Racial Identity and Mental Health among African Americans: It is unclear how racial identity influences self-esteem and psychological well-being among African Americans. Different empirically-based theories predict negative effects, no effects, and positive effects. Using data from a national probability sample, we find that, among African Americans, group identification is associated with more positive self-attitudes (self-esteem and mastery) and lower depressive symptoms. However, these beneficial effects of racial identity are largely explained by positive in-group evaluations and positive social relations. When these variables are controlled, racial identification increases distress and has little impact on other dimensions of well-being. Additionally, identity has salutary effects on mastery and depressive symptoms only among those who make favorable in-group evaluations. The findings highlight the importance of social relationships in identity processes, and they confirm that internalizing positive in-group evaluations is an essential element in the process by which racial identity benefits mental well-being.

Recommended Reading

