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Miranda Monique McKinley
Exploring the Experiences of
Internalized Racism for
Multiracial
Individuals: A Clinical
foundation for Social Work

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study is to give clinicians, researchers, and educator's insight into the multiracial experience. It is the hope of this study to give readers a greater understanding of the ways internalized racism manifest for multiracial individuals. The goal of the literature review is to illuminate past, current and potential further research, which would be useful tools for psychodynamic practice and clinical skill building for clinicians working with multiracial individuals. A total of ten self-identified multiracial adults participated in this qualitative study that utilized semi-structured open-ended questions. These questions were used to explore the unique experiences of each multiracial/biracial individual. The questions explored the various aspects of the intersectionality between internalized racism, coping skills and self-concept. Results found that multiracial individual's self-concept is affected by internalized racism and that all of the participants were able to use coping skills to assist in their self-reflection and multiracial identity formation and growth. The limitations and implications of this study suggest that there is a need for further study on this specific population and topic. This study represented each participant individually; giving the participants an opportunity to share their experiences of multiracial identity formation and experiences of racism and internalized racism as a multiracial adult.

Exploring The Experiences of Internalized Racism for Multiracial Individuals:
A Clinical Foundation for Social Work

A project based upon an independent investigation, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2014

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Throughout my adult life I have created truths about what it is to be me. My self-awareness and self-identity are based on these truths I tell myself. I have been comfortable, if not somewhat intentionally ignorant, about the systems of oppression that affect my self-identity. The earliest memory I have of being aware of my racial identity was when I was in elementary school. I was at recess on the swing set when a White classmate came behind me and pulled my hair as I was swinging. “Why is your hair so weird!? What are you anyways?” she said. I remember feeling ashamed for being different, feeling exposed and alienated at the same time. I went home after school and asked my mom why I was different? I was five years old.

When I spoke to my mother recently, she shared her reaction of this experience and talked about how she shielded me from the pain, as much as she could, through these years. She speaks of how she prayed and cried for me that night. Prayed that my experience with racism would be short-lived (unlike hers), and cried for the suffering she knew I would likely have to endure because of it. After my experience on the swing set my mother took direct measures, reading me books like “The Skin You Live In” and “Nappy Hair”.

I was aware of my biracial identity at an early age, my mother made me feel proud, uniquely special and accepted within my racial identity. She made it a point to say that I was both Mexican and African American; a fact that shaped my biracial self-identity to this day. At a young age my large family network supported the growth of my self-identity. I felt included and

accepted by both sides of my family. This support made it easier to deal with the change in social reality I would make later in life.

This is a firsthand account of my own experience with racism and having to reflect on my own identity as a multiracial individual. Throughout my life I have had similar experiences to the one when I was five and on the swing. Miller and Garran (2008) attest to the stages of racial identity development that take place during “adolescence...a time of psychological, endocrinological and social turbulence”(p.105). Miller and Garran (2008) assert Phinney and Kohutsu’s (1997) racial identity timeline as an important concept to review and outline the following: 1) the initial phase which “refers to all unexamined identity”; 2) the transition phase in which previously held assumptions about ones identity is put into questions; 3) the intermediate phase in which individuals reflect on the way their identity has impacted their social functioning.

Throughout my undergraduate studies at Hampshire College I felt compelled to connect with other people of color about their experiences at each of these stages. The Lebron-Wiggins Cultural Center became this space where I could explore and seek understanding from fellow students of color who had also moved from larger cities to attend a small predominantly White private college in Western Massachusetts. The following conversation snippet reflects the variety of experiences people of color and multiracial people may encounter:

“Miranda, you know it wasn’t as easy for me to accept myself as it was for you. My dad is Black and my mom is White. And because of that I experience being biracial in a very different way than you experience being biracial”.

This introduction will address and define the issues of multiracial identity formation and how the construction of identity evolves. The term, self-concept, embodies this framework for the investigation of how communities of color develop coping skills after experiencing

internalized racism (IR). There is often an assumption that racism becomes internalized. In this study, I believe that all people of color raised in a society where racism has been (and still is) so prevalent, will have internalized various elements of racist thinking: certain beliefs, stereotypes, assumptions, and judgments about others and themselves. In Chapter Two, the Literature Review, I will provide a more in-depth discussion of self-concept in terms of how multiracial individuals' self-identity can be affected by internalized racism.

Researchers Jones and Bullock (2013) found that between 2000 and 2010, multiracial children between the ages of 6-12 years were the fastest growing population in the United States, with “the overall population for multiracial individuals growing from 6.8 million to 9.0 million people--representing 2.9 percent of the country’s population” (p.6). Examining the psychological effects of internalized racism experienced by multiracial adults will provide a context for formulating a conceptual psychodynamic framework for clinicians working with this ever-growing population. My study posits that self-concept (i.e. the mental image or the way that one perceives oneself) is directly affected by the experiences of internalized racism encountered by multiracial adults, which may lead to an individual developing coping strategies by sharing skills within their own communities of color.

In this study, in this study, I will explore past and contemporary definitions of the language used to discuss work with multiracial individuals. For instance, challenges arise due to varying theoretical orientations, pertinent to the language surrounding the psychological experiences of multiracial individuals. Operational terms for multiracial identity, and the stages of racial identity development will be examined through the use of previous theoretical illustrations and ultimately move toward contemporary ways these terms can be employed when examining the impact of internalized racism in this study.

Through this study I hope to give clinicians, researchers, and educators insight into the multiracial experience. I hope to give readers a greater understanding of the ways internalized racism manifest for multiracial individuals. In the next chapter I will outline key terminology and contextualize relevant literature that can assist clinicians with their understanding of multiracial individuals experiences with internalized racism by looking at existing clinical frameworks.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

The following literature review will illuminate the deficits and advances in research on the effects of internalized racism on multiracial individuals' experiences of self-concept and self-identity development. The majority of the literature focuses on racial identity within a monoracial context. The literature exploring multiracial identity is plentiful but literature addressing the effects of internalized racism on multiracial identity is almost non-existent. Therefore, it has been arduous to locate studies exploring the coping skills acquired by multiracial individuals that use the language of internalized racism versus racial oppression.

What Is Multiracial Identity?

Multiracial identity challenges current understanding of race--forcing scholars to generate new ideas about intergroup relations, racial stigmatization, social identity, social perception, discrimination, and the intersectionality of race with other social categories. Early researchers in this field often distinguished between "race and "ethnicity" – assuming one is primarily based on ancestry and the other on culture (Patham and Helms, 1985). Others use the term interchangeably. To avoid repetition, I will generally use the term, "race," instead of repeating "race and ethnicity". Researchers Jones, Smith, Black, Hawaiian, and Indian (2001) state, "multiracial identities can be created by having parents from two different races or through transracial adoptions and other social and cultural processes" (p.18).

For the purpose of this research, a "multiracial" individual will be defined as a person whose identity includes more than one racial group. Historically, the term 'biracial' has meant being of two races (usually Black/White), whereas multiracial is an umbrella term covering two or more racial identities (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2010). Brunsma (2006) acknowledges how "the existence, experience, and voices of multiracial individuals are challenging" (p. 5). Therefore, for the purposes of this study, multiracial and biracial may be used interchangeably due to the writer's discretion and literature being explored.

This chapter will look at the growing body of literature in multiracial identity, while concurrently exploring the lack of studies done on multiracial individuals experience of internalized racism as a result of negative self-concept and identity. Consequently, this literature review will focus on several specific themes: 1) internalized racism, 2) identity formation, 3) self concept; 4) and finally, the possibility of coping strategies and how these are perpetuated and ground multiracial communities toward increased wellness. First, it is vital to define multiracial identity and the stages of racial identity development in pertinent studies and empirical frameworks.

The Stages of Racial Identity Development

Early racial identity development theories such as William Cross's (1971) 'nigrescence model' did not take into account that race is a socially constructed system of classifying individuals according to phenotypical characteristics that are genetically determined but not always consistent. Although Cross (1971) was interested in "Black Identity development" this early research focused solely on African American men using a colorism scale rather than exploring the psychological affects of oppression and internalized racism.

As stated earlier racial identity models have predominately been used to research the effect of monoracial individuals of color (Cross, 1971; West-Olatunji, 2008; Wood and Hilto 2013). Amuer et al. (2011) reviewed 40 qualitative studies, conducted from 1986-2006 that explored the nature of racial and ethnic identity. The author's meta-analysis explored the "social constructivists" view of race and the implications of racial identity theory in current research. Social constructivism posits that groups create shared meaning through social settings; which is useful when thinking about the stages of racial identity that are particular to multiracial individuals.

