The sentiment of the research participants is that the climate movement has a long way to go on diversity, equity, and belonging. Organizations need to constantly examine and evaluate their progress, set new goals, and fine tune their processes. BEDJI is not a list with items to be checked off. It is a continuous journey and evolving process that requires constant vigilance. Moyer’s MAP of social movements emphasizes that change happens over a long time, with periods of success followed by periods of retrograde. It is up to activists and their allies to push progress to the next stage, even when it feels like no one cares. The work of liberation is never done.

John Kotter’s eight-step framework for leading change in organizations emphasizes the importance of iteration. The eight stages are: creating a sense of urgency, building a guiding coalition, forming a strategic vision, enlisting a volunteer army, removing barriers, generating

short term wins, sustaining acceleration, and instituting change (Kotter, 2023). Kotter emphasizes that these steps are not necessarily linear, rather each one is an accelerator that drives change throughout the organization. Changes need to be evaluated, processed, and repeated in order to be sustained. As change happens, the vision of what is desirable and possible may also change. The iterative process is essential for BEDJI to evolve beyond what is initially imagined.

### ***Strategies for Engagement***

Many conventional strategies used to communicate and engage with people on climate change are based on the interests and needs of White people. My research found that people of color differ from Whites in their perceptions of climate change. In addition to facing more direct barriers to engagement and challenges from racism, they have different experiences of the impacts and different worries. The following are recommendations for framing climate change in ways that resonate with people of color and strategies for authentic engagement.

**Climate change is a present-day crisis.** Invoking future generations when messaging about why people should care about the environment is standard practice, but invoking direct impacts to people and communities alive today would be more compelling for people of color. Climate change is happening now and people of color are feeling the brunt of its impacts. Sixty-four percent of the BIPOC survey respondents said that they experience direct impacts of climate change such as heat, flood, fire, drought, air pollution, and sea level rise compared to 44% of Whites. Connecting direct impacts to climate change is essential for motivating people to take action.

**Climate change is local.** Communities around the world are impacted by climate change, but these stories are often not local. Stories about polar bears and farmers in Bangladesh make climate change seem like a distant concern. Highlighting climate change's impacts to

communities close to home in narratives that feature diverse characters in relatable settings may be more effective in motivating concern and action. Change makers can also encourage people to consider how climate change impacts their own locations. For example, one volunteer spoke about a tree that no longer blooms in their backyard due to drought. Another volunteer said their city is subject to more power outages as demand on hot summer days outstrips the electrical supply. Reflecting on climate change's hyper local impacts can help make climate change more immediate and relatable to people.

**Climate change is intersectional.** Climate change deeply intersects with issues that Americans care about, such as the economy, preserving democracy, healthcare, and immigration (NPR, 2023). Climate caused natural disasters cause billions of dollars of damage each year and the loss of businesses and jobs. In 2022, climate disasters caused the U.S. at least \$165 billion (Smith, 2023). At the same time, fighting climate change is a huge opportunity for economic growth. Climate change exacerbates health issues. It worsens air pollution, increases allergens, and proliferates disease carrying insects (Ebi, et al., 2018). It increases the cost of food, home insurance, and utilities (Bittle et al., 2022). It poses grave threats to national security (Government Accountability Office, 2022). Making the connection between climate and issues that people already care about could motivate action even if they do not care about climate itself.

**Climate change is racial injustice.** Seventeen percent of BIPOC and White survey respondents said they are worried about climate change widening the equity gap. Seventy-two percent of Black Americans also say that addressing issues around race should be a top priority for the president and Congress (Pew Research Center, 2023). Groups that are most at risk for climate change are also those that are most vulnerable in society, including low income, immigrants, indigenous peoples, some communities of color, children, pregnant women, older

adults, vulnerable occupational groups, persons with disabilities, and persons with preexisting or chronic medical conditions (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). Making the connection between racial justice and climate change makes climate change more personal.

Given the long history of colonialism, slavery, and racism in the United States, it is crucial this history is taken into account in addressing climate change. Since people who have been marginalized are the most vulnerable, solutions need to center those who are marginalized. Solutions also need to take into account reparations as well as equal opportunity going forward. Reparations could mean channeling more climate adaptation resources to communities that are more vulnerable to climate change, centering frontline communities in adaptation strategies, letting communities lead, and compensating people for their participation. Racial healing needs to be a part of this work by acknowledging the harms inflicted through racist policies, and working to address historical wrongs.

**Emphasize efficacy.** My research showed that perceptions of inefficacy and lack of progress was a huge frustration and barrier for people in the climate movement. Twenty-six percent of BIPOC and 24% of Whites said they are worried about “government inaction” on climate change. Studies show that when people are concerned about an issue and perceive that political activism can be effective, they are much more likely to be engaged in activism (Roser-Renouf et al., 2014).

