



Being Black and Muslim in America: A Study on Identity and Well-Being

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The first Muslims in America were Black. Brought from the western and central coast of Africa, enslaved Black Muslims account for more than a third of the ancestors of Black Americans.¹ Today, Black Muslims still account for the largest racial group of Muslims in America, constituting more than a fifth of all Muslim Americans.² However, racial ideology, which has played a substantial role in the American sociocultural and political landscape, has continuously disadvantaged Black American communities and individuals in ways not experienced by other ethnic minority populations.³ The enduring legacy of racialized oppression faced by Black Americans has translated into an unavoidable concern for racial identity among this population. Black Americans, including Muslims, are raced, like it or not.⁴ As the systematic oppression of Black people in America continues, and as people of conscience continue to shed light on the innumerable acts of injustice they face, understanding what it *means* to be Black and Muslim is of utmost importance to the broader American Muslim community as a whole.⁵ This research study is an empirical investigation into the identity and well-being of Black Muslims in America.

Black Muslim Lives Matter

Black Muslims have been an integral part of the Islamic legacy. From the time of the Prophet ﷺ until today, Black Muslims have played an important role in the *ummah*. As racism existed at the time of the Prophet ﷺ, he frequently placed Black Muslims in important positions due to their virtues and to systematically empower them. He appointed Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ as the *mua'dhdhin* of the *masjid* in Medina, Usāmah ibn Zayd as the commander of an army as a teenager, and

¹ Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: NYU Press, 2013).

² Basheer Mohamed and Jeff Diamant, "Black Muslims Account for a Fifth of All U.S. Muslims, and About Half Are Converts to Islam," Pew Research Center, January 17, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/black-muslims-account-for-a-fifth-of-all-u-s-muslims-and-about-half-are-converts-to-islam/>.

³ Kevin Cokley, Brittany Hall-Clark, and Dana Hicks, "Ethnic Minority-Majority Status and Mental Health: The Mediating Role of Perceived Discrimination," *Journal of Mental Health Counseling* 33, no. 3 (2011): 243–63.

⁴ Robert M. Sellers, Mia A. Smith, J. Nicole Shelton, Stephanie A. J. Rowley, and Tabbye M. Chavous, "Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity: A Reconceptualization of African American Racial Identity," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 2, no. 1 (1998): 18–39.

⁵ For a broad overview of the subject, see Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

proclaimed that Umm Ayman (Barakah bint Tha‘labah) was like a mother to him after his birth mother. His love for Black companions was special as his adopted son and second mother were both Black. They gave birth to Usāmah ibn Zayd, who was known as “the beloved, son of the beloved,” due to the Prophet’s love for them. It was said that no child’s birth was as joyful to the community than the birth of Usāmah. The environment created by the Prophet ﷺ allowed young Black Muslims to have numerous role models they could identify with and “possible selves” that they could aspire to emulate.⁶ A young boy could dream of being the next Bilāl, Zayd, or ‘Ubādah, and a young girl could dream of being like Umm Ayman. Their blackness was not an impediment to success. The racial climate that the Prophet ﷺ created allowed for healthy identity development, where a companion could be proud to be Black and witness Blacks being honored in society. Black and Muslim identity could blend together in harmony, where one could cherish their racial background and their faith. Although racism still existed, as the infamous incident between Bilāl and Abū Dharr attests, it had been substantially reduced.⁷ The following generations saw the rise of many Black scholars and leaders throughout the Islamic empire.⁸

In recent Muslim American history, the most respected and influential personalities include Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali (may Allah have mercy on their blessed souls). They are role models for everyone, especially for Blacks and Muslims in America. They championed the importance of having a strong Black and Muslim identity. Malcolm X said, “One of the things that made the Black Muslim movement grow was its emphasis upon things African. This was the secret to the growth of the Black Muslim movement. African blood, African origin, African culture, African ties. And you’d be surprised—we discovered that deep within the subconscious of the black man in this country, he is still more African than he is

⁶ Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius, “Possible Selves,” *American Psychologist* 41, no. 9 (1986): 954.

⁷ A powerful example of the change in beliefs was when the companions traveled to Egypt and the ruler of Egypt mocked them for being led by ‘Ubādah ibn Šāmit, a Black companion. They responded to his racist comments saying, “Even though he is black, as you can see, he is the best in status among us. . . . Blackness is not something bad among us.” Details of the encounter can be found here: Omar Suleiman, “When the Sahaba Met a Racist King | Virtual Khutbah,” YouTube, June 5, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiWMVOjkoLk>.

⁸ This subject is beyond the scope of this paper. It has been well-documented that many of the centers of learning in the Islamic empire were led by freed slaves of color. For example, ‘Atā’ ibn Abī Rabāḥ, a Black scholar, was the intellectual leader of Mecca.

American.”⁹ Similarly, Muhammad Ali proudly proclaimed, “I am America. I am the part you won’t recognize. But get used to me—black, confident, cocky; my name, not yours; my religion, not yours; my goals, my own. Get used to me.”¹⁰ Both of these giants illustrated how Black identity and Muslim identity could be fused together in the most beautiful manner, even when facing huge obstacles and blatant discrimination from the racist society they lived in.

Black Muslim American identity

The Black Muslim American identity is inseparable from the extant literature on being Black and American. W. E. B. Du Bois, in his seminal sociological masterpiece, *The Souls of Black Folk*, highlights the psychological challenges of being Black and American. He eloquently writes,

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.¹¹

For the Black Muslim American, a “triple consciousness” may exist, where one may ever feel their threeness—an American, a Black, a Muslim.¹² The Black American Muslim identity is therefore incredibly complex and includes a racial and religious dimension.¹³ It has been suggested that African American Muslims

⁹ Quoted in William Safire, ed., *Lend Me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997).

¹⁰ Charles C. Haynes, “I Am America,” Freedom Forum Institute, June 8, 2016, <https://www.freedomforuminstitute.org/2016/06/08/i-am-america/>.

¹¹ William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (London: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹² Many scholars since the civil rights era have theorized that oppression is intersectional. Race, class, gender, religion, and other aspects of identity may overlap in discrimination.

¹³ Nisa Muhammad, “Black and Muslim: How Chaplains Can Empower Marginalized Students,” *Yaqeen*, February 22, 2020, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/nisa-muhammad/black-and-muslim-how-chaplains-can-empower-marginalized-students/>.

have inherited a “triple heritage” consisting of (1) *Westernization*, (2) *re-Africanization*, and (3) *re-Islamization*.¹⁴

Racial identity refers to the significance that people place on race in defining their self-concept. Self-concept is a person’s belief about who and what they are. Research on Black identity has identified multiple dimensions of racial identity, including racial salience, centrality, private regard, and public regard.¹⁵ The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) has synthesized numerous psychological theories of identity to capture the complexities of Black identity.

Racial salience refers to how much a person's race is a relevant part of their self-concept at a particular moment in time. It may be considered state-like, where one’s racial identity is activated when made salient. Racial centrality refers to how much a person normatively defines themselves with regard to race; it is a measure of whether race is a core part of an individual's self-concept.¹⁶ Racial regard refers to a person's affective and evaluative judgment of their race and may be further broken down into private regard and public regard. Private regard refers to how much an individual feels positively or negatively towards their race in general and as a member of that race. Private regard is thus similar to the idea of belonging to one’s race and having racial pride. Public regard refers to how much an individual feels that other people view their race positively or negatively. Public regard may be especially important, as Du Bois highlighted “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others.”

Similar to racial identity, religious identity may be conceptualized by the dimensions of salience, centrality, and regard. From a religious perspective, Islam should be salient in the life of a believer, central to who they are as a person, and they should be proud of their faith. This dimension of religious pride is mentioned in the verse, “And who is better in speech than one who invites to Allah, does righteous deeds, and says, ‘Indeed, I am of the Muslims.’”¹⁷ Unfortunately, as

¹⁴ Yusuf Nuruddin, “African-American Muslims and the Question of Identity: Between Traditional Islam, African Heritage, and the American Way,” in *Muslims on the Americanization Path*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 215–62.

¹⁵ Sellers et al., “Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity,” 18–39.

¹⁶ Sellers et al., 18–39.

¹⁷ Qur’an 41:33.

Islamophobia has been on the rise, religious public regard is also a fundamental concern to the well-being of Muslims. This may be an additional challenge for Black Muslims who also have to cope with low racial public regard.

