



# **Did the Black Lives Matter Movement Help English-Speaking Black Young Adults in Quebec Recover from the Damaging Psychological Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic?**

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# Table of contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Objectives</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Key Questions</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Literature Review and Theoretical Approach</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Methods</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Measures</b>	<b>6</b>
Demographics	6
Impact of Pandemic and BLM Movement	7
Personal Basic Psychological Needs	7
Collective Basic Psychological Needs	7
Narrative Accounts of Experience in Spring 2020	8
<b>Results</b>	<b>8</b>
Preliminary Results	8
Psychological Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Participation in the BLM Movement	9
Personal and Collective Need Satisfaction and Frustration and Adaptation to the COVID-19 Pandemic and BLM Events	10
Narrative Accounts of the Spring of 2020	11
<b>Discussion</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>16</b>
Appendix I Examples of Narratives Written About the Events of the Spring and Summer of 2020	18



# Introduction

The historic events of the spring of 2020—the collision of the worst public health crisis in a century and the largest Black civil rights movement in half a century—offer a unique opportunity to examine how the frustrations and hopes of English-speaking Black young adults were affected. We sought to understand the potentially competing impacts that the public health and social justice crises have had on the young adults in their communities.

Quebec has the second largest Black population in Canada (after Ontario), with 27% of Canada's total Black population. Quebec's Black population has doubled in size in the past 20 years, with 325,000 people currently living here. This population is predominantly French speaking (80%), and it is concentrated in the Montreal metropolitan area (over 90%). The Black population tends to be younger than the Canadian average, and its members are more likely to be first-generation Canadians.

Racialized US health data show that Black communities have suffered COVID-19 infection rates twice as high as the general population, and death rates three times as high (Golestaneh et al., 2020; Rentsch et al., 2020). A recent survey in Toronto found that the Black population had four times as many cases of COVID-19 per capita as the White population (*Globe & Mail*, January 26, 2021). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been found to be particularly negative for Black Canadians and Quebecers (Statistics Canada, 2021) as well as young adult English-Speakers in the province of Quebec (Généreux et al., 2020). We can estimate that Quebec's Black communities have been disproportionately affected because Black communities in Quebec have one of the most concerning socio-economic portraits in the province (Jean-Pierre & Collins, 2020; MIDI, 2014).

The present study was designed to examine the psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement on English-speaking Black young adults in Quebec. Emerging research conducted by Statistics Canada and the Université de Sherbrooke suggests that young adults may have been particularly affected by the pandemic in terms of their well-being and mental health (Généreux et al., 2020; Helliwell, Schellenberg, & Fonberg, 2021). A recent study conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic in Quebec revealed that, compared with older adults, young adults (18–24 years old) and Anglophones more directly experienced the impacts of the pandemic (e.g., isolation), felt more stigmatized, had a lower level of confidence in the authorities, and did not use the same sources of information (e.g., greater use of acquaintances and social networks) (Généreux et al., 2020). However, to date we know of no study that has investigated the experience of the pandemic on English-speaking Black young adults in Quebec or the impact of the BLM social justice movement that gained mass attention and support a few months after the beginning of the pandemic. Thus, a longitudinal study of 106 young adults was conducted in August and December 2020.

The research is a collaboration between the McGill Human Motivation Lab, led by Dr. Richard Koestner and Dr. Anne Holding, and the Black Community Resource Centre (BCRC) of Montreal, directed by Dr. Clarence Bayne and Raeanne Francis. John Davids and Xiaoyan Fang, research associates at the BCRC, were instrumental in developing the research plan, preparing the surveys, recruiting participants, and interpreting the results. The BCRC is a non-profit community organization working to strengthen the English-speaking Black community in Quebec by providing professional support to organizations and individuals in need. The BCRC serves as the secretariat for 14 community agencies that provide services to the English-speaking Black community. The Centre is committed to helping visible minority youth achieve their full potential.

## Objectives

- 1 To examine impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on English-speaking Black young adults' psychological need satisfaction, achievement, social engagement, and well-being between March 15 and May 31, 2020, from when the lockdown began until the time when the George Floyd BLM protests began in Montreal.
- 2 To examine whether participation in the BLM movement in June 2020 helped English-speaking Black young adults recover from the adverse psychological effects of the pandemic. The BLM movement was conceptualized as a meaningful, identity-relevant, social cause, participation in which would enhance individual and collective feelings of psychological need satisfaction.
- 3 To examine the personal narratives that English-speaking Black young adults<sup>1</sup> constructed regarding the events of the spring of 2020 for the purpose of supplementing our quantitative research with qualitative insights.

1 All but 3 of the 106 (97%) participants reported they had at least intermediate skill in reading, writing, and speaking English. Surveys in French were made available to these participants. The results reported in this paper are unchanged if these 3 participants are removed from the analyses.

# Key Questions

- 1 Did the well-being of English-speaking Black young adults diminish over the spring of 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic and the BLM protests occurred?
- 2 Did the satisfaction/frustration of personal and collective basic psychological needs play a role in the changes that occurred for well-being?
- 3 Did the psychological changes that occurred for English-speaking Black young adults during the spring of 2020 endure over time?

