

CHRISTIANITY AND BIRACIAL/BI-ETHNIC IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Check One Box and One Box Only: Christianity and Biracial/Bi-ethnic Identity Development

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Abstract

A phenomenological overview showed the current understanding and conceptualization held by biracial and bi-ethnic individuals of their racial identity development. While the literature on biracial identity development recently expanded, there is little research done on the various coping mechanisms and mindsets used to create a solidified sense of racial identity in biracial and bi-ethnic individuals. Additionally, there is no research investigating Christianity's influence on biracial identity development. Such research could bring greater understanding to the various ways double racial consciousness has impacted the lives of multicultural individuals.

Furthermore, investigations have brought greater understanding of the different identity resolutions individuals have made amid racial ambiguity, the factors that helped encapsulate their identity formation, and how the Christian faith impacted this process. For the further investigation of this topic, bi-ethnic and biracial individuals between the ages of 18-28 were interviewed. The qualitative data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for potential patterns to contribute to existing literature. Research yielded ten influential factors that included phenotypical appearance, societal designation of identity, racial profiling and discrimination, peer influence, familial integration, language, media, dating, international schooling, and Christianity.

Check One Box and One Box Only: Christianity and Biracial/Bi-ethnic Identity Development

The interworking of identity development holds a plethora of complexities that are as varied as the individual due to the multitude of components that encapsulate identity as a whole (Deters, 1997). While the identity development of a person matures over an extensive length of time, it is a process that each person must undergo. Furthermore, a crucial aspect in the completion of identity recognition is the concept of acceptance (Ellemers et al., 2002). Throughout human history, acceptance and group recognition were found within one's cultural group due to the shared language, physical characteristics, and customs (Bailey, 2000). For many, one's cultural group gives a sense of home and belonging that cannot be found outside of its geographical or contextual parameters. This sense of belonging, however, can become ambiguous when an individual is composed of two separate races or ethnicities (Gonzales-Backen, 2013). Because of this, identity formation in biracial individuals takes on the added factor of racial identity reconciliation. Not only can this induce psychological discord, but there can be other ramifications impacting various sectors of familial, educational, and social life. For this reason, it is imperative to further investigate the individual experience of biracial identity development. Doing so determines which factors help these individuals achieve their identity formation and reveals how religion, specifically Christianity, influences this process.

The Change of Social and Cultural Tides.

As human history progresses, ideologies and conceptualizations of the surrounding environment and culture continually evolve. This is especially true in the case of racial reconciliation within the parameters of American history. While intermixing of races has always occurred, its prevalence was minuscule considering it was seen as highly taboo and prohibited in earlier U.S history. But as time continued, social and legal reforms changed the landscape of

American culture and by 1967 the Supreme Court case of *Loving v. Virginia* decriminalized interracial marriages (Deters, 1997). Although there were children born of mixed race before this court mandate, the number of interracial marriages grew exponentially following the court ruling, which consequentially increased the number of biracial births. It was reported in 2013 that the current approximation of self-identifying biracial individuals has risen to 5.2 million, which represents a 33% population increase from the year 2000. Since then, the prevalence of biracial births has increased, especially as the acceptance and prevalence of interracial couples continue to rise (Allen et al., 2013). Despite this acceptance being beneficial for the progression of equality among the various racial and ethnic groups that comprise U.S culture, it does pose a unique difficulty in the process of identity formation for these biracial and bi-ethnic individuals. Considering that race functioned as a classification system, those who constituted a race had a sense of group identity among themselves. This, however, can contribute to the marginalization of those who have membership in two different racial groups in that they may not feel or be accepted fully into either group (Deters, 1997). The enslavement of African peoples in the United States exemplifies this social phenomenon through the differential labor placement among the enslaved people. The institution of American slavery created a racial and color hierarchy with Caucasians at the highest placement, biracial in the middle, and Black individuals in the lowest placement (Perkins, 2014). Individuals of sole African descent, having darker skin tones, almost always worked outside in various fields. The children conceived between White and African people, however, received preferential treatment and labor assignment within the slave master's home. Although these children were partially White, they were still regarded as African slaves by the Caucasian population (Khanna, 2010). Although they were considered African, their lighter skin elevated their social status and thus created division between them and

those who had a darker skin tone. While some group membership carried a negative connotation and others privilege, it still provided group identity and solidarity among its members—security that was not always afforded to the biracial population. Because of this group membership ambiguity, research indicates that biracial and bi-ethnic individuals undergo a different and more challenging racial identity development than their monoracial counterparts (Collins, 2000).

Biracial and Bi-ethnic Identity Development Theories

Because of the various facets of the biracial experience previously mentioned, different theories emerged over time that postulates the progression of identity development and identity attainment. The difficulty found in the development pattern for biracial individuals is generally focused on feelings of acceptance. While being a part of two different cultural worlds may hold benefits, the Marginal Man theory suggests that biracial persons tend to experience marginalization from both groups, leaving the person in a cultural suspension (Cheng & Klugman, 2010). This theory argues that as a result of this cultural suspension, biracial individuals display different psychological and social characteristics. This suspension and characteristic differences can be due to the concept of in-group and out-group recognition. Social identity and self-categorization scholars theorize that individuals act in alignment with the drawn-out cognitive boundaries between in- and out-group members. Not only do these behavioral alignments maximize in-group similarities and inter-group differentiation, but they also enable individuals to create an emotional attachment to their group membership while also creating an exaggeration of the concept of “us” and “them” (Cheng & Klugman, 2010). Furthermore, Social Identity Theory holds that people view their in-group as good and positive due to in-group similarities and discrimination towards out-group members. This differentiation then acts as the driving force that separates in-groups from out-groups (Gaither et al., 2014).

Moreover, this social categorizing of in- and out-group leads to intergroup comparison and thus contributes to the more positive satisfying interactions between in-group members (Soliz et al., 2009). It is this driving force that contributes to the long-held desire for cultural preservation and distinction from other cultural groups. For many biracial people, however, in-group association is not as easily recognizable due to the differing levels of power and prestige between their racial groups as held in the American racial hierarchy (Cheng & Klugman, 2010). Consequently, people begin to question where they belong, especially when their physical features are ethnically ambiguous. This then begins the process of solidifying one's racial or ethnic identity.

