"Racelessness" in a Canadian Context?
Exploring the Link Between Black Students' Identity, Achievement, and Mental Health

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The relationship between racial identity, academic achievement, and mental health for 107 Black Canadian university students was examined within Fordham's "racelessness" framework. Fordham posited that to achieve success, educational or professional, in a society where Blackness is devalued, Blacks adopt a strategy of racelessness—they downplay their Black identity, disengage from their culture of origin, and assimilate into the dominant culture. Racelessness, however, results in psychological difficulties. This study failed to find evidence of the adoption of a raceless strategy by students. In fact, racial identity did not appear to be directly related to academic achievement. Possessing a closer affinity to Blacks, however, appeared to be psychologically protective. In addition, mentally healthier students had a more positive academic orientation, which in turn was related to higher GPA. Taken together, these findings suggest an indirect relationship between racial identity and academic performance.

Keywords: *racelessness; African Canadian; identity; academic achievement; mental health*

African Americans[1] have endured and continue to encounter systemic discrimination in all spheres of society (Peters, 2002). Possibly the most debilitating are those barriers that exist in the economic and educational realms.

The twin evils of educational and occupational inequity have conspired to limit the upward mobility of generations of African Americans. Far from being the "great equalizer," schools have served to maintain and entrench socioeconomic disparities (see Ogbu, 1987, 1990). The education procured by the African American population has, for the most part, been separate from and unequal to that made available to the dominant cultural group. The hidden curriculum in the form of low teacher expectations of Black students, a Eurocentric curriculum, and streaming into noncollege preparatory or special education programs (see Irvine, 1990; Lomotey, 1990; Ogbu, 1990, 1994) has undermined the educational and, consequently, the occupational potential of Black students. African American students frequently leave school without the academic skills necessary for securing even entry-level positions in the job market (Gibbs, 1984). Darity and Mason (1998) have observed that whereas earning disparities between Blacks and non-Blacks may be primarily due to discrimination in employment, it may also be due in part to inferior school quality. Even those students who survive and indeed thrive in the educational system are not guaranteed equal access to desirable, high-status jobs. Although African Americans have made significant gains in employment over the years, the majority are still underemployed, congregated in low-paying jobs with little opportunity for advancement (Bowman, 1991). Pay inequities and the glass ceiling (see Bowman, 1991; Edwards & Polite, 1992; Ogbu, 1987, 1990, 1994; Phelps & Constantine, 2001) are constant reminders that even highly skilled African Americans encounter significant impediments to socioeconomic mobility.

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) postulated a unique theory of African Americans' adaptation to societal inequities. They asserted that African Americans cope with the systemic discrimination that characterizes their daily lives through the evolution of a collective identity that is in opposition to that of the dominant group. This collective identity has negative implications, however, for Black achievement and well-being. Although consistent support has not been found for Fordham and Ogbu's theory, it provides a useful framework for examining African American identity and associated psychosocial outcomes (i.e., achievement and mental health). Following is an in-depth examination of the concept of racial identity, a description of Fordham and Ogbu's theory, as well as research that supports and contradicts their theory.

BLACK IDENTITY AND "RACELESSNESS"

Fordham and Ogbu (1986) declared that Blacks developed stratagems for boundary maintenance between their culture and that of the dominant group by making distinctions between behaviors, activities, and attitudes

appropriate for themselves and those that are believed to be characteristic of the majority culture and, thus, not acceptable. Engagement in behaviors or adoption of modes of thinking that are culturally unsanctioned signifies disloyalty to the collective. They further noted that the oppositional identity has grim ramifications for the academic performance of Black students. The standards of performance, judgment of competence, and distribution of rewards in the educational sphere are at the discretion of the dominant group. Historically, Blacks have not had equal opportunity for educational success and in cases where they did succeed, they did not receive rewards commensurate with their level of attainment. Thus, Fordham and Ogbu noted that the standards, practices, and requirements of schools are seen as reinforcing White culture and, therefore, as a threat to Black identity. Students equate success within such a setting with being "White" and resist educational indoctrination. The Black peer group acts as a gatekeeper, maintaining group solidarity by discouraging behaviors and attitudes associated with academic achievement, for example, getting good grades, speaking Standard English, studying hard, and punctuality. Black students with a high achievement orientation risk being ostracized by their peer group or accused of "acting White" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Kester, 1994; Kunjufu, 1988; Ogbu, 1987, 1990).

