

## **Black Adolescent Girls: Do Gender Role and Racial Identity: Impact Their Self-Esteem?**

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This study was designed to explore Black adolescent girls' gender roles, racial identity, and self-esteem. These variables have not been examined together in a study of Black girls, yet studies of girls from other racial/cultural groups have demonstrated significant relationships. This type of exploration is important because Black girls do not experience the same declines in self-esteem as girls from other racial/cultural groups. Gender role orientation and racial identity have been put forth as possible explanations for Black girls' bolstered levels of self-esteem. Results indicated that Black girls with androgynous and masculine characteristics reported high levels of self-esteem. The results also indicated that Black girls with internally defined Black racial identity attitudes reported high levels of domain-specific self-esteem. In addition, androgyny was associated with high scores on internalization (Black racial identity).

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**KEY WORDS:** Black girls; gender roles; racial identity; self-esteem.

For the past century, scholars have described adolescence as a period in girls' development when many begin to devalue their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, and, consequently, risk becoming repressed (Basow, 1999; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Deutsch, 1944; Freud, 1905; Pipher, 1994). Theorists have also described early adolescence as an important time in gender role socialization when individuals learn traditional gender role attitudes and behaviors (Erikson, 1968; Miller, 1976; Simmons & Blyth, 1987). The establishment of a traditional gender role (i.e., masculinity in boys and femininity in girls) is considered by some theorists (e.g., Erikson, 1950/1963; Kohlberg, 1966) as the major developmental task of adolescence.

Individuals are socialized into gender roles beginning in infancy, and continued through the adult

years, via immediate and distal socializing agents such as parents and the media (Ruble & Martin, 1998). Theorists have proposed that adolescence is a period of increased gender role differentiation among both boys and girls (Hill & Lynch, 1983), which is triggered by heightened changes in physical appearance and role expectations (Hill & Lynch, 1983; Rosenberg, 1965; Stoller, 1968) and the development of abstract thought (Galambos, Almeida, & Petersen, 1990). The gender intensification hypothesis asserts that there is an acceleration of gender-differential socialization during adolescence that encourages girls to display stereotypical feminine characteristics (i.e., passivity, nurturance, and submissiveness) and boys to display stereotypical masculine characteristics (i.e., independence, assertiveness, and strength) (Hill & Lynch, 1983). At adolescence, gender roles are reorganized, and the range of allowable preadolescent behaviors is restricted for boys and girls. Adolescents are encouraged to adopt the gender-typical behavior that is expected throughout adulthood (Stoller, 1968). There is ample empirical support for the gender intensification hypothesis (e.g., Galambos et al.,

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1990; Ruble & Martin, 1998). Several feminist scholars (Chodorow, 1979; Dinnerstein, 1976; Gilligan, 1982) have argued that repression in adolescent girls is a response to restrictive gender socialization practices. Researchers (e.g., Basow, 1999; Brown & Gilligan, 1992) stated that adolescent girls receive powerful messages from adults and from the culture that undermine their self-confidence, suppress their self-identity, and compel them to conform to limiting gender roles. This research, however, primarily reflects the experiences of White girls. Research on Black girls indicates that their gender roles may be less limiting and restrictive (Collins, 1991, 2000, 2004; Ward, 1996) and that their self-esteem remains relatively constant during adolescence (American Association of University Women [AAUW], 1991).

### Gender Schema Theory

Bem's (1983) gender schema theory proposes that individuals' thoughts and feelings about gender influence their response to culturally prescribed socialization practices. Bem (1981) theorized that gender-typed (masculine male and feminine female) individuals are more likely than nongender-typed individuals to be responsive to cultural gender prescriptions. Accordingly, gender-typed individuals are likely to evaluate themselves in terms of traditional stereotypes, which define the gender "appropriateness" of attitudes and behavior (Bem, 1983). In contrast, androgynous individuals' attitudes and behaviors are not selected because they are "appropriate," but rather because they are consistent with how the individual views himself or herself. Each of the gender roles (gender-typed masculine or feminine, androgynous) has implications for psychological well-being, which can vary for members of different racial/ethnic groups (Bem, 1984). The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) is a widely used measure of gender roles (Blanchard-Fields, Suhrer-Roussel, & Hertzog, 1994; Holt & Ellis, 1998; Puglisi & Jackson, 1980), which has been used with diverse samples (e.g., Harris, 1994, 1996, 1997; Konrad & Harris, 2002). A recent validity study of the BSRI with Black and White college students (Konrad & Harris, 2002) found a wide range of responses among the Black students. Some of the Black students considered stereotypical feminine attributes to be more desirable for a woman and stereotypical masculine attributes to be more desirable for a man; however, some Black students considered both

stereotypical masculine and feminine attributes to be equally desirable for men and women. Others found stereotypical masculine attributes to be desirable for women and stereotypical feminine attributes to be desirable for men. These findings are consistent with Harris's (1994) study of the validity of the BSRI with young Black adults that demonstrated that Black people consider many BSRI traits (both feminine and masculine) desirable for women and men.

