

Testing for Generational Difference Impacts on Employee New Job Seeking Intent in Response to COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter Movement

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Abstract

Using a sample of 122 employed U.S. survey respondents, this study investigated if there were generational difference impacts on employees seeking jobs in response to COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Four generations were sampled – Generation Z (Gen Z), Generation Y (Millennials), Generation X (Gen X), and Baby Boomer (Boomers). Results showed that generation had a significant effect on employees search for new jobs in response to COVID-19 and BLM after controlling for demographics, i.e., gender, race, and education level and organization variables, i.e., annual salary, COVID-19 employee experience and BLM employee experience. Further analysis showed that Gen Z employees were more likely to actively seek new employment in response to the BLM movement than Gen X and Boomers, whereas Millennials were more to actively search than Gen X due to COVID-19. These results suggest insights into the role of societal crises in shaping workplace behavior across generations.

Keywords: COVID-19, black lives matter, employee experience of crises, employee job search, generations

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

Recently the United States (U.S.) economic and social system has suffered two large and unanticipated national crises: the COVID-19 health pandemic and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) social movement in response to racial violence and injustice (Dave, Friedson, Matsuzawa, Sabia & Safford, 2020). Separately and together, these national events placed great stress on both employers and employees, increased mobility in the labor force, and put employers' priorities and values under scrutiny by employees and job seekers. In this paper, we explore the effect of employees' experience of COVID-19 and BLM on their intention to search for new jobs, and how these factors played out across demographic and especially generational variables. Our results provide insight into the increasing focus of Millennials and Gen Z focus on the quality of life and work life, including attention to personal safety and social issues, as well as potential guidance to managers seeking to retain (and recruit) employees during periods of rapid change in the social and labor market context.

The rapid spread of COVID-19 beginning in March 2020 led to significant layoffs, furloughs, unemployment, and uncertainty in the workforce that, in turn, led to changes in job search behavior (Koopman, Liu, Liang & Liu, 2021), including a dramatic increase in employees searching for work-from-home options (McFarland, Reeves, Porr & Ployhart, 2020). During the most intense period of the crisis, the response of corporations in terms of their crisis readiness, their capacity to pivot to a virtual and remote work environment, their care or lack thereof for their employees, and their social commitments proved to be highly variable (Kniffin et al. 2021). At the same time, the increased risk of face-to-face exposure, the stress placed on front-line workers, and the opportunities in some occupations to work from home led to increases in employee mobility between jobs, increased scrutiny of the priorities of potential employers and shifts in employee preferences as they affected choices about work (Causa, Abendschein, Luu, Soldani, & Sorio, 2022).

Coincident with the COVID-19 pandemic, a second national crisis emerged in the U.S. with the murder of George Floyd in the custody of Minneapolis, MN, Police on May 25, 2020. Following on a steady stream of police violence against black and brown people, the George Floyd murder sparked an unprecedented reaction and renewed widespread calls for racial justice, equity, and reform throughout the U.S. and, indeed, many parts of the world. The reaction coalesced into the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement that included greatly increased scrutiny of employers' employment practices (e.g., Ho, 2020) and prompted some companies to increase their commitments to racial equity and diversity, redefine their brands and brand communications (Ferraro, Helmsley & Sands, 2022), and change hiring processes (Kirk & Rovira, 2022) – although real change has so far proven to be partial at best (Chavez, Weisshaar & Cabello-Hutt, 2022).

1.2 Importance of the Problem

To date, there has been little research into cross-generational differences concerning employees' experience of COVID-19 and BLM and their intent to search for new jobs. In this study, we explore whether employees' COVID-19 and/or BLM experiences prompted them to look for new jobs. We find first, that holding other demographics and organizational variables constant, generation has a meaningful effect on whether employees react to their experience of societal crises by looking for new jobs, and second, that Millennials were significantly more likely than Gen X to respond to COVID-19 by looking for a new job, whereas Gen Z was significantly more likely than both Gen X and Boomers to respond to BLM by looking for a new job.