Fordham (1988) argued that the collectivistic orientation of African Americans is not conducive to success in a society in which an individualistic ethos prevails. To facilitate success, whether in the school or in the workplace, some Blacks adopt a strategy of racelessness (i.e., they dissociate from their community and assimilate into the dominant culture). She observed that students attending school in a low-income, Black neighborhood had to deemphasize their Black identity to achieve academically. Furthermore, the pressure to renounce their culture is not unique to public school students. Fordham (1991) noted that to survive the elitist environment of the private schools, Black students are forced to relinquish aspects of their identity and to distance themselves spatially and psychologically from their cultural group. Racelessness is a strategy that makes possible the attainment of vertical mobility in a society in which Blackness is devalued. According to Fordham (1988, 1991), the adoption of this strategy places Blacks at risk for psychological disorders such as high stress levels, anxiety, and identity confusion.

Issues affecting the African American community have received considerable attention in recent decades. A preponderance of studies, however, has focused on pathology, failure, and underachievement. Comparatively few have investigated resiliency and triumphs. Thus, the factors related to achievement are not as well known or understood as those related to failure.

Furthermore, little is known about correlates of their psychological well-being. The attainments, professional or academic, of African Americans, as well as their mental health, will be examined within Fordham's racelessness construct.

Fordham proposed an inverse relationship between Black identity and success. This link has been examined in a number of studies, although not necessarily in response to Fordham's assertions. A particular conundrum faced by researchers in the field of racial/ethnic identity is the operationalization of such a multifaceted and complex concept. Racial/ethnic identity has not been consistently conceptualized by researchers, and different methods and instruments have been employed to assess it in the context of academic achievement. Among the tools employed in this area of research are the Racial Identity Attitude Scale (Parham & Helms, 1981), African Self-Consciousness Scale (Baldwin & Bell, 1985), the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997), and the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992). Moreover, not all studies of Black individuals' racial/ethnic identity have relied on a quantified measure of identity. In some cases, racial identity was determined by participants' responses during open-ended interviews (e.g., Datnow & Cooper, 1996; Edwards & Polite, 1992; Mehan, Hubbard, & Villanueva, 1994; Phinney, 1989; Phinney & Chavira, 1992; Reid-Merritt, 1996; Sampson & Milam, 1975; Sanders, 1997; Sweet, 1991).

Although the measurement of identity has varied from study to study, it is likely that each strategy taps into some facet of the multifarious construct of ethnic/racial identity. The position adopted in this article is that much of the previous research can provide, at a minimum, an indication of individuals who have a strong racial identity (i.e., close affective, cognitive, or behavioral ties to their racial-cultural group) and those who have a weaker racial-cultural identity (i.e., those who are closer to Fordham's concept of racelessness).

RACELESSNESS AS A STRATEGY FOR SUCCESS

Some research suggests that the reconciliation of achievement with racial identity has proved to be difficult for some African Americans. For certain middle-class Blacks, for example, a by-product of increased education or wealth is psychological distance from most Black communities (Thornton, Tran, & Taylor, 1997). Thornton et al. (1997) concluded that the middle class has an ambiguous bond to other Blacks. Both Reid-Merritt (1996) and Sweet (1991) interviewed professionals who appear to fit the definition of *raceless* as conceptualized by Fordham. Reid-Merritt described a subset of the women she interviewed as having disengaged from their community. These women

presented as individualistic in their orientation and as self-centered. The very educated and occupationally successful young men studied by Sweet attempted to emulate the lifestyle that they perceived their White male colleagues enjoyed. In the process, they distanced themselves from markers of their cultural group, including family members.

Identity-achievement conflicts have been observed among students as well as among professionals. It appears that some students view a Black identity as a deficit and as not conducive to advancement. Hudson (1991) observed that young, upwardly mobile adolescent males, for example, were wary of including involvement in Black activities on employment applications. One young male noted that to function in a White setting meant doing "the White thing or nothing at all" (p. 277). Banks (1984) found that for African American children living in predominantly White suburban communities, pro-school attitudes were inversely related to pro-Black attitudes. He noted that children's increased "attitudinal assimilation" into the dominant culture correlated with more positive attitudes toward their schools, neighborhoods, and Whites, but with less positive ones toward Blacks. In prep schools, the pressure to discard cultural identity may be even greater for Blacks because of issues of social class. In such settings, Cookson and Persell (1991) observed that in addition to the burden of acting White, Blacks must also "act upper class."

Fordham's racelessness construct is not without criticism. Ford, Harris, Webb, and Jones (1994) challenged Fordham's assertion that the high-ability Blacks in her study rejected their culture. They believe that Fordham misinterpreted some of her respondents' statements as indicators of racelessness. For example, Fordham equated students' dislike of Black music with an expression of racelessness. Ford et al. (1994) instead saw it as a reflection of individual differences. Ford and her colleagues reinterpreted some of the comments made by the high-achieving students as simply the expression of a desire to be judged on the basis of ability and not on the basis of race.