Poston (1990) proposed that racial identity development progresses in five distinct stages: personal identity, choice of group categorization, enmeshment/denial, appreciation, and integration. The first level entails young children holding an identity that does not necessarily incorporate racial consciousness. Instead, identity during this stage is primarily based on the self-esteem individuals have within their families. It is during this critical developmental period that the family establishes a base foundation of acceptance and belonging within children that can better serve them as they progress in their identity development (Renn, 2008). However, the second stage, choice of group categorization, initiates more internal conflict. It is here that the individual feels compelled to choose an ethnicity and begins to self-categorize based on personal, physical, and cultural factors. Scholars define self-categorization as a cognitive operation that actively processes stimuli from one's social environment to aid in identity placement (Cheng & Lively, 2009). Self-categorization may result in choosing one dominant culture or trying to incorporate aspects from both cultures into their self-conceptualization. This attempted self-conceptualization leads to the third stage in this developmental model: enmeshment and denial. Children may feel guilt due to an inability to fully identify with all aspects of their heritage

which then may trigger feelings of anger, shame, and self-hatred. Moreover, all youth at this developmental milestone deal with the need for group belonging, but biracial individuals were found to struggle with the added factor of dual-race membership. As identity development progresses to the fourth stage, the individual begins to expand his or her cultural knowledge and reference base, but may still identify with one predominant group. Although there may be a greater disposition towards one race or ethnicity during this time, the internal exploration elicits a desire to know one's complete racial heritage. Primed cultural curiosity then leads to the fifth and final stage of the biracial developmental model: integration. An individual in the integration stage has a greater recognition and appreciation that encompasses all ethnicities and/or races he or she may have. Additionally, individuals in this stage report feeling complete and a contributing member of society (Poston, 1990). While this process reflects a healthy resolution to racial identity ambiguity, there can be various social and psychological factors that inflict internal conflict and can prevent the progression of identity realization.

Psychological and Social Ramifications

As highlighted earlier, an important aspect of identity conceptualization in all people is the assurance of an in-group. Because multiracial individuals can resonate with similarities from both of their monoracial counterparts, their self-identity placement adds the category of partial group identification. Consequently, this lack of a sense of "us" has been thought to cause psychological stress (Cheng & Klugman, 2010) based on both internal struggle and the collective reaction of others. As biracial individuals wrestle through their identity placement, their conceptualization of identity will normally begin to manifest itself through an outer presentation, which is then either received with acceptance or rejection from those who constitute a specific racial group (Mawhinney & Petchauer, 2013). It is here that many biracial individuals can spend

years grappling with their identity based on the identity label approval or rejection from their socialized environment (Davenport, 2016). Although many biracial individuals are encouraged by their parents to identify and embrace both cultures, others outside of their familial sphere may directly reject their identity; a concept called identity denial (Townsend et al., 2009). Ultimately, this validation or rejection indicates to the biracial individual if he has a sense of belonging in a cultural home. Vivero and Jenkins described a cultural home as a

sense of belonging to an ethnic or geographic community with consistent socialization themes and traditions, demarcated by a clear understanding of who the in- and out-groups are. The cultural home provides a set of integrated assumptions, values, beliefs, social role norms, and emotional attachments that constitutes a meaningful personal identity developed and located within a sociocultural framework and is shared by a group of similarly located individuals. (1999, p. 9)

Without validation, however, many biracial individuals can feel a sense of inauthenticity (Deters, 1997), which can contribute to a sense of cultural homelessness (Vivero & Jenkins, 1999). This inauthenticity can be triggered by various personal, relational, and environmental factors that are all usually interrelated through the focal point of rejection. Williams and Ware (2019), further explored rejection in biracial identity through counter-storytelling auto-ethnographies of two Black-biracial individuals. The personal narrative of a half-Black half-White young woman described this identity denial and inauthenticity through her experience in a predominantly Black support group held at her university. While her narrative described this group initially being open and helpful in exploring her Black identity, it later turned into a source of reoccurring insecurity as monoracial Black members deemed her as not Black enough to be considered accepted or associated with their communal history of inflicted injustice due to her

lighter skin (Williams & Ware, 2019). The evolving interaction of acceptance to denial from her immersion in a new Black community encapsulates the experience of identity denial that many biracial and bi-ethnic individuals come up against. In addition to the psychological impact of rejection, other ramifications that can infiltrate various sectors of a person's life. Research indicates that cultural homelessness can cause children to display aggressive behavior towards peers, poor social skills, poor academic achievement, negative attitudes towards adults, social isolation, and depression (Benedetto & Olisky, 2001). Furthermore, other studies also suggest that multiracial individuals have a higher probability of experiencing anxiety, hypersensitivity, and insecurity concerning identity dilemmas, prejudice, and peer rejection, resulting in a fractured self-concept (Cheng & Lively, 2009). While biracial individuals may encounter these various psychological and social obstacles, all of which can lead to confusion, conflict, and maladjustment, it is now seen as a rite of passage on a multicultural individual's identity formation development (Townsend et al., 2009).