### Gender Roles and Psychological Well-being

Historically, conformity to traditional gender roles was considered a prerequisite for psychological well-being. However, more contemporary researchers argue that conformity to traditional gender roles is associated with poor adjustment. These theorists assert that androgyny (e.g., possessing both masculine and feminine characteristics) or masculinity (e.g., possessing a predominance of instrumental characteristics) is positive for self-esteem and psychological well-being (Mokgathe & Schoemen, 1998; Molloy & Herzberger, 1998; Salminen, 1994; Sharpe & Heppner, 1991). More recently, researchers have found that for girls and women, nontraditional, androgynous, and stereotypical masculine characteristics are associated with life satisfaction (Mokgathe & Schoeman, 1998), positive body image (Molloy & Herzberger, 2002), and academic achievement (Robison-Awana, Kehle, Bray, Jenson, Clack, & Lawless, 2001). One major limitation of research on gender role and psychological well-being is its lack of attention to racial/ethnic differences.

### Race and Gender Socialization

Individuals internalize their conceptions of masculinity and femininity from their culture; therefore, characteristics considered to be masculine or feminine depend on one's race or culture (Harris, 1994, 1997; Pettigrew, 1964; Wade, 1996). For more than 200 years, Black women had to function similarly to their Black male slave counterparts (Fordham, 1993). Black people continue to face unequal access to economic, social, and political resources (Massey & Denton, 1993; Oliver & Shapiro, 1997), which reduces the viability of gender role differentiation (Harris, 1997). Collins (2004) stated, "Black men and women did not adhere to traditional gender roles because they could not." (p. 202). By necessity, Black women's labor has been pivotal to

the economic survival of the Black family; therefore, Black women's definitions of womanhood have expanded beyond traditional notions of femininity to include hard work, perseverance, self-reliance, tenacity, resistance, and sexual equality (Collins, 1991, 2000, 2004; Reid, 1988). As a result, Black girls have been socialized with both traditional gender roles (e.g., care and nurturance) and nontraditional gender roles (e.g., worker, financial provider) (Ward, 1996). During the same period, White people's gender roles were largely based on a sexual division of labor with separate spheres for men and women.

Research indicates that Black people's gender roles are more flexible and less restrictive than traditional patterns found among White people (McCullum, 1997); as such, Black people's gender roles are often characterized as androgynous (Harris, 1997). Harris (1996) found that Black men and women have an equally likely chance of viewing traditional masculine characteristics (e.g., independence and assertiveness) as self-descriptive. In contrast, White men's and women's gender roles were more polarized: White men were more likely to view masculine traits as self-descriptive, whereas White women were more likely to view feminine traits as self-descriptive. Therefore, for White men and women, there was a greater separation of gender roles. Similarly, Harris (1996) found that Black women reported higher levels of stereotypical masculine and androgynous characteristics than White women.

The relationship between Black adolescent girls' gender roles and psychological well-being is less clear, because of limited research in this area (Erkut, Fields, & Sing, 1996; Golden, 1996; Goodman, 1990). Molloy and Herzberger (1998) found masculinity and androgyny to be associated with high personal self-esteem among Black and White college women. Mokgatthe and Schoeman (1998) found that nontraditional gender roles were associated with life satisfaction among Black South African college students. Yet, these studies did not include adolescents. In a conceptual report, Ward (1996) asserted that Black girls who adopt the roles of worker and mother and who display strength and perseverance are likely to have a healthy self-esteem, because these roles and characteristics are consistent with their cultural teachings. Yet, Black girls are not a monolithic group socialized in the same manner. Racial identity theories have been developed to explore different ways that individuals from the same racial group identify with their group.

### Black Racial Identity

Drawing on Cross' (1971, 1991) nigrescence theory, Helms' (1990) model concerns an individual's attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward oneself and others with respect to racial group membership. Helms' (1990) model of Black racial identity proposes that Black people can move from having self-degrading racial identity attitudes to self-enhancing racial identity attitudes in which they are secure about their own racial group and appreciate people from other racial and cultural backgrounds. The model consists of the following ego identity statuses (Helms, 1996): pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization. According to Helms (1990), each status represents a "world view" through which people organize racial information about themselves, other people, and institutions. At any one point, an individual may endorse attitudes from each of the four ego statuses, with one predominant status that has the largest influence on an individual's worldview (Helms & Piper, 1994). An individual's level of racial identity, therefore, is not static and linear but can recycle through different statuses over time. Each status or "world view" is characterized by a certain level of psychological functioning that effects the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive expressions of individuals.

In the first status of Black racial identity, pre-encounter, an individual depends on White society for self-definition and approval and exhibits negative attitudes toward his or her own racial group. The second Black racial identity status, encounter, is characterized by psychological confusion and emotional turmoil triggered by an experience that challenges one's existing beliefs about the meaning and significance of race (Carter, 1995, 2000). In the third status, immersion-emersion, an individual attempts to discover his or her Black heritage by adopting a superficial and defensive Black identity, while idealizing Black culture, and denigrating White culture (Carter, 1995). In the fourth status, internalization, an individual has a positive attitude toward members of his or her own racial group as well as other racial groups; interpersonal relations and activities are characterized by social and political activism, rather than by race and culture.

Black adolescents' racial and ethnic identities have been demonstrated to be associated, generally, in the protective direction, with numerous psychological and behavioral characteristics including self-esteem, stress, and delinquent behaviors (McCreary,

Slavin, & Berry, 1996; Phinney & Kohatsu, 1997; Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998; Smith, 1999; Spencer, Cunningham, & Swanson, 1995). A positive racial identity in Black students has also been associated with academic aspirations, achievement, and pro-school attitudes and behaviors (O'Connor, 1997; Oyserman, Harrison, & Bybee, 2001; Resnicow, Soler, Braithwaite, Selassie, & Smith, 1999). In adolescence, racial identity may be a particularly central aspect of identity, as a young person seeks relationships outside of his or her family (Oyserman et al., 2001). There is a need for additional studies of adolescents of color, because they are more likely to be actively engaged in exploring their racial or ethnic identity than White adolescents (Phinney, 1992; Ross Leadbeater & Way, 1996) and the racial content of societal messages intensifies during this period (Tatum, 1997, 2004).

