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Stages of Racial Identity Development Among Multiracial Undergraduates

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Abstract

Individuals who identify as multiracial have been on the rise since interracial marriages became legal in 1967. 2000 was the first Census year in which “two or more races” was an option for individuals to identify themselves. Most previous research focuses on individuals whose racial heritage is a mixture of Black and white. While this research is rich and informative, it fails to incorporate individuals that identify as two or more marginalized racial identities such as Black/African American and Hispanic or Asian Pacific and Native American. The current study will address this gap in research by focusing on individuals who identify as two or more marginalized racial identities and how that influences their racial identity development. More specifically, this research seeks to determine how identifying as multiracial with two or more marginalized racial identities influences an individual’s racial identity development by qualitatively exploring the life experiences of multiracial individuals that identify as two or more marginalized races through 20 to 30-minute semi-structured interviews. This study compares participants’ responses to each stage of Poston’s Biracial Identity Development Model to determine if the model describes the experiences of racially mixed marginalized populations as well as the biracial population. Multiracial individuals are faced with unique challenges within society, such as experiencing duality among their racial identities, not feeling like they belong, and learning to navigate life through a multiracial lens. It is important to understand this growing population and their racial development journeys.

Key words: Multiracial, marginalize, racial identity development

Stages of Racial Identity Development Among Multiracial Undergraduates

The 2020 Census, which is currently in progress, will provide valuable data about how the multiracial population has changed. From 2000 to 2010, the number of individuals who self-identified as two or more races, the definition of multiracial, increased by two million (U.S. Census, 2012). With interracial marriage and multiracial families becoming more accepted in society (Rios, 2018) these numbers are likely to have increased. The process of developing into one's racial identity varies from person to person. For individuals that identify as multiracial, this development could be more complex than it is for monoracial individuals (i.e. individuals who identify with just one racial category) (Herring, 1995). Research indicates that multiracial individuals experience duality and/or twoness among their racial heritages (Albuja et al., 2019; Perkins, 2014; Williams & Ware, 2019). They are constantly asked, "what are you?" which implies that society does not know how to perceive their appearance (West & Maffini, 2019). Multiracial individuals tend to have higher stress levels due to the feeling of rejection among their racial groups (Shih et al., 2007). Research also indicates that individuals who identify as multiracial are more aware of racial categories and strongly believe that race is a social construct (Shih, 2007).

What the existing research does not do well, however, is to address the specific experiences of multiracial individuals who identify with two or more marginalized racial heritages. Most current research focuses on individuals whose heritage is a mixture of Black and White. The purpose of this research is to qualitatively explore the life experiences of multiracial individuals that identify with two or more marginalized racial identities. This study examines how identifying as two or more marginalized racial identities influence racial identity development through analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with multiracial

individuals with two or more marginalized racial identities in the context of a medium-sized university campus. Participants' responses are compared to Poston's biracial identity development model (Poston, 1990) to identify elements of their identity development that are unique to individuals with two or more marginalized racial identities.

Multiracial Identity and Identity Development

In 1967 interracial marriage was decriminalized, allowing people to legally marry outside their racial group (Fryberg et al., 2012). With interracial marriage being legal, offspring from interracial marriage has been on the rise (Rios, 2018). However, it was not until the 2000 Census that individuals were able to self-identify as more than one race on the U.S. Census (U.S. Census, 2012). There was a gap of more than two decades between the legalization of interracial marriage and the Census adequately tracking the prevalence of the multiracial population in the U.S. Before 2000, individuals that were multiracial were relegated to identify with their lower racial status (Brunsmas, 2006). The inability to choose more than one racial category affected the multiracial community contributing to the various Multiracial Movements in the 1990s (Williams, 2017). The movements stressed that it was unacceptable to force multiracial Americans into monoracial categories (Williams, 2017).

From 2000 to 2010 the population of individuals who identify as more than one race went up by two million to a total of over nine million people identifying as more than one race on the U.S. Census. This caused a shift in research, leading researchers to examine the growing population (West et al., 2018). The research conducted here examines a narrower subset of the multiracial population, more specifically, this research examined individuals who identify as two or more marginalized racial groups such as Black and Asian, or Native American and Latinx.

For those that attend college, the years spent in college are a key time for self-discovery and identity development (Hyman, 2010). During this time individuals explore who they are and who they want to be through their academic work, campus life, and community living (Hyman, 2010). Depending on the higher education institution, students may or may not have access to academic or social settings that support their racial identity (Anglin & Wade, 2007). With the understanding that collegiate years are a crucial time for identity development, this research focuses on the identity development of individuals who identify as multiracial in a college setting. This research uses Tatum's (1999) definition of racial identity development as "the process of defining for oneself the personal significance and social meaning of belief to a particular racial group." This process takes on different forms such as feeling torn between the two or more races, not knowing how to identify, and learning how to identify comfortably with multiple racial groups.

Multiracial Identification

Racial identity is a complex issue for multiracial individuals. These individuals have their parents, friends, and society telling them who they are which can lead to a conflicted process of self-identification. People who identify as a person of color are marginalized in the U.S. which causes a complex set of additional issues these individuals must navigate. From a young age, individuals who identify as a person of color must navigate the world through racial discrimination that gives them a sense of powerlessness, inequality, and injustice (Sanders-Phillips et al., 2009). How people view themselves is informed by how society views them, this influences an individual's racial identity development. White (2000) describes it as an "identity see-saw" in which multiracial individuals struggle between how they self-identify and how society sees them. When society views a person in a certain way and has prejudices against their

racial group, it can negatively affect how that individual views themselves and people like them. As people of color get older the racial messages they are exposed to deepen (Tatum, 1999).