Contributing Factors

The overall solidification of identity is an important process in every individual's life. Persons who are described as having an achieved identity are those who have thoroughly explored their identity and have committed to that identity. Not only is this achieved identity the most adaptive identity status, but research reveals that this position is coupled with higher self-esteem, a greater internal locus of control, and higher autonomy (Gonzales-Backen, 2013). Considering all the possible social, emotional, and psychological ramifications that can be caused by an ambiguous racial identity placement, understanding the factors that contribute to a positive identity formation process is crucial for the betterment of biracial and bi-ethnic persons. In the deciding process of racial identity formation, various factors that can contribute to the

finalization of identity. Root (as cited in Renn, 2008) proposed that the solidification of biracial identity can result in four different outcomes: acceptance of identity that society assigns, identification with both racial groups—what some experience as simultaneity and fluidity among all racial compositions (William, 1999), identification with a single racial group, and identification in a new racial group (as in identifying with other biracial persons). Although the outcomes of identity development have been identified, there is still a need for more investigation as to how these persons come to this conclusion. One predominant variable is the phenotypical manifestation in the individual. Renn (2008) stated that such aspects of appearance, such as skin tone, hair color and texture, eye shape, and nose shape, strongly influence identity resolution. It is important to acknowledge that different factors may have stronger implications depending on the different racial composition. As noted through personal narratives from two individuals with Black/White racial pairings, hair texture and length played a crucial role in their subjective connection to their African American heritage (Williams & Ware, 2019). As an example, the female account reported feeling closer to her African American culture when she wore and maintained her naturally curly hair with a short cut. While hair texture had more influence on an African American identity placement, it may not hold the same weight in other cultures. Furthermore, language, especially in Latino and Asian families, can be a strong identity marker (Renn, 2008). While this may make people feel more secure about their identity, for biracial individuals who were not taught their native cultural language by family members, it can be a source of great duress. Moreover, a large part of language is based on one's geographical and social location, with great emphasis on the participation of family members in the actual learning process. It is through familial support that not only is one's cultural language learned, but also the maturation and development of one's identity. Parents can foster a healthy racial

identity development within their biracial children through validation of dual-heritage, encouraging the discussion of the child's racial make-up, allowing their child to form friendships with children of all backgrounds (Nuttgens, 2010). Likewise, familial influence was also found to impact dating preferences of their biracial children later in life. Their dating patterns primarily reflected the emphasized culture within the home (Roberts-Clarke et al., 2004). Regardless of whether familial support in racial identity development is afforded to a biracial child, its presence, or lack thereof, may be a significant contributor to where one's identity is solidified as well.

In addition to familial relationships, the friendships (Gaither et al., 2014), and racial composition of an individual's neighborhood and the school can play an important part in where a biracial or bi-ethnic person places his identity. It is within these settings that the social climate may either promote positive or negative notions about the varying ethnic and racial groups, which ultimately influences ethnic identity affirmation (Gonzales-Backen, 2013). Apart from these aspects, Davenport (2016) stated that gender is one of the strongest predictors of multicultural identification with women being the most likely to identify as multicultural.

Lastly, research indicated that religion may play a role in in-group identification. Davenport (2016) investigated the role of religion through the examination of the CIRP freshman surveys conducted annually at UCLA. This revealed that different sects of religions corresponded more with certain racial pairings. Examples include Baptist membership with Black-White biracial individuals, or Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism for Asian-White biracial individuals (Davenport, 2016). However, little has been said about how religion has helped resolve identity ambiguity. Poll and Smith (2003) indicated that mental health can be supported and promoted through spiritual means. Furthermore, holistic group identities, such as religion,

become stronger with other identities of self (Turner-Zwinkels et al., 2015). In one biracial person's experience, the individual recounted how his switch from a predominantly White church to an all-Black church played a key role in his leaning towards his Black identity (Williams & Ware, 2019). In addition to group identification, it is found that religion, specifically the concept of a person being an eternal being with a connection to God, is thought to be effective in protecting and restoring psychological health (Poll & Smith, 2003). This indicates that Christianity may be able to aid significantly in protecting against any psychological distress caused by racial ambiguity. Not only this, but Christianity may also help solidify one's racial identity and simplify the formulation process.

Locating the Researcher

To bracket off personal connection and experience in studying biracial identity development, it is important to note the specific aspects of the researcher that relate to this study. Carina Schiro is a bi-ethnic individual with a Sicilian and Puerto Rican ethnic pairing (White and Hispanic heritage). Both her neighborhood and schooling were predominantly White. Moreover, she also identifies as a Christian. Despite her having experience with racial identity resolution and being a Christian, these factors were separated for objective exploration of biracial and bi-ethnic identity development and the role that Christianity may play in this process.

Research Questions

Biracial identity development and formation is an extensive process that ultimately needs further research into what different aspects of life contribute to biracial identity development. While there can be psychological and social ramifications due to the perceived cultural isolation, biracial identity theories have shown that there are positive resolutions that can be made towards this ambiguity. Although current research continuously expands, there is yet to be a

phenomenological study that investigates common themes in racial solidification and how Christianity may factor in the identity formation process. The process of biracial and bi-ethnic identity development may be enhanced by the answers to the following research questions:

1. What factors have the most impactful contributions on a biracial and bi-ethnic person's racial identity?
2. Does Christianity impact racial identity development in biracial and bi-ethnic individuals? If so, in what ways?

Method

To study the various factors that contribute to racial identification, and the specific impact Christianity may have on this process, a phenomenological study was conducted (Creswell, 2013). This study aimed to gather qualitative data on the cognitive perception, understanding, and lived experience of biracial individuals and their racial identity development via semi-structured interviews.

Participants

The participants incorporated into this study were all of biracial or bi-ethnic descent and were between the ages of 18 and 28 years. Criterion sampling was applied for the recruitment of all seven participants due to the selectivity requirements of the study. Furthermore, while there was one outlying participant from a different state, the majority of participants were recruited from a large southeastern United States Christian college. Although each participant was biracial/bi-ethnic, the racial pairing in each individual varied greatly, thus producing unique and diverse pools of data. Six out of the seven individuals were solely comprised of two races or ethnicities with one participant having four or more races/ethnicities. Each participant's identity

was concealed through the use of pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. Lastly, all seven participants identified as Christian.

Procedure

Recruitment

After receiving Institutional Review Board approval for research, participants were recruited via criterion sampling through snowball and convenience means. In-class announcements, social media posts, and face-to-face interactions were the primary ways that sampling was obtained. Once initial contact and surface-level explanation were given, each participant received an email containing an in-depth explanation of the study, its aims, the risks, and possible benefits one may receive through participation. A biracial/bi-ethnic racial verification form and a consent form were attached to each email with instruction of completion of said forms. After the researcher received the completed forms, the researcher scheduled an interview time according to the convenience of the participant.

