The Interpretation of Multiracial Status and Its Relation to Social Engagement and Psychological Well-Being

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This research examines how multiracial individuals chose to identify themselves with respect to their racial identity and how this choice relates to their self-reported psychological well-being (e.g., self-esteem, positive affect) and level of social engagement (e.g., citizenship behaviors, group alienation). High school students who belong to multiple racial/ethnic groups (N = 182) were asked to indicate the group with which they primarily identify. Participants were then classified as identifying with a low-status group (i.e., Black or Latino), a high-status group (i.e., Asian or White), or multiple groups (e.g., Black and White, etc.). Results showed that, compared with multiracial individuals who identified primarily with a low- or high-status group, those who identified with multiple groups tended to report either equal or higher psychological well-being and social engagement. Potential explanations and implications for understanding multiracial identity are discussed.

Efforts are currently being undertaken in the United States to require educational and governmental organizations to broaden their racial classification systems to include a multiracial category (see Nakashima, 1992; Renn, this issue). From a social–psychological perspective, such a policy change raises a variety of fascinating questions. One such question, which motivates this research, is whether identification with a multiracial category is associated with positive or negative psychological consequences.

Unfortunately, the psychological literature does not provide a clear answer to this question, as it has uncovered mixed and sometimes conflicting findings regarding the costs and benefits associated with multiracial identity (see Shih & Sanchez, 2005, for a review). For example, some research suggests that multiracial individuals, relative to their monoracial counterparts, are more likely to experience negative social (e.g., increased problem behaviors; Gibbs, 1998; Lyles, Yancey, Grace, & Carter, 1985; McRoy & Freeman, 1986; Pinderhughes, 1995) and psychological outcomes (e.g., low self-esteem; Gibbs, 1998; Sommers, 1964; Teicher, 1968). Conversely, other studies suggest that multiracial individuals experience equal (Bracey, Bamaca, & Umana-Taylor, 2004; Grove, 1991; Herman, 2004) and sometimes better outcomes (Sanchez & Shih, 2004; Stephan & Stephan, 1989) than their monoracial peers. Given the mixed nature of these findings, it is difficult to predict how encouraging individuals to identify as multiracial relates to their psychological well-being and levels of social engagement.

In this article, we argue that part of the difficulty in understanding the psychology of multiracial individuals might stem from the way researchers have typically operationalized multiracial identity. Simply belonging to multiple racial groups does not guarantee that multiracial individuals will psychologically identify with all of those groups. Yet past research seems to assume this by studying multiracial identity using a multiracial–monoracial dichotomy, in which individuals who belong to multiple racial groups are compared to individuals who belong to a single group to see which group fares better along a host of dimensions (see Shih & Sanchez, 2005, for a review). Because this approach tends to lump all multiracial individuals into a single category, we suspect that past research has been making unwarranted assumptions about the uniformity of multiracial identity. Perhaps delving within the multiracial category to examine how multiracial individuals interpret their racial identity will help clarify the challenges and benefits associated with multiracial identity and advance our understanding of multiracial psychology.

Multiracial Identity Differences

Most multiracial individuals are probably aware of the fact that their racial background consists of more than one racial category. However, whether these

individuals actually categorize and identify themselves in multiracial (vs. mono-racial) terms is a different question. Given that the social movement to raise consciousness about multiracial identity is still relatively new, many multiracial individuals might think and behave primarily in terms of a single identity (see Daniel, 2001). Others, of course, might resist conventional norms and adopt an identity composed of multiple racial group memberships. We argue that this distinction—between multiracial individuals who primarily identify with one group and those who identify with multiple groups—forms a potentially meaningful and previously unstudied division within the multiracial category.

Not only might individuals who identify with various racial groups perceive themselves as belonging to a more complex social category, identification with multiple racial groups may also entail unique social comparison referents and group cognitions (Crisp & Hewstone, 2007). As such, if there are benefits and/or costs associated with having a multiracial identity, we would expect them to be especially salient among individuals who actively identity with multiple racial groups.

A Tripartite Classification

Based on the lines of reasoning developed above, a primary goal of this research is to examine how multiracial individuals interpret their multiracial identity. To this end, we propose a tripartite system for categorizing multiracial individuals. The first category is composed of multiracial individuals who primarily identify with one racial group. Even though they are technically multiracial, these individuals may bear more psychological resemblance to monoracial individuals because they self-perceive in terms of a single racial group.