SUCCESS AS AN AFFIRMATION OF RACIAL IDENTITY

Occupational and educational achievements may also be identity affirming for African Americans. Contrary to Fordham's (1988) racelessness model, a number of studies have found a positive relationship between success and Black identity. Moreover, many African Americans who have "made it" tend to view racial solidarity as essential for group advancement. For example, Edwards and Polite (1992) observed that a common characteristic of the professionals that they interviewed nationwide was their sense that a strong Black identity was empowering. These professionals viewed

their personal advancement as tied to that of Blacks as a whole and that individual success was not truly possible until group success had been achieved. Similarly, Sampson and Milam (1975) concluded from a study of the Black middle class that they tended to be racially conscious and to have a sense of unity with other Blacks. Reid-Merritt (1996) noted that the majority of the women interviewed were race conscious and had a concern for social justice. These women sought to strike a balance between their success and the maintenance of a strong Black identity. The preservation of connections to their community was of utmost importance to them. Although the Black middle class has often been characterized as abandoning their community and their culture, the above-mentioned studies suggest otherwise (see also Coner-Edwards & Edwards, 1988).

Cultural pride also appears to be common among high-achieving Black students as well as among professionals. O'Connor (1997), for example, observed that a collective Black identity may promote academic aspirations and achievement rather than limit them, as suggested by Fordham and Ogbu (1986). The findings of a number of studies appear to support this view. Resnicow, Soler, Braithwaite, Selassie, and Smith (1999) found a positive relationship between a pro-Black identity and pro-school attitudes and behaviors (see also Chambers et al., 1998; Mehan et al., 1994; Sanders, 1997; Taylor, Casten, Flickinger, Roberts, & Fulmore, 1994). Ford and Harris (1997) additionally found that although students generally were positive in their racial orientation, it was the gifted achievers who had the most positive racial identity.

Central to Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) racelessness theory is the contention that students associate doing well in school with "Whiteness." When this association was directly examined, however, it was found that few students perceived engaging in the activities necessary for academic success as acting White (Chatman, Taylor, & Eccles, 2002). Furthermore, Black students with an Afrocentric identity have been found to perform at a higher academic level than those with a Eurocentric identity (Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani, 2001). Even within the elitist prep school (Ward, 1990) and private school (Datnow & Cooper, 1996) environments, it has been found that Black students are able to retain their cultural identity while excelling. At the university level, Taylor and Olswang (1997) found that many Black students viewed cultural pride as one of the necessary attributes for success in predominantly White universities. Also, Sellers, Chavous, and Cooke (1998) concluded from a study of the identity-achievement link among college students that racelessness did not appear to be advantageous in terms of academic success. It thus appears, as Chambers et al. (1998) have suggested, that

an Afrocentric orientation may have positive implications for students' academic motivation.

In addition to the identity-achievement link, the identity-mental health link has also received some attention from researchers. In contrast to the former, however, the latter appears consistent with Fordham's beliefs that a weaker Black identity is associated with poorer mental health.

RACIAL IDENTITY AND MENTAL HEALTH

Fordham's assertion that cultural disengagement may lead to psychological difficulties has received support from a number of studies. Arroyo and Zigler (1995), for example, found that attitudes indicative of racelessness were characteristic of high-achieving Blacks and high-achieving Whites but that such attitudes had negative psychological consequences only for Blacks. More specifically, a significant relationship existed between racelessness and introjective depression for Black students.

Consistent with Fordham's position, it appears that cultural identity and engagement serves as a protective factor. A positive Black/Afrocentric identity has been found to be related to higher self-esteem (Ahmed, Polo, Waterman, & Walker, 2002; Chambers et al., 1998; Phinney, 1992; Phinney & Chavira, 1992; Resnicow et al., 1999; Spencer et al., 2001) and negatively related to depression (Ahmed et al., 2002) and problem behaviors (Resnicow et al., 1999; Rotheram-Borus, 1990). Furthermore, a pro-Black attitude was found to be associated with more negative attitudes toward drug use (Resnicow et al., 1999).

When a developmental approach to identity measurement has been taken (see Cross, 1971; Parham & Helms, 1981), researchers have generally found that African Americans who had not yet achieved an internalized Black identity were less healthy mentally than those who had. Anxiety, paranoia, and general psychological distress were found to be characteristic of the preencounter stage of identity development (Carter, 1991); furthermore, preencounter was negatively associated with self-esteem (Munford, 1994; Parham & Helms, 1985) and positively related to depression (Munford, 1994). In contrast, internalization correlated positively with self-esteem (Parham & Helms, 1985) and negatively with depression (Munford, 1994). Students with an achieved ethnic identity scored higher on measures of psychological adjustment, self-evaluation, and sense of mastery than did those who had not reached this final stage (Phinney, 1989). A strong ethnic identity may also be beneficial in terms of physical health, given that certain types of mental distress manifests in physical symptoms (Wright & Littleford, 2002).