Data Collection

The conducted interviews were designed to address their lived experience as biracial individuals, if they have come to an identity resolution, what identity resolution did they come to, what factors influenced this choice, and what role, if any, Christianity contributed to this resolution. Through the use of semi-structured interviewing, the participants were able to give voice to their experiences, thus aiding the researcher to gain better depth and explanation of the phenomenon. After an interview time was established, the location of the interview was decided upon by the interviewer. All but one interview was conducted in a public location on the campus of the university. The other interview was conducted in an upper midwestern state, the state of residence for one of the participants. The interview was facilitated through a semi-structured

interview guide (Appendix A) that allowed for follow-up questions for a better understanding of participants' responses. Each interview lasted between 20-40 minutes and was audio recorded. Each participant was interviewed uninterrupted. The audio recordings were then manually transcribed by the researcher verbatim. Finally, the results were member checked, ensuring the trustworthiness of the data, and that confidentiality of each participant was protected.

Data Analysis

Conducting this phenomenology involved setting aside any preconceived notions and personal experience about the phenomenon to reduce bias (Creswell, 2013). The researcher of this study was bi-ethnic, thus separation of personal experience and understanding of biracial identity development was crucial for effective data collection, analysis, and finalization of results. After manual transcription was completed, the data were analyzed, coded, and categorized so that existing patterns and commonalities among interviews could be identified and used to describe the phenomenon. The researcher underlined and highlighted key texts that were deemed explanatory of the phenomenon of biracial identity development or were repeated themes among interviews. The organization of the data was then separated into distinctive themes that were connected to the participants' identity development (Appendix B). All pertinent data concerning the impact of Christian faith on identity development were also separated. The themes were then supported by selective quotes from the participants. Finally, after the results were unified into a description of the phenomenon and used to answer the research questions, the results were member-checked by each participant to ensure accuracy and that confidentiality was adequately maintained.

Results

Participant Profile

For the protection of the participants' identity, pseudonyms were given to conceal identifying information. Below describes a brief participant introduction.

Reagan

Reagan is a biracial young adult undergraduate student who resides in the midwest. Her racial composition consists of Surinamese and White heritage. She was raised in the United States, but would occasionally visit Suriname to be with family. Moreover, she identifies as a Christian.

Ian

Ian is a young adult graduate student who currently resides in the southeastern part of the United States. His racial composition is South Korean and White. Additionally, he identifies primarily as Asian rather than biracial. He was raised in the United States but had family who lived internationally. His parents are monoracial. Lastly, he identifies as a Christian.

Julio

Julio is a multiracial young adult undergraduate student studying in the southeastern part of the United States. His racial composition includes African American, White, Native American, West Indian, and Latino (Mexican) heritage. Julio was raised in the United States as were the majority of his family members. Both parents are biracial. He also identifies as a Christian.

Amber

Amber is a biracial young adult currently pursuing an undergraduate degree in the southeastern part of the United States. Her racial composition includes African American and White heritage. She was raised in the United States. Despite one parent having international

experience, both maternal and paternal families live in the United States. Both parents are monoracial. Lastly, she identifies as a Christian.

Sandra

Sandra is a biracial young adult undergraduate student studying in the southeastern part of the United States. She is Japanese and White. She was raised in Japan and the United States. Moreover, both parents are monoracial. She also identifies as a Christian.

Miles

Miles is a biracial young adult pursuing his undergraduate degree in the southeastern part of the United States. His racial composition consists of Latino (Cuban) and African American heritage. He was raised in the United States and both of his parents are monoracial. Additionally, both sides of his family reside in the United States. He also identifies as a Christian.

Marcella

Marcella is a biracial young adult undergraduate student studying in the southeastern region of the United States. Her racial composition is composed of Thai and White heritage. She was raised and attended school in Thailand, but during the summer season, she and her family would stay in the United States. Her parents are monoracial. Lastly, she identifies as a Christian.

The Biracial/Bi-ethnic Experience

It is important to note that although each participant's racial composition had at least two races or ethnicities, not every participant identified as a biracial/bi-ethnic person. As noted earlier in previous research, there are four possible outcomes that a biracial or bi-ethnic individual can resonate with: Acceptance of designated racial label from society, identification with both racial groups, identification with a single racial group, and identification in a new racial group (as in identifying with other biracial persons; Renn, 2008). Based on the

understanding and experience of the majority of the participants, at times, there seemed to be a mixture of fluidity between greater identification emphasis on one race depending on surroundings and time, but when asked what their racial identification was, five out of seven participants identified as a biracial or multiracial individual. One participant identified as primarily one race, but did, however, acknowledge that part of his family was of another race. The other participant personally identified as biracial, but due to societal view, in public he is seen as just Black. This monoracial identification did not negate the experience or understanding of these individuals in the contribution to biracial identification studies.

Each participant described a similar experience of biracial existence that incorporated a strong desire for acceptance and fitting into one or all of their racial groups. One participant described this desire when growing up as “kind of hard to see – [to] have all your friends be White and you just wanted to fit in so badly because there wasn’t another group that you fit into.” Another described her desire to fit in especially during the time frame of living in a country of racial heritage. She explained that “I definitely didn’t want to be mixed... I still wanted to identify as White when I was there for some reason. Or maybe like full Japanese, I just didn’t want to be both.” A third participant also described his absence of fitting in as, “it was never a sense of really like I’d fit into one group, I was always the outcast.” Despite this desire to fit in, other participants also highlighted that there was also a competing desire to acknowledge the other racial components. This internal struggle was best represented through Amber’s understanding of having to side with one race as she explained:

for me to choose a box is denying half of who I am. If I choose the Black box then I am denying my mother and her side of the family. If I pick the White box I’m denying my

father and his family... I can't be biracial and only express one part of me without the other part boiling up inside and demanding to be set free.

Julio also explained how "I mean you can't change the truth; even if let's say I didn't like it [being multiracial] it doesn't take away from the fact that I am." Moreover, four out of the seven participants described frequently being asked that same question of "what are you" in regards to their racial composition. This coincides with previous research that described the experience of a biracial and bi-ethnic person. Additionally, it was found that all seven participants struggled the most with their racial identity during adolescence, with three out of the seven having some present insecurity into young adulthood.