Wood and Hilto (2013) explore the "Black Moral Male Development (BMMD)" while West-Olatunji et al. (2008) examine self-identified Vietnamese participants in their research using the racial identity model (Mghe & Mahalik, 2001). These monoracial identity designs created scaling systems for people of color and furthered research within the framework of "minority stress" (Myer, 2003). However, these designs' limitations resided in using gender (Wood and Hilto, 2013) and racial specific (West-Olatunji, 2008) populations. Moving forward I believe it is important to include a scaling and theoretical orientation that accounts for the various forms of self-identification and the development of self-concept among multiracial individuals as well.

While research has been done on racial identity development (Phinney, 1992; Brown, 2003), little has been done about the differences of racial identity development among people of color that self identify as being from more than one racial or ethnic background. However, multiracial identity development has been an area of study that has shown promising, if limited growth.

Internalized Racism

In my research, I define internalized racism as a systemic oppression of a racial group or groups influenced by societal racism that asserts the supremacy of the dominant group and then maintains or perpetuates the discourse that oppresses them; this includes the set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures and ideologies that undergird the dominating group's power (Tappan, 2006).

Biven (2005) illustrates three concepts of internalized racism that will inform my analysis. First she states that IR is “More than just a consequence of racism, then, internalized racism is a systemic oppression in reaction to racism that has a life of its own”. Additionally, she asserts the following:

...because race is a social and political construct that comes out of particular histories of domination and exploitation between people, people of color's internalized racism often leads to great conflict among and between them as other concepts of power. (p. 43-44)

Ultimately, Biven's concept of IR asserts that many in this society, including the helping professions, denounce intentional discrimination or prejudice against a person because of that person's membership in a certain racial group. The press for political correctness suppresses some behaviors or comments, and most people, including social workers or others in the helping professions, would not describe themselves as “racist”. Nor do they engage in forms of overt racism. However, even if every person in the world currently conducted themselves in a non-racist manner, institutional racism would still exist.

A recent critical analysis by Holtzman and Sharpe (2014) look at internalized racism within the context of media. The authors mirror Biven's (2005) definition although through the

lens of media messages about racism, microaggression and internalized racism. Correspondingly these authors believe that internalized racism is an always-involuntary response of people of color to racism and in the context of internalized White supremacy, which will be explored further in the Results and Discussion section. I believe Holtzman and Sharpe's (2014) working definition of internalized racism will provide for an in depth critical analysis for thinking about internalized racism within multiracial populations. The following excerpt depicts this in relation to internalized racism among people of color:

the taking in of negative messages of overt and covert racism, superiority and inferiority, and re-enacting those messages on oneself and others in ways that are self destructive historical and ongoing racial targeting (p. 217)

Authors Joseph and Williams (2008) explore how internalized oppression stymied their growth as individuals and scholars of color, and inhibited their ability to act "as radical change agents." The authors posit that such psychological, social, and economic self-sabotage is implanted by and works toward the benefit of the White society that depends on systemically limiting, blocking, and undermining Black success, innovation, and power. From a behavioral framework, the authors used the concept of internalized racism by explaining the historical trajectory of language used to oppress people of color.

Joseph and Williams (2008) used this behavioral framework to adapt a set of broad ideas and theories around internalized racism in order to build upon the questions they found in their literature review. Additionally, by using a conceptual narrative framework the authors were able to explore the intersectionality of internalized racism. A noted limitation in their theoretical research was their choice to select studies using highly educated participants who identified as monoracial people of color. While it is beneficial to understand these glimpses of identity

expression, it does not provide a holistic understanding of a longitudinal personal multiracial narrative about identity development across the socioeconomic spectrum. In order to gain a more holistic picture of multiracial identity development and acquired coping skills, research of multiracial identity development in relation to experiences of the influence of internalized racism on self-concept must also be studied.

Internalized racism and multiracial individuals. As stated earlier in the introduction, there is a lack of literature focusing on the effects of internalized racism on multiracial individuals. Rivera (2010) and Renn (2008) were among the first researchers who conducted studies that highlighted “discrimination” and racial oppression faced by multiracial individuals. While Rivera (2010) coded participants based on his “Biracial Experiences of Discrimination Inventory” scale, Renn (2008) merely linked the positive psychological well being of multiracial students with their ability to freely choose their racial self-identity. However, for the purposes of my study there was no literature explicitly stating how multiracial individuals were affected by Biven’s (2005) operational definition of internalized racism.

Renn (2008) sampled a “small group of college-aged students who identified as biracial and multiracial” (p. 15). Renn (2008) found evidence that having a healthy or robust multiracial identity is linked to positive psychological well-being. In Renn’s (2000) study of 24 multiracial students from four different colleges, people assumed they could freely choose which race(s) they wished to identify. As one woman noted: “If you accept race as a social construction, that gives us even more legitimacy in the freedom to choose what you want to identify as, because there’s no biological thing tying you to one or the other background” (p. 411).

Correspondingly, Rockquemore and Laszloffy (2005)’s Continuum of Biracial Identity (COBI) model attributed the same importance in being able to self identify with more than one

racial identity in order to maintain a positive self regard of ones multiracial heritage. The COBI suggests a “blending continuum” anchored by poles indicating a singular identity option. At one end of the continuum is a singular (exclusively) Black identity. At the other end is a singular (exclusively) White identity. In between are a variety of blended identity options with varying degrees of emphasis. For instance, one may have a blended biracial identity with a Black emphasis, a blended identity with equal Black and White emphasis, or a blended identity with White emphasis. What is vital to note is that no particular location along the continuum ought to be considered ideal for all biracial individuals? Rather, it is a question of adaptation to one’s social environment. Ultimately, this is a big benefit for my research because it gives the individual the right to choose how to define themselves which can be empowering and heighten their self-esteem. This model will be explored in further detail later in the literature review in relation to multiracial concept and self-identity.

Rivera’s (2010) study design incorporated a self-produced inventory entitled the “Biracial Experiences of Discrimination Inventory” which listed the following five sampling measures in which participants were coded based on these five categories: 1) “the biracial response to monoracial context” which covers how someone perceives and makes sense of their interactions with other people who are not people of color; while having conflicting ideas about how to align oneself within this inventory; 2) “racial microaggressions” which are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults towards people of color; 3) “confusion of interracial family relations” which can manifest in individuals not feeling as though they belong to their family based on differences in skin color; 4) “assumptions or

marginality and finally “internalized multiracial racism” which closely resembles the above explanation of IR (Rivera, 2010, p. 135).

Consequently, this inventory has been the most pertinent empirical study I have located that explores the effects of internalized racism on multiracial individuals. Despite the fact that the sampling size had no variants across multicultural identity, Rivera (2010) did find that multiracial individuals have experiences of discrimination that correlate “with perceived ethnic discrimination.” Rivera’s formation of the “Biracial Experiences of Discrimination Inventory” scale included the most comprehensive correlation with IR in the exploration of “internalized multiracial racism.” For example, Rivera (2010) was able to contextualize various layers of multiracial identity development and the affects of racism on the psyche. I will explore this concept further in the next section of processing identity formation for multiracial individuals and their therapists.

Identity Formation

Braken’s (1992) study employed six specific domains related to self-concept which included the following factors: social (the ability to interact with others); competence (the ability to meet basic need); affect (the awareness of emotional states); psychological (feelings about looks, health, psychological condition and overall appearance); academic (success or failure in school) and family (how well one functions within a family unit). How does self-concept affect the racial identity development of multiracial individuals? Rockquemore and Brunsma’s (2002) mixed methods results named four therapeutic themes to notice when working with multiracial individuals: 1) The influence of environment and context; 2) Multiracial identity development as a process; 3) Ascribed identity versus self definition; and 4) The richness of multiple heritage.

Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2009) found that: based on a review of the empirical literature across several disciplines, the following four patterns emerge for identity development within the mixed-race population: (a) racial identity varies, (b) racial identity often changes over the life course, (c) racial identity development is not a predictable linear process with a single outcome, and (d) social, cultural, and spatial context are critical. (p.20-21)

Moving forward, multiracial and biracial individuals are creating new meaning in how to formulate and reflect on the concept of self and racial identity in the 21st century. Ultimately, the goal of this research is not to prompt the questioning “Who am I?” (Root, 1990), but rather “How have I coped?” and “What do I do, knowing who I am?” In other words, this research focuses on what specific coping and defense mechanisms, if any, do multiracial individuals employ after experiencing internalized racism.

Self-Concept Versus Self-Identity

In order to understand the historical and contemporary definitions of self-concept and self-identity, it is helpful to think about how we define the self and how that self is fixed within the experiences of multiracial individuals. Psychodynamic thought refers to the way the psyche, in this example, the self, is experienced as active, and not static. This can seem ambiguous because the psyche, or self, consists of a number of ‘selves’ (Berzoff, Flanagan, and Hertz, 2011). Therefore, one can posit that a multiracial person’s sense of self consists of complex layered internal and external processes.