CURRENT STUDY

Although Fordham's belief that the development of a raceless identity was necessary for African Americans to succeed has received some support, the majority of the evidence points to a cultural affirmation framework for success. This is true for both professional and educational attainments. Thus, for some Blacks a raceless persona is viewed as a viable, if not the only, strategy for academic or professional mobility. For many, however, racelessness is not necessary for achievement; instead, connections to their community and culture affirm their success. Fordham's supposition that negative psychological consequences are associated with a loss of or diminished ties to the Black community has received support. For the most part, African Americans who identified strongly with their culture were psychologically healthier than those with weaker attachments.

Fordham (1988) further speculated that racelessness may be a strategy adopted by minority groups other than African Americans. One such group conceivably may be African Canadians. The experiences of Black Canadians have, in many ways, paralleled that of their American counterparts. Both groups have historically been discriminated against in all spheres of life and today continue to face obstacles to educational and socioeconomic advancement. Like their American counterparts, African Canadians have historically encountered considerable occupational barriers (see Spray, 1972; Winks, 1997), and discrimination in employment continues to be a reality for African Canadians (Henry, 1994). African Canadians did not fare well educationally either. At the advent of public education in Canada, the Black population was barred from common schools and forced to set up their own or to forgo an education. Moreover, the education that such schools offered tended to be inferior to that made available to Canada's White population (see Hill, 1992; Winks, 1997). Today, the widespread practice of streaming Black students into special education or nonacademic programs can be viewed as separate and unequal education in a new form (see Black Learners Advisory Committee [BLAC], 1994; Coelho, 1988). Inequities in the school often cause Black students to disengage from the educational process (Dei, Holmes, Mazzuca, McIsaac, & Campbell, 1995). They underachieve, fail, and drop out of school in staggering numbers (Brathwaite, 1989; Coelho, 1988; Dei et al., 1995). For African Canadians, inequities in education reinforce their occupational stratification (see BLAC, 1994).

The educational performance of Black Canadian students has received moderate attention in the form of descriptive reports and newspaper articles. Empirical studies of a quantitative nature, however, are almost nonexistent.

Much of the existing literature has focused on the students' underachievement or failure. Furthermore, attention has been directed primarily to school factors that impinge on Black students' education, with psychosocial factors garnering little consideration. Finally, few researchers have tackled the issues related to Black students' education beyond the secondary school years.

This study is a first step in addressing the gaps that exist in the literature. It brings together three aspects of Black Canadian students' life that have yet to be studied in conjunction with each other: achievement, identity, and mental health. These variables are examined within the context of Fordham's racelessness framework. The goal of this study is to determine the relevance of racelessness for African Canadian students' achievement and mental health. Information garnered from this study will add to the existing body of knowledge concerning the educational experience of African Canadians, specifically university students. Furthermore, it will provide valuable information about much neglected topics such as African Canadian students' racial identity and mental health.

A number of hypotheses were formulated on the basis of the literature that was reviewed. The majority of studies reviewed failed to support Fordham's contention that a strategy of racelessness was necessary for achievement. Instead, a stronger Black identity was found to be related to greater levels of success. Thus, it was hypothesized that Black Canadian students who possessed a stronger affinity with their racial group would perform at a higher academic level than those with a weaker affinity. Few research studies have examined the link between identity and mental health among African Americans. However, those that do exist suggest that a weaker Black identity is related to poorer mental health. Thus, it was hypothesized that, in the current study, students with closer affinity to other Blacks would be psychologically healthier. Finally, the link between achievement and mental health has been all but ignored for Black individuals. Thus, although no firm predictions were made about this particular relationship, it is quite possible that better achievement will be associated with better mental health, given the positive and reinforcing nature of both of these events.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 107 African Canadian students drawn from two universities in the city of Toronto. Toronto is culturally diverse, and the student

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics for the Primary Variables

Variable	M	SD	n
Grade point average	2.67	0.81	98
Academic self-efficacy	4.45	1.16	106
Academic apathy	3.55	1.08	106
Self-liking	4.09	0.66	107
Self-competence	4.29	0.49	107
Brief Symptom Inventory 18	14.91	10.68	104
Somatization	3.48	3.17	104
Depression	5.70	4.85	104
Anxiety	5.73	4.88	104
York Ethnic Identification Scale	5.66	0.81	105
Centrality	5.16	1.29	104
Ingroup affect	6.49	0.74	105
Ingroup ties	5.32	1.19	106

body of both universities where this study was conducted reflects this diversity. Although exact percentages of Black students are not available (race statistics are not collected), student surveys suggest that Blacks appear to make up a small percentage of the population of both universities (from 5% to 9%; see Hobson, 2000). The majority of the participants were undergraduate (86.9%) and female (83.2%). The age of the sample ranged from 18 to 43, with a mean age of 24 years. Participants were recruited through flyers posted on each campus, through various Black students' organizations, and by word of mouth. A small number were recruited through psychology classes. The measures were group administered to students by the senior author who is African Canadian.