Duality. Being multiracial leads to individuals feeling like they are being torn among their identities and living a duality. Duality is defined as the attempt to understand both sides of one's racial identity (Perkins, 2014). Multiracial individuals who identify as a mix of Black and White are faced with a unique position within society due to having privileges with one racial background but being disqualified from certain advantages that monoracial White individuals have (Perkins, 2014). Individuals who identify with two or more marginalized racial backgrounds do not have a privileged racial identity. Understanding both racial backgrounds is a challenge for this population. Multiracial individuals may have been raised within one of their racial backgrounds, but their physical appearance may steer people away from identifying their membership in that population. For example, an individual may have been born and raised by a Black mother, while their father was White but not a participating parent. This individual would be considered biracial but only has cultural ties to the Black side of the family. If this individual is light-skinned, people from the Black community may not see this individual as one of them. Different racial backgrounds carry different values and ways of life. Identifying as both racial groups and trying to connect with both sides of your racial background can be difficult and lead to this population to feeling a sense of twoness.

Denial of Identity. Coming from two different racial heritages makes it more difficult for an individual to fully embrace either of their racial heritages. Multiracial individuals are often denied membership in their racial groups because they are not perceived to be completely part of that racial group (Albuja et al., 2019). Being denied membership by the people within your racial group is called identity denial and it affects one's racial identity development by threatening

additional aspects of self-concept for multiracial individuals (Albuja et al., 2019). Not being fully accepted within your racial group can put a halt on the process of multiracial identity development. This halt on the process of multiracial identity development stems from the way race has previously been constructed. Individuals must learn how to navigate their feelings of not being fully accepted within one of their racial groups. Many multiracial individuals experience a concept called “borderline identities” in which they feel as though they fall between standard monoracial groups (Albuja et al., 2019).

Constant identity denial may lead to multiracial individuals completely denying one of their racial heritages, and instead classifying themselves as monoracial. This may be an easier way to express who they are. They may also be raised by a single parent who exposes them to only one racial heritage. That experience may lead to individuals feeling that a monoracial identity is appropriate for them, which could confuse the individual and those around them. The individual could feel confused because there is a part of them that will never really make sense. It is possible they don't fully fit in with the racial group they identify as. This could impact the current research because it'll provide a different perspective on how multiracial individuals navigate their racial identity.

Misrepresentation. Categorization threat is a type of identity denial that multiracial individuals encounter. It is the experience of being miscategorized as a member of an incorrect group (Townsend et al., 2009). An individual's racial ambiguity is what causes a categorization threat. Racial ambiguity is defined as one's physical appearance not being easily categorizable among the "traditional" racial categories (Young et al., 2013). Being miscategorized can cause negative emotional responses that lead to individuals feeling the need to assert their identity as a group member to gain acceptance. Not being physically perceived as a member of one's racial

group may lead to individuals feeling disconnected from their own identities. Misrepresentation is an implicit microaggression that many are unaware they are committing. Microaggressions are intentional or unintentional statements or behaviors that portray hostility or degrading messages towards people of color (Nadal et al., 2011). When multiracial individuals are asked questions such as “what are you?” or “you look like [racial category x] but you act like [racial category y],” it can cause cultural mistrust, decreased psychological well-being, and alienation (Townsend et al., 2009).

Feeling of rejection. Not being able to easily classify among the monoracial majority or monoracial marginalized groups, multiracial individuals often feel a sense of rejection from both of their racial groups (Shih et al., 2007). Though they may be able to identify with one of their racial groups more than another, it still sets them apart because these individuals are often not considered to be full members of those racial groups.

Multiracial Identity Development

Multiracial individuals face unique challenges to their racial identity development that are not experienced by monoracial individuals. Racial identity development helps shape individuals’ attitudes toward themselves, others who are part of the racial group, and those who are not (Poston, 1990).

Developing into a multiracial identity takes a life span focus (Herring, 1995). It is a complex and undefined process (Poston, 1990). Though many models attempt to describe racial identity development, they all fail to encompass the full complexity of multiracial individuals’ development. Poston noticed this gap and came up with a five-stage model based on biracial individuals’ unique identity development. Though this model focuses on biracial identity, this research explores whether it applies to multiracial individuals with two or more marginalized

racial identities and their racial identity development. The five-stage model explains the steps that biracial individuals go through to fully settle into their racial identity and become fully integrated within both of their racial groups. To experience wholeness within both of their racial heritages, these individuals go through stages of personal identity, choice of group categorization, denial/guilt, appreciation, and integration. Williams and Ware (2019), provide a simplified version of Poston's biracial identity development model. There are five stages in Poston's model:

1. The first stage of Poston's biracial identity development model occurs when the individual is very young. During this time, the child starts developing a sense of self first. Their personal identity factors are based on self-esteem and feelings of self-worth. Children learn and develop within their family, race is just becoming salient to them, but it is not their main focus.

2. Within the second stage, individuals have established a foundation of their personal identity. Depending on their personal experience and the context of their childhood, individuals usually start leaning toward one racial heritage during the choice of group categorization stage. There are a few individuals who immediately grasp their identity of being multiracial. It takes others more time to explore their comfortability with their racial identities.