## Literature Review and Theoretical Approach

The two main theories we have used to formulate this project are self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017) and social identity theory (Hogg, 2016; Tajfel et al., 1979). We focus on these two theories in the context of emerging adulthood, which is thought to be a distinct developmental period between 18 and 29 years of age, during which individuals become more independent and explore various life possibilities (Arnett, 2000). Emerging adults' success in goals related to education, career, and relationships has been shown to be linked to well-being and healthy development in longitudinal studies (Messersmith & Schulenberg, 2010).

Self-determination theory (SDT) is an empirically based and widely researched theory of human behaviour and motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Deci & Ryan, 2000). The theory assumes that humans have evolved to be inherently curious, social, and active beings that are interested in their surroundings, strive to gain mastery over them, and desire to connect with others. SDT theorists believe that human beings are universally oriented toward these growth behaviours because they seek to satisfy three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The need for *autonomy* refers to the need to freely endorse and feel ownership over experiences and actions (deCharms, 1968). *Competence* refers to the need to operate effectively in the environment or feel capable of learning the skills necessary to operate effectively in the environment (Bandura, 1977). *Relatedness* refers to the need to feel socially connected with others, to care for them, and feel cared for in return (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Together, these needs are thought of as psychological "nutrients" that are vital for a human being's flourishing, development, and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2017). However, not only can low satisfaction of any of these needs (i.e., *need deprivation*) hamper psychological and developmental growth, but *need frustration* can be especially harmful (Bartholomew et al., 2011). The frustration of basic psychological needs occurs when a person is exposed to harsh, controlling, or rejecting social environments, and it increases the risk for ill-being and pathological

functioning (Ryan, Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2019). Thus, need satisfaction and need frustration are crucial mechanisms in both optimal, positive functioning and non-optimal, pathological functioning.

Social identity theory proposes that people define their sense of self partly by identifying with social groups (e.g., sports teams, national, religious, or ethnic groups; Tajfel et al., 1979). Social identity theory addresses the ways in which social identities affect people's attitudes and behaviours. The theory considers how people are personally impacted by the experiences of their fellow group members and their social group as a whole. Social identities are most influential when individuals consider membership in a group to be central to their self-concept and they feel strong emotional ties to the group (Oyserman, 2007).

Recent research has examined how self-determination theory and social identity theory intersect by investigating how the thwarting of group members' needs at the group level can adversely impact personal need satisfaction and, in turn, psychological well-being (Kachanoff et al., 2019). People have a need to feel that members of their social group are (a) accepted and respected by other groups in society (i.e., group relatedness needs), (b) capable of achieving desired outcomes (i.e., group competence needs), and (c) free to determine and express their own sociocultural identity openly in society (i.e., group autonomy needs). When group members experience systemic discrimination, they may feel that their social group has been ostracized within society, is incapable of achieving success relative to other groups, or is restricted from expressing its own authentic culture.

We propose that self-determination theory's conceptualization of basic psychological needs represents a way to capture the concept of empowerment which was thought to result from participation in social change movements such as Black Lives Matter. Empowerment has typically referred to individuals or groups gaining greater influence and control over important aspects of their lives. Empowerment is often coupled with visions of hope and possibility, and it is thought to have fuelled successful movements for positive social change for Black Americans, the LGBTQ community, and many other marginalized groups. Interestingly, Rappaport (1987) presaged a link between the community psychology concept of empowerment and self-determination theory's focus on autonomy, relatedness, and competence when he contended that the concept of empowerment must include people's needs, rights, and choices.

Prior to our research, we hypothesized that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in high levels of need frustration in Black young adults due to increased economic hardship, social isolation, and disproportionately high infection and mortality rates in the Black community. Importantly, we believed that need frustration occurred at both the personal and collective level, thus potentiating the negative psychological effects. Specifically, we hypothesized that this need frustration would have negative consequences for young adults' achievement and social goals, which in turn would undermine their well-being.

Meanwhile, our hypotheses regarding the impacts of the BLM movement were not clearly directed, since arguments could be made to expect different outcomes. On the one hand, popular support for the movement may have contributed to need satisfaction and experiences of empowerment and social cohesion in young Black adults at both the personal and group level,

