

Self-concept



Though scholars acknowledged the malleability and context dependent nature of how individuals shape their personal and social identities (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994), racial identity literature lacks the complexity to address these fluid characteristics of self-categorization. Social identity has been defined as the social categorizations of self and others, such that self-categories “define the individual in terms of shared similarities with members” of a particular social group (Turner et al., 1994; p. 454). Drawing together the unique experiences of multiracial individuals, as shared similarities, may be further understood by exploring the complexity of racial malleability. In order to understand individuals’ self-understanding of their social identities, one must understand how they construct their self-concept and self-views. K. Gergen and M. Gergen (1983) asserted that self-concept theory neglects individuals’ ability to actively shape their view of their self. Further, they emphasized that individuals reflect on their self-understanding historically to construct their self-concept in a given moment.

The authors suggested that one’s self-understanding is a constantly unfolding narrative based on one’s life experiences. Many multiracial individuals are constantly confronted with the what are you question when someone is unable to easily racially identify them (Chen & Hamilton, 2011). Given the nature of an individual’s identity and how he or she forms this identity based on messages he or she receives and then the experience of having that identity questioned, there is the potential for self and other doubt to affect the way the person selfidentifies. When another person through identity questioning doubts an individual’s avowed identity, many processes may occur for that individual to prevent the experience of

dissonance. It is evident that self-understanding is complex and consists of multiple factors. Research referred to the way in which we understand ourselves as self-concept and there is extensive literature exploring the implications for the development of a self-concept (Markus & Kunda, 1986). Integrating various mental representations of one's self has been described in terms of having multiple self-aspects, which correspond to a variety of roles, relationships, contexts, or activities (McConnell, 2011). Specifically, McConnell (2011) put forth a framework of multiple self-aspects describes the self-concept as a collection of multiple, context dependent selves.

This research investigated the ways 8 people understand their multiple self-aspects and the impact this has on mental health. This dissertation study focused upon the impact of multiple racial identities and how that may relate to one's psychological well-being.