Theories of identity posit that the importance of a particular identity (e.g., racial and religious) within a person's self-concept should be accompanied by behaviors that are associated with that identity.¹⁸ Racial and religious centrality and regard are expected to influence psychological functioning and behavior. For example, those who believe Islam is a core part of their self-concept and who are proud to be Muslim are likely to engage in more religious behavior than those who do not consider Islam central to their self-concept. Many studies have investigated the relations between identity and discrimination and how they relate to mental health and self-esteem.

Identity, discrimination, and mental health

Racial discrimination is a pervasive phenomenon in society. The majority of Americans (56%) believe being Black hurts people's ability to get ahead, and 59% believe being White helps people's ability to get ahead.¹⁹ 60% or more of Black adults report encountering racial discrimination in their lives.²⁰ Although these statistics are incredibly disturbing, the consequences of discrimination are much more alarming. Racial discrimination, whether it be blatant or subtle, negatively affects mental health and well-being.²¹ Furthermore, discrimination not only prevents the pursuit of opportunities, but also has the potential to decrease

¹⁸ Sheldon Stryker and Peter J. Burke, "The Past, Present, and Future of an Identity Theory," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (2000): 284–97; Osman Umarji, "Will My Children Be Muslim? The Development of Religious Identity in Young People," *Yaqeen*, January 16, 2020, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/osman-umarji/will-my-children-be-muslim-the-development-of-religious-identity-in-young-people/#ftnt12>.

¹⁹ Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Anna Brown, and Kiana Cox, "Race in America 2019," *Pew Research Center*, April 9, 2019, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/04/09/race-in-america-2019/>.

²⁰ Ronald C. Kessler, Kristin D. Mickelson, and David R. Williams, "The Prevalence, Distribution, and Mental Health Correlates of Perceived Discrimination in the United States," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 40, no. 3 (1999): 208–30.

²¹ Tony N. Brown, David R. Williams, James S. Jackson, Harold W. Neighbors, Myriam Torres, Sherrill L. Sellers, and Kendrick T. Brown, "'Being Black and Feeling Blue': The Mental Health Consequences of Racial Discrimination," *Race and Society* 2, no. 2 (2000): 117–31; Kessler, Mickelson, and Williams, "Perceived Discrimination," 208–30; Racial discrimination was associated with lower levels of psychological functioning as measured by perceived stress, depressive symptomatology, and psychological well-being.

motivation in educational, professional, and religious settings.²² For Black Muslims, the consequences of discrimination are doubly concerning. As members of two marginalized groups, they are discriminated against from every angle imaginable. Whereas immigrant Muslims have witnessed increases in discrimination since September 11th, 2001, Black Muslims have been systematically targeted due to the color of their skin since they were forcefully brought to America hundreds of years ago (and stripped of their culture, language, and religion), in addition to dealing with additional discrimination due to their faith. The rise in Islamophobia and discrimination has had many deleterious effects on Muslims in the past decade, including decreased self-esteem and increased psychological distress.²³ If we consider the seriousness of the trauma induced by the various types of discrimination against Muslims in just the past decade, one can only imagine the impact of trauma and centuries-long discrimination on the well-being, physical health, and life outcomes of Black Muslims in America.

Cultural resources, such as racial identity, religious support, and religious coping, relate to experiences of discrimination and psychological well-being. Substantial research has investigated the role of religiosity and its impact on the psychological health and well-being of Black Americans. Beyond merely identifying with one's faith, religiosity may be better understood as adherence to prescribed practices associated with the worship of God.²⁴ For Black Americans, acknowledgment of the ultimate sacredness of God may be reflected in one's *commitment* to attending organized faith communities, scriptural reading, ritual practices (e.g., *Ṣalāh*), and outreach activities.²⁵ Black Americans who regularly attend religious services

²² Edna C. Alfaro, Adriana J. Umaña-Taylor, Melinda A. Gonzales-Backen, Mayra Y. Bámaca, and Katharine H. Zeiders, "Latino Adolescents' Academic Success: The Role of Discrimination, Academic Motivation, and Gender," *Journal of Adolescence* 32, no. 4 (2009): 941–62.

²³ Sawssan R. Ahmed, Maryam Kia-Keating, and Katherine H. Tsai, "A Structural Model of Racial Discrimination, Acculturative Stress, and Cultural Resources among Arab American Adolescents," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 48, no. 3–4 (2011): 181–92; Bonnie Moradi and Nadia Talal Hasan, "Arab American Persons' Reported Experiences of Discrimination and Mental Health: The Mediating Role of Personal Control," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 51, no. 4 (2004): 418.

²⁴ Jacqueline S. Mattis and Carolyn R. Watson, "Religion and Spirituality," in *Handbook of African American Psychology*, ed. Helen A. Neville, Brendesha M. Tynes, and Shawn O. Utsey (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2009), 91–102.

²⁵ Mattis and Watson, 91–102.

report fewer work, family, and financial stressors.²⁶ Collectively, these studies demonstrate that religiosity among Black Americans is inversely related to psychological distress—that is, as religiosity increases, psychological distress decreases.²⁷

Overall, people with more cultural resources report having better mental health.²⁸ However, some cultural resources (e.g., stronger racial identity) have also been found to relate to increased sensitivity to experiencing discrimination, which in turn causes psychological distress.²⁹ Therefore, the relation between identity and psychological functioning is complex. In studies of Black Americans, believing that others held negative attitudes towards Blacks (i.e., low public regard) was related to perceiving more discrimination but these same beliefs buffered against the impact of discrimination on mental health.

Black Americans have had to deal with abusive tactics and barbaric policies from the first day of their arrival in this country until today. From slavery to Jim Crow laws,³⁰ from COINTELPRO³¹ to the school-to-prison pipeline (SPP),³² from the destruction of Black Wall Street³³ to the Tuskegee syphilis experiment,³⁴ this country has turned a blind eye to the plight of the most oppressed.³⁵ One

²⁶ Christopher G. Ellison, Jason D. Boardman, David R. Williams, and James S. Jackson, “Religious Involvement, Stress, and Mental Health: Findings from the 1995 Detroit Area Study,” *Social Forces* 80, no. 1 (2001): 215–49.

²⁷ Jeffrey S. Levin and Robert Joseph Taylor, “Panel Analyses of Religious Involvement and Well-Being in African Americans: Contemporaneous vs. Longitudinal Effects,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37, no. 4 (1998): 695–709; Ellison, Boardman, Williams, and Jackson, “Religious Involvement, Stress, and Mental Health,” 215–49; Sung Joon Jang and Byron R. Johnson, “Explaining Religious Effects on Distress among African Americans,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 43, no. 2 (2004): 239–60.

²⁸ Ahmed, Kia-Keating, and Tsai, “Structural Model of Racial Discrimination,” 181–92.

²⁹ Nyla R. Branscombe, Michael T. Schmitt, and Richard D. Harvey, “Perceiving Pervasive Discrimination among African Americans: Implications for Group Identification and Well-Being,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77, no. 1 (1999): 135.

³⁰ “Jim Crow Era,” A Brief History of Civil Rights in the United States, Georgetown Law Library, <https://guides.ll.georgetown.edu/c.php?g=592919&p=4172697>.

³¹ Nadine Frederique, *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “COINTELPRO,” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/COINTELPRO>.

³² Libby Nelson and Dara Lind, “The School to Prison Pipeline, Explained,” Justice Policy Institute, February 24, 2015, <http://www.justicepolicy.org/news/8775>.

³³ Kimberly Fain, “The Devastation of Black Wall Street,” JSTOR Daily, July 5, 2017, <https://daily.jstor.org/the-devastation-of-black-wall-street/>.

³⁴ Elizabeth Nix, “Tuskegee Experiment: The Infamous Syphilis Study,” History, May 16, 2017, updated July 29, 2019, <https://www.history.com/news/the-infamous-40-year-tuskegee-study>.

³⁵ Danyelle Solomon, Connor Maxwell, and Abril Castro, “Systematic Inequality and Economic Opportunity,” Center for American Progress, August 7, 2019,

consequence of this systemic racism³⁶ is that many Black Americans, as a coping mechanism, have internalized the need to work harder than non-Black Americans in order to succeed. This psychological process has been coined “John Henryism.”³⁷ However, coping through exerting more effort to overcome racial discrimination has been linked with various negative outcomes, including burnout and hopelessness.³⁸ Although human beings can be incredibly resilient and overcome challenges when faced with acute discrimination, exposure to chronic discrimination exacerbates stress and its negative consequences. Believing that one has to work harder than others to succeed is psychologically devastating. Feeling agentic, believing that one’s behavior can influence outcomes, is a fundamental motivator. As Alberta Bandura said, “Unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties. Whatever other factors serve as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to effect changes by one’s actions.”³⁹ Therefore, it is of utmost concern that environmental conditions allow people to feel agentic.

