Identity experiences

In addition to exploring the context factors associated in the malleability of multiracial identity, it is also essential to understand the experiences of multiracial individuals regarding potential challenges and resilience. It is apparent that multiracial identity has been a controversy in the United States as evidenced by the public debate about whether individuals should be able to check more than one box on the US Census (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). The public discourse on multiracial identity has been fraught with monoracial conceptualizations of race and multiracial discrimination (Campbell & Herman, 2010). Multiracial Discrimination.

Messages about one's racial identity have been demonstrated to impact how individuals understand their identity. Miville and colleagues (2005) refer to the experience of being asked what are you as a form of multiracial racism. Given the history of race relations and racism in the United States, multiracial 33 individuals have been described as a group that bridge racial divides (Cheng & Lee, 2009), however there is little acknowledgement of multiracial racism.

Based on multiracial research and literature, Johnston and Nadal (2010) outline categories of multiracial microaggressions, which are everyday denigrating messages multiracial people receive about their identity: (1) inclusion or exclusion based on multiracial identity, (2) exoticization or objectification, (3) assumption of monoracial identity or mistaken for another group identity, (4) denial of multiracial identity, and (5) pathologizing of identity and experiences. These messages are conveyed indirectly through experiences where multiracial people have their identity questioned or assumed. Given the role of other peoples' perceptions in how multiracial

people identify, it is essential to explore the multiracial experiences of discrimination. Findings from a recent study suggested that the integrated multiracial identity buffered the effects of perceived discrimination on psychological well-being (Jackson, Yoo, Guevarra, & Harrington, 2012). Furthermore, multiracial individuals experience microaggressions within their family, which is a common theme across multiracial people and unique to this population (Nadal et al., 2013). Recent research has shown that group identification with multiracial people may buffer the effects of discrimination on psychological well-being (Giamo, Schmitt, & Outten, 2012). Therefore, multiracial discrimination as an identity challenge experience may be related to one's malleability and overall psychological well-being.

Family & Societal Messages. The experiences of multiracial individuals and the messages they receive implicitly through these experiences contribute to one's views about their racial identity. Experiences with family members and their messages about multiracial identity have been identified as an important factor in multiracial identity 34 (Lorenzo-Blanco, Bares, & Delva, 2013; Jacobs, 1992). Other studies have shown the impact of social interactions and others' messages about race on multiracial children's identity and understanding of their heritage (Newsome, 2001).

Positive messages through family socialization about the individuals' multiple heritages, and social context have been linked to positive identity development in multiracial college students (Brittian, Umana-Taylor, & Derlan, 2012). Greater exploration of the experiences of multiracial individuals through social interactions and messages about their identity is warranted. Many monoracial people are also racially ambiguous, however,

their racial identity development may be an explicit process with socialization by a family of one race including consistent messages about identifying with a specific racial group. These consistent messages may be linked to positive private and public regard, which have been explored as protective factors in racial identity for Black individuals (Sellers et al., 1998). Racial regard is described as how an individual makes meaning of the messages about his or her collective group, which has been separated into two categories: public regard (i. e.

, larger societal views of the group) and private regard (i. e., the individuals own value of their group). Racial regard is similar to other constructs such as racial pride or the concept of psychological closeness with this racial identity or group (Sellers et al., 1998) and refers to the extent to which the individual feels other people view their racial group positively or negatively.

Given the impact of messages for monoracial groups of color, it is important to address the impact for multiracial people and the link to their psychological well-being. 35 Research on the importance of positive views of one's group has also been described as collective self-esteem, which has been positively associated with psychological well-being particularly monoracial people of color (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine & Broadnax, 1994). Specifically, Crocker and colleagues (1994) conducted a study with Black, Asian, and White college students by administering surveys of collective self-esteem, personal self-esteem and psychological well-being. After controlling for personal self-esteem, private collective self-esteem (similar to private racial regard) was associated with increased life satisfaction and decreased hopelessness. Public collective self-esteem (similar to public racial regard)

was related to decreased depression and hopelessness. It is important to note that similar associations have been studied in monoracial people of color.