MEASURES

A variety of scales were administered to the participants to measure the three central constructs of racial identity, academic achievement (grade point average and academic orientation), and mental health (self-liking, self-esteem, and psychological distress). The measures are described below and the internal consistency coefficients for this sample are provided. The descriptive statistics associated with the measures are presented in Table 1.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Grade point average.[2] Students' grade point averages (GPAs) were obtained either through self-report or through their university's Registrar's office. Because the two universities from which students were drawn calculate GPA on a different scale, numerical scores were transformed into their letter grade equivalents and the letter grades were used in the analyses.

Academic orientation. Two measures, academic efficacy and academic apathy, were taken from the Survey of Academic Orientations scale (Davidson, Beck, & Silver, 1999). Each six-item scale was associated with a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). A high score on the academic efficacy scale indicates confidence in one's academic skills (e.g., "Anytime that I really need a good grade on a test, I can get it"; α = .69). A high score on the academic apathy scale indicates a lack of interest and effort in academic work (e.g., "I might cut class if I think that the lecture material will not be on the test"; α = .59).

RACIAL IDENTITY

Racial identity measure. Racial identity was assessed with a 12-balanced-item version of the York Identification Scale (YETI) (Cameron, Sato, Lalonde, & Lay, 1997), which has proved to be a reliable and valid measure for a number of group identities (Cameron & Lalonde, 2001; Lalonde, 2002), including Black Canadian identity (Boatswain & Lalonde, 2000). The scale assesses three components of identity (centrality, affect, and ingroup ties); and higher scores indicate a greater importance of the identity for self-definition (Centrality: "In general, being Black is an important part of my self-image"), more positive feelings about this identity (Affect: "In general, I'm glad to be Black"), and a sense of belonging with ingroup members (Ingroup Ties: "I have a lot in common with other Blacks"). Each item was associated with a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha for the full scale was .79. The alphas for the Centrality, Affect, and Ingroup Ties subscales were .71, .71, and .74, respectively.

MENTAL HEALTH

Self-esteem. Tafarodi and Swann (1995) developed a two-component measure of global self-esteem: self-liking and self-competence. Each

subscale includes 10 items that were associated with 5-point Likert-type scales (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). A higher score on the Self-Liking subscale indicates a greater approval of the self (e.g., "I feel comfortable about myself"; α = .87). A higher score on the Self-Competence subscale indicates that the individual has a greater overall sense of himself or herself as capable, effective, and in control (e.g., "I have done well in life so far"; α = .77).

Psychological distress. The Brief Symptom Inventory 18 (BSI 18) (Derogatis, 2000) is an 18-item standardized measure of psychological distress. The BSI was chosen for its brevity and because it measures three primary symptom dimensions: somatization, depression, and anxiety (6 items each). Furthermore, a T-score cutoff point for clinical levels of psychological distress is available for the full BSI scale and its three subscales. Participants indicate the degree to which they experienced psychological symptoms during the past 7 days using a 5-point scale ranging from *not at all* (0) to *extremely* (4). Somatization items reflect distress arising from perceived bodily dysfunction such as gastrointestinal and respiratory disorders (α = .57). Depression items assess clinical depressive symptoms such as dysphoria, self-deprecation, and hopelessness (α = .82). Anxiety items measure symptoms such as restlessness and tension (α = .81). Cronbach's alpha for the whole scale was .87.

RESULTS

RACIAL IDENTITY AND ACHIEVEMENT

To test the hypothesis that higher achieving students would be more likely to have a closer affinity to their racial group than lower achieving students, an ANOVA was performed, with GPA separated into three categories of participants (A, B, and C or lower) serving as the independent variable and racial identity serving as the dependent variable. No significant differences in identity were found based on GPA, $F(2, 93)$ = 1.76, *ns*.

Correlational analyses also were conducted to examine the hypothesized relationship between racial identity and the two indicators of academic orientation. It was expected that greater feeling of academic efficacy and lower levels of academic apathy would be associated with a stronger racial identity. No significant relationship was found between the global measure of identity

TABLE 2
Bivariate Correlations for the Ethnic Identity and
Self-Esteem Variables

	Self-Competence	Self-Liking
York Identification Scale	.24*	.31**
York Identification Scale—Centrality	.11	.05
York Identification Scale—Affect	.25*	.35**
York Identification Scale—Ingroup Ties	.19*	.35**

NOTE: N ranges from 104 to 106.
* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (two-tailed). **Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed).

and the academic orientation measures, but a small positive correlation was found between the Ingroup Ties subscale and academic efficacy ($r = .20$, $p < .05$). This correlation suggests that the stronger the ties students felt to other Blacks, the greater was their confidence in their academic abilities.