Self-concept is the mental image or the way that one perceives oneself; people’s self-concepts often do not exactly match reality. For instance, realities are variable and there is no single or universal reality when it comes to the experiences of multiracial individuals. External labeling about the individual's perceived ethnic or racial background might influence a

multiracial individual's self-concept. Roger's (1975) defined self-concept as "a collection of beliefs about oneself." For instance, self-concept is composed of three basic components: the ideal self, the real self and the public self.

Conversely, self-identity is the state in which one is aware of and can identify with oneself as a separate and unique individual. Tatum (2003) defines self-identity (specifically racial self-identity) as how people describe themselves within a wide variety of cultural, social, familial, geographical, and situational factors. Therefore, a multiracial person's self-identity holds more internal agency about how they choose to define given these various factors.

Research exploring the formation of self-concept and self-identity of multiracial individuals has been limited to monoracial analysis (Parham & Helms, 1985; Szymanski & Gupta, 2009). The contemporary dominant discourse regarding multiracial individuals is acutely insufficient in defining identity outside of poorly defined, myopic schemas. There are, however, a variety of theoretical perspectives that offer apt analysis of the complex and fluid nature of race and identity.

Multiracial self-concept and self-identity. Poston's (1990) Biracial Identity Development Model is (BIDM) composed of five stages: Personal Identity, Choice of Group Categorization, Enmeshment/Denial, Appreciation, and Integration. For the purposes of my study these five stages correlate with Miller and Garran's (2008) stages of identity model with emphasis on the multiracial experience. For instance, personal identity aligns with the initial phase; choice of group categorization, enmeshment/denial belong in the transition phase and appreciation and integration belong in the final phase. Poston (1990), like many working within the alternative approach (i.e. a multiracial model), addresses the flaws in previous racial identity

development models that refuted the integration of two racial identities, implying that mixed-race people must choose one racial identity.

Rockquemore and Laszloffy's COBI model (2005) used Poston's (1990) BIDM model to provide differential analysis of multiracial individuals racial identity development. Rockquemore and Laszloffy (2005) COBI model reflected their belief that:

there are multiple ways that mixed-race people identify themselves racially ... it resist attempts to fix mixed race people into a singular correct identity and instead recognizes that multiple and equally valid identifications exist among the growing multiracial population. (p.4)

The COBI model allows for inclusivity and collective identity vs. an imposed singular identity. This theoretical framework goes against earlier models, which perpetuated racial categories. This COBI paradigm allows multiracial individuals to define themselves. Likewise, researchers Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, and Freeman, (2010) found that "racial socialization is directly correlated with critical race theory and the stratification of people of color in families of multiracial and ethnic backgrounds" (p. 455).

Burton et al. (2010), sampled the following topics within a multiracial population: 1) inequality and socioeconomic mobility within and across families; 2) interracial romantic pairing, and finally; 3) the racial socialization of children. This exploratory design focused on the multiracial experiences of colorism with an emphasis of moving toward an understanding of differences among racialized systems. The authors note the limitation of their initial topic was impacted by internalized racism, which "severely limited families access to resources" (p. 449).

Choosing only one racial identity can affect the research outcome and also be psychologically harmful to the research participant. For instance, one of the complexities of

applying a single racial identity model to describe identity development for all multiracial individuals is the great variance among multiracial individuals in how they define their racial identity. Having to choose one racial identity can affect a multiracial individuals' sense of self-concept, in other words, lead to negative self-worth, potentially cause depressive symptoms to emerge, lead to conflictual relations with peers, and lower overall self-esteem (Terry & Winston, 2010).

Ultimately, these newer definitions are an attempt to empower multiracial individuals with a more immediate sense of control and power within their social environments by having them portray their own experience. The following section on coping strategies will illuminate the need for further research in the area of coping mechanisms practiced by multiracial individuals.

Coping Strategies

Psychological resilience is defined by flexibility in response to changing situational demands, and the ability to bounce back from negative emotional experiences. According to stress and coping theory, coping is defined as the process by which an individual attempts to manage and resolve, stressful events in one's life through both cognitive and behavioral means (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The predominant discourse on multiracial coping skills focuses on differences in sibling development (Root, 1990), the experiences of adopted multiracial adults raised in White households (Samuels, 2009) and the coping skills adopted by multiracial families and children (Pauker & Ambady, 2009).

Beyond this, locating theories discussing the coping and defense mechanism of multiracial adults affected by internalized racism becomes more obscure. Szymanski and Obiri (2010) did explore religious coping skills of people of color who have experienced internalized racism and "found persons with low internalized racism were not more likely to utilize positive

religious coping” (p.454). Root (1990) found that the role of family was important in the role of building coping skills for individuals who had experienced internalized racism, stating:

that the biracial person has to fight very hard to exercise choices that are not congruent with how they may be visually and emotionally perceived (p.197).

Additionally, there is ample research which examines coping skills for people of color dealing with racist events, but none about the coping skills people of color utilize when experiencing internalized racism. Researchers Brondolo, Ver Halen, Pencille, Beatty, and Contrada (2009) conducted a literature review on the coping techniques of people of color that reflects this sentiment. For instance, there I found that coping skills for people of color are written about in the context of external experiences of racism. Yet internal experiences of racism remain vastly under researched in the holistic coping skills of multiracial persons. The purpose of this study is to provide first person accounts of how multiracial individuals enlist coping skills and forms of self-care after experiencing internalized racism.

Summary

Despite the growing number of multiracial individuals, little research exists regarding the direct experiences of multiracial persons in their own words (Burton, 2010; Poston, 1990; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005; Root, 1990), and is especially lacking in demonstrating the effects of internalized racism on their self-concept and coping skills. Several studies suggested coping skills for people of color (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Pauker & Ambady, 2009; Root, 1990; Samuels, 2009; Szymanski & Obiri, 2010;). However, no studies explored specifically how multiracial individuals develop coping skills after experiencing internalized racism. The goal of this literature review is to illuminate past, current and potential further research, which would be useful tools for psychodynamic practice and clinical skill building for clinicians

working with multiracial individuals. In the following chapter I will outline the methodology of this research study and describe the components of the study in detail.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This study is an empirical qualitative study exploring the psychological effects of internalized racism experienced by multiracial adults. Ultimately, this research design strives to provide a context for formulating a conceptual psychodynamic framework for clinicians working with this ever-growing population. Due to the lack of data on this vital topic from both a qualitative and quantitative standpoint, this study utilized an exploratory design that allowed for more flexible content analysis. This chapter highlights the sample demographics, data collection methods, and subsequent data analysis of how multiracial individuals experience and cope with internalized racism

Sample

A total of ten self-identified multiracial adults participated in this qualitative study that utilized semi-structured open-ended questions. The inclusion criteria specified that participants be eighteen years or older, speak English as their primary language, identify as multiracial or biracial in identity, and be willing to be audiotaped via phone, face-to-face or Skype™. Selection procedures for participants were randomized and will be discussed further in the data collection methods section. Due to the study's research question, probability sampling method was used. A probability sampling method relies “on a random or chance selection method so that the probability of selection of population elements is known” (Engel, 2012, p. 226).

Despite the studies random sampling, the inclusion criteria provided allotment for controlled procedures that provided me with the ability to frame questions directly related to the sample population. In regards to the multiracial or biracial inclusion criteria, I defined multiracial identity as having two or more racial heritages (e. g., white, black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander). There was no exclusion criteria based on gender, socioeconomic status or academic background. Research was conducted on multiracial/biracial individuals and the intersectionality between identity formation, IR, coping strategies and self-concept.

Data Collection Methods

As stated earlier a snowball sampling method was employed to gather a core group of self identified multiracial/biracial English speaking adults. I sent out an email recruitment message (See Attachment A) to potential participants who fit the inclusion criteria (See Attachment A). The email message contained my contact information and a message to the potential participants stating that they could feel free to send my contact information to these individuals. Recruitment was done through email communication only. Once participants who met the inclusion criteria agreed to be in the study, they were sent an Informed Consent Letter (See Attachment B) to sign and return. Upon receiving the signed Informed Consent, I was in contact with my participants via email to set up appointments for phone, face-to-face or Skype™ interviews.

For this study, participants were asked to answer a list of ten open-ended questions pertaining to their experiences around internalized racism and subsequent coping skills developed (See Attachment C). Participation was voluntary and participants had the option to withdraw from the study at any point and were informed of they're right to refuse to answer any

of the interview questions. The interview questions were based around answering the following question: how can exploring the issues of multiracial identity formation provide a framework for the investigation of how communities of color develop coping skills after experiencing internalized racism (IR)?