Telling stories that demonstrate power and effectiveness of taking action can help people become engaged. Social movements have made tremendous progress on issues such as women’s rights, civil rights, and environmental pollution. The recent changes to diversity, equity, and belonging in the environmental movement have also happened in a remarkably short amount of time. The MAP model of social movements explains that progress is made in waves, and

backlash and periods retrograde are signs that the movement is making progress. Celebrating successes is important as well as acknowledging the need for progress.

**Address mental health and burnout.** For both BIPOC and Whites, climate change induced stress, anxiety, fear, and depression. Fifteen percent of BIPOC said climate change impacted their mental health while 49% of Whites did. Nine percent of BIPOC said burnout was a barrier to their participation compared to 2% of Whites. We need to move away from doom and gloom towards narratives of hope and positive transformation. At the same time, we need space to talk about anxiety, depression, anger, and other negative emotions. These strategies need to be personal, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic. We cannot treat mental health as a personal problem when the cause of it is systemic and institutional. White supremacy culture privileges rational and technological approaches to problem solving but connecting with emotions is where most people find motivation for action. Emotional connection is how people experience belonging and inclusion.

**Build authentic relationships.** Survey and interview participants said that building authentic relationships is important for climate organizations looking to engage BIPOC and frontline communities. Relationships entail getting to know people as individuals and listening to their concerns, needs, and suggestions. It requires giving as well as receiving and working together to co-create solutions. Relationships take time and investment. It is not extracting information, labor, or resources for one's own benefit. Relationships are also the antidote to tokenism and microaggressions. When people feel that they are accepted and appreciated for their uniqueness, rather than as a representative of their race, they are less likely to feel tokenized. White supremacy culture promotes relationships of transaction and extraction. Building authentic relationships is essential for countering White supremacy culture. Having

more diversity within an organization would also make it easier to bridge differences and build more effective collaborations when working with diverse communities.

**Build community and belonging.** All of the interview participants said that lack of belonging hurt them personally and made them less motivated to do their best work. They also said that feeling belonging, even if only among a small group of BIPOC peers, motivated them to stay. In some cases, this support was described as lifesaving. Support from White people was also important, for example, a leader committed to BEDJI, White allies that spoke up for and stood with BIPOC peers, colleagues who expressed appreciation and encouragement, a boss who was a mentor and advocate. People are happier and motivated when they feel they are part of something greater than themselves and part of a community that cares about them. There is a greater sense of belonging when there is diversity (no dominant group); when there is inclusion (acceptance, appreciation); and when there is equity (people treated with regard to their value as human beings rather than their race or identity). Belonging means to be invited, welcomed, accepted, known, supported, involved, heard, needed, befriended, present, and loved (Carter, 2021). Belonging is created when there is justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Just as microaggressions over time degrades a sense of belonging, “microaffirmations” are powerful in creating a sense of belonging (Delston, 2021). Microaffirmations are “signals that a recipient belongs to some valued or high-status class” often manifest as praise, assignment to special projects, mentorship, and other perks (Delston, 2021). Microaffirmations often lead individuals to gain a sense of confidence, belonging, and merit. However, when microaffirmations are distributed inequitably, they reduce sense of belonging. In order to promote equity in the workplace, we need to pay attention to giving microaffirmations as well as avoiding microaggressions.

**Engage young people.** Gen Z is the most racially diverse generation in the U.S., with 45% being non-White (Barroso, 2020). Successful efforts to engage Gen Z should result in more diversity (though not necessarily equity and belonging). In my survey, the majority (54%) of BIPOC respondents were under age 34 compared to 26% of Whites. Eleven percent of the BIPOC survey respondents said youth engagement should be one of the strategies to increase engagement in the climate movement. Six percent of BIPOC respondents said they felt marginalized because of their youth. Two of the survey participants said older people in positions of power not making room for young people is a barrier to diversity and equity.

Just as BIPOC have many assets to contribute to climate change, younger generations also possess many skills and motivations that benefit the climate movement, such as greater diversity, tolerance for difference, savviness with technology, and awareness of intersectional challenges. Millennials and Gen Z who have grown up in a time when the economy and other institutions have failed them have made them more aware of the role of institutions and systemic solutions needed to solve collective problems. Since they are the generations that will be most affected by climate change, they have the greatest prerogative to lead.

### ***Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic***

The Covid-19 pandemic had a profound impact on the trajectory of BEDJI in the climate movement. On the one hand, it was more devastating to marginalized communities. On the other hand, it accelerated awareness of inequity and racism in society. The switch to remote work was a challenge for activists but also made participation easier for some people. Even though it was harder to build authentic, warm relationships through the medium of Zoom, the barrier also mitigated microaggressions and equalized participation for people who were marginalized because of their race, gender, age, or other visible difference. The pandemic has transformed the

way that we think about and approach work, with many organizations leaning towards a hybrid of remote and in-person working after the pandemic. This approach could give workers more choice and flexibility in building relationships and obtaining work-life balance. The shift towards workers gaining more power as a result of these transitions is a positive for BEDJI.