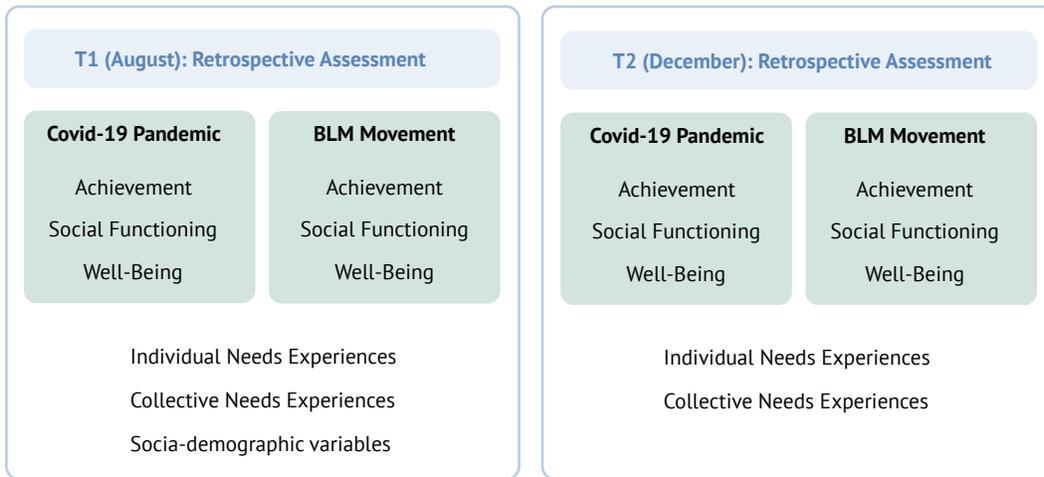
which in turn may have improved confidence in their achievement and social pursuits, and boosted their well-being. On the other hand, this movement may have also been experienced as need frustrating and disheartening—a painful reminder of the continued systemic racism, police brutality, and social injustices pervasive in North America and elsewhere, thus thwarting psychological needs, with negative consequences for young adults' achievement and well-being. We structured the retrospective parts of the first survey so that we could distinguish respondents' experiences at the height of the pandemic (April 2020) and after the BLM marches (June 2020).

## Methods

Our longitudinal study investigated the motivation and well-being of English-speaking Black young adults following the spring of 2020, a period during which two monumental events occurred for the community: the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement. The surveys examined the extent to which the pandemic and the BLM movement impacted psychological needs at the individual and collective levels, as well as outcomes related to achievement, social functioning, and well-being.

The research design is summarized in Figure 1. Surveys were administered in August 2020 to 106 English-speaking Black young adults recruited via the BCRC and other platforms. Follow-up surveys were administered in December 2020 to 86 of the original participants, representing an 84% retention rate. The surveys examined the extent to which the personal and group frustration resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic was counterbalanced by need satisfaction resulting from the success of the BLM movement. The first survey (T1) administered in August 2020 included two retrospective sections assessing experiences during the first COVID-19 lockdown in Quebec (March-May 2020) and during the revival of the BLM movement (June 2020). Key outcomes were perceptions of functioning in both achievement and social spheres, and self-reported well-being. Specifically, achievement functioning was assessed by inquiring about school and employment experiences, whereas social functioning was assessed by asking about friendships, romantic relationships, and leisure time activities. In the December assessment (T2), we added an item that asked about family functioning. Changes in well-being resulting from the pandemic and the BLM movement were measured by asking about physical health, mental health, and general motivation. General adjustment was measured in terms of depressive symptoms and subjective well-being. Key mediating variables were the frustration/satisfaction of the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and connection. All need variables were assessed at both the personal and collective level (e.g., “I feel free to pursue my goals” and “The Black community is free to pursue its goals”).

**Figure 1. Illustration of Study Design and Data Collection Strategy**



In addition to quantitative measurement of our variables of interest, narrative reports were collected to determine the psychological interpretations of the two events for members of the Black community. Narrative identity emerges as a central aspect of personality in young adulthood and functions to integrate past experiences and offer a template for the future (McAdams & Guo, 2017). A well-integrated narrative provides coherence and meaning for individuals. Narratives can also be constructed for a group's experiences, and there are links between personal and group identities (Bougie et al., 2011).

Surveys were administered on the survey platform Qualtrics. Data were analyzed using SPSS statistical software. This research was approved by the McGill University research ethics board. Both assessments included the following measures.

## Measures

### Demographics

In addition to confirming their ethnicity (i.e., Black/African Canadian), participants reported their age (*Mean* = 25.51, *Standard Deviation* = 4.81), gender (59% female), English and French language skills in reading, writing, and speaking, and their employment status (17.8% employed full-time/30 hours per week; 30.7% employed part-time; 39.6% full-time student; 10.9% unemployed; remaining participants chose not to answer).

In August, 2% of participants reported having contracted the COVID-19 virus. Approximately one third of the sample (32%) reported that someone they knew personally had contracted the virus. In December, 5% of the sample reported having contracted the COVID-19 virus, whereas 43% reported knowing someone who had had the virus. A small portion of the sample (14%) reported they had a job that designated them as an essential worker, and another 27% reported that a family member was an essential worker.

## Impact of Pandemic and BLM Movement

Our surveys included eight questions repeated twice on each survey regarding the impact of the pandemic and the BLM movement on participants' school goals, work goals, friendships, romantic interests, leisure activities, mental health, physical health, and general motivation. We aggregated the school and work items to form an achievement subscale; the friend, romance, and leisure items to form a social subscale; and the mental health, physical health, and motivation scales to form an adjustment subscale.

Respondents were asked to rate each item on a seven-point scale indicating whether that area of their life got better or worse because of the pandemic (or the BLM movement). The exact ratings were: *got a lot worse* (-3), *got worse* (-2), *got somewhat worse* (-1), *stayed the same* (0), *got somewhat better* (+1), *got better* (+2), and *got a lot better* (+3).

## Personal Basic Psychological Needs

The Balanced Measure of Psychological Needs scale (BMPN; Sheldon & Hilpert, 2012) was used to assess psychological need satisfaction and frustration at both measurement times. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with a series of statements on a seven-point scale ranging from "not at all true" to "very true." Both need satisfaction and need frustration were assessed with nine items, three statements for each need (autonomy, competence, relatedness). For example, the item "*I experienced some kind of failure or was unable to do well at something*" was used to assess competence need frustration.