For multiracial individuals there is theoretical speculation about the relationship, yet there is a dearth of empirical research on public or private regard of multiracial identity and the association with psychological well-being. Future research could ascertain the unique experiences of multiracial individuals with regard to societal messages about their racial identity and the impact on psychological well-being. Existing studies identified the forced choice dilemma as an example of an experience where a societal message may be conveyed that multiracial identity is not valued (Aspinall, 2003).

Sanchez (2010) used the term identity autonomy to describe the degree to which multiracial individuals feel they may identify however they choose. Findings suggested that forced choice dilemmas were significantly related to increased depressive symptoms and that this relationship was impacted by perceptions of public regard for multiracial identity and identity autonomy. In other words, when individuals felt forced to choose, they perceived negative public regard for multiracial 36 identity and lower identity autonomy (Sanchez, 2010).

Multiracial individuals were also more likely to perceive racial bias in varying contexts on college campuses compared to their monoracial counterparts (Brackett et al., 2006). Though multiracial individuals might experience discrimination at similar rates as monoracial individuals, Campbell and Herman (2010) found that there was significant resistance on the part of

Whites and monoracial people of color to include multiracial people in anti-discrimination policy.

There is limited evidence for negative societal messages about multiracial identity and the impact on psychological well-being, however, more must be known about the experiences of multiracial individuals regarding potential challenges and ways that multiracial identity may have positive impacts on psychological well-being. Racial Heritages. Research highlighted the common themes, messages, and experiences of multiracial individuals (Johnston & Nadal, 2010); however, a large portion of the research has been limited to identifying factors and experiences of BlackWhite multiracial identity (Jackson, 2012). Shih, Sanchez, Bonam and Peck (2007) noted that lack of multiracial diversity is a major limitation of their study on stereotype activation comparing multiracial individuals with their monoracial counterparts. Qualitative studies have also attempted to highlight common themes of the multiracial experience across multiracial heritages (Jackson, 2012; Miville et al.

, 2005, Schlabach, 2013). Therefore, the current study was inclusive of all individuals who identified as multiracial in order to explore the common themes of multiracial individuals. There is a recent body of literature that has begun to examine the experiences of Asian-White multiracial individuals and how their identity construction may be different from models that have been based on Black-White people.

For example, Lou and 37 colleagues (2011) found that Asian-White individuals showed greater variability in their identity as more of the

participants in this study tended to assert a protean identity whereby identifying differently in varying contexts. In another study using national survey data, Bratter and Heard (2009) found that Asian-White multiracial individuals tended to identify with their mothers' race in contrast to Black-White participants who tended to identify with their fathers' race, especially if he is White. However, if given the opportunity to integrate their identities, respondents were more likely to identify with an integrated identity. There is also evidence that the perceived social status of multiple racial heritages and family socioeconomic background might impact chosen identities as well (Townsend, Fryberg, Wilkins, & Markus, 2012). This dissertation study will investigate the common experiences of multiracial individuals rather than focusing on the differences within this population. Gender. Also of importance is the impact of gender on multiracial identity.

Research has shown that women have a tendency to emphasize negative interactions with same gender, monoracial counterparts (Rockquemore, 2002). One potential reason for this is the emphasis on appearance for women compared to men. Female participants in Rockquemore's (2002) study felt they were disliked based upon assumptions because of Eurocentric conceptions of beauty and assumptions about their vanity.

Further, male participants tended to identify with the same-gender parent when they lived in the same household as the same-gender parent. Overall, Rockquemore suggested that gender interacted with racial identity depending upon the social interaction as appearance is emphasized with women and their phenotypes may be more likely to be scrutinized by others. Root (1998) found similar experiences in her sample where female

multiracial 38 participants experienced an exoticization and sexualization that was not reported by men in the sample.

Therefore, multiracial females may have particular contextual experiences that impact their identity