### **Implications for Theory**

My research affirms and extends existing theories on race and social movements when applied to BEDJI in the climate movement.

#### ***Critical Race Theory***

Critical race theory examines how race impacts our understanding of reality and the structure of society. According to Parker and Lynn (2002), the main goals of critical race theory are (a) present stories about discrimination from the perspective of people of color (b) argue for the eradication of racial subjugation while simultaneously recognizing that race is a social construct (c) address other areas of difference, such as gender, class, and any inequities experienced by individuals. In addition, applying critical race theory to research methodology means that “the researcher foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process; challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of people of color; and offers transformative solutions to racial, gender, and class subordination in our societal and institutional structures” (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 30).

My research meets the goals of critical race theory and applies its methodology. The interviews present stories about discrimination from the perspective of people of color and the surveys capture BIPOC perceptions about climate change and the climate movement. I present both the challenges and strategies for eradicating racial subjugation within the climate movement. Intersectional identities such as gender, age, and socioeconomic background are

explored in how they complicate issues of oppression and participation for people of color. My research engages the reader in challenging dominant White narratives and promoting belonging, equity, justice, diversity, and inclusion.

My research also goes beyond critical race theory by arguing that people of color and those with marginalized identities provide unique perspectives that are invaluable for the climate movement. For example, by being directly impacted by climate change, BIPOC can relate the experience of climate change and the challenge of coping and adapting personally. Climate activists and professionals with direct experience of environmental injustice have a connection to the communities they are trying to help and perspective that their White counterparts do not have. Being BIPOC also enables them to communicate about climate change to BIPOC communities in a way that resonates with their values and lifestyles. Being able to hold both the perspectives of the marginalized communities they come from and the White dominant culture enables BIPOC be better communicators and innovators on climate change.

The phenomenon of being able to see both the perspective of the marginalized and the mainstream is described by stand-point theory, a theoretical framework that came out of the feminist movement. In this theory, society is imagined as concentric circles with the privileged inhabiting the inner rings and the marginalized occupying the outer rings. Those who are on the outside have less privilege and resources, but they have greater perspective on the whole of society. Sebene Selassie described it this way in *You Belong*:

If we imagine each circle is made up of people who are facing inwards, the closer you are to the center, the less you see (with the innermost circle seeing the least but making the most of the official decisions for all the circles). Conversely, if you are in the outermost circles, you have the greatest perspective (but have little power over systemic decisions). Also, the people from the outer circles not only see more, they actually visit the center by traveling the radius from edge to center, from

outside in (often because the systems are designed to serve people in the center). Center inhabitants rarely travel to the outer circles. Some start at the margins but are moved to the center through colonization, migration, education, or profession. We are conditioned to believe that proximity to the center is a measure of our belonging (and that conditioning originates from the center itself).

(Selassie, 2020, p. 30)

Because people of color are coming from the margins but also know how to navigate the center, they have a broader perspective of the challenges and solutions for a broader swath of society.

Those who are part of the mainstream might learn about what it is like to be marginalized through travel, reading, or talking to people, but they cannot have the personal experience of being marginalized since society is designed to serve them and uphold their perspective as normal and correct. Uplifting BIPOC voices and power is not only more just and equitable, but it also uplifts perspectives and solutions that are often dismissed by White supremacy culture.

### ***Social Movement Theory***

Critical race theory deconstructs the way race impacts our understanding of reality and centers the perspective of people of color. However, it doesn't show how race plays a factor in social movements. Social movement theories often don't show how race influences power and progress. Moyer's MAP of social movements emphasizes the agency of activists in making progress on social issues but disregards the impact of race on the position and power of activists. The model presents the progress of social movements from a White perspective. Below I discuss the applicability of the MAP model from the lens of critical race theory.

**Stage 1: Normal times.** Whose definition of normal? People of color have always found their lack of representation in American institutions to be a deviation and injustice. Normal times were never normal for the marginalized.

**Stage 2: Prove the failure of institutions.** Again the perception of failure has always existed from the point of view of BIPOC. However, in almost all social movements, the marginalized resisting the status quo, often at their own risk and expense, builds awareness of inequity and injustice among the general public. Their agitation proves the failure of institutions.

**Stage 3: Ripening conditions.** Conditions are ripe when people see that a problem can and needs to be solved. Several social movement theories point to the convergence of favorable conditions as the starting point of social movements, such as political opportunity, funding, and support, but it is really the internal condition of feeling “fed up” with the status quo that leads to the decision to do something about it. The difference between stage 3 and stage 2 is that people are no longer willing to tolerate the status quo.