In order to feel agentic, people must feel both a sense of personal efficacy and believe that their behavior will lead to certain outcomes.⁴⁰ Attitudes regarding uncertainty influence both self-perceptions and mental health.⁴¹ Therefore, as Black Muslims face racism and discrimination in nearly every environment, their

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/reports/2019/08/07/472910/systematic-inequality-economic-opportunity/>.

³⁶ Husain Lateef, “Insights for Muslim American Youth Development,” *Yaqeen*, February 25, 2020, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/husain-lateef/insights-for-muslim-american-youth-development/>.

³⁷ According to legend, John Henry's skill as a steel driver was measured in a race against a steam-powered rock drilling machine. He won the race by working nonstop, only to die in victory with a hammer in hand as his heart gave out from stress; Sherman A James, “John Henryism and the Health of African-Americans,” *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* 18 (1994): 163–82.

³⁸ Mary O. Odafe, Temilola K. Salami, and Rheeda L. Walker, “Race-Related Stress and Hopelessness in Community-Based African American Adults: Moderating Role of Social Support,” *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 23, no. 4 (2017): 561.

³⁹ Albert Bandura, “Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change,” *Psychological Review* 84, no. 2 (1977): 191.

⁴⁰ Bandura, 191.

⁴¹ Osman Umarji and Hassan Elwan, “Embracing Uncertainty: How to Feel Emotionally Stable in a Pandemic,” *Yaqeen*, March 30, 2020, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/osman-umarji/embracing-uncertainty-how-to-feel-emotionally-stable-in-a-pandemic/>.

attitudes regarding uncertainty likely influence their well-being, as uncertainty intolerance causes worry and stress.⁴²

Self-esteem is another important aspect of psychological well-being. Global self-esteem refers to a person's positive or negative attitude toward themselves as a totality.⁴³ Private racial regard can be considered similar to racial self-esteem, which should positively relate to one's global self-esteem.⁴⁴ Public racial regard may also relate to self-esteem, but only if a person values the opinions of others regarding their race and believes the opinions of others apply to them. Therefore, low public racial regard may not necessarily translate to low self-esteem. However, although low public regard may not directly influence self-esteem, low public regard may negatively affect mental health, which in turn may relate to self-esteem.⁴⁵

The present study

Research on Black Muslims is vital to understanding Islam in America. More research is needed to understand Black Muslim identity and how it relates to well-being. The present study seeks to expand on our understanding of these issues. In this study, we specifically want to understand racial and religious identity in Black Muslims and how these identities relate to their mental health and self-esteem. In order to investigate these questions, we utilize data from a national study of Muslims administered by Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research. The two broad research questions we seek to answer are the following:

- 1) What clusters of Black and Muslim centrality and public regard co-occur as part

⁴² Michel J. Dugas, Andrea Schwartz, and Kylie Francis, "Brief Report: Intolerance of Uncertainty, Worry, and Depression," *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 28, no. 6 (2004): 835–42.

⁴³ Morris Rosenberg, Carmi Schooler, Carrie Schoenbach, and Florence Rosenberg, "Global Self-Esteem and Specific Self-Esteem: Different Concepts, Different Outcomes," *American Sociological Review* (1995): 141–56.

⁴⁴ Stephanie J. Rowley, Robert M. Sellers, Tabbye M. Chavous, and Mia A. Smith, "The Relationship between Racial Identity and Self-Esteem in African American College and High School Students," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74, no. 3 (1998): 715.

⁴⁵ Monique Bolognini, Bernard Plancherel, Walter Bettschart, and Olivier Halfon, "Self-Esteem and Mental Health in Early Adolescence: Development and Gender Differences," *Journal of Adolescence* 19, no. 3 (1996): 233–45.

of the identity of Black Muslims in America? How do these clusters relate to self-esteem and mental health?

2) How do racial and religious factors relate to Black Muslim mental health and self-esteem? More specifically, to what extent do racial centrality, racial public regard, Islamic resources, Black resources, perceptions of discrimination, and uncertainty beliefs relate to mental health and self-esteem?

Method

The data utilized in this study comes from the Racial and Muslim Identity Survey (RMIS). RMIS is a cross-sectional study of Muslims in America administered by Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research in June 2020. Muslims were sampled using email and social media. The total sample included 1880 American Muslims. The sample was approximately 10% White ($n=183$), 26% Black ($n=499$), 33% South Asian (Pakistani/Indian; $n=620$), and 14% Arab ($n=258$). 55% of the sample was born in the US and 75% reported that at least one parent was born outside of the US. Approximately 27% reported having less than a college degree, 36% reported having a bachelor's degree, and 36% reported having a Master's degree or higher. The sample was 72% female and 28% male. 80% reported praying five times a day. Our study focuses on the 499 Black Muslims. 65% of the Black Muslims in our sample held college degrees, with 33% holding bachelor's degrees, 25% Master's degrees, and 7% doctoral or professional degrees. 45% reported making less than \$60,000 a year in household income, 28% reported making between \$60,000-\$99,000, and 27% reported making over \$100,000. 71% of the sample was female.

Measures

Predictors

Racial centrality. Two items from the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI)⁴⁶ were used to measure racial centrality ($\alpha=.92$). See Appendix A for a list of all items used in the study.

Racial public regard. Two items from the MIBI were used to measure racial public regard ($\alpha=.81$).

Racial private regard. Two items from the MIBI were used to measure racial private regard ($\alpha=.82$).

Muslim centrality. The same two items used to measure racial centrality were adapted to measure religious centrality ($\alpha=.88$).

Muslim public regard. The same two items used to measure racial public regard were adapted to measure Muslim public regard ($\alpha=.76$).

Perceived job discrimination. One item measured perceptions of job discrimination. Respondents were asked, “How much do you think that racial discrimination might keep you from getting the job you want?”

Uncertainty Intolerance. Two items from the intolerance of uncertainty scale were used to measure uncertainty intolerance ($\alpha=.80$).⁴⁷

Black Resources. Three constructs were used to create a latent measure of Black resources. Respondents were asked (1) how much they know about famous Black American personalities, (2) how much they know about Black American socio-political-historical issues, and (3) how regularly they studied Black history. A separate score was given for self-reported knowledge of Black American

⁴⁶ Robert M. Sellers, Stephanie A. J. Rowley, Tabbye M. Chavous, J. Nicole Shelton, and Mia A. Smith, “Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity: A Preliminary Investigation of Reliability and Construct Validity,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 73, no. 4 (1997): 805.

⁴⁷ Kristine Buhr and Michael J. Dugas, “The Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale: Psychometric Properties of the English Version,” *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 40, no. 8 (2002): 931–45.

personalities and issues, whereas a single item asked respondents, “How often do you study the traditions or history of your racial background” We felt these three components captured various types of race-related resources that one could draw from.

Religiosity. Four items were used to create a measure of reported religiosity ($\alpha=.67$). Respondents were asked about their level of religiosity, intimate relationship with Allah, how often they read the Qur’an, and how much they knew about Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Outcome variables

John Henryism. One item measured John Henryism. Respondents were asked, “How much do you believe, because of your race, that you will always have to work harder than others to prove yourself?”

Mental health. Three items were used to capture a latent measure of mental health over the past month. Respondents were asked about their anxiety, ability to focus, and well-being ($\alpha=.77$). Higher scores indicated worse mental health.

Self-esteem. One item was used to measure global self-esteem. Respondents were asked, “When you think about yourself, how do you feel?”

