

Racial malleability



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Context and lived experiences might each play a role in the context-specific logic of an individual who is choosing how to identify in a specific experience of identity questioning. It is evident that multiracial identity is malleable given all of these context specific and individual specific factors when identifying (Jackson, Wolven, & Aguilera, 2013). A recent experimental study demonstrated the malleability of participants based on having their White or Black racial identities primed (Gaither, Sommers, & Ambady, 2013). The findings of Gaither and colleagues (2013) study highlighted the relationship between multiple racial identities and social interactions, such that participants' behavioral changes based on the salience of a particular identity. However, existing multiracial theory and methodology have lacked the complexity for incorporating these factors in addressing the real-world lived experiences of this population.

Studies have attempted to address the malleability of multiracial identity and it's relationship to psychological well-being (Sanchez, Shih, & Garcia, 2009). Sanchez and colleagues (2009) noted that multiracial individuals might identify differently in varying contexts. The concept of avowing a different racial identity in varying situations, timepoints, and activities has been termed racial malleability, which has been linked with lower psychological well-being (Sanchez, Shih & Garcia, 2009). In particular, individuals who had a lower tolerance for self-inconsistencies tended to have lower psychological well-being when they were racially malleable. Further, racial malleability 39 was related to unstable multiracial regard (Sanchez, Shih & Garcia, 2009). Racial malleability is based on literature on the stability of self-concept; however, alternative conceptualizations of self-

concept will be presented later in this literature review. One issue in this study is that unstable multiracial regard was measured with an adapted measure of self-concept stability, which is contrary to the empirical literature about the importance of malleability in identity for multiracial individuals. It is important to note that identifying differently in varying contexts may be a way of coping with negative public regard for multiracial identity.

In an experimental study, Sanchez and Bonam (2009) found that when multiracial individuals disclosed their identity, people perceived them as colder, less competent and more vulnerable to negative feedback. Therefore, evidence shows that there may be disclosure costs given the current racial discourse. In a qualitative study, Jackson and colleagues (2013) found that shifting expressions of racial identity was used as a way to cope with ethnic discrimination and acculturative stress.

Some existing beliefs about multiracial identity are that choosing to identify as multiracial means individuals think they are better than their minority monoracial identity status (Vasquez, 2010). Additionally, multiracial identity has been described as a passing phase in our society where people feel that it is in style to identify as multiracial (Campbell & Herman, 2010). Given the public discourse on multiracial identity, it is possible that multiracial individuals might feel there is a negative public regard for their multiracial identity, which may contribute to malleable racial identity and certain understandings of self.