## Collective Basic Psychological Needs

Collective psychological need satisfaction and frustration was measured at both time points with the Social Identity Needs Scale (Parker et al., 2019). Participants were asked to rate their agreement with a series of twelve statements on a seven-point scale ranging from "not at all true" to "very true", such as "*My group remains oppressed in many ways*" (collective autonomy need frustration) or "*My group is positively recognized by other groups and organizations*" (collective autonomy need satisfaction).

## Narrative Accounts of Experience in Spring 2020

At the end of the August survey, participants were given the following instructions designed to elicit narrative accounts:

*In the space below, we would like you to write a short story about your experience this spring and summer as a young Black person having to deal with the worst pandemic in 100 years and the largest civil protests in 50 years. Please take about 5 minutes and try to give the story a beginning, middle and ending. Don't worry about technical aspects, just your thoughts and impressions.*

The narratives were coded for whether they focused on COVID-19 or the BLM movement and for emotions that were reported regarding each event.

# Results

Please note that the results section is technical, but that the interpretation of these results is provided in the Discussion section which follows.

## Preliminary Results

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for our key variables in both August and December. Paired-sample t-tests (a statistical procedure used to determine whether the mean difference between two sets of observations is significant) showed that levels of depressive symptoms and subjective well-being (SWB) were stable between the two assessments. A paired-sample t-test also found that need satisfaction was rated similarly at the personal and collective level,  $t(85) = 0.38$ , ns. By contrast, participants reported much higher levels of need frustration at the group level ( $Mean = 4.41$ ) compared with the personal level ( $Mean = 3.89$ ),  $t(85) = -3.40$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Table 1 also shows the correlations between the main variables at baseline. Personal and group need satisfaction were positively correlated, as were personal and group need frustration. Depressive symptoms were significantly negatively related to level of subjective well-being.

**Table 1. Descriptive Information and Correlations Between Key Baseline Variables**

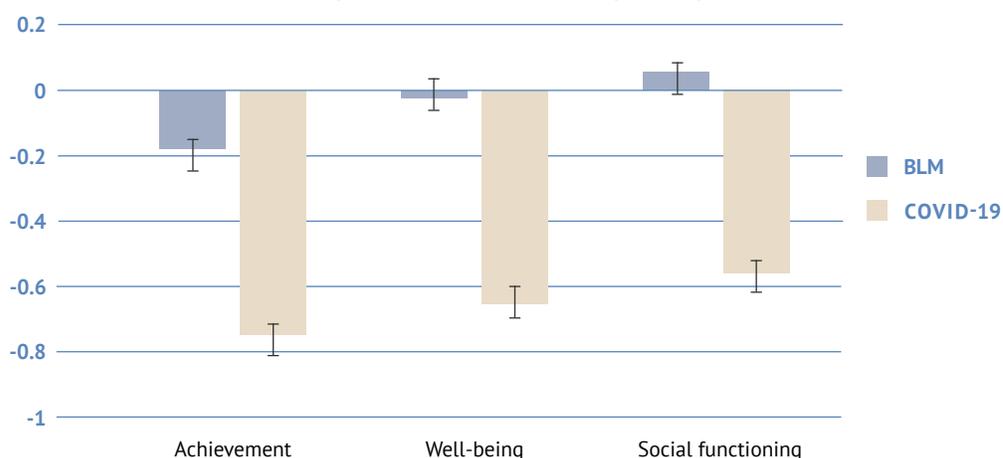
	M	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Personal Need Satisfaction	4.68	1.07					
2. Personal Need Frustration	4.64	1.23	-0.29**				
3. Group Need Satisfaction	3.89	1.07	0.43**	0.14			
4. Group Need Frustration	4.41	1.19	-0.42**	0.04	-0.58**		
5. Depression	2.23	0.60	-0.61**	0.43**	-0.33**	0.39**	
6. Subjective Well-Being	4.43	1.07	0.65**	-0.38**	0.39**	-0.41**	-0.80**
7. Depression (T2)	2.24	0.63					
8. Subjective Well-Being (T2)	4.54	1.20					

Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

## Psychological Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Participation in the BLM Movement

Figure 2 illustrates the mean ratings in August for the reported effects of the pandemic and the BLM events on achievement, social life, and general well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic was perceived as having a significantly negative effect on all three areas of functioning. One-sample t-tests showed the following results: achievement,  $t(104) = -6.68, p < 0.001$ ; social,  $t(104) = 5.66, p < 0.001$ ; well-being,  $t(104) = 5.07, p < 0.001$ . By contrast, the BLM events were perceived to have a negative effect on achievement ( $t(104) = -2.95, p < 0.01$ ), a positive effect on social functioning ( $t(104) = 6.45, p < 0.001$ ), and no effect on well-being ( $t(104) = 0.03, ns$ ).