These findings contribute to research into generational differences concerning, for example, Millennial concerns about safety and security and Gen Z's concerns about social equity (Jung, Jung & Yoon, 2021; Schroth, 2019), while also raising theoretical issues about the role of historical crises in defining generations and in exploring the signals received and behaviors exhibited in response to such crises (Zwanka & Buff, 2021). Practically, they contribute insight into the ways in which these crises have sensitized different generations, thus preparing managers to improve retention in response to future societal crises.

In the next section, we combine the emerging literature connecting COVID-19, BLM, employee retention, and differences between generations' priorities to refine our research questions. We then introduce the data and methods, conduct several analyses to identify relationships between employee experience of COVID-19 and BLM and their likelihood to search for new jobs as affected by generation and demographics and organizational variables. We conclude by reporting results and discussing the implications of the results for the literature on generations' changing preferences, social crises, social values and job search/employee retention.

1.3 The Impact of Employer Response on Employee Experience of COVID-19 and BLM

Because both COVID-19 and BLM affected employees' perception of safety at work, individual experiences of these crises were shaped, in part, by employer response. In the context of COVID-19, an employer's response that was favorable towards employee well-being, such as delaying or staggering layoffs or not requiring employees to work in the office, were received as signals of how much the employer valued people (Kniffin *et al.*, 2021). In the context of BLM movement, an employer's response that recognized the significance of the BLM racial injustice crisis, committed to diversity and racial equity, and took bold action toward helped with employee retention effort in many instances (Ferraro *et al.*, 2022).

In both cases, employers' responses are an example of signaling theory (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011), in that companies' reactions to crises serve as signals of organizational characteristics and employees and job seekers alike assess the congruence, or lack of congruence, between organizations' actions and stated values, beliefs, ideals, and purpose (Celani & Singh, 2011). In short, an employee's affiliation to an employer and so the retention of that employee can be influenced by signals the organization sends through its policies, behaviors, communications, and/or branding. If the signals received are negative, employees may well look for other opportunities.

Five generations currently work in the U.S. labor markets: the Traditionalists (born 1945 or earlier), estimated to be 2% of the current labor force; Baby Boomers (born between 1946 to 1964), estimated to be 25% of the current labor force; Generation X (born between 1965 to 1980), estimated to be 33% of the current labor force; Generation Y or Millennials (born between 1981 to 1996), estimated to be 35% of the current labor force; and Generation Z (born after 1996), estimated to be 5% of the current labor force (Parker, Graf & Igielnik, 2020). As such these generations represent age-based categories for analyses (Pritchard & Whiting, 2014).

For lifecycle, contextual and identity reasons (Urlick, Hollensbe & Fairhurst, 2017), people do perceive differences between generations (Lester, Standifer, Schultz, & Windsor, 2012), and there is evidence that generations exhibit different preferences about workforce context that affect their motivation to join and stay in

an organization (Martin & Ottemann, 2015). For example, Reis and Braga (2016) found that, in general, 1) the importance of interest values (i.e., valuing innovation, creativity, challenging environment) for choosing and staying with an employer increased with age; while 2) the importance of economic values (i.e., above average salary, promotional opportunities) decreased with age. More recently, Standifer and Lester (2020) compared Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials' preferences about work context and found that Gen X and Millennial employees valued flexibility and fun at work more than did Boomers; Boomers valued teamwork more than did Millennials; and Gen X valued recognition more than did Boomers. Yet-Mee, Chuen-Kee and Phoay (2008) found that Gen X working ethnic Chinese in Malaysia were more money-oriented than Boomers. Critically, during COVID-19, the perception, and to some degree the reality, of inter-generational differences were exacerbated except in organizations that took proactive steps to help all employees perceive and work towards an organizational set of interests rather than generational ones; to address perceived differences across generations; and to facilitate communication and knowledge transfer throughout the organization (Urlick, 2020). Finally, Parker *et al.* (2020) noted that Gen Z and Millennials shared similar views about racial and ethnic change in the United States, with 62% of Gen Z and 61% of Millennials saying that increasing racial and ethnic diversity was a good thing for U.S. society – versus 52% for Gen X and 48% for Boomers – an important difference in the light of BLM.