Ultimately, all of the interviews were conducted using Skype™ either due to either convenience for the participant or researcher in terms of available and preferred mobile access. Once the time of the interview was established with the participant the researcher and participant logged online and conducted the interview via Skype™. Prior to the Skype™ interviews I provided the participants with Biven's (2005) article on IR and the Participant Interview Question's via email (See Attachment C). The interviews were typically 30-60 minutes and were documented using an audio-recording device. During the interviews I was in my private residence, which insured participant confidentiality. Before the interview began I inquired in participants had any questions about the Informed Consent (See Attachment B), asked if the participants still agreed to be audiotaped and reminded participants of their right to refuse questions or withdraw from the interview at any point.

During interviews, I recorded data by audio recording and note taking. All participants allowed me to audio record our interviews. As stated, open-ended questions were used to explore the unique experiences of each multiracial/biracial individual. The questions explored the various aspects of the intersectionality between internalized racism, coping skills and self-concept. The first part of the interview explored how participants defined multiracial/biracial and these individuals' experiences with racism.

The second part of the interview examined how participants defined their experiences of internalized racism. After explaining my research's use of the working definition used in Biven's

(2005) article about internalized racism I then asked participants to state how they would define internalized racism. Subsequently, participants were then asked if they felt they had ever experienced internalized racism and how those experiences affected, if any, their self-concept.

The third part of the interview explored how participants “took care of themselves” with either negative or positive ways of coping. This part of the interview focused on dialogue around community based support, which may have included family, friends, spiritual practices, etc. When identifying information was found in the data, it was removed or disguised. Once the interview was completed interview audio files were encrypted and notes and Informed Consents (See Attachment B) were stored in a secure lock box.

Data Analysis

Engel (2012) states, “qualitative researchers have adopted a hermeneutic perspective on texts, that is, a perspective that views text as an interpretation that can never be judged true or false” (p. 407). Within my study I will use qualitative data analysis due to it being less driven by very specific hypotheses and categorical frameworks and more concerned with emergent themes and unique descriptions. Some weakness within the qualitative data analysis is that it can lack consistency and reliability because “the researcher can employ different probing techniques and the respondent can choose to tell some particular stories and ignore others (Rubin & Rubin, 2011, p. 184).”

For instance, this may have been the case when I chose to send out specific resources that I subjectively assessed for participants before the interview. Before participants shared their experiences, I ensured they would each read Biven’s 2005 article on IR. Therefore all participants came into the interview with some context of IR and the way it was being defined within my study—the way I ultimately defined it as a researcher and thus, narrowed their scope

of understanding to this one specific lens. This may have affected how they then defined internalized racism during the interview. However, it was not my intention to code participant's definition of IR but more importantly to understand whether or not they had experienced IR

Additionally, the participant interview questions (See Attachment C) were sent via email prior to the interview, which allowed participants to have an overview of the themes the interview would include. Consequently, the qualitative questions were then coded for themes, keywords, and subthemes. As a result of the current analysis biases were found by the researcher, which will be examined in the following results section.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

The function of this chapter is to present the results of the data collected from the ten interview participants who took part in this study. Major findings from this research study reflected similar experiences of a “complex” form of racism and microaggressions against the existing literature. My aim of this research was to explore the experiences of internalized racism on multiracial individuals, its effect on their self-concept and how individuals may have developed any coping skills. Consequently, emergent themes of humor and denial surfaced while selectively coding for coping skills.

While transcribing the interview I noticed the overlay of the selected code themes: multiracial identity, internalized racism, racism, self-concept and coping skills. For example, experiences of multiracial identity formation would overlap with racism, self-concept and coping skills. The following quote illustrates this nexus:

I remember a friend saying ‘most people think you are White’, but then saying that yes, but self-determination is a thing too and I carry and conceptualize myself as a person of color. And that it is a space that is welcoming to me and anyone that [sic] identifies as such. I don’t think I actually said it that way at the time because I was surprised that I heard that and I was like “Ooo”. Those moments catch me off guard, but they happen, and reinforce a sort of worry that I am occupying space that I shouldn’t be in. That I

occupy an identity for White reasons; why am I questioning my identity? It's been very solid awareness of who I am. (personal communication, March 25th 2014)

Thematically, this transcribed quote represents the codes stated above and allowed for an analysis of the following themes: being labeled, self-actualization and racial microaggressions. Racial microaggressions “lead to race-related stress” and this stress may persist for “days, weeks, months and even years” and can be “perpetuated by all types of people-strangers, casual acquaintance and even personal friends” (Sue et al., 2008, p. 336). These shared experiences require learning to negotiate a multifaceted identity within a racially-oriented society that prefers homogenous racial identity.

Thus, the following categories of results emerged from the final coding analysis: internalized racism, experiences of racism (e.g. microaggressions), multiracial identity formation and subsequent coping skills. Each of these factors will be presented further in this chapter under six main sections: demographic data; multiracial identity formation; experiences of internalized racism; experiences of racism; the effects of self-concept after these experiences; and coping skills.

Demographic Data

The interviews began by obtaining demographic information from participants through an email correspondence. Once participants met the inclusion criteria for the study they were emailed the following semi-structured interview questions, which were used as the basis for coding (See Attachment C). Participants were recruited through an email recruitment message (See Attachment A) which was sent to colleagues and friends who were potential participants who met the inclusion criteria. Individuals who received the email recruitment message were then asked within the message to forward this email to any potential participants.

Originally, the aim of this study was to obtain 12-15 participants but due to time constraints, only ten participants were interviewed. Individual comfort levels may have influenced the depth and degree of the detail provided by the participant. Using Brymans' (2006) four-stage coding technique I was able to define key terms, combine similar codes and identify interconnections between themes and narrative experiences of the multiracial individuals interviewed.

This chapter contains the findings from the transcribed interviews of the ten self-identified multiracial adults. While not all participants agreed to the term "biracial" or "multiracial" in describing themselves, they had all at one point in their life identified as such. Further examination of this can be seen in the section on multiracial identity formation. The sample was between the ages of 21 to 60 years with the median age of the group being 31 years of age. Participants all resided within the United States and had grown up in seven different states including Massachusetts, California, Virginia, North Carolina, New York, Illinois and Vermont.

All participants had pursued a degree in higher education (i.e. pursuing a degree after high school graduation); 4 out of 10 participants were still in either a community college, undergraduate graduate program at a four-year college or university setting. Six out of the ten participants defined themselves as being "queer" or "genderqueer." Seven out of the ten participants identified as half "White" or Caucasian." Six out of ten participants were "female"; two participants identified as "male" and two participants preferred to identify as "genderqueer". Two out of ten participants stated they were currently religious and/or spiritual as per the interview questions (See Attachment C).

Multiracial Identity

It's hard to explain to people that I identify as both this and that and that I don't have to choose to be either or when I want to be. (personal communication, March 25th, 2014)

Shih and Sanchez (2009) refer to this issue as “racial category construction”. Similar to their definitions, I believe that the term ‘multiracial’ comes from the perspective that race is socially constructed. Therefore when I use the term multiracial throughout this paper, readers can assume the term multiracial refers to people who identify with two or more racial heritages, “based upon socially constructed racial criteria (p. 6)”. Participants reacted to this definition in one of two ways: participants either had previous knowledge of race as being socially constructed or did not. Participants who had no prior knowledge of the theoretical framework of race as a social construction were subsequently given a brief overview.

Early childhood exposure to multiracial identity. Participants described identity formation when they were young multiracial children as a fluid process, depending on the child's development and environment. The following statement describes how one participant processed their dual identities:

I think that when I was a child I only identified as being multiracial or mixed based on my ethnicity, but then when I got to college I was like it can also be because I have lived in these places and that also makes me mixed and connected to all of these different things. So I think it is very layered and has to do with geography and ethnicity and any kind of different cultural factors depending on your lived experiences. (personal communication, March 18th 2014)

One participant stated that she “felt the effects of being biracial and not White when she was very young” and very often “people would assume [she] was adopted”. Similarly, other

participant's early childhood identity formation as multiracial depended on the community they grew up in:

I actually identify as multiracial largely because I prefer the term because it helped for the inclusivity of many races and I have been identifying as multiracial since I was in elementary school. That was the first time I started filling out forms by myself and would just check Asian and White, but they hadn't really started putting 'other' on forms yet until perhaps I was in high school, definitely when I was in college. (personal communication, April 1st 2014)

This statement provides context for the psychological repercussions that happened later for this individual, and that can often happen for multiracial individuals. This will be discussed further in Chapter Five. As mentioned earlier in my literature review, Rockquemore et al. (2005) raises an important question about their theory of multiracial identity formation: what are the consequences of different racial identities for multiracial people? For many, multiracial people have malleable racial identities that often change in the social context.