Analytic approach

To answer our first research question (RQ1) about Black Muslim identity, we used cluster analyses to understand the holistic pattern of identity-related beliefs that people had about being Black and Muslim.⁴⁸ To answer our second research question (RQ2) about Black Muslim mental health and self-esteem, we used structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze the data. SEM allows for simultaneously estimating the direct and indirect effects of multiple predictors and outcomes. This method allowed us to see the interdependencies amongst predictors

⁴⁸ We first ran a hierarchical agglomerative clustering algorithm (Ward’s method) to determine the best cluster solution. K-means clustering was subsequently performed to fine-tune cluster homogeneity by reassigning cases to the optimal cluster.

in order to explain the relations between constructs of interest. SEM provides advantages over regression analysis by allowing for simultaneously testing multiple relationships amongst variables. Figure 1 depicts the hypothesized model of the predictors of Black Muslim mental health and self-esteem.⁴⁹

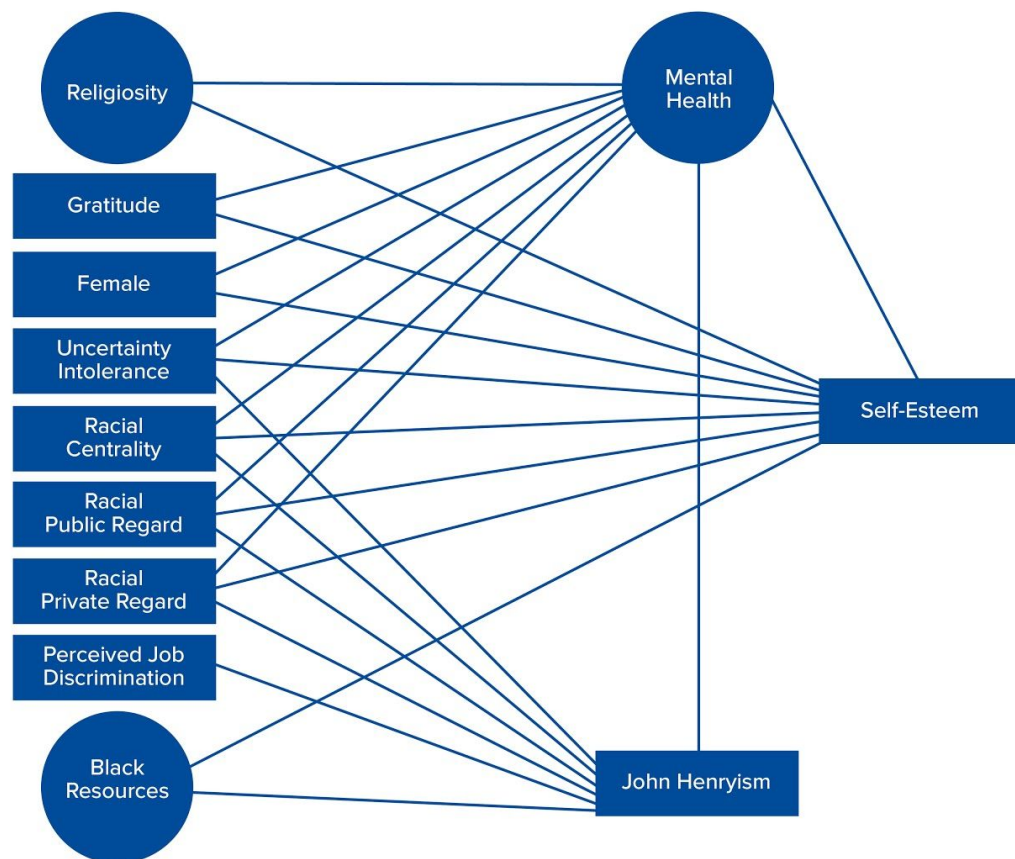


Figure 1: Theorized Model of Black Muslim Mental Health and Self-Esteem

⁴⁹ Ovals represent latent variables that have been modeled using factor analysis. Rectangles are observed variables.

Results

The Black Muslims in our study generally reported high levels of Black and Muslim centrality. 73% reported being Black as very or extremely important to their self-image, and 84% reported being Muslim as very or extremely important to their self-image. In contrast, levels of Black and Muslim public regard were incredibly low. Less than half a percent (0.4%) felt that society respected Blacks quite a bit or a lot. Slightly over one percent (1.1%) felt that society respected Muslims quite a bit or a lot.

In addition to high levels of identification with Islam, 83% reported praying five times a day, 33% reported reading the Qur'an daily, 79% considered their relationship with Allah to be quite or very intimate, and 50% reported knowing quite a bit or a lot about Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. 66% were born in the US and 43% were converts to Islam. See Table 1 and 2 in Appendix A for descriptive statistics and correlations.

Profiles of Black Muslim identity

The results of the cluster analysis revealed five profiles of Black and Muslim identities.⁵⁰ See Figure 2 for a visual depiction of the profiles. Being Muslim was central to every identity profile, whereas Black centrality differed between profiles. The first profile was characterized by medium Black centrality, high Muslim centrality, medium Black public regard, and medium Muslim public regard. We labeled this group *Muslim more central than Black/medium regard* ($n=78$, 16.5%). The second profile, *Muslim more central than Black/low regard* ($n=111$, 23.5%), was similar to the first, but had substantially lower perceptions of Black and Muslim public regard. The third profile, *Dual centrality/medium regard* ($n=130$, 27.5%), exhibited high levels of both Black and Muslim centrality and medium levels of Black and Muslim public regard. The fourth profile, *Muslim central only/medium regard* ($n=40$, 8.5%), had the fewest people and was characterized by low Black centrality, high Muslim centrality, and medium regard. The fifth cluster,

⁵⁰ The five-cluster solution explained 57% of the variance.

Dual centrality/low regard ($n=114$, 24%) was similar to the third cluster, except that public regard was substantially lower.

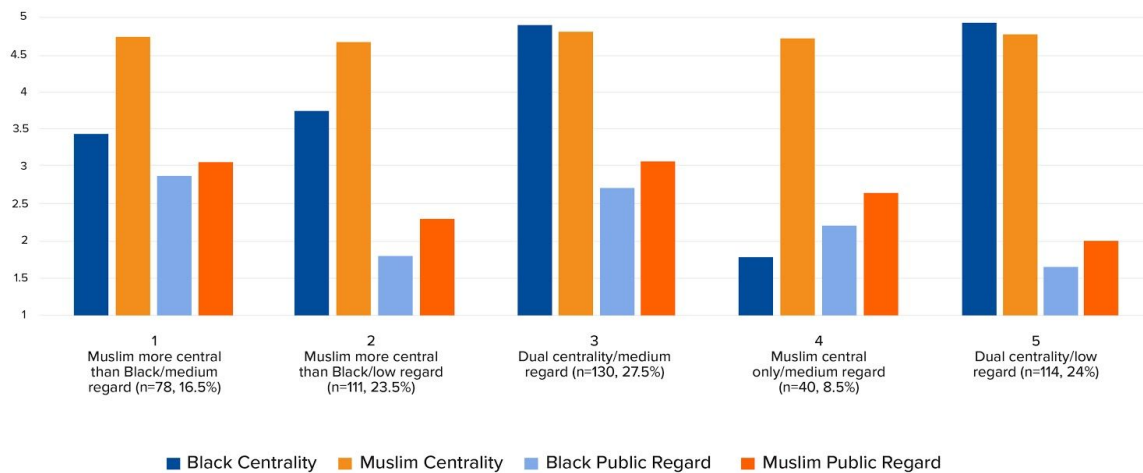


Figure 2: Profiles of Black Muslim Identity

Figure 2. Profiles of Black Muslim Identity

We investigated how these identity profiles related to mental health and self-esteem. Although the overall ANOVA was not significant ($p > 0.05$), we performed pairwise means to see how the profiles differed. Profiles with low regard (*Muslim more central than Black/low regard* (2) and *Dual centrality/low regard* (5) had significantly worse mental health than the other profiles. Thus, any differences in mental health between identity profiles were primarily related to perceiving others as not valuing Blacks and Muslims in society. As for self-esteem differences, the *Dual centrality/medium regard* profile (3) was associated with higher self-esteem than the *Muslim more central than Black/medium regard* (1) and *Muslim more central than Black/low regard* (2) profiles. In general, profiles with high Black and Muslim centrality (profiles 3 and 5) had higher self-esteem

than profiles with only high Muslim centrality (profiles 1 and 2). The exception to the overall findings was the *Muslim central only/medium regard* profile. People in this profile reported significantly lower levels of perceived job discrimination than the other profiles.⁵¹

Predictors of mental health and self-esteem

Before presenting the results of our empirical model predicting Black Muslim mental health and self-esteem, we want to briefly share how Black Muslims differed from non-Black Muslims on key constructs of interest to better situate our results. Black Muslims had higher levels of perceived job discrimination, John Henryism, and self-esteem, whereas there were no significant differences in mental health between them and non-Black Muslims (Figure 3).⁵² We will explain our results in a piecemeal fashion, starting with the predictors of John Henryism (i.e., the internalized belief of needing to work harder than non-Black Americans to succeed), followed by the predictors of mental health, and concluding with the predictors of self-esteem. See Figure 4 for a visual summary and Table 3 in Appendix A for the full results of the structural equation model.⁵³

⁵¹ The average perceived job discrimination for the *Muslim central only/medium regard* profile was 2.52 compared to 3.39 for all other groups (out of five). This difference of .88 was statistically significant ($t = 4.1, p < 0.001$).