Of course, demographic variables, including race, gender, and education level must be taken into account in any study of the effects of employer response to crises, especially crises that have been shown to have differential effects related to race, gender and economic well-being. For example, Crooks, Donenberg and Mathews (2021) noted that COVID-19 had a greater impact on the health and economic security of Blacks. Further, in a study of the hiring of accountants during the early and overlapping portion of the pandemic and BLM, Chavez *et al.* (2022) documented that White women benefited from COVID-19-related labor shortages, being called back more often than White men; that Black women found their call-backs enhanced during the early days of COVID-19; but that discrimination against Black men did not change at all during the pandemic and BLM. Clearly, to isolate intergenerational differences, it is important to control for differential effects of COVID-19 and BLM by race, gender, education level (Koopman *et al.*, 2021; Standifer & Lester, 2020), as well as economic security (e.g., salary) and current employee experiences in their organizations (Kniffin *et al.*, 2020). Controlling for demographic and organization variables will also provide a stronger research design to test generational effects (Spector, 2019).

1.4 Research Questions

RQ1 – *Do generational differences have an effect on employees' intention to search for new jobs in response to COVID-19 and/or the BLM movement, over and above the effects of demographic and organization variables?*

RQ2 – *If so, what are the generation-specific effects on employees' intention to search for new jobs in response to COVID-19 and/or the BLM movement?*

2. Method

2.1 Data Collection & Sample

After receiving university IRB approval (8/6/2020, #27346), a survey was sent in November 2020 to a panel of 129 anonymous respondents sourced by conjointly.com (<https://conjointly.com/>) to meet sampling criteria including full-time work, representation across generations, and a demographic match to U.S. national statistics (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). Of the panel, seven were not currently employed and were deleted. For the remaining n=122, the breakdown of employment status was full-time, n=100 (82%), part-time, n=16 (13%), consulting, n=4 (3%) and gig worker, n =2 (2%).

2.2 Survey & Measures

Demographic Variables. Three variables were measured: *gender*, *race*, and *education level*. *Gender* was measured by asking “what is your gender identity,” where 1=woman, 2=man, 3=non-binary, 4=prefer not to say (coded as missing). *Race* was measured by asking “what is your ethnicity,” where 1=White, 2=Black or African American, 3=American Indian or Alaska Native, 4=Asian, 5=Hispanic, 6=Bi-racial, 7=prefer not to say (coded as missing). *Education level* was measured by asking for the highest education level completed where 1=some high school, 2=high school, 3=some college, 4=Associates degree, 5=Bachelors degree, 6=Masters degree, 7=Doctorate, 8=prefer not to say (coded as missing).

Organization Variables. Three variables were measured: *annual salary*; *COVID-19 employee experience* and *BLM employee experience*. *Annual salary* was measured by asking “which choice best represents your current yearly salary in thousands (K),” where 1=less than \$35K, 2=\$35,001 to \$70,000, 3=\$70,001 to \$100K,

4=\$100,001 to \$125K, 5=\$125,001 to \$150K, 6=over \$150K, and 7=prefer not to say (coded as missing). *COVID-19 employee experience* and *BLM employee experience* were both measured using the same three-point scale, with the general prompt being, “how has the COVID-19 pandemic (or BLM movement) affected your current employee experience?”, where: 1=negative effect on my current employee experience, 2=no effect on my current employee experience, and 3=positive effect on my current employee experience.

Generation Variable. Participants were asked to respond to the item “What generation do you identify with: 1=Generation Z (born after 1996), 2=Generation Y (born 1981 - 1996), 3=Generation X (born 1965 - 1980), 4=Baby Boomer (born 1946 – 1964)?” (Parker et al., 2020). A response option for “prefer not to say” was also included.

Dependent Variables. Two variables were measured used, *COVID-19 Job Search Impact* and *BLM Movement Job Search Impact*, with the general prompt being, “how has your experience with the COVID-19 pandemic (or BLM movement) influenced your interest in seeking new employment?” with both measured using a three-point scale. Only the mid-point on each scale was slightly changed, where 1= I am choosing to remain at my current employer at this time, 2 = the COVID-19 pandemic (or BLM movement) has had no influence on my seeking new employment at this time,” and 3= “I am actively seeking new employment at this time.”