**Figure 2. Effects of the Pandemic and Participation in the BLM Movement on Achievement, Well-Being and Social Functioning in August 2020**



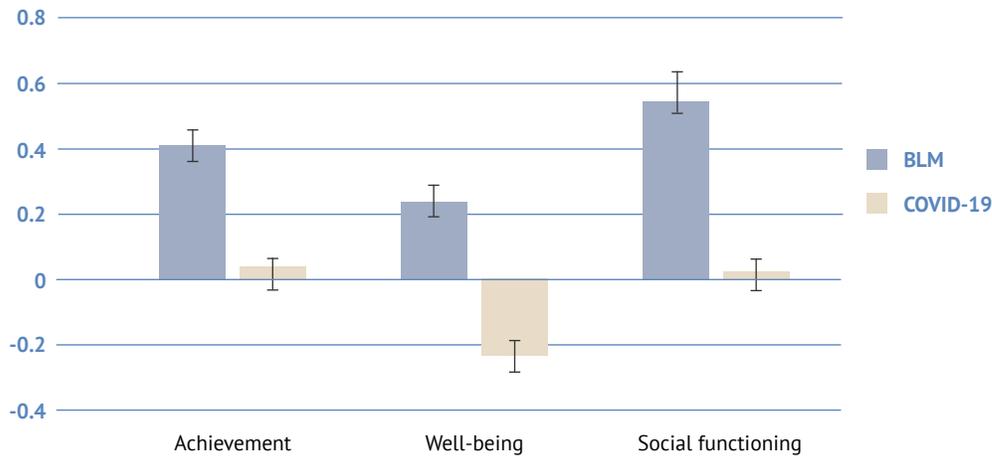
Paired t-tests revealed significant differences in ratings of the effects of the pandemic vs. the BLM events, with the latter always being more positive: for achievement,  $t(104) = 5.13, p < 0.001$ ; for well-being,  $t(104) = 5.27, p < 0.001$ , and for social functioning,  $t(100) = 8.38, p < 0.001$ . The result for social functioning was significantly stronger than for achievement and well-being,  $z$  of difference in  $t$ 's = 2.34,  $p < 0.01$ .

The follow-up in December allowed us to determine whether these psychological impacts were maintained over six months. Figure 3 illustrates the follow-up ratings for the effects of the pandemic and the BLM events on achievement, social life, and general adjustment. The COVID 19 pandemic was now perceived as having had no lasting effect on achievement and social engagement ( $p$ 's  $> 0.20$ ), but a marginal negative effect on well-being remained ( $t(84) = -1.74, p = 0.086$ ). The BLM events of the spring were now perceived to have made things better for participants in the areas of achievement ( $t(84) = 2.48, p < 0.05$ ) and social functioning ( $t(84) = 4.73, p < 0.001$ ), but still did not seem to affect participants' well-being, ( $t(84) = 1.33, p = 19$ ).

In summary, from August to December, there was a noticeable shift such that the damaging psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic dissipated, and

the psychological effects of the BLM events changed from a mixed picture to becoming generally positive.

**Figure 3. Psychological Impact of the Pandemic and Participation in the BLM Movement on Achievement, Well-Being and Social Functioning in December 2020**



### Personal and Collective Need Satisfaction and Frustration and Adaptation to the COVID-19 Pandemic and BLM E vents

The second major question of this investigation concerned the role of personal and collective need satisfaction and frustration on the adaptation of English-speaking Black young adults in Quebec to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the BLM events.

To assess the negative impacts of the events, we focused on prospective changes in depressive symptoms from the first survey in the summer of 2020 (T1) to the second survey in December 2020 (T2). To assess the positive impact, we focused on changes in subjective well-being. Previous research in basic needs theory has demonstrated that positive functioning is primarily related to higher levels of need satisfaction (with lower levels of need frustration playing a minimal role); by contrast, negative functioning is primarily related to higher levels of need frustration (with level of need satisfaction playing little role) (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). We therefore planned to use personal and collective measures of need satisfaction to predict changes in well-being from T1 to T2, whereas the personal and collective measures of need frustration would be used to predict changes in depressive symptoms.

The T2 measure of SWB was regressed first on the T1 level of SWB, and then on T1 reports of personal and collective need satisfaction. The regression equation yielded a highly significant multiple R of 0.772,  $F(3,82) = 40.23$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Baseline SWB was highly related to later SWB,  $b = 0.74$ ,  $t(82) = 10.05$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Collective need satisfaction was also significantly positively related to later levels of subjective well-being,  $b = 0.24$ ,  $t(82) = 3.01$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Personal need satisfaction (T1) was unrelated to T2 SWB,  $b = 0.01$ ,  $t(82) = 0.10$ , ns.

The T2 assessment of depressive symptoms was regressed first on the T1 level of symptoms, and then on T1 reports of personal and collective need frustration.

The regression equation yielded a highly significant multiple R of 0.535,  $F(3,82) = 31.51, p < 0.001$ . Baseline depressive symptoms were highly related to later symptoms  $b = 0.69, t(82) = 8.72, p < 0.001$ . Collective need frustration was also significantly positively related to later levels of depressive symptoms  $b = 0.26, t(82) = 3.10, p < 0.01$ . Personal need frustration was unrelated to December depression,  $b = -0.04, t(82) = -0.43, ns$ .