Although they held the same identification as biracial individuals, there was a slight variance in what factors carried heavier emphasis for each participant in regards to development. These variants may be due to the fact that each racial pairing holds different cultures, which thus place greater value on certain aspects of life. This being said, five out of the seven participants were born in the United States. Two participants, however, were born and have lived in one of the countries that constitute part of their biracial heritage. Furthermore, five out of the seven had a racial pairing that resided outside of the United States, but only four out of the seven regularly visited those countries of racial origin. Despite these variations in experience, however, repeated themes of the biracial identity formulation experience were found in common among the participants. The following common factors were distinguished as key influential aspects of the biracial and bi-ethnic participants' identity development.

Research Question 1: Impactful Factors of Racial Identification

Theme 1: Phenotypical Appearance

Examination of the data revealed that physical appearance played a significant role in a biracial individual's identity resolution. All participants' responses identified that their appearance was both a source of ambiguity and confirmation of their identification as a monoracial or biracial individual. A repeated factor among appearance was skin color. Reagan explained how she had always wanted to identify as White, "but I guess I wanted to be more like that, but due to how I look, I felt like I had to identify as more Black." Amber also explained her hesitation in full identification as a Black woman because "I feel it would be very hard for me to say that I'm fully Black just because of my skin tone." Moreover, hair texture was also a repeated theme among participants, especially those with a racial pairing of White, Black, and Hispanic. Amber described that her tightly curled afro was a source of conflict in her identity because at that time she desired to identify more with her White heritage for various reasons. In order to compensate she described how she got "relaxers every six months in my hair so that I could have long wavy hair and fit in with the rest of the girls." Julio also described that he predominantly looked more African American but because of the mixture of cultures he has a softer curl pattern and since he has grown his hair out he is now appearing more Latino. It is also important to note that three out of the seven participants looked culturally ambiguous as identified by the researcher. The one participant, that identified mainly as monoracial, personally thought he looked more Asian than Polish. For him, phenotypical appearance played a significant role in his identification as South Korean. The same was true for Miles. Although he was raised in a Cuban household, his predominantly Black appearance made others view him as monoracial. This theme was ultimately summed together through Reagan's explanation of a time when she felt particularly accepted into one of her racial groups. She said, "this might sound silly, but just because you look like somebody you feel closer to them."

Theme 2: Societal Designation

Another factor that coincides with physical appearance is the societal designation of identity. Although identity resolution is a concept that resides within a person, outside opinions and approval can also impact a person. Ian identified as predominantly Asian due to his personal opinion of his appearance, but he also explained that many other people have told him that he looks more Asian which impacted him as well. Additionally, Sandra, who looked racially ambiguous, described that “when I am with any Asian people, they’ll say I look more like my dad (White), but when I am with White people they say I look like my mom (Japanese).” Subsequently, this influenced her identification as a biracial individual. Moreover when Reagan was asked if any other factors impacted her racial identity development, she pointed out that “in society they kind of just want you to pick one [race] and it has to be the one you look like. So I felt like I just had to go with however people look at me.” Furthermore, Amber expounded on this topic by explaining that “society places us in the lesser of the two racial groups,” and that, “society places me as a person of color.” Furthermore, Marcella, who alternates residencies in the United States and Thailand, experienced two different societal designations. When she is in Thailand, people automatically see her as a biracial person. In the United States, however, people only see her as Thai and challenge her identity when it is discovered that she is biracial. Consequently, this caused confusion and internal conflict over her racial identity. This not only demonstrates the impact outside influence can have on racial identity, but it also reveals a cultural shift in attitude towards biracial identity in the United States.

Theme 3: Racial Profiling and Discrimination

In addition to society’s view of racial identity, the way people treat individuals based on their appearance in correlation to race was shown to also have an impact on racial identity. This

was especially evident in participants who had African American heritage. Four out of the seven participants described an instance of discrimination that impacted their identity development. Julio identified one of the factors that contributed to a closer relation to his Hispanic and Black cultures was from discrimination and racial profiling against him based on his appearance. He related his experience of being taught how to interact with a police officer in the same way other African American individuals are taught as a point of reference, relation, and connection of experience to that part of his culture. Moreover, when asked about his relational closeness to each side of the family, he mentioned that while his family was not centered on race, “race [still] came into it because it’s like you have similar experiences in the world that you could connect with and relate to...” Amber also expounded on her experience of racial profiling as both a point of identification with her Black heritage, but also a source of hesitation for full relation to that same racial component. She explained how her first experience of racism, having her hair texture made fun of in a predominantly White school, made her realize and think, “I am other or like less than...I am different” in regards to her monoracial peers. Although she has experienced discrimination due to her skin tone, she also contended that:

my experiences as a Black woman in America are nowhere the same as the experience of some of my friends because they are much darker than me and I will never have their experiences as a dark Black woman...because I am a very light Black woman.

Discrimination also created hesitation in closer relation to Amber’s White racial counterpart because she was not treated in the same manner as she saw other White women being treated and thus, “that is why I have always said I’m half and half.” In addition to negative stereotyping, Ian also described how people’s assumptions of him as an Asian person helped him to positively embrace his more monoracial identity. He described people’s stereotype of him

being a “Kung Fu master” made him think, “people must think this is really cool...it did make me think, ‘okay so people definitely see me as this Asian person,’... A lot of people asking me about it made me appreciate it more.” Regardless if the stereotyping was perceived as negative or positive by participants, it demonstrated an influence on how closely the participants associated their racial identity with part or all of their racial components.