2.3 Data Analysis

To provide context, we first run and report frequency analyses for all study variables, with missing data noted. We then calculate and report means, standard deviations and correlations among continuous variables. We matched data analyses to the nature of each research question (Stevens, 1996). Thus, we chose hierarchical regression analysis to test RQ1, concerning the effect of generation on crisis-related job search, first controlling for demographics and organizational variables. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to test RQ2, concerning the generation-specific effects on employees’ intention to search for new jobs in response to COVID-19 and/or the BLM movement. For the ANOVA analysis, if the overall F test was significant, the homogeneity of variance test between group means was then applied. If this test was not significant, we conducted post hoc group comparisons using the Tukey test for unequal group sizes. Before running either analysis, we checked that the variables complied with the relevant assumptions and reported all required transformation or recoding of variables. SPSS-PC (2021) was used for all data analyses. Findings at a $p < .05$ or $p < .01$ value (two-tailed) are reported as statistically significant.

3. Results

3.1 Initial Findings

Table 1 reports the frequencies and percentages for demographic and generation variables. Table 1 shows an approximately even split between women and men for gender. For race, the highest percentage category responses were White – 67%, Hispanic – 14%, and Black 9%. For highest education level completed, 30% reported a Bachelors Degree, 22% a Masters Degree, and 14% each some college or Associates Degree. For salary, 35% of respondents reported a salary of between \$35,001 and \$70K, with responses for the other categories hovering around 10%. “No effect” was the highest frequency response on current employee experience for both COVID -19 (42%) and BLM (65%). For generation, 48% of respondents were Millennials (Gen Y), 25% Gen X, 12% Gen Z, and Boomer, 15%. Finally, for job search impact, the highest frequency response for COVID-19 was “choose to remain at current employer” (43%), while for BLM it was “no influence on seeking new employment at this time (43%).

Table 1. Frequencies and percentages – study variables

Variable	N = 122
Gender	
Woman	n = 61 (50%)
Man	n = 60 (49%)
Missing/Prefer not to say	n = 1 (1%)
Race	
White	n = 82 (67%)
Black or African American	n = 11 (9%)
American Indian/Alaska Native	n = 2 (2%)
Asian	n = 7 (6%)
Hispanic	n = 14 (12%)

Bi-racial	n = 4 (3%)
Missing/Prefer not to say	n = 2 (2%)
Highest Education Level Completed	
Some High school	n = 2 (2%)
High School	n = 14 (12%)
Some college	n = 17 (14%)
Associates Degree	n = 17 (14%)
Bachelors Degree	n = 36 (30%)
Masters Degree	n = 27 (22%)
Doctorate	n = 8 (7%)
Missing/Prefer not to say	n = 1 (1%)
Annual Salary	
Up to \$35K	n = 16 (13%)
\$35,001 to \$70K	n = 43 (35%)
\$70,001 to \$100K	n = 17 (14%)
\$100,001 to \$125K	n = 20 (16%)
\$125,001 to \$150K	n = 10 (8%)
Over \$150K	n = 13 (10%)
Missing/Prefer not to say	n = 3 (2%)
COVID 19 Employee Experience	
Negative effect on current employee experience	n = 42 (34%)
No effect on current employee experience	n = 51 (42%)
Positive on current employee experience	n = 29 (24%)
BLM Employee Experience	
Negative effect on current employee experience	n = 21 (17%)
No effect on current employee experience	n = 79 (65%)
Positive on current employee experience	n = 22 (18%)
Generation	
Generation Z	n = 15 (12%)
Generation Y (Millennials)	n = 58 (48%)
Generation X	n = 31 (25%)
Boomer	n = 14 (12%)
Missing/Prefer not to say	n = 4 (3%)
COVID 19 Job Search Impact	
Choose to remain at current employer	n = 52 (43%)
No influence on seeking new employment at this time	n = 42 (34%)
Actively seeking new employment at this time	n = 28 (23%)
BLM Job Search Impact	
Choose to remain at current employer	n = 47 (39%)
No influence on seeking new employment at this time	n = 53 (43%)
Actively seeking new employment at this time	n = 22 (18%)

Table 2 reports the means, standard deviations, and correlations among continuous study variables. Generation is significantly and negatively correlated to both COVID-19 Job Search Impact, $r(113) = -.26, p < .01$, and BLM Job Search Impact, $r(113) = -.32, p < .01$. The correlation between COVID-19 Job Search Impact and BLM Job Search Impact is positive and significant $r(113) = .62, p < .01$, but the moderate overlap of 38% overlap ($.62^2$) indicates that these variables are sufficiently distinct to be used as dependent variables in subsequent analyses (Stevens, 1996). There is a long history of research (Chiswick, 2003) supporting the positive correlation, i.e., $r(113) = .43, p < .01$ found between education level and annual salary. This corroborative finding supports the validity of other study findings.