Contrary to our hypothesis, for both subjective well-being and depressive symptoms, it was the collective form of need satisfaction or frustration alone that played a significant role in predicting future levels of functioning. This suggests that the depression levels of English-speaking Black young adults in Quebec were primarily affected by whether they felt the Black community was having its needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence frustrated, rather than by whether their own personal needs were frustrated by the momentous events of the spring of 2020. At the other end of the hedonic ledger, their subjective well-being was primarily affected by whether the Black community was having their basic psychological needs satisfied, rather than whether their own personal needs were satisfied.

### Narrative Accounts of the Spring of 2020

Each narrative account was coded for whether it included a focus on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and/or the BLM movement. Contrary to our hypothesis, participants were somewhat less likely to focus on the BLM movement in their narratives than on the COVID-19 pandemic, respectively, 59% vs. 70%,  $X^2(1, N = 86) = 2.06, p = 0.15$ .

The narrative accounts were also coded for the extent to which they contained reference to high-arousal negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, tension, and alarm or to low-arousal negative emotions such as fatigue, exhaustion, sadness, and depression. Interestingly, a significant association emerged between high-arousal negative emotions and a focus on the COVID-19 pandemic on the one hand, and between a focus on the BLM movement and low-arousal negative affect,  $X^2(1,84) = 5.06, p < 0.05$ . Fear was the dominant emotion reported in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, whereas exhaustion was the dominant emotion reported in relation to the BLM movement. We were unable to compare the association of the COVID-19 pandemic and the BLM movement for positive emotions because only 4 narratives out of 86 included the mention of any positive emotions. (Appendix 1 provides examples of the narrative accounts.)

# Discussion

The central question of this investigation concerned the psychological impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the BLM events on English-speaking Black young adults in Quebec.

In August, the COVID-19 pandemic was perceived by Black young adults as having a significantly negative effect on all areas of functioning. By contrast, the BLM movement was perceived to have a negative effect on achievement, no effect on well-being, and a positive effect on social functioning, such as a sense of connection with friends, family, and acquaintances. These results provide only partial support for our main hypothesis. The COVID-19 pandemic did indeed have a significant negative psychological impact on English-speaking Black young adults in Quebec, but the BLM movement did little to counteract these negative impacts. It was only in the social domain that Black young adults felt that their lives had become appreciably better than their baseline because of the protest movement. The positive social effect probably resulted because the young adults in this study had been in lockdown for three months prior to the emergence of the BLM movement, which drew many Black young adults to the mass protests that were taking place on an almost nightly basis.

The follow-up survey in December allowed us to determine whether these psychological impacts were maintained over six months. Interestingly, the COVID-19 pandemic was now perceived as having had no lasting effect on participants' achievement and social life. However, a negative effect on well-being remained. Thus, there was a return to baseline functioning in the achievement and social domains but not for general well-being. A continued well-being deficit would be consistent with data collected in natural disasters. For example, in a study on the psychological aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, researchers found that adaptation and return to pre-hurricane well-being had not occurred 12 months after the storm (LaJoie, Sprang & McKinney, 2010). Indeed, given that the COVID-19 pandemic was still ongoing at the time of the second survey assessment, it is not surprising that well-being levels had not fully recovered, even if individuals generally experienced improvements with regard to their social functioning and achievements.

The results for the impact of COVID-19 from the August and December surveys provided a more nuanced picture than we expected. The pandemic clearly did move Black young adults toward despair regarding their prospects for achievement, social engagement, and well-being, but these negative effects were time limited. Six months later, achievement and social functioning were judged to have returned to baseline. It was only for well-being that a deficit resulting from the pandemic remained significant.

The results for the impact of the BLM events from the August and December surveys also provided a more nuanced picture than we had hypothesized. Indeed, coding of narrative accounts in the first survey indicated that the predominant impact of the BLM events was to exacerbate low-arousal negative emotions such as fatigue, exhaustion, and sadness. Only in the social domain did participants report that their lives had become appreciably better than their baseline because of the BLM movement.

However, the results of the December survey indicated a delayed emergence of clear positive effects of the BLM events on our participants' views of their achievement and social functioning.

Any conclusion regarding positive effects of the BLM movement are tempered, however, by our examination of the narratives that participants produced regarding their personal experiences of the pandemic and the BLM movement. These narratives did not emphasize positive, hopeful effects of the BLM movement; instead, the narratives focused on sadness about the continued suffering of Black individuals at the hands of police, and the helplessness and fatigue that participants felt about the seemingly endless repetition of such incidents. Because we did not collect narratives in December, it is impossible to know if the tone of these narratives had changed; research suggests that autobiographical memories often do change with time (McAdams, 2015). It is important to not place more value on the self-reports of improved functioning than the narrative accounts of distress, especially given the importance of narrative identity for the personality development of young adults (McAdams, 2015) and recent evidence that autobiographical memories that are filled with themes of need frustration have been associated with higher levels of anxiety and depression in the future (Philippe & Houle, 2020).