### Identity and Self-Esteem

Researchers have reported that White adolescent girls report a significant decrease (up to 30% in some studies; e.g., AAUW, 1991) in self-esteem from prepubescence to early adolescence (Erkut et al., 1996). Yet, Black girls' self-esteem has remained relatively constant during the same period (AAUW, 1991)—a finding that has not been explored systematically. Several hypotheses have been linked to girls' self-esteem. The gender role hypothesis asserts that gender-specific socialization practices can lead to negative outcomes, such as low self-esteem in girls (Salimen, 1994). The racial identity hypothesis asserts that positive feelings about one's own racial group are related to high self-esteem (Munford, 1994; Pyant & Yanico, 1991; Wilson & Constantine, 1999). No researchers have linked these two hypotheses together to examine how gender and racial identities are associated with Black girls' self-esteem. Correlations among Black racial identity and gender roles also have not been examined in Black girls. Helms and Piper (1994) conceptualized racial identity as a developmental process wherein an individual abandons cultural impositions of the racial self in favor of one's own personally relevant self-definition. Similarly, Bem's (1984) gender schema theory suggests that individuals who can abandon culturally imposed definitions of masculinity and femininity and develop their own guidelines for gender roles are more psychologically healthy (Bem, 1974). Understanding whether development in one domain (gen-

der) is related to development in another domain (race) may further elucidate our understanding of Black girls' development.

### The Present Study

The primary aim of this research was to understand factors that influence Black girls' positive self-esteem and to respond to calls for additional research on Black girls' development (Doswell, Millor, Thompson, & Braxter, 1998). A secondary aim was to examine whether racial identity and gender role orientation were linked in Black adolescents girls. In the present study, gender role and racial identity were conceptualized as predictor variables and self-esteem (total and subscales) was the criterion variable. In part, on the basis of our review of the literature, we developed three primary hypotheses. We expected to find that masculinity or androgyny would be related to high levels of total self-esteem and high levels of each of the six measured self-esteem subscales. We also expected that high scores on immersion-emersion and internalization would be correlated with high scores on total self-esteem and the six self-esteem subscales in Black girls. Finally, we expected that high scores on masculinity or androgyny would be related to high scores on the immersion-emersion and internalization subscales of the Black Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (RIAS-L).

## METHOD

### Participants

The participants were 200 Black high school girls from four New York City public high schools and four New York City College-Bound After-School Programs. Participants' ages ranged from 14 to 18 years ( $M = 16$ ;  $SD = 1.20$ ), and their grades ranged from 9 to 12 ( $M = \text{grade } 10$ ;  $SD = 1.12$ ). Fifty-two percent of participants reported their ethnicity as African American. The remaining 48% of participants self-identified as belonging to one of 25 ethnic groups. For purposes of the present study, participants' self-reported racial identity was examined.

### Instruments

Bem Sex Role Inventory Short-Form (BSRI; Bem, 1974, 1977, 1979) is a 30-item self-report

questionnaire that measures gender role. Respondents indicate how well each of the 30 adjectives describes themselves on a 7-point likert scale that ranges from *never or almost never true* (1) to *always or almost always true* (7). There are 10 each of stereotypically masculine, feminine, and neutral items. Bem (1973) reported internal consistency reliability coefficients as femininity  $r = .82$  and masculinity  $r = .86$ . For the present sample, internal consistency reliability coefficient's (Cronbach's alphas) were femininity  $r = .77$  and masculinity  $r = .79$ .

Participants' self-esteem was measured using the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (PHC-SCS; Piers & Harris, 1969), an 80-item self-report questionnaire designed to assess how children and adolescents feel about themselves. The scale yields a global self-concept score and subscale scores on six domains: behavior, happiness and satisfaction, intellectual and school status, physical appearance and attributes, anxiety, and popularity. Respondents mark their disagreement (N) and agreement (Y) on each item. A total score is calculated by adding each item scored in a positive direction. For example, if an individual marks N for the item, "I cause trouble to my family," he or she will receive one point. Higher scores indicate higher self-esteem. Internal consistency reliability coefficient ( $r$ ) for global self-esteem was adequate, .90, and for the six subscales, it ranged from .73 to .81. For the present study, the internal consistency reliability coefficient ( $r$ ) for global self-esteem was .89, and for the six subscales, it ranged from .64 to .80.

Participants' racial identity was measured using the RIAS-L (Parham & Helms, 1981), which is based on Cross' (1971) racial identity theory. The scale is a 50-item self-report questionnaire with four subscales: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization. Respondents used a 5-point Likert scale, which ranged from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5), to indicate their agreement with each item. The RIAS-L is scored by summing the responses to each item such that each participant has an individual score for each subscale. Internal consistency reliability coefficient ( $r$ ) ranged from .51 to .80. For the present sample, the internal consistency reliability coefficient ( $r$ ) ranged from .41 to .81.

Participants were also asked to report information such as race, gender, ethnicity, grade, and age.