3. The third stage of Poston's biracial identity development model consists of a time where individuals feel guilty and experience self-hate because of their inability to identify with both of their racial heritages equally. To move past this stage, multiracial individuals need to resolve these internal feelings and start feeling appreciation for both of their racial heritages.

4. The fourth stage of this model involves individuals expanding their knowledge on both of their racial heritages. They become eager in discovering pieces of their identity. Gaining this

knowledge enables multiracial individuals to feel more comfortable with identifying as multiracial. It begins getting easier for them to proudly state their whole racial identity.

5. Integration is the final stage of Poston's biracial identity development model. This stage symbolizes wholeness and full appreciation and acknowledgment of one's multiracial identity.

Purpose

Previous research has been conducted on multiracial individuals who identify as White and a marginalized race (e.g. Black/African American, Latinx/Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander). This research dives deeper into multiracial individuals who identify as having two or more marginalized racial identities. This research contributes to the body of knowledge by looking at a target sample that has not been used in previous literature. It is important to look at all aspects of being multiracial such as racial identity development, being misidentified, and the impact this has on the individual. Since the multiracial demographic is a growing population, being able to understand the developmental process is imperative for people to understand. This research revolves around figuring out how identifying as multiracial with two or more marginalized racial identities influences racial identity development. The findings of this study demonstrate how the development of racial identity for multiracial individuals with two or more marginalized identities relate to the stages of racial identity development of biracial individuals using Poston's biracial identity development model. It will reveal how the individuals feel about identifying as multiracial today and the added challenges it comes with.

Method

This research uses semi-structured interviews with students at a medium-sized university to examine the racial identity development of multiracial people with more than one

marginalized racial identity in comparison to the framework of Poston’s biracial identity development model.

Participants

Students were recruited through outreach in the university’s cultural centers (i.e. Black and African American Student Center, Latinx Student Center, Asian/Pacific American Student Center, and Native American Student Center) and through outreach in undergraduate sociology courses. Outreach in the cultural centers included emails and posters. In sociology courses, the researcher provided a brief overview of the research project, and students were sent an email requesting their participation. After each interview, each participant was also asked if they knew another person who would be likely to participate in the study.

After recruiting, this study ultimately consisted of nine undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 25. The sample was disproportionately female (7 females; 2 males) and had a range of racial backgrounds. Each of my participants identified as Black and one or more other racial identities (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Participant’s Pseudonym	Racial Identity	Gender
Suzie Adams	Black and Latinx	Female
Natalia Bandera	Black and Latinx	Female
Torrence Brown	Black and Latinx	Male
Kady Dalton	Black and Asian	Female
Marcos Garcia	Black Latinx, American Indian	Male
Alicia Henderson	Black and Asian	Female
Jordan Malay	Black, White, Latinx	Female
Megan Smith	Black and Latinx	Female
Melody Vance	Black, White, Latinx, Native American	Female

Data Collection and Analysis

Participants engaged in 30-45 minutes interviews. The interview process included thirteen foundational questions with the opportunity for follow up questions after each (see Appendix A). The questions were written to align with and test the stages of Poston's biracial identity development model. All interviews were conducted during Spring 2020. Interviews were primarily conducted in a private room in the university library to give the participants a safe comfortable space. The Spring 2020 COVID-19 outbreak limited face-to-face interaction resulting in two interviews being conducted over the phone. Participants were asked open-ended questions that allowed them to answer however they feel, and they were asked follow-up questions to encourage them to expand on specific topics. The interviews were recorded with a password protected audio recorder and the interviewer also took manual notes. All participants were provided with, and signed a form detailing the research parameters and indicating their consent to participate.

Once the interviews were completed and recorded, they were transcribed using a combination of manual transcription and Temi, a transcription application. The transcripts were then coded for themes and patterns that existed across multiple participants. Coding was conducted using Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis software. 34 parent codes and child codes were used in the analysis process (see Appendix E). Parent codes indicated overall big picture concepts while the child codes captured more specific concepts. For example, one big picture concept is “multiracial identity.” 13 child codes that go along with this concept such as “physical appearance influence” and “change over time.” Finally, participant’s responses were compared to the stages of Poston’s model.

Researcher Positionality & Methods

I am a multiracial woman. My father identifies as Black and my mother identifies as Hispanic. Consequently, growing up, I have had crossroads to navigate to get to where I am now because of my race. All my life I lived in Denver, Colorado which is predominately White. My mom did her best to have her children go to diverse schools so we would not feel different. I was still treated differently by my friends and family because of my racial identity, but I never understood why I was different. I felt I was not Black enough to hang out with the Black children or Hispanic enough to hang out with the Hispanic children. I did not speak any Spanish, nor did I have thick curly hair. It was not until college that I started learning more about what it meant to be Black. I came to learn that it is not all about having thick curly hair or listening to a certain type of music, but rather, it goes far deeper. I have yet to explore what it means to be Hispanic, but one day I will dive deeper into that side of my identity. My brothers' and my personal experiences inspired this research. What does it mean to be multiracial? How does this identity tie into my other identities? As a person who identifies as multiracial, I expect for my participants to be more comfortable with sharing their stories with me because I identify similarly. Identifying as multiracial there were a few moments where I wanted to share my experiences with my participants. They had gone through very similar experiences as I. At the end of a couple of interviews, I left the voice recorder going and spoke about my racial identity and the similar challenges I have gone through. I did not want to intervene in their interview with my experience, but when it was over, I felt it was important to let them know that they are not alone, that others are going through similar experiences. Having a shared identity with the participants in this study helped built rapport which allowed participants to be more open to sharing their experiences and feelings about their multiracial identity. Though having a shared

identity with participants in this study is beneficial it also led me to compare my own experiences with the participant responses, I had to be extra careful when analyzing data to not let this interfere with the data.