**Stage 4: Trigger event.** A trigger event brings into public consciousness what has been in the consciousness of the marginalized all along. From a BIPOC perspective, a trigger event is when conditions are so intolerable that taking action is less risky than not taking action. It is a moment when the burden of oppression is so strong that it erupts into resistance. In the aftermath of George Floyd, Black Americans described intense anger, grief, and outrage in reaction. These intense emotions led to spontaneous outpouring into the streets, and in Minneapolis, attacking police cars and setting buildings on fire. These incidents captured in media and shown across the world set off even more uprisings and intense reactions.

The conditions of 2020 were unique in producing a trigger event that elevated public consciousness about racial justice. Prior to 2020, there were plenty of incidents of police brutality towards Black people, however, the conditions of 2020 were different. First, the covid-19 pandemic brought life in the U.S. to a standstill. More BIPOC lost jobs and lives due to the disease. There was also a string of racist incidents that happened close to the death of George

Floyd, including Ahmaud Arbury, Breonna Taylor, and Christian Cooper. The incident of Christian Cooper, a bird watcher in New York's Central Park, was filmed on the same day as George Floyd. The simultaneity of these events made it difficult to not see them as related and symptomatic of a systemic problem. Finally, George Floyd's murder was captured on video, posted to social media, and instantly reached millions of people worldwide, a phenomenon that would not have happened ten years ago. It made police brutality immediate and visceral for millions of people. The combination of these conditions made the death of George Floyd a seismic trigger event unlike any other racial violence incident in recent memory.

**Stage 5: Identity crisis of powerlessness.** Moyer's model says that after a year or two, the high hopes of movement take-off inevitably turn into despair when activists perceive that change is not happening, when in fact, change is happening. In 2021, the police officers that killed George Floyd were convicted, police reform was initiated in many communities nationally, and federal laws were passed to address police brutality. However, the backlash to critical race theory and anti-racism also grew. DEI initiatives blossomed at institutions but were often stymied by lack of resources, commitment, or accountability as urgency waned. The intensity of response to the trigger event cannot be sustained for long and people return to lower levels of engagement. However, the MAP model theorizes that backlash is evidence that the movement is winning. As said in the quote attributed to Gandhi, "First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win."

**Stage 6: Majority public support.** In the age of social media and 24-hour news cycles, majority public support could be gained rapidly after a trigger event. For the gay marriage movement, it was only a few years between the legalization of same sex marriage by one state to its sanctioning by the Supreme Court. For racial justice, public support reached a critical point

after George Floyd, but White fragility made progress difficult even when it was widely acknowledged that harm has been perpetuated. In the aftermath of George Floyd, the country was saturated with news, stories, and images of Black Lives Matter, seeming to turn public consciousness overnight. But the realization of injustice and change takes longer.

**Stage 7: Success.** It is not uncommon to hear a White person say that racism no longer exists in America. But ask any Black person and they will tell you that racism is alive and well. What to some people seems like progress is for others insufficient and painfully incremental. For example, Juneteenth was declared a national holiday in 2021. But how helpful is that for Black Americans? Police killings of Black people continued, including 203 individuals in 2021 alone (Rahman, 2021). In the climate movement, racial diversity grew rapidly between 2017 and 2022 from grassroots volunteers to senior leaders. While many are now at tables they were not at before, are their voices truly heard? Are they treated equitably? Do they feel a sense of belonging? Many of the interviewees in this study reported increased diversity at their organizations but still a lack of equity and belonging.

**Stage 8: Continuing the struggle.** Three years after George Floyd, a lot has changed and a lot has remained the same. Diversity is better in environmental organizations, but the climate movement is still predominantly White. There have been changes in the leadership of prominent environmental organizations towards greater diversity and inclusion. The Inflation Reduction Act, a climate legislation that promised to deliver billions of dollars to fighting climate change, included for the first time direct investments to frontline communities for climate adaptation (The White House, 2022). From the perspective of many BIPOC, these are just the small gains in the fight for racial justice. In the meantime, a conservative majority in the Supreme Court is rolling back women's rights, civil rights, and environmental protections. Equal opportunity is not

enough without reparations for past wrongs. The struggle for liberation is not just decades, by Moyer's estimation, but centuries and lifetimes.

### **Implications for Further Study**

My research explored many aspects of diversity in the climate movement, including demographics, engagement, challenges and barriers to participation, and strategies and recommendations for BEDJI. However, there were many aspects that could be more successfully studied if there were more time and resources. Implications for further study are outlined below.

***Demographics of the climate movement.*** It became apparent early in my research that demographic information about the climate movement was scarce. As more environmental organizations devote resources to fighting climate change, and new organizations are started, the boundaries of the climate movement are constantly shifting. Guidestar, which publishes information about nonprofit organizations, does not share the racial breakdown of the staff nor the number of volunteers/supporters in an organization. Because many organizations do not collect demographic information about their supporters/donors/volunteers or are reluctant to share them, there is virtually no demographic information on the membership of these organizations, who make up the bulk of the climate movement. Organizations are increasingly collecting and reporting demographic information about their staff, but this is still far from a common practice. A collective effort by climate organizations to collect this data and share it is needed to improve our knowledge of who is in the climate movement. Without this baseline, it is difficult to measure progress on diversity.