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations of study variables

Variable Name	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Education Level ^a	4.58	1.49	(NA) ^f						
2. Annual Salary ^b	3.08	1.55	.43**	(NA)					
3. COVID-19 Employee Experience ^c	1.93	.75	-.01	.01	(NA)				
4. BLM Employee Experience ^c	2.03	.57	.07	.13	.27**	(NA)			
5. Generation ^d	2.40	.85	-.10	-.06	-.08	-.02	(NA)		
6. COVID-19 Job Search Impact ^e	1.77	.78	-.06	.13	-.13	.07	-.26**	(NA)	
7. BLM Job Search Impact ^e	1.76	.71	-.11	.16	-.17	-.18	-.32**	.62**	(NA)

Note. n = 115. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ (both two-tailed).

^a Education Level, 1 = Some high school, 2 = high school, 3 = some college, 4 = Associates degree, 5 = Bachelors degree, 6 = Masters degree, 7 = Doctorate

^b Annual Salary, 1 = less than \$35K, 2 = \$35 to \$70K, 3 = \$70,001 to \$100K, 4 = \$100,001 to \$125K, 5 = \$125,001 to \$150K; 6 = over \$150k

^c COVID-19 Employee Experience, 1 = negative effect on current employee experience to 3 = positive effect on current employee experience

^c BLM Employee Experience, 1 = negative effect on current employee experience to 3 = positive effect on current employee experience

^d Generation, 1 = Generation Z (born 1995 - 2012), 2 = Generation Y (born 1977 - 1994), 3 = Generation X (born 1966 - 1976), 4 = Baby Boomer (born 1944 - 1965);

^e Covid Job Search Impact, 1 = Choose to remain at current employer to 3 = actively seeking new employment

^e BLM Job Search Impact, 1 = Choose to remain at current employer to 3 = actively seeking new employment

^f NA (not applicable) in diagonal.

3.2 Tests of Research Questions

RQ1 asked, *do generational differences have an effect on employees' intention to search for new jobs in response to COVID-19 and/or the BLM movement, over and above the effects of demographic and organizational variables?* Table 3 reports the results of the final model hierarchical regression analyses. In the first step for each predicted variable – *COVID-19 Job Search Impact* and *BLM Job Search Impact*, the three demographic variables were included: *Gender*, *Race*, and *Education Level*. To use race as a binary predictor, all non-white employees were combined into one group (Stevens, 1996).

For *COVID-19 Job Search Impact*, these demographic variables explained 6% of the variance, $R^2 = .06$, $F(3, 110) = 2.38$, $p = .07$. One variable, *Race*, was significant, with $b = .36$, $t(112) = 2.25$, $p < .05$, indicating that non-whites were more likely to actively seek new employment in response to their experience of the pandemic. For *BLM Job Search Impact*, the demographic variables only explained 2% of the variance, $R^2 = .02$, $F(3, 110) = .74$, $p = .53$. However, *Education Level* was significant, $b = -.11$, $t(112) = -2.46$, $p < .05$, such that those with less education were more likely to seek new employment in response to their experience of BLM.

For the second step, *Annual Salary*, and *COVID-19 Employee Experience* were entered together as organization level variables for explaining *COVID-19 Job Search Impact*. These variables explained an additional 5% of the variance, $R^2 = .05$, $F(2, 108) = 2.63$, $p = .08$. Neither variable was statistically significant, but the overall F value was, $F(5, 108) = 2.53$, $p < .05$. For *BLM Job Search Impact*, in step 2, the two variables entered explained a significant amount of additional variance, $R^2 = .10$, $F(2, 108) = 6.01$, $p < .01$, and each variable was significant, i.e., *Annual Salary*, $b = .12$, $t(112) = 2.71$, $p < .01$ and *BLM Employee Experience*, $b = -.28$, $t(112) = -2.60$, $p < .01$. This indicates that salary increase and negative employee experience each impacted *BLM Job Search*. The overall F value was, $F(5, 108) = 2.89$, $p < .05$.