Findings

Multiracial Identity Definition

To dive deeper into how one develops into their multiracial identity, another question should be asked first; how does one interpret their racial identity? Participants in this study defined their multiracial identity through the food they eat, the culture they are exposed to, and the language they speak. As participants in this study navigate their racial identities, these components play an essential role in their interpretation.

Parent's Interpretation. The first agents of socialization that the participants in this study were exposed to were their biological parents. Parents play a fundamental role in the participant's racial identity development. Four participants had parents who were multiracial, but their parents chose a primary racial identity to express based on their physical appearance. Jordan Malay who identifies as a Black, White, & Latinx female, has a father who looks Black and a mother who looks White. When asked what her racial identity is, the participant first said, "Black and White". Towards the end of the interview the participant felt comfortable enough to share that she is also Latinx, she explained that she does not mention this part of her racial identity because it comes with the assumptions she will know and understand the culture, but she was not raised in the Latinx culture. She describes, "my dad looks Black, so that's the identity he chooses to express more, and my mom looks White so that the identity she chooses to express more". Both of her parents are also half Latinx, but they chose not to identify this way because society did not interpret them as having a mixed racial identity because of their appearance, this

influenced how the participant was raised. Melody Vance who identifies as a Black, White, Latinx, and Native American female, has parents who are both biracial. The participant stated,

So she (mother) really strongly tries to emphasize her Native ancestry and that's how she identifies. She accepts that her White background is a part of her, but it's not something that she seems to identify as strongly with, as being Native. My dad, I mean because physically he looks black. He doesn't speak Spanish; he doesn't really have prominent what you might call Latino features because his dad immigrated from Puerto Rico and they really tried to integrate their kids into American society cause my dad grew up in the 60s in Detroit. So, he identifies really within the Black diaspora. Those are the communities he grew up in, that's who he sees himself as. But they're definitely willing and open to talk about their racial backgrounds. It's not what they tend to put out to the world because I don't think that's how they're perceived by others.

The participant's parents are open to talking about all their racial identities, the participant mentioned that her parents share as much as they can about their parents, but her parents emphasize one of their racial identities over the other because of their physical appearance.

Torrence Smith who identifies as a Black and Latinx male and Marcos Garcia who identifies as Black, Latinx, and American Indian male, both experienced an occurrence in which one of their family members stated that they (the participants) are monoracially Black, although the participants knew they aren't just Black. Marcos made a statement,

My auntie would tell me, "you are just Black, you only look Black, all you are is Black" and I was like, "well I am not. My dad is this, how can I be all Black if my dad is this?" and she would look at me and say, "just because we look like it" and I was like, "that does not make any sense and that is not fair". I may not look like it, but I still want to learn.

This mindset made it more difficult for the participant to express his other racial identities. His auntie was the one who raised him. The participant expressed that it is not fair that he is only being interpreted as one racial identity, he still expresses that he wants to learn about his other racial identities. Torrence had a similar occurrence with his mother, though she is multiracial herself, she chooses to only express her Black racial identity. This mindset influenced Torrence's upbringing, making him more aware and conscious of his Black identity but feeling the need and desire to learn about his other racial identities.

Two of the participants in this study experienced a loss of a parent. When the parent passed away so did the participants' cultural ties to that parents' racial identity. Megan Smith who identifies as a Black and Latinx woman lost her father when she was very young. He identified as African American and Cuban. She was raised by her mother who identifies as African American. When growing up, Megan was only exposed to this racial identity. It is difficult for her to see her African American side and Cuban side as a mixture of her racial identity. She mentioned

I don't really like telling people that I'm part Cuban because I get the, "do you speak Spanish and what part of Cuba was he from?" And I'm like, "I don't know". I don't really talk to that side of my family, so I don't really have the answers to those questions. So, I like to identify with it, but I don't always like to vocalize it with people. I don't go around putting it on surveys and stuff, like when they ask you on applications.

Though being raised by a monoracial parent, the participant still aspires to learn about the Cuban side of her racial identity. Another one of the participants in the study, Marcos, lost his mother at a young age, she identified as African American and Native American. Throughout the interview the participant only mentioned having ties to his African American and Latinx racial identities.

Though his father is full blood Hispanic, he was raised by his aunt and uncle from his mother's African American side. The participant was never fully exposed to his Native American racial identity because of his mother passing. This influenced his racial identity because he knows that his mother identified this way, but there is a disconnect of his ties to this part of him.

Racial Identity Changes Over Time. Time brings more awareness and self-reflection on how one wishes to identify. As years go by, individuals start to develop in maturity as children emerge into adulthood. College seemed to have the biggest influence on one's racial development thus far. Participants mentioned not having the materials to understand their racial identity while they were in elementary school and middle school. College has provided opportunities by having a few clubs dedicated to providing a safe space for marginalized racial identities. It also has given participants in this study time to reflect on their identity. Melody stated that she believes her racial identity changes all the time but changed the most in college because she is more aware of it. She mentioned that college is the time of development and what she wants to do with that. Torrence expresses his racial identity change by stating,

I began to be more inquisitive and challenged my thought process in terms of like, "am I Afro Latino? What does that mean? How does that work for me? Although I don't know my great grandfather, can I still identify that way? Is it safe to identify that way? Will people believe me? Do I believe me?" There are a lot of questions.

