

Introduction to the problem of the individual's identity



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After decades of research, our understanding of the complexity of an individual's identity and the process of socially constructing one's identity is limited for particular groups of individuals who do not fit standard socially constructed identity groups. Specifically, traditional dichotomies of understanding racial identity have been applied to multiracial individuals (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009; Shih & Sanchez, 2005).

Researchers exploring the process of multiracial racial identification noted that the complexity of a multiracial individual's experience may not be captured by existing ecological or linear multiracial identity models (Hitlin, Brown, & Elder, 2006; Lou, Lalonde, & Wilson, 2011; Miville, Constantine, Baysden, & So-Lloyd, 2005; Rockquemore, Brunsma & Delgado, 2009; Shih & Sanchez, 2009). The complexity of a multiracial person's identity lies in the dynamic of having their identity questioned through the common experience of being asked, what are you? and the individual's own sense of belongingness to the group or groups they avow. In this dissertation study, the term multiracial is utilized to encompass: 1.) biracial individuals, those individuals identifying with heritage and/or direct parentage of 2 races, as well as 2.

) multiracial or mixed-race individuals identifying with heritage of 3 or more races (Miville et al., 2005). There is a major shift in our population, labeled a "Biracial Baby Boom," and research is lagging with regard to the lived experience and identification of this significant part of our population (Bratter, 2007). One impetus for understanding this dynamic lies within the sheer growth of the multiracial population in the United States by 32% in 10 years (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011).

With the recent increase in awareness of the ability to choose one's racial identity, as evident by the first opportunity to check more than one racial category on the 2000 U. S. Census (Jones & Symens Smith, 2001), basic research about the complexity of external and internal mechanisms of identity should be explored. Investigating identities that encompass multiple categories furthers our understanding of basic developmental and social processes associated with the psychology of self-concept including the integration of self and others' perceptions. Multiracial research further clarifies differences between racial identity (i. e., the individual's self-understanding), racial identification (i.

e., others' perceptions of the individual), and racial category (i. e., the available racial identities and how they may be chosen in a specific context) (Rockquemore, Brunsma, and Delgado, 2009). It is critical to note that the 2000 United States Census was the first attempt to assess the size of the multiracial population. It was found that 42 percent, of the 6. 8 million Americans self-identifying as multiracial, were under the age of 18 (Jones & Symens Smith, 2001). Multiracial individuals are a young, but growing segment of the population and their identity concerns are becoming a research focus as this population may have unique concerns from monoracial groups (Sue & Sue, 2008).

An emerging literature has begun to identify differences in the racial identity development process for multiracial individuals; however, this literature yielded mixed findings regarding the relationship with psychological well-being and overall mental health (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). This dissertation

study investigated alternative explanations for the relationship between multiracial identity and psychological well-being. Research Questions.

Therefore, this study aimed to explore the relationship between multiracial individuals' identifying process and their psychological well-being. The primary purpose of this study was to explore the variance in psychological wellbeing among multiracial adults as explained by racial malleability. Further, this study investigated moderators of the relationship between racial malleability and psychological well-being. This study examined whether these associations were moderated by experiences of others' disbelief and surprise about racial identification through the experience of identity questioning as well as other experiences of identity challenges and identity resilience. Additionally, this study explored the construct of authenticity and whether it was a valid measure of how individuals' feel true to themselves though they may identify differently over developmental periods and social contexts. In exploring the concept of authenticity an exploratory research question was whether authenticity is related to racial malleability and psychological well-being.

This research sought to deepen what is currently a literature of mixed findings in terms of the association between multiracial identity endorsement and psychological well-being (Binning, Unzueta, Huo, & Molina, 2009; Cooney & Radina, 2000). Theoretical Framework The population and research questions for this dissertation required the marrying of multiple theoretical frameworks rather than drawing on the traditional racial identity theory which currently focuses on monoracial development. Therefore, this study drew from multiracial identity theory as well as self-concept theory in <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-to-the-problem-of-the-individuals-identity/>

order to understand the context dependent nature of multiracial identity. Investigating these constructs has implications for applied science with regard to multiracial identity models and therapy with multiracial clients. However, it might also address the self-concept literature by illuminating these constructs in real-world experiences of having multiple self-aspects 4 and managing the experience in varying contexts. Given the cognitive demand of integrating self and others' perceptions, it is essential to understand the multiracial experience of additionally coming to understand one's racial identity through a potentially similar process of understanding one's own identity as well as what other people may tell an individual about their identity. For a multiracial person, the changing of contexts, such as relocating for work, provides a new opportunity to self-identify with new contextual factors (Renn, 2003). In order to make sense of new surroundings and locate oneself within psychosocial niches, individuals incorporate their own perceptions along with others' perceptions in order to construct their identity (Erikson, 1968).

Kelly (1966) described identity construction as a psychological process, which is impacted by the way an individual anticipates events. Therefore, people are personal scientists making meaning from their social context and their mental representations of themselves, which is constantly unfolding based on their anticipation of their environment. Multiracial Identity This dissertation study drew upon theories of multiracial identity development, which recognize the role of ecological factors being uniquely important in the malleable identity of this population. Multiracial identity is an emerging literature and is in a pivotal phase of integrating empirical research and

previous theory (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009). Typically the process of developing an identity involves a self-understanding that locates oneself in psychosocial niches that are constructed on the basis of future choices, the integration of experiences and the meaning one makes from the perception of other people (Markus & Kunda, 1986; McAdams, 2001).

Therefore, a methodology must capture the complexity of how people integrate their diverse experiences into their identity. Racial identity development is a process by which multiracial individuals come to understand their racial identity and declare a racial category; this affirmed identity is how the individual sees him or herself as a racial being.

As multiracial individuals, the process for identifying racially is neither straightforward nor automatically determined (Herman, 2004; Hitlin, Brown & Elder, 2006). Root (2003) associated the experience of self-identifying with one race to feeling cognitive dissonance. For example, their White friends might ask Black-White multiracial individuals why they do not try to pass for White. However, when they are with their Black friends, they may ask why the Black-White multiracial person does not admit to being Black (Herman, 2004).

This cognitive dissonance might impact how an individual identifies within varying contexts. Multiracial identity theory evolved through many approaches, which have been consistently tied to the larger racial discourse within society (Gilbert, 2005). The most recent focus of multiracial identity theory has been an ecological approach, which acknowledges the impact of the contextual factors on the individual (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009). Though ecological models have improved upon traditional approaches

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to multiracial identity, there is still a lag in connecting the existing empirical literature on multiracial individuals to existing theory. Rockquemore and colleagues (2009) highlight this dilemma, noting that in “race to theory” scholars have ignored patterns in empirical evidence.

Overall, empirical research with multiracial individuals has four patterns: (1) racial identity varies by individual, (2) racial identity tends to change over the course of life, (3) the development of racial identity is not a linear process with a single outcome, and (4) the sociocultural context is vital (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009). It is therefore acknowledged that multiracial identity theory is limited, however, ecological approaches may allow for more flexibility in understanding multiracial identity. A major barrier to integrating theory and empirical research has been research methodology (Rockquemore, Brunsma, & Delgado, 2009). Initial research was based on case study analysis, though more recently national datasets have been utilized to explore larger groups of multiracial individuals.

The research methodology, however, lacked the integration of lived experience and quantifiable measures of identity until the recent development of multiracial identity experiences measure (Salahuddin & O'Brian, 2011). This dissertation study is innovative in exploring multiracial identity experiences and factors associated with the racial identity development process based on empirical research with multiracial individuals as well as exploring the relationship between factors posited in ecological frameworks and examining the role of authenticity