***Diversity at different levels.*** Existing studies show that racial diversity has improved markedly in environmental organizations in the last five years. However, the leaders of

environmental organizations are still predominantly White. Future studies of diversity need to look at diversity at different levels and be more specific when it comes to race and ethnicity.

***Specific demographic groups.*** A recurring sentiment among study participants was that people of color are not all the same and different groups face different challenges. Current studies of climate opinion, such as the one conducted by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, are targeted at the general population and have samples that are too small to be conclusive about specific racial groups. Dedicated studies on what African Americans, Asians, Latinos, and Indigenous people think about climate change and their challenges and barriers to engagement are sorely needed.

***Equity, inclusion, belonging.*** For a long time, the percentage of people of color in the staff of environmental organizations was the only metric tracked in DEI. However, diversity itself is inadequate without progress in equity and belonging. More recent efforts, such as Green 2.0's transparency report card, also included a survey of organizations on their equity and inclusion initiatives. More studies are needed on equity and inclusion so we can measure progress and effectiveness. Measuring belonging would go even further to ensuring equity and inclusion.

***Challenges and barriers.*** The survey and interviews in this study uncovered many challenges and barriers for Whites and BIPOC in the U.S. climate movement. However, there are few systematic qualitative studies of BIPOC in the environmental or climate movement. More research can be done to study the experiences of BIPOC including those who are still involved as well as those who left or never joined. All of the interview participants encountered White supremacy culture, tokenism, and microaggressions in the climate movement. It would be eye-opening to have a crowd sourced collection of stories about these incidents made available in

real time the way Asian Americans Advancing Justice collected stories of hate incidents towards Asian Americans at the beginning of the pandemic (Stand Against Hatred, n. d.).

***Resources and strategies.*** There are now many resource groups for BIPOC and DEI, such as the Environmental Leadership Program, Green Leadership Trust, and the Race Equity Tool. Further research can study the impact of these resources and programs. Are diversity trainings helpful? What initiatives improve recruitment and retention? Do people who take advantage of DEI resources fare better than those who do not? What do people feel like they need to be supported and succeed? How can we invest more in helpful resources so that more people can take advantage of them?

All of these are areas that would benefit from further study, going beyond diversity in environmental organizations.

## **Conclusion**

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stated upon the release of the 2023 IPCC synthesis report, "Our world needs climate action on all fronts: everything, everywhere, all at once" (United Nations, 2023). In the time that I conducted this research, environmental organizations have become more racially diverse and more resources were committed to DEI than ever. But we need so much more. We need people of color not just in the ranks of the climate movement but also in leadership. We need deep investments of funding, resources, and commitment to doing the work. We can only solve this challenge if those who are most impacted by climate change are at the center of the movement to tackle this challenge.

Throughout this research, I have explored with participants everything that we do not want in the climate movement: a movement dominated by White people making decisions for people of color and exacerbating inequalities; people of color feeling tokenized, excluded, and

not heard as they try to participate; people of color facing systemic, institutional, interpersonal, and internal racism; a narrow focus on technocratic and market based solutions; a movement that makes people feel ineffectual, stressed, fearful, and burned out; a movement where we do not win a more livable world because it is too hard to care.

If these are the things we do not want, what do we actually want? What future are we fighting for? Let's imagine a climate movement in which the people who are most affected are most represented and involved in decision making; where the changes we fight for reduce inequality as well as carbon emissions; where people are treated with fairness and dignity; where people are appreciated and valued for their contributions, including with equitable compensation; a movement where everyone is able to contribute with their authentic selves; where artists and poets are valued as much as scientists and policymakers; a movement that inspires hope, joy, community, and belonging; a movement that is successful because everyone wants to be a part of it and it is easy to make a difference.

A more just, equitable, inclusive, and diverse climate movement where people experience a sense of belonging would create a more just, equitable, inclusive, and diverse society--a society where we live in harmony with other life on earth, where natural resources are used wisely and sustainably, where the benefits are enjoyed by all citizens of the earth, where everyone is able to thrive and live their full potential. A more just, equitable, inclusive, and diverse climate movement is one that works towards the liberation of all people from oppression. Each of us needs to do the work of transformation, but we cannot stop there. The work of liberation is work that needs to be done in community. As the great civil rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer said at the National Women's Political Caucus in Washington in 1971, "Nobody's free until everybody's free" (Brooks & Houck, 2011).