College is an ideal time of exploration. It provides an opportunity to learn more about yourself and who you want to be. It is also just the beginning. Identity development is a lifelong process. Undergraduate is the jumpstart of the many years of independence and growth to come. A participant in this study, Melody stated,

I think it (racial identity) again will change just because it's a different group of people, a different dynamic. I'll be at a different stage in my life where my goals are also different. I think depending on what kind of spaces I want to put myself in also impacts how my racial identity develops too. If I'm exposed to new groups of people in new ideologies and asked to show up in spaces differently, I think it will undoubtedly change.

Society's interpretation of someone's racial identity

Participants in this study discussed society's role in their racial identity explaining that a person's physical appearance has a significant influence on how they self-identify in terms of their racial identity (i.e. racial ambiguity). Ranging from strangers to friends to the participant's family, there has been judgment towards participants in this study because of their appearance. It stems from comments about being the "light" or "dark" ones in the family. These microaggressions affect how they are treated. Jordan and Natalia Bandura, a Puerto Rican, African American, and Columbian woman, both experienced an event where they were approached by strangers while being with their parents and asked if they were adopted. Their physical appearance, more specifically their skin tone did not match their parents which raised concerns and questions by curious people. A few participants mentioned not "looking like their racial identity" either because of their hair texture and/or their skin color.

Hair texture is an important component of why individuals are being miscategorized. For participants in this study, their hair texture is the main reason behind the question of "what are you mixed with?". Marcos stated that he looks more Black than Hispanic besides his hair and when he is in the barbershop people always ask him what he is mixed with because he has "beautiful hair". Hair was also used as an outlet to express or suppress one racial identity over the other. Torrence used his hairstyle to "prove" his Black racial identity by having dreads but

when he was younger, he would keep it short so people could not tell what his racial identity was. He explained it as,

I was traumatized, I would always cut my hair. And even in college I got locks, dreads so I can be perceived as Black, but I missed my curls. That is what I have always known, that is who I am, essentially. But I just wanted to suppress my racial ambiguity and just be Black for once.

Having a different hair type from your family is challenging. It is one of the first things people notice about someone. It is used in different ways whether one wants to express racial identity or hide it. Natalia talked about wanting to dye her hair blonde but deciding against it. She commonly gets categorized as White when she identifies as Afro Latina, she felt dying her hair blond would make those assumptions worse.

Categorization threat. Participants in this study experienced a categorization threat often which is defined as the experience of being miscategorized as a member of the incorrect group. Categorization threat is classified as a microaggression. Both of the participants who identify as Black and Asian are constantly categorized as Hispanic or Black and Hispanic, rather than a mixture of their correct racial identities. A few of the participants in this study mentioned stories about people always trying to guess their racial identity because the participant does not fit into a traditional racial identity (e.g. racial ambiguity). Participants are compared to famous people, which made them uncomfortable. For example, Melody describes an occurrence with a substitute teacher. The teacher was fixated on Melody looking like African American Misty Copeland, she felt it was a compliment because Misty Copeland is beautiful and talented. Melody described the occurrence as an “invalidation of her identities”.

Racial Battle Fatigue. My participants have experienced racial battle fatigue which is defined as the cumulative negative effect of racial microaggressions (Brown, 2019). How it happens even in spaces where individuals with a marginalized monoracial identity have that safe space where they do not experience those microaggressions but for multiracial individuals they are experiencing those microaggressions no matter what space they are in. The Black Student Union is a higher institution club. It provides a safe space for the Black student population on campus, although it is open for anybody who wants to attend. Black Student Union was a club that most of my participants attended at least once but did not feel like they 100% belonged because of their multiracial identity. For example, Torrence mentioned being the president of Black Student Union but there was an individual who told him that he is not even fully Black, “I remember the first day that I was president of BSU someone told me, ‘you are not really Black’ and it reminded me of middle school all over again”. Another example is Melody where she goes to these places but does not feel comfortable because she knows that she is different.

So, I joined lots of (clubs) primarily like ASU (African Student United) and BSU (Black Student Union). I experienced the feeling of being welcomed but not belonging because it was more than just like, “yes, I share physical similarities with these people. Like yes, I identify as African American, these people identify as African or African American”. One, I learned that colorism was a thing too, but also, I learned that there's a significant social and cultural piece to being a person of color that I really did not experience that played into that belonging piece. I did not grow up in communities of color. I know that those experiences of trying to be engaged, involved and again feeling like I'm welcome here, but there's just something that's stopping me from fully feeling like I'm accepted here and fully integrated into this community that I'm missing but there is not really a way for me to gain

back. So, I must figure out what my place is in here because of whatever life experiences that I have had, where do I find my place?

It is more difficult for Melody to feel like she completely belongs when attending clubs associated with racial identity. Although the clubs she attends are affiliated with racial identity she did not have the same experiences as the people within the clubs who identify as monoracial. Another example is Kady, a Black and Asian woman expressed she went to BSU, but she felt like she was only expressing her Black racial identity and not her Asian side, she mentioned that she wants a safe space where she can be both such as taking classes and having more organizations with mixed individuals, "because, with BSU, it's Black Student Union. I feel like I kind of got to choose, like I am Black for now in this club, but I would prefer to be Black and Filipino in another club".