Being labeled as the “other”. “To other” is to make or regard (a person, social group, etc.) as different. Within the same vein, participants described what felt like a pull between being multiracial, and “not being enough” for their monoracial backgrounds. As one participant described, “Being mixed, I felt like I always had to prove my blackness”. A resistance of anxiety can surface when the complex navigation for acceptance arises. For instance, the following statement by a participant elucidates the “anxiety” of feeling “otherized”:

When I think about what the term biracial or multiracial means to me I feel a sudden flood of anxiety washing over me. By all purposes I describe myself as biracial person but how I define it. I mean the simple answer is to say, right, a person of color who

subscribes to one or more racial backgrounds. But it is so much more complex than that. And I think that is where the anxiety arises for me. It just seems like such a simple question but I think the definitions for each individual are infinite. For me anyways, being biracial means having to navigate the different racial and cultural realities within each of my backgrounds. (personal communication, March 8th 2014)

A complex struggle for agency. Agency is the capacity individuals have to understand and bring about positive change within themselves. In multiracial and racial identity formation this agency is often limited due to the institutional and systemic oppression of people of color (Miller and Garran, 2008). The subsequent formulation also touches on the complexity of multiracial identity and the struggle with self-perception:

I think that being multiracial was something that when I was younger made me feel bad and otherized, but since coming back to school and now being able to think about my multiracial identity and what it meant to me and what it continues to mean to me. I just think it is so complex. There is not one single thing that it means to me. I think it is a variety of things that it means to me, both good and bad things of course but a multitude of things. What I can think of is this feeling of not being in control of what how you define yourself. You know I am perceived as White, but I always was denied this part of me that was Mexican and for a long long time. Which is now I am in a place of excitement because I have my own agency in deciding how I am learning about this other side of myself that was buried for so long. I can now look at myself in the mirror and know that there are two parts of my racial identity. And they are not mutually exclusive, nor do I think that these parts of my identity make up who I am at the core of my being,

whatever that is, it is mine to share or not to share with who I will. (personal communication, April 1st 2014)

I believe this vignette touches on the internalized racism multiracial individuals experience outside of the monoracial context. The following section in internalized racism will further elaborate on these social and interpersonal processes.

Internalized Racism

[IR] It is complex... but the definition I use for internalized racism is basically believing the stereotypes and prejudices we hear about ourselves. Believing it about yourself and them putting that onto other people in your community and racial group. (personal communication, March 25th, 2014)

Situating white supremacy among multiracial individuals. A complex understanding of White Supremacy within the multiracial context was evident in the participant interview given that seven out of the ten interviews claimed Whiteness as apart of their racial identity. Amodio, Devine and Harmon Jones (2007) state that multiracial individuals must not forget “where one still sits on the trajectory of White supremacy”. The subsequent description from a participant reflects this internal analysis:

So between that and this concept of passing is like this thing where I need to own my accountability that I am an agent as a White person, or partially White person to many people, that I am an Asian of White Supremacy. Whereas my internalized experience is just as Chinese as White and it’s such a dichotomized and difficult thing to occupy when other people projection on to me, which I think are fair, are not atonic to my internal experience and I have to negotiate with that. (personal communication, April 1st 2014)

A second experience from a participant illuminates upon the mystery, and dichotomized reality of the multiracial experience:

So like two events that I have noticed recently, one I have noticed the internal experience, so this is the more serious one. I just have this moment where I was walking down the street with a friend where I noticed that my own secondary and emotional thought processes and reactions to like the attractiveness of men and racial identity came up recently and I noticed that when I have or see an Asian man who is attractive I am aware that the primary emotional content and then there is a secondary thought process where it's just like coming to the surface that I am aware of this White Supremacy thing playing out in my own sexual attraction. And it's the secondary though process, not even with words but something that tries to redirect me to somebody who is White. And its scary and this feels really vulnerable talking about it because it seems very complicated and intense... (personal communication, March 9th 2014)

Self-reproach and blame. Collective guilt and shame create blame directed at oneself, which was evident in the transcribed material from multiracial participants (Gazel, 2007). Along with building up coping strategies there was an inherent feeling of encroachment that multiracial individuals felt. The palpable sense of losing one's agency and internalizing that process can be seen below:

There have been moments when I feel I need to act, talk, think, you know, just be this certain way. This way that isn't me, but more White. And I think when I started thinking that way I was pushing my true self and the way I perceived who I was away. Or it was being pushed away, or you know I guess it feels like something is being taken from you. It's never one thing, I mean it can be one thing, but usually it is a combination of you

experiencing this internalized racism and feeling as though you don't have the agency to stop it from happening even though it hurts and is bad and causes you to say 'Hey wait a sec is there something wrong with me?' (personal communication, March 14th 2014)

The "unconscious" level of shame and subsequent guilt is feels irrevocable for some participants around internalized racism that I will address further in Chapter 5.

Empowerment through social justice and language. Participants described a dilemma when people who want to challenge racism do not have a common language to talk about the problem, and the ensuing difficulty in coming up with common strategies to confront the problem. One participant notes these challenges eloquently as a "cerebral pause:"

When I feel guilt about speaking my Sinhalese back home. When I hesitate from doing something in regards to race and all its silly politics. That is when I know I am experiencing internalized racism. It's some sort of cerebral pause, right, just like when you little and you get caught doing something you shouldn't be doing, but you don't really know why. I think that is why. I mean I guess that is what it brings up for me a fear of being portrayed as the person I most absolutely am. (personal communication, April 8th 2014)

This participant further states that what aids in her understanding of the racial injustice she experiences is her connection to finding meaning-making in critical race theory:

I am always thinking deeper into that meaning of language and it may be because I grew up in a place where I spoke multiple different languages. All that to say that the way I am speaking about internalized racism has been constructed by the dominant group, right. (personal communication, April 8th 2014)

Racism

I was a waitress in a restaurant [during high school] and Vietnam vets were coming back and I had a couple of incidences were guys would flip out on me and have a little PTSD thinking that I was some Vietnamese whore. That is a weird thing to have happen to me. And I don't think that was a racist's incident, I just think I got triggered. (personal communication, April 1st, 2014)

Microaggressions. Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color (Wing, 2007).

The following vignette describes a layered presentation of a racial microaggression:

So I have been very angry in an intellectually and politically way with Katy Perry since last fall when she went on some award show in a Geisha outfit. So she totally did this yellow face thing at an award show and dressed like either a geisha of someone from classical Japanese culture. So this is one of those things were I will work up to actions of feelings associated with it, but I had known it was happening. And this performance went viral and there was an episode later on the commented on this on 'How I Met Your Mother' titled "How I met Your Racism" as a similar thing. One of the characters in the show was dressing up for Halloween and dressed up as Kung Fu master even though he was totally White and the social media blew up and they apologized the next day. Saying they didn't realize it was so offensive, I am so sorry. So within this period of a month it was just like people where just like just dress up as this stereotypes and in my mind its was that stereotypical Asian [dududududu!] and that theme as other as exotifying. I just brushed it off and didn't think about it too much, but at least once a week I would hear

that Katy Perry song on the radio. So the problem was I didn't want to feel the anger cause I am like pretty much any song she releases is problematic. Right before this interview I was trying to get into the emotional space by watching her video for "Dark Horse" with Juicy Jay and seriously I just want to give her a talking to because she did this like Cleopatra thing and the video was horribly offensive and everybody on this Cleopatra ship and everything was very ornate and she completely appropriated this African culture. So on top of her yellow face she is a hot mess and the gist of my story was that I really likes the song "Dark Horse" but I was cooking my dinner and it came on the radio and I have had so much shit going on in my life lately that I am able to at least access that anger and displace it on to stuff and be irritable so I finally felt it and as I yelled because I had the house to myself. And I yelled, "Fuck you Kay Perry!" and then turned it off [laughter]. I think that that was an intensely personal process but when I really identified as internalized racism was that willingness to justify and be like 'bless her heart she doesn't know any better' and that she is naïve in whoever she is, committed this massive racists act at some awards show and because of my love for her music I am going to sit with this struggle and internal conflict and listen to it for awhile but I am still angry with you Katy Perry and fuck you Katy Perry. (personal communication, March 9th 2014)

This vignette highlights the complexity racial microaggressions can have as well as highlight the struggle to develop a self-concept and deal with anger, adaptive denial/numbing, detachment, social media, reticence, confrontation, tipping point, use of humor for coping, self-reproach, and internal conflict.