We further divide this category according to the social status of the racial group with which these individuals predominately identify. Most previous research on multiracial identity has overlooked the role of racial group status in shaping multiracial individuals' psychological outcomes (see Cooney & Radina, 2000). This is true despite the possibility that status differences within the multiracial category might map onto broader societal patterns (see Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), such that those who primarily identify with a high-status racial group (e.g., Whites and Asians) might fare better than individuals who primarily identify with a low-status racial group (e.g., Blacks and Latinos). As such, we distinguish between multiracial individuals who primarily identify with a low-status group and multiracial individuals who primarily identify with a high-status group.

Finally, we conceptualize the third multiracial category as composed of individuals who, when considering their ethnic/racial identity, reject a monoracial categorization (e.g., Asian, Black, Latino, Native American, or White) and instead choose to identify with multiple groups (e.g., "half Black and half White," "Latino

and Asian," or "multiracial"). In sum, the tripartite multiracial classification system consists of multiracial individuals who either identify with a single high-status group, a single low-status group, or multiple racial groups.

Research Approach

Much previous research on multiracial identity has tended to operationalize multiracial identity using check boxes representing traditional, monoracial categories (see Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Those who check off more than one racial group are subsequently coded as multiracial; those who check off only one racial group are coded as monoracial. As alluded to above, a potential problem with this operationalization of multiracial identity is that multiracial individuals' awareness of their racial lineage might be distinct from the way they psychologically interpret their multiple group memberships.

Because we are primarily interested in examining how individuals' interpretation of their multiracial identity relates to various psychological and organizational outcomes, in this article we operationalize multiracial identity not only by asking individuals to check off the groups to which they belong, but also by asking them to indicate their primary racial identity on an open-ended item. Whereas the check-box procedure is essentially asking people to report their awareness of their group memberships, the open-ended question is intended to assess how multiracial individuals interpret their multiple group memberships. As such, we use the check-box procedure to identify individuals with multiple racial group memberships, but we subsequently use the open-ended item to determine if these individuals should be considered as identifying primarily with a single low-status group, a single high-status group, or multiple racial groups.

Because previous research has sought to understand the implications of multiracial identity both for the individual and for the groups to which they belong (see Shih & Sanchez, 2005; also see Berry, 2001), our choice of dependent variables focused on psychological outcomes pertaining to multiracial individuals' mental health and well-being (referred to hereafter as psychological well-being) and on social outcomes pertaining to the relationship between multiracial individuals and their social group (e.g., citizenship and problem behaviors; referred to hereafter as social engagement).

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 182 multiracial individuals from two high schools in Long Beach, California, who participated in exchange for a chance to win one of several $10 prizes (e.g., gift certificates to a local movie theater). The sample

was 60% female[1] with a mean age of 15.92 years ($SD = 1.15$). Using traditional racial categories, the schools from which the sample was drawn were roughly 44% Latino, 18% White, 15% Asian, 15% Black, 7% "other," and less than 1% Native American.[2] However, because participants were encouraged to check all racial categories that applied to them, the racial background of participants analyzed in this research was considerably more diverse: 62% of study participants checked White, 49% checked Latino, 34% checked Black, 31% checked Asian, 18% checked Native American, and 18% checked the "other" category. The coding procedure, described below, resulted in 54 individuals who primarily identified with a single low-status group, 49 individuals who primarily identified with a single high-status group, and 79 individual who identified with multiple groups.

Survey Procedure

Researchers individually visited the classrooms of teachers who agreed to give their students the opportunity to participate. These classrooms consisted of both monoracial and multiracial individuals. One week prior to the researchers' arrival, students were asked to take home and return a signed parental permission form. Students who returned the signed form, regardless of whether parental permission was granted, were automatically entered into a lottery drawing for prizes. Almost all of the students who returned the form were given parental permission to participate. The survey, which included a host of questions about school life and participation in an after-school program, took 20–25 minutes to complete.

Using the check-box procedure described above, participants were first asked to indicate their ethnicity by checking the box or boxes that corresponded to their racial group membership. We used this information to separate participants who selected more than one racial group; these individuals composed our multiracial sample. Later in the survey, participants were asked to write the ethnicity with which they most identify using an open-ended item, "The ethnic group I most identify with is: _____." Dependent measures were interspersed throughout the questionnaire.