RACIAL IDENTITY AND MENTAL HEALTH

To examine the relationship between mental health and racial identity, students' BSI scores were categorized as either positive cases or negative cases of general psychological distress based on the recommended clinical cutoffs. This allowed for an examination of differences in identity based on whether or not participants were experiencing clinically significant levels of psychological distress. An ANOVA was performed with the BSI as the independent variable and identity as the dependent variable. The BSI was found to be significantly related to identity, $F(1, 100) = 6.34$, $p < .05$. Students whose responses indicated a positive case of general psychological distress ($M = 5.36$, $SD = .90$, $n = 29$) had lower racial identity scores than students whose responses represented a negative case of psychological distress ($M = 5.80$, $SD = .75$, $n = 73$).

Correlational analyses were used to examine the relationship between the racial identity measure (and its subscales) and the self-esteem variables. This was done to determine if greater self-esteem would be related to stronger links to the racial ingroup. These correlations are presented in Table 2. Significant positive correlations were found between the racial identity Affect and Ingroup Ties subscales and both the Self-Liking and Self-Competence subscales. Students who felt better about being Black and who felt closer to other Blacks were more likely to feel competent and to like themselves.

TABLE 3
Descriptive Statistics for the Mental Health and
Academic Orientation Variables

	Academic Efficacy			Academic Apathy		
	M	SD	F(1, 101)	M	SD	F(1, 101)
BSI (full scale)						
Positive case (*n* = 29)	3.56	1.01	30.15***	4.08	0.99	11.47**
Negative case (*n* = 74)	4.77	1.01		3.32	1.05	
Somatization						
Elevated (*n* = 24)	3.83	0.93	9.17**	3.98	0.83	5.45*
Nonelevated (*n* = 79)	4.61	1.15		3.40	1.12	
Depression						
Elevated (*n* = 27)	3.77	1.2	13.88***	4.14	0.88	12.48**
Nonelevated (*n* = 76)	4.66	1.03		3.33	1.07	
Anxiety						
Elevated (*n* = 23)	3.75	1.12	11.38**	3.9	1.15	3.38
Nonelevated (*n* = 80)	4.62	1.08		3.43	1.05	

$* p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.$

MENTAL HEALTH AND ACHIEVEMENT

MANOVAs were conducted to explore the relationship between mental health and achievement. The first was carried out with GPA as the independent variable and BSI (uncategorized) and self-esteem as the dependent variables. The purpose was to determine if achieving students were more likely to report less psychological distress and greater self-esteem than their lower achieving peers. GPA was not found to be significantly related to mental health, $F(6, 182) = .44$, *ns*. When this analysis was conducted with the uncategorized BSI subscales, no significant effect for academic performance was obtained, $F(10, 178) = .81$, *ns*.

A further MANOVA was conducted, this time with the categorized BSI as the independent variable (positive case vs. negative case) and the academic orientation scales as the dependent variables. This allowed us to determine whether or not students who were experiencing clinically significant levels of psychological distress were more or less likely to report a more positive orientation to academics. A significant relationship between psychological distress and academic orientation was obtained, $F(2, 100) = 17.18$, $p < .001$. A follow-up ANOVA revealed that mental health was significantly related to both academic efficacy and academic apathy. The results of these analyses are reported in Table 3. Students with a greater sense of academic efficacy

and students with lower levels of academic apathy experienced less general psychological distress.

A final set of MANOVAs was conducted, again with academic orientation as the dependent variable and each of the BSI subscales (categorized into elevated and nonelevated levels of the specific disorder in question) acting as the independent variable. Categorizing the subscales allowed for a determination of which component of the BSI was related to academic orientation and, furthermore, if students differed in orientation based on whether or not they experienced elevated levels of the psychological disorder in question. Each of the BSI dimensions was found to be significantly related to academic orientation: $F(2, 100) = 5.62$, $p < .01$, for somatization, $F(2, 100) = 10.29$, $p < .001$, for depression, and $F(2, 100) = 5.96$, $p < .01$, for anxiety. Follow-up ANOVAs revealed that students with greater sense of academic efficacy had lower levels of somatization, depression, and anxiety. Also, students who approached academics with greater apathy had higher levels of somatization and depression. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3.