Colorism. “Colorism” is one expression of internalized racism; a “form of oppression that is expressed through the differential treatment of individuals and groups based on their skin color. Typically, favoritism is demonstrated toward those of lighter complexions while those of darker complexions experience rejection and mistreatment (Burton et al., 2010). “Colorism” within a multiracial context is conflated with identity formation, self-esteem and economic opportunity, which will be discussed in the next subsection. One participant had this to say about the effect of her lighter skin within a multiracial family system:

...Even within my own family the racism between being lighter or dark skinned. I have even had my Uncle say to me ‘Oh Black people who work at the State are really lazy’; and he is like a White Puerto Rican and I am like ‘Hi I am Black! And you know my dad and you know he’s Black!’ But you know its just those kinds of things that they just say but they do not realize the privilege they have even with being a person of color, but being like a White person of color. I think it hurts the collective when you just ramble off blatant stereotypes like that and when White ears hear that and when people who are really ignorant of matters like that, how they are like ‘Yeah, yeah that’s right! All Black people are lazy! (personal communication, March 18th 2014)

Impact on academia and employment. Burton et al. (2010) found that lighter-skinned applicants tend to benefit from the “the halo effect of physical attractiveness”. Attractive people are viewed as smarter and friendlier. Similar patterns of inequality based on skin color have been found in school-based settings (Sung, 2013). However, the following material illustrates how multiracial individuals may be more accepted in employment and academia, but at the cost of exposure to more subtle forms of microaggressions:

When I first started the job that I am at now, as the only person of color on my team. This women had gotten a candy bowl, and this candy bowl was being passed around the office for Halloween and she was just like ‘Where is the candy bowl right now!? If I don’t get it I am just going to lynch somebody! I am just going to lynch them!’ And I know that just the fact that I was present when she said that kind of made me feel like oh, that is really really messed up, who would just say that to any person of color, and or around any person or color, and just think that would be okay. I mean whether you mean it indirectly or directly it’s still something that I feel is aggressive in context. Even to use that word it’s such a loaded word.

But I feel I could address to the women who said it at that time because I mean it’s just kind of a power hierarchy. Not only was she White but she was also one of the team leaders in my group. It would have just put me in a very awkward position being new there. How do you address that? I didn’t know how too. (personal communications, March 18th 2014)

Feelings of hopelessness around the affects of race and employment affected the following participant because it was thought that her position as a person of color [POC] would benefit her clients at work. This self-imposed racial defining in terms of self-concept will be explored further in the following section:

I notice that I am being hired for non-White parents and I think that is very interesting. I was hired to work with a child who is half Black, and I do not think that is coincidental. There are not so many of them around here [POC] that its not coincidence. I have already been doing this for three months and I already have three out of four clients who are non-White. So I think there is this concept of these attorneys that I am going to relate better to

a person of color or that that person of color will relate back to me because I am a person of color. (personal communication, April 1st 2014)

Self-Concept

I couldn't imagine who I was without thinking about what I looked like. It took me a long long time to realize that I was more than my skin, my outward appearance. A long time to realize that I was internally something more profound than anything someone could see when they looked at my [hand motion quotes] "interesting" face. For a long time how I perceived myself was solely based on my race and being biracial. (personal communication, April 8th, 2014)

Normalization. For the purposes of this paper normalization will be defined as "to make conform to or reduce to a norm or standard (Merriam-Webster Inc., 2004). In regards to self-concept and multiracial identity, normalization surmises naming one's identity outside of the White norm and to resist assimilation, acculturation and its benefits. One participant stated that her siblings and herself "were thought of as cute" because they assimilated easily into White society:

I definitely associate with White culture just because one of the reasons that Asians assimilated so easily into this society was because you preserve nothing from which you came from. It's eradicated because life wasn't good over there, which is why they came over here. It was not preserving a culture that they valued, because they didn't value it. (personal communication, April 1st 2014)

Normalization often meant repressing one's multiracial identity while often being otherized in the process. Here is another account from a participant:

The little crossing guard when I was walking to school would just say ‘oh here comes chopsticks’, and she called us chopsticks and it was an endearing term to us at that time. It was said in a friendly way so we didn’t look at it as...I mean I am sure it was, or felt exclusionary in some way. I am sure that we felt different, but I didn’t feel it negatively. I can’t say that I went home and was hurt by that. Or was even disturbed by it, it was just part of my landscape (personal communication, April 1st 2014)

Taking up space. Many multiracial participants felt as though they were taking up space within the dominant White society while also looking for spaces within a predominantly POC communities. The following participant ascribed this to the historical significance of forced identity practices:

My identity is not always a private choice. And so when I make public statements about my identity as I am often asked to do I want to make one that calls attention to what I see as an existing legacy of racism. An existing legacy of tension.

I am in some spaces where people may or may not identify as mixed and the conversation has come up recently. And a lot of people are experiencing something that I experienced when I was younger and are still struggling to ... and I am speaking to mixed race, specifically within Black heritage... that people struggle to identify with Blackness of struggle with being allowed in Blackness and validated by other Black people. (personal communication, March 25th 2014)

The themes that I saw arise from these interviews around the self-concept of multiracial individuals included, validation, being visible while also being preoccupied with the idea of taking up space. Additionally, participant’s self-concept as a multiracial individual proved “complex” and layered in terms of navigating the different identities they occupied.

Coping Skills

We had the gifts that are accepted in White society as being gifts that are worth noticing. You know we are all good looking, we were all athletic enough and we were all smart enough. So that we got our self-esteem from being welcomed in that world. If we hadn't have had those gifts I think that any instances of racism would have hurt more. (personal communication, April 1st, 2014)

What I witnessed as a progression toward self-awareness became evidence of coping strategies from multiracial individuals. Coping mechanisms and skills were employed by all of the ten participants interviewed. For instance, forms of coping were found in multiracial identity formation, experiences of internalized racism, experiences of racism (e.g. microaggressions) and the subsequent section on multiracial self-concept. This final section will address the coping skills multiracial individuals in my study implemented during their narratives above.

The use of humor and self-reflection. One participant stated that self-reflection required vulnerability “where you don't really want to acknowledge this racist's process within you”. Without space to process these experiences individuals in the study were more likely to isolate and repress emotions. However, multiracial individuals who elicited the help of friends and humor were more likely to be open to expressing these vulnerabilities:

You know sometimes that's just the way things are and you can either live with it or let it destroy you. Yeah, by not letting it destroy me. Laughing about it sometimes. (personal communication, March 14th 2014)

The following quote from another participant juxtaposes this position by stating “I recently started meditating. I talk to friends, usually other people of color or people who I feel connected to through my background in some way” (personal communication, April 8th 2014).

Many of the participant's laughter seemed to stem from disbelief or a form of self-protection. For instance, laughter often arose in our interviews when participants had the chance to self reflect on their experiences of racism and systemic oppression. For instance one participant's laughter came out of the following self-reflection around confrontation:

[laughter] That kind of thing is just stunning to me, what are you suppose to say? I mean she would have died if she would have seen that I interpreted it as offensive. I guess that is the point of internalized racism that it is unfair because we support that kind of ignorance if we don't confront it at the time. But the choice for us is a really uncomfortable situation with someone we may not want to do that with. That's why in certain times when I feel like saying something I will make people face something they just said (personal communication, April 1st 2014)

Denial and repression. Participants also employed traditional ego defenses in their identity development and self-concept process such as splitting, repression, and denial, which led to increased reticence and self-reproach for some participants. The following transcribed material is a follow up from the earlier statement made by a multiracial individual experiencing racism within the workplace:

[In terms of coping/referring to lynching comment] I feel like there is nothing you can do much being in a White space, its like how can you even address that without coming off as like an angry Black person, or someone being like I didn't even mean it like that. You're kind of just meant to like take it and everything that you feel that they won't understand you just kind of like keep it inside and I guess I would just vent to friends about it. (personal communication, March 18th 2014)

Often these defenses are directly in line with experiences of racism, internalized racism and the self-concept a multiracial person may, or may not have constructed around these narratives. One participant described a “subtle ignorance” or “kindly meant racial experiences”. These adaptive truths are often a way for multiracial individuals to protect their psyche by exonerating the racists acts inflicted upon them.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings, narratives, and phenomenological themes gathered from a total of 10 multiracial individuals who participated in this study. Through the narratives of the participants, this chapter illuminated the intersectionality between multiracial identity formation, internalized racism, racism (e.g. microaggressions), self-concept and subsequent coping skills for multiracial individuals. The aim of this chapter was to address my research question, which asks what coping skills multiracial individuals employ when experiencing internalized racism.