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## **APPENDIX A: Survey Questionnaire (Belonging and Justice)**

Q1. What is your racial/ethnic affiliation? Check all that apply

- African-American/Black
- Asian/Asian American
- Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- Latino/Latina/Latinx
- Native American/Indigenous
- North African/Middle Eastern
- White/Caucasian
- Other (please specify)

Q2. Do you consider yourself

- White
- BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color)

Q3. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Non Binary
- Other (please specify)

Q4. What is your age?

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 45-54
- Above 64

Q5. What is your political persuasion?

- Very Progressive
- Moderately progressive
- Moderate
- Moderately conservative
- Very conservative
- Other

Q6. Socioeconomic status is the social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income and occupation. How would you describe your socio-economic status?

- Upper class
- Upper middle class
- Middle class
- Lower middle class
- Lower class

Q7. In what year did you join the organization as staff?

Q8. On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being not at all, and 10 being completely, how much do you agree with the following statements? Select "I don't know" if you don't know.

- Racial, ethnic, and gender-based jokes are not tolerated at this organization.
- The organization takes allegations of discrimination and harassment seriously.
- People of all cultures and backgrounds are respected and valued here.
- Staff are treated equitably with regards to pay, benefits, and performance evaluations.
- Diversity is an important part of hiring of staff.
- Diversity and inclusion is an important part of recruitment and engagement of volunteers.
- This organization provides an environment for the free and open expression of ideas, opinions and beliefs.
- Diversity of opinions, ideas and approaches are valued. ie. there isn't just "one right way."
- Leaders value the opinions of staff and volunteers.
- Non quantifiable progress is valued as well as quantifiable progress.
- The organization is willing to question its policies, practices and assumptions.
- The leadership is comfortable with sharing power and including staff in decisions that affect the entire organization.
- The organization builds trust and relationships with environmental justice communities and organizations.
- The organization is committed to advancing social justice.

Comments?

Q9. Belonging is a sense of fitting in or feeling like you are a member of a group. On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being not at all, and 10 being completely, how much do you agree with the following statements? Select "I don't know" if you don't know.

- I am comfortable talking about my background and cultural experiences with my colleagues.

- I feel comfortable with being myself at work.
- I am recognized for my accomplishments.
- I receive transparent communication about important developments in the organization.
- I can voice a contrary opinion or criticism without fear of negative consequences.
- I rarely feel like I am “the only one.”
- When I speak up at work, my opinion is valued.
- I am able to show my emotions at work.
- The organization enables me to balance my work and personal life.
- Mistakes are treated as learning opportunities.
- The organization provides opportunities for my personal and professional growth.

Comments?

Q10. What do you think the organization should prioritize in terms of improving diversity, equity, and inclusion? Please rank:

- Addressing discrimination, harassment, and microaggressions
- Hiring and retention of employees of color
- Outreach and engagement of BIPOCvolunteers
- Advocacy and organizing strategies that are inclusive and accessible
- Advocacy outcomes that promote equity and social justice
- Relationships with environmental justice organizations and communities

Q11. Anything else you’d like us to know?

## APPENDIX B: Survey Questionnaire

Q1. If you participate in climate action with an organization, what organization are you a part of?  
If you don't participate with an organization, please skip this question.

Q2: In what capacity are you involved with this organization?

- Supporter (I'm on their mailing list but have not done any actions)
- Donor
- Volunteer (I have done actions with this organization)
- Staff (I work for this organization)
- Board member
- Other

Q3. How long have you been involved with this organization? (years)

Q4. What is your racial/ethnic affiliation? Check all that apply

- African-American/Black
- Asian/Asian American
- Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- Latino/Latina/Latinx
- Native American/Indigenous
- North African/Middle Eastern
- White/Caucasian
- Other (please specify)

Q5. Do you consider yourself

- White
- BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color)

Q6. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Non Binary
- Other (please specify)

Q7. What is your age?

- Under 18

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 45-54
- Above 64

Q8. What is your political persuasion?

- Very Progressive
- Moderately progressive
- Moderate
- Moderately conservative
- Very conservative
- Other

Q9. Socioeconomic status is the social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income and occupation. How would you describe your socio-economic status?

- Upper class
- Upper middle class
- Middle class
- Lower middle class
- Lower class

Q10. How many times have you contacted your elected officials (call, email, message) about climate change in the last year?

- None
- 1-3 times
- 4-6 times
- 7-9 times
- 10 times or more

Q11. How often do you talk to your family or friends about climate change?

- More than once a week
- Once a week
- Once a month
- A few times a year
- Once a year
- Less than once a year

- Almost never

Q12. How many times have you participated in a public march or demonstration on climate change in the last two years?

- None
- Once
- Twice
- Three times
- Four times
- Five times
- More than five times

Q13. How many hours a week do you spend volunteering with a climate organization?

- None
- Less than 1 hour
- 1-3 hours
- 4-6 hours
- 7-9 hours
- 10 or more hours

Q14. How does climate change impact you?