Not Being Able to Speak Spanish

Seven out of the nine participants interviewed in this study have a Latinx racial identity. Out of the seven, only one participant spoke Spanish. Every other participant mentioned their inability to speak Spanish and how that influences their racial identity. They felt like part of their racial identity is invalidated by society. Marcos shared "I will tell them (strangers) I am Hispanic, and they would be like, 'you are not Hispanic if you don't speak Spanish' and I am always like, that doesn't make me Hispanic that is not right". Torrence stated, "Because it would be that thing where people be like, 'you can't speak Spanish, you can't do this, you can't do that". So, I just keep it to myself. I am learning Spanish". The inability to speak Spanish has led to a few of the participants in the study to hide that part of their identity to avoid the microaggressive comments. Suzie Adams who identifies as a Black and Latinx woman, mentions that her not being able to speak Spanish does not mean she is not Latina. When it comes to filling out

applications, she felt the need to mark African American, “knowing that she is mixed”. She then states, “I think that's how society wants to see us as African American”. When asked what her racial identity is, Jordan starts by saying Black and White, to avoid assumptions that she knows how to speak Spanish and the Latin culture. There is this hidden expectation that if you are Latinx then you need to speak Spanish. This hidden expectation shames the participants in this study and affects their racial identity development. They feel the need to classify as Latinx they need to learn Spanish first.

Direct Comparison to Poston’s Model

Poston’s biracial identity development model was designed for individuals who identify as biracial of Black and White racial identity. This model was established in 1990. In the past 30 years, the U.S. Census started accounting for multiracial people and it is becoming a new norm. Poston’s biracial identity development model is very structured and rigid. Everyone I interviewed ranged from ages 18 to 25. This generation is more fluid. The world has changed in a lot of ways since this model was established in 1990.

Personal Identity. Being able to measure personal identity through this interview process was difficult because participants may have had difficulty remembering their childhood and their evolution of becoming who they are as individuals. This study was unable to fully capture that time frame. Also, there were a few participants that mentioned they are still developing their personal identity. Torrence mentioned that personal identity stems from racial identity

I think being a Black person, you're not afforded to be just a person. Everything is connected to your race. From my personal experience, identifying as a man is not a thing. But it's like, I am a Black man, I'd never get to be a man. So, my personal identity came

from my Blackness. My learning of Malcolm X and his journey of how he became, how he went through his evolution or Carter, G Woodson, W.E.B Du Bois, Frederick Douglas, things like that. I learned that people like that by experiences and how they identify within their manhood, but their manhood was never separated from being Black. It's difficult to do that versus White men get to just be a man.

Parents are aware of their racial identity from the start and raised you from the beginning to think and act a certain way based on racial identity.

Megan believes she is still developing into her personal identity. Throughout different stages in her life she is being exposed to new things that influence her identity. She stated,

I think I still am developing. I really do. I feel like it depends on the phase that you're in life. In middle school you have one identity because of the people you're around and you're influenced more by your family. In high school you have a different identity and now I'm on my own. Own apartment, a different group of friends, I have to find a different identity that works with being a college student, going into the workforce. So, I think it's always changing a little bit.

Poston's biracial identity development model defined personal identity as a stage that takes place in someone's earlier years of life and without the influence of racial identity coming into play yet. According to the participants personal identity is a lifelong development and racial identity is embedded into your personal identity.

Choice of Group Categorization. Choice of group categorization comes into play after an individual has established a personal identity. According to Poston's biracial identity development model, choice of group categorization can go one of two ways. An individual can either define their identity by one of their parent heritages or they choose a multicultural

existence. Participants in this study did follow one of the two different pathways. Some participants were drawn to one of their racial heritages either implicitly or explicitly, while other participants chose a multicultural existence from the beginning. A few participants in this study were explicitly aware they were choosing one of their racial identities over the other. For example, Jordan chooses to identify as Black and White if someone were to ask about her racial identity. She expressed,

Usually I start off with the Black and White because I go off of how they identify me, then I'll add the Latin in later so that people don't take their whole judgment off of the Latin part of my identity. It comes with more assumptions that I will relate to certain things that I don't really relate to as far as how a Latin person would such as speaking Spanish.

Black and White is her choice of group categorization. These are the identities she felt more comfortable identifying with.

Denial/Guilt. Participants in this study did experience some guilt. The feeling of guilt stemmed from not giving enough attention to all of their racial identities, to not being able to experience one side of their racial identity as much, to only mentioning one racial identity on an application because there was not an option for both. There were a couple of participants in this research that did not experience guilt for identifying as one of their racial identities over the other because they felt it is not their fault, it's just the society they live in. Jordan did experience some guilt, "I wasn't giving enough attention to all of who I was, just one side of myself." She was able to overcome this feeling through self-reflection. Melody expressed that she did not feel guilt, she explained

It just felt more like this is the choice that makes sense, and no one ever questioned me either. For as many conversations my parents and I had, it was never, it was more

informative and explanatory. They never really asked me to consider what do you think about your racial identity and how do you want to identify? I don't know why necessarily, I don't think it was like an intentional thing, but that just wasn't part of how I grew up, so I didn't necessarily feel the need to think deeper about it. I didn't feel any guilt because I was just operating on a surface level of like, "well my White friends check White, and if my friends are Mexican then they check Latino/Hispanic. And so like, "I think I'm Black so that's what I'm going to check" and that was kind of it. I didn't think too much about it.