In the third step, the *Generation* variable was added. For *COVID-19 Job Search Impact*, adding *Generation* increased the model's explanation of variance significantly to $R^2 = .19$ (adjusted $R^2 = .14$), with an overall $F(6, 107)$

= 3.93, $p = .001$. *Generation's* contribution was significant and substantial $b = -.26$, $t(112) = -3.15$, $p < .01$; improved the model significantly, change in $F(1, 107) = 9.90$, $p < .01$; and improved the amount of variance explained significantly, by an additional $R^2 = .08$. Similarly, for *BLM Job Search Impact*, adding *Generation* increased the model's explanation of variance significantly to $R^2 = .23$ (adjusted $R^2, .18$), with an overall $F(6, 107) = 5.21$, $p < .001$. Again, *Generation's* contribution was significant and substantial $b = -.29$, $t(113) = -3.87$, $p < .001$; improved the model significantly, change in $F(1, 107) = 14.94$, $p < .001$; and improved the amount of variance explained significantly, by an additional $R^2 = .11$. These results provide support for RQ1, indicating that generation adds significantly to the explanation of the variance in respondents' decision to search for new jobs in light of their experience with the pandemic and BLM.

Table 3. Final Hierarchical regression models for incrementally testing the contribution of generation on covid job search impact and black lives matter

Outcome	COVID-19 Job Search Impact [#]					Black Lives Matter Movement Job Search Impact [#]				
	<i>b</i>	SE	R ²	Chge R ²	F	<i>b</i>	SE	R ²	Chge R ²	F
<i>Step 1: Demographic Variables</i>										
Gender ^a	.22	.15				-.03	.14			
Race ^b	.36*	.16				.05	.15			
Education Level ^c	-.07	.05				-.11*	.05			
			.06		2.38			.02		.74
<i>Step 2: Organization Variables</i>										
Annual Salary ^d	.08	.05				.12**	.05			
COVID-19 Employee Experience ^e	-.17									
BLM Employee Experience ^e						-.28**	.11			
			.11*	.05	2.53*			.12*	.10*	2.89*
<i>Step 3:</i>										
Generation ^f	-.26**	.08				-.29***	.07			
			.19**	.08**	3.93**			.23***	.11***	5.21***
(Adjusted R ²)				(.14)					(.18)	

Note. N = 114. *b* is unstandardized regression weight, SE = standard error; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; $p < .001$, all two-tailed.

^a Gender, 1 = male, 2 = female; ^b Race, 1= White, 2 = Non-white; ^c Education Level, 1= Some high school, 2 = high school, 3 = some college, 4 = Associates degree, 5 = Bachelors degree, 6 = Masters degree, 7 = Doctorate; ^d Annual Salary, 1 = less than \$35K, 2 = \$35 to \$70K, 3 = \$70,001 to \$100K, 4 = \$100,001 to \$125K, 5 = \$125,001 to \$150K; 6 = over \$150k; ^e COVID-19 Employee Experience, 1 = negative effect on current employee experience to 3 = positive effect on current employee experience; ^e BLM Employee Experience, 1 = negative effect on current employee experience to 3 = positive effect on current employee experience; ^f Generation, 1 = Generation Z (born 1995 - 2012), 2 = Generation Y (born 1977 - 1994), 3 = Generation X (born 1966 - 1976), 4 = Baby Boomer (born 1944 - 1965); ^g Covid -19 Job Search Impact, 1 = Choose to remain at current employer to 3 = actively seeking new employment; ^h BLMM Job Search Impact, 1 = Choose to remain at current employer to 3 = actively seeking new employment.