## Procedure

Teachers and administrators recruited students for this study. Participants included students whose parent(s)/guardian(s) had provided consent, and who, themselves, signed an assent form indicating their own agreement to participate in the study. The surveys were administered during advisory period at each high school and at the beginning of the day for each after-school program, respectively. On the day of data collection, the first author, who is a Black woman, presented the study as an exploration of attitudes of young people hold about themselves and about social issues. Consented students were asked to fill out the items independently and were instructed to direct any questions to the researcher. Participants completed a questionnaire packet that included: (1) the BSRI, (2) the PHCSCS, (3) the RIAS-L, and (4) a demographic questionnaire. Packets were counterbalanced to control for order effects. All students completed the surveys within 30 minutes. The students were provided no incentives for their participation but were notified that their respective teacher or administrator would receive a copy of the findings after the study was completed.

## RESULTS

### Preliminary Analyses

A multivariate analysis of variance indicated no significant differences in mean scores on the study variables (BSRI, PHCSCS, and RIAS-L) as a function of age, high school, or after-school program attended. For this reason, these demographic variables were not included in subsequent analyses. Table I displays the mean, standard deviation, internal consistency reliability ( $\alpha$ ), and range for all study variables.

Table II presents Pearson correlation coefficients that were computed to examine bivariate associations among study variables. Each gender type (masculine and feminine) was significantly positively correlated with total self-esteem and with five of six self-esteem subscales. There were no significant relationships between Black racial identity and total self-esteem. However, pre-encounter RIAS-L had significant negative correlations with each of the six self-esteem subscales. Internationalization RIAS-L had significant positive correlations with each of the six self-esteem subscales. There were three

**Table I.** Summary of Mean Values, Standard Deviations, Internal Consistency Reliabilities for the Bem Sex Role Inventory Short-Form, Black Racial Identity Attitudes Scale, and Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale ( $n = 200$ )

Scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Internal consistency reliability (alpha)	Possible range
<b>Bem Sex Role Inventory</b>				
Femininity scale	5.52	.86	.77	1.00–7.00
Masculinity scale	5.11	.98	.79	1.00–7.00
<b>Black racial identity attitudes scale</b>				
Pre-encounter	1.77	.57	.81	1.00–5.00
Encounter	3.19	.76	.41	1.00–5.00
Immersion–emersion	2.31	.60	.67	1.00–5.00
Internalization	3.96	.55	.67	1.00–5.00
<b>Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale</b>				
Behavior	13.06	2.66	.73	1.00–16.00
Intellectual and school status	13.52	2.73	.70	1.00–17.00
Physical appearance and attributes	10.09	2.45	.72	1.00–13.00
Anxiety	9.23	3.35	.80	1.00–14.00
Popularity	8.58	2.14	.64	1.00–12.00
Happiness and satisfaction	8.18	1.96	.69	1.00–10.00
Total self-concept	64.14	18.89	.89	1.00–80.00

significant relationships between gender role and Black racial identity.

### Relationship Between Gender Role and Self-Esteem

For the first set of analyses, participants' scores were classified into the four standard gender role categories using a median split method. Table III displays self-esteem scores by gender role categories. Among this group of Black girls, the majority re-

ported an androgynous gender role (33%), followed by undifferentiated (30%), masculine (20%), and feminine (17%).

There was a significant main effect of gender role on total self-esteem,  $F(3, 199) = 3.28, p < .05$ . A post hoc analysis (Tukey HSD) revealed that the significant variability in total self-esteem scores associated with gender role was related to androgyny. Androgynous Black girls scored significantly higher on total self-esteem than did undifferentiated Black girls ( $p < .05$ ).

**Table II.** Pearson Correlations Among Subscales of Bem Sex Role Inventory, Black Racial Identity, Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale ( $n = 200$ )

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
FEM	1.00											
MAS	.33**	1.00										
PRE	-.25**	-.19**	1.00									
ENC	.03	.08	.14*	1.00								
IMM/EM	-.23**	-.06	.36**	.50**	1.00							
INT	.08	.13	-.40**	.24**	.10	1.00						
BEH	.24**	.00	-.36**	-.23**	-.32**	.17*	1.00					
INT	.34**	.36**	-.35**	-.05	-.21**	.29**	.57**	1.00				
PHY	.26**	.33**	-.23**	.21**	-.00	.29**	.32**	.60**	1.00			
ANX	.07	.27**	-.32**	-.09	-.16*	.20**	.42**	.61**	.58**	1.00		
POP	.18**	.26**	-.27**	.05	-.04	.18*	.30**	.49**	.62**	.60**	1.00	
HAP	.22**	.25**	-.37**	.06	-.13	.29**	.49**	.62**	.73**	.74**	.49**	1.00
Total	.15*	.19**	-.02	.06	-.00	.08	.14*	.25**	.33**	.31**	.32**	.28**

*Note.* For Bem Sex Role Inventory: FEM = Femininity; MAS = Masculinity. For Black Racial Identity Attitudes Scale: PRE = Pre-encounter; ENC = Encounter; IMM/EM = Immersion–Emersion; INT = Internalization. For Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale: BEH = Behavior; INT = Intellectual and School Status; PHY = Physical Appearance and Attributes; ANX = Anxiety; HAP = Happiness and Satisfaction; TOTAL = Total Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