For participants that did not grow up with both parents, there was not any guilt for identifying with the racial identity they were exposed most to. For example, Megan who lost her father at a young age, was raised as African American since that was her mother's racial identity. When asked if she experiences any guilt for only identifying as African American most of the time she said,

I don't think so because I didn't grow up with both. I feel like if I did grow up with both and I chose one over the other then I would feel guilt. But I didn't. I wasn't really exposed to one, so I feel like it is not my fault.

Within this quote she stated that if she did grow up with both parents then gravitated to one racial identity over the other then she probably would experience guilt because she chose to do that herself. But that is not the case. Poston's biracial identity development did not include this occurrence happening among his model.

Appreciation. All nine of the participants in this study expressed the desire to learn about their racial identities, one way or another. A few participants indicated wanting to travel to their racial identity homeland and explore the culture in person. They felt if they immerse themselves in the culture that they will find themselves more comfortable identifying within the

culture. Megan expressed wanting to travel to Cuba to learn more about her father's culture. She stated,

I do want to visit Cuba to learn more about the culture, just because I don't have the people in my life to tell me and teach me these things. So I do want to go and kind of learn from myself and see if it is something I can really find myself being a part of or is it kind of like, I don't want to say too late, but is it too late for me to really feel like this is a part of me.

Growing up without her father in her life she was not able to be immersed in that culture but knows it is still part of her. Though her mother is supportive when it comes to Megan learning about her father's racial identity, traveling to Cuba and immersing herself in the culture will fulfill Megan.

Torrence also expressed wanting to travel to Puerto Rico to learn about his Latinx racial identity. He believes that if he travels to Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican community accepts him, he will feel complete. A big question was then raised, what if they do not accept him? He replied,

Obviously, it's still a part of me, it's definitely still a part of me. I am proud of being a human being first but with the culture I have. I will continue to practice the culture, learn Spanish, get my knowledge upon Puerto Rico, and the placement of folks. I either want to do research on Puerto Rico in terms of double consciousness and expand it nationally of how the geographic framework of double consciousness is Puerto Rico and the United States.

Participants in this study are eager to learn about all of their racial identities either by traveling and/or learning the language and culture. Once they do this it will be easier for them to proudly state their whole racial identity because they know more about it.

Integration. The fifth and final stage of racial identity development seemed possible to a few of the participants but impossible for others, while one participant, Kady, stated that she already feels integrated within her Black and Asian culture. Participants who stated integration is possible for them expressed that they would feel happy, complete, and accomplished. Melody expressed that one day she will be integrated, and she would feel, “truly balanced and oneness”.

There were a few participants who felt it would be impossible to feel fully integrated within all of their racial identities. They shared the barriers that would be holding them back. Jordan expressed that she hopes that one day she will be fully integrated among all of her racial identities, but she believes that something will hold her back from reaching that point in her life. She stated, “on an institutional level, we don't always implement a lot of policies that allow us to learn about ourselves”. She feels with that restriction she might not be able to fully integrate. Torrence expressed that his racial identity is so complex, and that America is essentially one big melting pot that he can't be fully integrated among all of his racial identities. At the beginning of the interview he expressed his racial identity consists of Irish, Italian, and Native American as well as African American and Latinx. But he does not have a connection to the other racial identities like he does with his African American side. Since his racial ambiguity is not the traditional Irish, Italian, and Native American physical appearance he feels he would not be accepted into those cultures and it would be harder for him to make that connection. Natalia mentioned that for her to feel completely integrated among all of her racial identity she would have to move back to the East Coast where there are people who look like her. She feels that Colorado is not a place where she can be comfortable among all of her racial identities.

Discussion

Individuals who identify as two or more marginalized racial identities do correspond to Poston's biracial identity development model with a few exceptions. Poston's biracial identity development model is an older model that is structured and rigid, with a little more flexibility and possibly few step adjustments; this model could work for individuals who identify as two or more marginalized racial identities. The U.S. has millions of people from many different racial identities. It is projected that by the year 2050, 1 in 5 Americans will claim a multiracial identity (Lee & Bean, 2004). It is important to understand the development of these individuals.

Society plays an essential role in racial identity development. The first agent of socialization participants were exposed to were their biological parents. For many of the participants their parents also identified as multiracial but chose a primary racial identity over the other influences how the participants viewed themselves. An individual's physical appearance influences how society sees them and how they see themselves. Hair texture and skin color were the main reason behind assumptions made by others. Participants would try to do their hair a certain way to adjust their racial ambiguity to make themselves look more like one of their racial identities. One theory that can be pulled from this is the looking glass theory, this theory suggests that we get our identity by the way people respond to us and see us. Participants in this study who had a racial identity that consisted of Latinx, felt a pressure that they needed to know Spanish to fully claim the Latinx identity. Society portrayed this hidden expectation that it is a requirement.