Theme 4: Peer Influence

Another aspect that played a significant role in identity development was the peer influence of each participant. When asked the racial composition of their friend groups, many of the participants expounded on the fact that those close to them and the majority race of their peer groups influenced their feeling of acceptance or rejection into one or both of their racial groups. While growing up, Reagan’s friend group was predominantly White with no other Surinamese individuals in proximity apart from her family. She explained how she wanted to identify closer to them, and by identifying as mixed she could position herself closer despite having darker features. “A lot of my friends were White, I kind of wanted to identify myself closer to them and I felt like if I just say Black, I distanced myself...in order to fit in...I would always just say mixed.” Amber described the same desire to fit in with her predominantly White friend group and thus closer to a White identity. In regards to relating to their Black racial heritage, Amber, Julio, and Miles described friends rejecting this part of their identity by claiming that they were not African American enough to be Black. Julio elaborated saying, “It’s easy for me to classify myself as African American, but then I would go to school and I would be with some of my Black friends and they would be like, ‘you’re not really Black.’” Sandra described the same experience of exclusion from her White friends due to them viewing her as an Asian woman rather than White and Asian. Interestingly, however, four out of the seven participants noted that

they did have either a friendship or family relationship with other biracial individuals, with some also being of the same racial pairing as the participant. When asked if they could relate to their biracial friends or family members more and if this same biracial status made them feel closer to these other individuals, all four affirmed that this was true. Through both rejection and acceptance of peers, the participants demonstrated that the influence of those relationally close to them impacted their view of racial acceptance.

Theme 5: Familial Integration

In addition to peer influence, familial relations insert great influence on many aspects of a person's life. The same was found true regarding racial identity. Five out of the seven participants affirmed that their family either directly or indirectly encouraged them to embrace all their cultures. When Ian was asked if there was a specific side of the family he felt particularly more accepted into the racial group he explained that, "I wouldn't say that with my family either of my races made me feel particularly more accepted by them. We were always encouraged to embrace who we are [and to] embrace our cultures ever since I was a kid." Furthermore, Marcella explained that her parents affirmed her biracial identity by explaining their family structure despite having to overcome negative stereotypes that White-Thai pairings had in Thailand. Reagan explained the indirect way in which her family placed value on both of her cultures: "...in my family we don't really care about race...it's just not something we really talk about. It's like we are who we are...there is no distinction." Moreover, Julio also explained how his mother's comments about him being handsome due to the mixture of racial features helped him solidify and embrace his multiracial identity. Cultural traditions and customs practiced in the home also impacted racial identity. Ian explained there was, "lots of Korean food at our house... from pretty early on when I was a kid I started to identify that we were a Korean

American family.” Both Reagan and Amber also described the collectivistic nature of their other racial counterparts which impacted their identity in comparison to their White and American heritage traditions.

Theme 6: Language

Language also plays a central role in cultural practice. Six out of the seven participants identified that at least one of their racial components spoke another language. Furthermore, five out of the seven participants also claimed that this language was spoken in their homes. Despite this, two out of the five were fluent in that cultural language. While Ian still maintained close relation to his Asian identification, he did explain that his inability to fluently speak Korean did at times impact his racial conceptualization negatively. Although he attended a Korean church that began the Korean language learning process, it was not complete due to his family moving to another state. Later on, this influenced him in relating to other Koreans, specifically the Korean international students at his university. Ian explained:

I know there is a really big Korean culture here on campus and so just trying to help them feel welcome, it felt like it was something that I couldn't do because I couldn't speak it. I do know a lot about the culture, but I haven't been over there, I haven't been like completely immersed in a fully Korean family... so if anything it felt a little disheartening to be kind of on the outside of that. I kind of place myself outside of it.

Despite this being described as a negative feeling and experience, he emphasized that it also drove him to take further steps in becoming fluent in Korean, thus creating an even closer connection to his Asian identification. In addition, Julio also explained how part of his identity as a Latino was denied by other Latinos. Although in appearance others have identified him as

either African American or Latino, his inability to fluently speak Spanish was a reason for others to say that he was not Latino. “‘You don’t speak Spanish so you’re not Mexican,’ well, my grandfather would say otherwise.” Furthermore, Miles affirmed that fluency in Spanish helped him feel closer to his Cuban heritage. Miles elaborated on how not being able to speak his cultural language would be like shutting out “half of who you are...and you are completely losing any stories, heritage, or knowledge...it’s integral to who you are.” Moreover, language also served as proof of Marcella’s Thai heritage when her racial identity was denied by a monoracial Thai individual.

Theme 7: Media

While not as prominent, with only three out of seven giving reference to this factor, media representation was identified to play a role in the racial identification solidification process. When asked about other aspects that led to Sandra’s racial identity as a biracial woman, she explained how seeing social media influencers who were also biracial on various platforms helped her embrace her own biracial culture. “It made me feel more comfortable with who I was. Seeing someone else that was like me and understood having those different experiences...they are really cool and embracing who they are.” Furthermore, Julio briefly mentioned watching the movie *Queen and Slim*, describing it to be a movie that highlighted injustices that minorities experience. He explained it impacted his emotions negatively. This was possibly due to personal relation to the events of the movie, thus impacting part of his relation to some of his racial components. Additionally, television shows and movies were impactful in shaping Miles’ racial identity. He explained that there were few Black and Latino characters represented in the media, and even fewer biracial characters.

The Black characters were the ones I looked the most like, so they were the ones I related to the most. Being half-Black, as a kid I adopted the belief that those Black characters would teach me what it really meant to be Black. The issue was...the Black characters were almost always the one-dimensional stereotypes of the "cool/ jock kid" or the "super-genius nerd". It's great that there's a lot more representation now that I'm an adult, showing people that they don't have to conform to racial stereotypes to be a part of their group, but I really needed that when I was a kid.

Although a more comprehensive representation of media would have been beneficial for Miles' racial identity development, he elaborated that the current racial representation in the media still is impactful in affirming his biracial identity. He explained that

...when Marvel came out with a biracial Black & Puerto Rican Spider-Man in the comics I had never felt more seen or represented in the media...I felt like I could finally see myself in the media without having to give up half of my racial identity first.

Theme 8: International Schooling

It is important to note that the experience of biracial individuals varies depending on location and context. Two out of the seven participants lived internationally. When explaining her experience as a biracial person living in Japan, Sandra said that if she would have gone to the international school she would have felt more comfortable. Although she understood that not every student would be mixed heritage, the diversity in origin would have comforted her. This was also reflected in Marcella's experience being raised in Thailand. When asked about other factors that influenced her biracial identity, she explained that attending the international school in Thailand helped normalize her identity due to the diversity of each student. "I've grown up with people who do not look like me...everybody is their own."