RQ2 asked about the details of the generational effect, *what are the generation-specific effects on employees' intention to search for new jobs in response to COVID-19 and/or the BLM movement?* Table 4 reports the ANOVA comparison of generational categories' explanation of variance for *COVID-19 Job Search Impact* and *BLM Job Search Impact*, respectively. For *COVID-19 Job Search Impact*, the overall model is significant $F(3,114) = 3.67$, $p < .05$. The homogeneity of variance assumption was met because the Levene test statistic(3, 114) = .60, $p = .62$ was not significant, and as recommended by Stevens (1996) the Tukey post hoc test was then used to test for differences between generation cell means. The results show that the Gen Y/Millennials ($M = 1.95$) mean was significantly higher than the Gen X ($M = 1.48$) mean ($p < .05$), indicating that Millennials were more likely to **seek** new employment because of COVID-19 than were Gen X employees. There were no significant differences between the means of the other generational categories, particularly for Boomers because of the small sample size ($n = 14$).

Turning to *BLM Job Search Impact* the overall explanation of variance was significant, $F(3,114) = 4.96$, $p < .01$; the Levene test statistic(3, 114) = 1.02, $p = .39$ was *not* significant; and the Tukey post hoc test results showed that the Gen Z ($M = 2.20$) mean was significantly higher than the Gen X ($M = 1.58$), $p < .05$, and Boomer ($M = 1.36$), $p < .01$, means. This indicates that Gen Z employees were more likely to **seek** new employment because

of BLM movement than were the Gen X and Boomer employees. Taken together, these results provide some insight into the differences in generations' response to social and economic crises, with certain generations – Millennials in the case of the pandemic and Gen Z in the case of BLM – were more likely than other generations to look for new jobs because of their experience with these crises.

Table 4. Analysis of variance and post hoc group comparison by type of generation on covid job search impact and black lives matter movement job search impact variables

Outcome	COVID-19 Job Search Impact				Black Lives Matter Movement Job Search Impact			
Overall F Test	$F(3, 114) = 3.67, p < .05$				$F(3, 114) = 4.96, p < .01$			
Homogeneity of Variance Test	.60				1.02			
Generation – cell means	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(1) Generation Z ($n=15$)	2.00	1.95 ^a	1.48 ^b	1.50	2.20 ^a	1.88	1.58 ^b	1.36 ^b
(2) Generation Y/(Millennials) ($n=58$)								
(3) Generation X ($n=31$)								
(4) Baby Boomer ($n=14$)								

Note. With each outcome, cell means that do not share the same superscript, e.g., ^a versus ^b are significantly different at the $p < .05$ level by the Tukey post hoc group test. Covid Job Search Impact and Black Lives Matter Movement Job Search Impact each measured on a 3-point scale, 1 = Choose to remain at current employer to 3 = actively seeking new employment.

4. Discussion

To the authors' knowledge, very little prior research has been done testing for four cross-generational differences in employees' intent to find new jobs due to their experience of COVID-19 and BLM. This study found, first, that, holding other demographics constant, generation has a meaningful effect on whether employees react to their experience of crises such as the pandemic and wide-scale social movements by looking for new jobs. Looking at both the absolute means for the job search variables (in the ANOVA) and the negative coefficient for generation (in the regression analysis), suggest that, in general, younger generations were more likely to respond by looking for new jobs. Further dissecting the overall findings indicated that Millennials were significantly more likely than Gen X to respond to COVID-19 by looking for a new job, whereas Gen Z was significantly more likely than both Gen X and Boomers to respond to BLM by looking for a new job. These findings are consistent with previous research finding that Gen Y (Millennials) working in deluxe hotels during COVID-19 were particularly concerned about job insecurity and became more proactive in looking for alternative employment versus Gen X employees (Jung, Jung & Yoon, 2021). The findings are also consistent with studies that show that, as the most diverse generation, Gen Z finds diversity, equity, and inclusion particularly salient (Parker et al., 2020; Schroth, 2019).

The demographic details raise some more complex questions. Specifically non-white employees were more likely to seek new employment due to their experience of COVID-19, while less educated and higher salaried employees were more likely to seek new employment due to their experience with BLM. On the one hand, the COVID-19 results are consistent with the prior research that shows that minority groups have been more affected by COVID-19 (e.g., Crooks, et al., 2021; Kniffin et al., 2021); on the other, the response to BLM raises questions about the mechanisms involved: Could it be that certain categories of workers feel uncomfortable as companies address the issues raised by BLM and look for new jobs in places that are less challenging? And if so, would the definition of "less challenging" vary, in part, by generational differences, with, for example, Gen Z employees more comfortable with diverse workplaces and Boomers with more homogenous ones? These questions can be addressed in future research.