⁵² Differences in perceived job discrimination, John Henryism, and self-esteem were statistically significant across the five profiles. T-tests were used to measure statistically significant differences ($p < 0.001$). Mental health was not significantly different across profiles.

⁵³ Stata 15 was used to run the model. The model was estimated using full-information maximum-likelihood estimation (FIML). The model fit the data well. $\chi^2(101) = 231.98$, RMSEA = .051, CFI = .93.

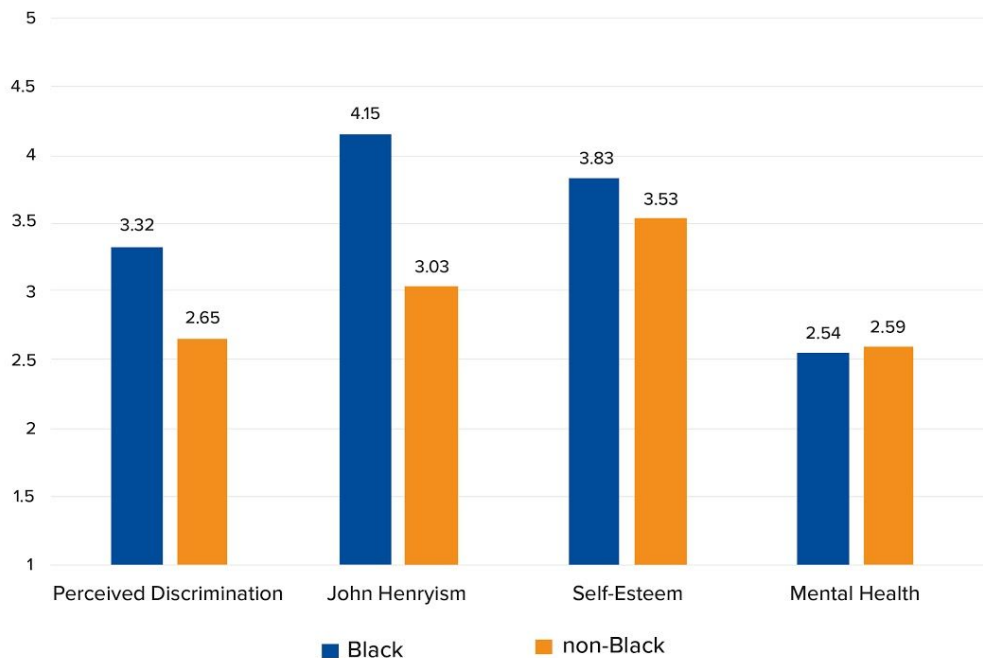


Figure 3: Difference Between Black Muslims and Non-Black Muslims

Figure 3. Differences between Black and non-Black Muslims on key variables

John Henryism was predicted by racial public regard ($B=-.22$), perceived job discrimination ($B=.45$), uncertainty intolerance ($B=.11$), and Black resources ($B=.14$).⁵⁴ An increase in perceiving society as valuing and respecting Blacks was related to a decrease in believing one would have to work harder because of their race. An increase in anticipating job discrimination due to one's race was related to an increase in believing one would have to work harder because of their race. An

⁵⁴ Standardized betas (B) are interpreted as follows: a one standard deviation increase in Black centrality was associated with a .12 standard deviation increase in John Henryism, while controlling for all other variables in the model (i.e., holding the value of other variables at the average [mean] level). All significant coefficients meet the threshold of $p < 0.05$.

increase in Black resources, which included knowledge of famous Black American personalities, historical issues, and studying Black traditions and history was also associated with increased John Henryism. The largest predictor of John Henryism was perceived job discrimination, which had an effect nearly three times greater than any other predictor.

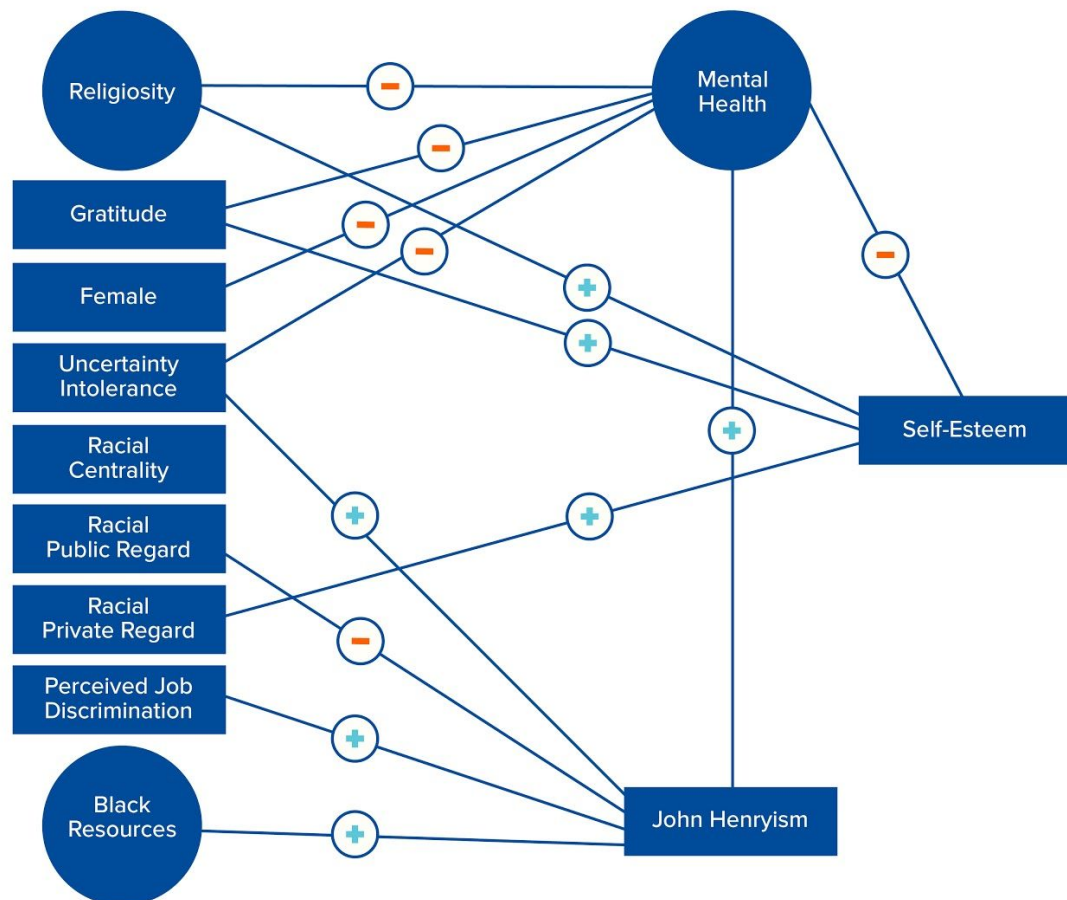


Figure 4: Black Muslim Mental Health and Self-Esteem

Figure 4. Structural Equation Model Results for Mental Health and Self-Esteem

Mental health was predicted by John Henryism ($B=.16$), uncertainty intolerance ($B=.38$), being female ($B=.17$), gratitude ($B=-.13$), and religiosity ($B=-.21$). In other words, increases in John Henryism, uncertainty intolerance, and being female were associated with worse mental health. Increases in gratitude and religiosity were associated with better mental health. Racial public regard did not predict mental health directly. Rather, it had an indirect effect on mental health by increasing John Henryism, which was related to worse mental health.⁵⁵

Self-esteem was predicted by mental health ($B=-.37$), racial private regard ($B=.15$), gratitude ($B=.12$), and religiosity ($B=.16$). Higher levels of racial private regard, gratitude, and religiosity were associated with higher self-esteem, whereas poor mental health was the biggest predictor of lower self-esteem.

Discussion

The present study sheds light on the religious and racial identities of Black American Muslims. Drawing from prominent theories of Black identity, we find that Black American Muslims differ in how they incorporate race and Islam into their identities. In addition to having to deal with negative appraisals of others regarding their religion, Black Muslims have to additionally deal with negative appraisals of others regarding their race. This “triple consciousness” with which Black Muslims have to navigate life has an effect on their well-being. The following two quotes from two of our participants capture the complexity and challenges that many Black Muslims in America face.

I'm a Black, immigrant, Muslim woman. The intersections in my identity make it impossible for me to ever rest. I'm always worried about some form of my identity and I feel a duty to always help.

Being a black Muslim can sometimes be a confusing feeling. Both demographics are very often disliked and have countless negative

⁵⁵ Black public regard had a statistically significant indirect effect on mental health. John Henryism fully mediated its effect on mental health.

stereotypes associated with them. I've experienced racism from other Muslims and I've experienced Islamophobia.