The findings within this chapter included the struggle for multiracial individuals to navigate their various racial identities within homogenous racial constructs. This chapter also found that multiracial individuals self-concept is affected by internalized racism and that all of the participants were able to use coping skills to assist in their self-reflection and multiracial identity formation and growth. In the next and final chapter, Discussion, I will speak more to the strengths and weakness of my study as well as offer suggestions and reflections on future research pertaining to multiracial individuals.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to provide subjective accounts of how multiracial individuals enlist coping skills and forms of self-care after experiencing internalized racism. A total of ten self-identified multiracial adults participated in this qualitative study that utilized semi-structured open-ended questions. The selected code topics emerged in the process of transcription: multiracial identity, internalized racism, racism, self-concept and coping skills. The development and exploration of the conceptual framework that informed this study [will also be](#) further elucidated. Within [these](#) topics, I illuminated on similar themes that arose from the transcribed material.

It was my belief that examining the psychological effects of internalized racism experienced by multiracial adults would provide context for formulating a conceptual psychodynamic framework for clinicians to work with this ever-growing population. Consequently, this study posits that self-concept (i.e. the mental image or the way that one perceives oneself) is directly affected by the experiences of internalized racism encountered by multiracial adults, which may lead to an individual developing coping strategies by sharing skills within their own communities of color.

Key Findings

The process of gathering relevant data from my literature review and the subsequent interviews revealed why further research is critical when working with multiracial populations.

The complex and varied experiences of the participants also had many overlays, which I will discuss in the summary sub-section. From my initial research I found it difficult to locate studies exploring the coping skills acquired by multiracial individuals that used the language of internalized racism versus racial oppression. I found that the term, internalized racism (IR), was predominantly used to demonstrate the affects of systemic and institutional racism for monoracial people of color. Subsequently, little was then said about the coping skills or defenses people of color enlisted when facing internalized racism. Ultimately, the literature review pointed me in the direction of what type of questions I would be seeking from multiracial individuals in correlation with the lack of literature.

Naming internalized racism. For the purposes of my study there was a lack of literature explicitly stating how multiracial individuals were affected by Biven's (2005) operational definition of internalized racism. As stated in the Methodology section, participants were emailed the Biven's (2005) article on IR and could choose to read it before the interview or not. All participants stated they had received the article and read it prior to our interview. It was not my intention to code the participants' definitions of IR but rather to understand whether or not they had experienced IR based on their own understanding of the concept.

As discussed in the preceding chapter, participants felt the affects of IR but struggled with its definition and use within academia and clinical fields of thought. One participant stated, "I wasn't very familiar with the term, but after reading through the articles you sent me I just remember feeling really sad, because someone had put into words what I had always felt alone in experiencing" (personal communication, March 14th, 2014). For instance, other participants who had a more grounded sense of how IR affected them revealed what helped build their own

understanding of solidarity with multiracial and POC communities. The following transcribed material elucidates this:

On some level I have internalized racism and project it onto others. But this idea of doing something about it comes from my background in social justice and knowing we can do something about it. It's not that folks don't want to. Many just don't know its option; or that lots of other people are down to fight as well. (personal communication, March 15th, 2014)

Humor as a defense mechanism. Psychodynamic theory is a set of theories that describes the changing inner energies that motivate, dominates, and control individual's behavior. It provides a framework that examines past experiences and present realities, as well as the internal and external forces that impact emotional control (Mitchel and Black, 1995). Berzoff's (2011) discussion of Freud's ego psychology was relevant to the responses of many of the participants. Ego psychology is "a system of psychoanalytic developmental psychology concerned especially with personality" (Merriam-Webster Inc., 2004). My study assists in illuminating how participants enlisted humor as a form of coping after experiencing forms of racism and internalized racism. The participants interviewed utilized defenses of humor, reframing, and acceptance based around the emotional and stressful situation they experienced. For example, many participants' reframing of a racist situation experience involved the use of humor to possibly lighten the distress and lack of agency they may have been feeling in the situation.

Self-concept and racial identity-formation. Rockquemore et al. (2005) raises an important question about their theory of multiracial identity formation: what are the consequences of different racial identities for multiracial people? It is common for multiracial

people to have malleable racial identities that often change in a social context. Additionally, Rivera's (2010) formation of the "Biracial Experiences of Discrimination Inventory" included the most comprehensive correlation with IR in the exploration of "internalized multiracial racism". It was important for me to look at the scales and inventory tables within the research; this provided for a greater contextualization of racial identity formation. For example, Rivera (2010) was able to contextualize various layers of multiracial identity development and the effects of racism on the psyche. The following statement provides context for the psychological repercussions that happened later for this individual, and that can often happen for multiracial individuals. One participant stated that she "felt the effects of being biracial and not White when she was very young" and very often "people would assume [she] was adopted." Similarly, other participants' early childhood identity formation as multiracial depended on the community they grew up in:

I actually identify as multiracial largely because I prefer the term because it helped for the inclusivity of many races and I have been identifying as multiracial since I was in elementary school. That was the first time I started filling out forms by myself and would just check Asian and White, but they hadn't really started putting 'other' on forms yet until perhaps I was in high school, definitely when I was in college. (personal communication, April 1st 2014)

In summary, the literature review created pathways to new discussions and also raised important questions about race and language, transference and countertransference among multiracial individuals and their therapists, and the need for the use of clinical psychodynamic frameworks when working with multiracial individuals. For instance, I found that coping skills utilized by people of color are written about in the context of external experiences of racism. Yet

internal experiences of racism remain vastly under researched in the holistic coping skills of multiracial persons. From this perspective, both theoretical and quantitative studies would be beneficial as future research is greatly needed in this area of knowledge.

Implications

An interesting topic arose in the participant interviews that had not appeared in the existing literature: the issue of white supremacy and its effects on multiracial individuals who also have White lineage. White supremacy is “the belief that white people are superior to all other races, especially the black race, and should therefore dominate society (Merriam-Webster Inc., 2004)”. The internal processes of multiracial individuals and white supremacy is a topic which needs to be furthered explored as irreproachable within discussion of critical race theory.

Research is limited [in](#) this area in reference to its effects on multiracial self-concept and coping skills. The following participant speaks to the institutional oppressions that constitute and continue to mystify this subject:

Academia is set up by White people which [sic] write how we speak and therefore how we communicate about the injustices we face on a day-to-day basis. Would it be hard for me to have this conversation with a White person doing this study? Absolutely. Do I deny my Whiteness, no. But I do see that part of my identity is the oppressor of my other identities, which can be a very complex thing to hold, very complex. (personal communication, March 8th, 2014)

Multiracial individuals will remain encased in their own experiences of oppression and of privilege, guilt, fear, anger and a sense of powerlessness, if they do not have recognition of their own collective voice as well as recognition that their voice need not be dominated by the voice

of white supremacy. It is my belief that confusion in language isolates and creates further confusion while the white supremacist system goes unchallenged.

Confronting racism and self-care. Confronting racism and reflecting on experiences of one's own internalized racism seemed exhaustive for participants. Multiracial participants who did confront these realities achieved and sought out self-care by “going to therapy”, “journaling”, “meditating,” and enlisting the support of friends and social justice POC communities. One participant obtained support by sharing a space with a “friend and I can just be ‘shoot the shit’ and say ‘fuck it’ and not have to be super polite.” Another participant turned to Twitter and spoken word stating, “Thankfully I have really dope friends who have similar lived experiences, criticisms, and resiliency. And we take care of each other.”

Limitations

Strengths and limitations in this study. One significant limitation of this study is the small and fairly homogenous sample size of the participants, which directly affected the validity of study. Communication was limited to email and Skype™ interviews and therefore no interviews were done face to face, which may have changed the rapport and openness of the participants involved. In contrast, an anonymous survey may have made for more unobstructed responses. Along with the small size there was also demographic data that could have been used to create qualitative findings of socioeconomic status, highest educational degree and a more in-depth look into the participant's racial and ethnic identities. Research presented in both the Literature and Findings chapters implicate the need for additional study on any of the multiple sub-sections of this study—primarily on coping strategies, the theoretical underpinnings of self-concept for multiracial individuals, and effective clinical approaches for working with this population.

One benefit of this study, which arose in the note taking process post-interviews, was the phenomenon of "emotional markers" such as how many times someone laughed, cried or became upset. Finding a way to better utilize these markers in further research would be beneficial for assessment and therapeutic work with multiracial individuals. Additionally, a lingering challenge uncovered in the study presented itself within one of my interview questions about self-concept. When asked if the experiences of racism and internalized racism had negatively affected the participant's self-concept I noticed that many were reluctant to say yes. Further inquiry into this reluctance could be useful in studying the coping skills acquired after experiencing racial anxiety and external oppression (Myer, 2003). Personally I am of the mind that there is no way to overreact to racism, because racism is a systemic devaluation and dehumanization of entire groups of people. Whether multiracial individuals choose to develop other ways of coping (e.g. poetry, music, theatre or films) is a subject of study that I would recommend for the further research.