Limitations & Future Research

This study had a sample size of nine participants ages 18 - 25 years old who had one racial identity as Black/African American. Future research is needed in order to fully understand racial

identity development among individuals who identify as two or more marginalized racial identities. Future research should expand the sample size, as well as focus on individuals who are 25 years old and older. As the years go on individuals become more knowledgeable and wiser. They have had more time to learn about who they are and who they want to be.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

1. Please tell me a little about yourself:
 - a. Where did you grow up?
 - b. Tell me about your family, any siblings?
 - c. In what ways do you think your background has shaped who you are as a person?
 - d. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?
2. How do your parents/caregivers identify?
3. How do you identify yourself in terms of race?
 - a. Have you always identified this way?
4. When growing up, did you have any multiracial friends?
 - a. Did your multiracial friends talk about their multiracial identity with you?
 - b. Were you able to relate to them better than your monoracial friends?
5. Have you ever been misidentified and/or mislabeled in terms of your race?
 - a. If so, how often does it occur?
 - b. If so, why do you think you were misidentified/mislabeled?
 - c. How do you react in situations like this?
6. At what age, do you believe you started to develop a *personal* identity? (1)
 - a. What did you like to do when you were a child?
 - b. What did you value the most?
7. Did you experience an event that made you realize how prevalent your race is?
 - a. A moment where “the rug was swept out from under you”
8. When growing up, did you feel more drawn to one of your racial heritages over the other? (2)
 - a. If yes, which race was it?
 - b. If yes, why do you feel you leaned toward that race when growing up?
 - i. What were some of the factors that influenced your decision?
 - c. If no, please explain how you were able to comfortably identify with both races.
 - i. Did your family and community help you achieve this identity in any way?
9. Have you ever felt torn between your racial heritages?
 - a. What did that feel like?
 - b. What caused those feelings?
10. If you were drawn to one of your racial heritages, did you ever experience any sense of denial or guilt for not identifying as both? (3)
 - a. How were you able to overcome the guilt and denial?
 - b. Has your identification with one group or another affect your relationships with parents or other family?

11. Now that you are in your undergraduate years, what factors here on campus has influenced your racial identity?
 - a. Are you a member of any clubs that are organized around racial identity?
12. Do you show appreciation for both of your races? (4)
 - a. Have you taken an initiative to learn about your racial heritage and culture?
 - i. What kind of ways have you taken to learn about your racial heritage?
 - b. Do you want to learn about your racial heritage and culture?
13. Sometime in the future, do you feel that you will experience wholeness and integration among all of your races? (5)
 - a. What do you think this feeling of wholeness will feel like?

APPENDIX B**Informed Consent Form****Informed Consent Form for Participation in Research**

Title of Research Study: McNair - Stages of Racial Identity Development among Mixed Marginalized Undergraduate Students

Researcher(s): Olivia Bobbitt, University of Northern Colorado, Department of Sociology
Email: bobb9494@bears.unco.edu

Research Advisor: Dr. Cliff Leek, Assistant Professor, University of Northern Colorado, Department of Sociology
Phone Number: (970) 351-4780 email: clifford.leek@unco.edu

Procedures: We would like to ask you to participate in a research study. If you participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in an interview that will take about 30 to 45 minutes to complete. The semi-structured interview will be audio recorded from researcher's password protected digital recorder. The interview will consist of open-ended questions about your racial identity and your racial development. The main purpose of this study is to see how identifying as a mixed marginalized individual influence that individual's racial identity development. Responses will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used to protect participants identity. Participants name will not be used within the study. Participants that choose to take part of this study will receive a \$5 gift card for Subway or UNC'S Coffee Corners. Incentive will be distributed after interview.

Potential Risks: There is no physical risk associated with this study. There is minimal risk of participants feeling some emotional discomfort when speaking about their experiences.

Questions: If you have any questions or concerns about this research project, please feel free to contact Olivia Bobbitt at bobb9494@bears.unco.edu. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Nicole Morse, Research Compliance Manager, University of Northern Colorado at nicole.morse@unco.edu or 970-351-1910.

Voluntary Participation: Please understand that your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.

If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Participant Signature

Date

Investigator Signature

Date

APPENDIX C

Recruitment Flyer

— MCNAIR SCHOLARS RESEARCH STUDY —

ARE YOU MULTIRACIAL?
**DO YOU IDENTIFY AS 2 OR MORE
MARGINALIZED IDENTITIES?**



IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN SHARING YOUR MULTIRACIAL
IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT JOURNEY - SCAN QR CODE



UNIVERSITY OF
**NORTHERN
COLORADO**



OLIVIA BOBBITT
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APPENDIX D

Code Book

The screenshot shows a software interface for a code book. At the top, there is a teal header bar with the word "Codes" on the left and four icons (magnifying glass, list, exclamation mark, and plus) on the right. Below the header is a scrollable list of codes. Each code is preceded by a small teal square containing a number. Some codes are expanded, indicated by a downward arrow to their left. The codes and their counts are as follows:

- 17 KEY QUOTE
- 4 Microaggressions
 - 19 Categorization Threat
 - 5 Generalization
 - 3 Identity Denial
 - 11 Racial Remarks
- 31 Multiracial Identity
 - 5 Application
 - 13 Change over time
 - 11 Culture
 - 8 ENOUGH
 - 2 FAULT
 - 4 Feeling of rejection
 - 8 Hard to be themselves in front of others
 - 5 Identity Denial
 - 5 Identity See-Saw
 - 2 LOST
 - 1 More aware of racial identity
 - 22 Phsyical Appearence Influence
 - 2 Soceity's Interpretation
- 0 Postons' Biracial Identity Model
 - 10 1. Personal Identity
 - 17 2. Choice of Group Categorization
 - 6 3. Denial/Guilt
 - 18 4. Appreciation
 - 10 5. Integration
- 16 Upbringing
 - 15 Parents Racial Identitiy
 - 5 Raised by single parent (monoracial)
 - 22 Spanish Language