Below, we provide a discussion of some of the key findings and how they relate to prior work centered around Black identity, religiosity, and discrimination. We conclude with implications for future research and Muslim communities.

Religiosity is a protective factor for Black Muslims

A key finding of our study is that religiosity plays a major role in navigating racial discrimination and improving overall well-being. This finding aligns with prior research over the past five decades that has examined the role of religiosity in the lives of Black Americans.⁵⁶ Far from superfluous, religiosity plays a key component in the mental health of Black Americans, including Black Muslims. We found that intimacy with Allah, knowledge of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and frequent engagement with the Qur'an were related to better mental health and higher self-esteem. The Qur'an states, "Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured."⁵⁷ Thus, through engaging with the Qur'an and connecting to Allah, Muslims are able to find peace of mind despite the challenges they face. The life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ exemplifies this as during his most difficult experiences with religious discrimination and being subjected to abuse, he would find solace with the revelation and through intimate conversation with Allah. This confirms the general finding that Black Americans who habitually engage in their religious practices have been found to be more prepared and better able to endure and cope with mundane and also extraordinary events of adversity.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Edward Franklin Frazier and C. Eric Lincoln, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974); Benjamin E. Mays, "The American Negro and the Christian Religion," *Journal of Negro Education* (1939): 530–38.

⁵⁷ Qur'an 13:28.

⁵⁸ Jacqueline S. Mattis, N'jeri Mitchell, Nyasha A. Grayman, Alix Zapata, Robert Joseph Taylor, Linda M. Chatters, and Harold W. Neighbors, "Uses of Ministerial Support by African Americans: A Focus Group Study," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 77, no. 2 (2007): 249–58; Harold W. Neighbors, James S. Jackson, Phillip J. Bowman, and Gerald Gurin, "Stress, Coping, and Black Mental Health: Preliminary Findings from a National Study," *Prevention in Human Services* 2, no. 3 (1983): 5–29.

As previously noted in this paper, racial discrimination is a common experience for Black Americans of all ages.⁵⁹ Evidence supports that religiosity in this population plays a significant buffering role against the detrimental mental health outcomes brought on by daily and historical racial oppression.⁶⁰ In a study that may partially help explain why, Black men who engaged in more religious coping were found to forgive race-related transgressions at higher rates.⁶¹

Our findings on religiosity and self-esteem are also supported by prior literature that has found religiosity among Black Americans positively impacts their self-concept and therefore self-esteem. Black American adults who reported higher scores of salient everyday religious practices have been found to report higher levels of self-esteem, life satisfaction, and perceived self-control than those who were lower in daily religious adherence.⁶² Indeed, Black American culture is deeply ingrained with belief in God and religious practice. Faith has been referenced as “how we got over”—a statement derived from the rich religious traditions of *Negro Spirituals* within Black American culture.⁶³ Moreover, progress for Black Americans historically has always been connected to a belief in a divine sanction to fight for social and racial justice.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ We investigated differences in perceptions of job discrimination and John Henryism as a function of age and did not find any differences.

⁶⁰ Alex Bierman, “Does Religion Buffer the Effects of Discrimination on Mental Health? Differing Effects by Race,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45, no. 4 (2006): 551–65.

⁶¹ Wisdom Powell Hammond, Kira Hudson Banks, and Jacqueline S. Mattis, “Masculinity Ideology and Forgiveness of Racial Discrimination among African American Men: Direct and Interactive Relationships,” *Sex Roles* 55, nos. 9–10 (2006): 679–92.

⁶² Bruce Blaine and Jennifer Crocker, “Religiousness, Race, and Psychological Well-Being: Exploring Social Psychological Mediators,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 21, no. 10 (1995): 1031–41.

⁶³ Jack L. Daniel and Geneva Smitherman, “How I Got Over: Communication Dynamics in the Black Community,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 62, no. 1 (1976): 26–39; James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).

⁶⁴ Albert J. Raboteau, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Ambiguous racial discrimination may play a central role in Black Muslim mental health outcomes

Racial identity beliefs play an important role in promoting resiliency against racialized discrimination.⁶⁵ Centrality, public regard, and private regard operate in meaningfully different ways in Black mental health and self-esteem. High private regard was found to predict higher self-esteem. Similarly, profiles with higher Black and Muslim centrality reported higher self-esteem. This indicates that positive attitudes towards Blacks are associated with higher self-esteem, even when considering the impact of discrimination and low public regard.⁶⁶ Thus, private regard seems to function as a means of preventing the internalization of other people's negative appraisals about one's race.

Low public regard, holding perceptions that others do not view Blacks in a positive way, was found to influence mental health and self-esteem in different ways. Low public regard was not directly related to either outcome, but seemed to indirectly relate to both. The structural equation model found that public regard influenced John Henryism, which then related to mental health. Thus, low public regard appears to have a trickle-down effect on increased psychological distress. The results of the profiles support this, as any differences in mental health between identity profiles were found to relate to public regard beliefs. Racial public regard did not appear related to self-esteem, suggesting that Black Muslims are not internalizing the negative appraisals of others into their self-esteem.

The relationship between public regard and discrimination is quite nuanced. Although Black Americans with low public regard beliefs are less bothered by experiences of racial discrimination than those with high regard,⁶⁷ Black

⁶⁵ Carol A. Wong, Jacquelynne S. Eccles, and Arnold Sameroff, "The Influence of Ethnic Discrimination and Ethnic Identification on African American Adolescents' School and Socioemotional Adjustment," *Journal of Personality* 71, no. 6 (2003): 1197–232; David H. Chae, Karen D. Lincoln, and James S. Jackson, "Discrimination, Attribution, and Racial Group Identification: Implications for Psychological Distress among Black Americans in the National Survey of American Life (2001–2003)," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 81, no. 4 (2011): 498.

⁶⁶ Rowley et al., "Racial Identity and Self-Esteem," 715; Camara Phyllis Jones, "Levels of Racism: A Theoretic Framework and a Gardener's Tale," *American Journal of Public Health* 90, no. 8 (2000): 1212.

⁶⁷ Robert M. Sellers and J. Nicole Shelton, "The Role of Racial Identity in Perceived Racial Discrimination," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 84, no. 5 (2003): 1079.

Americans with low public regard display protective factors against *blatant* forms of racial discrimination but are *more vulnerable to ambiguous conditions* of racial discrimination.⁶⁸ Hoggard and colleagues propose that ambiguous conditions of racial discrimination (e.g., subtle interpersonal mistreatment) may not provide Blacks with low public regard with sufficient cues and thus may cause them to become “caught off guard” and therefore less prepared to cope with the experience.⁶⁹

Taking the results altogether, we found that Black Muslims with low public regard had worse mental health. There are several possible explanations for this. It is possible that Black Muslims with low public regard and who have higher levels of psychological distress are experiencing high levels of *ambiguous forms of discrimination* inside and outside of the Muslim community. Given that most of our sample reported extremely high levels of Muslim centrality, it is plausible that a meaningful portion of discrimination is in fact occurring in Muslim community spaces. The quote shared at the beginning of the discussion lends some support to this hypothesis. Future research should investigate this further.

Impact of economic discrimination on Black Muslims

Among the many detrimental impacts of structural racism in the lives of Black Americans is its impact on Black economic mobility.⁷⁰ Our findings suggest that a primary cause for John Henryism among Black Muslims is anticipating job discrimination. The idea of never being able to rest is what John Henryism is at its core. Our empirical results indeed show that Black Muslims have substantially higher rates of perceiving job discrimination and John Henryism, both of which are damaging both psychologically and physiologically. Numerous studies have shown

⁶⁸ Lori S. Hoggard, Shawn C. T. Jones, and Robert M. Sellers, “Racial Cues and Racial Identity: Implications for How African Americans Experience and Respond to Racial Discrimination,” *Journal of Black Psychology* 43, no. 4 (2017): 409–32.

⁶⁹ Hoggard, Jones, and Sellers, 409–32.