Recommendations for Further Research

Future research may benefit from including first-person accounts of how multiracial individuals enlist coping skills and forms of self-care after experiencing internalized racism. In order to gain a more holistic picture of multiracial identity development and acquired coping skills, research of multiracial identity development in relation to experiences of the influence of internalized racism on self-concept must also be studied. This reflects the second process that must take place concurrently with examining and challenging assumptions of multiracial identity development. The importance of multiracial individuals need to make meaning of one's self-concept and how the effects of internalized racism should not be subdued. Moving forward, an introduction of resilient coping skills, which include family supports, internal defenses and

clinical therapeutic processes would be useful in formulating social work skills for clinicians working with multiracial individuals.

Conclusion

This study provides useful research regarding various aspects of multiracial identity development, the effects of internalized racism on multiracial individuals and subsequent coping skills. In a field predominantly occupied by White women, there needs to be more diversity in clinical approaches and interventions to address multiracial experiences, particularly of racism or microaggressions or assaults on people of color, and especially for multiracial individuals. This study was personally meaningful to me as a multiracial individual who was able to feel solidarity and connect with the participant's agency in creating clinical radical change through anti-oppression and social justice work. It is my hope that this study can be used for innovative and groundbreaking research on the therapeutic alliance of working with multiracial individuals.

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APPENDIX A

Email Recruitment Message

Dear Potential Participant:

My name is Miranda McKinley, and I am a graduate student at Smith College School for Social Work. My aim of this research is to explore the experiences of internalized racism on multiracial individuals and how they have developed (if any), coping skills. I believe it is important to raise awareness and discuss the importance of researching this understudied population. As a multiracial person of color the topic of this research is of personal interest. While exploring the existing literature I noticed there was quite a gap in the exploration of multiracial individuals and internalized racism. Your perspective is important and valuable because it will further the development of research on the intersections of race, internalized racism and multiracial identity.

For the purposes of this study internalized racism will be defined as a systemic oppression of a racial group or groups influenced by societal racism (i.e. refers to racists attitudes within a society) that asserts the supremacy of the dominant group and then maintains or perpetuates the discourse that oppresses them; this includes the set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures and principles that uphold the dominating group's power (Tappan, 2006). Therefore, this societal racism can affect the individual's race, class, gender, social status, inherited wealth, legal situation, and many other factors that are outside of the individual's control. A simple example being, a multiracial individual may grow up watching television shows with no multiracial representation. This multiracial individual may then begin to feel their racial background is invisibilized and in turn feel less self-worth than a person from a dominant group.

All participants must be eighteen years or older, identify as multiracial/biracial and agree to be audiotaped.

All interviews will be audiotaped to aid in processing the information they contain. Privacy will be kept by removing all identifying information from these transcripts using encryption software. If you choose to participate in the study we will meet face to face, speak over the phone or via Skype™ in interviews lasting approximately 30-60 minutes. There are few risks associated with the study. However, if there are experiences that you discuss that you feel warrant further attention there is an attached mental health resource guide. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may ask me any questions about the study or the interview at any time and you may also refuse to answer any questions during the interview.

There will be no financial benefit for participating in this study. However, I hope that the information you provide will help mental health clinicians understand the under researched topic of multiracial identity formation and internalized racism. I look forward to hearing from you, your colleagues or family members who fit the eligibility criteria and above and may know who would be interested in participating in this study. Please feel free to contact me with questions using the contact information provided below. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Miranda McKinley I Smith College School for Social Work, Graduate Student

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Smith College School for Social Work • Northampton, MA**

Title of Study:

Exploring the Experiences of Internalized Racism for Multiracial Individuals: A clinical Foundation for Clinical Social Work

Investigator(s): Miranda McKinley, Smith College School for Social Work, MSW Graduate Candidate [REDACTED]

Introduction

- You are being asked to be in a research study about the effects of internalized racism on multiracial adults, particularly individuals who identify as biracial.
- You were selected as a possible participant because you identified with the following inclusionary screening procedures: you are eighteen years or older, you define yourself as multiracial/biracial; you consent to be interviewed either in person over the phone or through Skype™ by audiotaped means; you consent to the use of your research for educational purposes.
- I ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of Study

- My aim of this research is to explore the experiences of internalized racism on multiracial individuals and how they have developed (if any) coping skills. I believe it is important to raise awareness and discuss the importance of researching an understudied population. As a multiracial person of color the topic of this research is of personal interest. While exploring the existing literature I noticed there was quite a gap in the exploration of multiracial individuals and internalized racism. Finally, there are the additional benefits of learning the process of writing an empirical study and obtaining a graduate degree upon successful completion.
- This study is being conducted as a research requirement for my Masters in Social Work degree.
- Ultimately, this research may be published or presented at professional conferences.

Description of the Study Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: participate in a (30-60 total interview (this includes: signing the informed consent; reviewing confidentiality, and answering interview questions). Additionally, face to face and Skpye™ interview will both be audio taped.

Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study

- The study posits the following risks to participants; psychological discomfort; travel obligations; time of participation. In order to minimize these risks participants will be informed of the time and travel restrictions before committing to participating in the study. If an eligible participant does choose to be a part of the study they will be given mental health resources located in the Bay Area should they need to process their experience of speaking about internalized racism any further (See: Attachment C Mental Health Resources).
- Specific psychological discomforts include irritation; discomfort, depression, anxiety and feeling over being overwhelmed by the experiences participants will be interviewed about. In order to minimize these psychological risks the researcher will 1) not ask participants to answer questions they do not feel comfortable asking 2) provide the participant with the option of not having to sit through the entire interview and as said above provide mental health resources if participants needs additional support around their processing their interview experiences 3) Participants can feel free to withdraw from the study during the interview process in which case all information provided by the participant up to that point will be destroyed.

Benefits of Being in the Study

Participants may benefit from this study due to the potential for participants to explore their identities and reflect on coping strategies that they may not previously have known. Further, it will provide the possibility that the research, through publication and dissemination, will influence clinical social workers, mental health clinicians, social science researchers, and the public at large to become aware of the effect of internalized racism among multiracial individuals.

Confidentiality

- This study is confidential. All interview material collected in the study will use anonymous identifiers.
- Your participation will be kept confidential. Confidential material will be placed in a lock box and files with audiotaped interview will be encrypted on the researcher's computer.
- All research materials including recordings, transcriptions, analyses and consent documents will be stored in a secure location for three years according to federal regulations. In the event that materials are needed beyond this period, they will be kept secured until no longer needed, and then destroyed. All electronically stored data will be stored using encryption software. I will not include any information in any report I may publish that would make it possible to identify you.
- To protect the confidentiality of study participants I will not label interview notes or cassette tapes with real names, but with pseudonyms instead. In addition, I will lock informed consent forms, interview notes, and cassette tapes in a file drawer during the thesis process and for three years thereafter, in accordance with federal regulations. After such time, I will either destroy the above-mentioned material or maintain it in its secure location. Finally, I will not use demographic data to describe each individual; rather, I will combine demographic data to describe the subject pool in the aggregate. In this way, study participants will not be identifiable in the final report.

Payments/gift

- You will not receive any financial payment for your participation in this study.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

- The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study (up to the date noted below) without affecting your relationship with the researcher of this study or Smith College. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely up to the date noted below. If you choose to withdraw, I will not use any of your information collected for this study. You must notify me of your decision to withdraw by email or phone by March 30th. After that date, your information will be part of the thesis.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

- You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Miranda McKinley [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. If you would like a summary of the study results, one will be sent to you once the study is completed. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any problems as a result of your participation, you may contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Committee at (413) 585-7974.

Consent

- Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep. You will also be given a list of referrals and access to mental health resources if you experience psychological distress related to your participation in this study.

.....
Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____
.....

1. I agree to be audiotaped for this interview:

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____

2. I agree to be interviewed, but I do not want the interview to be audiotaped:

Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Researcher(s): _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

Participant Information

Name:

Age:

Race(s)/ Ethnicity (ies):

Gender Identity:

Religion(s) and/or Spirituality (ies):

Participant Interview Questions

What does the term multiracial or biracial mean to you?

Have you ever experienced racism? , What experiences have you had and what kind of impact have they had on you?

Internalized racism is a term meaning... After having explained my working definition of internalized racism would you say that you have ever experienced it?

If yes, can you elaborate on these experiences?

What do you do to take care of yourself when things like this happen?

Have you learned to deal with this in a positive way?

Have these experiences led you to thinking about yourself in a negative way?

APPENDIX D

HSRB Approval Letter



School for Social Work

Smith College

Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

T (413) 585-7950 F (413) 585-7994

February 12, 2014

Miranda McKinley

Dear Miranda,

You did a very nice job on your revisions. Your project is now approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Congratulations and our best wishes on your interesting study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Kersten'.

Elaine Kersten, Ed.D.

Co-Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Mariko Ono, Research Advisor