Coding Procedure

Individuals who selected more than one ethnicity check box but who, on the open-ended question, indicated only one racial identity were classified as multiracial individuals who primarily identify with a single group. Participants

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[1]Participant sex did not moderate any of the findings reported herein.
[2]Our choice of racial/ethnic classification differs from census classifications by treating Latinos as a group on equal par with other traditional "racial" groupings.

Table 1. Ethnic/Racial Heritage within Each Type of Multiracial Identity

	Low-Status ID	Multiracial ID	High-Status ID
White	45	52	86
Asian	18	34	45
Native American	22	13	10
Latino	53	55	47
Black	55	50	6
Other	28	20	12
Total	221%	224%	206%

Chi-Square Test Comparisons

	Low-Status ID	Multiracial ID	High-Status ID
Low-status ID	—		
Multiracial ID	9.33*	—	
High-status ID	74.60**	46.80**	—

Note. Bottom entries are chi-square values from pair-wise comparisons of distributions between the multiracial categories.
*$p < .10$; **$p < .001$.

who indicated multiple categories within a particular ethnic category (e.g., a Latino who identified as "Mexican and Puerto Rican") and participants who identified as a hyphenated American (e.g., "Asian-American") were also coded as identifying primarily with a single group.

Because much research indicates that different racial categories are associated with differing levels of status and corresponding social and psychological outcomes (see Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), individuals who were coded as primarily identifying with a single racial group were further separated based on the social status of the racial identity they selected. Participants who identified with groups coded as White or Asian were classified as high status,[3] while those who identified with groups coded as Black or Latino were classified as low status.

Finally, individuals who, on the open-ended question wrote more than one racial group membership (e.g., "White and Black" or "Mexican and African American") or who indicated a racial identification with an all-encompassing category (e.g., "multiracial") were categorized as identifying with multiple racial groups.

To answer questions about the racial composition within each of these previously unstudied classifications, the racial demographic breakdowns within each category are displayed in Table 1. Because we anticipated that the high- and

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[3]Although there is some question as to whether the Asian population in Long Beach, California, should be considered high status, past research suggests that, at least in the academic context, Asian students are regarded as having social status on par with the social status of White students (O'Brien & Major, 2005).

low-status groups would have overrepresentation of high- and low-status racial group memberships, respectively, the main purpose of this analysis was to assess the composition of the category composed of individuals who identified with multiple racial groups. To make sense of the table, it is helpful to keep in mind that because participants selected more than one category, the composition of the different multiracial groups within each category exceeded 200%.

To test whether the distributions between categories were different, chi-square tests were conducted. Caution should be urged in interpretation of these tests, given that not all observations were independent (i.e., each student was technically represented in multiple cells, which violates independence assumptions of the chi-square test). These tests confirmed that the distribution of racial groups within the low-status category differed significantly from the racial distribution within the high-status category (chi-square $= 74.60$, $df = 5$, $p < .001$), with higher numbers of participants with Black ancestry and fewer numbers of participants with White and Asian ancestry in the low-status identity group relative to the high-status identity group. More interestingly, a visual inspection of distributions suggested the presence of a pattern, confirmed by chi-square tests, in which the racial distribution within the category of individuals identified with multiple racial groups resembled the low-status identity group (chi-square $= 9.33$, $df = 5$, $p < .10$) more so than it resembled the high-status identity group (chi-square $= 46.80$, $df = 5$, $p < .001$). This analysis is important because it sheds light on the demographic characteristics of the multiracial category relative to the other categories. Specifically, the racial makeup of multiracial identity category appears to be more similar to the racial makeup of individuals in the low-status category than individuals in the high-status category.

Psychological Well-Being Measures

Global self-esteem.   Self-esteem was measured using the 10-item Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale. Participants responded using a scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 4 (*agree strongly*). Sample items included: "I take a positive attitude towards myself" and "All in all, I'm inclined to feel I'm a failure" (reverse scored; Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$).

Positive affect.   Participants were given the question stem, "How much of the time during this school year…" and asked to respond to the two following questions (1 = *never*; 5 = *always*): "Have you been a happy person?" and "Did you have a lot of energy?" (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$).