⁷⁰ Vicki A. Bogan and William Darity Jr., “Culture and Entrepreneurship? African American and Immigrant Self-Employment in the United States,” *Journal of Socio-Economics* 37, no. 5 (2008): 1999–2019; John Sibley Butler, *Entrepreneurship and Self-Help among Black Americans: A Reconsideration of Race and Economics* (New York: SUNY Press, 2012); William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, Series in Political Economy and Public Law, No. 14 (Boston: University of Pennsylvania, 1899).

how John Henryism takes a toll on cardiovascular and mental health. The pressure of having to work harder than others due to anticipating discrimination literally increases blood pressure.⁷¹

Our findings also align with a large body of research examining the role of economic inequality facing the Black American community. The causal factors of economic inequality are strongly linked to an enduring legacy of chattel slavery, lynching, racial terrorism, Jim crow racism, and state and federally sponsored institutional discriminations.⁷² Consequently, Black Americans experience the highest levels of wealth inequality, second only to Indigenous Americans. As of 2016, the typical middle-class Black household had \$13,024 in wealth versus \$149,703 for the median White household. In other words, you would have to combine the net worth of 11.5 Black households to get the net worth of a typical White U.S. household.⁷³ The difference also demonstrates that no progress has been made in reducing income and wealth inequalities between the majority of White and Black households since the 1970s after the passage of major federal policies addressing equality.⁷⁴

A common assumption is that wealth gaps are primarily due to a lack of education among Blacks, yet data continue to show the opposite. In our sample, the difference in education between Blacks and non-Blacks was minimal but differences in wealth were substantial.⁷⁵ Despite stereotypes, Black Americans have an enduring legacy of pursuing higher education.⁷⁶ Moreover, even when

⁷¹ James, "John Henryism and Health," 163–82; Umarji and Elwan, "Embracing Uncertainty."

⁷² Asia Bento and Tony N. Brown, "Belief in Systemic Racism and Self-Employment among Working Blacks," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2020, 1–18.

⁷³ Heather Long and Andrew Van Dam, "The Black-White Economic Divide Is as Wide as It Was in 1968," *Washington Post*, June 4, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/06/04/economic-divide-black-households/>.

⁷⁴ Moritz Kuhn, Moritz Schularick, and Ulrike Steins, "Wealth and Income Inequality in America, 1949–2016," *Journal of Political Economy*, 2019.

⁷⁵ The difference in education was 3.9 vs. 4.1 (with 4 representing a bachelor's degree), whereas wealth was 4.1 vs. 5.1 (with 4 representing an income of \$60–79K and 5 representing an income of \$80–99K).

⁷⁶ Ibram H. Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstitution of Higher Education, 1965–1972* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Marybeth Gasman and Roger L. Geiger, "Introduction: Higher Education for African-Americans before the Civil Rights Era, 1900–1964," in *Higher Education for African Americans Before the Civil Rights Era, 1900–1964* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2012), 7–22.

comparing equal educational backgrounds, Black American women working full-time make only 61 cents for each dollar made by White American men, and 19 cents less than White American women.⁷⁷ The Samuel Du Bois Cook Center on Social Equity emphatically states,

Blacks cannot close the racial wealth gap by changing their individual behavior—i.e., by assuming more “personal responsibility” or acquiring the portfolio management insights associated with “financially literacy”—if the structural sources of racial inequality remain unchanged. There are no actions that Black Americans can take unilaterally that will have much of an effect on reducing the racial wealth gap. For the gap to be closed, America must undergo a vast social transformation produced by the adoption of bold national policies, policies that will forge a way forward by addressing, finally, the long-standing consequences of slavery, the Jim Crow years that followed, and ongoing racism and discrimination that exist in our society today.⁷⁸

Our results also confirm what decades of research have found. Black Americans are primarily concerned not whether other groups like them, but their potential to express self-determination in their own lives.

Black women are disproportionately impacted

Malcolm X in 1965 said that Black women are the most disrespected persons in America—the same rings true in 2020. Our findings that being female, among a sample of Black Muslims, is predictive of increased mental distress also aligns with a large body of literature about the experiences of discrimination and oppression faced by Black women in America. Black women are more likely than any other group to experience domestic violence by an intimate partner, regardless of income, and the least likely to benefit economically from their educational qualifications.⁷⁹ In Muslim communities, where the majority congregation is not

⁷⁷ National Women’s Law Center, “The Wage Gap for Black Women: Working Longer and Making Less,” August 19, 2019, <https://nwl.org/resources/the-wage-gap-for-black-women-working-longer-and-making-less/>.

⁷⁸ William Darity, Darrick Hamilton, Mark Paul, Alan Aja, Anne Price, Antonio Moore, and Caterina Chiopris, “What We Get Wrong about Closing the Racial Wealth Gap,” Samuel Du Bois Cook Center on Social Equity, April 2018, <https://socialequity.duke.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/what-we-get-wrong.pdf>.

⁷⁹ Krim K. Lacey, Tina Jiwatram-Negron, and Karen Powell Sears, “Help-Seeking Behaviors and Barriers among Black Women Exposed to Severe Intimate Partner Violence: Findings from a Nationally Representative Sample,”

Black, Black women commonly report that non-Black Muslims do not speak to them or stand close to them in the prayer lines.⁸⁰ Black American Muslim women thus have an expansive range of discrimination experiences compounded by being Black, Muslim, female, and ethnically, Black American. Our study adds to understanding multidimensional contributors to the discrimination experienced by Black Muslim with gender as a significant factor.

As a community, we are far from the days where a Black woman of African ancestry could be praised like Umm Ayman was for being a motherly figure to the Prophet or like Umm Zafar, a Black woman, of whom the Prophet said to the companions, “Would you like me to show you a woman from the people of paradise?”⁸¹ Instead, we are living in a time where Black women are seen at *best*, the *least* of us. Efforts must be taken to (1) better understand the experiences of Black women in the Muslim community and (2) to assist our communities in assuring that Black women, in addition to all women of all backgrounds, are being provided their due rights of honor and supported as members of the Muslim community.

Implications for Muslim communities

We believe the results of this study have implications for the Muslim community. First, it is a religious imperative to empathize and understand the plight of the *ummah*, of which Black Muslims constitute the largest group in America. The Prophet ﷺ said, “The parable of the believers in their affection, mercy, and compassion for each other is that of a body. When any limb aches, the whole body reacts with sleeplessness and fever.”⁸² Black Muslims in this country face more discrimination than any other group and our findings confirm that their perceptions of discrimination affect their lives in various ways. Thus, all Muslims in America need to be aware of Black American history, as well as present realities, in order to

Violence Against Women, June 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801220917464>; Samantha M. Sbrocchi, “Gender Pay Gap: The Time to Speak Up Is Now,” *Touro Law Review* 35, no. 2 (2019): 839.

⁸⁰ Jamilah A. Karim, “To Be Black, Female, and Muslim: A Candid Conversation about Race in the American Umma,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 2006, 225–33.

⁸¹ Ibn al-Jawzī, “Illuminating the Darkness: The Virtues of Blacks and Abyssinians,” *Dār al-Arqam*, 2019.

⁸² *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 5665; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2586.

understand the challenges and trauma that our brothers and sisters have to deal with, as well as the assets and strengths that Black Muslims have to offer. Therefore, non-Black *masjids* and Islamic organizations must invest in educating their communities in order to motivate the collective Muslim American *ummah* to care about and fight for the rights of the oppressed and benefit from their knowledge.⁸³ This form of education should not be limited to an annual program during Black History Month but through continuous respect for Black perspectives, knowledge, and experiences.⁸⁴ Furthermore, through incorporating Black educational programming in non-Black communities,⁸⁵ Black Muslims will feel an increased sense of relatedness and belonging to the community.⁸⁶ Additionally, such efforts will support the development of healthy Black and Muslim identities that should promote better mental health and self-esteem.

The Muslim community must also explore ways to reduce feelings of John Henryism and discrimination within our religious spaces.⁸⁷ Increasing Black Muslim representation in important community roles is an essential step to reducing John Henryism and discrimination. Just as the Prophet ﷺ had the foresight and wisdom to place Black companions in numerous positions of leadership, increasing the number of Black Muslims in positions of power is likely to have numerous positive outcomes. The community as a whole stands to benefit from the wealth of knowledge that Black Muslims have about America and Islam.

⁸³ Muhammad Khalifa, Omar Suleiman, James Wright, and Nimo M. Abdi, “Ancestral Knowledge and American Muslims: Rooting Cultural Resistance in Islam,” *Yaqeen*, February 21, 2019, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/muhammad-khalifa/ancestral-knowledge-and-american-muslims-rooting-cultural-resistance-in-islam/>.

⁸⁴ Muhammad Khalifa and Omar Suleiman, “Black History, American Muslims, and Conversations about Race,” *Yaqeen*, February 14, 2020, <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/muhammad-khalifa/black-history-american-muslims-and-conversations-about-race/>.

⁸⁵ Muhammad, “Black and Muslim.”

⁸⁶ Lateef, “Insights for Muslim American Youth Development.”

