

SURVEY RESULTS

1. IDENTITY

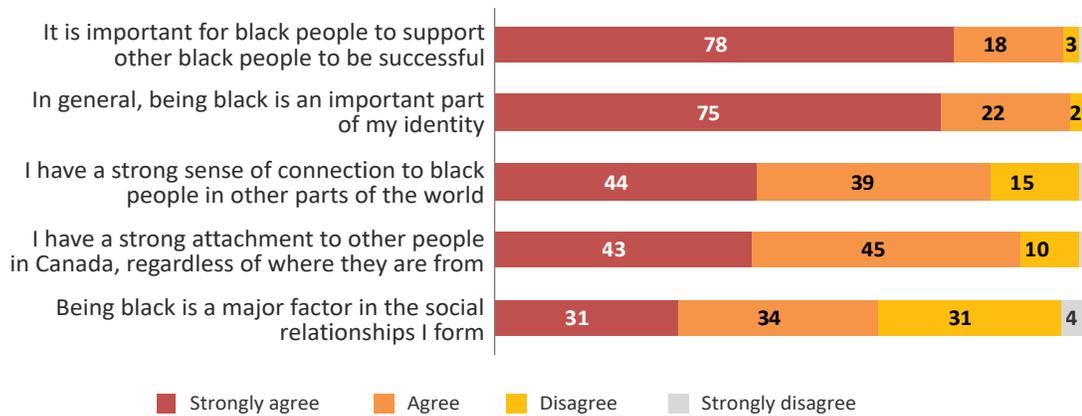
Overview

A central concept behind the Black Experience Project is that of identity and how it relates to the lived experience of Black individuals. While all those recruited to participate in the BEP survey self-identify either as Black or of African heritage, participants may nevertheless describe their identities in multiple and often overlapping ways.

Identity is complex, fluid and multi-faceted. It is formed through multiple processes and influences, relating to one's race, ethnicity, culture, or country of origin. Many other expressed identities may reflect religion, gender, sexual orientation, profession or even the neighbourhood in which a person lives. These different facets of identity are not mutually exclusive; in most cases, they are interwoven. In the case of the Black population in the GTA, identity is particularly complex because of the population's diversity – its different histories, origins and cultural backgrounds, as well as differences within the population in terms of levels of education, employment situations, and so on.

This Chapter addresses the shared identity stemming from the experience of being Black. It is framed in part through the experience of anti-Black racism, as well as through the diverse identities with the Black community in the GTA.

(7) Importance of Black identity



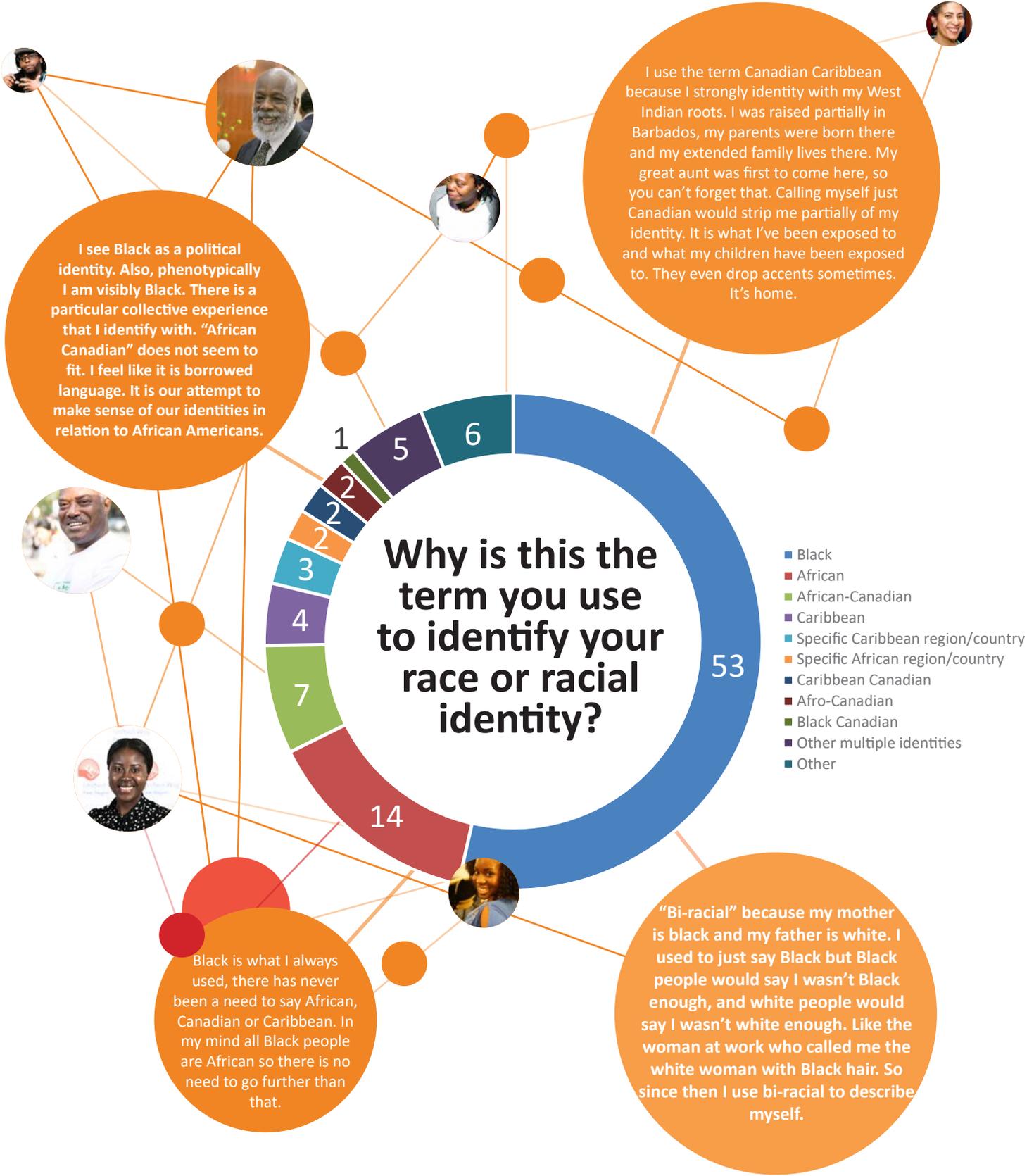
Black Experience Project participants express a strong sense of a shared Black identity and solidarity with other Black people. Participants are almost unanimous in agreeing that being Black is an important part of their identity – and most strongly agree that this is the case. More than four in five participants also agree that they feel a strong sense of connection to Black people in other parts of Canada and the world (see Figure 7).