Self-reported stress.   Participants were given the question stem, "How much of the time during this school year…" and asked to respond to the three following

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for Psychological and Organizational Outcomes as a Function of Group(s) with Which Multiracial Participants Identified

	Self-Esteem	Positive Affect	Stress	Problem Beh.	School Citizen.	Alienation
Low-status group	3.26 (.55)[a]	4.06 (1.34)[a]	3.84 (1.24)[a]	1.89 (.72)[a]	2.87 (.86)[a]	2.64 (.84)[a,b]
Multiple groups	3.26 (.52)[a]	4.60 (1.16)[b]	3.34 (1.13)[b]	1.83 (.62)[a]	3.38 (1.03)[b]	2.34 (.69)[b]
High-status group	3.16 (.51)[a]	4.19 (1.07)[a,b]	3.93 (1.06)[a]	1.89 (.62)[a]	3.11 (.92)[a,b]	2.69 (.85)[a]
Total	3.23 (.52)	4.34 (1.21)	3.64 (1.17)	1.86 (.65)	3.16 (.97)	2.52 (.79)
df	2, 167	2, 171	2, 173	2, 176	2, 178	2, 177
Fs	.69	3.56*	5.06**	.18	4.45*	3.94*

Note. Column means with different superscripts are significantly different from one another ($p < .05$).
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

questions ($1 = Never$; $5 = Always$): "Did you feel stressed?" "Did you feel worn out?" and "Did you feel tired?" (Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$).

Social Engagement Measures

Problem behaviors. A composite was formed from participants' responses to three items ($1 = never$; $5 = always$): "How often do you follow instructions from your teachers?" (reverse scored), "How often do you break school rules?" and "How often do you turn in your homework assignments on time?" (reverse scored; Cronbach's $\alpha = .66$).

School citizenship behavior. This construct was composed of four items ($1 = never$; $5 = always$): "I like to do things that help to improve my school's image," "I talk up my school to other people as a good place to be a student," "I like to volunteer for activities at my school," and "I like to help out at school" (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$).

School alienation. This construct was operationalized as the mean of five items ($1 = disagree\ strongly$; $5 = agree\ strongly$): "School rules are not about what students like me think is important," "Authorities at school use rules to try to control students like me," "School rules are not designed to protect me," "I don't really care about what happens at my school," and "I don't really care about what happens to other students," (Cronbach's $\alpha = .64$).

Results

After verifying that none of the results were moderated by gender or grade in school, the primary analyses for this research consisted of one-way analyses

of variance (ANOVAs), in which the dependent variables were examined as a function of the tripartite multiracial classification system. When the omnibus test was significant, post hoc Tukey tests, which use a conservative critical value, were conducted to determine which means differed from one another. As can be seen in Table 1, four out of the six ANOVAs were significant, and in each of the significant cases, the category of individual who identified with multiple groups was involved in the difference.

First, in the ANOVA on self-reported positive affect, $F(2, 171) = 3.56$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$, post hoc tests revealed that individuals who identified with multiple groups reported significantly greater positive affect ($M = 4.60$) relative to individuals who primarily identified with a low-status group ($M = 4.06$; $t(123) = 2.45$; $p < .05$), but neither of these categories differed from individuals who identified with a high-status racial group ($M = 4.16$; $ts < 1.91$, $ps > .14$). Second, in the ANOVA on self-reported stress, $F(2, 171) = 5.06$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .06$, individuals who identified with multiple groups reported significantly lower levels of stress ($M = 3.34$) than both individuals who primarily identified with a low-status group ($M = 3.84$, $t(127) = 2.40$, $p < .05$) and individuals who primarily identified with a high-status group ($M = 3.93$; $t(127) = 2.84$, $p < .05$). Individuals who primarily identified with a low-status group did not differ from individuals who primarily identified with a high-status group, $t(95) < 1.0$, ns.

Third, the ANOVA on school citizenship behavior, $F(2, 178) = 4.46$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .05$, revealed that individuals who identified with multiple groups reported significantly more citizenship behavior ($M = 3.38$) than did individuals who primarily identified with a low-status group ($M = 2.78$; $t(131) = 2.95$, $p < .01$). However, these two groups did not differ in citizenship behavior relative to individuals primarily identified with a high-status group ($M = 3.11$; $ts < 1.5$, $ps > .28$). The fourth and final significant ANOVA was on the school alienation variable, $F(2, 177) = 3.94$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$, which revealed that individuals who identified with multiple groups reported significantly lower levels of alienation ($M = 2.34$) than individuals primarily identified with a high-status group ($M = 2.69$; $t(129) = 2.50$, $p < .05$) and slightly lower levels of alienation compared to individuals who primarily identified with a low-status group ($M = 2.64$), although this latter difference was only marginally significant, $t(130) = 2.14$, $p = .09$. Individuals who primarily identified with a low-status group did not differ from individuals who primarily identified with a high-status group, $t(98) < 1.0$, ns. Finally, the two omnibus analyses for which no significant mean difference were found were the ANOVAs on self-esteem, $F(2, 167) = 0.69$, ns, and problem behaviors, $F(2, 176) = 0.18$, ns.

