

Discussion about racial malleability and psychological well- being



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This dissertation study examined the relationship between racial malleability and psychological well-being as defined by perceived stress and life satisfaction. Overall, this sample's mean scores indicated low levels of perceived stress compared to diverse community samples in other studies (Lavoie & Douglass, 2011) and average levels of life satisfaction based on normative data for the measure. For the purposes of this study, psychological well-being was defined as one's overall sense of positive psychological characteristics and the absence of negative characteristics, thus this sample demonstrates positive overall psychological well-being. Racial malleability had a significant relationship with life satisfaction, but not with perceived stress.

There is, however, partial confirmation for the first hypothesis such that the relationship between racial malleability and perceived stress was moderated by experiences of having one's identity questioned. The second aim of this study was to explore how authenticity was related to racial malleability and psychological well-being. Findings suggest that self-alienation aspects of authenticity are related to psychological well-being such that the more individuals feel disconnected from a sense of who they are, the more stress they perceive and the lower their life satisfaction. Findings are discussed further in this chapter as well as implications for future studies and counseling with multiracial individuals. Expansion of Racial Categories One of the contributions of this dissertation study is related to the need to expand racial categories. Participants were given multiple opportunities to self-identify their races during this study.

Often participants chose to elect the other, please specify category when response options did not represent the identity of the participant. For example, one participant checked White, Asian, and other in order to specify that she is also of Middle Eastern descent. When asked in an open-ended question how she identifies she responded, " My father is Palestinian Arab, Hazara Afghan and Uyghur Chinese. None of these three ethnic groups are ever on check boxes and do not fit into the neatly fit categories. My mother is Irish." Another participant, who only checked Latino, responded to the open-ended question, " I am Indian, Hispanic and Dutch" and described her racial identity as I consider myself biracial, but I experience the world as a person of color.

It is important to note the complexity of assessing racial identification in this population as the US Census only has checkbox options, some of the nuances to how people identify are lost in quantitative response options. Other multiracial quantitative research studies utilize a reductionist approach and consolidate racial categories in order to make comparison across racial mixes such as looking at Asian-White people compared to Black-White individuals (Lou, Lalonde, & Wilson, 2011). This study reinforced findings from qualitative studies (Jackson, 2012, Miville et al., 2005) pointing to the similarities of multiracial individuals as a population and therefore is one of the first quantitative studies that did not analyze the differences across racial mixes rather the commonalities among the multiracial population were explored. Multiracial Identity and Psychological Well-Being This sample overall reported positive psychological well-being demonstrated by lower mean scores on negative aspects of well-being, perceived stress,

and average scores on positive aspects of well-being, life satisfaction, when compared to diverse community samples population (Lavoie & Douglas, 2011; Pavot & Diener, 1993). This finding helps to extend the research on multiracial identity and psychological well-being. Recent research has found contrary findings; Schlabach (2013) found that there were group differences in emotional and social well-being based on scores from the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) such that multiracial adolescents tended to have lower emotional well-being compared to their monoracial peers.

Mixed findings could be related to the utilization of different measures to assess for psychological well-being. The present study utilized a measure of perceived stress rather than a measure of depressive symptoms as the CES-D been demonstrated to be a problematic measure of psychological well-being in diverse samples (Kim, DeCoster, Huang, & Chiriboga, 2011). Binning and colleagues (2009) also assessed for multiracial psychological well-being using a measure of global stress and found that individuals who identified with multiple racial groups reported significantly lower stress. Furthermore, prior to this study, other multiracial research did not control for recent life experiences that may impact a person's psychological well-being generally. In this study, recent life experiences significantly accounted for variance in perceived stress and life satisfaction.

This finding is consistent with research exploring the relationship between daily stressors and perceived stress and life satisfaction (Mayberry & Graham, 2001). However, previous multiracial research exploring

psychological well-being neglected to include daily hassles as a control
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variable, which may account for some error in findings supporting a relationship between multiracial identity and psychological well-being. This study is one step toward deepening the equivocal research as it utilized reliable and valid measures of well-being while controlling for general life stressors in order to elucidate multiracial well-being.