**Table III.** Means and Standard Deviations of Self-Esteem Scores by Gender Role ( $n = 200$ )

	Androgynous (33%)	Undifferentiated (30%)	Masculine (20%)	Feminine (17%)
Behavior	13.48	12.75	12.34	13.65
School	14.52	12.14	13.85	13.59
Physical	10.89	9.27	10.29	9.71
Anxiety	9.89	8.44	10.24	8.09
Popularity	8.91	7.93	9.00	8.56
Happiness	8.71	7.69	8.34	7.79
Global self-esteem	69.45	59.14	63.76	63.00

A closer examination of the self-esteem subscale scores indicates a significant main effect of gender role on five of the self-esteem subscale scores: school self-esteem,  $F(3, 199) = 9.19, p < .01$ ; physical attractiveness,  $F(3, 199) = 5.26, p < .01$ ; anxiety,  $F(3, 199) = 4.78, p < .01$ ; popularity,  $F(3, 199) = 2.92, p < .05$ ; happiness,  $F(3, 199) = 3.59, p < .02$ . Post hoc analyses (Tukey HSD) for each of the self-esteem subscales indicated a pattern similar to the pattern found for total self-esteem. Androgynous Black girls scored significantly higher on five of the six self-esteem subscales than did undifferentiated Black girls. Notably, for the anxiety subscale, Black girls with stereotypical masculine attributes scored significantly better (lower anxiety) than did androgynous ( $p < .05$ ) and undifferentiated Black girls ( $p < .05$ ).

### Canonical Correlations Between Gender Role and Self-Esteem Subscales

We conducted a canonical correlation analysis to examine relationships between gender role (predictor variable) and self-esteem subscales (criterion variable). A dimension reduction analysis revealed two canonical variates to be significant (variate 1: Wilks Lambda = .69,  $p < .0001$ ; variate 2: Wilks Lambda = .87,  $p < .0001$ ). For the first factor, the canonical correlation was .48 (20% of the variance). To establish which gender role and self-esteem subscales contributed most strongly to the overall relationship, the canonical variate loadings were examined. A cutoff of a .30 loading in the structure matrix was used for interpretation, following convention (cf. Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989). The gender role that contributed most to the canonical correlation was masculinity (.91), followed by femininity (.70). The gender role canonical variate suggests endorsement of an androgynous gender role that includes masculine and feminine characteristics.

Among the self-esteem subscales, the five subscales that contributed most strongly to the canonical correlation were intellectual and school status (.88), physical attributes and appearance (.75), happiness and satisfaction (.59), popularity (.58), and anxiety (.48). The loadings on the self-esteem canonical variate might also be termed "positive feelings about self." The relationship demonstrated by this canonical variate (gender role and self-esteem) suggests that Black girls who endorsed a flexible gender role orientation that includes stereotypical feminine and masculine characteristics also endorsed positive feelings about self (see Table IV).

For the second factor of the canonical correlation, the correlation was .35 (13% of the variance). A cutoff of a .30 loading in the structure matrix again was used for interpretation. To establish which gender role and self-esteem subscales contributed most strongly to the overall relationship, the canonical variate loadings were examined. The gender role subscales that contributed most to the relationship were femininity (−.71), followed by masculinity (.42). High scores on femininity reflect traditional feminine characteristics and might be termed "communal"; this subscale loaded negatively on this dimension. High scores on masculinity reflect traditional masculine characteristics and might be termed "instrumental"; this subscale loaded positively on this dimension. Among the six self-esteem subscales only two, behavior (−.64) and anxiety (.37), contributed strongly to the relationship. High scores on the behavior subscale might be termed "conformity to societal rules and norms," and this subscale loaded negatively on this canonical dimension. High scores on anxiety might be termed "ability to manage anxiety," and this subscale loaded positively on this dimension. The relationship described by this canonical variate might suggest that Black girls who endorsed a stereotypical feminine gender role also endorsed conformity to societal

**Table IV.** Canonical Correlation Analysis: Bem Sex Role Inventory and Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale ( $n = 200$ )

	First canonical variate		Second canonical variate	
	Standardized correlation	Standardized coefficient	Standardized correlation	Standardized coefficient
Bem Sex Role Inventory				
Femininity scale	.70	-.45	-.71	-.96
Masculinity scale	.91	-.76	.42	.74
Self-esteem				
Behavior	.22	.41	-.64	-.85
School	.88	-.96	-.16	-.06
Anxiety	.48	.29	.37	1.15
Popularity	.58	-.19	.06	-.18
Happiness	.59	-.13	.07	-.40
Physical	.75	-.27	.00	.04
Canonical correlation	.48		.35	
Wilks Lambda	.69 ( $p < .0001$ )		.87 ( $p < .0001$ )	

rules and had difficulty in managing anxiety. The canonical variate suggests that girls who endorsed a stereotypical masculine gender role report an ability to manage anxiety and do not conform to societal rules and norms (see Table IV).