Q15. What are you most worried about when it comes to climate change?

Q16. What challenges or barriers do you experience to participation in the climate movement?

Q17. What systemic or structural changes would make participation in the climate movement easier for you?

Q18. Other thoughts or comments?

## **APPENDIX C: Informed Consent Form for Surveys**

You're invited to take this survey if you identify as a climate activist in the United States. This means that you spend time being involved in activities or organizations that support action on climate change.

The purpose of this research is to understand the demographics of the climate movement, the extent of diversity in the climate movement, and challenges and strategies for equity and inclusion, particularly for people of color in the United States.

You will be asked a series of questions regarding your race, age, gender, political affiliation, and socio-economic background. Questions 7-12 ask you about your engagement with the climate movement. Questions 15-19 are some open-ended questions about diversity, equity, and inclusion. Please answer as many as you are able and skip any questions you do not want to answer. The entire questionnaire takes about 5 minutes to complete.

We believe that there are no physical or emotional risks associated with this survey; however, to protect your privacy and the integrity of this study, your response will be anonymous and confidential. We will not ask for your name, birth date, address, or contact information. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. You are free to skip any question that you choose not to answer. If we need to quote or paraphrase you, a pseudonym will be used where appropriate. We value your honest opinion and will not disclose your name or the name of the organization you're affiliated with in any reporting of the results.

If you have questions about the study, you may contact Principal Investigator Clara Fang at [redacted]. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the IRB institutional review board chair at Antioch University New England, Kevin Lyness [redacted] or AUNE provost Dr. Shawn Fitzgerald at [redacted].

## **APPENDIX D: Interview Protocol**

- How do you identify?
- What is your current role?
- How did you become interested in climate change?
- How did you get involved in the climate movement?
- How would you rate diversity in the US climate movement or in your organization?
- How would you rate inclusion?
- How has the organization changed from a year ago from a DEI perspective?
- What do you believe has shifted in people's thinking or behavior on DEI?
- What barriers in general do you think people of color face when trying to engage with the climate movement?
- What challenges have you faced as a person of color in the climate movement?
- Have you experienced macro or microaggressions?
- How did you overcome these challenges? What motivates you to stay involved?
- What strategies would help the climate movement advance DEI?
- What resources do organizations need to feel supported in their DEI work?
- How has the pandemic and remote work affected DEI?

## **APPENDIX E: Informed Consent for Interviews**

The purpose of this research is to understand challenges and strategies for building an inclusive climate movement, particularly for people of color in the United States. You are invited to participate in a personal interview with the researcher because of your role in the climate movement.

Although you may not benefit directly from this research, the information that you provide will be valuable in providing insight on diversity in the climate movement. The research will help climate advocates understand the barriers and motivations for people of color to participate in the climate movement. This will enable them to devise strategies to improve equity and inclusion and build on the experiences of other organizations. In addition to benefits to climate organizations, this research will center the experiences of marginalized communities in the climate movement and build resilience and solidarity among marginalized communities in the climate movement.

While there are no physical risks associated with this study, we understand that race, equity, and inclusion are sensitive discussion topics for many people. We will do our best to protect your privacy by maintaining the confidentiality and integrity of your interview, which will be maintained on a password-protected computer kept in a locked office. We will not disclose your name, contact information, organization, or employer to anyone outside of the research team. If you are quoted or paraphrased in the final report, we will not name the organization referenced and pseudonyms will be used when appropriate. You will be emailed an edited transcript of your interview that you can review for accuracy. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw without penalty at any time.

The interview will last 60 minutes to one hour and conducted via Zoom. You will select a time that is convenient for you and be provided with a link to meet online. The interviews will be recorded via Zoom to the researcher's password protected cloud drive. On the next page you can review the questions that will be asked in the interview.

If you have questions about the study, you may contact Principal Investigator Clara Fang at [redacted]. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the IRB institutional review board chair at Antioch University New England, Kevin Lyness [redacted] or AUNE provost Dr. Shawn Fitzgerald at [redacted].

## APPENDIX F: Permissions

All figures have been reproduced with permission from the authors.

Figure 1. Five Representations of Community

### Permission to use Five Figures of Community figure

3 messages

cfang

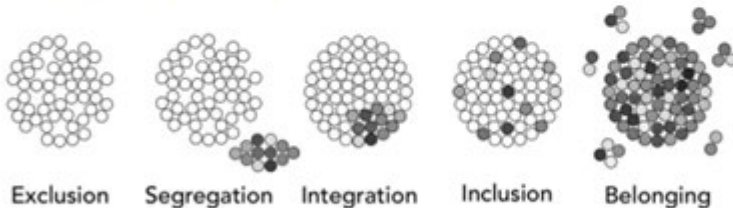
To: erik\_carter

Sat, Apr 1, 2023 at 12:35 PM

Hello Dr. Carter,

I contacted you in December regarding using your work in our research on equity in climate adaptation and resilience planning. Thank you for providing your articles on belonging! We would like your permission to use the 10 elements of belonging and the figure of five representations of community in our paper, [Centering Equity in Climate Resilience and Adaptation: A Practitioner's Guide](#), p. 10. This is being published in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration climate resilience practitioner series.