Theme 9: Dating

While less prominent, three out of the seven participants mentioned romantic relationships as an influential aspect in their racial identity. Amber explained that she felt rejected from her White racial pairing because there would be cultural aspects that she could not relate to fully. Moreover, she mentioned being partially Black also made her feel fetishized and that those who dated her, specifically White males, could “dip [their] toes in the water but not have to deal with a full-blown Black woman...” Additionally, Miles mentioned possible insecurity that could develop from dating a Black woman opposed to dating a Latina woman due to the contrast of his level of Black heritage relation and her monoracial Black personhood. Furthermore, Marcella briefly mentioned possible confusion that may arise from dating someone who is not the same racial pairing as herself.

Research Question 2: The Influence of Christianity

In addition to discovering and unifying the various factors that can influence biracial identity development, this study also aimed to understand the relationship Christian faith may have in the process of identity resolution. All seven participants identified as Christians and made more of an indirect connection of faith to their overall racial identity development. Moreover, none of the participants reported practicing other religions. When asked if their faith played a role in solidifying their racial identity, four out of seven answered yes. Sandra described her faith as a base in which she could work through the uncertainties or insecurities about her racial identity. Reagan explained that her faith helped solidify her biracial identity saying, “in school, we always learned that [God] made us in his own image and that he loves and accepts us...God made me who I am, he made me look like this.” Likewise, both Marcella and Miles affirmed that having their racial identity was important, but their identity in Christ was the basis

for any other form of identification. The other three participants explained that their faith did not directly solidify their racial identity, but rather it influenced and changed the way of looking at their race, their identity, themselves, and others, which thus indirectly was linked to their identity resolution process. Amber explained that her faith helped her reexamine how she looked at her race. “The person of Jesus Christ...he was fully God and fully man...we have a God who knows our pain...why should I deny either part of me if the Lord made me like that?” When asked about the role prayer had in the process of identity development, she explained how it allowed her to give her pains, betrayals, and bitterness over to the Lord in prayer and “him redeeming me from those things and reminding me that when the world fails me, he never has and never will.” Julio explained how prior to becoming a Christian, he had no identity in general. He described how through God’s grace and his faith in Jesus, those areas were rectified.

I’m not the same person I used to be...if someone ever said it [racial identity rejection from others]...I know [where] my identity is and that’s found in Christ Jesus...God blessed me with having the identities of being...all these beautiful races...but then also he showed me that ultimately where I am found is in Christ Jesus, hidden in him.

In addition, Julio explained that his faith helped tremendously in taking away the insecurities of being multiracial. Ian also explained the way his faith was related to his already established identity by saying, “My relationship with God reminds me always that no matter what, I am always a child of God in Christ no matter what my race is... so I don’t know if my relationship with God impacted my identity in my culture, but it helps me link my culture to others.” Marcella also affirmed that her faith enabled her to reach out to other cultures.

Furthermore, two out of the seven participants reported that the racial composition of their church, reflecting their races respectively, also influenced the feeling of acceptance in their racial

identity. When asked the time frame of solidifying his racial identity, Ian explained that “pretty early on I would say. From when I was a kid you know growing up being a part of a church did really help solidify that for me.” He then elaborated on going to an American church and then to a Korean Church. Amber also explained how going to a racially diverse church that is invested in racial issues was one of the places where she felt particularly accepted. The data seemed to suggest that Christianity may serve as a foundation from which biracial and bi-ethnic individuals navigate racial identity.

Discussion

The overall investigation of this study aimed to answer the common factors that impact racial identity development and if Christianity influenced this process of racial identity resolution. Through the lived experience of seven participants, it was found that phenotypical appearance, a societal designation of identity, racial profiling and discrimination, peer attitude and opinions about one’s racial identity, family integration of race, fluency in a cultural language, the media, international schooling, and romantic dating impacted racial identity resolution.

The unified description of the biracial experience from the seven participants was in agreement with previous research. A vital part of identity development in each participant was the concept of acceptance and rejection. Both Julio and Ian’s description of feeling somewhat on the outside of their racial groups corresponded to the Cheng and Klugman (2010) explanation of the psychological stress invoked on biracial individuals from no identified racial in-group. This also exemplified the phenomenon of cultural homelessness (Vivero & Jenkins, 1999). Another factor in agreement with previous literature was identity denial (Townsend et al., 2009). Five out of the seven participants described at least one time when another individual from one of their

racial group counterparts denied their inclusion into that racial group. Although two participants did not recount a specific time of identity denial, they did confirm the feeling of being on the outside of their racial in-group. This indicates that there are varying degrees of rejection and exclusion experienced by biracial and bi-ethnic individuals. Despite this rejection, however, the participants also expressed the need for full representation of both cultures in their person. Without this self-recognition of all their racial components, it seemed that feelings of disownment and betrayal were invoked. These feelings reflect the enmeshment/denial stage of Poston's (1990) biracial identity development model.

Moreover, the unification and comparison of each participants' lived experience revealed various factors that coincided with previous research. Renn (2008) explained in his research that phenotypical appearance strongly influenced racial identity among biracial individuals. The same was true of this study's participants. Physical appearance enabled the participants to feel closer to some of their racial counterparts, but it also hindered them from full identity recognition with just one racial group. This ambiguity seemed to maintain a biracial identity status among participants. Additionally, physical features, regardless of how ambiguous, also impacted both societal designation of racial identity and discrimination experienced by the participants. These factors influenced racial identity in that they are shared experiences among the participants and one of their racial components. Sharing some of the same experiences, usually with their minority racial counterpart, made some of the participants feel closer to that racial group. But because there was a degree or limit to how much they shared with that racial group experience, it also stood as a reminder that they were not fully part of that group. Previous literature reflected this concept through the personal narratives of other biracial individuals (Williams & Ware, 2019). This also seemed to maintain a biracial identity in participants.