A final question of this investigation concerned the role of personal and collective frustration versus empowerment in the adaptation of English-speaking Black young adults in Quebec to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the BLM movement. We expected that the pandemic would cause frustration of the basic psychological needs, whereas the BLM movement would be associated with empowerment (as reflected in need satisfaction). Importantly, we distinguished between need experiences at the individual and collective levels, hypothesizing that (1) collective feelings of need frustration would contribute to diminished well-being over and above the effects of personal need frustration; and (2) collective feelings of need satisfaction, which we likened to empowerment, would contribute to improved well-being over and above the effects of personal need satisfaction. Together, the results supported our hypotheses: the inclusion of collective measures of frustration/empowerment allowed us to explain more of the variance in well-being outcomes than did the personal measures alone. Surprisingly, personal ratings of need satisfaction/frustration during the time of the worst public health and civil rights crises were unrelated to changes in depression and well-being. These findings speak to the importance of measuring psychological needs at the collective level when examining the adjustment of young adults who identify with a historically disadvantaged group.

The present investigation suffered from several limitations, including a relatively modest sample size, the inclusion of only two waves of data collection, and a narrow range of outcome measures. We also did not collect data with regard to where in Quebec participants were living, and thus cannot make more specific comments about whether our participants were predominantly from Montreal or other parts of the province. We have begun a larger investigation in which we recruited 400 English- and French-speaking Black young adults from a nationally representative Canadian panel developed by the survey company Leger. This new three-wave, longitudinal investigation will include follow-ups in March and August 2021. Together, the two investigations will allow us to explore the psychological effects of

the COVID-19 pandemic during distinct six-month periods of case expansion (August to December 2020) and contraction (January to July 2021). We will be able to compare how patterns of personal and collective need satisfaction/frustration change during these periods, and whether the changes will have an impact on psychological distress and well-being in Black young adults. The national sampling will also allow us to make interesting comparisons of English-speaking Black young adults in Quebec, who were the focus of the current study, with (1) English-speaking Black young adults in the rest of Canada and (2) French-speaking Black young adults in Quebec. These comparisons will allow us to examine the important intersectional question of whether language minority status interacted with racial minority status in placing Black young adults at particular risk during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We recently examined the first wave of data from this new investigation to explore differences between Quebec English-speaking and French-Speaking Black young adults. We hypothesized that the psychological effects of the pandemic might be significantly more negative for the English-speaking Black community because of the intersectional effects of being both a linguistic and racial minority. We also hypothesized that Black English-speaking young adults might gain less benefit from the BLM movement because the protests and social media campaigns were conducted predominantly in French. Our initial results provided support for both hypotheses. After nine months of the worst pandemic in a century, English-speaking Black young adults in Quebec reported significantly lower levels of subjective well-being than their French-speaking counterparts. Furthermore, they also reported receiving fewer psychological benefits from participating in the BLM movement during the spring and summer of 2020 than their French-speaking counterparts. Both findings appeared to be mediated by the perception of lower collective need satisfaction for the Black community by the English-speaking young adults.

# Conclusion

The present investigation highlights the value of using self-determination theory and social identity theory to understand how the momentous events of 2020 have impacted English-speaking Black young adults in Quebec. There is evidence that our participants were at risk for an adverse psychological reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic and that they did not benefit as much psychologically as expected from the success of the BLM movement. One policy implication is to pay greater attention to how Black young adults feel about whether their community is able to satisfy its basic psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence in Quebec and Canada. Our findings suggest that, in the context of the twin crises of 2020, achieving a sense of collective need satisfaction was more important psychologically to Black young adults than achieving personal need satisfaction.

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# APPENDIX I

## Examples of Narratives Written About the Events of the Spring and Summer of 2020

### Participant 6

“At the beginning of the pandemic I was very scared and confused. I felt over consumed by the media and all the measures that were in place. I can always remember going to the grocery store the days leading up to the lock down and seeing people scurrying for food and toilet paper. This was very scary and made me think that the worst was about to happen. For the first couple months, I found myself extremely worried and lonely. Not being able to go about my daily routine such as going to work, spending time with friends or even going to the mall was hard and made me feel isolated. However, living with my family made my experience barrable since I was never alone and had people to communicate with in my home.

The killing of George Floyd really was shocking and made me feel very angry. I was happy that the BLM movement was revived and ready to make a change. I was also happy that people other than Black people were outraged by the killing and supported the movement. I was hopeful that change would come especially since there were so many events. But as time went on it seems like the momentum died. This made me feel very sad and confused because I really believed now would be the perfect time to make the social political changes needed to end racism in some way. This summer was not as horrible for me, and my stress levels reduced. I think it is because I stopped watching the news as often and limited the time I spent on social media during this time. Instead I spent a lot of time outside in the park and taking a few drives around town. Also, a lot of the social distancing measures were reduced so it was easier to visit friends for a few gather-ings indoors and outside. Now that we are in currently in the red zone, I am feeling a bit nervous but not as nervous as at the beginning of the pandemic. I do feel hopeful and positive that better days are ahead.”