Finally, the correlations between academic orientation and self-esteem were examined to determine if higher levels of self-esteem were related to a more positive academic orientation. Correlations between the orientation and self-esteem variables revealed a significant positive association between academic efficacy and both self-competence ($r = .41$, $p < .01$) and self-liking ($r = .44$, $p < .01$). Conversely, academic apathy correlated negatively with both self-competence ($r = -.36$, $p < .01$) and self-liking ($r = -.38$, $p < .01$). Students with higher self-esteem had a higher sense of their academic efficacy and those who exhibited more apathy toward their academic career had lower self-esteem.

GPA AND ACADEMIC ORIENTATION

Given that GPA showed little relationship to the other variables, the link between GPA and the academic orientation variables was examined to explore if higher achieving students reported more positive academic orientation than their lower achieving counterparts. A MANOVA was performed with GPA as the independent variable and academic orientations as the dependent variables. GPA was found to be significantly related to academic orientation, $F(4, 186) = 4.74$, $p = .001$. Follow-up ANOVAs revealed that significant relationships were obtained for efficacy, $F(2, 94) = 7.03$, $p = .001$, and for apathy, $F(2, 94) = 5.26$, $p < .01$. Post hoc tests revealed that "A" students reported greater efficacy than "B" and "C" (or lower) students and "C" (or lower) reported significantly greater apathy than "A" students. The descriptive values are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4
Descriptive Values for Grade Point Average (GPA) and
Academic Orientation

	Academic Efficacy		*Academic Apathy*	
GPA	M	SD	M	SD
A (*n* = 14)	5.3	1.04	3.08	1.07
B (*n* = 41)	4.58	1.14	3.29	1.02
C or lower (*n* = 42)	4.05	1.11	3.94	1.13

DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis of this study was that students with stronger Black identities would achieve at a higher academic level. This hypothesis was not supported. Higher achieving students were no more likely to have stronger affinity to their racial group than their lower achieving counterparts. Thus, an identity affirmation view of success was not confirmed. Conversely, the racelessness framework also did not receive support. There are a number of potential reasons for the discrepancy between the current results and those obtained by Fordham and other researchers. First, very few of the studies that we reviewed were conducted with university students. The majority focused on adolescents. It is likely that adolescents, who are at a developmental stage where the major task is that of identity development, have not separated their ethnic from their academic self (as noted by Sellers et al., 1998). Furthermore, there is likely to be greater variations in academic performance and academic attitudes among adolescents. These circumstances may lead to students who believe that to succeed means either separating from their own-group peers or clinging to their culture. At the university level, these issues may not be relevant. University students may have compartmentalized identities in which their racial and academic identities have been separated. Furthermore, university students have likely committed to the idea of success regardless of their cultural leanings and will be among Black peers who, for the most part, share the same values and goals as themselves. At this stage, they may see no need to separate themselves from other Blacks to get ahead or feel that their culture is a deciding factor in their success.

Second, it is possible that racial identity has a different role in and relevance to the lives of Black Canadians as compared to their American counterparts. Although Blacks in Canada and the United States share similar experiences, there are also crucial distinctions. Black Canadians did not have a civil

rights movement as in the United States, which likely contributed to the collectivity of Black American consciousness. Furthermore, unlike their U.S. counterparts, the Black population from which students in this study were sampled is quite diverse. The majority of Black Torontonians are immigrants or descendents of immigrants from various Caribbean islands and African countries and, thus, may not have the same sense of group solidarity and demands for group conformity believed to be characteristic of African Americans (see Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Furthermore, one of the enticements for Caribbean migration is the perception of the educational opportunity available in the host country. They emigrate with the belief that an education is the key to socioeconomic advancement (Gopaul-McNicol, 1993). This high value placed on education was likely passed on to their children, and it may not be mediated by their racial identification.

The second hypothesis, that students with a stronger affinity to other Blacks would be psychologically healthier, received some support, consistent with the findings of others such as Chambers et al. (1998). It is reasonable to expect that feeling connected to one's Black racial group and feeling positive about that group is psychologically beneficial. A sense of unity with the ingroup is probably especially necessary for Blacks who must deal daily with discrimination, stereotypes, and exclusion from full participation in societal institutions. These and other injustices may negatively affect Black individuals' self-esteem and psyche. A strong identity may act as a buffer against all the negatives with which they are bombarded (see Wright & Littleford, 2002). Given that both Black Americans and Black Canadians experience stressors related to discrimination, subtle and overt, it is not surprising that this result would be similar across the two nations. An alternative perspective is that Black students who are psychologically healthier may be predisposed to have a stronger Black identity. Poor mental health affects many aspects of development, and racial identity development may be one of them.