In addition, I would like permission to use the same figure in my dissertation, [To Change Everything We Need Everyone: Belonging, Equity, Justice, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Climate Movement](#) p. 21



Thank you for your amazing work! Glad to see you're now at Baylor University!

Sincerely,

Clara

Carter, Erik

To: cfang

Sat, Apr 1, 2023 at 12:40 PM

I approve both. Thank you for sharing a copy of how you used the framework.

Erik

Permission to use Five Figures of Community figure

Sat, Apr 1, 2023 at 12:35 PM

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Thank you for your amazing work! Glad to see you're now at Baylor University! Sincerely, Clara-

Clara Fang, she/hers  
PhD Candidate, Environmental Studies  
Antioch University New England

Sat, Apr 1, 2023 at 12:40 PM

I approve both. Thank you for sharing a copy of how you used the framework.

Erik

Figure 2. Movement Action Plan Eight Stage Model of Social Movements

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**Permission to republish Bill Moyer's Movement Action Plan chart**

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Jean Wyenberg

To: cfang

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Permission republish Bill Moyer's Movement Action Plan chart

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Best regards  
Jean Wyenberg  
Customer Service  
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working from home: please contact by email

Figure 3. Percentage of People of Color on Full-Time Staff at Environmental NGOs

## Permission to use figure in PhD dissertation

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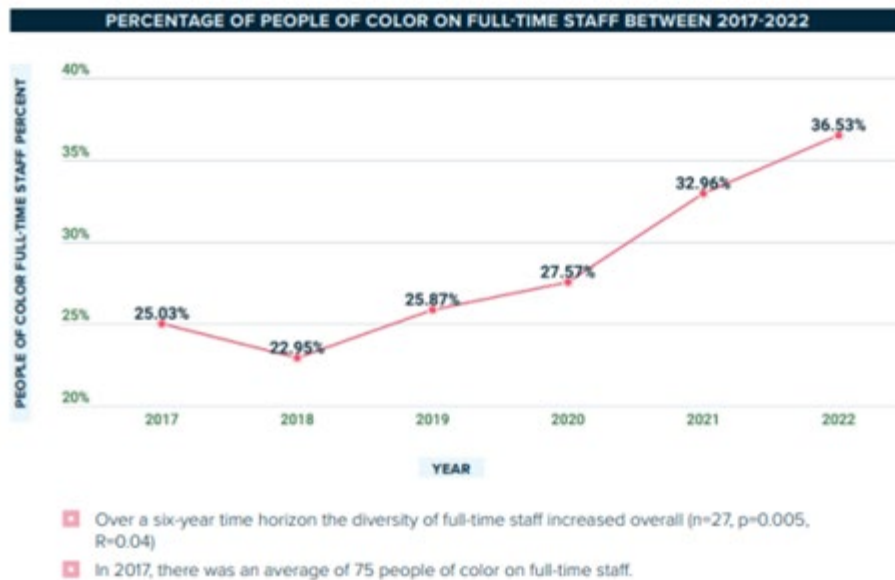
Clara Fang

Fri, Feb 10, 2023 at 2:55 PM

To:

Hi Adriane,

I am writing to let you know that I am almost complete with my dissertation on diversity in the climate movement which I have been doing at Antioch University for the past 5 years. In order to submit my dissertation, I would like your permission to include this figure from the Green 2.0 2022 report card in my dissertation and subsequent publications:



The item will be cited as *2022 NGO and Foundation Transparency Report Card. (2022). Green 2.0.*

<https://diversegreen.org/transparency-cards/2022-green-2-0-ngo-foundation-report-card/>

Could you please let me know if I have permission?

Thank you for all you do!

Clara

Adriane Alicea <aalicea@diversegreen.org>

To: Clara Fang <cfang@antioch.edu>

Sure thing! Thanks Clara.

ADRIANE ALICEA, She/Her

Deputy Director, Green 2.0

Office Number: (202) 517-6076

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[chart of Percentage of People of Color on Full Time Staff 2017-2022]

The item will be cited as *2022 NGO and Foundation Transparency Report Card*. (2022). Green 2.0.

<https://diversegreen.org/transparency-cards/2022-green-2-0-ngo-foundation-report-card/>

Could you please let me know if I have permission?

Thank you for all you do!

Clara Fang, she/hers  
PhD Candidate, Environmental Studies  
Antioch University New England

Wed, Feb 15, 2023 at 9:53 AM  
Sure thing! Thanks Clara.

**ADRIANE ALICEA, She/Her**  
Deputy Director, Green 2.0