Conceptually, the differential effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the BLM movement on generations' intention to look for new jobs, draws attention to the possibility that defining generational cohorts not by birth but by historical crises that had wide-spread effects on experience might be a promising approach to cross-generational analysis of signals received and behaviors exhibited in response to different kinds of crises – e.g., a global pandemic versus a multi-national social movement (Zwanka & Buff, 2021).

Practically, this study calls attention to the reality that Gen Z and Gen Y/Millennial employees may be more “job-seeking sensitive” to profound shifts in workplace realities, in part due to their experience coping with recent workplace changes due to COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter. It also highlights how generations’ specific concerns – e.g., Gen Z’s concern for social equity, condition their response to specific social crises – in this case BLM. With employee retention forecasted to be a critical issue for the foreseeable future (Maurer, 2023), and the labor force representation of Gen Z and Gen Y increases, organizations will need to pay increased attention not only to future national social, political, and environmental movements, but also to the ways in which these social movements play out in the workplace. The broader theoretical implications of these findings are that the role of organizational purpose, and the alignment of employee and organizational purpose, i.e., purpose-fit, can be important for attracting and retaining future job seekers (Fairfax & Hill, 2022). This indicates a need for continued research.

4.1 Study Limitations and Future Research

Due to survey response anonymity, the research design is based on cross-sectional self-reported data. Spector (2019) has argued that cross-sectional research designs can still provide evidence for variable relationships, and that inflated results due to self-report common method variance is often overstated, particularly when relevant control variables, such as the demographic and organization variables used here, can rule out spurious relationships. Although the results are suggestive, sample size was a major limitation for certain analyses. For example, the demographic variable “cells” were often small – e.g., on $n = 14$ for Hispanic, $n = 11$ for Black, $n = 7$ for Asian. While not far off the actual distribution in the United States population (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023), the small n s necessitated the use of the much simpler binary category of white/non-white, a categorization that loses important details about the experiences of different groups of people within the United States. For example, see Chavez et al. (2022) for an example of the complicated gender and race dynamics that played out in the hiring of accountants as COVID-19 played out.

Similarly, there were only $n = 14$ (12%) Boomer and $n = 15$ (12%) Gen Z employees sampled. Given the small sample size of Gen Z employees, the fact that we could observe a significant difference in their behavior compared to other generations suggests particularly strong results. By the same token, although the mean of 1.50 for Boomers who looked for new job because of their experience with COVID-19 was nearly identical to the mean for Gen X ($M = 1.48$), the smaller sample size of Boomers reduced the power to detect a significant difference (Stevens, 1996) with Gen Y. Finally, the study sample break-down over-represented both Gen Z and Gen Y and under-represented Gen X and Boomers in comparison to the U.S. working population (Parker *et al.*, 2020).

In short, a study with a larger sample size could provide replication value and deeper insight into the more subtle interactions between generation and demographics as they affect employee job search in reaction to crises such as COVID-19 and BLM. Such a study would be further strengthened by considering additional, here untested demographics, such as the type of industry and the geographical region in which respondents worked and lived. It could also be strengthened by employing a 5- or even 7-point response scale for the continuous COVID-19 and BLM variables.

Especially given the hints that the job-search response to BLM and COVID-19 may well reflect different concerns and mechanisms – such as concerns about personal safety versus concerns about identity and equity and organizational purpose – it would also be useful to follow this study with one that explores the mechanisms connecting generational experiences to job search behaviors given societal crises. Useful variables would be ones that measure actual job search behaviors (Fang & Saks, 2021); effects of crises on employee engagement and motivation and alternative reactions, such as organizational citizenship versus undermining behaviors (Gonzalez, 2023; Yiwen & Hahn, 2021); and the impact of organizations’ culture and policies, such as helping to alleviate employee burnout, and reducing selection biases to increase social equality are needed in future research (Kniffin et al., 2021).

4.2 Conclusion

Although exploratory, this study provides useful insights into the impact of generations, especially Gen Z and Millennials, on their job-seeking intentions in response to their experience of COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter, and raised a number of questions about the ways in which societal level crises might affect generations’ experience, expectations and behaviors.

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