No firm predictions were made about the relationship between mental health and achievement, but we suggested that better achievement would be associated with better mental health, given the positive and reinforcing nature of both of these events. Although health and GPA were not related, the health and academic orientation variables were significantly related. In general, students with lower levels of psychological distress and higher self-esteem reported a greater sense of control over their academics and a greater likelihood of being proactive in their efforts to do well. It appears that poor mental health can interfere with students' sense of academic effectiveness and efforts. Conversely, lacking in confidence and exerting little effort in school may produce psychological distress and low self-esteem. Academic

orientation in turn had a strong connection to GPA with those with a more positive orientation performing at a higher level academically. For Black Canadian university students, then, it appears that academic orientation is a more crucial factor for academic performance than racial identity. Furthermore, their academic orientation is related to their mental health. It is important to note that no direction of causality can be inferred from this study. Thus, it is just as likely that academic performance influences academic orientation as well. Students who perform at a higher academic level may feel more powerful with respect to his or her academic level and be more active in taking responsibility for and control over his or her learning. Students' performance and orientation may also be influenced by other factors that range from financial stability to a sense of belonging on campus and an ability to relate with professors.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are a number of limitations to this study. First, because some of the GPAs obtained were self-reported, it is possible that some were underestimated or overestimated. Second, given that participation was voluntary, there was likely a self-selection bias in the sample, which limits generalizability. It is possible that students who are psychologically distant from the Black community would not have volunteered for the study. Thus, our sample of participants may have been more homogeneous in terms of their identity than the population of Black university students. Also limiting generalizability is the examination of students solely from metropolitan Toronto. Toronto is somewhat unusual in terms of its general cultural diversity as well as in the diversity of the Black population. In other parts of Canada, such as the Maritime Provinces, Blacks are more culturally homogeneous. In those provinces, the Black presence extends back to the 17th century (Hill, 1992; Pachai, 1990; Winks, 1997). Although there were Blacks in Toronto in the earlier centuries as well, the majority migrated during the 20th century from the Caribbean and later from Africa. Replication of this study with other Black Canadian populations may lead to different results. Smith (2000), for example, found differences between central and eastern Canadian Black high school students in their reported academic support and performance and in their cultural attitudes; she attributed these differences to their differing historical presence in Canada. In this study, the vast majority of participants were female, which precluded a meaningful exploration of gender differences. Also, it limits the degree to which the results can be generalized to the Black population at large. Finally, the imbalance in favor of undergraduate students as compared

to graduate students may also have influenced the results, again limiting generalizability.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Given a lack of clear support for either a racelessness or an affirmation framework of achievement in this study, an alternative to both models might be needed for an African Canadian population. Alternatively, it is possible that the particular aspect of identity that has the strongest relationship to achievement was not tapped in this study. A future area of research is an examination of the relationship between other aspects of identity and achievement. Support was found for the link between racial identity and mental health. Again, however, other aspects of identity and its link to mental health would provide a greater understanding of their relationship. Although analyses did not reveal a direct relationship between mental health and GPA, it is possible that they are indirectly related through their link with academic orientation. It is also possible that identity is also, in a roundabout way, associated with GPA, given its link with mental health. These are issues for future studies to tease out.

Approximately one quarter of the participants' responses on the BSI places them at risk psychologically. Given the probable importance of mental health for academic success, future studies of the factors placing Black students at risk are necessary with the goal of providing culturally appropriate intervention. Such intervention may involve assisting them in their development of a stronger affinity to their racial group.

Factors that may mediate the relationship between identity and achievement and mental health require further exploration. Socioeconomic status, for instance, may prove to be an important variable. Although gender-related differences were not found in this study, it is still an important factor that needs to be further explored. Past studies have found gender-related differences in racial identity. Ford and Harris (1997) found that female students had more positive racial identities than male students. In Fordham's (1991) study, one mother expressed concern about sending her son to private schools, noting that sons were more likely to lose themselves in such a setting whereas daughters were more likely to emerge from the experience with a stronger sense of themselves. Fordham (1988) observed that females were more prepared to identify with the dominant culture's values and beliefs than males were.

In conclusion, racial identity is a complex construct, and there is still much to learn about it and its relationship to the achievement and mental health of Black Canadians. This study provides a starting point.

NOTES

1. *African* and *Black* are used interchangeably throughout the article. Also in terms of terminology, the terms *ethnic*, *racial*, and *cultural* have all been employed as descriptors of Black identity and are substituted for each other throughout the literature. When describing a particular study, we have tried to use the term used by its authors in the review of their work.

2. No significant difference was found between GPAs that were self-reported and those obtained from school records. An attempt was made at creating a uniform GPA scale by converting the GPAs from one university to their equivalents on the scale employed by the second university. The use of these values in the correlational analyses did not produce changes in the pattern of results obtained using letter grades.

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