Discussion

As noted above, most studies on multiracial identity tend to overlook potential differences within the multiracial category by lumping all individuals who check

more than one racial group membership into a single multiracial category. We argue that this operationalization may be blurring important distinctions within the multiracial category, particularly with regard to multiracial individuals' awareness of their racial group memberships and their psychological interpretation of their racial identity. To help get around this limitation, in this study we used an open-ended response item that allowed multiracial individuals to self-label with regard to their ethnicity. We then created a tripartite classification composed of multiracial individuals who self-labeled as a member of a low-status monoracial group (i.e., Black or Latino/a), multiracial individuals who self-labeled as a members of a high-status monoracial group (i.e., White or Asian), and multiracial individuals who self-labeled as belonging to multiple racial groups. We were particularly interested in finding out how individuals in this latter group fared on various measures of psychological and organizational well-being relative to their counterparts who primarily identified with a single racial identity.

The results of this study suggest that the individuals who identified with multiple groups were doing as well, if not better, than multiracial individuals who identified with a single low- or high-status group. Specifically, participants who identified with multiple racial groups reported significantly lower stress levels relative to individuals who identified with either high- or low-status groups. Individuals who identified with multiple racial groups also displayed more positive affect and more school citizenship behavior relative to those who identified primarily with a low-status group. Individuals who identified with multiple racial groups also reported lower levels of alienation relative to those who identified with a high-status racial group. The two nonsignificant effects suggested that individuals who identified with multiple groups have self-esteem levels no different than their low- and high-status identity counterparts and were no more likely to report having engaged in problem behaviors. This pattern of results suggests that identification with multiple groups or a "multiracial" category is associated with positive outcomes for multiracial individuals' psychological well-being and social engagement.

We were somewhat surprised to find virtually no differences between individual who identify with either low- or high-status groups, despite the fact that past research suggests that members of high- and low-status groups tend to differ in many of the domains we examined (e.g., alienation; see Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Additional research should be conducted to more confidently determine if these null findings were due to idiosyncrasies of the sample studied or if they are truly null effects.

Potential Explanations

This research suggests there may be psychological benefits associated with having a multiracial identity. There are several potential explanations for why this

may be the case. For one, the results we observed might be explained by differences in psychological resilience across the three categories. Research suggests that having one's valued identities neglected or ignored can be a threatening experience (e.g., Barreto & Ellemers, 2002; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000; Huo & Molina, 2006; Huo, Molina, Sawahata, & Denag, 2005; see also Huo & Binning, 2008). Faced with such a threat to their multiracial status, individuals could choose to simply "pass" as monoracial, but they might also choose to "voice" their multiracial status by openly embracing multiple group memberships (see Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Perhaps the ability to stand one's ground and reject social pressure to identify with a single racial group and instead adopt a multiracial identity connotes a high level of resiliency among individuals who choose to identity with multiple racial groups. Future research should assess if individual differences in resiliency exist among multiracial individual who identity with single or multiple racial groups.

Multiracial individuals may also benefit from the ability to make salient different identities depending on their social context. Rather than being "caught" between two worlds, it might be that individuals who identify with multiple groups are better able to navigate both racially homogenous and heterogeneous environments than individuals who primarily identify with one racial group. For example, an individual who identifies with multiple groups may be able to avoid or attenuate the negative consequences associated with tokenism (see Kanter, 1977) in majority White environments if one of his or her component identities is also White. Conversely, a multiracial individual who identifies with only a single group may be susceptible to the negative consequences associated with being in a token role. In other words, the multiracial individual who identifies as belonging to multiple groups may be able to place one foot in the majority and one in the minority group, and in this way might be buffered against the negative consequences of feeling tokenized. Even if a multiracial individual belongs to two low-status groups (e.g., Black and Latino), by virtue of the fact that their multiracial identity allows them to identify with both Black and Latino monoracial individuals, this may allow them to identity with a larger number of people compared to those who only identify with a single racial group. In this way, multiracial individuals in diverse environments might have a broader sense of "fitting in," which may have positive consequences for their psychological and social well-being.