There is also a striking commonality of perspective when it comes to the extent to which Black people are treated unfairly because of their race (a theme explored in greater depth in Chapter 4). For instance, BEP participants agree almost unanimously that people in the GTA experience unfair treatment because they are Black.

The consensus about the importance of being Black to one's identity, and the extent of unfair treatment due to race is evident across BEP participants regardless of the diversity of their racial, ethno-cultural and other identities.

The survey confirms the complexity and diversity of identities within the Black community in the GTA. Noting that people use different terms to refer to themselves, the survey asked participants what term they use to identify their racial identity.

The term "Black" predominates, and it is used by just over half of BEP participants; almost one in two prefers one of a number of other terms, including "African" (see Figure 8). Black is the predominant identity for participants in the study including a majority of those born in Canada or the Caribbean. In contrast, only 30 percent of those born in Africa identify their race as Black – just over half as many as those born in other parts of the world.



Moreover, participants choose the term they use to identify themselves racially for different reasons. Some say it represents their heritage or cultural background (55%), while others say it represents their personal identity (40%), or that it corresponds with how others view them (25%). Some indicate it includes or expresses solidarity with all Black people (20%). A substantial proportion participants give multiple reasons for how they define their racial identity. Not surprisingly, among those who identify racially as African, most say they choose this term because it reflects their heritage or cultural background. Among those who identify as Black, however, the reasons given are more varied, with no one reason noticeably outweighing the others.

Race is only one dimension of identity. Participants also express a variety of ethnic or cultural identities, including Caribbean- and African-based identities. Specifically, close to half of participants say their most important ethnic or cultural identity is Caribbean (either in general or in terms of a specific Caribbean country). The next most common identity (for about one in four participants) is African (in general or in terms of a specific country or region), while one in ten identify their most important ethnic or cultural identity as Canadian (see Figure 9).

These results also highlight the way in which the make-up of the Black community differs across the generations. When it comes to ethno-cultural identity, the oldest generation (those ages 55 and over) is largely homogenous, with a majority identifying as Caribbean (see Figure 10).

In contrast, the younger generation (under 35) is more diverse, and in particular more likely to identify as African. This pattern mirrors the generational shift relating to country of origin presented in Chapter 1 and may also reflect the politics of the younger generation, who, regardless of their origin choose to identify in this way.

All but a handful of BEP participants mentioned at least one identity other than race or ethnicity, and most named more than one. The two aspects of identity most widely indicated are gender or sexual identity (40%; e.g., being a woman/man, heterosexual, LGBT) and religion (40%; primarily Christian). In both cases, these identities are more prominent among women than men, especially in the case of gender/sexuality (59% of women versus 29% among men). Among participants who self-identified as LGBT (5% of all participants),

more than eight in ten (84%) named some aspect of gender or sexuality as part of their identity (principally being part of this community – 61%). One-third (34%) of this group also mentioned religion as part of who they are.

(9) Most important ethnic/cultural identity	
	%
CARIBBEAN*	46
Jamaican	28
Caribbean/West Indian	7
Trinidadian and Tobagonian	4
Other Caribbean	7
WEST AFRICAN	12
Ghanian	7
Nigerian	4
Other West African	2
EAST AFRICAN	7
Somali	3
Other East African	4
AFRICAN - OTHER	8
CANADIAN	9
Canadian	6
Other (e.g., Nova Scotian)	3
BLACK	5
OTHER	9
Tribes / Language / People	4
Other	5

**Main categories represent net percentage of secondary categories*

(10) Most important ethnic/cultural identity (by age group)