#### Canonical Correlations Between Black Racial Identity and Self-Esteem Subscales

We conducted a canonical correlation analysis to examine relationships between the four subscales of Black racial identity (predictor variable) and the six self-esteem subscales (criterion variable). A dimension reduction analysis revealed two of the four canonical variates to be significant (variate 1: Wilks Lambda = .61,  $p < .0001$ ; variate 2: Wilks Lambda = .81,  $p < .0001$ ). For the first factor, the canonical correlation was .49 (24% of the variance). To establish which Black racial identity and self-esteem subscales contributed most strongly to the overall relationship, the canonical variate loadings were examined. The RIAS-L that contributed most strongly to the canonical relationship were pre-encounter (-.85), immersion-emersion (-.67), encounter (-.50), and internalization (.42). Racial identity attitudes associated with pre-encounter, encounter, and immersion-emersion might be termed "externally" defined racial attitudes, and these subscales loaded negatively on this dimension. Racial identity attitudes associated with internalization might be labeled "internally" defined and this subscale loaded positively on this dimension. All six self-esteem subscales contributed strongly to the relationship between Black racial identity and self-esteem, including behavior (.88), in-

tellectual and school status (.76), anxiety (.66), happiness and satisfaction (.65), popularity (.41), and physical appearance and attributes (.31). These loadings might suggest a canonical variate termed "positive feelings about self." The negative relationship between the three RIAS-L (pre-encounter, encounter, and immersion-emersion) and six self-esteem subscales indicate that externally defined RIAS-L were inversely related to positive self-esteem. The positive relationship between internalization and the self-esteem subscales suggests that internally defined racial identity attitudes are associated with positive self-esteem (see Table V). Specifically, individuals with high scores on pre-encounter and immersion-emersion attitudes were less likely to have positive self-esteem with respect to behavior, intellectual and school status, anxiety, happiness and satisfaction, popularity, and physical appearance and attributes.

For the second factor, the canonical correlation was .41 (16% of the variance). To establish which Black racial identity and self-esteem subscales contributed most strongly to the overall relationship, the canonical variate loadings were examined. The RIAS-L that contributed most to the relationship were encounter (.85), internalization (.64), pre-encounter (-.32), and immersion-emersion (.30). This canonical variate represents attitudes associated with a developing awareness and comfort with Black racial identity. Among the self-esteem subscales, physical appearance and attributes (.82), happiness and satisfaction (.63), popularity (.45), and intellectual and school status (.40) contributed most strongly to the relationship. The positive relationship between these two dimensions might suggest that a developing



**Table V.** Canonical Correlation Analysis: Black Racial Identity Attitudes and Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale ( $n = 200$ )

	First canonical variate		Second canonical variate	
	Standardized correlation	Standardized coefficient	Standardized correlation	Standardized coefficient
Black Racial Identity				
Pre-encounter	-.85	-.56	-.32	-.26
Encounter	-.50	-.32	.85	.83
Immersion emersion	-.67	-.34	.30	-.03
Internalization	.42	.31	.64	.32
Self-esteem				
Behavior	.88	.56	-.05	-.47
Intellectual and School	.76	.37	.40	.18
Anxiety	.66	.19	.21	-.70
Popularity	.41	.09	.45	.19
Happiness and satisfaction	.65	.32	.63	.72
Physical appearance	.31	.49	.82	.63
Canonical correlation	.49		.41	
Wilks Lambda	.61 ( $p = .0001$ )		.81 ( $p < .0001$ )	

awareness and comfort with Black racial identity is related to satisfaction with the self, particularly in regard to physical appearance and “belonging” (see Table V). This second factor expresses a different relationship between racial identity and self-esteem. These findings suggest that Black girls with high scores on internalization attitudes were more likely to have a positive self-esteem than those with high scores on encounter attitudes.

**Relationship Between Gender Role and Black Racial Identity**

To explore the relationship between gender role and Black racial identity, a canonical correlation analysis was conducted where the four subscales

of RIAS-L (pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization) formed the independent variable set and the two subscales of the BSRI (femininity and masculinity) were the dependent variable set (see Table VI). A dimension reduction analysis showed the first of two canonical variates to be significant (variate 1: Wilks Lambda = .87,  $p < .001$ ).

For the first factor, the canonical correlation was .34 (12% of the variance). To establish which gender role and Black racial identity subscales contributed most strongly to the overall relationship, the canonical variate loadings were examined. A cutoff of a .30 loading in the structure matrix again was used for interpretation of factors. From the gender role subscales, the variables that contributed most strongly

**Table VI.** Canonical Correlation Analysis—Black Racial Identity Attitudes and Bem Sex Role Inventory ( $n < 200$ )

	First canonical variate		Second canonical variate	
	Standardized correlation	Standardized coefficient	Standardized correlation	Standardized coefficient
Black Racial Identity				
Pre-encounter	-.80	-.64	-.29	-.41
Encounter	.15	.57	.51	.08
Immersion-emersion	-.61	-.67	.71	.80
Internalization	.33	.01	.68	.42
Bem Sex Role Inventory				
Femininity	.95	.84	-.31	-.64
Masculinity	.61	.33	.79	1.01
Canonical correlation	.34		.12	
Wilks Lambda	.87 ( $p < .001$ )		.99 ( $p < .426$ )	

to the canonical relationship were the femininity subscale (.95), followed by the masculinity subscale (.61). This canonical variate suggests endorsement of an androgynous gender role that includes masculine and feminine characteristics. From the racial identity subscales, the identity status scores that most strongly contributed to the relationship were pre-encounter (−.80), immersion–emersion (−.61), and internalization (.33). High scores on the pre-encounter and immersion–emersion subscales might suggest an underlying dimension that reflects either strong “pro-White” or “pro-Black” racial attitudes and might be termed “externally” defined racial identity attitudes. Attitudes associated with internalization might be termed “internally” defined racial identity attitudes. The relationship between the two sets of variables might suggest that an androgynous gender role is related to “internally” defined racial identity attitudes and negatively related to “externally” defined racial identity attitudes (see Table VI).