⁸⁷ See Richard J. Reddick, “We Can’t Breathe at Work, Either: John Henryism and the Health Impact of Racism,” *Fortune*, June 19, 2020, <https://fortune.com/2020/06/19/john-henryism-black-racism-workplace/> for workplace-related examples.

The struggle for social justice must be championed with an Islamic ritualistic foundation

An important takeaway from our study is the importance of maintaining a healthy Black and religious identity along with a strong foundation of religious practices. The Muslim community can learn from the Black American community, which less than 150 years post slavery, was able to establish institutes of higher learning across the southeast (i.e., Historically Black Colleges and Universities). These institutions continue to produce leaders in all disciplines, and their achievements include spearheading the civil rights movement.⁸⁸ At the core of those movements and achievements has been a firm grounding in religiosity, which historically assisted Black Americans to achieve what previously seemed impossible.⁸⁹ Therefore, we believe it is essential for all Muslims in America to support institutions where Black Muslims can develop a sound understanding of their race and religion. The ability to maintain a strong religious commitment in the pursuit of success is vital, as striving for success outside of a divine epistemology is perhaps no more than striving to run into a “burning house,” as Dr. Martin Luther King explained. Ignoring Islam leads to a situation where the potential for success is slim and the end of oppression unknown, given the current treatment of persons who are not only Black but also Muslim.⁹⁰ For Muslims, our epistemologies must be grounded in the book of Allah and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Conclusion

The present study is one of the first to empirically investigate Black Muslim identity and well-being in a large sample of American Muslims. Understanding the racial and religious identities and lived experiences of Black Muslims is critically important in understanding the Muslim American community. The Prophet said,

⁸⁸ Martha S. Jones, *Birthright Citizens: A History of Race and Rights in Antebellum America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Henry N. Drewry and H. Doermann, *Stand and Prosper: Private Black Colleges and their Students* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

⁸⁹ Diane J. Chandler, “African American Spirituality: Through Another Lens,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 10, no. 2 (2017): 159–81.

⁹⁰ Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*, vol. 2 (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010); Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

“None of you will have [complete] faith until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.”⁹¹ Every Muslim wishes for good mental health and for a discrimination-free life. If one wants this for themselves, they should want it for their Black Muslim brothers and sisters. It is important to note that this study relied on correlational data and therefore the relations between constructs do not constitute evidence of strong causality. Rather, our results support and contribute to a vast body of prior literature and provide evidence that race plays a key component in well-being. We encourage researchers and community-based organizations to engage in more research on the largest and most marginalized community of Muslims in America. We hope that these research endeavors lead to investments and interventions that support the healthy development of Black Muslims and the general Muslim community.

Appendix A

Survey Questions Used in the Study

Asked on a Likert scale of 1 to 5

Racial/Religious Centrality

1. How important is being Black/Muslim a part of your self-image?
2. How important is being Black/Muslim a reflection of who you are?

Racial/Religious Private Regard

1. How good do you feel about Black people?
2. How happy are you to be Black?

Racial/Religious Public Regard

1. How much does society view Blacks/Muslims people as valuable contributors?
2. In general, how much do others respect Black/Muslim people?

Perceived Work Discrimination

⁹¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 13; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 45.

1. How much do you think racial discrimination might keep you from getting the job you want?

John Henryism

1. How much do you believe, because of your race, that you will always have to work harder than others to prove yourself?

Uncertainty Intolerance

1. My mind can't be relaxed if I don't know what will happen tomorrow.
2. Uncertainty makes me uneasy, anxious, or stressed.

Religiosity

1. How intimate do you consider your relationship with Allah?
2. How much do you know about Prophet Muhammad?
3. How religious do you consider yourself?
4. How often do you read the Qur'an?

Black Resources

1. How often do you study the traditions or history of your racial background?
2. Knowledge of Black American Issues (Asked on a Likert scale of 1 to 4)

How much do you know about:

- Prison Industrial Complex
- COINTEL PRO
- School-to-Prison Pipeline
- Black Wall Street
- Nation of Islam
- Tuskegee syphilis experiment
- Jim Crow laws

3. Knowledge of Black American Personalities (Asked on a Likert scale of 1 to 4)

How much do you know about:

- Malcolm X
- Marcus Garvey
- H. Rap Brown (Jamil Al-Amin)
- Warrithuddin Muhammad
- Martin Luther King

- Rosa Parks

Tables

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Racial Centrality	4.16	1.01	1	5
Racial Public Regard	2.24	0.75	1	5
Racial Private Regard	4.52	0.62	2	5
Muslim Centrality	4.80	0.46	2	5
Muslim Public Regard	2.56	0.75	1	5
Muslim Private Regard	4.52	0.55	2	5
Perceived Job Discrimination	3.32	1.20	1	5
John Henryism	4.16	1.06	1	5
Uncertainty Intolerance	2.93	1.16	1	5
Female	0.71	0.45	0	1
Gratitude	4.15	0.89	1	5
Black Personalities	2.62	0.74	1	4
Black Issues	2.53	0.85	1	4
Racial History	3.38	1.08	1	5
Qur'an Reading	3.56	1.33	1	5
Self-reported Religiosity	3.74	0.86	1	5
Intimate with Allah	4.15	0.85	1	5
Knowledge of the Prophet	3.62	0.90	1	5

Note: SD - Standard Deviation

Table 2
Correlations of Study Variables

	SE	MH	RC	Rpub	Rpriv	MC	Mpub	Mpriv	PD	JH	UI	Fem	Grat	BR	RR
SE	1.00														
MH	-0.48***	1.00													
RC	0.06	0.07	1.00												
Rpub	0.14**	-0.19***	-0.04	1.00											
Rpriv	0.28***	-0.15**	0.33***	0.10*	1.00										
MC	0.12*	-0.08	0.13**	0.06	0.22***	1.00									
Mpub	0.09	-0.11*	-0.03	0.38***	0.02	-0.00	1.00								
Mpriv	0.17***	-0.14**	0.09*	0.19***	0.32***	0.39***	0.09*	1.00							
PD	-0.06	0.16**	0.24***	-0.28***	0.10*	0.02	-0.10*	0.02	1.00						

Table 3**Full Results of the Structural Equation Model**

Structural Model		<i>B</i>	Std. Err.	<i>z</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
John Henryism	Racial Centrality	0.06	0.04	1.38	0.167
	Racial Public Regard	-0.22	0.04	-5.40	0.000
	Racial Private Regard	0.02	0.04	0.50	0.614
	Perceived Job Discrimination	0.45	0.04	11.76	0.000
	Uncertainty Intolerance	0.11	0.04	2.73	0.006
	Black Resources	0.14	0.05	3.19	0.001
Self-Esteem	Mental Health	-0.37	0.06	-5.95	0.000
	Racial Centrality	0.02	0.04	0.43	0.669
	Racial Public Regard	0.03	0.04	0.66	0.512
	Racial Private Regard	0.15	0.04	3.45	0.001
	Uncertainty Intolerance	-0.06	0.05	-1.24	0.216
	Female	0.01	0.04	0.15	0.882
	Gratitude	0.12	0.05	2.42	0.016
	Religiosity	0.16	0.07	2.34	0.019
	Black Resources	0.04	0.05	0.71	0.481
Mental Health	John Henryism	0.16	0.05	3.19	0.001
	Racial Centrality	0.02	0.05	0.37	0.713
	Racial Public Regard	-0.07	0.05	-1.46	0.144
	Racial Private Regard	-0.06	0.05	-1.27	0.203
	Uncertainty Intolerance	0.38	0.05	8.14	0.000
	Female	0.17	0.05	3.77	0.000
	Gratitude	-0.13	0.06	-2.34	0.019
	Religiosity	-0.21	0.07	-2.91	0.004
	Black Resources	0.05	0.06	0.95	0.340
Measurement Models		<i>B</i>	Std. Err.	<i>z</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
Mental Health	Anxiety	0.83	0.03	31.55	0.000
	Wellness	0.70	0.03	22.38	0.000
	Focus	0.68	0.03	21.23	0.000
Religiosity	Qur'an	0.43	0.05	8.89	0.000
	Prophet	0.56	0.04	13.11	0.000
	Intimate with Allah	0.72	0.04	18.92	0.000
	Religiousness	0.69	0.04	17.51	0.000
Black Resources	Black History	0.59	0.04	16.05	0.000
	Black Issues	0.89	0.02	37.77	0.000
	Black Personalities	0.84	0.02	34.15	0.000

Note: *N* = 499, All coefficients are standardized.
 χ^2 (101) = 231.98, RMSEA = .051, CFI = .93.