Previous research also demonstrated a possible relationship between the racial composition of one's friend group and the racial identity of the biracial individual (Gaither et al., 2014). For some participants, their friendships influenced their desire to relate to one of their racial counterparts. Peers and friends also stood as another source of rejection and acceptance of racial identity in addition to extra societal opinions. Interestingly, participants also expressed a closer relation to other biracial friends and family members due to similarities. This may relate to the concept of shared experiences with others that confirm in-group status. In many ways, this seemed to normalize the emotions and cognitions that accompanied racial identity navigation. This coincided with the influencing factor of social media. Social media helped one participant solidify her biracial identity in that it normalized her experience. Other participants also indicated that the media stood as a source of affirmation of their biracial identity. By seeing other people embrace their biracial identity directly or by having the presence of a biracial character in various storylines, participants felt represented and thus more confident in their biracial identity. While only a few participants mentioned the impact media had on their identity development, the lack of influence on other participants could reflect different use of media. This factor was not found in previous research but seems to have the potential for further impact of racial identity.

Furthermore, familial support was another factor that was supported by previous literature (Nuttgens, 2010). For some participants, their family stood as the main source of acceptance and education about their mixed racial heritage. The familial setting was also an environment where cultural practices were held. This coincides with the influencing factor of language (Renn, 2008). For the participants who were fluent in their cultural language, this enabled them to connect with one of their racial groups. Considering that all the participants related their racial components as pieces of their being, language also stood as a connection to a

part of who they are personally and collectively. This was especially true for the Asian and Latino participants in that language served as proof of their racial identity, regardless of their appearance.

Additionally, past research indicated the racial composition of schools could impact racial identity (Gonzales-Backen, 2013). For the participants that grew up in the United States, the racial composition of their schools was not as influential of a factor in their identity. For the two participants that were raised outside of the United States, having a racially diverse school was important and influential in their racial identity formation. This could reflect the largely monoracial and monocultural population that other countries have in comparison to the racial diversity held within American culture.

Although dating was another influential factor mentioned infrequently, its influence on identity was diverse. Past research indicated that the dating patterns of biracial individuals varied and were most influenced by the dominant culture displayed in the individual's home (Roberts-Clarke et al., 2004). While that study primarily focused on dating patterns and selection of biracial women, this phenomenology identified dating as a possible source of insecurity in one's biracial identity.

In regards to the impact religion may have on identity development, past research mentioned a connection between religion and in-group racial affiliation (Davenport, 2016). This research primarily touched on how different religions influence a sense of connection among different races. Research also connects religion with mental-health promotion (Poll & Smith, 2003). This study found that the Christian faith indirectly influenced racial identity. Christian faith seemed to provide a filter and framework in which they able to view and overcome the challenges of racial identity development. Considering that all participants referred to their

interracial heritage as specifically crafted by God and they were children of God, this suggests that Christian faith provides acceptance and security of overall identity. Amidst the process, Christian faith was seen as a foundational starting place that can be accessed to negate negative experiences, identity denial, and insecurities about acceptance.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite this study providing an evidence-based phenomenological overview and a unique perspective and study on faith and its implication on racial identity, there are limitations to this study. One limitation was the inability to use random sampling in participant recruitment. Additionally, the sample number was small. Despite a small sample size, saturation of the data occurred, which reduced the need for further investigation. Furthermore, not every possible racial pairing was incorporated into this study. While there were many similarities in the experience of each participant as a biracial person, complete representation was not fully covered. Although each participant's origin is located elsewhere, some even internationally based, all but one participant was recruited from the same Christian university.

Since the field of racial identification studies is continuously expanding, future research can further expound and explore the influential factors found in this study. Additionally, a comparison of the impact that different religions and faiths may have on biracial identity development may also prove beneficial. Research also can further investigate how international schools influence racial identity development for biracial individuals who were raised internationally. Lastly, future research can focus on biracial dating selection and its influence on racial identity.

Implications

Despite the confinements that the limitations posed in this study, various useful implications can be made from its findings. As biracial and bi-ethnic population rates rapidly grow in the United States (Allen et al., 2013), it is more important to understand the dynamics that are acting as an individual navigates cultural homelessness, identity confusion, and identity resolution. This is especially applicable in the field of counseling in that there may be dual or multi-cultural variables that can impact the counseling process. In addition, this study also serves as a framework to better understand the complexities of identity as a whole. Most importantly, this study provides an understanding of how the Christian faith aids biracial/bi-ethnic identity resolution.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

Tell me about yourself?

Tell me about your family

Can you describe your racial composition?

Parents' racial composition?

Is there one side of the family that appearance-wise you resemble more than another?

Was there a different language other than English spoken in the home?

Can you speak the language?

Where did you grow up?

The racial composition of the neighborhood?

The racial composition of the school?

The racial composition of his/her friends?

Are you a Christian?

Racial composition of your church?

In what way has your faith impacted your life?

How do you identify yourself racially?

When did you achieve this sense of identity?

Recently? A few years ago? (Prompt)

When did you struggle the most with figuring out your racial identity?

How do you respond when being asked your racial identity?

Can you give me an example of a time you felt rejected from one or both of your racial groups?

How did this impact you emotionally, cognitively, or both?

How did this impact your racial identity resolution?

Were there any particular factors in your life that are not mentioned that lead to your racial identity resolution?

Can you describe a time when you felt accepted into one or both of your racial groups?

How did this impact you emotionally, cognitively, or both?

How did this impact your racial identity resolution?

What role did prayer / your relationship with God play in regards to your identity?

Was there a time it helped you solidify your identity?

Was there a time it hindered your identity solidification?

Is there anything regarding your experience that you would like to share that has not been asked yet?

If you are raising a biracial child, what is it that you would do to promote a healthy racial identity development?

May I contact you again for further clarification on this interview?

Appendix B

Findings:

Contributing Factors

Phenotypical Appearance

Societal designation of identity

Racial profiling and discrimination

Peer influence

Familial integration

Language

Media

Dating

International schooling

Christianity