### Participant 36

“To begin with, the pandemic did not affect me too much. I was a teacher, therefore once schools closed, I was immediately out of a job and stayed home with my children, but it was also a relief that I qualified for some sort of financial aid. The first two weeks were smooth, I was enjoying my time home. As an introvert, being able to slow down and spend time with my little ones was a blessing in disguise. Then two weeks quickly became months and as my routine was quickly thrown out the window so was my motivation, energy & sanity. Amid losing it, came the tragedy of George Floyd and the beginning of the largest civil protest. These events sparked my anxiety through the roof, I was stressed, worried for the future of my kids as if I wasn't already before. While tears were streaming down my face, the unity I saw within my community encouraged me to also join the fight, I joined protests, listened to podcasts, signed up for any training or education platform I could find on the current situation and challenge my thoughts to reeducate myself in order to become a better advocate for my community on race issues. Fast forward to now, I am extremely burned out, mentally drained, it feels like I am now feeling the weight of all the emotions my brain & body went through over the past few months while still having to complete my daily responsibilities. As a young Black female, I find it very hard to continue these days, but regain strength in finding hope.”

## Participant 51

“At the beginning of the of the pandemic with the BLM movement, I felt like sometimes when I went out for a jog people would look at me differently. By their facial expression I could feel the empathy. I felt that they were trying to be nice by smiling at me or greeting me. In the middle at work, my coworkers and I shared our opinion about the situation. We talked about the pandemic but also about what is happening to the black community. At the end, more people took conscience of the situation is the US and in Canada too, even though the work is still not done yet.”

## Participant 65

“At the beginning of the pandemic, I was a little anxious because I was fearing for the health of myself and my family. Eventually, I saw how governments and schools were able to deal with the pandemic and enact closures for the safety of citizens. I then became less agitated about the situation and began to adjust accordingly. I enjoyed staying indoors and receiving more time to work on school assignments. Professors gave us extra time for assignments to which certainly helped. I felt relatively well mentally during the pandemic, but my physical health began to become a concern I started gaining weight from not exercising. I didn't bother too much about this because I was happy that I was doing well mentally. However, my mental health started to wane when I learned about the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbey, Rayshard Brooks and other Black people in the United States. I also learned about Dafonte Miller not receiving the justice he ought to have received in the Ontario courts. These events depleted my self-worth and made me think of myself poorly because of how people with my skin color are treated. Eventually I have been able to work against this thinking to realize Black is beautiful even if society says otherwise.”

## Participant 72

“To a large extent over the past few years, many of my social behaviours among my peers and colleagues have evolved to become more “White” to fit the status-quo of what's expected. As the only Black woman in my program, I'm terrified of failing as I feel it reflects poorly not only on me, but my entire race. I've always gone the extra mile to be polite and formal in a professional context.

The revival of the BLM movement reminded me that none of that matters - I'm still Black. And unless racism is dealt with at a systemic level, my behavioral over-compensating is meaningless. I was bombarded by scripted messages of solidarity from all types of random organizations who were clearly trying to do their civic duty by giving lip-service to the issue, but often without action plans in place to tackle it. Black family and friends were outraged and in pain. Non-Black POC offered a confusing assortment of support. And White friends were largely silent. No acknowledgements were made by my lab or department head. Life was meant to continue as usual.

This brought back to the surface for me all those feelings of inferiority I thought I had gotten rid of by behaving more “White” over the years. It reminded me of my Blackness. And it hurt. Old wounds opened and I had to begin again on a journey to love my Black self. The beauty of it is that I found community in the middle of it with other Black students on Twitter.”

## **Participant 88**

“I was stuck in the house for months, unable to see my partner and my friends. However, I am so grateful that the pandemic did not have drastic effects on my physical condition or finances. It was really my mental state that was affected. It was upsetting to not know when I could see my partner again, I cried myself to sleep a few times because of an overwhelming sense of uncertainty in my life. On top of this, Black people were being killed in the streets, and I felt powerless that I could change anything in the world [...] Part of me also feels disconnected from the Black community because I am mixed, and yes I acknowledge that by being mixed I have a certain privileges, but I still feel like I can't speak my experiences as a Black person because I don't have it as bad as others. I feel like I'm missing something to be a part of the Black community, because I was born in Canada, and seldom participate in “black culture”, whatever this means. It is hard to put my thoughts about this into words.”

## **Participant 101**

“When the news broke out that Ahmaud Arbery was murdered, my first thought was “Not again.” Not another Black individual, not another murder of a Black person at the hands of a white individual, not another life lost. I was submerged with many emotions: anger, exhaustion, fear, disappointment. I was torn between wanting to help and wanting to hide. These events weighed on my family life and on my friendships.

Eventually, after a few weeks, I was able to decide how I wanted to approach the situation, how I wanted to navigate this pandemic and the social injustices I faced. I took the activism approach. I went on into the streets, I started black centered initiatives. I started and ended some conversations.

Today, I still feel many of those emotions, but I try to channel them through my work.”



(Photo credit: Allen McInnis/Montreal Gazette)

**Richard Koestner** is a professor of Psychology at McGill University who is dedicated to studying human motivation. He is the Founder and Director of the McGill Human Motivation Lab, and he has published over 200 scientific articles. Prof. Koestner recently won the *Canadian Psychology Association Donald O. Hebb Award for Distinguished Contributions to Psychology as a Science* (March 2021) and earlier won the *Canadian Psychology Association Education and Training Award* (June 2007) Dr. Koestner is also a QUESCREN researcher-member.



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