Research examining bicultural individuals' cognitive integration of their multiple identities also provides a potential explanation for the findings in this article (Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002; also see Cheng & Lee, this issue). This research has found that individuals who see their different cultures as being compatible (e.g., Chinese and Americans) are better able to "frame-switch" between their cultural mind-sets relative to individuals with low-perceived compatibility between their cultures. Thus, when compatibility is high, individuals

are able to switch between their different cultures' ways of perceiving the world with relative ease. It may be that those individuals who explicitly adopted multiple group memberships in our sample have higher levels of perceived compatibility between their identities and thus are particularly adept frame-switchers. The ability to frame-switch in this context may translate into the ability to better navigate racially diverse contexts which may lead to beneficial consequences for psychological and social outcomes (see also Benet-Martinez, Leu, & Lee, 2006).

Policy Implications

Given that these findings suggest that having a multiracial identity is beneficial, a logical next question to ask is whether steps should be taken at the social level to promote the adoption of multiracial identities. Although a purely scientific answer to such a question will likely take years of additional research, we do believe that this study highlights some issues that must first be resolved before this question can be answered. First, it is critical to determine if the psychological and social benefits documented in this article are caused by the adoption of a multiracial identity or if they are precursors to the adoption of a multiracial identity. Although in this study we treated participants' identity as a predictor of their outcomes, it could be the case that those individuals who are better adjusted (those who score high on measures of psychological and social well-being) are the ones who feel most at ease with their identities and feel more comfortable in deviating from the mainstream (i.e., monoracial) racial categories (cf. Sidanius, 1988). If this is the case then encouraging multiracial individuals to adopt a multiracial identity would be misplaced, and instead more general efforts should be made to improve multiracial individuals' psychological well-being and social engagement.

Limitations

The results of this study may, in part, be dependent on the broader social context in which the multiracial individuals sampled reside. Specifically, our participants were drawn from high schools in Long Beach, California—a city that the 2000 U.S. Census indicates has sizeable representations of all major racial categories (United States Census Bureau, 2000). Some researchers have argued that identification with multiple identities may be easier for multiracial individuals in this kind of environment, perhaps because the sheer number of salient racial and ethnic classifications helps make unique ethnic and racial variation more normative and socially acceptable (Stephan, 1992; see also Amiot, de la Sabionniere, Terry, & Smith, 2007). Future research should explore if multiracial individuals in less diverse social contexts are able to as easily identify in

multiracial terms. It may be that multiracial identity is repressed by some social contexts and fostered by others and that the psychological and organizational consequences of multiracial identity depend on the contexts in which such individuals reside.

Finally, it may be that multiracial participants who identified with multiple racial groups are at a more advanced level of identity development relative to their multiracial counterparts who identified with single racial groups. For instance, in the parlance of Amiot and colleagues' four-stage model of social identity development (2007), it might be that multiracial individuals who identified with a single racial group are at the second stage of identity development—the categorization stage where there is little overlap between multiple social identities—whereas individuals who identified with multiple racial groups are at the fourth and final stage of identity development—the integration stage where conflicts between social identities are resolved and simultaneous identification becomes possible. Although this research did not find interactive effects for students' age or grade level on the outcome variables, future research employing a longitudinal design should be conducted to determine if the difference in outcomes that we found across the three multiracial classifications are due to differences in identity development.

Conclusion

These findings suggest there may be something unique about individuals who, when asked to report their primary group membership, openly claim membership in multiple racial groups. Regardless if these individuals benefited from their identity interpretation or if their identity interpretation stemmed from a more general form of psychological resiliency (or both), the findings are noteworthy because they suggest that the manner in which multiracial individuals interpret their multiracial status is associated with their own personal and social well-being. As such, it appears that the benefits of multiracial status, both for individuals themselves and the social contexts of which they are a part, might be especially prevalent among individuals who self-perceive as multiracial. We believe that, in order to provide the clearest picture of the multiracial experience, future research on multiracial psychology would benefit from acknowledging the importance of multiracial individuals' interpretation of their multiracial status and not simply their awareness of their multiple group memberships.

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