## DISCUSSION

Researchers (e.g., Sarigiani, Camarena, & Petersen, 1993; Spencer & Dornbush, 1990) have described a need for studies that explore within-group differences among girls. In the present study, we examined within-group gender and racial differences among Black adolescent girls to better understand their relatively bolstered levels of self-esteem. Overall, two of our study’s three hypotheses were fully supported, and one hypothesis was partially supported. Among our sample of Black adolescent girls, we found that gender role orientation was related to total self-esteem and self-esteem subscales: Black girls with a masculine or androgynous gender role fared more positively in self-esteem. We were surprised to find that Black racial identity was not related to total self-esteem in this group of Black girls, but Black racial identity was related to the self-esteem subscales: Black girls with internally defined racial identity attitudes (internalization) reported high self-esteem on some subscales. We also found support for our hypothesis that gender role orientation and Black racial identity attitudes were related.

### Gender Role and Self-Esteem in Black Girls

First, we found that the majority of Black girls in our sample endorsed an androgynous gen-

der role (both masculine and feminine characteristics), followed by a stereotypical masculine gender role. This finding is consistent with research on Black women’s and men’s gender roles. Several researchers found that Black women endorse androgynous characteristics as self-descriptive (Harris, 1994, 1996, 1997; Konrad & Harris, 2002; Molloy & Herzberger, 1998). Individuals develop their attitudes and beliefs about gender in response to reinforcement and modeling from members of their racial and cultural group (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1990). Black girls’ models of womanhood and their cultural teachings have included displays of independence, self-confidence, and self-reliance (Collins, 1991, 2000, 2004; Reid, 1988). Therefore, Black girls who display both stereotypical masculine and feminine characteristics (e.g., androgyny) may receive positive appraisals, because this pattern fits the gender role expectations of their cultural group.

Second, we found that Black adolescent girls who endorsed either a masculine or an androgynous gender role reported high levels of self-esteem (both total self-esteem and self-esteem subscales). These findings are consistent with previous research, which shows that masculinity or androgyny in Black adults (Harris, 1996; Mokgathe & Schoemen, 1998; Molloy & Herzberger, 1998) and in White and Chinese girls (Sharpe & Heppner, 1991) is related to high self-esteem. The pattern of results in the present study also supports Bem’s (1974) gender schema theory, which asserted that psychological androgyny or masculinity in men and women is associated with mental health (Bem, 1979). Individuals who are androgynous may be more effective because they can perform both stereotypical masculine “instrumental” functions and stereotypical feminine or “communal” functions (Powell & Butterfield, 1989).

Several findings related to gender role and the self-esteem subscales warrant further discussion. Black girls who had an androgynous gender role reported positive self-esteem related to physical appearance and intellectual school status. Several researchers have found that women who scored high on masculinity or androgyny are better able to define their own standards of beauty, more satisfied with their sexuality, and have a more positive body image than those who are stereotypically feminine (Bem, 1984; Kilmicka, Cross, & Tarnai, 1983; Molloy & Herzberger, 1998).

The positive relationship between gender role and physical attractiveness is particularly important because physical appearance is a strong predictor of

self-esteem for adolescent girls (Erkut et al., 1996; Erkut, Marx, Field, & Sing, 1999)—adolescent girls who feel positively about their physical appearance often feel positively about themselves as persons. A growing body of research indicates that Black girls, more so than their White, Asian, and Hispanic counterparts report feeling positively about their physical appearance (Erkut et al., 1996). Black women are reported to be able to resist mainstream messages regarding beauty, because they do not believe that these standards are relevant to themselves (Chin & McConnel, 2003; Duke, 2002). Instead, Black women report being influenced by their cultural group's beauty messages, which may be in direct opposition to the media ideal (Duke, 2002). Asian and White women, on the contrary, reportedly endorse mainstream beauty standards, and thus they are more likely to be dissatisfied with their bodies than Black women are (Chin & McConnel, 2003).

### Black Racial Identity and Self-Esteem

In the present study, we found that RIAS-L were differentially related to the self-esteem subscales. Black girls who had the highest scores on pre-encounter racial identity attitudes (pro-White/anti-Black) scored low on total self-esteem and self-esteem subscales. In contrast, Black girls who had the highest scores on internalization racial identity attitudes (pro-Black/pro all racial groups) scored high on total self-esteem and self-esteem subscales. In other words, Black girls who depend on White standards to define themselves and feel negatively about being Black had low self-esteem, whereas Black girls who felt positively about being Black had high self-esteem on the subscales. These findings are consistent with previous research and provide empirical support for Helms (1990) Black racial identity model. Racial identity theory posits that people who exhibit high pre-encounter racial identity attitudes have strong negative feelings about being Black and, consequently, have less positive feelings about themselves (Cross, 1991; Helms, 1990). The theory posits that individuals with high scores on internalization attitudes have incorporated a positive evaluation of Blackness into their self-concept. Our findings also support researchers' findings (e.g. Wilson & Constantine, 1999) of a relationship between pre-encounter and low self-esteem.

Several findings related to the connection between Black racial identity and the self-esteem sub-

scales warrant further discussion. We found that Black girls with high scores on pre-encounter racial identity attitudes reported low self-esteem related to physical appearance, happiness and satisfaction, intellectual and school performance, and popularity (see Table V). The opposite pattern of results was true for Black girls with high scores on internalization racial identity attitudes. These findings suggest that Black racial identity status was differentially related to the self-esteem subscales among this group of girls. In the present study, Black girls with high scores on pre-encounter racial identity attitudes reported low self-esteem regarding physical attractiveness. This finding identifies a subset of girls who lie outside the generalization, which indicates that Black girls feel positively about their physical appearance (Erkut et al., 1996; Winston, Eccles, & Senior, 1997). Rather, the pattern of scores reported by Black girls with high scores on pre-encounter racial identity attitudes was comparable to the pattern of scores reported by White girls on self-esteem measures (Erkut et al., 1996). Helms (1990) asserted that individual racial identity statuses moderate the use of Black and/or White racial groups as a reference point for guiding one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Helms, 1990). In pre-encounter, Whites serve as the racial reference group and there is a rejection of Blacks as a reference group. It is possible that Black girls with high pre-encounter racial identity attitudes have internalized mainstream standards of beauty, which lead many girls to feel dissatisfied with their physical appearance. In a study of adolescents, Smith (1991) also found low levels of Black racial identity (pre-encounter) to be associated with lower overall satisfaction with appearance. Conversely, we found that Black girls with high internalization racial identity attitudes reported feeling positively about their physical appearance. This group of girls is likely to use other Black people as a reference group for their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Other researchers have reported that Black girls who reject mainstream beauty standards and compare themselves to a broader set of standards report feeling more positively about themselves (e.g., Duke, 2002).

Although Black people often report high levels of self-esteem, our results suggest that racial group membership alone does not account for levels of self-esteem in Black girls. Instead, the manner in which a girl identifies with being Black is critical for self-esteem. Black girls who have the capacity to respond objectively to members of the dominant group, while

feeling good about their own racial group, are more likely to feel positively about themselves.

### **Gender Role and Black Racial Identity**

Consistent with previous theory and research on Black men (e.g. Wade, 1996), we found that Black girls who reported an internally defined Black racial identity (internalization) also reported an androgynous gender role. Conversely, there was a negative association among Black girls with an externally defined Black racial identity (pre-encounter and immersion) and those who reported an androgynous gender role.

These findings support Helm's (1990) and Bem's (1984) respective theories, which asserted that individuals who can abandon culturally imposed definitions about their racial or gender groups, respectively, have more positive mental health. Other researchers (e.g., Wade, 1996) have found a similar pattern of results. For example, Wade (1996) found that Black men who hold pre-encounter, encounter, and immersion–emersion attitudes (externally defined racial identity attitudes) are more likely to have polarized oppositional views of gender roles and to conform to traditional gender role standards than those who have internally defined racial identity attitudes (internalization). Wade (1996) argued that there may be an underlying psychological construct (i.e., ego development) that links racial identity and gender role. Several researchers have found that ego identity is likely to be similar across domains (e.g., Helms & Piper, 1994; Nghe & Mahalik, 2001). Nghe and Mahalik (2001) found racial identity statuses that employ immature and neurotic defenses (pre-encounter, encounter, and immersion) to be related to less sophisticated ego statuses (i.e., gender-typed feminine or masculine).

### **Limitations and Implications for Practice**

Several limitations of the present study should be considered when interpreting our data. We utilized a cross-sectional design, thereby limiting our ability to investigate causal relationships among variables. In addition, we utilized self-report measures, and there may be some issues regarding the reliability and validity of some of the measures. Racial identity instruments have not kept pace with the evolving complexities of the theory (Carter, 1995),

and questions have been raised about the validity of certain subscales of the RIAS-L (Ponterotto & Wise, 1987; Pyant & Yanico, 1991). In addition, although reliability figures were adequate for total self-esteem, correlations with some self-esteem subscales were quite low given the proposed relatedness between global self-esteem and self-esteem dimensions (Piers, 1984). Finally, the participants in our study consisted of Black New York City public high school students, which limits the generalizability of the results to other populations.

Despite the limitations, there are several important implications of these findings. First, among our sample of Black adolescent girls, there is tremendous variety in the ways that they identify with and make sense of their gender. Some girls were categorized as stereotypically feminine (e.g., nurturing, emotional, and warm), others were categorized as stereotypically masculine (e.g., independent, autonomous, and strong personality), but most were categorized as androgynous (both stereotypical masculine and feminine). The range of responses suggests that educators, counselors, and family members involved with Black girls should be careful not to ascribe characteristics to this group simply because they are female and Black. Another important implication is that, although gender role is linked with self-esteem among Black adolescent girls, Black girls who adopt more flexible gender role behaviors (e.g., androgynous) fare better in terms of self-esteem; conversely, Black girls who adopt a stereotypical feminine gender role reported lower self-esteem. Raising awareness about the potentially detrimental aspects of a gender-typed feminine gender role is important, because of the connection with self-esteem, and psychological and behavioral outcomes. A third implication of our study is that there is tremendous variability in these Black adolescent girls' attitudes toward and beliefs about their own racial group. Some girls felt positively about being Black and others felt negatively about being Black. Black racial identity attitudes significantly impacted their self-esteem. Black girls who reported feeling positively about their racial identity also reported higher self-esteem on the subscales. Conversely, Black girls who felt less positively about their racial group reported lower self-esteem. Finally, our findings suggest that racial identity and gender role are related to ego development, wherein development in one arena (e.g., race) is linked to development in another arena (e.g., gender) for this sample of Black adolescent girls. When working with adolescents, who are faced with the challenging

task of forming a consolidated identity, practitioners might utilize an ecological approach that considers the entire landscape of an individual's life (Spencer, 1999). This type of exploration would be informed by gender, race, culture, socioeconomic status, religion, and sexual identity, among other reference group variables.

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